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CHAPTER 28

Personal identity and schizophrenia

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What is this chapter about?

'One of the essential features of schizophrenia is the disturbances of the experiencing "I"' (Bovet and Parnas, 1993, p. 589).

This chapter looks at another central concept drawn from the philosophy of mind, which can both inform and be informed by psychopathology. The concept of personal identity is central to the subject matter of psychiatry. However, it also exemplifies the relationship between empirical and conceptual work that has run throughout this book. While psychopathology can teach us a great deal about what is involved in the nature of persons and our identity through time—and thus what can threaten that—there is no simple experiment available to answer the question: What is a person? Instead empirical evidence and conceptual exploration go hand in hand.

In more detail, the chapter concerns what can be called the experiencing 'I' as well as the 'I' that is experienced. That is to say, it is about the self *identification* as well as the *identity* of one's person. It is also about the impact that mental illness, in general, and schizophrenia, in particular, may have on personal identity.

In this chapter as well as in the philosophical literature 'personal identity' or 'identity of a person' is taken to mean not a thing or property (like a driver's license or a sense of humor) that can be taken from you or altered in you, but what it takes for you as a person to persist from one time to another—for the *one and the same* person to exist at different times. What determines which future person, or which past person, is you?

Personal identity is a difficult topic. Yet it is or should be important to clinicians and mental health professionals. Suppose you have a patient in a clinic who is being hospitalized for onset of schizophrenia. Might this very person fail as the person he is to survive through the illness? Clearly you don't wish the illness to turn him into the psychologically fragmented remnant of a person. Or suppose a client presents herself to you with a diagnosis of dissociative (multiple) identity disorder. Could her body be the home of two, or three, or six different persons, each with its own temporal career? How could you find out if there are six persons in that body?

Plan of the Chapter

- ◆ *Session 1* introduces some of the basic issues about personal identity.
- ◆ *Session 2* sets out four different ways of denying that there is any such thing.
- ◆ *Session 3* introduces the idea that mental illness can impact on identity.
- ◆ *Session 4* looks at 4 positive theories of personal identity.
- ◆ *Session 5* concludes by looking again at how mental illness sheds light on identity.

Session 1 Personal identity: evidence and constitution

Context and bearings

One of the most famous case histories of schizophrenia is that of Daniel Schreber (1842–1911). Schreber was a judge in Leipzig who suffered from late-onset schizophrenia and was hospitalized in a sanatorium. He wrote an autobiographical account of his experiences called 'Memoirs of my nervous illness', which was discussed by Freud, Bleuler, and Jaspers, and is the subject of Sass's recent book *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber and the Schizophrenic mind* (1995).

Schreber's life was dominated by hallucinatory experiences and delusions. The director of the sanatorium wrote of Schreber's delusions as follows:

He believed that he was dead and decomposing, that he was suffering from the plague; he asserted that his body was being handled in all kinds of revolting ways . . . The patient was so much occupied with these pathological phenomena that he was inaccessible to any other impression and would sit perfectly rigid and motionless for hours. Spitzer *et al.* (1981, p. 339)

Schreber sometimes acknowledged that his beliefs and attitudes were not normal. When not in the grips of an acute stage of his illness he wrote: 'I could even say with Jesus Christ: my kingdom is not of the world' (quote from Schreber's memoirs cited in Little, 2000, p. 571).

Schreber was profoundly muddled about and disturbed within himself. He had trouble identifying his own thoughts and deeds. He had difficulty distinguishing between what was part of him and what not. The 'I' whom he believed was dead and decomposing was, of course, alive. His body, which in fact moved of his own accord, he believed was moved or controlled by others. To compensate sometimes Schreber sat motionless.

Here is a remark from a second victim of schizophrenia:

I get shaky in the knees and my chest is like a mountain in front of me, and my body actions are different. The arms and legs are apart and away from me, and they go on their own. That's when I feel I am the other person and copy their movements, or else stop and stand like a statue. I have to stop to find out whether my hand is in my pocket or not . . . Sometimes the legs walk on by themselves or sometimes I let my arms roll to see where they will land.

Chapman (1966, p. 232)

Normally, we know when we perform our movements or actions. We tend immediately to recognize our deeds. In schizophrenia, by contrast, the ability to identify one's actions as one's own is severely disturbed. So, too, is recognition of mental activity as one's own. A young patient of the Canadian psychiatrist C.S. Mellor (1970) remarks: 'I cry, tears roll down my cheeks and I look happy, but inside I have a cold anger because they are using

me in this way, and it is not me who is unhappy, but they are projecting unhappiness into my brain.'

What is the connection between being a person and being able to recognize one's actions, for example, as one's own? To get a preliminary idea about this consider the following pair of conceptual claims one sometimes comes across in philosophic discussions of personal identity, which suggest that the connection is *not* very close (they differ in the degree of separation proposed):

1. There is a distinction between the *identification* that we make of our selves or persons and our *identities* as persons. That I recognize my self or person in my thoughts or deeds is one thing. That I am who I am is another.
2. Those two facts (one about person identification and the other about identity) are not just distinguishable (or can be distinguished theoretically) but profoundly separable. Being me (my identity as a person) and conceiving me (my identification of my self) bear no relation one to the other.

