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Department of Philosophy
The University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556-4619
574-631-5910 dept/ 574-277-7427 home
Fax: 574-631-0588
Email: peter.vaninwagen.1@nd.edu

Plantinga's Replacement Argument Peter van Inwagen

Alvin Plantinga has recently turned his attention to materialism. More precisely, he has turned his attention to the thesis that philosophers of mind call materialism.¹ This thesis can be variously formulated. In this essay, I will take “materialism” to be the conjunction of the following two theses.

(1) Human persons—what human beings refer to when they use the first-person-singular pronoun—are substances. They are substances in the strict and philosophical sense: they persist through time, retaining their identities while changing various of their accidental properties²; they are not grammatical fictions; they are not “modes of substance”; they are not logical constructs on shorter-lived things (they are not entia successiva); they are not abstract objects (they are not, for example, things analogous to computer programs); they are not events or processes.³

(2) These substances, these human persons, are wholly material. They are (if current physics is to be believed) composed entirely of up-quarks, down-quarks, and electrons, so related by the electromagnetic and color forces as to compose matter in its solid, liquid, and gaseous phases. They are, in two words, living organisms—or, if not whole living organisms, then parts of living organisms (human brains, brains-plus-central-nervous-systems, brain-stems, cerebral hemispheres, cerebral cortices—or perhaps even luz bones or tiny, almost indestructible material things unknown to physiology . . .). They have no immaterial part.⁴

Plantinga's position as regards materialism can be summed up in the words of President Coolidge's well-known summary of the preacher's position on sin: He's against it. That is to say, he not only rejects materialism, not only thinks it false, but thinks it of great—as one might say—human importance to convince his philosophical audience that it is false. In that respect, Plantinga's position vis-à-vis materialism is unlike my position vis-à-vis dualism (that is, the conjunction of thesis (1) and the denial of thesis (2)⁵). I think that dualism is false, but I don't think it's particularly important—in the matter of how human beings live their lives—whether others share this belief.⁶ If this were another paper about Plantinga on materialism, I might try to convince my readers that Plantinga was

wrong to think that the question whether we are material things was of great “human importance”—a question whose importance was comparable to, say, the importance of the question whether materialism in the strong sense mentioned in note 1 is true, or the question whether human persons are substances in the strict and philosophical sense, or the question whether any moral judgments are objectively true, or the question whether human persons survive death. In my view, the question whether human persons are material is indeed “an important philosophical question” in the sense in which, say, the question whether there are Platonic universals, or the question whether causation can be analyzed in terms of constant conjunction, are important philosophical questions. But we philosophers can perhaps forgive non-philosophers if they are not much interested in either of these two “important” questions; it is much harder to forgive them—it is much harder to understand them—if they are not interested in the question whether “the cosmos is all that there is or was or ever will be,” or the question whether they will have a post-mortem existence.

This paper is not that paper. My business here is with a much more narrowly defined and technical issue. I propose to examine a certain argument of Plantinga’s, an argument for the falsity of materialism, an argument he calls “the replacement argument”⁷.

1. I begin with a statement of the conclusion of the replacement argument:

I am not identical with any material substance; that is to say (since we are presupposing that I am a substance), I am an immaterial substance.

The replacement argument, like the central argument of Meditations on First Philosophy, is conducted in the first person. Plantinga’s text is both a record of Alvin Plantinga’s going through the argument “for his own case” and an invitation to each of his readers to go through the same argument (*mutatis mutandis*) for his or her own case. In my presentation of the argument, I will go through the argument for my own case: the pronoun ‘I’ in the above statement of the conclusion of the argument and in the presentation of the argument in the sequel refers to me. When one has gone through the argument and discovered that one is not identical with any material substance (Plantinga contends), one will see that anyone else could go through the same chain of reasoning for his or her own case and discover thereby that he or she is not identical with any material substance. Having seen that this is so, one will, of course, conclude that no human person is identical with any material substance—that every human person is an immaterial substance. I am willing to grant that if Plantinga’s reasoning (adapted to my own case) convinces me that I am not identical with any material substance, it should convince me that every human person is an immaterial substance. I will, therefore, consider only the first-person chain of reasoning that is supposed to convince me that I am not identical with any material substance.

