

# PERSONAL IDENTITY AND THE AFTERLIFE

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FOR ALL THE POINTS OF THE COMPASS,  
THERE HAS BEEN ONLY ONE DIRECTION SINCE OUR BIRTH,  
AND TIME IS ITS MEASURE.

—Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (Act I, Scene 4)

NOTHING IN HIS LIFE BECAME HIM LIKE THE LEAVING IT.

—William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (Act I, Scene 4)

### PERSONAL IDENTITY AND PERSONAL SURVIVAL

What is it that stays the same from the time you're born until the time you die, such that we can say that the *same* person existed from birth until death? All the molecules of your body are constantly being replaced; the outward appearance of your body is constantly changing as you gain and lose weight, add wrinkles and scars and other marks of time, and lose teeth, hair, and other parts. And if your body does not seem especially stable, your mind is even less so, what with your thoughts, feelings, and desires constantly shifting. There seems, indeed, to be little stability to your existence; and yet you typically feel quite comfortable in talking about your past and future as though they really are yours. When we talk about 'identity' and 'identical', we don't mean 'similar' or 'identical in resemblance'; I don't resemble very closely the newborn baby that later grew up to be who I am now, and yet I would say that that baby was me — that we are identical. Similarly, two ball bearings in the hub of my bicycle wheel might resemble each other perfectly, and yet they are not, in the sense we have in mind, identical, for they clearly are not the same thing (they are not *numerically* identical).

The question of personal identity grows especially compelling in the face of death. Watching others die and losing their companionship helps motivate our desire for, and belief in, an "afterlife" — that is, some form of human existence beyond our quotidian realm. Ever since Plato, philosophers have been depicted with one foot in the grave, forever worrying over death and the afterlife — and perhaps some understanding of death is important for a proper understanding of life. Philosophers do have quite a bit to say here, although some of them argue, like Wittgenstein, that positing an afterlife doesn't really help explain or give meaning to life, since it merely puts off answering life's inevitable mystery. Other philosophers, like John Perry, argue that the notion of an afterlife is incoherent (and therefore, in any normal sense of the word, impossible).

Personal survival involves two things — a person and survival — and it must allow for both my anticipation of future experiences and my memories of my now present and past experiences. Survival clearly requires more than merely "surviving in the memory of others," and it requires more than the material atoms of my body surviving somewhere in the ecosphere (recycled in the bodies of worms and plants), and it also requires more than my mental atoms or mental stuff (if there is such) surviving as part of the Godhead or World-Soul or Nirvana. If the thing that survives is not a thinking thing that remembers my experiences and is connected to my present self in some appropriate way, then I

#### WITTGENSTEIN ON DEATH

6.4311 Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death.

If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.

Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits.

6.4312 Not only is there no guarantee of the temporal immortality of the human soul, that is to say, of its eternal survival after death; but, in any case, this assumption completely fails to accomplish the purpose for which it has always been intended. Or is some riddle solved by my surviving forever? Is not this eternal life itself as much of a riddle as our present life? The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1919)

cannot be said, in any meaningful sense, to survive.

There are three common Western traditions regarding the survival of bodily death. The first is bodily resurrection. Here personal survival simply involves the resurrection of the body (or, perhaps, the creation of a “similar” body). The second tradition, stemming from the ancient Greeks, is a disembodied survival. Here the non-physical soul survives the death of the body, and this soul is either eternal (having existed for all eternity), immortal (having begun to exist in the past, but now continuing to exist indefinitely), or mortal (where the soul will die sometime in the future after the body’s death). A third tradition, endorsed by most Christian sects, is the view that survival requires both resurrection of the body and continued existence of the immaterial soul (see 1 Corinthians 15, or the Apostles’ Creed). Here, the soul can exist separately from the body, but the person is not complete until the soul and body are united.

Must simply the “thinking thing” survive, or is there more to me than that? Can I be me without my body? What has to survive so that the same person that exists now will also exist later? This brings us to the more general question of personal identity, namely, in what does personal identity consist? What makes me “the same person” from moment to moment through the career of my life (and possibly beyond)? Before we consider this, however, we need to look at the nature of identity in general.

