

Personal identity and a future without souls?

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Christian philosophers are currently debating central questions concerning personal identity: What does it mean for (non-divine) human persons to survive or endure change in their lives, rather than go out of existence? Are we identical to or completely constituted by our bodies (or an identity-bearing part of them such as the brain)? Is it possible to survive without souls? In this article such questions will be discussed and related to current philosophical research.

Introduction

This article is about personal identity.¹ Persons are capable of living through a lot of change. They can persist through continual changes in living conditions, relationships and character. Persons can persist while and after taking mood-altering, memory-altering and character-altering drugs. It is possible to trace persons' identities through a history of such alterations. Changes can be quite drastic without persons ceasing to exist. We do, however, hear people say such things as, "She is no longer with us!" when many of a person's character traits do not survive as a result of, for example, dementia. And people do say "He's not the same person as before!" when, say, a person who was once a cold-blooded killer becomes a saint. However, those who say such things usually mean that the person they are speaking of has ceased to be a certain way, rather than that they have ceased to exist. Persons remain the numerically identical persons throughout many qualitative changes.² They can cease to be many things without ceasing to be the persons they are.

What are the conditions that must be satisfied for a person to persist through change, rather than go out of existence? This type of question is impossible to answer if we do not know what type of beings we are. How otherwise would we know under what conditions we persist – our persistence conditions? If we are essentially embodied beings, then we exist or persist *only if* embodied. If we are beings who are identical to our bodies, then we exist or persist *whenever* they do. "Are human persons material beings who our essentially embodied beings?" will be a central question of this article.

It is quite common for persons to claim that we are such beings, but many Christians throughout history have claimed that human persons are not merely material beings. They would not be caught dead without an immaterial soul.³ They have thought it possible for souls to survive the death of the body so that persons do not cease to exist at bodily death, but persist even afterwards.⁴ They have believed in a postmortem life with two stages: first a temporarily disembodied stage and then a re-embodied one at the

time of a general resurrection.⁵

Nonetheless there is currently a live debate among Christian philosophers over whether persons are wholly material or not and under what conditions we could survive in a life after death. In this article, I will be asking whether human persons like you and I (i.e., non-divine persons, non-aliens etc.) are *identical to a body* or some proper part of it that is identity-bearing such as a brain or a part of a brain; or wholly and essentially *constituted by a body* or some part of a body capable of a self-conscious life; or not. When I refer in this article to views in which a person is either *identical to* or *constituted by* a body, I will mean for these views to be interpreted as stated in the preceding sentence unless it is clear from the context that I do not mean this. In this article I will be focusing on the views of Peter van Inwagen,⁷ Lynne Rudder Baker⁸ and Dean Zimmerman⁹ since they are three of the Christian philosophers involved in the debate over Christian materialism presented above and have all written a lot on personal identity. Materialism as regards human persons should not be equated with a global materialism, which applies to everything that exists. Christian materialist, for example, normally believe that God is not a material being. Since Zimmerman borrows an argument from Roderick Chisholm, I will also be discussing Chisholm's views. Derek Parfit has questioned strongly whether it is personal identity we should be interested in when we think about our relation to the future. Therefore I will start by considering his argument. I argue that his duplication arguments for the conclusion that personal identity does not matter assume a defective view of personal identity – that it could be a contingent relation.

Next I will consider Baker's claim that, although human persons are not identical to their bodies, they are constituted by them and are essentially embodied. I will argue that she has not explained what it means to have the same first-person perspective adequately and that her view faces a serious grounding problem.

In the following section I will consider van Inwagen's explanations of how persons could survive after death. Both he and Zimmerman supply some stories as just-so stories to show how survival could be possible on a materialist view where one is identical with one's body. (Remember what I emphasized above: "body" can mean "part of body" – enough to be identity-bearing.) I find neither of these stories plausible and many persons would find them much less plausible than believing in souls.

Finally, I consider the Zimmerman-Chisholmian argument for the claim that successive entities like our bodies cannot be identical with or be the constituters of persons. Questions concerning bodies are vague matters, while question concerning one's identity are determinate – there is a determinate fact about the matter. I compare their view with Parfit's and conclude that their view offers good reasons to question the claim that persons could be identical to or constituted by their bodies. Parfit claims that one way to escape the results of his reasoning is by believing that there are entities such as souls and that is exactly what Zimmerman does. Of course, Parfit believes that there are other reasons *not* to believe in souls.¹⁰ Chisholm's view is weaker than Zimmerman's in that he claims that it is possible to be a tiny particle in the brain, which seems quite implausible, at least many persons would say less plausible than dualism.

Parfit: Does personal identity matter?

