

A Problem for the Somatic Theory?

Recall:

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 implies that it is absolutely *impossible* (incoherent even) that you could wake up with someone else's body *and* brain.

One of the objections Sam Miller makes is that we can know with absolute certainty who we are "first personally" (e.g. when we just wake up, without looking at our bodies or knowing anything about our brains).

Suppose such 'body swapping' is possible. What kind of view would be required to make sense of the possibility Sam mentions?

Psychological Theories of Identity

Idea: maybe "person stages" are unified to make up a person by their psychology. But what's the psychological "glue" that brings these person-stages together? Sam suggests:

Attempt 1: A person A at an earlier time is identical with a person B at a later time if B remembers being A.

But this is straightforwardly circular. Consider:

Napoleon circa 1817 who says he remembers fighting in the battle of Waterloo.
Delusional Joe circa now who says he remembers fighting in the battle of Waterloo.

Delusional Joe might have the same *apparent* memories as Napoleon. But he won't "really" be remembering (and he won't really be Napoleon). What does it take to "really" remember?

It seems...

Real memory = "seeming to remember" + being the same person

So it turns out appealing to real memory presupposes the idea of being the same person. So although Attempt 1 above might be *right* it's not very *informative*. It tells us what personal identity is by presupposing our understanding of personal identity.

Dave Cohen suggests we can break the circularity by appealing to a notion of causation. Real memory occurs *when the apparent memory is caused by the events remembered in the right way*. So we can define a causal notion of memory as follows, without appeal to personal identity:

causal-memory = “seeming to remember” + experiences of memory
caused by the experiences of past person remembered

Then we can use this in our characterization of numerical identity.

Attempt 2: A person A at an earlier time is identical with a person B at a later time if B causally-remembers being A.

A last problem: do you remember yourself at all times in the past? Probably not. So far this analysis says that those past parts of you are your present self are not parts of the same person. That's got to be wrong. We can resolve this by adopting...

Psychological Theory A: A person A at an earlier time is identical with a person B at a later time if A and B are part of a “chain” of person stages such that each later stage causally-remembers being its immediately preceding stages.

The idea is that a person is kind of like a rope: no single thread runs through the entire length of a rope. Nonetheless, the threads collectively make a tightly connected whole. Likewise our psychological continuities are strongest locally and gradually fade. But collectively those continuities make up a strongly unified individual across time.

Now, on this theory could we survive the deaths of our bodies? If God observed our memories and implanted them in a new “self” would that be enough?