

1 **A critical exposition of the two Physical Criteria of Personal Identity**

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3 'Who am I'? This question on identity has plagued the philosophers over time. This is not only a
4 metaphysical question but also a psychological problem regarding our identity. We are not
5 concerned about our own identity but also about the identity of other person. The question is that
6 why the identity of a person is considered a problem at all. We find that there are many things
7 which can be easily identified, and it is clear that identification of these things is not considered
8 as a problem. The philosophers are not concerned about the identity of material things or any
9 physical objects, then why is it that they regard the identity of a person as a special problem. In
10 the case of the material things, we can identify them by their spatio-temporal characteristics. Let
11 us take an example of a table or a book. I can identify a table of my room as the same table
12 which I saw yesterday by its spatio-temporal continuity. It occupies the same place which it
13 occupied yesterday and hence there is temporal continuity. I can individuate it from another table
14 which is visibly similar with the table of my room by their spatial character because two different
15 tables have occupied two different places at the same time.

16 But it may be said that a person has a spatial character because a person has a body and the body
17 must occupy a particular place. So, a body can be regarded as a physical object, but a person is
18 not just a body. The identity of a person is not easy to define because he has a mental life. The
19 mental event has a temporal character because every mental event occurs at a particular time but
20 it does not occupy a particular place. Any identification presupposes certain criteria. These
21 criteria differ from physical objects to mental events to persons. We are not concerned with the
22 definition of a person but the identification of a person. So, the question is that how can we
23 identify a person. Is it through bodily continuity or through some other criterion? Before
24 discussing personal identity, we have to know what the term 'identity' means. Generally when
25 we use the term 'identity', we mean the sameness between two things or a close similarity
26 between them. For example, we say that 'this earring is identical with the earring which I had.' It
27 means that there are some affinities between two earrings. In psychological discussion the term
28 'identity' used to refer to the uniqueness or the individuality of a person. By using the term
29 sometimes the psychologists want to mean the distinctive characters of a person by which the

30 person can be individuated from other persons. But in the discussion of personal identity the term
31 'identity' is neither used to refer to the sameness between two things nor the uniqueness of a
32 person's character. The term is used to mean the inseparableness of two persons at different
33 times and different places. Sometimes we are concerned about the identity of me and sometimes
34 we discuss about the identity of other persons. So, it is clear that a fixed definition is not possible
35 for the term. The term is used in different ways in different spheres of life. But we use the term
36 in a restricted sense. In this discussion the term is used to refer to a persistent thing which
37 remains the same in various changes at different times.

38 In his lifetime a person undergoes numerous physical and psychological changes, but a person
39 recognizes himself as 'me' in different changes. It is clear that, some factors are responsible for
40 the sameness of a person and makes him conscious about his own identity. He defines himself as
41 the same self as he was yesterday or ten years ago. There are different theories regarding this
42 problem but here I am not going to discuss all the views in detail. I just want to uphold the view
43 that both bodily and psychological traits are responsible for personal identity. The spatio-
44 temporal continuity is regarded as a criterion of material objects. Material things must occupy a
45 particular place at a particular time, for example a coffee mug. We can identify a coffee mug as a
46 material thing because it occupies a particular place at a particular time. It can never be
47 considered as a material object if it does not have any spatio-temporal character. But it can never
48 be regarded as a criterion of being an animal, because, the animal's body undergoes different
49 changes throughout their life. We can never deny that identity presupposes some sort of spatio-
50 temporal continuity but, it is not the only criterion of animal's identity. So, it is clear that we can
51 only determine the criterion of anything when we know about the exact nature of that thing. The
52 nature of a person is always considered as a special problem because it is discussed from
53 different perspectives. A person must have a mind which differs from the other material things
54 and from other animals. Mind is taken as a non-material and invisible entity which cannot be
55 known by others. Philosophers consider the mind to be a non-physical entity. According to
56 Sydney Shoemaker, there is a philosophical tendency to identify persons with their minds and to
57 equate the question 'In what does the identity of a person consist?' with the question in what does
58 the identity of a mind consist?'¹ For him, having mind is not sufficient to regard persons as an

¹Shoemaker, Sydney., *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity*, Allied Publisher Limited, Bombay, 1971, p. 8.

59 immaterial thing. He said that there is a philosophical theory which does not deny the existence
60 of mind as an immaterial thing, but nevertheless consider person as a material object. So, it is
61 clear that Shoemaker wanted to show that, the nature of a person is not very simple to describe
62 by admitting the existence of mind. The mind cannot be considered as a criterion of being a
63 person.