Does it matter whether we exist or persist? Should we be concerned about personal identity and survival? Derek Parfit is well known for having challenged the idea that personal identity matters for us.¹¹ Survival in certain circumstances would not include what matters, claims Parfit. For example, an endless hellish future might be without hope. Such survival would not include what matters: quality of life. However there is another question that needs to be distinguished from the question of whether or not an outcome, of some person or other, provides quality of life. Would it not matter – be a matter for one’s own special concern – that the person, in some state of affairs or other, is *oneself*, instead of someone else? Parfit says,

Of those who believe that we do have reasons to care about our future, most assume that personal identity provides that reason. On this view, we should be specially concerned about our future because it will be *our* future. If all we know is that someone will later be in pain, we may have some reason for concern; but, if we learn that we shall be in pain, we have a distinctive, further reason.¹²

It is possible for the quality of someone’s life to be horrendous, a paradise *or* something in between. This is so *no matter* which individuals are included. But, Parfit claims, even if a horrendous outcome could destroy what matters, that is, what is properly valued and desired, it need not destroy what prudentially matters. “We would have as much reason to care about our ... future.”¹³

Parfit is right that we have a special relation to ourselves, some further reason to be concerned than if it was solely some person or other, whoever that may be,

that was included in the outcome being considered. However we have a special concern for *many* persons because of their relation to us. For example, we have special concern for parents, children spouses etc. So it is important to realize that our choice is not between total indifference to who we are talking about and an intense self-interest. We have relationships that naturally have implications for what matters to us. But Parfit’s point is not to deny special concern for persons related to us in special ways. The point is that are concerned about others, says Parfit, because of their features, but we cannot help to be concerned about ourselves. Parfit says that persons’ relations to themselves are special in the sense that they are ones of self-identity – we can choose our friends, but not ourselves. Parfit says,

We are concerned about ourselves, not chiefly because of our qualities, but because we are ourselves. Our concern for others cannot take this form. Thus I cannot love you simply because you are you. Everything is identical with itself. And this property of self-identity cannot relate you to me. It does, however, relate me to me. Even if I cannot love you, regardless of your other properties, just because you are you, I may care about myself simply because I am me. Though everything is identical with itself, only I am me.

Numerical self-identity, or my being me, is not a qualitative matter.¹⁴

Parfit is on to something when he says that we cannot choose ourselves in the same way we choose our friends. However when he says that numerical self-identity is not a qualitative matter he is either clearly wrong or using “qualita-

tive matters” in a way different than the way that the phrase is commonly used when speaking of numerical and qualitative identity. Since this is important for the question of whether or not personal identity matters, I will clarify what I mean, even if only briefly.

Consider the following. Take any quality of life you like and imagine that it is possible to duplicate or clone it. To be qualitatively identical duplicates does not mean that the duplicates have all the same features or qualities without restriction: No two distinct things can exactly resemble each other.¹⁵ If you produce a duplicate in a copy machine, the copy differs from the original in some of its properties, for example, its location, the atoms making it up etc. The point that I am emphasizing here is the following. Any qualitative identity without restriction is numerical identity, so if there is a numerical difference, *there is a qualitative difference*. So if what matters can be gotten through duplication, then, of course, what matters would not be numerical identity. One could have all that mattered without numerical identity. With that clarification, we are now in a position to consider Parfit’s Division Argument.¹⁶

Parfit has argued that persons can be double-minded or have a divided mind in the sense that they can have two streams of consciousness, one in each side of their brain.¹⁷ Since this is so, claims Parfit, we could imagine that we could take one side of a person’s brain, say the left side, called “Lefty,” and transplant it into another body just like the original one in some way that guaranteed that the resulting person would be a continuer of the person Lefty begins with. I will not go into all the details about how Parfit thinks this could be possible or why half of the brain is enough for the person to continue in

the new body. What is important to note is that Parfit claims that the person would have survived since Lefty’s survived and that the right side of the mind, called Righty, would not have survived in this case. Parfit calls this the “Single Case.”

Next we are asked by Parfit to consider the “Double Case,” also called by Parfit “The Division.” This is the same as the Single Case except that Righty survives in the intrinsically same way as Lefty, but is transplanted into another body that is just like the original body, just as Lefty’s new body was. So Righty’s transplant case is the same as Lefty’s single transplant case, except for the fact that when Righty is transplanted so is Lefty, resulting in a double case. What is especially relevant in comparing the Double Case to the Single Case is that in the Double Case the outcome cannot be two different persons who are identical with the original person. Two different persons cannot be numerically identical to the same person.

So from these two cases Parfit constructs what he calls “The Division Argument,” which argues for the conclusion that personal identity is not what matters in such cases. The Division Argument is:

- (1) In the Single Case, the resulting person would be me.
- (2) My relation to myself in the future would here contain what prudentially matters.
- (3) Whether this relation contains what matters must depend only on its intrinsic features.
- (4) My relation to myself tomorrow, in the Single Case, is intrinsically the same as my relation, in My Division, to each of the two resulting people.

Therefore

- (5) My relation to each of these people must contain what matters.

However

- (6) It is not true that each of these people would be me.

Therefore

- (7) Personal identity would not, here, be what matters.¹⁸

Many persons have reacted to this argument by saying something like, "Think if I were this double-minded person. I matter and if the outcome would mean that I am missing, then something that matters is definitely missing." Parfit does not think that anything has really gone missing even if we do not have personal identity any longer. Remember that in the single case the resulting person would be me – all that matters was included in the outcome. Well nothing that matters has disappeared in Lefty in the Double Case since the Double Case just is the Single Case except that Righty – not Lefty – gets another outcome than in the Single Case. Lefty is intrinsically the same in both cases. So if you were Lefty then nothing has disappeared in the description of your intrinsic condition in going from the Single Case to the Double Case. The only difference is that there are now two continuers of the original person, whereas in the Single Case there was only one. But that, says Parfit, is only an extrinsic difference not an intrinsic one.¹⁹ Furthermore, considered intrinsically, both Lefty and Righty result in an individual by the same procedures. This focus on intrinsic and extrinsic facts is central to Parfit's argument so Parfit sums up the Division Argument in the following way.

