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On Boyd's Rebuttal of Kripke's Argument for Dualism

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Abstract

The essay presents Saul Kripke's argument for mind/body-dualism and makes the suppositions explicit on which it rests. My claim, inspired by Richard Boyd, is that even if one of Kripke's central suppositions - the principle of necessity of identities using rigid designators - is shared by the non-traditional identity theorist, it is still possible for her to rebut Kripke's dualism.

Introduction

The plan for the essay is first to present Kripke's argument for mind/body-dualism and to make the suppositions explicit on which it rests. Second, *traditional* identity theory is distinguished from *non-traditional* identity theory, if only to set aside further discussion of *traditional* identity theory. My claim is that *even if* one of Kripke's central suppositions - the principle of necessity of identities using rigid designators - is accepted by the *non-traditional* identity theorist, it is still possible for her to rebut Kripke's dualism. The third section expounds the *non-traditional* identity theorist's possible appeal to an analogy in order to explain the relation between mental phenomena (e.g. pain) and physical phenomena (e.g. C-fiber stimulation), while section four reconstructs Kripke's attack on this analogy. Refuting Kripke's attack in light of Boyd's proposals in section five, I conclude that *non-traditional* identity theory is viable.

1. Kripke's Argument for Mind/Body-Dualism

Kripke (1980) wants to defend some form of dualism (without defending Cartesian substance dualism though). In order to do so, he uses the *Cartesian Intuition*, i.e. the intuition that it is possible that the mind exist without the body and that it is possible that the body exist without the mind. In other words, Kripke deems it possible that there be disembodied minds (or "pure souls") and that there be "dis-minded" bodies (or "zombies"); either way - it is possible that the mind is different from the body, schematically represented by:

$$\diamond (A \neq B)^1$$

Due to his conception of names as rigid designators, Kripke is committed to what he calls the *principle of necessity of identities using rigid designators* (cf. Kripke 1980, e.g. p.146). Henceforth, I shall call this principle (PNIRD):

$$(A = B) \rightarrow \square (A = B)^2$$

Notice that the logically equivalent contrapositive of this principle is:

$$\diamond (A \neq B) \rightarrow (A \neq B)^3$$

1 As it is common, I use the symbol " \diamond " as abbreviation of the sentential operator "it is possible that" and the symbol " \square " as abbreviation of the phrase "it is necessary that". Kripke insists that he is concerned with metaphysical modalities (cf. Kripke 1980, e.g. p.35); his view will not be challenged here.

2 For what follows, the reader should take the letter "A" as a place holder for a name of a mental phenomenon (e.g. pain), and the letter "B" as a place holder for a name of a physical phenomenon (e.g. C-fiber stimulation).

3 For the sake of the argument, I'll suppose that (PNIRD) and its equivalent contrapositive are true. I shall thus put aside the obvious objection to the contrapositive that possibility does not imply actuality.

Kripke argues that the *Cartesian Intuition* taken together with the (PNIRD) entails the view that mental phenomena are actually different from physical phenomena; here's the reconstruction of his argument:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| (1) $\diamond (A \neq B)$ | <i>Cartesian Intuition</i> |
| (2) $(A = B) \rightarrow \square (A = B)$ | (PNIRD) |
| (3) $\diamond (A \neq B) \rightarrow (A \neq B)$ | from 2, by contraposition |
| (4) $A \neq B$ | from 1, 3, by modus ponens |

2. Mind/Body-Identity Theory

In order to characterize identity theory, it is advisable to distinguish between *traditional* and *non-traditional* identity theory. A *traditional* identity theorist (whether type or token) rejects the (PNIRD) and thus accepts its negation:

$$\neg((A = B) \rightarrow \square (A = B))$$

which is logically equivalent to:

$$(A = B) \ \& \ \neg \square (A = B)^4$$

The *traditional* identity theorist thus claims (in the first conjunct) that, as a matter of fact about the actual world, it is true that pain is identical with C-fiber stimulation, but - when sharing the *Cartesian Intuition* (in the second conjunct) - the theorist adds that this is not necessarily true; it is possibly false because we can imagine a world in which pain exists without there being any C-fiber stimulation (e.g. in "pure souls") and because we can imagine a world in which C-fiber stimulation exists without there being any pain (e.g. in "zombies").

Kripke thinks that *traditional* identity theory is simply false because it is committed to an incorrect conception of names as non-rigid designators. I shall share Kripke's supposition of names as rigid designators and of the (PNIRD) throughout this essay; so I shall set aside further discussion of *traditional* identity theory here. The goal of the essay rather is to show that *even if* an identity theorist shares Kripke's supposition, it is possible for her to rebut Kripke's dualism.