64 In philosophy the matter of personal identity deals with the question that what makes a person at
65 a particular time identical with a person at another time. There are two main criteria which are
66 worth examining. Let me explain the term 'identity'. The term 'identity' in personal identity
67 refers to numerical identity and not qualitative identity. Personal identity is not the same as
68 personality, though some theories of personal identity maintain that continuity of personality
69 may be required for one to persist through time. However, the two main criteria of personal
70 identity are – psychological criterion and physical criterion.² The most natural theory of personal
71 identity is the bodily identity. The bodily view is supported by Bernard Williams. He described
72 the body as a necessary condition of personal identity. Bernard Williams gave some arguments
73 by which he emphasized the role of body while criticizing Locke's theory of memory claim.

74 For him, the memory may be the sufficient condition of personal identity but without the bodily
75 consideration, the discussion of personal identity would be meaningless. The theory of bodily
76 criterion or bodily identity states that, the continuous bodily existence only determines the
77 identity of a person. This approach defines human being as a biological organism. According to
78 this view, our identity over time consists in the identity of our bodies. Primarily we can identify
79 or individuate a person through his body. In the case of other person, we can never identify a
80 person without the behavioral manifestation, and it is only possible with the help of the body.

81 The memory view of Locke has faced many objections; among these Bernard Williams'
82 objection can be explained in the following manner. He expressed serious doubt on memory
83 criterion and emphasized on bodily continuity as a criterion of personal identity. But before
84 explaining Williams' argument we must discuss A.G.N Flew's view on Locke's memory claim.
85 There are many formulations of Lockean theory. One of these formulations is offered by A.G.N

²According to the psychological criterion, if the person X is same as Y or identical with Y then X must have the same beliefs, desires, intentions and memories that Y had yesterday. The absence of continuity of memory and psychological aspects involve the absence of personal identity, even if there is continuity of the body. For the physical criterion, P2 is the same person as P1 if P2's body is the same body as P1's body.

86 Flew. He formulates Locke's thesis and presents the thesis in the form, "if X can remember Y's
87 doing such-and-such, then X and Y are the same person."³ But if we go with Flew's formulation
88 then we should say that I will be identical with anyone whose action can be remembered by me
89 and reversely if anyone can remember my actions then that person will be identical with me. But
90 in our daily life we frequently remember my brother's joining the army, without implying that I
91 and other person's actions without being identical with that person. For instance 'I remember my
92 brother's joining the army, without implying that I and my brother are the same person.'⁴ Bernard
93 Williams explained that if A.G.N Flew is correct then it leads to an absurd consequence.
94 According to him, we must include the body in the discussion of personal identity. He did not
95 fully reject personal characteristics but held that personal characteristics or other psychological
96 considerations do not constitute personal identity apart from the body. The characteristics do not
97 exist without the body, they are of the body and hence bodily continuity is a necessary condition
98 of personal identity. To raise the objection against memory criterion, he imagined a situation in
99 which a person, says James, claims to remember the life history of Abraham Lincoln. But does it
100 mean that James is Abraham Lincoln? Williams stated that their characters should be considered
101 as similar but not identical. But Williams was also concerned about the problem of duplication.
102 If we tried to describe James' relation to Abraham Lincoln in terms of exact similarity of
103 everything except the body then we have to face some difficulty in finding a suitable description
104 in these terms of his memory claims⁵ because we should compare the similarity and dissimilarity
105 between same thing and similar phenomena. We can't say that James' memory claim is the exact
106 copy of Abraham Lincoln's life history because we don't have the memory of Abraham Lincoln.
107 So, we could not say that two men had the same memories. In order to explain this theory he
108 imagines another situation which involves the problem of duplication. Williams considered that
109 it is logically impossible that two different persons correctly remember being the man who did
110 some particular actions and saw some particular events; but it is not logically impossible that two
111 different persons should claim to remember being this man. He imagined a situation where two
112 people are psychologically continuous with Abraham Lincoln. For example, James and his
113 brother Robert undergoes the same changes. Williams said that if it is logically possible that
114 James should undergo the changes describes, then it was also logically possible that some other

³ Gustafson, Donald., *Essays in Philosophical Psychology*, Macmillan and Company Limited, 1964, p. 327.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