On any plausible criterion, personal identity could depend on extrinsic facts. Since what matters

does not depend on such facts, identity cannot be what matters.²⁰

Parfit's claim here seems to make personal identity contingent on extrinsic factors such as whether or not a double to me exist or not. But identity is not contingent.

Saul Kripke has given a well-known argument for the claim that identity is necessary, that is, that there is no such thing as contingent identity. Kripke's argument for this claim is basically the following.

1. If object *x* is identical with object *y* then clearly whatever property object *x* has, object *y* has and *vice versa*.
2. Everything is necessarily identical with itself. (One does not just happen to be identical with oneself and nothing else.)
3. If *x* is necessarily identical with *x* then, if *x* is identical with *y*, *x* is necessarily identical with *y*.
4. Therefore if *x* is identical with *y* then necessarily *x* is identical with *y*. That is, identity is *necessary*, which means that there is no *contingent* identity.²¹

Although persons have many contingent properties, persons are necessarily identical with whatever they are identical to – bodies, brains, brain-hemispheres, souls or whatever it may be. So take anything whatsoever. Either it is necessarily identical with a certain person or it is impossible that it is identical with that person. *Necessity* and *impossibility* are the only two alternatives, since identity is not a contingent matter. So when it comes to identity, if it is possible – not impossible – then it is necessary. There are many possibilities that are not necessities, of course, but they are all contingent possibilities and identity is not a contingent matter.

I have not been able to go into many details of Parfit's arguments, but central to his whole way of reasoning about personal identity is the idea that a person could lose their identity merely as a result of a contingent branching in the future. This would be a very extraordinary type of loss of identity, one in which what was lost disappeared in the losing even though no intrinsic changes had occurred in "oneself." Thankfully, one's identity is necessary and cannot cease to exist as a result of such extrinsic and contingent matters. Whether one is a grandfather and many other things can depend on such extrinsic factors, but not one's personal identity. Parfit does show some interest in the relation of constitution, which is a contingent relation, but he has very little to say about it. Therefore it is better to go to Lynne Rudder Baker for examination of what that relation amounts to, since she is well known for her arguments for material constitution.

Baker: constitution as a substitute for contingent identity

Baker, even though she is a materialist, does not believe that any part of the body or stream of consciousness needs to continue to exist as an identity-bearing continuant. This is so because she believes that the relevant relation between a person and their body is constitution – not identity. She says,

The idea of constitution plays the role in my view that the idea of "contingent identity" plays in others' views. (Indeed, one advantage of my views is that I can achieve what other philosophers want when they invoke ersatz "identity," without cheapening the idea of identity.) Identity is necessary; constitution is contingent. Hence, constitution is not identity.²²

Baker claims that human persons are *constituted* by their bodies and their bodies are constituted by matter. Baker believes that the relation of *constitution* that clay has to a statue is the same relation that a human body has to a human person. We know that if some clay is made into first one statue, then a different one, then the two statues are not the same statue though made of the same clay. If the clay were identical to what it constitutes then it would be identical to each of two different statues. But one thing cannot be identical to two different things, so the clay cannot be identical to what it constitutes. Likewise, a person can hardly be identical with the matter that happens to constitute that person's body for part of that person's existence, according to Baker. Since contingent identity is not possible it is not possible for the material that constitutes the body (and even the person) to be identical to the person for only a part of that person's existence. So human persons are, instead, *constituted* by human bodies, according to Baker.²³

As noted above, Baker claims that human persons are constituted by their bodies, even if not identical with them. But even though Baker is a materialist in regard to human persons she is not a materialist in regard to divine persons. Divine persons do not need to have a body to exist. Furthermore, if one is a human person this does not mean that one cannot continue to exist as a person without a human body, according to Baker. But if one's existence began embodied, unlike a divine person, one must continue to be embodied with *some* body even if it is not a *human* body. Baker does not make clear why a body is essential for the existence of human persons that are not divine. Personal identity is assured, anyways, in the transition from one body

to the next by continuing to have one's own first-person perspective.

A first-person perspective is a perspective in which one conceives of oneself *as* oneself. One does not only have thoughts, desires etc. One also realizes that one is the one having those thought, desires etc., if one has a first-person perspective. One realizes that one is the *subject* of these conscious states – one is not only conscious, but self-conscious. So it the capacity for such a perspective that Baker takes to be necessary for personal identity. For God it is not only necessary but it is also sufficient for personal identity. But for persons like us it is also necessary that we be embodied for personal identity. This means that neither we nor the Apostle Paul could exist without a body. It also means that being a human could just be a phase that I go through. Once I was a child, then a teenager, then an adult and then possibly, according to Baker, the next phase could be non-human. Being human is not an *essential* property of human persons according to Baker, as she makes abundantly clear in the following presentation of her views:

Putting together the ideas of a first-person perspective and of constitution, we get this:

HP: An entity *x* is a human person at *t* if and only if (i) *x* has a capacity for a first-person perspective at *t* and (ii) *x* is constituted by a human body at *t*.