### DEATH AND GRIEF

Grief fills the room up of my absent child,  
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,  
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,  
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,  
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form.  
Then have I reason to be fond of grief.  
Fare you well: had you such a loss as I,  
I could give better comfort than you do.  
I will not keep this form upon my head  
When there is such disorder in my wit.  
O Lord! My boy, my Arthur, my fair son!  
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!  
My widow-comfort, and my sorrow’s cure!

— William Shakespeare, *The Life and Death of King John* (Act III, Scene IV)

## VARIETIES OF IDENTITY

Summers were the best part of my growing up — a claim I imagine most of us could make — and part of what made summers so good for me was spending time on my grandparents’ farm. There were apple trees to climb and woods to explore, but best of all were those long afternoons when my grandpa and I would float around in a little rowboat on the pond out back. We called it fishing, although fish weren’t always involved in the project. He bought that boat new when I was little, just for us, so that we could fool around together on the water.

Sometimes we’d haul the boat in for repairs, and I’d help replace an old plank, or sand and brush on a new coat of paint. Now while it didn’t happen to the rowboat we used, it’s not much of a stretch to imagine having to replace, over the years, each of the boards that made up that little boat. And there might be some grandfathers, fussier than mine, who would replace a board at the first sign of damage or rot; and if you combined such fastidiousness with my own grandpa’s frugality, then you can easily imagine a pile of loose planks slowly accumulating in the corner of the barn — all the old boards from the rowboat that were replaced (“You never know when a board like that might come in handy...”). You could imagine how, after ten or fifteen years of such replacements, every single board in the original rowboat would be replaced. And off in the corner lay all the boards original to the boat when it was first bought.

Now imagine this frugal, fastidious grandpa finally dying, and all his property going up for sale in an estate auction. You’re there, of course, because there are warm memories in some of the things for sale, including that old rowboat that you see lying off to the side in the grass alongside various farm implements. You also notice a pile of lumber stacked neatly in a corner of the barn, and come to realize that these are the castoffs from the many repairs made on the rowboat. While waiting for the auctioneer to finish with the household goods, you start piecing these planks together, and pretty soon you’ve reconstructed the original rowboat, the one you’re grandpa bought for the two of you back when you had just turned three. All it would take are some nails and sealant and paint, and you could be out back floating on the pond again, just like in the old days. The memories make your heart ache and you long to get to work on it.



Then you look back over at the other rowboat lying in the yard, and stop short. Which boat was it that so fills your memory of summers long ago? The boat over there in the grass, or this one in the barn that needs a little work? You remember how, during one of your last summers at your grandpa's (before high school came with all its distractions), you scratched your initials into the bottom near the back, and after a little searching, you find them on one of the loose planks in the barn. The more you reflect, the more you're torn between these two boats. Which one did you share with your grandpa?

Let's give these boats different names to facilitate the discussion. The boat your grandpa bought so long ago we'll call Al; the boat out on the grass we'll call Bill; and this pile of boards we'll call Carl (just to even things up, let's invest a few afternoons and fasten all those boards back together, so as to make Carl seaworthy). Now we can start making some observations. Back towards the end of that first summer, when your grandpa felt the need to replace one of Al's small planks, Al was still Al even after the replacement. It would have been strange to claim otherwise; and likewise with each subsequent summer: Al was still Al. That would suggest that Al is identical to Bill (listed in the auction as a "rowboat"), and this seems to be true not in the sense that Al and Bill are *similar*, but rather in the very strong sense that they are numerically identical, that they are one and the same rowboat.

And yet if you consider all the planks belonging to Al when it was first purchased, you'd find those very same planks now in Carl (listed in the auction as "miscellaneous lumber"). So it also seems that Al and Carl are identical — again, in this strong sense of being numerically identical. Yet we know that both these claims can't be true, since Bill and Carl aren't numerically identical — they can't be identical, because they are two separate things.

