

## **Fission Examples in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Personal Identity Debate**

In our own times the introduction of fission examples into the personal identity debate has provoked a fierce controversy, still raging, over the seemingly new question of whether personal identity is what matters primarily in survival (see, for instance, Parfit, 1971, 1976, 1984; Shoemaker, 1984; Perry, 1972, 1976; Lewis, 1976, 1983; Nozick, 1981; Sosa, 1990; Unger, 1991; Martin, 1997). Yet, surprisingly, neither fission examples nor the recognition of their importance to the question of what matters in survival are new. Throughout the eighteenth century, personal identity theorists were aware of fission examples. By the end of the century they had both raised the "new question" and even suggested in response to it that personal identity is not what matters primarily in survival. But, then, the discussion of fission examples and their implications for personal identity theory fell completely out of sight! In the present paper we shine a light on this earlier discussion. Then, we suggest an answer to the puzzle of how it could have been forgotten.

### **John Locke**

In Locke's day, not only Cartesians and Neo-Platonists, but even Aristotelians took the identity of person to depend essentially on the continuity of soul, which was thought to be immaterial, indivisible and, hence, naturally immortal. Theorists differed on how matter could combine with soul to form a living person. Since these theorists were almost all Christians they accepted the doctrine of the Resurrection and, hence, were concerned to provide an account that would explain how the same people who had lived on Earth could live again in the afterlife. All relied in their accounts of this on the idea that during the interim between bodily death and resurrection the soul persisted. Most

thought that for the soul to persist it had to be mentally active continuously. They hotly debated the question of whether it would join again with the same or with different matter. Onto the stage of this scholastic debate, Locke burst forth with the genuinely radical and progressive thesis that the identity of the resurrected person does not depend on the person's having either the same soul or the same material body. Rather, Locke claimed, identity depends on the person's having the same consciousness.

In supporting his explosive new idea Locke was preoccupied with the implications of fission-like examples: "Could we suppose two distinct incommunicable consciousnesses acting the same Body, the one constantly by Day, the other by Night; and on the other side the same consciousness, acting by Intervals two distinct Bodies." Regarding these, Locke said, "I ask in the first case, Whether the Day- and the Night-man would not be two as distinct Persons, as Socrates and Plato; and whether in the second case, there would not be one Person in two distinct Bodies, as much as one Man is the same in two distinct clothings" (1694,II.27.23).

The first of these examples, the day/night case, is like a case of multiple personality disorder with amnesiac barriers between the personas; there are two consciousnesses in one body and these consciousnesses are "incommunicable" (i.e., not co-conscious). In Locke's view, the day-person and night-person, in spite of their sharing the same body, are different people. In the second example, one consciousness is in two bodies. Locke's use of the expression, "acting by intervals" suggests that he meant that the consciousness was first in one body, and then in the other, but never in both at the same time. If that is what he meant, then neither of these examples is a genuine fission example. Neither involves one consciousness dividing into two, each of which is then continuous with the original, contemporaneous with the other, and yet independent of the other. Unless all three of these conditions are satisfied, as they are only in what we are calling genuine fission examples, one lacks a compelling motive to

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regard fission descendants as different people from each other and, hence, (since each of the fission descendants have an equal claim to be the original person) to regard the original person as different from each of the fission descendants.

In a third example Locke said, "[I]t must be allowed, That if the same consciousness . . . can be transferr'd from one thinking Substance to another it will be possible, that two thinking Substances may make but one Person. For the same consciousness being preserv'd, whether in the same or different Substances, the personal Identity is preserv'd" (II.27.13). It is unclear whether Locke was here considering the possibility of the same consciousness being transferred first to one thinking substance and then to another, but never to both at once, or whether he was considering the possibility of its being transferred to two independently conscious thinking substances at the same time. Only in the latter case would he be presenting what we are calling a genuine fission example.

However, Locke then goes on to consider the possibility that in a case in which one's little finger is cut off consciousness might not just stay with the main part of the body or just go with the little finger but, instead, might split and go with both: "Though if the same Body should still live, and immediately from the separation of the little Finger have its own peculiar consciousness, whereof the little Finger knew nothing, it would not at all be concerned for it, as a part of it self, or could own any of its Actions, or have any of them imputed to him" (II.27.18). This final example, which clearly is what we are calling a genuine fission example, is the first time a personal identity theorist explicitly considers a fission example. Although Locke himself did not explore its implications for his theory of personal identity, once he published his new theory the fission-example cat was out of the bag.