An entity *x* is a person in virtue of satisfying (i), and *x* is a human (rather than a divine or Martian) person in virtue of satisfying (ii). If *x* is a person constituted by a human body at *t*, then *s* is essentially a person. That is, there could be no time at which *x* existed without being a person. But *x* is not essentially a *human* person. An entity *x* is a human per-

son only if *x* is constituted by a human body, and it is possible that *x* is constituted by a body at one time but constituted by a non-human body (a bionic body, a resurrected body) at another time. Even though it is possible that we come to have different bodies, anything that begins to exist as a human person (i.e., begins to exist constituted by a human body) is essentially embodied.²⁴

I said above that Baker believes that personal identity is assured even if a one changes bodies by one's continuing to have one's own first-person perspective. Now it is important that it is the same first-person perspective and not a numerically different one. This can be confusing. Sometimes persons say – but not Baker – that as long as one has the same *stream of consciousness* (software) any *body* (hardware) will do. The problem with this way of thinking about these issues is that the same software can be run simultaneously in many different computers, making the software like an abstract object instead of a distinct concrete person like you and me. In the movie *The 6th Day* Arnold Schwarzenegger plays both a man named "Gibson" and also a clone of Gibson. Throughout the movie the clone thinks that he is Gibson and that Gibson is a clone – making for a bad situation. The clone has what he takes to be Gibson's first-person perspective, but in reality he only has his own clone first-person perspective. Van Inwagen has pointed out that Baker has not helped us in knowing what having the *numerically identical* first-person perspective (in contrast to a clone's possibly *qualitatively identical* first-person perspective) means where the perspective is not anchored to the same body or soul. But knowing this is vital for any theory of personal identity such as

Baker's where persons can switch bodies and where there are no identity-bearing souls that have these perspectives.²⁵ I agree with van Inwagen that this is a serious problem for Baker's theory.

Baker also believes that, although human persons are completely constituted by their material bodies, they can have powers, functions and roles that a mere material organism could not have. What is essential is that they are capable of having a first-person perspective.²⁶ What is it that gives persons this potential if they are completely made up of the very same molecules as their body? What are the alternatives? I can think of three types of explanations: Explanations from the (1) natural world, (2) social world or the (3) supernatural explanations. The third alternative would go against Baker's purpose to try to explain human material constitution without the need for anything outside the natural or social world. If we look to explanations from the natural world, I have seen no plausible explanations that do not amount to a use of mereology (i.e., parthood relations). But Baker says over and over again that she is not giving mereological explanations.²⁷ Baker does give many examples of constitution from the social world that many persons take to be quite plausible: the constitution of money, artworks, artifacts etc.²⁸

We know, for example, that a paper dollar bill can play an important role in getting food on the table, even though it could not do this if it were merely the paper it is constituted of. This is because people use the paper dollar bill in this way and have many intentional attitudes toward it (e.g., they believe it is of value, they desire it etc.). But this does not seem to be a good answer to why we are persons rather than only physical organisms.

Are we just persons because other persons have seen, and continue to see, us as valuable and desirable? No, we are not a "social construction" in the way that one could say that money is. That cannot be Baker's answer. Baker is fond of saying that there would not be statues if there were not an artworld. But this is the same type of response as what we just said about money. When one refers to oneself with "I," does one really believe that what is referred to depends for its existence in there being a social world that recognizes one as a person? Baker can hardly present that as an alternative.

If human persons are not social constructions and natural constitution via parts does not explain human constitution, what explains the fact that human persons are so different from the material they are constituted of? It is a mystery to me how she thinks constitution works in the case of human persons. The approaches normally employed to solve puzzles concerning constitution when applied to language, artworks and money do not seem so acceptable when applied to Jones, you or I. And she rejects the use of mereology. It seems quite clear that in going from strict identity to constitution (not contingent identity, which Baker sees as obviously defective), Baker has gotten a grounding problem instead.²⁹ We will now take a look at a materialist alternative that takes the relevant relation to be one of strict identity.

Van Inwagen: are persons identical to their bodies?

One's body is a lot like a stream. Different water molecules successively constitute streams and likewise the matter that constitutes one's body also changes successively? Russell DiSilvestro summarizes this point concisely: "Human organisms are

constantly getting transformed, acquiring new parts through processes like inhalation, nutrition, and hydration, and losing current parts through processes like exhalation, excretion, and perspiration.”³⁰

Van Inwagen is convinced that persons are identical to their bodies (or a proper part of their bodies that is identity-bearing), but takes up the fact of metabolism as a part of the following difficulty for his view:

Suppose that God proposes to raise Socrates from the dead. How shall he accomplish this? How shall even omnipotence bring back a particular person who lived long ago and has returned to the dust? – whose former atoms have been, for millennia, spread pretty evenly throughout the biosphere? This question does not confront the dualist, who will say either that there is no need to bring Socrates back (because, so to speak, Socrates has never left), or else that Socrates can be brought back simply by providing his soul (which still exists) with a newly created human body. But what shall the materialist say? From the point of view of the materialist, it looks as if asking God to bring Socrates back is like asking him to bring back the snows of yesteryear or the light of other days. For what can even omnipotence do but reassemble? What else is there to do? And reassembly is not enough, for Socrates was composed of different atoms at different times. If someone says, ‘If God now reassembles the atoms that composed Socrates at the moment of his death, those reassembled atoms will once more compose Socrates’, there is an obvious objection to his thesis. If God can reassemble the atoms that composed Socrates at the moment of his death in 399 BC – and no doubt he can –, he can also reassemble the atoms that composed

