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AN OBJECTION TO SWINBURNE'S ARGUMENT FOR DUALISM

Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann

In various places Richard Swinburne has presented and defended an argument for Cartesian dualism.¹ His argument has been discussed extensively in the literature, and he has recently offered a defense of it against several of the published objections.² But we think that Swinburne's argument invites an objection that has not yet been raised in the literature and is fatal to the argument.³

Swinburne's argument was originally designed to prove the conclusion 'I have a soul in 1984', and we will leave it in that form to begin with. It uses four abbreviations:

- p = 'I am a conscious person, and I exist in 1984'
- q = 'My body is destroyed in the last instant of 1984'
- r = 'I have a soul in 1984'
- s = 'I exist in 1985'.

Let the variable x range over all consistent propositions that (a) are compatible with the conjunction of p and q and that (b) describe only 1984 states of affairs.⁴ Swinburne then offers these three premisses:

- 1. p
- 2. $(x) \Diamond (p \ \& \ q \ \& \ x \ \& \ s)$
- 3. $\neg \Diamond (p \ \& \ q \ \& \ \neg r \ \& \ s)$

From premisses 2 and 3, Swinburne says, it follows that $\neg r$ is not within the range of x. But, since $\neg r$ does describe only 1984 states of affairs and so satisfies restriction (b) on x, $\neg r$ must violate restriction (a): $\neg r$ must be incompatible with $(p \ \& \ q)$. Therefore, $(p \ \& \ q)$ entails r. "But the addition to p of q, which describes what happens to my body at the end of 1984[,] can hardly affect whether or not p entails r." And so, Swinburne concludes, "p by itself entails r. Hence, from Premiss 1, r "⁵—i.e., that I am a conscious person existing in 1984 entails that I have a soul in 1984. No argument for one's having a soul could look more elegant.

Many of the objections that have been raised against this argument have been fairly sophisticated complaints against premiss 2, claiming, for

instance, that Swinburne equivocates between *de re* and *de dicto* readings of the premiss, a charge he vehemently denies. But we think premiss 2 presents a more fundamental problem that hasn't yet been recognized.

In the case presented by Swinburne's argument, a person who is conscious in 1984 has his body totally destroyed at the last instant of 1984 and nonetheless survives into 1985.⁶ Now according to Swinburne, "Premiss 2 says that it is possible that [s] I survive into 1985, given that [p] I am conscious in 1984, even if [q] my body is totally destroyed [in the last instant of 1984] and [x] whatever else might be the case in 1984, compatible with these last two suppositions."⁷

But *is* that possible? Consider, for instance, this substitution for x:

x1 = 'God destroys my soul at the last instant of 1984'.⁸

x1 certainly appears to meet the restrictions on x: (b) it describes only a 1984 state of affairs, and (a) it is compatible with (p & q). But, contrary to premiss 2, it is not possible that p and q and s *and* x1. And so it looks as if the introduction of x1 constitutes a counter-example to premiss 2. Furthermore, x1 is by no means unique.⁹ Any of the following examples, among others, would have the same result:

x2 = 'I cease to exist at the last instant of 1984'

x3 = 'The last instant of 1984 is the last instant of my existence'

x4 = 'The last instant of 1984 is the last instant of time'.

Consequently, premiss 2 looks false.

It might at first glance seem easy to protect premiss 2 against this sort of counter-example. x1 (like our other examples of substitutions for x that falsify the premiss) is compatible with (p & q) but not with s. So someone might suppose that the problem we're introducing could be easily solved by adding a third restriction on x: that (c) any substitution for x must also be compatible with s. Then, it seems, all our destructive substitutions for x will be ruled out, and premiss 2 will have been protected against our kind of counter-example.

However, introducing restriction (c) renders Swinburne's argument invalid. With restriction (c) in force, when we recognize that -r isn't in the range of x, that will be because -r is incompatible with the conjunction of the *three* propositions p and q *and* s. So in that case it *won't* follow that -r is incompatible with just (p & q), and so it *won't* be the case that (p & q) entails r.

Consequently, either the argument is unsound because premiss 2 is false, or the argument is invalid.

Furthermore, although the argument's validity could be salvaged by reformulating it so that it maintains that -r is incompatible with (p & q & s), the reformulation would render the argument useless for Swinburne's purposes. A conclusion that p and q *and* s entail r, or that a world in which p, q, *and* s are all true is also a world in which r is true,¹⁰ would come as no news to philosophical readers, whether or not they would accept it. An argument to that conclusion would be an argument

for dualism that couldn't, or shouldn't, produce a qualm in even a very nervous materialist.

