

The Self

Subjects in Search of Objectivity

A Place to Begin

- * A Natural Thought:

- * S^2 at t^1 is the same person as S^1 at t^1 *iff* S^2 and S^1 are (or have) the same body.

- * Let us call this the Bodily Continuity (BC) theory of personal identity.

The Prince and the Cobbler

- * For should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon as deserted by his own soul, every one sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions: but who would say it was the same man? The body too goes to the making the man, and would, I guess, to everybody determine the man in this case, wherein the soul, with all its princely thoughts about it, would not make another man: but he would be the same cobbler to every one besides himself. I know that, in the ordinary way of speaking, the same person, and the same man, stand for one and the same thing. And indeed every one will always have a liberty to speak as he pleases, and to apply what articulate sounds to what ideas he thinks fit, and change them as often as he pleases. But yet, when we will inquire what makes the same spirit, man, or person, we must fix the ideas of spirit, man, or person in our minds; and having resolved with ourselves what we mean by them, it will not be hard to determine, in either of them, or the like, when it is the same, and when not. —Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II 27. 15

Against BC

1. If BC, then sameness of body is both necessary and sufficient for PI.
2. If sameness of body is sufficient for PI, then the body of the cobbler when informed by the consciousness of the prince would be the cobbler and not the prince (or, be the body of the cobbler and not the body of the prince).
3. It is not the case that when informed by the consciousness of the prince, the body of the cobbler is the cobbler (or, is the body of the cobbler and not the body of the prince).
4. So, sameness of body is not sufficient for PI.
5. If sameness of body is necessary for PI, then the prince and cobbler could not swap bodies.
6. The prince and cobbler can swap bodies.
7. So, sameness of body is not necessary for PI.
8. So, not BC.

A Positive Proposal

- * The story of the prince and the cobbler not only tells against BC, but suggests a better theory, the psychological continuity (PC) theory of PI:
- * S^2 at t^2 is the same person as S^1 at t^1 *iff* S^2 and S^1 are psychologically continuous and connected.
 - * For instance, S^2 at t^2 is the same person as S^1 at t^1 *iff* S^2 remembers the experiences of S^1 .

Some Advantages of PC

- * Captures various features of our self-conception:
 - * We are thinkers/perceivers/feelers.
 - * We are agents.
 - * So we—rightly—hold ourselves as praiseworthy/blameworthy.
 - * We remember ourselves, so to speak, from the inside.
 - * We are, in sum, *essentially* psychological beings.
 - * We tend to regard the self, as a psychological being, as a locus of value.

Problems for PC

- * Two sorts of problems arise:
 - * The boy, the corporal, the general (Reid)
 - * The possibility of fission

The Simple View

- * Two constraints on PI (VN, 43):
 - * Nothing can be a self, can be *me*, unless:
 - * It determines completely and determinately that any question of whether a given mental state—past, present, or future—is mine (= the *all or nothing condition*)
 - * It excludes any possibility of its being the case that any two of my experiences should occur in non-identical subjects (= the *one-one condition*)
- * ‘Subjectively, these seem like nonnegotiable essential features of myself’ (VN, 43).

Pressure on the Simple View

- * The possibility of fission seems to imply the possibility of there being a future person for whom there is no possibility of that person's being uniquely me.
 - * This violates the one-one condition.
- * On the assumption that mental states are determined by brain states, then presumably, in principle, my brain cells could be replaced by other cells (or, for that matter, by silicon chips. . .), with the resulting gradual changes in my memories and personality traits.
 - * In this case, there simply might be no answer to the question, at a given time, about whether someone was me or not me.
 - * This violates the all-or-nothing condition.

Perhaps?

- * Perhaps, though, we should attend to the thought that there are no mental states without mental subjects.
- * Yet subjects seem like, well, substances, beings of a certain kind, '*things*' says Nagel (VN 45).
- * This subject seems something in which the stream of conscious states occur.
- * It seems to be something which is modally ductile, in the way in which no stream of consciousness can be.
- * So, we are left, again, with a subjectively given series of states seeking an objective foundation, at least in the sense that we are seeking a bearer of states which is not itself a state—and not, importantly, constituted by the activity of any subject of states.
 - * For then it would be a self-constituting being, poofing itself into existence from nothing.