Socrates at some particular instant in 409 BC. In fact, if there is no overlap between the two sets of atoms, God could do both of these things, and set the two resulting men side by side. And which would be Socrates? Neither or both, it would seem, and, since not both, neither.³¹

Van Inwagen believes that this is a difficult problem for Christian materialists. But one might wonder, “Why not just say that *only* what constituted Socrates at death could be the right atoms for the resurrected body?” There are many responses to this, but one familiar one (one that van Inwagen also notes) is to take up cannibalism-type cases. The types of questions that have been asked in regard to these cases are: If one supposes that there is a bodily resurrection, as traditional Christians do, what happens to victims of cannibalism? If a person is eaten by cannibals, will that victim get the matter that constituted his body when he died (which the cannibals assimilated to their bodies) at the resurrection? Or will one or more of the cannibals get a part of the matter? If not, would they have gotten a part if part of the matter that constituted their victim had it still constituted their own bodies when they died? These are not just hypothetical questions or questions one might have after seeing a movie like *Fried Green Tomatoes* in which some customers at the Whistle Stop Café unknowingly are served human flesh to eat. There have been many cannibals throughout history so such questions have been taken seriously by theologians and philosophers that have discussed the relation of persons to the material that constitutes their bodies. These questions are relevant both for materialist like van Inwagen and those critics of materialism that believe in a bodily resurrection of the dead. But

they are especially relevant for materialists like van Inwagen who believe that they can persist only if their bodies (or a proper part of their bodies that is identity-bearing) persist.

The answer to the problem of persistence that Van Inwagen gives is that it is possible for God to save for safe-keeping until the resurrection some identity-bearing part of the body that died in order for there to be some material continuity. His original story that he used to illustrate such a possibility was what he calls the corpse-removal-and-simulacrum story. He sees this story as a just-so story, a story that is a possibility, but which is not put forth as true. In the story God removes at death persons' corpses and keeps them for safe keeping, while placing *simulacrum* (fake corpses) in their place. In this way God can assure the continuity of the person, while not letting on to the world what is going on. If corpses could never be cremated etc., people would start to realize what was going on and the supernatural would be too obvious for a rational person to choose to live in rejection of it.³² Most persons have not considered this story so plausible and therefore other alternatives have been sought.

One such alternative is given by Zimmerman, who, although he is a dualist, sought to show how the resurrection could be a genuine possibility even for a materialist. Zimmerman's model is called "the Falling Elevator Model." It is so-called to associate it with the jumping out of an elevator at the last minute before it crashes to try to avoid destruction in cartoons. It is similar to Parfit's Single Case fission case of Lefty and Righty covered above, only in this case it is not the organism that fissions, but the atoms of the organism. When the atoms fission, half becomes a corpse and the other half goes

with life to God and waits for the resurrection.³³ This story has also not gained such wide acceptance for a similar reason as van Inwagen's, but there are some Christian materialists that use it as an explanation.

Unless the requirement that there be some material continuity is illusory, the materialist needs to show how the continuity requirement can be solved in order to have a satisfactory philosophical theory, according to van Inwagen. Although attempted solutions to the problem have been given by van Inwagen, and even Zimmerman, the consensus today among philosophers is that these attempts are not so plausible.

Zimmerman: problems of vagueness and indeterminacy

Roderick Chisholm compares a person's metabolic process to the continual replacement of the parts of a ship in one of his well-known examples. The ship replaces so many parts that after a while none of the parts are the original ones. He asks us to reflect over how the ship persists through these changes. Throughout the different times of its existence the ship exists in virtue of the parts that constituted it at those particular times. But the parts themselves exist in their own right and do "duty for" or "stand in" for the ship at different times. The properties that the ship has at different times are in virtue of the stand-ins having those properties.³⁴

Some people have doubted whether there really are the types of "stand-ins" that Chisholm speaks of. Zimmerman notes, however, that we speak of them all the time. We use **mass terms** such as "water," "gold," and "cellular tissue." These mass terms characterize *kinds* of stuff. We even have the very general mass

term "matter," which can be used as a synonym of "stuff." And things such as streams, ships, rings and bodies are made of different *portions* of stuff (or matter) from time to time. Locke called these *portions* of kinds of stuff "**masses**" of stuff. Zimmerman gives the following as examples of portions or masses of stuff. "I have in mind such singular terms as 'the water in the tub', 'the gold used to make my ring', 'the cellular tissue making up my liver', 'the matter of which my body is constituted'."³⁵ Streams, livers and bodies are successive entities – being made of different masses of matter from time to time. Zimmerman is confident that there are these kinds of *stand-ins*, these masses of matter that do duty for successive entities.