The first step in this chain of reasoning is intended to lead me to the conclusion that I am not identical with a certain material substance, my body.

Once I have reached this conclusion (Plantinga contents), it will be evident to me that, for any material substance, a parallel chain of reasoning would establish the conclusion that I was not identical with that material substance: that I was not identical with my brain, my brain-plus-my-central-nervous-system, my brain-stem, one of my cerebral hemispheres, my cerebral cortex,⁸ I will grant that if one application of the replacement argument proves that I am not identical with my body, other, exactly parallel, applications would prove that I was not identical with any other material substance.⁹ I will therefore consider only the argument for the conclusion that I am not identical with my body. (And, anyway, I am one of those materialists who believes that one is identical with one's body—in a sense of 'one's body' that I shall spell out in a moment. I in fact believe that none of the other items in the foregoing list of "material person-candidates" exists.¹⁰)

Here is the general strategy of the argument. I am to consider (guided by Plantinga's statement of the argument for his case) a certain imaginary episode or adventure—imaginary but possible—that I survive and during which my body ceases to exist. And I am to conclude from the possibility of that imaginary adventure that I am not identical with my body. I certainly have no logical objection to this dialectical strategy. If it is indeed possible for me to survive my body's ceasing to exist, then to assert (in the face of this possibility) that I am identical with my body would be to deny a very attractive modal principle: that $\underline{x} = \underline{y} \rightarrow \sim \diamond \underline{x} \neq \underline{y}$, or, in plain English, that a thing and itself cannot part company.¹¹ (Similarly, if someone wanted to convince me that the Morning Star was not identical with the planet Venus, and if that person proposed to prove this to me by asking me to consider an imaginary—but possible—astronomical catastrophe that destroyed the planet Venus and left the Morning Star unscathed, I should have no logical objection to this strategy.) Of course I believe that any application of this strategy will yield an argument with a false premise—almost certainly the premise that the imagined adventure is a possible adventure—, for, as I have said, I believe that I am identical with my body, and that conclusion follows jointly from this belief of mine and the obvious logical validity of the proposed argument. But that is no reason to refuse to consider the argument: for all I know, considering the imaginary adventure on which the argument turns will convince me that it is more plausible to believe that that adventure is possible than it is to believe that I am (as I have always supposed) identical with my body.

The question on which the cogency of the replacement argument turns, therefore, is: Is the adventure Plantinga describes possible?—or, more cautiously, Is it more plausible to suppose that it is possible than it is to suppose that I am identical with my body?

2. I proceed to a statement of the replacement argument for the conclusion that I am not identical with my body. I begin with a description of the imaginary-but-possible adventure that (if Plantinga is right) I should survive and my body would not.

Following Plantinga's procedure in laying out the description of his adventure, I first give my body a proper name: I say, "Let 'B' be a proper name of my body." But this thing I am supposed to do raises a question: what do I mean

by ‘my body’? Well, a (human) body is, I suppose, a living human organism—a thing that a biologist would classify as a member of the species Homo sapiens. But what do I mean when I say of a certain body, a certain living organism, that it is my body? This is not a trivial question, since a definition of ‘my body’ that one philosopher favored might well be rejected as tendentious by other philosophers. For example: ‘the body with which I interact causally’ (given that a thing can interact causally only with things other than itself). In “Philosophers and the Words ‘Human Body’,”¹² I contended that it was not possible to define ‘x’s body’ in a way that was neutral with respect to all historically important theories of the person-body relation—I contended, that is, that any possible definition of ‘x’s body’ would presuppose the truth or the falsity of at least one of the historically important theories of the person-body relation. For present purposes, however, it will suffice to have a definition of ‘my body’ that is neutral with respect to dualism and materialism (with respect to the affirmation of (1) and (2), on the one hand, and the affirmation of (1) and the denial of (2) on the other). And such a definition is possible:

My body =_{df} the living human organism such that it is possible for me to bring about changes in that organism without bringing about changes in any other organism (other than such organisms as it may have as proper parts)—and which is such that causing changes in it can cause changes in me and in no other person.¹³

This definition is not “neutral with respect to all historically important theories of the person-body relation,” for it presupposes the falsity of epiphenomenalism and occasionalism (that is, the thesis that I have a body in this sense presupposes the falsity of both these historically important theories). But it is, I believe, neutral as between dualism and materialism. ‘B’, therefore, is to be understood as a proper name for a certain living human organism, that living human organism in which I can bring about changes “directly.”