115 man should simultaneously undergo the same changes.⁶ Williams considered that if
116 psychological continuity or memory gives us sufficient ground for personal identity then we
117 should say that they both are identical with Abraham Lincoln. But they can never be both
118 identical with Lincoln; if they are then Lincoln would be identical with James as well as identical
119 with Robert. If James is identical with Lincoln on the basis of his memory claim then Robert
120 must be identical with Lincoln when he claims to remember the same things which Lincoln did.
121 But a man can never be identical with different persons at the same time. Moreover, if they both
122 are identical with Abraham Lincoln then James and his brother must be identical with each other.
123 If James remembers doing the things that Lincoln's did then James will be identical with
124 Lincoln, in the same manner if Robert remembers doing the things that Lincoln did then in the
125 same way Robert will be identical with Lincoln. If this will happen then we should say that
126 James is identical with Robert, because, according to the rule of transitivity, if A is identical with
127 B and B is identical with C then A is identical with C. But two different persons can never be
128 identical with each other. Two men can be similar but similarity in all respects is not possible.
129 The external body and internal qualities of two persons may be similar but in spite of that two
130 different persons must occupy different places. So, two different persons should not be identical
131 with each other. But the memory criterion provokes to say that two different persons become
132 identical at the same time. Williams argues that we must say that one of them was identical with
133 Abraham Lincoln and that the other was just like him. But if both of them are identical with
134 Lincoln then why one of them should be considered as identical with him and the other as similar
135 with him. How can we determine that which description to apply to which and there would be no
136 principle determining which description to apply to which.⁷ It would be objected that if we admit
137 that one of them was just like Lincoln then why we shouldn't say that they were similar with
138 him. Williams suggested that it would be best to say that both had mysteriously become like
139 Abraham Lincoln. If this would be the best description of each of two then why would it not be
140 the best description of James alone? There is no particular reason for us to consider James' claim
141 as genuine memory claim. Bernard Williams made a distinction between similarity and identity.
142 He claimed that the distinction between them is not possible without the reference to the body. In
143 the discussion of personal identity, we are concerned about the numerical identity and not

⁶ Williams, Bernard., *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 8.

⁷ Gustafson, Donald., *Essays in Philosophical Psychology*, Macmillan and Company Limited, 1964, p. 333.

144 qualitative identity. To consider the numerical identity of a thing or a person, we must consider
145 the visible parts or the body. However, when we consider the point of similarity, there must be
146 two or more different things in which similarity has occurred. In the case of James and Lincoln,
147 we can say that James has similar character and similar past as Lincoln. But it does not entail that
148 James and Lincoln are identical. Memory claims do not explain the difference between identity
149 and similarity. The body is the only way by which 'identity' and 'similarity' can be explained.
150 We can distinguish 'same body and 'exact similar body' which do mark a difference. If we have
151 Lincoln in front of us and he claims to remember the things which James claims to remember
152 then we should say that they have the similar memory. But we only have the memory of James
153 and do not have the memory of Lincoln. So, how can we say that they have similar memories?
154 We shouldn't say that they are identical because identity requires spatio-temporal continuity
155 which they do not have. For him, if we take away the body from personal identity then we take
156 away all the content from personal identity. Hence he tries to prove that memory alone does not
157 constitute the identity of a person. He said that if we want to take James' memory claim as a
158 criterion of being identical with Lincoln then we have to verify Lincoln's' claim to have seen and
159 done all the things that James' now claims to remember having seen and done. This could be
160 done only by the knowing what Lincoln did, what Lincoln did could be known only by someone
161 or more than one who observed Lincoln's activities as a witness. In order to describe one's
162 activities we must witness the body of that person. Behaviors of a person are always related to
163 the body. Williams held that without considering the body and without relying on the continuity
164 of the body the identity of that person is not possible. Williams' consideration on the identity is
165 known as the bodily criterion of personal identity. There are another two versions of physical
166 criterion of personal identity – the bodily view and the brain view.

167 Now I will try to discuss another physical criterion which is known as the brain view of personal
168 identity. In this regard I will try to explain David Wiggins' view on personal identity. The brain
169 view is well explained by the brain transplantation thought experiment. The story of brain
170 transplantation in the discussion of personal identity was first introduced in 1963 paper *Self*
171 *Knowledge and Self Identity* by Sydney Shoemaker. In this story two persons go through an
172 unfortunate accident. As a result the brain of Robinson was totally damaged, but the person still
173 alive. Another person Brown did not alive but his brain was unwounded. So, doctors decided to
174 transfer the whole brain matter of Brown to Robinson's brainless skull. After the operation the

175 person survives. The resulting person was called as Brownson because he has Brown's brain and
176 Robinson body. Now according to the supporters of the psychological criterion the person is
177 actually Brown. Shoemaker said that when the person regains his consciousness he firstly
178 shocked with his body. He concluded that if the person not only behaves like Brown but also he
179 displayed all the mannerisms, interest, like and dislike and so on which are actually characterize
180 Brown then we should say that the person is Brown. Many of us inclined to say that Robinson is
181 actually Brown because he had the part of Brown's body which is the brain and brain is the seat
182 of all our behavioral and psychological features. But for Shoemaker, it would be absurd to
183 conclude that brain identity is our criterion of personal identity. Behind this claim, he had his
184 own reason. For him, after regaining consciousness if Brownson talked, acted and manifested all
185 the characteristics which Robinson had before the operation then no one would claim that the
186 man was really Brown rather than Robinson because he has Brown's brain. He rejected all types
187 of causal relationship and necessary connection between one's brain and his psychological
188 features. He wanted to show that if we say that Brownson is Brown then we must be using the
189 psychological criterion of personal identity. Now let me explain David Wiggins' view on brain
190 transplantation.