As noted above, some people have doubted whether there really are these sorts of things. But why should we doubt that *the water in the stream* today can be different from *the water in the stream* that was there yesterday. And why should we doubt that the stream is dependent for its existence on having different *portions of water* that constitute it in succession throughout its existence, one *portion* doing duty for the stream at one time, another one at another time? I take it to be quite unproblematic to say that one's body is, likewise, constituted by different portions of matter at different times in the way that Zimmerman, in agreement with Chisholm, claims. So Zimmerman has clarified how we can say familiar and true things about Chisholm's "stand-ins" by discussing what he calls "masses of matter."

But if bodies are *successive entities* in the way describe above one may ask: when are the different portions of matter that "flow" through one's body (as the water in a stream) a part of one's body

and not just on their way in or out? Zimmerman claims that answering the question of when a molecule truly becomes part of a cell is a hopelessly vague matter because it is a continuous process that can be divided up into an indefinite number of different stages.³⁶ It is like asking when a particular water molecule becomes a part of a cloud. This problem of vagueness is a consequence of the fact that bodies and their parts are successive entities.

Talking about a person's body can be a vague matter in the way that talking about bodies of water can be. Imagine that Daniel rents a beautiful house on the coast and that one day Daniel points out the window, after a nice morning swim, and says, "That's some wonderful water!" I then ask him, "What do you mean? Do you mean that the bay is nice, that the ocean is nice, or that the warm water that streamed in this morning from the Gulf is nice?"³⁷ Maybe Daniel meant all three things. It is after all very hard to know exactly where the bay ends and the ocean continues or where the Gulf Stream is in the bay or ocean. But if Daniel wanted to refer to the ocean, how much of the ocean did he want to include? Most likely Daniel did not want to include all of it. Maybe he meant just the part of it that he experienced as warm and refreshing during his morning swim. But how much is that part? And is the portion of water that constituted that part of the ocean still there or has some new water streamed in from the Gulf? What all these questions show is that it is not so easy to distinguish exactly what Daniel was referring to. Such matters are very vague and Daniel could have meant many things and it is very much up to him what he meant. He can use the very same words at one time to mean one of these thing, at another

time to mean another, and a third time to mean even more vaguely a combination of them.

Things are very different when it comes to persons. I take it that Daniel knows who he refers to when he says "I" in "I was referring to the warm water that streamed in from the Gulf this morning." That person is the very same person, say, as had traveled to that coast when he was just a child some twenty years before (with a body half the size). And it is important that he refer to just that person and no other if he is going to use the expression "I" appropriately. So how we refer to bodies of water is quite different to how we refer to ourselves. The same is true, argues Zimmerman, of the difference between referring to one's own physical body and oneself. Referring to one's body is a vague matter, whereas referring to oneself is not.

Chisholm has discussed some of the consequences of treating persons as though they were successive entities like their bodies are. When it comes to successive entities we need to make decisions about what constitutes them. If one has a ship one needs to know what constitutes it to draw up an insurance contract and the same thing holds for one's body and medical insurance. One can read in certain contracts such things as when we refer to *x* we mean for purposes of this contract *y*. This must be so if there are not going to be endless controversies about what it is we are talking about. But however precisely we define our terms these types of decisions are going to be vague matters, where different conclusions can be properly drawn because of the vagueness. The ship after the major overhaul is not strictly the same ship, but for purposes of the contract it might be. After all the operations one has gone through one

can wonder how much of "one's" body is strictly one's own, but for purposes of the health insurance contract it most likely would be one's own body. We need to be able to speak loosely in speaking of such successive things. But we who speak in this way are, clearly, not just *loosely speaking* of being the numerically identical persons from, for example, childhood to adulthood. We are *strictly speaking* the numerically identical persons.

Compare Chisholm's and Zimmerman's way of seeing personal identity as determinate with Parfit's way of seeing such questions. Parfit says,

If we do not believe that there are Cartesian Egos, or other such entities, we seem forced to answer No. It is not true that our identity must be determinate. We can always ask, 'Would that future person be me?' But, in some of these cases,

- (7) This question would have no answer. It would be neither true nor false that this person would be me.

And

- (8) This question would be empty. Even without an answer, we could know the full truth about what happened.

If our questions were about such entities as nations or machines, most of us would accept such claims. But, when applied to ourselves, they can be hard to believe. How could it be neither true nor false that I shall still exist tomorrow? And, without an answer to our question, how could I know the full truth about my future?³⁸

Parfit is very consistent with his materialism and comes to the same conclusion about bodies as both Chisholm and Zimmerman. The difference is that Chisholm thought that it was possible for

persons to be identical with a tiny physical particle in their brain that somehow was not affected by all the changes happening in the body around it.³⁹ And Zimmerman believes in immaterial souls. Neither of them believes that personal identity is indeterminate, as the identity of material bodies is. Most materialist have not followed Chisholm in believing it possible that persons are a little particle in the brain. Many have limited what they see as identity-bearing parts of the body to more normal alternatives such as the entire brain, half of a brain or a relatively large part of it that could plausibly be thought to think. However such things *are* successive entities. Therefore the same types of problems arise in having these parts of the body as identity-bearers as in having the whole body. And substituting psychological identity-bearers does not help as long as one can duplicate them as in the Parfitian cases. Numerical identity cannot be duplicated. Once one starts to allow for alternatives like Chisholm's alternative, the alternatives start to look to many people a lot more controversial than believing in immaterial souls as Zimmerman does.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The traditional Christian explanation that besides material bodies there are also immaterial souls can explain how a person can persist after biological death. Numerical identity cannot be contingent, which causes problems for any theories that rely upon duplication or replication

