

Perry – *A Dialogue*



The problem of *trans-temporal personal sameness* (aka the problem of personal identity):

- Is person P1 at time T1 the same person as P2 at T2?
- If so, in what does that sameness *consist*?

Characters in Perry's dialogue:

Gretchen Weirob – philosophy prof, atheist, materialist, empiricist, skeptic; is dying from injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident

Sam Miller – professional chaplain (presumably Christian) and a long-time friend of Weirob's

Dave Cohen – former student of Weirob's, Jewish

Perry – *The First Night*



Weirob's challenge: “Persuade me that my survival after the death of this body is *possible*.” (2)

- Definition of survival: there will be someone for whom it would be appropriate for Weirob to *anticipate* having her experiences and correct to say that she *remembers* Weirob's. (3-4)
- “[T]he only relation that supports anticipation and memory, in this way, is simply *identity*.” (4)
 - Is this right?

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Weirob's challenge: “Persuade me that my survival after the death of this body is *possible*.” (2)

- There are many types of possibility, e.g.,
 - Epistemic = not thought certainly *not* to be the case.
 - Logical = not internally inconsistent
 - Physical = compatible with the fundamental laws of physics
- Weirob *says* she means
 - something that would be sufficient for comfort (2)
 - not likely or physically possible but “conceivable, given ... [that] this body will die ... be buried and ... rot away.” (3)
 - imaginable, given the same facts (3)
- But mere *epistemic* possibility is sufficient for comfort, and provided she doesn't think it *certain* that there is no afterlife, it is epistemically possible for her. So why does she need an argument?
 - Perhaps she wants a positive, logically possible *model* of survival.

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Miller's first proposal: Just imagine a person existing in the future after your body is gone and that that person is you. (5)

Weirob's reply:

- “But in a few days *I* will quit breathing, *I* will be put into a coffin, *I* will be buried. ... That, I take it, is obvious, is given.” (5)
- What is she assuming?
- She has a *bodily identity* theory of personal identity.
- i.e., sameness of person consists in sameness of body:
same body, same person
- If we burn a Kleenex box to ashes we would never upon finding a similar box take it to be *the very same box*. (5)
- Exact similarity (qualitative identity) is not sufficient for identity (numerical identity).

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Miller's second proposal: “What is fundamentally you is not your body, but your soul or self or mind.” (6) He suggests a *soul identity* theory of personal identity.

- Sameness of person consists in sameness of soul:
same soul, same person.
- Substance dualism (Plato, Descartes): “Your soul or mind is immaterial, lodged in your body while you are on earth. The two are intimately related but not identical.” (7)

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Weirob's reply:

- Since you can't perceive my soul, how can you know that I-now am the same person you've known for years? (8)
- Since all you can perceive is my body, you must be relying on a principle like *same soul, same body*.
- If that principle is a necessary, *a priori* truth, then your theory is in danger of collapsing back into the *bodily identity* theory. (9)
- If that principle is a contingent, *a posteriori* truth, a “generalization we know by observation,” then how could we come to know it? (10)
- “Since you can never ... see or touch [a soul], you have no way of testing your hypothesis.” (11)

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Weirob's reply (cont.):

- Miller: We judge sameness of soul by psychological similarities (12).
- Weirob: How is this even “evidence to the slightest degree” for identity of soul? (13) Similarities in a river over time do not “establish” identity of water in the river. (14)
- Miller: I can be sure of a body-soul correlation in my own case. (15)
- Weirob: Perhaps you can know that such a correlation holds *at a time*, but how about *over time*? Why couldn't there be a continuous “flow of souls” through a body? (16):

What do you think so far? Has Weirob *refuted* the soul identity theory?