

Two arguments against materialism (as stated by John Searle)

Saul Kripke: Rigid Designators

A purely logical argument was advanced by Saul Kripke against any version of the identity theory. Kripke's argument appeals to the concept of a "rigid designator." A rigid designator is defined as an expression that always refers to the same object in any possible state of affairs. Thus, the expression, "Benjamin Franklin," is a rigid designator because in the usage that I am now invoking, it always refers to the same man. This is not to say, of course, that I cannot name my dog "Benjamin Franklin," but, then, that is a different usage, a different meaning of the expression. On the standard meaning, "Benjamin Franklin" is a rigid designator. But the expression, "The inventor of daylight saving time," though it also refers to Benjamin Franklin, is not a rigid designator because it is easy to imagine a world in which Benjamin Franklin was not the inventor of daylight saving time. It makes sense to say that someone else, other than the actual inventor, might have been the inventor of daylight saving time, but it makes no sense to say that someone else, other than Benjamin Franklin, might have been Benjamin Franklin. For these reasons, "Benjamin Franklin" is a rigid designator, but "the inventor of daylight saving time" is nonrigid.

With the notion of rigid designators in hand, Kripke then proceeds to examine identity statements. His claim is that identity statements, where one term is rigid and the other not rigid, are in general not necessarily true; they might turn out to be false. Thus, the sentence, "Benjamin Franklin is identical with the inventor of daylight saving time," is true, but only contingently true. We can imagine a world in which it is false. But, says Kripke, where both sides of the identity statement are rigid, the statement, if true, must be necessarily true. Thus, the statement, "Samuel Clemens is identical with Mark Twain," is necessarily true because there cannot be a world in which Samuel Clemens exists, and Mark Twain exists, but they are two different people. Similarly with words naming kinds of things. Water is identical with H₂O, and because both expressions are rigid, the identity must be necessary. And here is the relevance to the mind-body problem: if we have on the left hand side of our identity statement an expression referring to a type of mental state rigidly, and on the right hand side, an expression referring to a type of brain state rigidly, then the statement, if true, would have to be necessarily true. Thus, if pains really were identical with C-fiber stimulations, then the statement, "Pain = C-fiber stimulation," would have to be necessarily true, if it were to be true at all. But, it is clearly not necessarily true. For even if there is a strict correlation between pains and C-fiber stimulations, all the same, it is easy to imagine that a pain might exist without a C-fiber stimulation existing, and a C-fiber stimulation might exist without a corresponding pain. But, if that is so, then the identity statement is not necessarily true, and if it is not necessarily true, it cannot be true at all. Therefore, it is false. And what goes for the identification of pains with neurobiological events goes for any identification of conscious mental states with physical events.

The Conceivability of Zombies

One of the oldest arguments, and in a way the underlying argument in several of the others, is this: it is conceivable that there could be a being who was physically exactly like me in every respect but who was totally without any mental life at all. On one version of this argument it is logically possible that there might be a zombie who was exactly like me, molecule for molecule, but who had no mental life at all. In philosophy a zombie is a system that behaves just like humans but has no mental life, no consciousness or real intentionality; and this argument claims that zombies are logically possible. And if zombies are even logically possible, that is, if it is logically possible that a system might have all the right behavior and all the right functional

mechanisms and even the right physical structure while still having no mental life, then the behaviorist and functionalist analyses are mistaken. They do not state logically sufficient conditions for having a mind.

This argument occurs in various forms. One of the earliest contemporary statements is by Thomas Nagel. Nagel argues, "I can conceive of my body doing precisely what it is doing now, inside and out, with complete physical causation of its behavior (including typically self-conscious behavior), but without any of the mental states which I am now experiencing, or any others, for that matter. If that is really conceivable, then the mental states must be distinct from the body's physical state." This is a kind of mirror image of Descartes' argument. Descartes argued that it is conceivable that my mind could exist without my body, therefore my mind cannot be identical with my body. And this argument says it is conceivable that my body could exist and be exactly as it is, but without my mind, therefore my mind is not identical with my body, or any part of, or any functioning of my body.