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The contemporary intellectual predominance of materialism grows out of an accumulation of arguments that gain power by uniting various scientific disciplines. Charles Taliaferro hopes to counter the unified power of the materialist theory with a cosmological picture that has a unity of its own, bringing together dualism about persons and a form of classical theism. The thought is that each gains by supporting the other. The first two-thirds of Consciousness and the Mind of God is given over to evaluating the leading philosophical arguments for various forms of materialism and putting forward a case for Taliaferro’s preferred brand of personal dualism, which he calls “integrative dualism” to distinguish it from the views associated with Plato and Descartes that grant too much independence to the mental. The final one-third of the book piggy-backs on the earlier discussion and is devoted to the presentation of Taliaferro’s “integrative theism” and criticisms of various Neo-theistic views that have attempted to placate materialist sentiments in various ways.

This book includes an insightful critical review of the main materialist positions in anglophone philosophy of mind—and many that are less prominent—and an introduction to some Neo-theistic views that will seem strange to traditional ears. The brightest stars in contemporary materialism—Paul Churchland, Donald Davidson, Daniel Dennett, David Lewis, Thomas Nagel, John Searle, Sydney Shoemaker—strut across the stage of the book and are all given a honest chance to present some of their most subtle and attractive arguments. This is where Taliaferro’s book is most valuable, as a survey and evaluation of the strongest materialist positions. At every point Taliaferro has thoughtful observations and explanations. Moreover, the final chapters sympathetically present the revisionist theologies of Adrian Thatcher, Fergus Kerr, Grace Jantzen and others. The author’s arguments for his own integrative dualism and integrative theism are a useful addition to this vast field, if only by illuminating the surrounding theories in the process of self-clarification.

The first chapter presents some prominent materialist arguments, puts forward a criterion for the non-identity of mental and physical properties (a so-called dual-aspect theory) and then chips away at the plausibility of the materialist case generally. Chapter Two introduces Taliaferro’s own integrative dualism, the view that we persons are nonphysical yet in an integrative union with our material bodies, and describes its advantages over other forms of dualism, especially with respect to materialist objections about the possibility of a coherent theory of meaning and about vulnerability to otherminds skepticism. The next chapter presents a modal argument for types of dualism that are more substantial than those that distinguish only between mental and physical properties. The final three chapters are more theologically focussed. Chapter Four argues that integrative dualism avoids the world-denying, body-hating aspects of Platonic and Cartesian dualisms that have led to a Neo-theistic embrace of materialism. Chapter Five devel-
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ops Taliaferro’s integrative theism by an explanation of God’s omnipresence in the universe, as evinced in divine agency and knowledge. The final chapter details the arguments for passibilism, God’s intimate emotional presence in and interaction with the world.

Taliaferro’s arguments for dualism, both weaker and stronger versions, rely on the principle of the indiscernibility of identicals (if A is B, then whatever is true of one is true of the other). You are justified in believing that the two cars you saw on different occasions are not the same car if you are justified in believing that something true of one is not true of the other (say, that one “was built [entirely] in Japan” while the other “was built [entirely] in Norway”). Of course, your belief could be wrong, but the principle does justify the inference, given the right kind of evidence.

Initially, Taliaferro argues for a weak version of dualism, which is meant to soften us up for the more substantial dualism to come. He makes three emendations to the simple principle of indiscernibility of identicals, only the first two of which he comments on. The emended criterion of non-identity is: “for any property X and any property Y, if I have reason to believe that I can conceive of X without conceiving of Y, I have reason to believe that X and Y are not identical” (p. 52). First, he qualifies the criterion in a way that recognizes the possibility of mistakes. He is a dualist who is satisfied to argue that he has reason to believe the mental and the physical are not the same, though he admits that he might turn out to be wrong. Second, this weaker dualism is formulated in terms of properties rather than objects. Later, we get the sterner, more substantially dualistic versions. Third, the criterion is not formulated in terms simply of what is true of the properties but in terms of whether one conceives of them. It is this final shift of formulation that creates problems for Taliaferro.