The second point *surely* is mistaken or overstated even if the first, in some sense, is true. No relation? Victims of schizophrenia such as Schreber are disturbed in self identification. Perhaps it's not just self identification that is disordered in schizophrenia. Perhaps also the personal identity of a victim of schizophrenia is disintegrated—assuming that (contrary to the second point above) personal identity connects in some intimate manner with success or failure at identifying one's person.

Occasional failure to recognize my self in my thoughts and deeds may not affect my identity as a person. So, yes, that I self identify is one thing, my identity is another. However, persons are essentially self-identifying beings. Lynne Rudder Baker (1997), a philosopher at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (USA), writes as follows: 'A being that cannot think of itself in a... first-personal way is not a person' (p. 443). (See also Baker, 2000.) If so chronic or persistent failure to self identify is incompatible with being a person.

This raises a philosophical question about personal identity in schizophrenia, which can and also will be posed for other mental illnesses: Can personal identity withstand an illness such as schizophrenia in which self identification is profoundly muddled and disturbed? Can someone such as Schreber persist through the illness? Or is schizophrenia too much for a person, literally, disintegrating or dissolving him as the person he is? Some illnesses perhaps do have such a disintegrating impact. Advanced Alzheimer's dementia (as we will see) very well might. Does schizophrenia?

This is not an easy question to answer. It is not even easy to understand. Let's begin by discussing the concept of personal identity.

The story of U

Suppose someone writes your biography. When would it—the biography and not the pre-biographical contextual material—begin? Presumably it would begin with your beginning. It would begin when you enter existence. When would it end? Presumably it would end when or if you exit from existence.

Call this biography (if you wish, imagine your own name here in the place of 'U'): *The Story of U*.

It is a presupposition of the Story of U—and more generally of the continued existence through time of any person—that *one and same person exists over time or at different moments in time*. The story of U begins with the entry into existence of U and ends with the exit from existence of this same person, the identical person, U.

Among statements in the story we might find some like the following:

- (1) As a child, U was shy and socially withdrawn. However when U went to the university U's social personality changed. U became socially active and gregarious.

Such propositions are about U and say that U changed as U aged or matured. U's biography would also include statements such as:

- (2) U had always been bright and curious. U had a gift for numbers. So no one was surprised, least of all U's parents, when U decided to become a university professor of mathematics. U now teaches topology at Warwick.

Such statements are about U, too, but unlike those in (1), those in (2) say that some features of U endured through adulthood. Some features did not change. U always was bright and curious.

Suppose U points to a photograph taken in childhood and says 'That's me winning the math prize in school.' 'I was surprised by the ease with which I could solve differential equations.' U's biographer may include this picture in U's biography. She may also include a picture, cherished by U's parents, of U as a young professional participating in an academic ceremony at Warwick in full regalia. Two pictures. One person. One U.

What does it mean for the same person to exist at different moments in time or throughout his or her span of existence? What is there—what 'persistence glue'—perhaps buried in a heap of biographical facts makes a person the same person at different moments in time? Philosophers call it *personal identity*. But what's that?

There are two conceptual possibilities. The first is that it is *nothing*. Personal identity is an illusion. Persons fail to persist over time; strictly speaking, there aren't persons. Peter Unger (1979) of New York University writes: 'I do not exist and neither do you' (p. 236). This possibility grossly violates common sense and Unger's enthusiastic embrace of the position may suggest to

EXERCISE 1

(10 minutes)

Think about the way the *Story of U* introduced above might be continued.

- ◆ What resources might we take from it to explain what the identity of U through time might consist in?
- ◆ What factors would we appeal to to determine whether we were still, at a later time, talking about the same person we had described earlier?
- ◆ What factors would U appeal to?
- ◆ What is the connection between how we know whether we are talking about the same person and the facts that underpin sameness?

some readers a form of mental illness. (Perhaps the Cotard delusion that consists, in part, in believing that one is dead or does not exist; see below.) However, Unger surely is not deluded. He is enunciating a philosophical thesis. Several very distinguished thinkers (to be noted below) have denied that, strictly speaking, they exist. These thinkers are paragons of sense and sensibility.

The second possibility is that personal identity is *something*. Persons persist over time; strictly speaking, there are persons. This of course is the common sense view and it also the view of most philosophers who have written on the subject of personal identity. However, the problem is articulating just what that something is, what personal identity consists in.

What then is the something that personal identity is?

Personal identity is not evidence

The answers to the questions in Exercise 1 are far from clear but we can make some preliminary points.

Personal identity is not a matter, for example, of having specific fingerprints. If someone 10 years from now has U's fingerprints, we may say that this person is U. However, having U's fingerprints is not the same as being U. It is *evidence* of U, but it is not the same as *being* U. It is possible to reproduce fingerprints or to transfer them from one person to another. We can imagine U saying 'Smith has my fingerprints but Smith is not me.' 'I alone am me.'

Other types of evidence for identity include physical and psychological similarities between past and present persons. If I met U in 1987 and then bump into someone in 2004 who looks and acts just like U, as I remember U, I have evidence that this present person is U. However, past U need not be like present U to be U. People do change. So, similarity is not *necessary* for identity. Neither does similarity *suffice* for identity. Identical twins may be utterly indistinguishable except for their locations, but they are not the same (identical) person. Just as the story of U is not the story of U's fingerprints, it is not the story of U's similarity over time or physical or psychological inalterability.