In correspondence with us Swinburne has responded to our objection by denying that x_1 (or any proposition relevantly like it) meets his restrictions on substitutions for x : "Any proposition which affirms that something existed throughout 1984 and then ceased to exist, which is entailed by [your]... [x2] and... [x3], clearly involves an entailment about a hard fact in 1985, viz., that there is no such thing then. So [x2] and [x3] are ruled out as fillings for x ."¹¹ And, of course, something similar can be said about x_1 : it, too, entails a hard fact about 1985. As for x_4 , Swinburne denies that it is logically possible for time to end, and so he takes x_4 to be ruled out by his restricting substitutions for x to consistent propositions.

Not everyone would agree, of course, that it is *logically* impossible for time to end. Without a convincing argument to support this strong claim of his, premiss 2 is left vulnerable to a counter-example founded on x_4 . But because we don't want to discuss Swinburne's view about the necessity of endless time, we're going to leave x_4 out of consideration.

But what about Swinburne's reason for rejecting x_2 and x_3 (and x_1) as substitutions for x ? He claims that these substitutions are ruled out by his original restrictions because each of them "involves an entailment about a hard fact in 1985, viz., that there is no such thing then"—i.e., that there is no such thing as me in 1985. So his defense against our counter-example amounts to this claim:

(RS) Any proposition that involves an entailment about a hard fact in 1985 violates restriction (b) on substitutions for x , that they describe only 1984 states of affairs.

The fact that Swinburne is committed to this claim helps explain why the sort of objection we're raising against premiss 2 didn't worry him as he was formulating his argument. All our counter-examples to premiss 2 are substitutions for x that are compatible with p and q but not with s . As we've said, such counter-examples might be warded off by adding restriction (c), that substitutions for x must be compatible also with s , but that move would vitiate the argument. If, however, claim (RS) is true, then restriction (c), which can't be added without vitiating the argument, is already in effect in restriction (b), that substitutions for x must describe only 1984 states of affairs. Any proposition that is incompatible with s must either describe 1985 states of affairs or entail a proposition that itself describes 1985 states of affairs, and all such propositions are ruled out by (RS). Part of the ingenuity of Swinburne's argument, then, consists precisely in his having intended restriction (b) in that way, which allows him to claim that premiss 2 is true without having expressly to admit the possibility that $\neg r$ is not within the range of x just in virtue of $\neg r$'s being incompatible with s .

But is claim (RS) true? Look again at x_1 : 'God destroys my soul at the last instant of 1984'. As we've said, it certainly appears to satisfy restriction (b). Swinburne, however, denies that any proposition such as x_1

describes only 1984 states of affairs because, he says, it “involves an entailment about a hard fact in 1985”, namely, that there is no such thing as me then.

It might be objected that if Swinburne is right about that entailment, then a claim about my death entails that there is time after my death, which seems absurd. But of course if, as Swinburne supposes, the persistence of time is logically necessary, this objection would be empty; and so we won't pursue it here.

Well, then, what about Swinburne's idea that any proposition that entails a proposition describing a hard fact about 1985 can't be only about 1984? We're inclined to think that this is a mistaken way of thinking about what it is for a proposition to be about some particular time only. It seems to many people that if F_1 , a fact about t_1 , depends on F_2 , some fact that obtains at t_2 , a later time, then a proposition describing F_1 is not about t_1 only. But it is not clearly the case that F_1 depends on F_2 whenever F_1 's obtaining at t_1 entails that some contingent F_2 obtains at t_2 .¹² We think, however, that we don't need to argue with Swinburne over the general point about what it is for a proposition to be about some particular time only. For it seems to us that Swinburne can apply claim (RS) to defend premiss 2 as he does only at the cost of invalidating his argument.

Swinburne's argument maintains that $\neg r$ (= 'It is not the case that I have a soul in 1984') is not within the range of x . And the crux of his argument consists in his saying that since $\neg r$ clearly does satisfy restriction (b), describing only 1984 states of affairs, it's because of its violation of restriction (a)—its being incompatible with $(p \ \& \ q)$ —that $\neg r$ isn't in the range of x . So, given Swinburne's commitment to claim (RS), his argument requires him to say that $\neg r$ involves no entailment about a hard fact in 1985.¹³

Unfortunately for Swinburne's argument, however, $\neg r$ entails just the sort of fact about the post-1984 future that Swinburne himself gives as an example of an entailed hard fact about that future—“viz., that there is no such thing then”—since 'It is not the case that I have a soul in 1984' entails that there is no such thing as my soul in 1985. In the context of Swinburne's argument, the 'I' of $\neg r$ is of course identical with the 'I' of p ('I am a conscious person, and I exist in 1984'). We also assume here that if something has a soul, it necessarily has a soul; but this assumption, or one relevantly like it, must underlie Swinburne's argument as well. Otherwise, God could give me a soul at the very instant at which my body is totally destroyed, and I could thus exist into 1985 even if my body is destroyed at the last instant of 1984 and I lacked a soul before then—in which case premiss 3 would be false.

