

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics  
Prof. Funkhouser  
Johnston, “Human Beings”

- Distinguish the *evidential* from the *constitutive* questions:

Believing correctly that  $p$  is arguably part of what it means to have knowledge that  $p$ , whereas the holding of patterns of mental and physical continuity and dependence across a stretch of time seems to be the sort of evidence we might ideally rely upon in justifying our claim that a person survived or continued on through the stretch in question. Why should we think that we could analyze what it means to say that someone has survived in terms of the concepts of the sorts of relations that are *evidence* for survival? (393)

- The method of cases.

- The dominant view of personhood, amongst philosophers, is *wide psychological reductionism*. The “wide” qualification allows for non-standard causal grounds for psychological continuity (e.g., something besides the persistence of our biological brain).

- Johnston rejects the orthodox view, and claims that mental and physical continuity provide evidence for personal identity but do not constitute it. He also rejects the method of cases.

So the primary question for a philosophical theory of personal identity is: What sort of thing is such that things of that sort can be reliably and unproblematically reidentified over time in *just the way* in which we reliably and unproblematically reidentify ourselves and each other over time? (395)

1.

- Williams’s cases (or his different descriptions of the same case) generate the “conundrum” — we have differing intuitions, one that supports and another that opposes the dominant view. One intuition suggests that bodily continuity is not necessary for personal identity. The other intuition suggests

that psychological continuity is not necessary either.

- Nozick's "closest-continuer" alternative.
- "An adequate response to the conundrum has to explain why we can make sense of this *stipulation* [e.g., that this stuff will happen to *A*] even though we respond as we do in the first presentation of Williams's case." (398) Wide psychological theories do not account for our ability to make sense of this stipulation.

2.

- Johnston suggests that we are "bare loci of mental life" that do not require psychological or bodily continuity. (398)
- Radical examples: Kafka's metamorphosis and a person who gradually turns into rock.
- Many of the (epistemological) objections to bare loci (399–400) mirror Locke's objections to bare substance accounts.

3.

- Hypothesis:
  - ... we are essentially organisms of a particular animal species, namely *Homo sapiens*, so that the locus of mental life that we reidentify when we reidentify a person over time is just an instance of a biological kind, a kind whose members typically exhibit a complex mental life. (401)
- The Brownson/Brownless example illustrates the (at least theoretical) distinction between a human being and a human organism — only human organism is a strictly biological kind. Q: Are we essentially human organisms? If so, am I also essentially *this* human organism?
- Johnston argues that we are not identical to our brains, even if our brain is necessary and sufficient for preserving our identity.
- The following point denies teletransportation:
  - A human mind is neither an independently traceable substance nor some bundle theorist's ersatz for such a substance. A human mind is just a mode of functioning of a natural unit (e.g., a human organism or a human brain) whose conditions of persistence are storable in nonmental terms. (403)

4.

- Johnston thinks that our intuitions regarding the first Williams case are misguided:

By means of an understandable overgeneralization from the ordinary run of cases, we will be led to trace individuals in accord with the wide psychological criterion. We could call this overgeneralization *the psychological-continuer effect*. (404)