

Metaphysics // Fall 2018

Handout 20

Spaces and times: Quinton

MULTISPATIAL REALITY. Kant maintained the unity of space and the unity of time. The basis of these claims was our capacity of 'pure intuition', sometimes also labelled 'outer' and 'inner' sense. Newton, unmentioned here, was committed to the same claim of unity, though for different reasons (his conception of space and time was also significantly different). Quinton asks whether it is possible to construct a thought-experiment that would undermine this thesis of unity.

To preserve the terms of Quinton's thought-experiment, suppose that I am a resident of England. And suppose that one day my dream experiences undergo a drastic change. Every night I go to bed I find myself in Lakeside. Whereas in England I am a farmer (say), in Lakeside I am a fisherman. The dream is vivid and consistent. This happens night after night, so that gradually there is no reason for me to dismiss my Lakeside life as a dream. It appears to me as real as my life in England.

Hence, Quinton says, it would be reasonable to conclude that I inhabit 'two worlds', by which he plainly means 'two spaces'. This conclusion is extraordinary, but only in the way any conclusion of a non-sequitur argument is. Let us see why.

COHERENCE WITHIN DREAMS. In the first place, as Quinton notes himself, there is a question of simple coherence, in the sense of the dream being logically consistent. After all, my dreams are sometimes long, sometimes short. How can the Lakeside day events be fitted into typically fewer hours than the England events. This is not a serious objection, I think, and Quinton deals with it fairly in the text.

More troubling is probably the following issue of coherence. Do I, in England, dream of my dreams in Lakeside? Suppose I don't—that is, I[Eng] have no dreams containing a dream of I[Lake]. Then the England/Lakeside parallel is incomplete. Sitting at my coffee table in England, I know that I have dreams. The content of these dreams is my life in Lakeside, a life involving the events of I[Lake]—e.g., catching fish in Lakeside. But I also know that I[Lake] has no dreams. That would count as evidence for treating the England life as real, but the Lakeside life as imaginary. In any case, the desired analogy between England and Lakeside would break down.

Alternatively, suppose I do have dreams in Lakeside. What do they consist in? By assumption they are dreams about my life in England, about the events in the life of I[Eng]. Yet this dream-life-in-England, as seen from my bed in Lakeside, cannot begin: for it to begin I must first wake up in England, i.e. the life of I[Eng] must 'resume'. But if I wake up in England, my dream in England comes to an end.

Conclusion: I[Eng] can dream of Lakeside, but I[Lake] cannot dream of England. However, this assumes that England and I[Eng] are somehow in a privileged position. Cannot it in reverse, that only I[Lake] have dreams? Probably so. Then more generally, we say that dreams are possible only in one location, but not in the other.

CAUSATION AND IDENTITY. As Quinton himself admits, physical causation is impossible, but the same cannot be said about psychological causation. Why should that be so? The answer is unclear. We can add more details to this objection. In Quinton's description, *I* live in England and *I* live in Lakeside. Or at least, we are supposed to conclude that looking at the scenario described. But what gives me grounds to say that of my *self*? For the self to be preserved in both spaces, some of its features must be preserved too. Shouldn't we say that some bodily features must be preserved across spaces? If so, we have physical causation as well.

EPISTEMIC WARRANT. The most salient objection, I think, is simply this. Having the Lakeside-like dreams can persuade me, if it persuades at all, of any kinds of things. I may think that someone has screwed up my brain. Or I may think that the bed I go to every night is rigged. Or that every English bed is rigged. Or that I recall the experiences before my birth, i.e. the experiences of my soul before it inhabited my current body, in the *Meno*-like fashion.

There is, in other words, no shortage of more or less disturbing explanations. Quinton, I think, has not given us a reason why the described scenario should lead me to the conclusion that reality is

multispatial. Absent in it is a *specific indication* that no *spatial* relations exist between England and Lakeside.

GLOBAL SCEPTICISM. Connected to the previous problem is the following observation. From the perspective of I[Eng], England may feel more real: Lakeside happens when I[Eng] go to sleep. The Lakeside dream may be more or less coherent internally, but it must retain the status of a *dream*. However, if it is a dream, then the question whether there are spatial relations between England and Lakeside is irrelevant. Or at least this is what I[Eng] am entitled to conclude.

Suppose, on the other hand, we reject the premiss: Lakeside, as remembered in England in the awake state, does not appear more or less real than England. Memories of it are like memories of my recent visit to Banbury. This would place me (i.e. I[Eng]) in the situation of a rather global scepticism. I[Eng] will begin questioning many facts of England uncritically assumed so far. It would seem rather strange that in this situation of uncertainty I[Eng] would be entitled to conclude that reality is multispatial—and that he would conclude that merely on the basis of the experiences he undergoes on his bed at night.

MULTITEMPORAL REALITY. Quinton argues that, in contrast to the spatial case, we should not conclude that England and Lakeside are in separate times. This is because the events in England and Lakeside can still be fitted in one memory, either in the memory of I[Eng] or in the memory of I[Lake]. But the two memories are in fact one. This is so, since ‘I[Eng]’ and ‘I[Lake]’ do not refer to two distinct individuals. By assumption, they merely refer to the different temporal (and spatial) positions of the same individual. Hence they should be fitted in the same time-series.

Observe here that the conclusion we draw relies on the following claim:

Lemma 1. Let M_A and M_B be memories of two events A and B . Then, if M_A and M_B can be fitted into the same series, then A and B can also be fitted into the same series.

Question 2. Prove Lemma 1.

COMMENTS. I have no objection to Quinton’s argument regarding time. But I think that, as indicated above, a parallel argument, if not exactly the same, should be made in the case of space. Namely, that the insistence on the preservation of personal identity should undermine any conclusion about multispatial reality.

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