Furthermore, even if we replaced the pronoun in $\neg r$ and recast the argument using a proper name—e.g., 'Richard'—it would still be the case that $\neg r$ entails a hard fact about the future. We think that 'It is not the case that Richard has a soul in 1984' entails

- (D) Either (i) it is not the case that Richard has a soul in 1985, or (ii) in 1985 God causes Richard's soul to come into existence and to exist for some time, however short.

But for those who, unlike us, suppose that God is contingent and that souls can just pop into existence without being created, (D) can be rephrased as (D')

- (D') Either (i) it is not the case that Richard has a soul in 1985, or
(ii) in 1985 Richard's soul begins to exist and exists for some time, however short.

Neither (D) nor (D') is a necessary truth, since there are worlds (including the actual world, as Swinburne sees it) in which Richard has a soul in 1985, but it does not come into existence in 1985. Moreover, both disjuncts of both (D) and (D') describe 1985 states of affairs. Given Swinburne's view that -r is about 1984 only, he must also suppose that disjunct (i) of both (D) and (D') describes a hard fact about 1985. And, because we deny (RS), we can maintain that disjunct (i) describes a hard fact even if we also hold that -r (and propositions relevantly like it) entail propositions describing contingent facts about the future. Finally, it seems to us that both (Dii) and (D'ii) describe hard facts about 1985. Consequently, whether we suppose that -r entails (D) or only (D'), -r entails a proposition describing a hard fact about 1985. So, if (RS) is true, then, because -r entails a proposition describing a hard fact about 1985, -r is not only about 1984 states of affairs—contrary to Swinburne's claim.

In conversation, Swinburne has objected to this argument on the following grounds. First, on his view, God is contingent, and souls can pop into existence without being created, and so -r doesn't entail (D).

Second, although he doesn't deny that -r entails (D'), he does deny that (D') describes a hard fact, because of the nature of (D'ii). On Swinburne's view, (D'ii) describes a soft fact about 1985. Let the moment at which Richard's soul comes into existence be *t*. Then (D'ii) entails that immediately *before t* that person's soul did not exist. Now on Swinburne's view any fact about a time *t* is a soft fact if it entails a hard fact about any other time, *whether earlier or later* than *t*. His view therefore stipulates very stringent requirements for the status of hard fact, since a fact about *t* will be a soft fact not only if it entails that some fact about the future obtains, but even if it entails a fact about any time before *t*. Standard examples used to illustrate hard facts will not count as hard facts in line with these requirements—e.g., *Jones wakes up at 8 a.m.*, which entails that *before 8 a.m. Jones exists*; *Caesar dies at t1 on the steps of the Capitol*, which entails that *before t1 Caesar is alive*; *the sun rises in the east at t1*; which entails that *before t1 the sun does not have the position in the sky it has at t1*. Consequently, Swinburne's requirements for the status of hard fact strike us as very implausible. For that reason we reject his claim that (D'ii) describes a soft fact about 1985. And so, even if we recast Swinburne's argument, replacing the pronoun with a proper name, and even if we accept his views that God is contingent and that souls can come into existence without being created by God, on our view it is *nonetheless* true that -r entails a hard fact about the future—the one described by (D').

Therefore, if Swinburne is right in supposing that no proposition that entails a hard fact about 1985 is a proposition that satisfies restriction (b), describing only 1984 states of affairs, then -r's not being within the range of x is sufficiently explained just by its violating restriction (b): -r isn't about 1984 states of affairs only. In that case, it doesn't follow from premisses 1-3 that -r is incompatible with (p & q). And in that case Swinburne's argument is, again, invalid.

Therefore, viewed from more than one angle, either Swinburne's argument for dualism is unsound because premiss 2 is false, or it is invalid.