Consider his instantiation of the argument for property dualism. “I can conceive of auditory sound experience without conceiving of the accompanying sinusoidal compression wave trains, the motion of my eardrum, and so on” (53). So, according to the criterion, the (mental) property of being an auditory experience is not the same as the (physical) property of being a compression wave train, being the motion of my eardrum, etc. But contrast the earlier example of the cars. Forget the defeasibility qualification, forget the application to properties. What forced the inference to the non-identity of the cars was the incompatibility of what was said of them. Being built entirely in Norway and being built entirely in Japan could not be true of a single automobile. But that incompatibility is lacking in the case Taliaferro presents on behalf of property dualism.

Consider whether Bill’s favorite property and George’s favorite property are the same. Does Taliaferro’s criterion help? I have reason to think the properties are different, his criterion tells us, if I can conceive of one without conceiving of the other, and surely I can do that. After all, I might not even know that George exists. It is a consequence of Taliaferro’s criterion that, if we can give different property descriptions and can think of one description without thinking of the other, we have reason to think they describe different properties. This makes Taliaferro’s criterion too strong: when would we ever identify two different conceptions as of the same property? In fact, Taliaferro offers no clear example of two reputed proper-
ties that are the same. (The closest he comes are unhelpful examples of high philosophical controversy—for example, being knowledge and being justified true belief.) Since it seems to me that I can conceive of the property of being the sum of 3 and 4 without thinking of the property of being the sum of 4 and 3, by Taliaferro's criterion those are different properties.

Taliaferro himself recognizes that my being able to conceive of the property of being the 42nd President without conceiving of the property of being Al Gore's running mate does not show that the 42nd President was not Al Gore's running mate. But his diagnosis of what blocks that inference turns on the difference between properties and bearers of properties. His conceptual criterion, he claims, gives us reason to differentiate among the former, not among the latter. The properties are surely non-identical, but to go on to draw a conclusion about the non-identity of the bearer(s) is a common error. "It is because I can distinguish the properties being a Roman orator known by many people as Tully from being someone who denounced Catiline and who is known by many people as Cicero that I am enabled to reach the mistaken view that Tully and Cicero are different people, whereas there is only one person known by virtue of possessing these different properties." (57) But this diagnosis is wrong. What is behind such reasoning, if anyone did ever indulge in it, is the assumption that, where there's different names, there's different people, and if that assumption is unjustified, then so is the inference. But justified or not, the reasoning involves adding to the attribution of the properties—being named Tully and being named Cicero—the idea that they are incompatible, not merely different. (Who would think that because there's a piece of fruit in my drawer that is round and there's a piece of fruit in my drawer that is orange that I've got two pieces of fruit?!) It's not the move from conceptions of properties to the bearers of properties that is the problem: it's the assumption about the incompatibility of properties.2

Taliaferro's integrative dualism makes its first full-dress appearance a third of the way through the book in response to a couple objections that have troubled more fractured forms. If mental events are utterly separated from the physical and bodily realm, how is it possible to have any shared, public communication about them, and how is it possible to know anything at all about the mental states of another person? Taliaferro seems to grant that if our minds were utterly disembodied, unintelligibility and skepticism would follow. His answer is to maintain the metaphysical distinctness of our minds and bodies while recognizing the contingently embodied nature of persons. Though metaphysically distinct, the person and his body are "profoundly united" and "interwoven," forming "a singular reality" and "a substantial unity." What this personal embodiment amounts to is illustrated by the commonplaces of daily life. It's not that my brain perceives using my eyes or that my body is a container in which I dwell. "I feel with these fingers and this skin, I see with these eyes, smell with this nose ... I feel my heartbeat or have a stomach ache." I can move (parts of) my body directly, not by means of moving something else (though I can do that, too). My movements "incorporate" and "realize" my intentions. I am a certain size and weight. These and other platitudes make me more than a spirit inhabiting a body and also more than a mere material body.
So, Taliaferro has charted a course between the Scylla of materialistic functionalism, which appreciates the crucial role of public causal relations for the possibility of meaningful content yet ignores the real distinction between the phenomenal and the behavioral, and the Charybdis of fractured dualism, which appreciates the real separability of the mental and the physical yet pushes the former into a privacy that is incoherent and re­
dolent of skepticism. This reviewer is very much in sympathy with Taliaferro’s project, and the platitudes about sensation, thought, and action do chart the right course. But what’s missing is a higher order of philosophical explana­tion of this middle ground. Saying that mind and body are metaphysically (if contingently) distinct yet “profoundly linked” merely whets the appetite. Saying that the body “embodies” the mind is no explanation of their relation­ship at all. At most it marks the spot where explanation is required. It is important to realize that the requirements on Taliaferro are dramatic and different from those on some of his competitors. An identity theorist, say, can call on analogies from the scientific canon—the identity of water and H₂O or of genes and DNA. But Taliaferro’s integration of mind and body is metaphysically unique, and, therefore, completing his project means recast­ing basic categories of metaphysics itself. The commonplace of personal embodiment are not the solution: they pose the question.

