

Peer Review

Review of: "The Mind as a Particular: Why Cartesian Dualism Is True"

Carles Salazar¹

1. Universitat de Lleida, Lleida, Spain

Once again, Alexandros Syrakos has produced a wonderful paper. Let me just comment on one particular point of this very rich text. I believe this is the soundest defence of Cartesian dualism that I can think of and the corresponding hardest critique of physicalism. Even though I sympathise with Syrakos's dualistic ontology, I am afraid physicalism cannot be so easily defeated. If I understood him correctly, Syrakos's point can be summarised in one single argument: that of the impossibility of a duplicate self. Whereas I can imagine a physical duplicate of my body, there is no way I can imagine a duplicate of myself. Therefore, my physical body cannot be coextensive with my self. In the same way as two identical physical bodies cannot give rise to the same self, different not co-present physical bodies can pertain to the same self, as it is the case with our own bodies and selves as time goes by: the bodies change but the selves remain the same. But let us imagine, for the sake of the argument, the physicalist conception of the self. According to this view, the self is merely an epiphenomenon of one's physical body. Let us take as a thought experiment what we might call the teletransportation 'Star-Trek' experiment. Each time the Enterprise's members enter the teletransportation machine, their physical bodies are destroyed and reconstituted somewhere else. Nobody notices any difference, since the reconstituted bodies inherit all the memories of the previous bodies. From Syrakos's point of view, however, these reconstituted bodies would correspond to different selves, as the previous selves would have perished with their bodies in the teletransportation machine. But suppose the teletransportation machine breaks down and fails to destroy Captain Picard's body as he enters into it, and it also reconstitutes a copy of Captain Picard somewhere else (I believe that actually happened in one of the episodes). Who is the real Captain Picard? Syrakos would have no problem in identifying the real Captain Picard: the real Captain Picard is the one who entered the machine and was not destroyed, while the other is just a copy of Picard's physical body (brain included, obviously). But the argument is much less clear than what Syrakos's point would lead us to believe. The atoms and molecules that

make up our physical bodies are gradually replaced as time goes by, and yet our selves remain. Think of Chalmers's 'fading qualia' thought experiment (Chalmers 1996: 253-259). It could be plausibly argued that if my neurons are gradually replaced by silicon chips, there is no way I can actually notice the change, for the same function performed by my neurons is being now performed by silicon chips. What about if instead of replacing my neurons, I produce a duplicate copy of my brain in silicon chips? That would simply be another instance of a duplication. Again, according to Syrakos's argument, my silicon copy would not be myself; it would be just a duplicate of my physical brain, but not a duplicate of my self. There seems to be an inconsistency here. When the neurons are replaced by silicon chips, we have only one self with two different material substrates *at different times*, but when there is no replacement, then two 'selves' come into existence *at the same time*. How could that be? Syrakos is right: there cannot be a duplicate of any self. But only, and this is my qualification to his argument, as long as those duplicates are co-present, for when that is not the case (i.e., when the teletransportation machine works properly), the duplication of the physical body will automatically produce a duplication of the self (pace Syrakos), namely, the reconstitution of the old self in the new body. Note that what the teletransportation machine does, and what Chalmers's 'fading qualia' thought experiment is supposed to show as well, is (similar to, though not identical with) what the passage of time does to our bodies and selves: bodies change as time goes by, but selves remain the same. Why? Because my self, say, seven years ago, is not co-present with myself now. If it were, it would not be my self any more. In the same way as a co-present copy of Captain Picard is not the real Captain Picard, nor would a co-present silicon copy of my brain be my self. There is even a physicalist interpretation of this phenomenon on the basis of the non-cloning theorem of quantum states, according to which it is impossible to create an independent and identical copy of a quantum state (as long as both copies are co-present in the same branch of the multiverse). Anyway, these are just some thoughts inspired by an outstanding and thought-provoking paper.

Reference

Chalmers, D. 1996. *The conscious mind*. Oxford: OUP.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.