

21. James 2008, A feminist critique of psychological views

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Psychological criterion: Person A at t_1 is person B at t_2 iff B at t_2 is psychologically continuous with A .

There's a series of psychologically connected steps from A at t_1 to B at t_2 .

Bodily criterion: Person A at t_1 is person B at t_2 iff they have the same body.

Again, motivation for psychological view: the prince and the cobbler.
→ Many claim that the body is not important for the "four features"

Moral responsibility, prudential concern, fair compensation, survival.

James: this is too simple! In realistic cases, meaningful psychological connectedness *depends on* bodily continuity.

The model and the mechanic: A female fashion model has her brain transplanted into the body of a not-particularly-in-shape male car mechanic.

Unable to identify with this new body, end up with dissociated personality.

The athlete and the klutz: A Olympic figure skater has their brain transplanted into someone who spills their milk every day at lunch.

Similarly, psychological connectedness depends on social circumstances:

The prince and the cobbler (extended): The prince, after having his brain transplanted into the cobbler's body, finds that he is no longer respected, listened to, given authority, etc.

The hero and the villain: Someone who's seen as a hero comes to be (let's imagine wrongfully) believed to have done a horrible crime, is "canceled" and made to be a pariah.

Upshot: psychological continuity and connectedness is *not* what's essential to personal identity. Personal identity—at least in the sense that matters—is contingent on bodily and social continuity as well.

Objection 1: But (e.g.) the prince could truly say, "I used to be a prince, treated with respect and authority." He could dread the switch—and not in the same way he dreads death.

He thinks his life will get much worse, not that it will end.

Reply: Is it really so different than death? If the change will be quick and radical enough, might he fail to identify with the person who exists after the switch?

Counter-reply: This seems to depend on the *psychology!* If it's quick enough, psychological connectedness may break.

Objection 2: These aren't objections to the psychological view. They're ways of showing that psychological continuity and connectedness is *itself* dependent on social and bodily continuity.

Compare: it's no objection to the psychological view that your psychology depends on how your brain is wired!

Moreover, if in these cases somehow psychological connectedness *is* maintained, then it seems to be a case of survival!

E.g. fashion model embraces new body.

Reply: The problem is not with the psychological criterion, but with the *approach* to personal identity.

Why do philosophers worry about personal identity? Because we think it matters.

→ Does bare psychological continuity really matter very much?

→ There are *other* facts in the vicinity of “personal identity” that matter.

The “four features”.

E.g. our self-narratives, and self-conceptions—which are tied to far more than just our psychology.