PERSONAL IDENTITY

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

What is a person? What makes me the same person today that I was yesterday or will be tomorrow? These are questions that philosophers have long pondered, and the history of this topic, as in other areas of philosophy, is a series of footnotes to Plato. In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates recalls the argument he heard from Diotima that nature is governed by the principle of love, which manifests itself in the desire of mortal nature to live forever and to be immortal so far as possible. Living organisms manage to achieve some measure of immortality through sexual repro-duction. On Diotima's view, however, something like this also happens within the lifetime of each organism:

> Even while each living thing is said to be alive and to be the same—as a person is said to be the same from childhood till he turns into an old man—even then he never consists of the same things, though he is called the same, but he is always being renewed and in other respects passing away, in his hair and flesh and bones and blood and his entire body. And it's not just in his body, but in his soul too, for none of his manners, customs, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, or fears ever remains the same, but some are coming to be in him while others are passing away. . . . And in that way everything mortal is preserved, not, like the divine, by always being the same in every way, but because what is departing and aging leaves behind some-thing new, something such as it had been.[1]

This argument implies that what we think of as our continuing per-sonal identity is really an illusion. The people we are today are not, strictly speaking, the same as the people we were yesterday. Our bodies are not the same as the bodies that existed then, and our actions and thoughts are also different. We are "the same people" now as we were yesterday only in the sense that the people we are now are successors of, and are similar to, the people we were before. The argument in Plato's *Symposium* thus poses a problem about personal identity: on what basis can any of us reasonably claim that he or she is really the same person over time?

Aristotle proposed a solution to this problem: when a substance under-goes a change, there is something about it that remains the same, which Aristotle called the "substratum." Although a thing changes in many

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[1] Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 207d–208b.

ways over time, it retains the same substratum over time, because it has the same essence. This solution leads to other questions: Do things have essential properties? If so, what are they? And even if the people we were yesterday had the same essential properties as the people we are now, does this suffice to make them the "same" people?

In the modern era, John Locke criticized Aristotle's subtle metaphysical distinctions as obscure and unsupportable through empirical observation. He dismissed the Aristotelian substratum as a "something-I-know-not-what." Locke reformulated the problem of personal identity in his own way: Is a person a physical organism that persists through time, or is a person identified by the persistence of psychological states, by memory? Locke was also concerned about the implications of personal identity for moral responsibility. We might ask, for example, whether rationality requires us to exhibit equal concern for our earlier selves and our later selves.

The essays in this volume address these perennial and thorny issues, as well as the implications of various solutions for morality and public policy. Some of the essays defend general theories of identity—theories based on constitution, or on dualism, or on some form of bodily or psychological continuity. Some examine the work of Derek Parfit and other influential theorists. Other essays discuss how the conception of the person influences developments in various disciplines, including law, economics, and even literature. Still others relate personal identity to specific policy issues, asking how our concept of identity bears on the morality of cloning, genetic engineering, abortion, or private property rights.

The collection opens with a group of essays that examine various general theories of personal identity. In "Experience, Agency, and Personal Identity," Marya Schechtman explores the development of accounts of identity based on psychological continuity. The key challenge for such an account is to make sense of a person's survival (as the same person) over time, and one way to do so is to emphasize subjectivity—to adopt a view of the person as a subject of conscious experience. As Schechtman notes, however, Derek Parfit has argued that such a view is seriously flawed. If the view of a person as a subject of experience is to justify the importance we attach to identity, it will need to provide a deep unity of consciousness throughout the life of a person, and Parfit argues that no such unity is possible. In response, many philosophers have switched to a view of persons as essentially agents, claiming that the importance of identity depends on unity of agency rather than unity of consciousness. Schechtman acknowledges that this shift contributes significantly to the debate over identity, but she maintains that it does not offer a fully satisfying alternative. Unity of consciousness still seems to be required if identity is to be as important as we think it is. Drawing on discussions of identity as it relates to practical philosophy—and especially on the work of Christine Korsgaard and Harry Frankfurt—Schechtman sketches a new understand-

ing of the unity of consciousness that attempts to answer Parfit's critique. She proposes an integrated view of identity that sees persons as both subjects and agents.