The adventure that is central to the replacement argument is, as one might have expected, an adventure that involves the rapid replacement of various parts of my body. The argument comes in two versions, a “macroscopic” version and a “microscopic” version. In the former, the parts of my body that are rapidly replaced are largish, visible parts of my body like my hands and feet and my left cerebral hemisphere. In the latter, the parts are smallish, invisible parts—atoms, perhaps, or cells. I will consider only the macroscopic version of the argument. (I will later briefly explain why it will not be necessary for my purposes to consider the microscopic version.)

Here, then, is the macroscopic version of the replacement argument.

We suppose first that, for some time now, my brain has had a certain odd property: at any given moment, one of my two cerebral hemispheres is “dormant” and the other “active”; at any given moment, the hemisphere that is active at that moment is then “doing all that a brain ordinarily does” (p. xx); at midnight of each day, all the “relevant” “data” or “information” (I reproduce Plantinga’s scare-quotes) that was then stored or tokened (or whatever the word should be) in the

active hemisphere is copied to¹⁴ the dormant hemisphere; the dormant hemisphere then becomes active and the active hemisphere dormant. If I am awake when this rather complex event happens, I shall not notice it. Any train of thought that I may be engaged in at the time will proceed without interruption. The first part of that train of thought will be tokened in one cerebral hemisphere and the remainder in the other, and the “hemisphere switching” will have no phenomenological consequences whatever.

I do not know whether the recurring sequences of events that are entailed by my brain’s having this “odd property” are physically possible. And I do not know whether, if they are possible and if they were actually to occur, they would have the phenomenological consequences (or lack thereof) that are claimed for them. But I am inclined to think that Plantinga is right to suppose that they are at least metaphysically possible and that he is right to suppose that I should notice nothing if one of them occurred when I was awake (that the sequence of events would be the physical correlate of a single, unified episode of consciousness). At any rate, I will not dispute either of these things.

We now consider some partition (in intellectu) of B into largish, visible parts (non-overlapping); the following partition, let us say: My left and right legs (LL and RL), my left and right arms (LA and RA), my lower torso (LT), my upper torso (UT), my neck (N), my head, exclusive of my neck and my cerebrum (H), and my left and right cerebral hemispheres (LB and RB). (The reader is advised at this point to make a visual aid: a “gingerbread man” outline of a human figure with the labels ‘LL’ etc. attached to the appropriate sections of the figure.) Our imaginary adventure consists in the sequential replacement (in the order mentioned) of each of these parts of B by perfect duplicates (which had been grown in a vat or something like that). Plantinga (speaking of his own case), imagines that this sequential replacement occurs while he is reading the South Bend Tribune. (As a staunch Kathleen Wilkes-style advocate of realism in philosophical examples, I am compelled, in adapting Plantinga’s argument to my own case, to substitute the Chicago Tribune for the South Bend Tribune—for only in very distant possible worlds do I ever open the South Bend Tribune.) The sequence of replacements is integrated with the dormant/active cycle of my cerebral hemispheres in this manner: the sequence of replacements begins just before midnight; whichever of my cerebral hemispheres was dormant before midnight is replaced with a duplicate and is then annihilated; midnight comes, and the “relevant information” tokened in the active hemisphere is copied to the (newly installed) dormant hemisphere, which is then activated; simultaneously with its activation, the hemisphere that had been active is rendered dormant; it is then replaced with a (dormant) duplicate and annihilated.

