

Personal Identity – Part II

1. Personal Identity: Why Care?

Under what possible circumstances is a person existing at one time identical with something existing at another time?

Here are some topics that personal identity might be thought to be relevant to:

- Law—especially punishment
- Ethics, e.g., questions of promise-keeping
- Practical Rationality

It can be helpful to keep these questions in mind as we proceed. Sometimes it's easier to get a grip on the question of whether someone would be the same person as you by thinking about whether it would be practically rational for you to make sacrifices to insure their future interests, whether they should feel guilty for things you've done, etc.

2. Four Views about Personal Identity

Body: If X is a person, then X is the same person as Y just in case Y has the same body as X. (Olson)

Soul: If X is a person, then X is the same person as Y just in case Y has the same soul as X. (Descartes)

Memory: If X is a person who exists at some time t_1 , and Y exists at some time $t_2 > t_1$, then X is the same person as Y just in case Y has X's memories. (Locke)

Psychological Continuity: If X is a person, then X is the same person as Y just in case X is uniquely psychologically continuous with Y, where psychological continuity consists in overlapping chains of strong psychological connectedness, itself consisting in significant numbers of direct psychological connections like memories, intentions, beliefs/goals/desires, and similarity of character (Parfit)

3. Examples

Each of these examples may serve as a counterexample to one or more of the views above, go through the examples and use the chart below to mark which examples you think provide which counterexamples to which views.

Transplant: There are lots of cases like Locke's case of the prince and the cobbler. Suppose that you and your friend were going to have the following operation: your brain will be implanted in her body, and her brain will be implanted in yours.

Memory Transfer: A ruthless serial killer (who's also a brilliant neuroscientist) has a terminal disease, but before he dies he kidnaps Joe and implants his memories into Joe's brain. Joe now has, in addition to all his old memories, a new set of gruesome memories—memories of committing various murders. Joe is repulsed by these memories, and tries not to bring them to mind, but he can recall every detail of the killer's heinous acts.

Questions: According to the three views above, is Joe the same person as the person that committed the murders? What's the right thing to say about this case? Should Joe feel guilty? Be put in jail?

Lame Excuse: I wake up one morning and feel quite normal. My body looks the same, I have some seeming memories that are confirmed by my surroundings, the desire to have eggs for breakfast, that I seem to remember always having, etc. The phone rings and my friend Jane calls to remind me that I owe her a hundred dollars, she tells me that I borrowed this money from her at a casino to make some unwise bets. I say to her: “well, it certainly seems like someone owes you money – I do hope you get paid back! Problem is, though, I have no reason to think that I am the person that lent that money from you. I do have a seeming memory of that night – I can relate exactly what happened, in fact. But for all I know, I might have become someone else in the meantime. I do wish you the best of luck though in finding the person who owes you that money!”

Memory Loss: Suppose a young boy is flogged for stealing an apple. He then becomes a brave officer and remembers stealing the apple. Then he becomes a general and remembers being a brave officer but doesn't remember stealing an apple. (Reid)

Teletransportation 1: You go into a machine which scans your body and a duplicate comes out on another planet with all the same memories, beliefs, desires, etc.

Teletransportation 2: You go into the machine and there is a malfunction. Two duplicates pop out.

Teletransportation 3: Someone goes into the teletransporter. You pop out at the other side. You are very glad to be alive, and especially glad to realize that there was no malfunction – only one duplicate was created. Suddenly, you see some fuzzy dots on the camera that shows what's happening on yet another distant planet – oh no – it looks like someone else is popping up – he's wearing the same jeans as you, and oh – shoot – it looks like you're about to die!

	<i>Body</i>	<i>Soul</i>	<i>Memory</i>	<i>Psychological Continuity</i>
<i>Transplant</i>				
<i>Memory Transfer</i>				
<i>Lame Excuse</i>				
<i>Memory Loss</i>				
<i>Teletransportation 1</i>				
<i>Teletransportation 2</i>				
<i>Teletransportation 3</i>				

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