

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics
Prof. Funkhouser
Swinburne, "Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory"

1.
 - Swinburne, like some others we have studied, separates the evidential and constitutive questions (though he does not use this vocabulary) concerning personal identity. What should we make of this passage, though?

Many writers about personal identity have, however, needed to give only one account of personal identity, because their account of the logically necessary and sufficient conditions of personal identity was in terms of the evidence of observation and experience which would establish or oppose claims of personal identity. They have made no sharp distinction between the meaning of such claims and the evidence which supported them. Theories of this kind we may call empiricist theories. (377)

Swinburne will argue against empiricist theories and, as he sees it, those who collapse the evidential and constitutive questions.

- The first empiricist theory that Swinburne considers is one according to which sameness of body — where this is understood, roughly, as continuity of matter and form — constitutes sameness of person. Swinburne makes some basic comments about substances and properties. He argues that something like the bodily criterion holds for most material objects. Though, material objects differ over the extent to which sameness of material constitution is required for identity (e.g., he contrasts a desk with a plant in this regard). Here's Swinburne's characterization of the bodily criterion, as applied to people:

For P_2 at t_2 to be the same person as P_1 at t_1 , both have to be persons (to have a certain kind of body and mental life) and to be made of the same matter (i.e., to be such that P_2 's body is obtained from P_1 's by gradual replacement of parts). (378)

But Swinburne objects that in cases in brain transplant cases we are inclined to judge that the person goes with the brain and does not remain with the

majority of the old body. So, the brain is a privileged organ when it comes to personal identity. This suggests the brain theory of personal identity as a materialist alternative to the more generic bodily theory.

- The chief empiricist alternative to bodily/brain theories is a psychological theory — what Swinburne calls “the memory-and-character theory”. (379) Again, Locke is representative here. Swinburne reminds us of the modifications that are necessary to make the Lockean theory plausible — e.g., requiring mere memory chains (rather than direct connections) for personal identity and holding that the remembered event must have really occurred.

- Swinburne presents duplication cases as a major objection to psychological theories of personal identity. Williams’s example of the men with memories corresponding to the life of Guy Fawkes is one example of this type. But Swinburne also adds that brain duplication cases, as when hemispheres are separated, are possible. And there is not a good principled reason for holding that personhood goes with psychological (or brain) continuity only so long as such cases do not occur.

- Swinburne also notes that these psychological and brain criteria can be met to varying degrees. But, Swinburne questions whether it is acceptable that person P_1 can be more or less the same as person P_2 .

Also, consider Swinburne’s discussion of the “mad surgeon story” as he applies it to Parfit’s theory. (383–384). Has Swinburne really identified a *problem* here?

But one problem is: how could you have reason for part joyous expectation and part terrified anticipation, when no one future person is going to suffer a mixed fate? (384)

- Swinburne ends up saying that memory and bodily continuity are merely (potentially misleading) evidence of personal identity and do not constitute it. But is this very convincing?

For although there can be equally good evidence that each of two later persons is the same person as an earlier person, that evidence is fallible; and since clearly only one person at one time can be strictly the same person as some person at an earlier time, it follows that in one case the evidence is misleading — although we may not know in which case. (385)

Swinburne claims that we are indivisible souls.

2.

- Swinburne claims that personhood can be *completely* separated from considerations of brain or psychological continuity. He considers examples from religion and science fiction that seem to make sense of us inhabiting different bodies (e.g., reincarnation, resurrection, and gradually taking over the body of another) or having no body at all. Similarly, he claims that we can survive a complete loss of memory.

- Swinburne says that the only reason to deny that these things are possible is due to accepting an implausible form of verificationism. But is this true? And what relevance does this have anyway?

- Here's another argument:

Since the body which is presently yours (together with the associated apparent memories) could have been mine (logic and even natural laws allow), that shows that none of the matter of which my body is presently made (nor the apparent memories) is essential to my being the person I am. That must be determined by something else. (387)

- Swinburne does claim that certain mental capacities are essential to being a person. (387) But, these capacities can be realized in a disembodied mind. So, Swinburne claims, he is a classical dualist. (He even seems to endorse both Descartes' divisibility and conceivability arguments for dualism.)

- Swinburne also claims that souls can cease to exist (due to the failure, say, of natural processes) and can be destroyed. Though, God could always bring them back to life. (390)