At the center of the book is a modal argument for substantial dualism of minds and bodies. Like the earlier, weaker argument for property dualism, it relies on what we can conceive and on the application of the principle of the indiscernibility of identicals. But unlike that earlier argument this stronger version turns on a true incompatibility of properties, the possibili­ty of a mind existing without a body versus the possibility of a body exist­ing without a body. Putting aside criticisms aimed at clearly invalid forms of the argument, which can be avoided by requiring a direct reference to the things compared, Taliaferro finds the most serious threat to his argu­ment in Nagel’s distrust of modal intuitions. Why think that what see illS possible to us really is possible? Part of Taliaferro’s response to Nagel is to accuse him of inconsistency since ironically the sort of conceptual thought-exp­eriment Nagel rejects for dualism he applies within his own argument against the view that there are no features of reality that are beyond human conceivability. But, his alleged inconsistency aside, Nagel is right to point out that the use of modal intuitions requires some principled justification. Taliaferro’s answer is that the modal arguer not be “intellectually negi­gent.” To some, I suspect, this appeal to intellectual virtue will seem little more than hand-waving, and it is true that the author offers slim practical advice, acknowledging the difficulties involved in filling out concepts like attentiveness and carefulness. But though one might wish for more, it seems to me that Taliaferro is right to bring us to this place where there is evaluation without comprehensive explicit rules. He should be commend­ed for not giving in to the temptation piously to pronounce speciously pre­cise prescriptions.

The last set of three chapters—the final third of the book—is devoted to applying the lessons of integrative dualism to some problems in con­temporary theology. Once again, Taliaferro takes a stance between non-inte­grative dualism and materialism, but here the materialistic target is not
atheistic. The Platonic and Cartesian dualisms that have accompanied much of traditional theology have unfortunate consequences that have led some theologians to embrace features of materialism. Fractured dualism can result in a fragmentizing individualism, an excessive asceticism, and a denial of the value of the physical world and its ecology. A backlash from theologians like Adrian Thatcher, Fergus Kerr, and Grace Jantzen has led to post-dualist theologies of human and divine nature, theologies that incorporate materialist lessons in various ways. Taliaferro argues that an integrative dualism can furnish clues for a theology that retains much of the classical theistic picture while avoiding both the denigration of the physical and the paradoxes of a materialistic theism.

Integrative dualism, Taliaferro argues, makes more sense of a number of traditional Christian theological questions than either the non-integrative dualisms or the new materialistically-influenced theism. The Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the afterlife are all best understood according to a model that accepts the possibility of a true embodiment yet allows for the perfect separation of the soul and the body. Moreover, God's relation to the cosmos is illuminated by the idea of integrative theism that borrows aspects of our own dualistic status. While God is not embodied in the universe, His omnipresence there conserves its existence and explains the possibility of His agency and omniscience. The integrative aspect of Taliaferro's view is most on display in his advocacy for the personhood of God, with His passionate, loving, even suffering nature. Taliaferro's passibilism dovetails nicely with his integrative dualism, at least at the analogical level. But it shares with that view—and even augments—a sense of ultimate metaphysical mystery. A suffering presence that is disembodied is even more mysterious than metaphysically distinct things that are metaphysically united. Perhaps we have simply reached bedrock, and metaphysics and theology must rest content with describing accurately the peculiarities of these singular cases.

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NOTES

1. I'm ignoring here issues of implicature. Why would I describe the same fruit to you using semantically different—even if logically consistent—sentences?

2. If one were justified in thinking that the property of being the 42nd President is incompatible with being Gore's running mate, then one would be justified in thinking that the 42nd President is not Gore's running mate.


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In a well-known paper, Alvin Plantinga urges that "Christian philosophers