John Locke, an English physician and philosopher of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, discussed the nature of identity in his widely influential *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). Locke considers several kinds of identity: logical identity (a thing is what it is and not another thing;  $A = A$ ), the material identity of heaps (where if you add, remove, or replace a particle, then you have a different heap), and the functional identity of systems or organized beings (where if the thing remains the same functionally, then it is said to maintain its identity — functional identity assumes some sort of material continuity, but not a material identity). We can avoid the paradoxical situation with Al, Bill, and Carl by distinguishing between the material identity of heaps and the functional identity of systems. Al and Bill are functionally identical, while Al and Carl are materially identical. Once this distinction is made, the paradox disappears.

With respect to the functional identity of systems or organized beings, Locke considers separately the identity of non-living organized beings (ships, tools, machines), the identity of plants and animals, and finally the identity of human beings. According to Locke, life is the principle of identity for living things. It is the "organizational principle" uniting the disparate parts (which themselves may change). We might re-phrase this and call life the "functional unity" of the thing, which maintains a thing's identity through the many material vicissitudes of time.

### DEATH AND MEANING

"Dead bodies are indecent; they proclaim with embarrassing candor the secret of all matter, that it has no obvious relation to meaning. The moment of death is the moment when meaning hemorrhages from us."

— Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2004)

### LOCKE ON PERSONS

John Locke defined a person as "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it: it being impossible for any one to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive." [*Essay*, Bk. 2, ch. 27, §9]

## THE BASIS OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

The identity of human beings depends upon this functional unity of the life of the organism. Locke was quick to point out, however, that 'human being' and 'person' do not mean the same thing, and that consequently the identity of the one might not be the same as the identity of the other. A human being is a kind of living organism, while a person is a thinking being and, in particular, is a forensic or legal being. In other words, a person can be held accountable for her actions, and what makes a person accountable for her actions is the ability to recognize them as her own, and this requires an awareness of what she is doing, in doing X, as well as an ability to remember having done X. So being a person (or here: the same person

as she who so acted in the past), involves both consciousness and memory. Locke concluded that personal identity requires memory: I am the same person over time so long as I have memories that connect me to my past selves.

### BEING IDENTICAL VS RECOGNIZING IDENTITY

Two separate but closely related questions regarding personal identity are (1) What makes me the same person over time?, and (2) How do I know that I'm the same person over time? The former question concerns the basis of personal identity (an ontological question), while the latter concerns the way we can recognize such identity (an epistemological question). The epistemological question, furthermore, may well have different answers regarding my own identity and the identity of others. The criteria I use for considering myself to be the same self from day to day are that I have the same memories, that I have roughly continuous emotional states, and that others around me respond to me in the same way (they say things like "Hi Steve," and the people that I remember knowing act towards me as though they know me, etc.). The criteria that I use for deciding that someone is the same as someone I've previously seen normally includes their bodily resemblance and general behavior (which should exhibit beliefs and attitudes generally consistent with those held previously). This epistemological question is not trivial — indeed, Locke appears to have ultimately viewed the ontological question as moot, claiming that we can have no knowledge of such matters.

### IS MENTAL SUBSTANCE THE BASIS OF MY PERSONAL IDENTITY?

Leading candidates for the basis or foundation of personal identity are mental substance (immaterial substance; spirit; soul; the thinking thing), bodily substance (the human body), consciousness and memories, and the brain (a part of the body). Let's first consider the possibility that my mental substance remaining the same is the basis of *me* remaining the same. This claim is somewhat plausible — especially for Cartesians, who equate the self with the "thinking thing" or mind (which is a mental substance). Since I am just my mind, my personal identity rests wholly on the identity of my mind. Descartes felt that we have immediate and perfect knowledge of our own minds, which should make the recognition of our own identity easy.