'We inquire,' writes Daniel Robinson (1998), past-president of the Division of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology of the American Psychological Association, 'as to name and occupation, address, social security number, fingerprints, credit cards, and so on.' 'Following this investigation . . . we are prepared to assert that we know the actual identity of the person—the personal identity' (p. 353).

If Robinson is talking about *evidence* for identity, he is right. Such facts as those he cites are evidence of identity. Given the proper evidence we know who someone is. However, evidence for personal identity does not tell us what constitutes identity. What conditions make it up? What composes it? What is it?

If, by contrast, Robinson means to be talking about what *constitutes* personal identity, he is wrong. Personal identity is not a type of evidence. It is a *relation that no person can have to anything or anyone but himself or herself*. It is whatever it is that, in some sense, holds a person together over time and through alterations. Having fingerprints, say, of type T, fails to fit the bill, as more than one person can share T-type prints. Being similar to

someone fails to fit the bill. The same person can be similar to persons other than herself.

Thus we need to inquire a little deeper to find what might constitute identity. In the next session we will look at claims that, properly speaking, nothing does. This will help frame the discussion in the rest of the chapter. Responding to the challenge of 'identity antirealism' will give some clues for any plausible form of identity realism.

Reflection on the session and self-test questions

Write down your own reflections on the materials in this session drawing out any points that are particularly significant for you. Then write brief notes about the following:

1. What is the connection between psychopathology and personal identity?
2. What role does evidence of identity play in constituting personal identity?

Session 2 Four kinds of identity antirealism

Identity antirealism

In response to the question, 'What constitutes personal identity?', several very distinguished thinkers or philosophers have advanced versions of the view that, strictly, there is no such thing. 'Well, then,' they say, 'you can search for the composition of personal identity all you wish, but we're sorry to say that you will not find anything.' 'This is because when we refer to ourselves existing at different times—when we refer to our identity—we refer to *nothing*.' 'We don't persist.' 'Personal identity is an illusion, a myth. It's all nonsense.' 'Like witches, caloric fluid, phlogiston, and the gods of Roman religion, "personal identity" is the mistaken posit of a false theory of the metaphysics of personhood.'

Let's call this nihilistic view *personal identity antirealism* (hereafter 'PIAR' for short). It might also be called *identity fictionalism*, the idea being that personal identity is a fiction. It's a myth. The most common types of PIAR are of the following four sorts. They are:

PIAR-1

'The identity of my self or person' refers to nothing because if it did we should be able to find it in introspection. Introspection is the turning of the mind's eye inward. We can find nothing in introspection for the words 'I' or 'self' to refer to. What we find in introspection if we look carefully enough and without the naive prejudices of common sense are thoughts without thinkers, feelings, and emotions without selves or persons. We find collections or bundles of experiences but no 'experienter'. We find no person, no 'I' or self with a temporal career.

The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–76), arguably the most influential English-speaking philosopher, held a version of

PIAR-1. We might call Hume's version *introspectionist antirealism*. Here in one of the most famous passages in the history of the philosophy of personal identity is Hume's report of his introspective search for self.

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. When my perceptions are remov'd for any time, as by sound sleep; so long I am insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions remov'd by death, and cou'd I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I shou'd be entirely annihilate, nor do I conceive what is further requisite to make me a perfect nonentity. If any one upon serious and unprejudic'd reflexion, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. . . . He may perhaps, perceive something simple and continu'd, which he calls *himself*, though I am certain there is no such principle in me.

Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1967, Bk. I, pt. 4, ch. 6)

Only introspection can prove the existence of the self, Hume assumed. Nothing he found, he claims, was a '*contin'd*' him.

EXERCISE 2

(10 minutes)

As we saw in Chapter 3, the Canadian psychiatrist C.S. Mellor has studied schizophrenia in detail. A schizophrenic patient of his (Mellor, 1970, pp. 16–17) complained that her thoughts were 'sucked out of my mind by a . . . vacuum extractor, and there is nothing in my mind, it is empty.' Mellor's patient's disturbance is known as 'thought withdrawal'.

How different is Hume's account of his search for his self from Mellor's patient? Mellor's patient complained that her mind was devoid of thought. Suppose Hume complains that his mind is devoid of him. He cannot identify his self in his thoughts (or so he says). If you were to confront Hume as a psychiatric patient how would you construe his self-report? Can we make sense of his account of his search?

PIAR-2

Hume's claim is radical and initially surprising. How can there not be something that both underpins our personal identity—something that connects our thoughts etc.—and is also introspectible? But on the other hand, Hume's introspection surely stands for each of us as well. We would come to the same conclusion.

To assess Hume's scepticism about the idea of substantial self to unify ones thoughts or ideas we need to come up to date and think about the variety of forms of identity antirealism. We will, consider three other forms. The next, PIAR 2, is based on the following thought.

'My personal identity' refers to nothing because if it did we would use words like 'I' as referring expressions, but 'I' is not a referring expression. When I say something like 'I have a toothache', despite the fact that 'I' appears as the grammatical subject of a

predicate ('have a toothache'), it is not serving a referring function at all. It may draw your attention to something (the toothache) but it does not report something about *me*. The word 'I' refers to nothing in a way rather like the way in which 'and' and 'furthermore' refer to nothing. It's a useful word but not a referring term.

