

Recall the problem from last time: if we say that personal identity over time consists in having the same soul, then we very well may be forced to admit (upon learning about souls) that we are "dying" every day or every minute and replaced with an entirely new person. The fact that we can't rule this possibility out shows that we can't be very sure who we, and each other, really are. So maybe we should look for an alternative...

The Somatic Theory

Take Gretchen's position.

Somatic Theory of Personal Identity: A person at an earlier time is the same as a person at a later time if they have the same body.

This theory thinks of us as being very much like other physical objects in terms of what it takes for us to persist. Remember that, for the most part, one normal object at a later time (e.g. a car) is the same as an object at an earlier time if they are, more or less, the same hunk of physical matter.

But when it comes to bodies not all parts seem to matter equally. This can complicate things. If you remove my hand, is the part without my hand still me? What about if you remove my arm? My legs?

Most importantly: what happens if Tom and Jerry get into an accident: Tom's body is intact but he lost his brain and Jerry's brain is intact, but he lost his body. Doctors put Jerry's brain into Tom's body. *Who (if anyone) survives?*

Somatic Theory A: A person at an earlier time is the same as a person at a later time if they have the same *torso*.

On this theory, Tom survives. Gretchen defends a view something like this in the dialogs. Another view:

Somatic Theory B: A person at an earlier time is the same as a person at a later time if they have the same *brain*.

On this theory, Jerry survives. If either of these theories is right, is it even *in principle possible* that we could survive our bodily destruction?

Consider Gretchen's example of a tissue box:

I burn a tissue box to ashes in front of you. What could make something at a later time *that tissue box* (a numerically identical, not qualitatively identical one)?

Gretchen thinks "nothing". But is this right?

Could we, or maybe God, "put our pieces back together" after we die? Consider two cases:

Watchmaker. My watch needs to be cleaned. The watchmaker takes it completely apart, adjusts some things and cleans the parts, and then puts them back together. Is the watch I get back the (numerically) same as the watch I gave to the watchmaker?

Building blocks. My daughter builds a tower made of blocks and asks me to show it to my spouse later. But after my daughter goes to bed I accidentally knock the tower over. I put it back together meticulously so that it's absolutely indistinguishable from when it fell. When my spouse comes home I say "look at the tower our daughter built!" Is the tower I present the (numerically) same tower that my daughter built?

Should we trust our intuitions in just one case, or both? Which case are *we* more like?

It is tempting to say that the answer here is merely conventional: say whatever you want, it doesn't *really* matter because there are no "deep facts" about identity over time here.

How About Conventionalism?

Sometimes what we say is just matter of convention. Consider the question: "what is a planet?" That can be decided by a committee (as we have seen in recent history). It's not obvious there are deep metaphysical facts about what a planet is, so we can just stipulate whatever we like.

The problem is that this doesn't seem acceptable in the case of personal identity, because of the issues of anticipation. Consider a case where after your body dies God will put back together your molecules and torture the resulting person. Suppose "the committee on linguistic reform" decides to that we should say that's not you. Should that give you comfort?