It is also worth noting that Locke introduced several of the main themes that have figured importantly in the post-1960s discussion of fission examples. For instance,

in one remarkable passage Locke linked the question of whether a person persists to the question whether a present self-consciousness, first, has a special kind (or degree) of concern for someone in the past, second, is accountable for the actions of someone in the past, and, third, has appropriated the actions of someone in the past: "[F]or as to this point of being the same self, it matters not whether this present self be made up of the same or other Substances; I being as much concern'd and as justly accountable for any Action was done a thousand Years since, appropriated to me now by this self-consciousness, as I am, for what I did the last moment" (II.27.16). In retrospect it seems but a short step from the theoretical separation of these elements that ordinarily attend personal persistence to considering the possibility that one or more of them might obtain even when a person does not persist.

\_\_\_\_\_ Whatever his own intentions may have been Locke also suggested, both to critics and admirers of his new theory (e.g., Clarke, 1738, Butler, 1736, Hume, 1739, and Law, 1769) that people are fictional entities. In his Notebooks he may have entertained this idea in distinguishing between the "natural" and the "moral" man, and then suggesting that there are importantly different roles for each. In the Essay he expressed a similar idea by distinguishing between man as an animal, whose nature presumably it is the job of science to discover, and man as a rational being, that is, a person, perhaps a normatively defined hybrid. Locke reinforced this latter distinction by his bold pronouncement that "[Person] is a Forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit" (II.27.26) and seems to have thought that man as person has a different role than man as animal, including that of providing a proper subject for ethical theory and the law. However, he suggested that persons have not been created as a consequence of explicit theory for practical purposes. Rather, to put it more baldly and clearly than Locke could have, he suggested that persons came into being as a natural by-product of processes of identification and the application of self-concepts, both of which are Fission Examples [23]            page 4

ingredients in reflexive consciousness. It would take us too far afield to discuss this interesting possibility.

In the Essay Locke suggested diplomatically that it is highly probable that the soul is an immaterial substance to which consciousness is annexed, though he also said that, in principle, God could have "superadded" the power of thought to matter. His advancing of this latter possibility together with his new theory of personal identity provoked a storm of immediate criticism to most of which Locke refused to respond. However, Locke could not avoid an engagement with Bishop Stillingfleet, who on the issue of the resurrection defended the traditional view that to be resurrected one's body must include the very matter it had at the end of one's life. Locke argued, first, that this view is incoherent and, then, that St. Paul's idea that the resurrected body could be composed of entirely new, "spiritualized" matter is consistent with his own view. Late in the century, Priestley, in defense of his materialistic view of the resurrection, would appeal in a similar way to St. Paul. Stillingfleet died before he could respond to Locke's third letter. But others soon entered the lists.

### **Samuel Clarke & Anthony Collins**

Locke's fission-like examples and his suggestions leaning towards an account of persons as fictions had a remarkable development between 1706 and 1709 in a six-part debate between Clarke and Collins (Clarke, 1738, III.720-913). In the early eighteenth century this debate was reprinted several times and even went through two editions. Clarke, Boyle Lecturer and "chief lieutenant of Newton," was at the time regarded by many as the most intelligent man of his era. Collins, a disciple of Locke, was at the onset of the debate relatively unknown. Collins' initial challenge to Clarke was in response to Clarke's attempt to establish the immortality of the soul. Their exchange soon developed into a more general consideration of personal identity and whether matter can think. Clarke defended the traditional view that consciousness could reside

only in immaterial substance, while Collins defended the new view that matter could think.

Surprisingly, perhaps, what we are calling genuine fission examples were introduced into this debate not by Collins, as a way of developing Locke's view, but by Clarke, as a way of objecting to it. Subsequently fission examples were discussed several times in the debate. The basic outline of Clarke's overall argument is simple. He assumed that consciousness is a real property and, hence, that were it a property of a material system every part of the system would have to be conscious as well (730,760). Such a result, he maintained, would be absurd. Collins maintained that consciousness can emerge from properties of parts of the system (or be "superadded" by God to the system) even though the parts themselves are not conscious.

In Clarke's first reply to Collins he asked him to suppose that "the smallest imaginable Particle of Matter imbued with Consciousness or Thought" has "by the Power of God" been "divided into two distinct Parts." Clarke then asked, "[W]hat will naturally and consequently become of its Power of Thinking?":

If the Power of Thinking will remain only in One of the separated Parts: then either That One Part only, had at first the Power residing in it; and then the same Question will return, upon the Supposition of Its being likewise divided; or else it will follow that one and the same Individual Quality may be transferred from one Subject to another; which all Philosophers of all Sects in the World, have always confessed to be impossible. If, in the last place, it be said, that upon the Division of the Particle, the Power of Thinking, which was in it, will wholly cease; then it will follow, that That Power was never at all a real Quality inhering or residing in the Substance, (in which mere separation of Parts, makes no Alteration;) but that it was merely an external Denomination, such as is Roundness in a Globe, which perishes at its being divided: And this, I suppose, will be granted to be sufficiently

absurd (761).