Now, following Plantinga’s example, I am to consider this imaginary episode and I am asked to reason as follows:

If this process occurs rapidly—during a period of one microsecond, say—B will no longer exist. I, however, will continue to exist, having been reading the comic page during the entire process. (p. xx)

The story is rather complicated. Let us set it out in the form of a time-line. I shall suppose, as Plantinga has invited me to suppose, that the sequence of replacements takes exactly one microsecond. Let it begin just before midnight, at the instant t . At t , RB is dormant and LB is active. The numbers represent nanoseconds (thousandths of a microsecond).

t	LL is replaced and annihilated
$t + 100$	RL is replaced and annihilated
$t + 200$	LT is replaced and annihilated
$t + 300$	RA is replaced and annihilated
$t + 400$	LA is replaced and annihilated
$t + 500$	UT is replaced and annihilated
$t + 600$	N is replaced and annihilated
$t + 700$	H is replaced and annihilated
$t + 800$	RB (dormant) is replaced with a duplicate (RB*), also dormant, and annihilated
$t + 800 - t + 900$	The information in LB (active) is copied to RB* (dormant)
$t + 900$	RB* is activated and LB rendered dormant
$t + 1000$	LB is replaced with a (dormant) duplicate and annihilated.

The one-microsecond interval $t - t + 1000$ is (we suppose) a subinterval of a 12-second interval during which I read (and, in the words of The Book of Common Prayer, inwardly digest) that day's "Doonesbury" strip: at the start of the longer interval I glance at the first panel; at the end of it, having reached the fourth and final panel, got the point, and chuckled, I have formed the intention to go on to "The Boondocks." This whole 12-second mental episode proceeds without interruption. When the one-microsecond sequence of replacements occurs, I don't notice a thing: it has "no phenomenological consequences whatever." It is evident that I exist throughout the 12-second interval ("I, however, will continue to exist, having been reading the comic page during the entire process") and that B does not—for the one-microsecond sequence of replacements has destroyed B.

This story is evidently metaphysically possible, and its metaphysical possibility establishes that it is metaphysically possible for both the following two propositions to be true.

I exist throughout a certain interval

B ceases to exist at some point in that interval.

And, as we have seen, this metaphysical possibility logically implies that I am not identical with B. (Here endeth the statement of the argument.)

3. But why, one might ask, am I to suppose that the sequence of replacements destroys B? Well, I am willing to grant that it does. B is a living human organism, and a certain “minimum assimilation time” is required for an object to become a part of an organism—and this minimum assimilation time is certainly greater than one microsecond (and a fortiori greater, than 100 nanoseconds, the interval between the successive replacements in the story). Consider, for example, an eye transplant. Suppose that \underline{x} is a detached but viable human eye.¹⁵ Suppose that \underline{x} is not a part of Alice and then becomes a part of Alice. How long does it take for \underline{x} to become a part of Alice? How quickly can this happen? Well, it certainly can’t happen instantaneously. There cannot be two “adjacent” intervals (two intervals such that a certain mathematical instant \underline{t} is the least upper bound of one them and the greatest lower bound of the other) such that \underline{x} is not a part of Alice at any instant that belongs to the earlier interval and is a part of Alice at every instant that belongs to the later one. Assimilation, whatever else it may be, is a causal process, and causal processes take time.¹⁶ This much can be said a priori. And we know enough a posteriori to say more. If \underline{t} is the first instant at which \underline{x} is “spatially in place,” is at that place in Alice’s eye socket at which the surgeon wants it to be (supposing, unrealistically, that being in place is a condition that can be achieved instantaneously), there will be an interval following \underline{t} during which \underline{x} is not a part of Alice, and we know enough about rate at which chemical reactions occur to know that this interval will be greater than one microsecond (much less, so to speak, 100 nanoseconds). But we need not appeal to any empirical facts (which do have a way of turning into empirical non-facts). The a priori point is sufficient for our purposes: if the intervals one microsecond and 100 nanoseconds should turn out to be “too long,” we can simply adjust the intervals between replacements in the example.