But Locke rejected this Cartesian view that personal identity was a matter of "substantial unity" (namely, that we exist as the same soul or mental substance over time) — for Locke did not think we could gain any knowledge of such a soul. We neither care nor know whether, throughout our lives, we are in some "vital union" with the same or different immaterial substances, and we are willing to affirm or deny personal identity in complete ignorance of this. Hence, the identity of immaterial substance is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for personal identity. In reviewing Descartes' arguments in his *Meditations*, we see that all he has shown is that I am certain that some thinking thing exists, but not that this is somehow the same thinking thing that existed ten minutes ago. We have (as Berkeley put it) merely a "notion" of the workings of a mind or mental substance, but nothing more. Locke followed Descartes in being a dualist, but argued (against Descartes) that we cannot have knowledge of this substance (and therefore no knowledge of its identity through time). Locke argued that we can imagine a single person containing more than one mind or mental substance, as well as imagine many people sharing a single mind or mental substance. This becomes more clear when you think of the mind or mental substance as merely a tool or mechanism for thinking (somewhat like the CPU of a personal computer), without involving any memories or thoughts as such. Here we can imagine that these minds or souls could get passed around freely, just as different carpenters might all use (at different times) the same hammer. Similarly we might imagine a single person using two different minds (thinking mechanisms), just as a carpenter might use (perhaps as a joke, or to show off) a different hammer in each hand.

#### AN EPICUREAN DEATH

"Death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more."

— Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"

### IS BODILY SUBSTANCE THE BASIS OF MY PERSONAL IDENTITY?

Perhaps being the same person simply requires that there is the same body. The main point favoring this theory is that we seem to rely on the similarity of bodies in determining the personal identity of others.<sup>1</sup> One might object that the body could not possibly be the basis of personal identity since my personal identity remains the same through time whereas my body is constantly changing: molecules come and go as I eat, respire, sneeze, (etc.), my skin and hair and fingernails are constantly being replaced, and so on. So there is very likely no part of me that is the same as when I was born (at which time there was also only about seven pounds of stuff). Similarly, we might have the misfortune of *losing* parts of our bodies: our appendix or tonsils, a finger, toe, or limb in an accident, etc., and yet no one would suggest that such losses bring about a loss of personal identity, nor do they typically interfere with recognizing other people as the same over time.<sup>2</sup> These considerations should remind us of the difference between material and functional identity: clearly our bodies lack material identity over time (since their matter is constantly changing), but they appear to have a functional identity until the time of death, and it is this functional identity that serves, perhaps, as the basis of our personal identity.<sup>3</sup>

Locke and others have objected, however, that the functional identity of our bodies is simply the identity enjoyed by all plants and animals, and that *personal* identity is something more, insofar as being a person is more than simply being an animal. What we want is an identity of that thing that chooses and acts, an identity of agency and thus an identity of the responsible party for those actions. Who or what I am would seem to be much more than just my body; rather, I am a mind with a set of experiences (thoughts, sensations, feelings, desires) — and surely these are what determine my personal identity. To further this point, Locke argued against the view that bodily substance is the basis of personal identity in much the same way that he argued against mental substance, namely, that we can imagine a single person (or consciousness) spread between two or more bodies, and we can also imagine a single body inhabited by two or more persons (after the fashion of Jekyll and Hyde, perhaps, or of Sybil, the famous case of what was once called “multiple personality disorder” but in the *DSM IV* is now called “dissociative identity disorder”). If a one-to-one correspondence between bodies and persons is not necessary, then bodily identity cannot be the basis of personal identity.

[Poem (haiku)]

The world of dew  
is a world of dew and yet  
and yet.

— Issa (1763-1827), on the death  
of his only child

### ARE CONSCIOUSNESS AND MEMORY THE BASIS OF MY PERSONAL IDENTITY?

Given the above arguments, Locke concluded that substance (both mental and material) is simply irrelevant to personal identity. What matters rather is the identity of my consciousness (that is, thought or awareness itself, as opposed to Descartes’ “thinking thing”) and of my memories. My consciousness separates my self from other selves, and so personal identity would seem to consist of an identity of consciousness. My identity extends as far back into the past as my memory. As far as we can ever know, mental and material substance is irrelevant: I may consist of many such substances but, so long as they are united by a single consciousness, I remain a single person.