In such early passages although Clarke clearly had fission in mind, he had not yet directed his focus to its implications for personal identity.

In his Third Defense Clarke introduced a fission example to show that Collins' attributing consciousness to material substances leads to a contradiction. The "contradiction" Clarke had in mind arises from considering consciousness as a real property and yet admitting that it can be separated from the substance in which it inheres. Earlier Clarke had argued on general metaphysical grounds that even though all material substances transform continuously into other substances by addition or subtraction of particles it is "absurd" to suppose that the same numerical property can be "transferred" from one substance to another. Now Clarke argued that in attributing sameness of consciousness over time to a material substance Collins must really be attributing it to a "flux" of substances, which contradicts the assumption of a real property's inseparability from its substance (787; see also 843).

Instead of denying Clarke's assumption directly, Collins replied by introducing memory as the faculty that guarantees the persistence of the same consciousness and, hence, of the person (809; 819-20). He suggested that the forgetting of past but distant actions can be understood by appeal to a failure of transference in the brain since only if the recollection of past experiences is transferred to new particles of the brain will memory for them be retained. But, then, when such recollections are transferred and consciousness of past actions is maintained, consciousness - and ultimately the person - changes substances. His reply, thus, results in shifting the argument to personal identity, and accordingly refocusing Clarke's objection.

Clarke initially replied that Collins' account of transference is "an impossible hypothesis":

[T]hat the Person may still be the same, by a continual Superaddition of the like

Consciousness; notwithstanding the whole Substance be changed: Then I say, you make individual Personality to be a mere external imaginary Denomination, and nothing in reality: Just as a Ship is called the same Ship, after the whole Substance is changed by frequent Repairs; or a River is called the same River, though the Water of it be every Day new. . . But he cannot be really and truly the same Person, unless the same individual numerical Consciousness can be transferred from one Subject to another. For, the continued Addition or Exciting of a like Consciousness in the new acquired Parts, after the Manner you suppose; is nothing but a Deception and Delusion, under the Form of Memory; a making the Man to seem himself to be conscious of having done that, which really was not done by him, but by another (844).

In other words, Clarke objected to Collins that if memory were able to guarantee identity of persons then persons would be fictional.

Clarke, then, introduced the idea of fission to hammer home the point that such a sequence of like consciousnesses is not the same as a series of acts by a single consciousness:

[S]uch a Consciousness in a Man, whose Substance is wholly changed, can no more make it Just and Equitable for such a Man to be punished for an Action done by another Substance; than the Addition of the like Consciousness (by the Power of God) to two or more new created Men; or to any Number of Men now living, by giving a like Modification to the Motion of the Spirits in the Brain of each of them respectively; could make them All to be one and the same individual Person, at the same time that they remain several and distinct Persons; or make it just and reasonable for all and every one of them to be punished for one and the same individual Action, done by one only, or perhaps by none of them at all (844-5).



Collins' view is thus shown to be contradictory because it would lead in this imaginary fission-scenario to saying of two or more individuals both that they are and also are not the same person.

Clarke, then, in a variation on his fission example, immediately emphasized the resulting contradiction:

[I]t is a Contradiction plain enough, to say that God's impressing permanently upon a Thousand Mens Minds, after the Manner of the Representation of a Dream, the like Consciousness with that which I find in my own Mind; would make every one of them, to be, not Persons like me, but the same individual Person with myself (845).

And then again, in the context of considering the resurrection:

[I]f the same Person, after Annihilation, could, by restoring of the same Consciousness, be created again; he might as possibly be created again, by addition of the same Consciousness to new Matter, even before Annihilation of the first: From whence it would follow, that Two, or Two Hundred, several Persons, might All, by a Superaddition of the like Consciousness, be one and the same individual Person, at the same time that they remain several and distinct Persons: It being as easy for God to add my Consciousness to the new formed Matter of One or of One Hundred Bodies at this present Time, as the Dust of my present Body at the Time of the Resurrection. And no Reason can be given, why it would not be as just at any time, to punish for my Faults a new created Man, to whom my Consciousness is by the Power of God superadded: . . . This inexplicable Confusion, wherewith your Doctrine perplexes the Notion of personal Identity, upon which Identity the Justice of all Reward and Punishment manifestly depends; makes the Resurrection, in your way of arguing, to be inconceivable and impossible (852).