Now consider any partition (again, in intellectu) of an organism into \underline{n} non-overlapping parts P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n . If the P ’s are replaced sequentially by duplicates, and if the interval between successive replacements is less than the minimum assimilation time (or, even better, if the whole sequence of replacements takes place in an interval less than the minimum assimilation time), the organism will thereby be destroyed.¹⁷ No doubt the “replacement P ’s” will pretty quickly come to compose an organism—a duplicate of the original organism—, but it will not be the original organism.

I have conceded that the sequence of replacements, if it is sufficiently rapid, will destroy B because that thesis is a consequence of the metaphysic of living organisms that I endorse. (Neglecting the point that, according to that metaphysic, neither the “objects replaced” nor the “replacement objects” exist.) Plantinga devotes considerable space and philosophical ingenuity to an attempt

to refute that metaphysic (pp. xx-yy). It will perhaps not astonish the reader to learn that I believe that this attempt is a failure, but this is not the place to discuss that attempt. All that is relevant for our purposes is that he and I agree that a sufficiently rapid replacement of the parts of a living organism will destroy that organism—and, in particular, that the episode of rapid replacement that he imagines would destroy B.

This, then, is the macroscopic version of the replacement argument. There is no need for us to consider the microscopic version, for I am willing to concede that a sufficiently rapid replacement of the cells or the elementary particles of which B is composed would destroy B. My reasons for thinking this—they are, of course, based on a theory of material composition that Plantinga rejects—are essentially the same as the reasons I have given for thinking that a sufficiently rapid replacement of its macroscopic parts (given some partition of B into macroscopic parts) would destroy B.

4. The question comes down to this. Why should I accept—why should anyone accept—the following premise of the replacement argument: that I should continue to exist throughout the 12-second interval that contained the one-microsecond replacement episode? After all, if I am identical with B, this premise is false. It therefore requires some sort of defense.

Plantinga does not offer an explicit argument for this premise. But examination of his text suggests an argument, an argument I will call the argument from continuous consciousness. (I am thinking particularly of the sentence, “I, however, will continue to exist, having been reading the comic page during the entire process.”) One might plausibly contend that Plantinga presupposes this argument, or that he regards the argument as so obvious that he believes that it is unnecessary to state it, that contemplating the replacement story—contemplating the version of the story adapted to the reader’s own case—will cause the argument to be present in the reader’s mind. I will formulate the unstated argument in these words:

During the 12-second interval, a single episode of conscious awareness occurs. If a single episode of conscious awareness occurs during a certain interval, a single person must be the subject of that episode. I am the subject of the earlier parts of this episode. Since a single person is the subject of the whole episode, I am therefore the subject of the final parts this episode—and I therefore exist at the end of the 12-second interval.

This argument is, in my judgment, valid. But are its premises true? In particular, is its first premise true: ‘During the 12-second interval, a single episode of conscious awareness occurs’? Not in my view. Plantinga’s modus ponens (if indeed the modus ponens is Plantinga’s) is my modus tollens¹⁸:

I do not exist at the end of the 12-second interval. But if any person is present throughout the 12-second interval, it is I. No person, therefore, is present throughout that interval. If, therefore, a single episode of

conscious awareness occurs during the 12-second interval, no one person is its subject. And if a single episode of conscious awareness occurs during a certain interval, a single person must be the subject of that episode. It is, therefore, false that during the 12-second interval a single episode of conscious awareness occurs.

If you asked me what I should expect, phenomenologically speaking, if I were about to be subjected to a replacement procedure like the one Plantinga has imagined, I would reply that (considerations pertaining to an afterlife aside) I should expect my consciousness to come to an abrupt end at the moment the replacements were made. My phenomenological expectations would be identical with those I should have if I were told that I was about to be vaporized by the explosion of a hydrogen bomb. And this is no mere bloodless conviction of the intellect. I value my own continued existence and continued consciousness as much as most people do, but I would sacrifice no present pleasure or other good (e.g., a sum of money that I might leave to my loved ones) to bribe the powers-that-be to substitute my undergoing the replacement procedure at t for my being vaporized at t.

