

## Personal Identity, Part IA: *Metaphysics*.

Lecture IV: *Physical Approaches: Turning the Tide*, Thursday 26th October

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Let's focus on physical accounts. So far, we neglected these because of cases like **Brain Transplant** or **Mind Transplant**. So, let's start with what a physical theorist might say about such puzzle cases.

### 1. *Bernard Williams on Body-Swapping*

1.1. Consider the following case from (Williams, 1956).

**Charles and Guy Fawkes:** Charles undergoes some changes and afterwards he has all the memories, dispositions, desires, and beliefs of Guy Fawkes.

1.2. Here are two interpretations or hypotheses about what is going on in **Charles and Guy Fawkes**.

**Hypothesis 1.** Charles is identical to Guy Fawkes.

**Hypothesis 2.** Charles has become clairvoyant.

**H1** is what a broadly psychological account must be committed to: identity consists in psychological continuity. In contrast, according to **H2**, Charles does not literally *die*, and Guy Fawkes is not reborn.

1.3. Interestingly, we should note that **H2** fares better than **H1** when we complicate the case as follows.

**Charles, Robert, and Guy Fawkes:** Charles undergoes changes and afterwards he has all the memories, desires, and beliefs of Guy Fawkes. However, this time, so too does his brother Robert.

If **H1** holds, then Robert *and* Charles are identical to Guy Fawkes. This is problematic because Charles and Robert are themselves not identical and identity is transitive. **H2**, however, is non-problematic here: there is no logical problem in having two individuals with clairvoyant access to Guy Fawkes.

1.4. Williams (1970) also argues that judgements in puzzle cases are sensitive to how they are represented.

**Body Swap Game:** Two people *A* and *B* consent to a procedure by which the total psychology of *A* and *B* are swapped: two people emerge from the procedure 'A-body' and 'B-body'. The former is the body of what was once *A* with switched psychology. The latter is the opposite. Before the procedure, they must (selfishly) chose which of *A*-body and *B*-body receives \$1M or gets a large electric shock.

Suppose that *A* selects *A*-body for electric shock and *B*-body for \$1M. *B* selects conversely.

If the *A*-body receives \$1M and *B*-body is electrocuted, then:

*B*-body will complain about the electrocution.

*B*-body will complain that this is not what *he* wanted to happen to *him*.

*A* got unlucky, but choose wisely. Indeed, this suggests that 'to care about what happens to me in the future is not necessarily to care about what happens to this body (the one I now have)...' (Williams, 1970: 164)

1.5. This might all be intuitive. However, Williams then asks us to consider the following.

**Future Electrocution:** Suppose you are told that you will be electrocuted in half an hour. However, you are also told that just before your electrocution, your entire psychology will be swapped with the psychology of someone else. Moreover, the same thing happens to this someone else.

Is it rational to fear the future electrocution? We can break the case up into stages.

- (a) You are told you will be electrocuted.
- (b) You are then told that before electrocution, your psychology will be wiped.
- (c) You are then told that you will be given a new psychology.
- (d) You are then told that the new psychology is the total psychology of someone else.
- (e) You are then told that the same someone else undergoes the same ordeal.

It is rational to be fearful at (a) and, moreover, it isn't rational to be less fearful at (b). Likewise, with (c): having new memories, beliefs, etc. doesn't make it less rational to be fearful. Finally, (d) and (e) should have no effect: (d) means your new psychology belonged to someone else and (e) means that someone else is going to be electrocuted and have their psychology swapped and so on.

1.6. This case is important. First, it seems to undermine the psychological view: in (a)–(e), I am rationally fearful of what happens to *me*, regardless of the psychological changes. Second, it undermines the argument from puzzle cases for psychological views: **Further Electrocution** is a re-description of **Body Swap Game**.

## 2. Some Physical Criteria

2.1. Suppose we are convinced by all this. What physical relation, then, does personal identity consist in? Perhaps the most straightforward answer: sameness of *body*.

**Bodily Criterion:** *A* is identical to *B* iff *A*'s body is numerically identical to *B*'s body.

This is in step with the every day epistemology of persons, it makes sense of everyday expressions like 'I am injured', and it would explain the troubling case of **Future Electrocution**.

2.2. However, it's quite unclear how we should understand bodily identity. Amy Kind (2015) notes that in fantastical cases, we recognise someone *transforming* into a bear, as precisely that: a *transformation*, rather than the destruction of their body. But even if we stick simply to more mundane cases, it's undeniable that our bodies undergo huge changes. How, then, should we understand numerical identity of bodies?

2.3. One might think that it's best to reformulate the Bodily Criterion in terms of some form of continuity, only this time *physical* continuity. But the worry then is that we could generate *physical* reduplication cases. Think about technologies which would allow for people to split in two. This would result in two bodies, each physical continuous with the original body. This is a reduplication case but for a physical theory of identity.

2.4. Another worry one might have about the Bodily Criterion is that it isn't a criterion for *personal* identity at all; or at least not if we have in mind what we usually consider to be persons. This is embraced by some who endorse the Bodily Criterion. Judith Jarvis Thomson (1997: 203) says her account captures the identity of 'just plain people—ordinary men, women, children, and infants'. But remember that we were focused on the question 'What is it for someone to be the same person over time?'. It's worth thinking about whether the Bodily Criterion is properly an answer to *that* question.

## References

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