While Schechtman focuses on the role of psychological continuity in identity, other theorists have endeavored to ground human identity in our physical, biological nature. Lynne Rudder Baker adopts a version of this approach in her essay "When Does a Person Begin?" According to Baker's "constitution view" of persons, a human person is wholly constituted by (but not identical to) a human organism. Such a view, she believes, does justice both to our similarities to other animals and to our uniqueness. What distinguishes us from other animals is that each human person possesses a robust first-person perspective: the ability to have thoughts about oneself and to recognize oneself as the subject of those thoughts. In setting out her position, Baker defends the thesis that the coming-into-existence of a human person is not simply a matter of the coming-into-existence of an organism, even if that organism ultimately comes to constitute a person. She marshals support from developmental psychology in order to formulate a broadly materialistic account of the coming-into-existence of a human person. In the course of her essay, she distinguishes the constitution view from various alternatives, including substance dualism, biological animalism, and Thomistic animalism, arguing that these alternatives fail to capture what is essential about human nature. She concludes with a discussion of how the constitution view can be used to address questions about the morality of abortion.

In "Persons, Social Agency, and Constitution," Robert A. Wilson seeks to extend Baker's constitution view of persons, applying it to the realm of social agency. The key theoretical move Wilson makes is to conceive of constitution as a pluralistic relation, so that a single entity might constitute more than one thing; for example, a human body might constitute a person, but also a living thing, a member of a species, a moral agent, etc. Persons, in turn, may be seen as constituting many different types of rational and moral agents: police officers, businessmen, parents, policymakers, and so on. Wilson takes this analysis one step further, arguing that we can use the constitution relation to make sense of collective social agents such as organizations, corporations, and governments. These larger entities, he maintains, bear a special relationship to the collections of persons who make them up and through whom they act. This relationship, which Wilson calls "agency coincidence," is analogous to the relationship of "spatial coincidence" that exists between bodies and the persons they constitute. Understanding this relationship, he argues, can help us understand the nature of collective action in the social realm.

The relationship of body and mind (or soul) has been a central issue in the theory of personal identity, and one approach to addressing this issue— dualism—has been largely neglected in contemporary discussions. David S. Oderberg sets out to remedy this neglect in his contribution to this

volume, "Hylemorphic Dualism." The version of dualism most commonly discussed, and rejected, by contemporary theorists is Cartesian dualism, the view that the mind is a separate and immaterial substance, bearing only a contingent relationship to the body it inhabits. But Oderberg contends that a more promising version of the theory is hylemorphic dualism, the version defended by Aristotelian and Thomist philosophers. On this view, all substances are said to be compounds of matter and form, and the form is said to actualize the matter, giving the substance its identity. The form of a human person is his or her rational nature. In his essay, Oderberg lays out the main lines of the hylemorphic dualist position, with particular reference to personal identity. He argues that overemphasis of the problem of consciousness has had an unhealthy effect on recent debate, and seeks to show why we should instead emphasize the concept of form. He offers an account of the concept of identity in terms of the notion of substantial form, and goes on to analyze the relation between form and matter. In the remainder of the essay, he argues for the immateriality of the substantial form of the human person (the soul) and for the soul's essential independence of matter. He concludes that although the soul is the immaterial bearer of personal identity, that identity is still the identity of an essentially embodied being.

The hylemorphic theory of identity also figures prominently in Edward Feser's essay "Personal Identity and Self-Ownership." Feser is a defender of the classical-liberal thesis of self-ownership, the view that each individual is the owner of his or her body, talents, labor, and so forth. Those who defend this thesis, Feser notes, generally focus on the "ownership" aspect and say little about the metaphysics of the self that is said to be self-owned. It makes sense, then, to ask which accounts of the self are consistent with robust self-ownership. Feser examines a range of theories—Cartesian dualism, bodily continuity, psychological continuity, and the identity theories of Robert Nozick and Derek Parfit—and finds that none of them are suitable for grounding a metaphysics of the self that is consistent with self-ownership. Having rejected these theories, Feser argues that the hylemorphic theory of Aristotle and Aquinas provides an account of the self that advocates of self-ownership can embrace. He acknowledges, however, that adopting this theory may lead us to a conception of self-ownership that differs from the standard libertarian or classical-liberal conception. On the hylemorphic view that Feser defends, individuals have a right to an environment in which they can develop moral virtues and exercise their self-owned capacities and powers. Governments may have an obligation to foster such an environment by placing some limits on how individuals may use their property and by regulating certain sorts of public activities.