to argue for the view that a person's identity depends on contingent factors. Baker's constitution view suffers from a lack of clarity of what it means to have the same first-person perspective and what grounds the differences between a person and their body when they are alike in so many ways is a mystery. Van Inwagen's, and even Zimmerman's, just-so story for how a person could have a life after death is implausible. This makes it very hard to believe that there is some material (part of the) body that has to survive in such a way. Chisholm's tiny particle in the brain is not any more plausible. However his successive entities argument, which Zimmerman uses, offer strong support for the conclusion that while questions of personal identity are determinate, questions of material constitution are vague matters.

The above philosophical considerations give support to the conclusion that souls are not just "entities" that have no function in plausible views concerning personal identity. When souls disappear from one's theory even more mysterious explanations and stories of what matters can take their place. A materialist view of personal identity where persons are identical to or wholly and essentially constituted by material bodies (or parts of bodies capable of conscious life) is not easy to combine with a belief in an afterlife, but has problems even with what matters in this life.

Notes

1. I would like to thank SKY (Stockholms Kristliga Ynglingaförening) for a stipend that has supported my research on personal identity. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dean Zimmerman, Stefan Lindholm, and an anonymous referee for comments on a first draft of this article. The views expressed in his article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect views of SKY or any persons mentioned above.

2. Numerical identity is to be distinguished from so-called "qualitative identity." Replicas are more or less qualitatively similar to the original which they replicate. However, since they differ from the original, they are not numerically identical to it. The original's and replica's sameness is a matter of degree, some of their properties

being different. I will assume that where there is no difference in properties there is no numerical difference either; otherwise there is. I will say more on this below.

3. The terminology is not always constant. At times the soul is called a "spirit," "ghost," "self" or something else. See John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1989).

4. See for instance David S. Oderberg "Hylemorphic Dualism" In *Personal Identity* in Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, and Jeffrey Paul (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 70–99. Oderberg says that "the person I am dies but does not thereby cease to exist; hence, [biological] death and cessation of existence, for entities like us, are not the same event" (p. 96).

5. Here is a sample of passages from the Christian scriptures (NRSV) that have been purported to support such claims: Saul is purported to have contacted the deceased Samuel, going against laws forbidding the contacting of the dead (1 Sam 28:3-25; Deut. 18:10-11; Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Isa. 8:19). Jesus is portrayed on the cross as telling one of the anxious criminals who was crucified next to him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43) even though both Jesus and the criminal would be biologically dead at the promised time of meeting. One should not fear persons who can kill one's body, but not one's soul; one should fear the person who can do both (Matt. 10:28). The disciples are portrayed as believing in immaterial ghosts, spirits or souls – Christ responds to their shock at seeing him after his bodily resurrection by saying, "a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). The disciple's reaction here is often interpreted as being partly explained by the many passages throughout scripture in which people who die are said to have given up their ghost or spirit (as in Luke 23:46) and also the disciples' lack of knowledge of Jesus' special bodily resurrection on the third day after his death. In James it is assumed that "the body without the spirit is dead" (James 2:26). Paul has a purported vision, possibly had "out of the body" (2 Cor. 12:2-4).

6. In this article I will be assuming that persons in general are *wholly present throughout* all the stages of their lives. An adherent of temporal-parts theory would say, instead, that persons are like their bodies in the following way. Just as different parts of one's body are spread out through space – possibly, one part up there rather close to the ceiling, other parts down there on the floor – so are different temporal parts of persons spread out through time. One is not identical with any of one's temporal parts, rather one is identical the *sum* of them. So instead of being completely present throughout all the stages of one's life, one is spread out throughout time. That one is wholly present at each stage of one's life I take as a given in this article. Cf. to Harold W. Noonan, *Personal Identity*, 2nd ed., (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 220.

7. See, for example, Peter van Inwagen, "A Materialist Ontology of the Human Person", in Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *Persons: Human and Divine*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). pp. 199-215 and Peter van Inwagen (2006), "I Look for the Resurrection of the Dead and the Life of the World to Come," online paper in MS Word format. <http://philosophy.nd.edu/people/all/profiles/van-inwagen-peter/documents/Resurrection.doc>. [Accessed February 2, 2012]

8. See, for example, Lynne Rudder Baker, *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Lynne Rudder Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life: An Essay in Practical Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

9. See, for example, Dean Zimmerman, "Material People," in Michael Loux and Dean Zimmerman (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 491–526 and Dean Zimmerman, "From Property Dualism to Substance Dualism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 85 (2010): pp. 119-150.

10. In the scope of this article I cannot discuss the different varieties of dualism in relation to personal identity. For more on dualism and its possible strengths and weaknesses from a dualist's perspective see Dean W. Zimmerman, "Dualism in the Philosophy of Mind," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., Donald M. Borcherdt (ed.). (New York: Macmillan, 2006), pp. 113-122.