Nothing in what Clarke said suggests that he may have been thinking of the fission-descendants in any of these examples as being co-conscious. Rather, his examples support the charge of contradiction only if the descendants are conceived to be, although replicas, distinct persons.

Collins' reply leaves it unclear whether he understood the force of Clarke's examples:

I do allow that each of those Beings would be the same Person with Mr. Clarke, that is, each of them would have a present Representation of the past Actions of Mr. Clarke . . . [Hence,] let there be ever so many thinking Beings that have a present Representation of a past Action, they can all constitute but one and the same Person, because they all agree in, or have a present Representation of the same past Action, wherein Self or personal Identity consist (877).

Since the emphasis in this passage is entirely on the agreement of present mental representations in the replicas' minds it is an open question whether Collins took Clarke's view to be a case of genuine fission or instead one that involves co-consciousness among the replicas.

The possibility that Collins here misinterpreted Clarke is heightened by an analogy Collins drew between the replicas and the parts of a human body:

[M]y consisting of even so great a Bulk of Matter, or even so many distinct Beings, does not constitute different Persons, but constitutes what we call Self, by the Sympathy and Concern I have for each part united to me, though I have a distinct Act of Sensation for each part that is at any time affected (877).

Later, however, in responding to problems posed for his view by the doctrine of the resurrection, Collins appealed to the "Article of Christian Faith, that the same numerical Particles that are laid in the Grave, shall be raised at the Resurrection" (878, emphasis added). In such passages Collins took the problem for his view with having several

psychological replicas to be that the punishment of twenty distinct beings, all having "present Representations of the same sinful Actions" would make God's punishment unjust by making it to be "twenty times as much as the sinful Action deserved" (878). While, strictly speaking, such worries as this one are compatible with the hypothesis that Collins considered the replicas to be co-conscious - the punishment might be twenty times greater because it is inflicted in full measure on each of twenty bodily parts all of which are related to the same consciousness - such an interpretation is far-fetched. It is more plausible to suppose that what Collins had in mind is that the injustice would result simply from God's bringing about a pain twenty times greater than was merited. This simpler interpretation is also supported by the fact that Collins later explicitly excluded, for moral reasons that again relied on his sense of justice, that God could create "distinct thinking Beings, with each of them a Consciousness extended to the same past Actions, and attributing them to themselves" (878, emphasis added).

In sum, Clarke provided genuine fission examples. Ironically, he also had a view of the self according to which genuine fission is impossible. So, he perceived the seeming possibility of genuine fission as an absurdity following from relational accounts of identity. To deepen the irony, Collins, who had a view of personal identity that allowed him to acknowledge fission as a real possibility, may not have fully followed Clarke's examples. In any case, because this debate was well-known, both fission examples and the idea that they have implications for personal identity theory of a sort Locke had not considered was brought to the attention of eighteenth century theorists.

### **Joseph Butler.**

We know Butler was familiar with the debate between Clarke and Collins because he twice footnotes it (1736,32,321). Yet although Butler may allude to fission examples, he never directly discusses them. What he does, rather, is to reassert the immaterial substance view of personal identity, often merely repeating Clarke's

criticisms of relational views. However, Butler's deft way of doing this suggests that with the possible exception of Clarke he saw more clearly than anyone had what was radical in Locke's view. And Butler's skillful articulation of this radical core in order to reject it may have helped Hazlitt, who greatly admired Butler and whose views we shall soon consider, to get clearer about which aspects of this radical core he wanted to embrace.

Butler's best known thought on personal identity is his criticism of the memory analysis. Although he has gotten all the credit for seeing how Locke's view might be circular the criticism itself is clearly implicit, among other places, in Clarke's insistence, repeated several times in the debate with Collins, that by consciousness Locke must mean: "That Consciousness by which I not only Remember that certain Things were done many Years since but also am Conscious that they were done by Me, by the very same Individual Conscious Being who now remembers them" (1738,III.787). However, immediately after making his own famous objection to the memory view, Butler highlights two other and, in our view, deeper issues for which he is not well known: first, that there are important links among identity, responsibility, and self-concern and, second, that on a view such as Locke's it is questionable whether persons (or selves) would be real.