Non-traditional identity theory (whether type or token) accepts the conception of names as rigid designators and the (PNIRD) and is thus committed to the argument:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| (1) $A = B$ | <i>Identity Theorist's Intuition</i> |
| (2) $(A = B) \rightarrow \square (A = B)$ | (PNIRD) |
| (3) $\square (A = B)^5$ | from 1, 2, by modus ponens |

4 This claim is in turn logically equivalent to: $(A = B) \ \& \ \diamond (A \neq B)$

Now, the *non-traditional* identity theorist cannot attack the validity of Kripke's argument from the *Cartesian Intuition* and the (PNIRD). So she must, in an effort to establish that his argument is unsound, rather attack the *Cartesian Intuition* itself (i.e. the negation of the conclusion of her own argument) - by showing, for instance, that it is impossible that pain be different from C-fiber stimulation.

3. The Non-Traditional Identity Theorist's Analogy

The *non-traditional* identity theorist (henceforth, the *identity theorist*) wants to hold:

$$A = B$$

but cannot at the same time hold:

$$\diamond (A \neq B)$$

For the latter claim contradicts the conclusion of her own argument, and the conjunction of both claims entails that the identity statement is merely contingent (which would render her a *traditional* identity theorist). Instead, the *identity theorist* must hold:

$$\neg \diamond (A \neq B)$$

The challenge for her, then, is to say why the above identity statement is only seemingly contingent. The *identity theorist* must thus explain away its apparent contingency. In particular, she must explain why it is only apparently possible that pain not be identical with C-fiber stimulation, while it is in fact impossible.

Kripke thinks that the *identity theorist* cannot meet this challenge. In his view, she fails to explain away the apparent contingency of the identity statement - even if the *identity theorist* employs the following analogy and claims:

(1A) The situation regarding the statement "pain = C-fiber stimulation" is just like the situation regarding the statement "water = H₂O".

(2A) Also the statement:

$$\text{Water} = \text{H}_2\text{O}$$

has frequently been deemed merely a contingent truth, but - due to Kripke's work - it has turned out to be a necessary truth.

(3A) The explanation why this statement has frequently been seen merely as a contingent truth is that there has been a tendency to mistake it for the statement:

$$\text{The phenomenon felt as water} = \text{H}_2\text{O}^6$$

(4A) Now, this statement is admittedly merely contingently true, i.e. it is true in the actual world, but:

(a) it is possible that the phenomenon felt as water exist without the presence of H₂O, i.e. water (e.g. on Twin-Earth); and

(b) it is possible that H₂O, i.e. water, exist without the presence of the phenomenon felt as water (e.g. in a world inhabited by alien creatures who have entirely different sensations produced by H₂O).

5 Notice that this claim is logically equivalent to: $\neg \diamond (A \neq B)$ and thus to the negation of the *Cartesian Intuition*.

6 Alternatively: The phenomenon that produces the sensation we call "the sensation of water" = H₂O.

(5A) And the situation is analogous for the statement "pain = C-fiber stimulation".

4. Kripke's Attack on the Analogy

Kripke thinks that the *identity theorist* cannot employ the above line of reasoning because, per the analogy, the *identity theorist* would be committed to claim:

(2B) Also the statement:

$$\text{Pain} = \text{C-fiber stimulation}$$

has frequently been deemed merely a contingent truth, but - upon reflection - it has turned out to be a necessary truth.

(3B) The explanation why this statement has frequently been seen merely as a contingent truth is that there has been a tendency to mistake it for the statement:

$$\text{The phenomenon felt as pain} = \text{C-fiber stimulation}^7$$

But it is precisely at this point where the analogy breaks down for Kripke. For the *identity theorist* cannot continue to argue:

(4B) Now, this statement is admittedly merely contingently true, i.e. it is true in the actual world, but:

(a) it is possible that the phenomenon felt as pain exist without the presence of C-fiber stimulation, i.e. pain (e.g. in "pure souls"); and

(b) it is possible that C-fiber stimulation, i.e. pain, exist without the presence of the phenomenon felt as pain (e.g. in "zombies").

The *identity theorist's* appeal to this analogy is not viable for Kripke, because he thinks that there is no possible world in which the phenomenon felt as pain is different from pain - thus rendering the statement:

$$\text{The phenomenon felt as pain} = \text{pain}$$

a necessary truth⁸, while he also thinks that there is a possible world in which the phenomenon felt as water is different from water - thus rendering the statement:

$$\text{The phenomenon felt as water} = \text{water}$$

merely a contingent truth (even though "water = H₂O" is a necessary truth).