11. See Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) and Derek Parfit, 2007, "Is Personal Identity What Matters?" (The Ammonius Foundation) Online: http://www.stafforini.com/txt/parfit_-_is_personal_identity_what_matters.pdf. [Accessed April 18, 2012]

12. Derek Parfit, "Is Personal Identity What Matters?", p. 14.

13. Derek Parfit, "Is Personal Identity What Matters?", p. 15.

14. Derek Parfit, "Is Personal Identity What Matters?", p. 25. See also p. 80.

15. I base this on the fact, following Leibniz, that any one thing has every quality it has without exception, and that any two things differ in at least one quality.

16. Parfit's Division Argument is seen as one of his stronger arguments. Parfit also has arguments where persons are duplicated in replication booths. But I believe the Division Argument strikes more persons as more plausible than replication booths and the central outcome discussed is still two persons resulting from one person.

17. See, for example, Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 248 where Parfit says that whether one speaks of two minds or a divided mind is just two ways of describing the same state of affairs. See also Derek Parfit, "Is Personal Identity What Matters?", p. 46.

18. Derek Parfit, "Is Personal Identity What Matters?", pp. 46, 47.

19. Derek Parfit, "Is Personal Identity What Matters?", p. 50.
20. Derek Parfit, "Is Personal Identity What Matters?", p. 48.
21. See Saul Kripke, "Identity and Necessity," in A. W. Moore (ed.), *Meaning and Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 162–191. One should not draw the conclusion from the fact that contingent *identity* is impossible that contingent *identity statements* are impossible. Contingent statements are, of course, possible, but this does not mean that it is possible for identity itself to be contingent. Kripke's argument draws the conclusion that there is no contingent identity. In the argument it is the object that is spoken of (which at one time *happens* to be referred to by using *x* and at another time by using *y*) and it is said of that object that it is necessarily self-identical. The necessity concerns an *object*, not a *statement*. It is essential for objects to be self-identical. I cannot go more into this in this article, but see Kripke for more on this.
22. Lynne Rudder Baker, "The Ontological Status of Persons," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 65 (2002), pp. 370–388. The citation is from p. 3.
23. See, for example, Lynne Rudder Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life*, pp. 32–48 and "The Ontological Status of Persons," p. 4.
24. Lynne Rudder Baker, "Christians Should Reject Mind-Body Dualism," in Michael Peterson and Raymond VanArragon (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, MA: Basil Blackwell, 2004), p. 332.
25. See Van Inwagen, "I Look for the Resurrection of the Dead and the Life of the World to Come," pp. 12–13.
26. Lynne Rudder Baker, "Reply to Zimmerman," in Michael Peterson and Raymond VanArragon (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, MA: Basil Blackwell, 2004), p. 343. Baker says, "are capable of having a first-person perspective" instead of "have a first-person perspective" since she is well aware of the fact that persons can lack such a perspective if, say, they are in a temporary coma. The fact that first-person perspectives play a so central role in Baker's view weakens it considerably. Comas and other things that cause one not to have a first-person perspective for a time are not so uncommon and one can be glad that one's being a person is not dependent on being able to realize that one is oneself in the way Baker does.
27. See, for example, Lynne Rudder Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life*, p. 32.
28. See, for example, Lynne Rudder Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life*, chapters 2 and 3.
29. The grounding problem is the problem of giving grounds for claiming that there is a difference between the constituter (e.g., the marble or material) and the constituted (e.g., the statue or person), there being so similar in so many ways. See Karen Bennett, 2004, "Spatio-temporal Coincidence and the Grounding Problem," *Philosophical Studies*, 118 (2004): pp. 339–371.
30. Russell DiSilvestro, *Human Capacities and Moral Status* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), p. 111.
31. Van Inwagen, "I Look for the Resurrection of the Dead and the Life of the World to Come," pp. 5–6.
32. See, for example, van Inwagen, "I Look for the Resurrection of the Dead and the Life of the World to Come," pp. 6–9.
33. Dean Zimmerman, "The Compatibility of Materialism and Survival: The 'Falling Elevator' Model," *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (1999): 194–212.
34. See Richard Feldman and Fred Feldman, 2008, "Roderick Chisholm" in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), (Winter 2008 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/chisholm/> [Accessed January 22, 2012]
35. Zimmerman, "Material People," p. 494.
36. See Dean Zimmerman, "From Experience to Experiencer," in Mark C. Baker and Stewart Goetz (ed.), *The Soul Hypothesis: Investigations into the Existence of the Soul* (New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 188.
37. This example is inspired by some of Zimmerman's bay-ocean examples. See, for example, Dean Zimmerman, "Properties, Bodies, and Minds: An Examination of Sydney Shoemaker's Metaphysics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 78 (2009), pp. 673–738.
38. Derek Parfit, "Is Personal identity What Matters?", p. 9.
39. See Roderick Chisholm. "Is There a Mind-Body Problem?" *Philosophical Exchange* 2 (1978): pp. 25–34.
40. One may wonder if having an identical genotype would be sufficient for the numerical identity required for personal identity, but being genetically identical is not the same thing as being numerically identical. See for more on this: DiSilvestro, *Human Capacities and Moral Status*, p. 121. Moreover, this would not solve out-of-body types of experiences for these experiences are, of course, conscious whereas something with an identical genotype need not be.