Derek Parfit's theory of identity—a subject touched upon in Feser's essay—is the focus of Marvin Belzer's "Self-Conception and Personal Identity: Revisiting Parfit and Lewis with an Eye on the Grip of the Unity

Reaction." Belzer begins by sketching Parfit's reductionist account, according to which a person's identity over time is constituted by a series of interrelated mental states and events that are directly connected to one another through a continuity of memory, intention, belief, and desire. A crucial element of Parfit's theory is a thought experiment involving fission—the idea that a single person could divide into two separate persons, as amoebas and other simple organisms do. In a case such as this, Parfit argues, one would not survive the fission, but one would have "what matters in survival," since one's memories, desires, etc. would survive into the future. As Belzer observes, Parfit's analysis of the fission thought experiment involves the rejection of a common-sense intuition known as the "unity reaction": the intuition that self-unity is an essential characteristic of persons. Other theorists, such as David Lewis, have denied Parfit's claim that reductionism contravenes common sense. Belzer revisits the debate between Parfit and Lewis, arguing that Parfit wins it. He also examines another version of the reductionist theory, put forward by David Velleman, according to which fission does not conflict with the unity reaction. The key to making sense of cases of fission, Belzer contends, lies in taking up the perspective of a person who anticipates undergoing fission and forms intentions about his future, post-fission actions. After drawing out the implications of this approach, Belzer concludes that Velleman's theory fails to eliminate fission-based conflict with the unity reaction.

The next two essays deal with the relationship between identity and rationality. In "The Normativity of Self-Grounded Reason," David Copp proposes a standard of practical rationality and seeks to ground this standard in the idea of autonomous agency. He defines rationality as the efficient pursuit of one's values, where those values are aspects of one's identity. The concept of identity at work here is psychological rather than metaphysical. Specifically, Copp ties a person's values to his "self-esteem identity," defined as the set of propositions about his life that he believes and that ground emotions of esteem, such as pride and shame. According to this approach, it is plausible to view action governed by one's values as *self*-governed (autonomous) action. Agents are rational, Copp argues, when they comply with a standard that requires them to serve their values, and to seek what they need in order to continue to be able to serve their values. Copp offers examples of the values he has in mind (e.g., honesty and friendship) and describes them in terms of policies or intentions to act in a certain way under given circumstances. He goes on to defend the important role that autonomy plays in grounding his standard of rationality, addressing a number of objections. He concludes by noting the limits of his view: an agent may be rational according to the standard Copp has set out, yet may still lack moral values and moral reasons for action.

The link between rationality and repentance is the subject of Jennifer Roback Morse's contribution to this volume, "Rationality Means Being

Willing to Say You're Sorry." Morse begins with a pair of related ques-
tions: What does a person really want when he asks for an apology? And
why do people so often find it difficult to give an apology? Repentance is
relevant to personal identity, Morse contends, because the unrepentant
soul has his own theory of identity. The unrepentant person believes that
he is his preference, and that he is entitled to the behavior that flows from
his preferences. Morse characterizes the unrepentant person in economic
terms, drawing on the concept of *Homo economicus* (economic man). Accord-
ing to a simplified version of rational choice theory, *Homo economicus*
analyzes the costs and benefits of various courses of action, using the
information available to him, and decides which course of action maxi-
mizes his utility (understood in terms of his ordered preferences). This
account of human action, Morse argues, can help us understand such
phenomena as why people are so often reluctant to admit wrongdoing
and why people place so much importance on receiving an apology. The
actions of the unrepentant person are guided by something akin to this
naive economic theory of human behavior. Such a person, Morse concludes,
can never truly be sorry for anything, and as a result, will be almost
impossible to live with. A person who identifies himself too closely with
his preferences will bring misery to himself and to those around him.

In "Personal Identity and Postmortem Survival," Stephen E. Braude
begins with the observation that the problem of personal identity can be
viewed as either a metaphysical or an epistemological issue. Metaphysi-
cians want to know *what it is* for one individual to be the same person as
another. Epistemologists want to know how to *decide* if an individual is
the same person as someone else. These two problems converge when we
consider the subject of personal survival after death. In his essay, Braude
discusses apparent examples of mediumship (communication with the
dead) and putative reincarnation cases—phenomena that suggest per-
sonal survival after bodily death and dissolution. These cases make us
wonder how it might be possible for a person to survive death and either
temporarily or permanently animate another body. They also lead us to
wonder how we could decide if such postmortem survival has actually
occurred. In discussing these intriguing issues, Braude argues that meta-
physical worries about postmortem survival are less important than many
have thought. He then considers why cases suggesting postmortem sur-
vival can be so compelling, and he surveys our principal options for
explaining these cases. Critics of the idea of postmortem survival point to
a growing body of scientific evidence for the existence of an intimate link
between brain states and mental states—evidence that would seem to
rule out the survival of a person's consciousness after the destruction of
his body. Braude maintains, however, that this evidence is not as con-
vincing as some would suppose, and that the "container metaphor" (the
idea that mental states are *in* the brain) is problematic. The conclusion
Braude reaches is provocative: it may be that making judgments about

whether someone has survived bodily death is not radically different from determining a person's identity in less exotic circumstances, such as when (for example) one re-encounters a former acquaintance.