<sup>1</sup> Although we can also make mistakes here, this being a stock element in many comedies. Recall the fascinating case of Martin Guerre, which has since been made into a movie, as recounted in Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Harvard U. P., 1983).

<sup>2</sup> It should perhaps be noted here, as well that roughly 90% of the cells that are part of our physical make-up are bacteria that are genetically unrelated to us (the so-called microbiome of our bodies).

<sup>3</sup> This speaks to those religious beliefs opposing cremation or organ donation on the grounds that the material body must be preserved for a future resurrection.

Locke is likely right in seeing our mental lives as central to our sense of self, and yet there are certain intractable problems with viewing personal identity as based on continuity of consciousness and memories. First, it's a commonplace that our consciousness is discontinuous and our memory is incomplete (I fall asleep, I forget things), which suggests that my continuity as a person is always being broken; but no one believes that they are a different person after every nap, and so it seems unlikely that this consciousness criterion is adequate.<sup>4</sup>

It can be argued (successfully, I think) that our memories bridge the various gaps in our conscious lives; upon awakening (from a nap or longer sleep, or from a coma, etc.) we use our memories to reconstruct our lives again — this usually happens quickly and spontaneously, although in cases of protracted coma this can take longer and be more difficult. But we still have the problem of incomplete memories. Thomas Reid, an 18th century Scottish philosopher and critic of Locke's, raised this problem with his "Brave Officer" example: imagine an officer who, in mid-life, recalls being flogged as a boy, and who, as an old man, recalls his brave deed as an officer but can no longer remember the flogging. On Locke's criterion, the boy and the officer are the same person, and the officer and the old man are the same person, but the old man and the young boy are not. Locke might try to avoid this by talking about *potential* memories, but surely we can imagine a case where the old man has simply lost his childhood memories such that they truly do not exist (even potentially) for him, and yet we would still want to say that the old man was the same person as the child.<sup>5</sup>

But perhaps the most difficult problem for Locke's memory criterion is that we are unable to distinguish between **genuine** and **apparent memories** by referring to memories and consciousness alone. Insane asylums are filled with people who claim to be Napoleon Bonaparte or Jesus or Catherine the Great, and they will even "remember" such events as the defeat at Waterloo, or the crucifixion, or various episodes at the St. Petersburg court, but we don't want to allow that these people are in fact identical with whom they claim to be. They are crazy, and their memories are not genuine. How do we know this? Well, we assume that their memories are not genuine because their bodies could not have been in the right place to have had those memories (none of them are old enough, for instance, to have been at Waterloo to witness the defeat of Napoleon's army, or at the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, or at Catherine's court).

### IS MY BRAIN THE BASIS OF MY PERSONAL IDENTITY?

Separating genuine from apparent memories seems to require some reference to the body, as shown in the following argument:

- || (1) Sincere memory claims are either genuine or apparent.
- || (2) Being "in the right location" to have the memory is necessary for a memory to be genuine.
- || (3) Location is determinable only by referring to the body.
- || (4) ∴ Distinguishing genuine from apparent memory claims requires the body (and possibly more than that).

So it would appear that bodily identity is necessary for recognizing personal identity. Basing the recognition of personal

<sup>4</sup> Descartes had championed the view that our minds are never inactive, that they are always thinking to some degree (lest they go out of existence) — although Locke needs continuous *conscious* thoughts, and not even Descartes was willing to claim that these occurred.

<sup>5</sup> Another response to Reid's puzzle is that transitivity would hold for persons only if they are real things, but persons might instead be a kind of non-transitive relationship.

