

Peer Review

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

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Alexandros Syrakos writes pleasantly, and his main argument is pursued consistently throughout the paper. At times, however, the narrative style of writing makes the sentences imprecise. For example, in the following passage: “... *some philosophers, prompted by the so-called hard problems, have taken the relatively bold step of acknowledging that not all of reality is physical. This has led to views such as property dualism and panpsychism. However, even these perspectives remain anchored in the belief that the human mind is a macroscopic, derivative, and illusory phenomenon that can be analyzed into more fundamental microscopic phenomena, albeit allowing these to be of some non-physical, mental nature.*” The main argument here seems to be about the mereology of mind, that a more complex mind is grounded in less complex mental phenomena, so the adjectives ‘macroscopic’ and ‘microscopic’ make sense, but I am unsure how to interpret ‘derivative’ (which seems to fit better in a discussion of epistemology rather than the present context of an ontology of mind) and ‘illusory’ (which suggests fakeness, but I do not see how the aggregation of fundamental phenomena makes the aggregate fake, just as the body is not fake for having limbs and cells). It does not help that ‘property dualism’ and ‘panpsychism’ are not defined. Perhaps it is better not to mention derivation and illusion here, since the argument does not need these terms anyway.

However, my primary concern with the paper is that the main argument appears circular. In the introduction, it is said that “*each one of us experiences life through their own, private, unique, and non-duplicable¹ perspective, which is what fundamentally differentiates him/her from the rest of the universe and gives him/her their identity.*” I take this to be a conclusion of which I, as a reader, need to be convinced after reading the paper. I nevertheless got the impression that the reader needs to presuppose this point, namely that there cannot be two of me, as is said in footnote 1.

Let me illustrate what I mean by considering the following claim: *“The concept of the self is the most fundamental and familiar concept that we innately have, and therefore it is the most difficult to express in terms of other concepts.”* Is this concept of self the uniqueness of the individual perspective the reader needs to be convinced of? If so, I need a compelling argument because this claim is not intuitively true, even though the intuitiveness seems to be assumed: *“deep inside we all have, perhaps unconsciously, a natural understanding of selfhood which is both innate and reinforced by personal experience of our own existence.”* What about those scholars in the philosophy of mind who do not agree that they have this innate and natural understanding of self? I realize that these passages stem from the introduction, where the author is allowed to make claims that will receive back-up later, but I had difficulty finding the back-up in the arguments that followed.

In the section on the pairing problem, specifically 2.1, it is asked: *“Why do the two brains, yours and mine, give rise to these particular two different perspectives, i.e. to you and me? This is a crucial aspect of the phenomena produced by the two brains – the most crucial, actually, because this is the most important aspect of a mind: its particularity, who one is, their identity in the most fundamental sense.”* Is it true that my brain and your brain give rise to different perspectives? Probably, but, as a physicalist, I would argue that the difference lies in the structure and processes of the body.

This is where the body duplication argument gets relevant. From the physicalist perspective, I could argue that this argument does not show uniqueness of personhood because the duplicated body is not physically identical to the original body. For that to be the case, both bodies need to have the same structure *and* behavior. If we assume identity in structure and behavior, the physicalist has two options:

1. Accept Leibniz' principle of the identity of indiscernibles (PII) and say that both bodies share a consciousness. In fact, according to the PII, two things that are qualitatively identical are not numerically different, so two identical bodies are just one body and their 'two' identical minds are just one mind. Of course, we would need to exclude the fact that both bodies occupy different positions from the set of qualities, which is a debatable move, but the alternative is that spatial position amounts to a difference between the two bodies, making them not identical. If the body and its duplicate are not identical, the physicalist can easily maintain that the minds will also differ.
2. Reject the PII and conclude that two identical bodies acting in tandem (again assuming that we can bracket the difference in spatial position as irrelevant) have perfectly identical minds that only differ numerically.

Both positions are defensible.

Concerning the body swapping experiment, which builds on the body duplication argument, the physicalist again has the options of endorsing or rejecting the PII.

1. If I, as a physicalist, accept the PII, then swapping my atoms with those of an identical duplicate body would mean, with respect to the mind, swapping two identical mental properties, which is not a swap at all.
2. If I reject the PII, I could accept that I have – piece by piece – swapped minds with my duplicate, but since it is my exact mental duplicate, neither of us would perceive this merely numerical difference, and introspection would not reveal anything.

Again, both positions are defensible.

I am convinced by Syrakos' point, however, that human identity cannot be chained to particular atoms, since our bodies change constantly: *"we know that the matter constituting our bodies changes all the time, yet we remain the same persons."* At least, we remain roughly the same persons. If Syrakos means the stronger claim that we maintain an unalterable identity core throughout our lives, then this is not something that I know, but need to be convinced of.

In section 3, my worry about circularity surfaces right at the beginning of the section, because the reader is told: *"We know very well that we are all different in many "peripheral" or "universal" respects"* and a little later: *"However, at their core, all persons are fundamentally exactly alike: each of us is a centre of existence, an origin of first-person perspective, of consciousness."* Is the point here that the particular systems of mental properties (i.e., micro-mentalities?) that the physicalist sees as supervening on particular physical (bodily) systems are merely peripheral? And that a more fundamental mental property is needed to explain the center of existence, i.e., personal identity? If so, then section 3 is telling me that I know very well that there is a quintessential self, but this is not something I know very well, and the paper has set out to prove this point. I do not see the problem in assuming that my mental properties in their particular organization constitute my first-person perspective. Why can I not say that my mental duplicate, whose mind supervenes on my physical clone, has a first-person perspective that is identical to mine, whether numerically different or not? Personal identity is only an all-or-nothing affair, as is claimed in the text, when I grant that personal identity is really about a quintessential self and not about a system of mental qualities. If the latter obtains, my brother is not a 100% different person, but his mind only differs from mine in proportion to the difference in physical constitution and behavior that exists between us.

The assumption of a unique core of personhood, distinct from the allegedly peripheral mental properties that the physicalist would accept, seems to be the driving force of section 4: “*To ask why I came to be as a result of a particular combining event I must consider my deepest self, divested of all these “accidental” properties of mine.*” It has not yet been proven that there is a deepest self, so the composition argument cannot rely on this assumption. Without it, however, the argument does not seem to work, since the physicalist can find her/his personal identity without difficulty if ‘personal identity’ is defined as a system of mental properties. Section 5 also relies on the first-person/third-person distinction that was made in section 3 and of which I am not yet convinced.

In sum, the paper tackles a fascinating topic and uses interesting thought experiments to clarify various aspects of the main argument, but it leans too heavily on the assumption of a quintessential human center of existence. I am curious to see how Syrakos would respond to my PII-inspired interpretation of the body duplication experiment, but the more pressing issue is to remove the (appearance of) circularity from the main argument.

The main argument would not appear circular if Syrakos could answer me the following, without appealing to a fundamental core of personal identity: What is so problematic about assuming that my personal identity is a set of mental qualities in a particular ordering? I can imagine a mental duplicate, whose qualitative make-up corresponds to some sort of essence – or blueprint – that enables some higher power to create me and enables me to find myself in the world history of minds. Moreover, if the argument in section 3 for the fundamental difference between first and third-person perspective were to be strengthened, this argument could then, perhaps, be used for the move to a theory of quintessential self.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.