One reason for advocating this initially surprising view is that first person avowals appear to have a particular kind of immunity to error. If I report that I am thinking such and such then it seems that I am normally immune to error as to *who* is thinking such and such. But if 'I' were a referring expression it would surely be possible to misapply it by referring to the wrong thing. That, after all, seems to be a feature of other referring expressions.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958) held a version of PIAR-2 and this position received an influential expression in a paper of Elizabeth Anscombe (1975) entitled 'The first person'. It may be called (appropriating a term from John Canfield's (1990, pp. 57–96) sympathetic discussion) *grammatical antirealism*.

PIAR-3

This is a more radical and general position. It holds that reality does not contain distinguishable things of ordinary day-to-day or familiar sorts (persons, cars, pieces of candy, rocks). The existence of such things (including persons) is an illusion.

Such a radical and general denial of ordinary things enjoys a surprisingly distinguished pedigree in the history of philosophy. The list of advocates includes Parmenides (a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher) and Buddha (the religious leader). Among contemporaries Peter Unger (1979a, 1979b) defends the denial. It may be called (as it is not restricted to persons) *anti-ordinary-things antirealism*. Reality may be one big individual (Very Big! a Blob perhaps), tiny subvisible particulars (microparticles perhaps), or something else entirely, but no particulars of ordinary or familiar sorts and thus no persons (including you and me) exist.

PIAR-4

'My identity' refers to nothing at all because if it did persons would be distinct from how they are conceived or represented and they are not. The furniture of the world includes planets and pebbles, fields and waves, sparrows and spices, theories and concepts. Planets, pebbles, and other real particulars are distinct from how they are conceived or represented. But persons are not distinct from how they are represented. Pebbles can sit on the beach but pebble *concepts* cannot. By contrast person concepts or person representations exist but persons, strictly speaking, do not exist. Person concepts or representations exist in human heads and culture but persons have no place in the real world at all.

A lot of interesting work has been done with PIAR-4 in the context of examining types of mental disorders. (The ambitious reader might want to read some of the following: Kathleen Wilkes (1988, 1991, 1999), Daniel Dennett (1991; Dennett and Humphrey, 1989), Owen Flanagan (1992, 1994; Hardcastle and Flanagan, 1999), and Thomas Metzinger (2000) for defences of the position. See Stephen Braude (1995) and George Graham (1999a,b, 2002) for critiques.) It may be called *representational antirealism*.

Daniel Dennett is a professor of philosophy at Tufts University in Massachusetts (USA). He is the author of many books and articles on the philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Here is how Dennett (in the context of discussing multiple personality disorder) with co-author Nicholas Humphrey conveys the tenor of representational antirealism.

Many people who find it convenient or compelling to talk about the 'self' would prefer not to be asked the emperor's-new-clothes question: just what exactly is the 'self'?... [But human beings] just find it useful to imagine the existence of this conscious inner 'I' when we try to account for behavior (and, in our own case, our private stream of consciousness). We might say that the self is rather like the 'center of narrative gravity' of a set of biographical events and tendencies; but, as with a center of physical gravity, there's really no such *thing*... Let's call this nonrealist picture of the self, the idea of a 'fictive-self'. [Brackets added.]

Dennett and Humphrey (1998, pp. 38–39)

EXERCISE 3

(10 minutes)

What should be made of these four forms of PIAR? Should it persuade us that we ourselves are fictions or unreal? We don't persist. We *aren't*? What would be the consequences of this view? How might it be asserted, argued for and assessed.

Of course we cannot make a full and fair assessment of PIAR without looking at the arguments for various versions of this nihilistic doctrine, and we don't have room for that. However, there are at least two serious difficulties with PIAR that strongly suggest that the conclusion of a full and fair assessment of the position would be that PIAR is mistaken—seriously mistaken.

The first is that PIAR confronts those who endorse it with a kind of contradiction. Suppose you are reading something written by a philosopher who denies that persons persist. If you ask them whether they have written that personal identity is a myth, and they answer 'Yes, I wrote that', then this presupposes that (contrary to what they wrote) they believe persons persist—at least that *they* persist through the writing, the question, and the answer 'yes'.

Here is how Sir A.J. Ayer (1910–89), a distinguished British philosopher of the mid-twentieth century, expressed the contradiction: When it comes to the sentence 'I don't exist', he noted (and we are paraphrasing his remarks here), if one succeeds in making the statement, it must be false (Ayer, 1956, p. 50). 'I don't exist', say I. Peter Van Inwagen, a philosopher at the University of Notre Dame (2000) calls identity antirealism 'so much... arm-waving' (p. 176). One is tempted to agree with Van Inwagen. If a thesis cannot be stated without being false, it hardly seems to be a real thesis at all.

The second comment concerns Hume. Well, actually, it's more than a comment. It's a mini-exercise in introspection or in thinking about what it is like to undergo conscious experiences.

I-Thoughts

As noted Hume wrote that 'when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*... I never catch *myself* at any time.' According

to Hume the illusory idea of a self or person to whom, over time, experiences occur should be replaced with the idea of experiences occurring un-selfconsciously, impersonally.

