

The characters in the dialog and their views on personal identity:

Gretchen Weirob:	represents a somatic (body) theory.
Sam Miller:	represents first a dualist, then a psychological theory.
Dave Cohen:	eventually joins in defending the psychological theory.

Gretchen is dying and wants her good friend Sam to distract her. She challenges him to show her that it is at least *in principle possible* for her to survive the, now immanent, destruction of her body.

Sam asks: isn't it obvious that we know this is possible because we can *imagine* it? Well, we need to know that what we're imagining is *coherent*. And this is precisely what Gretchen is worried about.

### The Dualist (a.k.a. "Soul") Theory

Sam thinks it is coherent to suppose you could survive your bodily destruction. After all, he claims, it is at least *possible* we have souls. If we do we could survive our bodily destruction since although our bodies will eventually be destroyed, maybe our souls will continue to exist. For this to work in the right way, we need to endorse the...

***Dualist Theory of Personal Identity:*** A person at an earlier time is the same as a person at a later time if they have/are the same immaterial substance (i.e. the same mind or soul).

Gretchen is not convinced. She thinks that *even if there are souls*, this is a bad theory of personal identity. Why? Because we have great ways of telling whether two people are the same over time. But we have *no way* of telling whether two souls are the same over time. Let's go through the steps of her reasoning:

The problem: We seem to regularly re-identify the same people over time with great ease. Other people's souls are not things we see, or smell or touch. So how is re-identification of souls possible?

Answer 1: We see the same bodies, and we know that the same souls are always attached to the same bodies. *Same body, same soul.*

Reply 1: But how do we know that whenever we have the same body we have the same soul? It seems like we can never get any evidence for this position, because we are never in contact with anyone else's souls.

Answer 2: Whoops. It's not *just* by seeing the same bodies, but by witnessing the same personalities that we re-identify the soul. *Same personality, same soul.*

Reply 2: Again, how do we know *that* correlation. We never actually see souls. So how do we ever learn that the same souls are correlated with the same personalities? This idea faces the exact same problems as before.

Answer 3: We know the principles correlating souls and bodies or souls and personalities *from our own case*. Once we learn these correlations from our own case we apply them to others. That's how we know when we're seeing someone with the *same* soul just from looking at their body, or talking to them.

Reply 3: First: can we generalize so radically from one case? Second: do we even *know* from our own case that we have the same soul over time? That would only be true if we knew our souls were never changing (say, overnight, or even more often). Do we know that?

Gretchen thinks that we know so little about souls that it is entirely possible that our souls could be rapidly changing without our even noticing it! To illustrate the idea, she draws...

***The River Analogy:*** In one sense a river looks static, like one unchanging object. But it's not: it's really a continuous change of objects (water) flowing through the same space. Couldn't characters and personalities be kind of like the river? Always *seeming* to be the same thing, but really at bottom constantly changing (through a constant change in souls)?

The whole point of all these reflections is to support the first premise in this *reductio* of the Dualist position:

If personal identity consists in sameness of imperceptible soul, then our judgments of identity across time are all *without justification*.  
But we *can* make justified judgments about identity across time.  
So personal identity can't consist in the sameness of an imperceptible soul.

Note, again, this argument *does not* attack the dualist theory of personal identity by attacking the idea that *souls exist*. Rather it says that *even if* souls exist, they aren't the grounds of personal identity.

What's next? Naturally the idea that personal identity consists in having the same *body*. We'll see next time that this idea is much more complicated, and problematic, than one might have anticipated.