I will concede that if, as I began to read “Doonesbury,” I had been ignorant of the fact that the series of replacements was about to commence, then, at the end of the 12-second interval there would exist someone who believed that he had just had the experience of reading the four panels of a comic strip.¹⁹ But, in my view, this person would be wrong. He would not have existed when the 12-second interval began. He would have been brought into existence by the series of replacements and by the subsequent “coalescing”—Plantinga’s nice word—of the “replacement parts” into the whole that is himself. At the moment the replacement parts began to form a whole, his consciousness would have been “switched on” all in an instant; he would be created remembering, as Russell said in another connection, “a wholly unreal past” (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, having wholly unreal memories of a real past).

I have discussed what is essentially the argument from continuous consciousness in §16 of Material Beings (pp. 205-207). I said there (the ‘you’ is an interlocutor who had presented a case different from Plantinga’s replacement story, but not entirely unlike it):

You say that a “continuous consciousness” is present in a certain situation over a certain interval. [But you also hold that the presence of a continuous consciousness implies the continuous presence of a conscious thinker. If that is so, then to] find out whether a certain situation contains a “continuous consciousness,” . . . we have first to find out whether that situation contains a continuously conscious thinker. We can’t do things the other way round. We can’t find out whether a situation contains a continuously existent thinker by first finding out whether it contains a “continuous consciousness.” (pp. 205-206)

The reader who desires a fuller discussion of this point is directed to pp. 205-207 of Material Beings.

To sum up: The argument from continuous consciousness has a premise that I (I who am attempting to go through the replacement argument “for my own case”) see no reason to accept, namely that a single, continuous conscious episode would occur during the replacement episode; therefore, I have no reason to accept the premise of the replacement argument that the argument from continuous consciousness was supposed to establish: that I should exist throughout the replacement episode (I know of no reason to accept that premise of the replacement argument other than the reason that was supposed to be provided by the argument from continuous consciousness). I have not, I concede, said anything that should convince Plantinga that either of these premises is false. I have not said anything that should convince anyone that either of these premises is false. But it is not my business to convince Plantinga (or anyone) of anything. It is, rather, Plantinga’s business to convince me of something: that I am not identical with B. And this he has not done. Perhaps the replacement argument will convince others that they are not identical with their bodies—perhaps, indeed, it will convince some or even all of those who have read the present essay of this. I do not claim for this essay the power to turn its readers into people who will be unmoved by the replacement argument. But its readers will understand why I am unmoved by it. (As will the readers of §16 of Material Beings. The argument of the final section of this essay is little more than a recapitulation of an argument presented in that section of the book.)

¹ As opposed to the following stronger thesis, which is also called materialism: Everything—or every concrete thing or everything that has causal powers—is material. One might well accept materialism in the sense of the present essay but reject this stronger thesis; that, in fact, is my own position.

² In this essay, I shall presuppose an “endurantist,” as opposed to a “perdurantist” account of persistence. I think that most of, if not all, my arguments could be translated into perdurantist terms, but they would have to be presented in forms that were very different from the forms in which I shall present them. Since both Plantinga and I are endurantists, I see no point in trying to present my arguments in forms acceptable to perdurantists.

³ Many philosophers of mind reject thesis 1 and would call themselves materialists (if, for no other reason, because they are materialists in the strong sense of note 1). Plantinga and I, however, agree that thesis 1 is true. It will therefore be convenient for me to treat the “materialism-dualism” dispute as a dispute about whether “human substances” (on whose existence Plantinga and I agree) are material or immaterial substances.

⁴ Or at any rate they have no non-physical part. Perhaps electrons (for example) are too small (or “too weird”) to be classified as material objects. But electrons are certainly physical things, since they have properties like mass that are uncontroversially physical properties.

⁵ Strictly speaking, dualism is the conjunction of these two theses with the thesis that matter exists (or that material things exist). The conjunction of thesis (1) and the denial of thesis (2) and the thesis that matter exists is what some philosophers call substance dualism—a species of dualism that is opposed to property dualism. In my view, however, substance dualism is the only dualism—property dualism being (depending on the words that are used to formulate it) either an unintelligible thesis or a thesis that is not really a species of dualism. For more on my difficulties with the idea of property dualism, see my essay “A Materialist Ontology of the Human Person,” in Dean Zimmerman and Peter van Inwagen (eds.), Persons: Human and Divine, forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

⁶ I do think it’s important for Christian dualists to take special care not to allow their dualism to weaken or to undermine the importance of the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead. And I do think that there’s some danger of dualism’s having such consequences.