Derek Parfit is Reader in Philosophy at the University of Oxford. Some comments of Parfit (1999; see also 1971, 1984) may be appropriated to explain the sorts of conscious activity that is consistent with a stream of consciousness of a card-carrying Humean identity antirealist: 'They would have no concept of themselves as the thinkers of... thoughts, or as agents of... acts.' And they would regard their experiences as occurring, rather than as being had.'

Parfit tries to convey the conscious tenor of how beings who did not regard themselves as persisting persons might identify thoughts in their stream of consciousness (but not as in episodes in *their* stream of consciousness). 'In place of the pronoun "I", these beings might have a special sense of "*this*" which referred to the sequence in which this use of "*this*" occurred. When one of us would say "I saw the Great Fire", one of them would say, "*This* included a seeing of the fire".'

In short, someone with a PIAR introspective consciousness would lack what are called 'I-thoughts'. Normally, of course, we think of ourselves as subjects of conscious states and attitudes. We entertain I-thoughts. We normally experience various thoughts, feelings, and actions as our own or (in the words of philosophers Roderick Chisholm (1976) and Sydney Shoemaker (1986)) as *adjectival* upon ourselves, our 'I's'. PIAR introspective consciousness operates with non-self, non-'I', or impersonal conscious awareness. Experiences occur but not as one's own. 'Instead of "I am angry", PIAR-ists would say "Anger has arisen here"' (Parfit, 1999).

Undergoing I-thoughts, strictly speaking, is incompatible with being a committed PIAR theorist in full control of one's antipersonal existence makeup. However, is it really possible let alone desirable to prune oneself of I-thoughts? Isn't there a second problem here comparable with the one mentioned above? If I admonish myself to experience no I-thoughts, and somehow succeed, aren't I responding to *my own* admonishment? If I fail to follow the admonition isn't this because, no, that's what I am. I am the sort of creature that can follow or fail to follow self directions. I am a person concerned to think in manner consistent with my beliefs, admonishments and commitments. I am, in Lynne Rudder Baker's terms, a being that can think of itself in a first-personal way. We will see later (in discussing John Locke and schizophrenia) that a capacity for I-thoughts may well play the central role in defining our persistence. The ways in which we think and speak of ourselves (the ways in which we identify ourselves as ourselves) may help to constitute who we are as persons existing across time.

Thus, although there have been a number of influential arguments against the reality of personhood, no such account can satisfactorily deal with the paradoxical consequences of such a denial. A guarded realism seems therefore a better approach to take. The next session will look at the consequences forms of mental illness for this discussion.

Reflection on the session and self-test questions

Write down your own reflections on the materials in this session drawing out any points that are particularly significant for you. Then write brief notes about the following:

1. What is puzzling about personal identity?
2. Why would any philosophers deny the existence of facts about personal identity?
3. Is such antirealism about personal identity itself coherent?

Session 3 Identity and mental illness

Gender identity disorder

In what follows we will assume that personal identity is a genuine feature of the world and thus that any form of PIAR should be rejected. This raises the question of whether personal identity can be lost. Suppose we wonder whether some mental illnesses or disorders eliminate or cause the disintegration of identity or persistence; others do not. Some, we fear, destroy personal persistence. Which ones? Is schizophrenia among them?

Let's consider two non-schizophrenia disorders first. Let's compare and contrast gender identity disorder with advanced stage Alzheimer's dementia. Alzheimer's is a progressive brain disease that in its advanced stage means victims have lost substantially all the memory of earlier lives and cannot, except occasionally and only in a fragmented way, respond appropriately to or recognize people to whom they have been close.

What is gender identity disorder? The *Desk Reference to the Diagnostic Criteria from DSM-IV* (APA, 1994) says that gender identity disorder consists, in part, in 'strong and persistent cross-gender identification' (p. 246). This may manifest itself in a pre-occupation with eliminating and replacing primary and secondary sex characteristics (via e.g. requests for hormones or surgery). (See also Green 2000, pp. 211–217.)

'Charles' is the name of a hypothetical patient with transsexual gender identity disorder described in *DSM-III Case Book* (Spitzer *et al.*, 1981, pp. 63–64). Anatomically, Charles is a woman with normal female anatomy, but Charles feels her anatomy to be personally repulsive and emotionally incongruous. To Charles it is a source of chronic distress. She claims that she is a man. She wears a strap-on penis, upper garments that flatten her breasts, and seeks prescriptions for testosterone. She is the intimate other of a bisexual woman with two children, each of whom regards Charles as their stepfather.

As a young girl Charles was a tomboy. Let's call Charles as a tomboy 'Charlie'. Suppose that the story of this person is written. It refers to her as having been a tomboy named 'Charlie'. Once Charles begins trying to live as a member of the opposite sex, however, suppose that this hypothetical biography refers to Charlie as 'him'. The male pronoun is used because Charlie has replaced her gender identity with that of a man—'Charles'. 'Gender' is a potentially distinct category from 'sex'. 'Sex' is a term

of anatomical reference. 'Gender' can be used as a socio-cultural term. It may identify people's preferences for how they wish to live and be perceived socially (as a man or as a woman). One and the same person can have different gender identities. But one and the same person cannot have different personal identities.

