

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics
Prof. Funkhouser
Chisholm, “The Persistence of Persons”

1.

- An “*ens per alio*” always has the properties that it has in virtue of the properties of its “stand-ins” or the things that “does duty” for it. Here recall our earlier Chisholm reading and, in particular, the example of the table that persists through time. Chisholm does not take seriously the possibility that he is an *ens per alio*.

There is no reason whatever for supposing that *I* hope for rain only in virtue of the fact that some *other* thing hopes for rain — some stand-in that, strictly and philosophically, is not identical with me but happens to be doing duty for me at this particular moment. (331)

But is this an accurate depiction of the position?

If there are thus two things that now hope for rain, the one doing it on its own and the other such that its hoping is done for it by the thing that now happens to constitute it . . . (331)

- Chisholm also claims that if he is a constituent of an *ens successivum* then he should be skeptical regarding his personal memories and his ability to predict his personal future. But why think this?

- Chisholm claims that we should accept, until provided with positive reason to believe otherwise, that we are things that persist through time and change. And he denies that there is any such positive reason. Instead, there are only skeptical considerations like those raised by Kant and Locke.

- And Chisholm denies the coherence of Locke’s story concerning the supposed transfer of consciousness to another substance. See the four possible interpretations, none of which is supposed to be plausible, that Chisholm discusses on p. 333.

2.

- Chisholm claims that there is always a fact of the matter whether current person x is identical to some future person y .

- Chisholm acknowledges that there is a loose sense in which we will say of someone that he is not the same person as before. But in saying this we do not mean that these are numerically distinct people.

- Thought Experiment #1: Instead of using anesthesia for a surgery, would you take an amnesia pill to get you to forget your past life while on the operating table, and then a second pill after the surgery that will cause you to forget what happened while on the table? Chisholm says this is not rational, because *you* would still experience the pain. This is so even though you would not remember the pain, nor would you recognize yourself as yourself while experiencing the pain.

- Thought Experiment #2: Chisholm considers a case of fission, in which a person divides and is succeeded by two people. Chisholm denies that the original person can survive by being both of the post-fission people. Instead, the original person can survive by being at most one of the post-fission people.

- Chisholm's comments here are not very helpful:

What are we to do, for example, when bodily criteria and psychological criteria conflict? Suppose we know that the person on the left will have certain *bodily* characteristics that we have always taken to be typical only of you — and that the person on the right will have certain *psychological* characteristics that we have always taken to be typical only of you. In such a case there may be no sufficient reason at all for deciding that you are or that you are not one or the other of the two different persons. But from this it does not follow that you *will* not in fact be one or the other of the two persons. (335)

Chisholm goes on to distinguish *truth-conditions* from *evidence*. There may be a fact of the matter as to which person you are, even if we cannot access any evidence sufficient to discover this fact.