John Finnis takes a novel approach to the topic of identity in his essay "'The Thing I Am': Personal Identity in Aquinas and Shakespeare." The identity of the human person, Finnis says, can be understood in terms of four elements, based upon the four kinds of order identified by Thomas Aquinas at the beginning of his commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics.* First, we can be understood as part of the natural order, as animals with certain natural capacities. Second, we are part of an "order of thought": we are conscious of ourselves and of others; we are capable of reason, judgment, and memory. Third, we are capable of deliberation and choice, and our choices serve to shape our character. Fourth, we are capable of mastering various skills and crafts, including the craft of self-expression. This fourth element includes our ability to adopt "personas" to convey to others some impression (whether true or false) about ourselves. Taking these four elements as a starting point, Finnis goes on to examine Shakespeare's dramatic works in order to discern his understanding of human identity. Finnis shows how Shakespeare conceives of identity as both (1) one's lasting presence to oneself as one and the same bodily and mental self, and (2) one's self-shaping by one's free choices, especially one's commitment choices. Finnis discusses several of Shakespeare's plays, especially *All's Well That Ends Well,* and seeks to demonstrate how Shakespeare explores these aspects of identity, quite deliberately, through cases of mistaken identity and the humiliation that his characters suffer when the personas they have constructed for themselves are exposed.

The final two essays relate to technological innovations and the impact they may have on personal identity. F. M. Kamm seeks to discover whether the prospect of human cloning represents a threat to the nonsubstitut-ability of persons—the moral principle that separate persons are not sub-stitutable for one another when we perform a calculation of the harms and benefits of some proposed course of action. In "Moral Status and Personal Identity: Clones, Embryos, and Future Generations," Kamm divides entities into three rough categories: those that count morally in their own right in the sense that they give us reasons to constrain our behavior toward them (e.g., trees or works of art); those that have moral status (e.g., some nonhuman animals); and those that can have moral claims against us (e.g., persons). She argues that entities falling into the first two categories enjoy only a weak form of nonsubstitutability (if any): such entities may give us reasons not to destroy them (and even reasons to help them), yet their good can sometimes be substituted by the good of other entities. In contrast, entities that can have moral claims (and can be owed duties) have a much stronger form of nonsubstitutability. Kamm goes on to apply her analysis to the issue of reproductive cloning. Critics of cloning argue that it would violate the dignity of persons, since we

might be tempted to regard persons produced by cloning as something less than fully human. We can even imagine scenarios in which clones are produced in order to serve as mere means to the good of others (for example, by having their organs harvested for transplants). Kamm examines the objections raised against cloning and finds them unpersuasive: persons produced by cloning, she argues, would have the same dignity and status as those produced through sexual reproduction. She concludes by drawing out the implications of her analysis for cases involving the rights of future generations and the genetic enhancement of human embryos.

The collection's final essay takes a detailed look at the issue of genetic engineering and its potential impact on human identity. In "The Identity of Identity: Moral and Legal Aspects of Technological Self-Transformation," Michael H. Shapiro discusses various technologies that are being developed for significantly altering the traits of existing persons (or fetuses or embryos) via germ-line modification, and considers whether the concept of personal identity requires revision in the face of such technologies. He observes that our existing notions of personal identity (and related ideas such as personhood and autonomy) may seem unable to comfortably accommodate the possibilities of technologically directed trait formation and development. This is a matter of moral and legal importance because the assumed continuation of personal identity over time underlies interpersonal relationships, the assignment of rewards and punishments, and the very idea of what constitutes an autonomous person. Shapiro contends that efforts to enhance human traits, including merit attributes and other resource-attractive characteristics (e.g., intellectual and athletic abilities), may generate serious legal problems, and thus that some speculation is warranted on how trait change generally will be managed within our legal and socioeconomic systems. In particular, we need to consider the question of access to trait-altering technologies and how these technologies may have the effect of magnifying socioeconomic inequalities. In the end, however, Shapiro suggests that existing and projected technologies do not impel the abandonment or remodeling of the idea of personal identity. Nevertheless, we may have to reconsider some uses of this concept in different settings, rethink our understandings of ideas of merit and desert, and deal with issues of resource distribution that may lead to larger and more entrenched "distances" between social and economic groups.

The theory of personal identity has ancient roots in the history of philosophy, and questions about identity still hold a central place in contemporary philosophical discussions. These twelve essays offer valuable insights into the nature of human identity and its implications for morality and social policy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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