[Poem]

#### SPRING

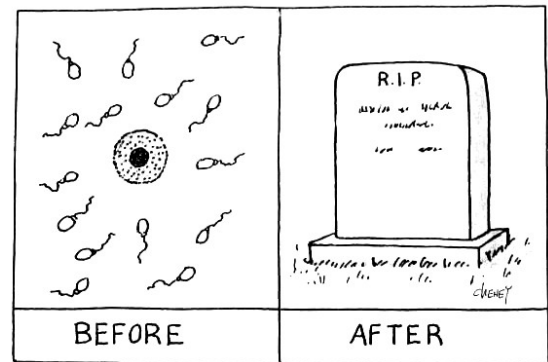
To what purpose, April, do you return again?  
 Beauty is not enough.  
 You can no longer quiet me with the redness  
 Of little leaves opening stickily.  
 I know what I know.  
 The sun is hot on my neck as I observe  
 The spikes of the crocus.  
 The smell of the earth is good.  
 It is apparent that there is no death.  
 But what does that signify?  
 Not only under ground are the brains of men  
 Eaten by maggots.  
 Life in itself  
 Is nothing,  
 An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs.  
 It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,  
 April  
 Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers.

— Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1921 (1892-1950)

identity on the body, however, met with several problems above. A way out of this difficulty might be to base personal identity on just a *part* of the body, namely, the brain. The brain, after all, is what is affected by the various sensations that form the basis of all genuine memories of events like Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. If your brain was not at Waterloo at the time, then you cannot have a genuine memory of the event; at best, you experienced it in some second-hand way, such as from reading a book or hearing a history lecture.

It is not difficult to demonstrate the centrality of the brain to our personal identity. Suppose tonight, after you've fallen asleep, a team of neurosurgeons breaks into your bedroom, puts you under general anesthesia, and removes your brain; suppose that they had earlier removed Barack Obama's brain and now proceed to install it into your skull. Later that night they will rush back to Washington, DC, to hook-up your brain to Barack Obama's body. Now here we have a fairly practical question: Where will you be when you wake-up in the morning?

The person with Barack Obama's looks will likely shrink back a bit at the First Lady's morning affections and will worry about being late to class. Meanwhile, the person with your looks will be issuing Executive Orders, calling for Secret Service agents, and in other ways acting presidential. Your friends will at first think you are playing a joke on them; after a while one of them will quietly call a counselor in the student development office to let them know that you've finally lost your marbles. People's intuitions differ regarding this brain-transplant scenario, but most feel that they go wherever their brain goes. Just as the biblical Ruth said to her mother-in-law Naomi, so we say to our brains, "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried" (*Ruth*, 1:16-17).



These strong intuitions that identify our brains with our selves are in part based on the belief that the brain is the repository of our memories. But there must be more to personal identity than these memories, for suppose that there exists a "memory-transfer" machine that allows us to surreptitiously switch your memories with the President's. After the transfer, both of you will be somewhat confused (for instance, one of you will have memories of going to bed in the White House, of having such and such a body, etc., and yet will be confronted in the morning with the experience of a completely different bedroom and body). Do we want to say here that one goes with one's memories? Maybe, but it all seems less certain. It could be that after the transfer, we have instead two very confused persons who awake in the same beds (and bodies) they had earlier fallen asleep in? Is it possible that your brain has a way of processing experiences that makes them uniquely yours? We normally consider a person suffering from amnesia as the same person, and presumably a person with a wholly new set of memories will still be that same person, only now somewhat deluded.<sup>6</sup>

A similar thought-experiment, developed by Bernard Williams,<sup>7</sup> further separates the roles of memories and brains in our sense of personal identity. Williams argued that memories are not what count (or at least not exclusively) in matters of anticipating the future. Suppose that you were told that tomorrow afternoon you will be tortured. You are understandably worried. Now imagine that your future torturer also tells you that tomorrow morning, before the torture begins, you will lose all of your memories as well; will you find any comfort in this change of plans? A Lockean might, since then the person being tortured would no longer be you, but the rest of us would find such a prospect worse than simple torture. It would still be you and your body suffering the torture — only now you would no longer remember who you were or how you got there.