Alzheimer's disease

The DSM-IV reference manual also contains descriptions of Alzheimer's (APA, 1994, pp. 85–86). Symptoms include (among others): severe memory impairment, apraxia (victims may fall frequently or be unable to walk at all), and disturbance in executive functioning (they are incapable of sustaining plans or projects, their desires change rapidly). Does Alzheimer's bring an end to the existence of its victim as a person? Does it destroy the glue that binds a person over time? Can Alzheimer's cause the disintegration of personal identity?

When a person can acquire new memories, retain old ones, form and act on plans that are reasonably stable, and not inconsistent and self-defeating in the very short term, he or she readily is seen as a persisting person. If, however, in the grips of advanced Alzheimer's, someone's choices and desires, no matter the vigor of their expression, flatly contradict one another, reflect no coherent short-term plans, and so on, it is not so easy to see this particular being as a person. It is tempting to believe that a life lived in advanced dementia (with memory loss) is not the temporal career of a person. If we yield to this temptation, although gender identity disorder, we might say, is compatible with personal identity, advanced Alzheimer's, we will say, is not. The story of a person with such an illness ends when the advanced illness begins. A victim becomes a mere residue or remnant of a person.

EXERCISE 4 (10 minutes)

- With respect to personal identity, what are the differences between the two cases discussed so far in this session?
- Does either suggest reason to believe to a greater or lesser extent in the reality of personal identity?

More on the idea and importance of personal identity

One way of thinking about the differences between the two cases is that while gender identity disorder threatens the nature of the identity of a person, Alzheimer's, at least in its terminal form, threatens the possibility of any identity. Dementia looks to threaten the very idea of identity.

Perhaps the temptation to deny that a person can persist through advanced dementia will strike some readers as tendentious and contrived. So, before proceeding with this denial, we need to stop and say more about both the idea and the importance of personal identity.

Consider the following two pairs of statements:

- First person identity pair
 - (fpi1) 'I will do that later'
 - (fpi2) 'I did that earlier'

♦ Third person identity pair

(tpi1) 'He will do that later'

(tpi2) 'She did that earlier'

Now consider the following more specific examples of statements of each type:

(FPI1) 'I will read the chapter tomorrow'

(FPI2) 'I majored in philosophy thirty years ago'

(TPI1) 'He will rob the bank tomorrow'

(TPI2) 'She had an abortion two years ago'

Note that in each pair of statements the same person (me/you, the first person, in the first pair; he or she, other persons, in the second pair) is said to exist at different periods of time, roughly now, earlier, and later.

Note how deep our attachment is to the reality of the persistence of persons. We take it to be something substantial.

EXERCISE 5

(10 minutes)

Write down your own ideas about why personal persistence might matter to you as a person. Why, for example, is it important to you that you are the same person who has been reading this chapter for the last several minutes? If you are not the same person, what would that tell you about your powers of memory? That they could be grossly mistaken?

First, consider what it means to be a person. For one thing a person is a complex creature that can do many things. As a person I can act in various ways. I can hope, desire, and dream about many things. There are, also, things that can happen to me because I am a person. I can be joyous or forlorn. I can find myself in love, expectant, prideful or anxious.

Some of what happens in me, such as chemical activity in my kidneys, never enters my direct awareness, but much that happens to me and a great deal that I actively do deserves to be called 'conscious'. I will not climb trees because I am consciously and deathly afraid of falling. I will consciously attend to each key on the piano as I learn to play. I consciously desire, feel, intend, remember and act.

Now consider how much of our lives or existence as persons hinges on our persistence—requires personal identity across time. The possibility of intentional action requires that our actions as well as the intentions expressed in performing them are the actions and intentions of one and the same person. In voluntary behaviour our intentions help to cause our limbs to move. That is why we are able to say things like (FPI1) 'I will read the chapter tomorrow'. I can form the intention or decision today to read the chapter tomorrow. When I say as in (fpi1) 'I will do that later', I am presupposing that I expect later to act on a decision formed now. Second, the memory of my past presupposes the reality of personal identity across time. Events in which we were actively involved happen in the past and we may recollect them today. I say (FPI2) 'I majored in philosophy thirty years ago'. That memory, if true, is the result of a complex causal process involving activities in which I was engaged 30 years ago, the storage of information about that activity in the (my)

mind/brain, and its recall in the form of a memory report. If you remove the identity fact that I am the same person as the person who majored in philosophy 30 years ago, you eliminate my capacity for truly remembering the major as my major. You obliterate the 'my' of the major. I cannot remember something that I did unless I actually did it. I might *seem* to remember but I cannot really remember. Third, moral responsibility for good or bad deeds hinges on personal persistence. We persons stand morally accountable for things we've done or undone. We can be urged to act or to refrain from acting in certain ways under threat of punishment or prospect of praise. 'If you rob that bank tomorrow, and get caught, you will go to prison.' We assume that the same and only the same person as the criminal should go prison for the crime. Sending another person to prison for the robber's misdeed would be an injustice. Warning the potential robber that someone other than himself will go to prison likely would fall on deaf and unmoved ears.

What does it mean to be a person?

Some philosophers demand more from an analysis of the concept *person* than is offered above. George Graham and Terence Horgan (a philosopher at the University of Arizona in the USA) (1998) provide some terminology that can be deployed to characterize competing accounts of what it means to be a person. Accounts that depict concepts such as 'person' and other philosophically controversial concepts such as 'free will', 'mind', and so on, as making lot of detailed and substantive claims about the meaning of concepts, are *opulent* accounts, while accounts depicting concepts as requiring few semantic elements are *austere*. An austere account of the meaning of 'person' may appeal because accounts at the opulent end of the spectrum are likely to be excessively controversial or contestable. They have many elements and so have trouble avoiding debate. But how austere is desirable or feasible? We shouldn't and can't avoid any and all debate.