Kripke therefore believes that the *identity theorist* cannot explain away the apparent contingency of the statement "pain = C-fiber stimulation" by appeal to the analogy. The *identity theorist* consequently has to bite the bullet and to accept the *Cartesian Intuition*:

$$\diamond (A \neq B)$$

But from this premise, together with (PNIRD), it immediately follows that:

$$A \neq B$$

And so Kripke concludes that some form of dualism is true, while *identity theory* is false.

7 Alternatively: The phenomenon that produces the sensation we call "the sensation of pain" = C-fiber stimulation.

8 Notice that for Kripke, then, there is a definite description that is a rigid designator.

5. The Identity Theorist's Rebuttal

Boyd (1980, cf. p.83ff.) attempts to refute Kripke's attack on the analogy by arguing from the *identity theorist's* point of view as follows:

(1C) The situation regarding the statement "pain = C-fiber stimulation" is exactly like the situation regarding the statement "water = H₂O".

(2C) The statement:

Water = H₂O

is - due to Kripke's work - indeed a necessary truth.

(3C) But the explanation why this statement has frequently been seen merely as a contingent truth is rather that there has been a tendency to mistake it for the statement:

Water = the phenomenon identified as H₂O by standard tests available in the actual world⁹

(4C) Now, this statement is admittedly merely contingently true, i.e. it is true in the actual world, but:

- (a) it is possible that water exist without the presence of standard tests available in the actual world to identify the phenomenon as H₂O; and
- (b) it is possible that standard tests available in the actual world to identify the phenomenon as H₂O exist without the presence of water.

(5C) And this situation is precisely analogous for the statement "pain = C-fiber stimulation".

For, per Boyd, the analogy expands as follows:

(2D) True, the statement:

Pain = C-fiber-stimulation.

is a necessary truth.

(3D) However, the explanation why this statement has frequently been seen merely as a contingent truth is that there has been a tendency to mistake it for the statement:

Pain = the phenomenon identified as C-fiber stimulation by standard tests available in the actual world¹⁰

(4D) Now, this statement is admittedly merely contingently true, i.e. it is true in the actual world, but:

- (a) it is possible that pain exist without the presence of standard tests available in the actual world to identify the phenomenon as C-fiber stimulation; and
- (b) it is possible that standard tests available in the actual world to identify the phenomenon as C-fiber stimulation exist without the presence of pain.

The *identity theorist's* appeal to this analogy is viable for Boyd, because he thinks that there is a possible world in which the phenomenon identified as C-fiber-stimulation by standard tests available in the actual world is different from pain and because he also thinks that there is a possible

world in which the phenomenon identified as H₂O by standard tests available in the actual world is different from water. Boyd thus thinks that both the statement:

Pain = the phenomenon identified as C-fiber-stimulation by standard tests available in the actual world

and the statement:

Water = the phenomenon identified as H₂O by standard tests available in the actual world

are merely contingent and not necessary truths (even though "water = H₂O" and "pain = C-fiber stimulation" are both necessary truths).

Conclusion

I agree with Boyd that the *identity theorist* can explain away the merely apparent contingency of the statement "pain = C-fiber stimulation". While Kripke focuses on the left-hand sides of the identity statements "water = H₂O" and "pain = C-fiber-stimulation" and replaces them with mentalistic definite descriptions of the form "the phenomenon felt as ___" in order to establish the alleged disanalogy, Boyd focuses on the right-hand sides of the identity statements and replaces them with physicalistic definite descriptions of the form "the phenomenon identified as ___ by standard tests available in the actual world" in order to establish the analogy.

And Boyd is right. Water is not identical with the phenomenon felt as water; rather it is identical with the phenomenon identified as H₂O by standard tests available in the actual world. Likewise, pain is not identical with the phenomenon felt as pain; rather it is identical with the phenomenon identified as C-fiber stimulation by standard tests available in the actual world.

Hence, the *identity theorist* can hold that the case of pain being identical with C-fiber stimulation is just like other cases of identity, e.g. that of water being identical with H₂O, or that of heat being identical with mean molecular energy, etc. The theorist can thus reject the *Cartesian Intuition* and accept its negation:

¬◇ (A ≠ B)

in which case ~~the~~ she does not have to accept Kripke's conclusion that some form of dualism is true. Instead, the *identity theorist* can maintain that materialism (preferably some form of non-reductive token materialism) is true, and she can at the same time commit herself to the (PNIRG).

Literature

Boyd, Richard N. 1980 "Materialism without Reductionism: What Physicalism Does Not Entail", in: Ned Block (ed.), *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. 1, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 67-106.

Kripke, Saul A. 1980 *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge: Harvard UP.

⁹ Alternatively: Water = the liquid that ___ (where a description of standard tests to identify water in the actual world goes into the blank).

¹⁰ Alternatively: Pain = the phenomenon that ___ (where a description of standard tests to identify C-fiber stimulation in the actual world goes into the blank).