It is important to us to conclude by emphasizing the obvious: our arguments against Swinburne's argument don't constitute or even contribute to an argument against dualism generally; there may, of course, be other, perfectly acceptable arguments for dualism. What's more, Swinburne is arguing for a Cartesian sort of dualism; but that isn't the only sort that has been important in philosophy. Aquinas, for instance, developed a very different, non-Cartesian form of substance dualism.¹⁴ We're inclined to think that Aquinas's version is untouched by the sorts of objections we raise against Swinburne's argument and also avoids the standard objections to Cartesian dualism in the literature.¹⁵

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NOTES

1. Sydney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne, *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), Ch. 2, "The Dualist Theory"; Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), Ch. 8 and Additional Note 2; Swinburne, "The Structure of the Soul" in A. Peacocke and G. Gillett, *Persons and Personality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Swinburne, "Body and Soul" in R. Warner and T. Szubka, *The Mind-Body Problem: A Guide to the Current Debate* (Oxford & Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994), 311-316.

2. "Dualism Intact", *Faith and Philosophy* 13:1 (January 1996).

3. We don't mean to suggest that the argument has been or can be satisfactorily defended against the published objections, some of which strike us as successful.

4. Swinburne's own version of his second restriction on substitutions for x is simply "describing 1984 states of affairs", but it becomes clear that he really means 'describing *only* 1984 states of affairs', and so we're using (b) in that stricter form.

5. "Dualism Intact", p. 69.

6. Total destruction of the body isn't explicit in q, nor is existing in 1985 expressly construed as *surviving into* 1985 in s, but Swinburne's use of these expressions in his subsequent discussion of the argument shows that q and s are to be interpreted in those ways. See the passage quoted immediately below.

7. "Dualism Intact", p. 69.

8. It is a part of traditional Christian doctrine which Swinburne accepts that God can annihilate souls. For that reason our x1 does not violate restriction (a), that substitutions for x must be compatible with (p & q). Even on a Cartesian dualist account of the nature of a person, it is possible for a human person to cease entirely to exist.

9. In their article "Swinburne's Argument for Dualism" (*Faith and Philosophy* 11 [1994], 127-133), William Alston and Thomas Smythe consider -r itself as a candidate for a substitution for x that would falsify premiss 2. They acknowledge that "Swinburne thinks that... [-r is] incompatible with (p.q)", but they note that "that is the conclusion of the argument; it cannot be taken for granted in a premise" (p. 132). From Swinburne's point of view, using -r as Alston and Smythe do begs the question against him.

This controversy raises another worry about the argument, one that we won't pursue here. If assuming that -r is compatible with (p & q) begs the question against Swinburne, it seems also to beg the question against his opponent to assume that -r can't be a substitution for x just because it is incompatible with (p & q). Since materialists would think that -r is compatible with (p & q) and dualists wouldn't, there seems to be no stance other than *neutrality* regarding -r's compatibility with (p & q) that doesn't beg the question in the one direction or the other. If that's the case, then taking premiss 2 to be true is question-begging, too. (We owe this point to Robert Pasnau.)

10. If temporal gaps in personal existence are possible, then not every world in which p, q, and s are all true will be a world in which r is also true. But Swinburne, reasonably enough, denies the logical possibility of such gaps ("Dualism Intact", p. 73f.).

11. Letter of May 4, 1995.

12. The claims at issue here involve the distinction between hard and soft facts. For a good review and an excellent analysis of the distinction, see John Martin Fischer, "Hard-Type Soft Facts", *The Philosophical Review* 95 (1986), 591-601.

13. On Swinburne's own views it seems impossible for any proposition to satisfy restriction (b), to be only about 1984. If the persistence of time is logically necessary, then any proposition at all, including any proposition ostensibly about 1984 only, will entail that there is time after 1984; and that there is time after 1984 does seem to be or to include a hard fact about 1985. Swinburne's way of disarming this criticism is based on his view that all hard facts are contingent (as he has remarked in correspondence with us). In that case, (RS) is in effect this: Any proposition that involves an entailment about a hard (and hence contingent) fact in 1985 violates restriction (b) on substitutions for x, that they describe only 1984 states of affairs. It isn't clear, however, that it's open to Swinburne to claim that all hard facts are contingent. According to him, "A hard fact about a certain time is a fact, all of whose truth-conditions, the states of affairs which make it a fact, are states of affairs at that time" (*The Christian God*, p.132). But the proposition '1985 exists' seems to satisfy this definition, since all the states of affairs which make it a fact are states of affairs at that time—viz., 1985. Since, however, Swinburne holds that it is a necessary truth that time always exists,

which entails that there is time through 1985, it's hard to see how he can hold that '1985 exists' can be contingent. (We're grateful to Sydney Shoemaker for discussion of these points.)

14. See Eleonore Stump, "Non-Cartesian Substance Dualism and Materialism Without Reductionism", *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995), 505-531.

15. For comments on and discussion of an earlier draft we are grateful to William Alston, Robert Pasnau, Alvin Plantinga, Sydney Shoemaker, Richard Swinburne, and Nicholas Wolterstorff.