191 Neo-Lockean or psychological theory is often contrasted with biological theories or animalists
192 which hold that we are fundamentally human animals and the persistence conditions of us are
193 biological. This view has been held by a number of writers but the most forcefully defended by
194 Eric T. Olson, in his book *The Human Animal*. This view presents a powerful challenge to neo-
195 Locken views. But the British philosopher David Wiggins tried to reconciles these two views. He
196 said that we are fundamentally person and fundamentally animals and that is why these two
197 terms 'persons' and 'human being' are conceptually concordant.⁸ For him, we have both
198 psychological life and also a biological life. He argued that in Shoemaker's brain transplantation
199 thought experiment, Brown is Brownson but not because of his psychological continuity but
200 because of the fact that Brown's life goes along with his brain. According to him, brain is the
201 'seat' of the vital and psychological functions. In his *Sameness and Substance Renewed* he
202 claimed that Brownson was the functional inheritor and continuator of all Brown's innate
203 faculties. This was the reason why Brownson counted as the inheritor of title to be Brown.

⁸ Wiggins, David., *Sameness and Substance Renewed*, Syndicate University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 193.

204 Neither Brown nor Robinson nor Brownson was a brain. But the brain being the seat of memory
205 and consciousness was not just any old part of the body among others. It was the essential
206 nucleus of a person (of a human being). He did not reject the brain transplantation story where
207 Brownson survives as Brown. But he rejected that there is no necessary connection between
208 psychological continuity and personal identity. Wiggins introduced us with a case of
209 psychological continuity without personal identity. He held that the mammalian brain is roughly
210 symmetrical and there is a minimal disturbance of normal function when it can be separated. In
211 this particular fission case two hemispheres of a brain are transplanted into two different persons
212 brainless skulls. Here the supposition is that after the transplant there are two persons who are
213 psychologically continuous with the previous person. If we support neo-Lockeans then we
214 should say that the previous person is identical with the two persons. But Wiggins considered
215 that it is impossible for both to be identical with the original person because these two persons
216 can never be identical with each other. Wiggins' example provides a duplication objection
217 against Shoemaker.⁹ The original person can never be identical with two different persons. The
218 point to be noted that he did not reject the neo-Lockean's claim that two resulting people survive
219 and are psychologically continuous but rejects the claim that that psychological continuity
220 constitutes personal identity. For him, such fission case seems to constitute an example of
221 psychological continuity without personal identity.

222 These two points of views are included in the physical criterion of personal identity. But why
223 one is different from the other. The brain is also an important part of our body,so, why they are
224 considered as two different criteria, but there are important notes. If we take into account the
225 bodily criterion on the one hand and in the possibility of brain transplantation what happens to
226 the body? In the case of brain transplantation, the whole brain or some part of the brain is
227 transplanted into another person's brainless skull. Our memory, desire, emotions and behaviors
228 are dependent on the brain. If with the help of advanced medical science, the whole brain matter
229 of the person A is transplanted into B's body, and B's brain is transplanted into A's body then
230 what happen with the resultant two persons if we agree with Bernard Williams' theory, then we
231 would have to say that the person A and the person B remain the same because their outer bodies
232 have not been changed. But if A manifests all the characters which B had and conversely B

⁹ Bernard Williams rejects Locke's memory criterion based on the same ground.

233 manifests A's characters then what would happen to the bodily view? It can never be denied that
234 the brain is a part of our body and if our memory, desires and behaviors are caused by our brain
235 then we should not deny the brain as a determining factor of personal identity. So, if we agree
236 with Bernard Williams then the possibility of brain transplantation with the advancement of
237 medical will be a threat.

238 Conclusion:

239 If we consider these two criteria then it would be clear that there is an important difference
240 between the two. Bernard Williams' bodily criterion takes the visible part of the body as a
241 determining factor of personal identity, whereas for David Wiggins, only brain should be
242 considered as a criterion of the persisting condition of a person. But it should not be denied that
243 one's brain is an essential part of his own body. So how can we differentiate the bodily view and
244 the brain view? It may be said that instead of the term 'bodily continuity', the criterion will be
245 clearer if we use the term 'the external bodily continuity'. If it will be used in that way then there
246 is no confusion with the brain view and one can never be misguided with these two criteria.

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