⁷ The argument is presented in Plantinga’s essay “Against Materialism.” The section of the paper devoted to the argument (Section 1) is entitled, appropriately enough, “The Replacement Argument: An Argument from Possibility.”

⁸ It is a nice question whether some version of the replacement argument can be used to show that I am not identical with my luz bone or with some tiny, almost indestructible material thing unknown to physiology. Since I am willing to stipulate that I am neither of these things, I will not consider this nice question.

⁹ What I am granting here is not entirely trivial. Consider this argument of Moore’s: I am closer to my head than I am to my feet; therefore, I am not my body. Whether or not this argument does show that I am not my body, it is evident that no parallel argument shows that I am not, e.g., my brain.

¹⁰ For reasons that I have spelled out in Material Beings (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990).

¹¹ And it is also to deny Leibniz’s Law, which is perhaps even more attractive than this modal principle, for if I shall exist on Thursday and if my body will not exist on Thursday, then, if I and my body are identical (Leibniz’s Law assures us), I both have and lack the property “being a thing that will exist on Thursday.” The Law of Non-Contradiction (which is, if possible, even more attractive than Leibniz’s Law) therefore implies that if I and my body are identical and if I shall exist on Thursday and my body will not exist on Thursday, then Leibniz’s Law is false.

¹² In Peter van Inwagen (ed.), Time and Cause: Essays Presented to Richard Taylor (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980), pp. 283-299.

¹³ This is the definition of ‘my body’ that I used in Metaphysics, second edition, (Boulder, Colo. and London: Westview Press and Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 169-70. It was first suggested to me by Frances Howard-Snyder in conversation.

¹⁴ Plantinga says “transferred.” I prefer to say “copied,” and that is the word I shall use. Information is not, after all, a liquid that can be pumped from one place to another—however useful the metaphor of a “flow of information” may be in

some contexts. To speak of transferring something from place A to place B strongly suggests that, after the transfer, the “something” is no longer in place A. My paradigm of a “transfer of information” (if one must use the phrase) is this: Imagine two boards, on each of which there are n on-off switches arranged spatially in the same way; someone takes note of the on-off positions of the switches on one of the boards and turns the counterpart of each of the switches on the other board to the same position. After that has been done, the information that had been (and still is) “tokened in” the pattern of “ons” and “offs” on the one board will be tokened in the (now identical) pattern on the other board. This paradigm should make it clear why I prefer to speak of “copying” rather than “transferring” information.

¹⁵ According to my metaphysic of material things, there are no such things as human eyes, detached or undetached, but I will concede their existence for present purposes. That is, since we are considering an abstract point in the metaphysics of assimilation, I will not insist that the example I am about to offer be consistent with my beliefs about the ontology of the material world—with the answer to the “Special Composition Question” that I accept. A similar point applies to LL and RB and all the other “parts” that figure in my version of Plantinga’s imaginary episode: I don’t in fact think that they exist, but I am willing to concede their existence “for the sake of argument.”

¹⁶ As Plantinga points out (p. xx), if this principle can be established on no other grounds, it follows from the fact that causal influence can propagate no faster than the speed of light.

¹⁷ In the language used to discuss assimilation in Material Beings, the organism will be destroyed because its life will have been “disrupted.” (p. 147)

¹⁸ John Pollock once said to me, “Al and I accept all the same arguments. It’s just that the ones he thinks are proofs, I think are reductios, and the ones he thinks are reductios, I think are proofs.”

¹⁹ Actually, I’m wary of conceding even that much. I am inclined to think that—for “Kripke-Putnam” reasons—the newly created “someone” would not speak or understand English or any other language. And I doubt whether it would be possible to believe that one had just had the experience of reading the four panels of a comic strip without having a language. But I’ll let that worry go, since it’s not relevant to our present concerns.