Consider a presupposition about personhood of Ronald Dworkin, who is a professor of both law and philosophy at both New York University and Oxford. In a chapter on 'Life past reason' in *Life's Dominion* (1993) Dworkin writes of anticipating the possibility of being a victim of advanced Alzheimer's dementia:

I know that if I become demented, I will probably want to go on living, and that I may then still be capable of primitive experiential pleasures. Some dementia victims, it is true, lead frightful, painful lives, full of fear and paranoia. Some are brutally unpleasant and ungrateful to those who care for them. But even they continue to want to continue living. . . . (But others may) think a life ending like that is seriously marred. . . . They do not think like the childish pleasures of dementia would redeem its curse. . . . They would prefer not to live on.

(pp. 230–231, parenthesis added).

Dworkin's hypothetical anticipation presupposes that he could become demented ('if I become demented'). If he is right in this supposition, the temptation to believe that dementia shatters personal persistence should be resisted. It doesn't. The question Dworkin then asks is whether he would want to persist as an advanced Alzheimer's victim. He says that he very well might.

Dworkin, no doubt, is operating with a fairly austere concept of person. He seems to be saying that to be a person—to be Dworkin with advanced dementia—it is enough to be a human organism that is capable of primitive experiential pleasures and of wanting to live. Not that such a creature would want to live but that it *could* want to live. That's enough.

Dworkin's reaction to the hypothetical prospect of advanced Alzheimer's confronts us with a dilemma: either we deny that a victim of advanced dementia (Alzheimer's) is a person, and hold that the concept of person is not *that* austere (as is presupposed in Dworkin's book), or we concede that a human organism that is capable of experiential pleasures and a desire to live is a person and endorse the notion that the persistence of a person can include dementia. How should we resolve this dilemma? And (speaking of schizophrenia again) what, if anything, does trying to escape from such a dilemma posed for persistence by Alzheimer's dementia reveal about the fate of personal identity in schizophrenia?

There is at least one theory of personal identity and of the conditions that obtain just when a person persists that promises a way out of this dilemma. It is owed to John Locke and insists on analysing the concept *person* so as, in effect, to enable us to decide whether a victim with advanced Alzheimer's could be *you*, a person. The decision is negative. Locke's is one theory of identity among those that will be mentioned below. We will look at this in the next session.

Reflection on the session and self-test questions

Write down your own reflections on the materials in this session drawing out any points that are particularly significant for you. Then write brief notes about the following:

1. With the preliminary work on personal identity of the previous session in mind, what impact do the psychopathologies discussed in this session have on personal identity or self-identification?
2. How can one resolve whether a condition such as severe dementia threatens the very identity of the sufferer?

Session 4 Theories of personal identity

Again: what constitutes personal identity? If the answer is something, what is this something?

There are four main possibilities each represented by a variety of different theories in the literature and variations on those theories. To keep things simple the theories are stated briefly.

1. *The physical approach.* The first is that our identity through time consists in the persistence of something physical. You are the past or future person that has your body, or that has the same brain as you do, or that is the same biological animal that you are. Whether you survive or persist has nothing to do with anything non-physical. We will call this the *physical approach*.

Defense of the physical approach may be found in Richard Taylor (1997), Peter van Inwagen (1990), and Eric Olson (1997, 1998). David Wiggins (1980) endorses a version of the physical approach (on one interpretation). So too did Aristotle (384–322 BC) (on one interpretation) and St Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) (on one interpretation). (We shall not explore the relevant interpretations here.) The physical approach may also be found in Bernard Williams (1970a,b).

2. *The spiritual approach.* The second is that our identity through time consists in the persistence of something non-physical. You are the past or future person that has your soul, or that has the same incorporeal ego as you do, or that is the same spirit that you are. Whether you survive or persist has nothing to do with something physical. We will call this the *spiritual approach*.

Advocates of the spiritual approach include Plato (427–347 BC), Descartes (1596–1650) (though see Baier, 1981), Locke, and Richard Swinburne (see Swinburne's contribution on dualism in Shoemaker and Swinburne, 1984).

3. *The capacity approach.* Both the physical and the spiritual approach agree that something (in the sense of some *object* either physical or spiritual) constitutes our persistence. Our identity through time primarily and necessarily follows from the survival of that something. A third view, in a sense, does not make a direct commitment to the type of object required—whether physical or spiritual. The primary glue for identity through time consists in the persistence of capacities that are distinctive and definitive of personhood. If such personal capacities are the capacities of something spiritual, this means that something spiritual must survive. However, if personal capacities are the capacities of something physical or need to be embodied in material of some sort (human bodies or brains), then something physical must survive. We will call this the *capacity approach*.

On this view, persons have personal capacities. These personal capacities mean that persons can perform certain activities that cannot be performed or performed as well or in the same manner by non-persons.

Not every advocate of the capacity approach agrees on the capacities that are supposed to be distinctive and definitive of personhood. So, the capacities must be identified and argued for. The most popular version of the capacity approach may be outlined as follows.