"The average man does not know what to do with this life, yet wants another one which will last forever."  
 — Anatole France (1844-1924)

This thought-experiment appears to speak against the memory criterion, but not the brain criterion. Imagine two people, you

<sup>6</sup> Comparing a brain-transfer with a memory-transfer suggests an important difference between memories and the ability to acquire new memories. If you feel that personal identity is most closely related to actual consciousness, rather than to memories, then merely transferring memories isn't enough to re-locate a person in another body; rather, whatever serves as the "seat of consciousness" must also be transferred, and the brain would seem to be the best candidate for this.

<sup>7</sup> See Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future" in *The Philosophical Review*, v. 79 (1970).

and someone named Smith. The torturer tells you that tomorrow afternoon he will give Smith one million dollars, but that he will cut off your fingers, have your eyes pecked-out by crows, and so on. This should cause you no small distress in anticipating the events of tomorrow afternoon. But now suppose that your torturer tells you that all of the above will happen, except that before it does, he will switch your brain with Smith's. Now won't it be the case that, although you may feel some distress at losing your body and acquiring Smith's, you nonetheless *would* be changing bodies, and that this would be a proper description of what was happening, so that the body that was being tortured was no longer your present body? It might be terrible to think of a crow pecking-out your old set of eyes (or anyone's eyes, for that matter) — but still, they wouldn't be *your* eyes anymore, and *you* would not be tortured. So again, it seems that our identity depends on our brains rather than on our memories.

### IS MY BODY THE BASIS OF MY PERSONAL IDENTITY? — A RECONSIDERATION

The above thought-experiment gives preference to the brain over other parts of the body, but there are reasons for worrying about such preferential treatment. After all, no one has undergone a brain transplant yet, and so we can only guess at some of the consequences. It might turn out, for instance, that our bodies are unique in the way that they filter our experiences, such that if my brain were in a different body, the world would appear quite differently to that brain. Or it may turn out that my emotional states are closely linked to my body, such that losing my body (by having the brain transplanted into another body) might also involve losing my emotional constitution. It may, indeed, turn out that these “background” features of ourselves are in fact so central to our sense of self that a brain-transplant would better be described as a loss of one's brains (and cognitive memories) rather than as a loss of one's body (with its emotions and ways of experience).

Finally, there is the question of spatially locating the self that is brought into focus by Daniel Dennett's story “Where Am I?” Dennett's story suggests that, in brain-transplants, we won't identify with the location of our brains, but rather with the location of whichever body or sense-organ that is feeding sensory-information to the brain — a fact obscured by the simple brain-transplant thought experiments. In Dennett's story, the body seems to be much more important for the “location” of the self and its thoughts than the brain — unless your body dies, and then you seem to be “disembodied.” There's still a brain, but it doesn't really serve as a body for you (since it has no sense organs).<sup>8</sup>

Is the brain the “seat of consciousness”? Traditionally this “seat” just was the thinking thing, that is, the soul or mental substance (which, if Locke is right, we aren't able to re-identify, for lack of criteria). But suppose there are no souls, and consciousness resides simply in the brain: why should I presume this consciousness to be *me*? Perhaps consciousness is just a power or ability, and is the same in everyone; like eyeballs or hearts, perhaps it could be changed without affecting personal identity.

On the other hand, if my consciousness is unique to me, then what makes it different from your consciousness? Regardless of what is considered the seat of consciousness (such as the soul or the brain), there remains the problem of finding some feature or mark of this “seat” such that it is uniquely *me* and not some other person. It can't simply be a particular set of experiences and memories, since we are still left with the question of what makes any one experience mine rather than yours. Could it be the attitude or character (that is, the *way* that consciousness responds to input)? Is this what individuates one consciousness from another? Common sense seems to push us back to the body: an experience is mine insofar as it happens to my body; consequently, persons are individuated on the basis of their bodies (to be specific: their nerve endings), and not their souls or brains or memories.

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<sup>8</sup> We encounter here two senses of spatial location: My location in the space of experienced objects, and the theoretical space that I conceive my brain to be in, when I find myself without sensory inputs.