We persons are not just living animals or bodies. We are not even just beings that can feel and perceive. We are self-conscious creatures that can identify ourselves as ourselves across time. We are aware of ourselves as our selves and we think of ourselves as having pasts and futures or lives of our own. We keep track of our selves as our selves over time. Our capacity to keep track of ourselves as ourselves over time is both distinctive and definitive of personhood. It is also—so this line of thought goes—the basis of personal persistence. Persons persist just so long as their *self tracking* capacity endures or

persists. Facts about the persistence of persons are facts about the persistence of the self tracking capacity of persons.

Some advocates of the self tracking version of the capacity approach (such as John Locke) are immaterialists about persons and combine (3) with some version of (2) the spiritual approach. Other advocates insist on the embodiment of the capacity. They combine (3) with some version of (1) the physical approach. On this physicalist usage the capacity of persons to self track might be the capacity of the human brain. If so that which is tracking itself is the brain of a person (and then persons are identical with their brains). Additionally, the notion of self tracking has been analysed or described in different ways. Usually but not always self tracking is said to consist in autobiographical memory (sometimes also called 'experience memory'). Autobiographical memory occurs when I recollect some past action or event as involving me: as something that I did or witnessed and experienced. 'I majored in philosophy thirty years ago.'

Friends of the *self-tracking capacity approach* include philosophers such as H.P. Grice (1941), Anthony Quinton (1962), Sydney Shoemaker (1984, 1997), and Robert Nozick (1981) (on one interpretation).

4. *The closure approach.* A fourth view can be mentioned though it is difficult to pigeonhole and quite mysterious from a clinical or medical professional point of view. Our identity through time consists in something humanly unknowable and not analysable. Call this (for the sake of a label) the *identity basis*. The identity basis might be a microscopic object located somewhere in the brain. Or it might be a non-physical thing, a soul. Or it might be something else entirely. Either way, any way, there are no informative, tractable (knowable) persistence conditions for persons. Persons persist; identity antirealism is false. However, we just don't know how we persist. We just don't know what the identity basis is. With the emphasis on unanalysability this view is sometimes called the *simple view* (see Roderick Chisholm, 1976, pp. 108f; see also Chisholm, 1969) (although it is anything but simple). With the emphasis on unknowability it is sometimes labelled as an instance of 'cognitive closure' (human cognitive inaccessibility) (See Colin McGinn, 1999, and also see Dean Zimmerman, 1998.) The 'glue' of personal identity is unknowable by us. We will call this the *closure approach*.

Our intent in the rest of this chapter is not to discuss all these theories. They are listed so that the reader may be in a position to pursue theories that may intrigue or appeal to him or her. We will focus on the self-tracking capacity approach. This is because the self tracking approach has the most immediate or direct implications for how to understand the effect on identity of a number of different mental illnesses. We shall endorse (for the purposes of the chapter and as suggested earlier) the claim that persons are entities that can think of themselves in a first-personal (or 'I' thought) way. Such a claim perhaps is compatible with the spiritual approach, the physical approach, as well as the closure approach. However, it is

strikingly central to the self tracking capacity approach. So we will deploy the self tracking capacity approach.

Locke's identity

EXERCISE 6 (15 minutes)

Read the following extract from Locke's discussion of personal identity:

Locke, J. (1989). *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (ed. P. Nidditch). Oxford: Clarendon Press. Sections 17–26.

Link with Reading 28.1

- ◆ How does he avoid Hume's challenge to the substantiality of personality set out earlier in this challenge?
- ◆ What insight does Locke suggest into the empirical cases discussed above?

There are two key passages in the reading linked with Exercise 6. Locke writes of personal identity as follows:

Self is that conscious thinking thing . . . which is sensible, or conscious of Pleasure and Pain, capable of Happiness or Misery, and so is concern'd for it *self*, as far as the consciousness extends.

(Essay II. XXVII.17)

Person, as I take it, is the name for this *self*. Where-ever a Man finds, what he calls *himself*, there I think another may say is the same *Person*. . . . This (person) extends it *self* beyond present Existence to what is past, only by consciousness, whereby it becomes concerned and accountable, owns and imputes to it *self* past Actions just upon the same ground, and for the same reason, that it does the present.

(Essay II. XXVII.26)

Locke's claim that we can remember ourselves as ourselves in past times and that this is the defining condition of our being that past person is on to something about identity, though just what is open to debate. Efforts to clarify Locke's insight and to develop it into theory of personal identity have been undertaken by a number of philosophers. Some of these have been in response to some famous criticisms of Locke's claim offered in the eighteenth century by Thomas Reid and Joseph Butler (see the excerpts in Perry (1975) mentioned in the annotated list of recommended readings). Though our space is limited, let's make one such an effort at development here.

Identity in self-conscious Locke-step

Consider the experience that you are having at present. At the centre of it, say, is reading this chapter, but much else is happening as well. The experience may include such things as the following: the taste of the coffee that you are drinking as you read the chapter; the sight of words on the printed page; the touch or texture of the current page as you turn it; the sparkle of sunlight as it hits your desk, and so on. These components of taste, sunlight, and so on, in the experience are not disordered or jumbled, one hopes, but appear or occur as part of (what may be called) an experiential unity. You do