Butler introduces these two issues by remarking that "the question" is "whether the same rational being is the same substance," which, he says, "needs no answer because Being and Substance, in this place, stand for the same idea" (1736,320). But, he continues, "the consciousness of our own existence, in youth and in old age, or in any two joint successive moments, is not the same individual action, i.e., not the same consciousness, but different successive consciousnesses" (320-1). And, yet, "the person, of whose existence the consciousness is felt now, and was felt an hour or a year ago, is discerned to be, not two persons, but one and the same person; and therefore is one and the same" (321). From this, he says, "it must follow" on a view such

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as Locke's, that:

it is a fallacy upon ourselves to charge our present selves with any thing we did, or to imagine our present selves interested in any thing which befell us yesterday; or that our present self will be interested in what will befall us tomorrow; since our present self is not, in reality, the same with the self of yesterday, but another like self or person coming in its room, and mistaken for it; to which another self will succeed tomorrow. This, I say, must follow: for if the self or person of today, and that of tomorrow, are not the same, but only like persons the person of today is really no more interested in what will befall the person of tomorrow than in what will befall any other person (322).

Butler conceded that some may think he is misrepresenting Locke's view since "those who maintain it allow that a person is the same as far back as his remembrance reaches" (322). But, he claimed, the Lockeans "cannot, consistently with themselves, mean, that the person is really the same" but "only that he is so in a fictitious sense: in such a sense only as they assert, for this they do assert, that any number of persons whatever may be the same person" (322, emphasis added). Yet, Butler concluded, a person or self "is not an idea, or abstract notion, or quality, but a being only, which is capable of life and action, of happiness and misery," and, hence, not a fiction (323). Others, as we shall see, took a different view. What Butler made explicit to motivate a retreat back from Locke's view Hazlitt, in particular, would make explicit to recommend an advance beyond it.

### **David Hume**

Hume said nothing on a whole host of issues regarding personal identity that were being hotly debated at the time. In particular, he never discussed whether he thought the relation that bound our present to our past selves was "sameness of consciousness," as Lockeans maintained, or something else. And he never mentioned

any example, such as Locke's prince and cobbler example, that might have shed light on his opinion on this issue. Needless to add, he never discussed fission. And he had little to say, and nothing new, about how personal identity might be analyzed in a way that links it to questions of accountability and interestedness.

What Hume did do was to suggest that the self is fictitious. In his view, since all reason or understanding has to work with are diverse perceptions, it is the imagination that provides the links upon which our conception of self is ultimately based, and yet we invariably create the fiction that we are something more than just perceptions imaginatively linked: "For when we attribute identity, in an improper sense, to variable or interrupted objects, our mistake is not confin'd to the expression but is commonly attended with a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable, or at least with a propensity to such fictions" (1739, 255). And further: "The identity which we ascribe to the mind of man is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetable and animal bodies. It cannot, therefore, have a different origin, but must proceed from a like operation of the imagination upon like objects" (259). Rather than considering the nature of personal identity per se, Hume turned instead, and almost exclusively, to the question of what role the fictional self plays in our emotions and motivations. He thus shifted the emphasis from conceptually analyzing the notion of personal identity to empirically accounting for its functional role.

### **Thomas Reid**

Reid commented briefly on fission examples when he said of Locke's view of personal identity that it "hath some strange consequences, which the author was aware of, Such as, that, if the same consciousness can be transferred from one intelligent being to another, which he thinks we cannot shew to be impossible, than two or twenty intelligent beings may be the same person" (Reid,1785/1863, VI.3). There is no way to

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tell whether what Reid had in mind is what we have called genuine fission examples.

### **Abraham Tucker**

Tucker contributed importantly to Paley's theological utilitarianism and he was a hero to Hazlitt, who in 1807 republished an abridged version of his seven volume, The Light of Nature Pursued (1768-77). Although he claimed to be a Lockean he had original ideas that opposed those of Locke, including views on the unity of consciousness and personal identity. Like Clarke, he argued for the simplicity and immateriality of the mind or spirit based on its necessary unity and indivisibility, but in some ways Tucker's arguments are more sophisticated than Clarke's and his overall position is closer to Kant's. He differed from Kant in holding that our experienced unity of consciousness has metaphysical implications for a numerical unity of spirit rather than for a synthetic unity of consciousness. As a consequence Tucker stands at the end of one tradition, rather than at the beginning of another. He discussed personal identity and the unity of mind in two works: Man in Quest of Himself (1763) and The Light of Nature Pursued (1768-77, III), in both of which he insisted on the fact that the divisibility of matter implies a metaphysical divisibility and therefore that no system of matter could maintain the unity of mind and numerical identity of self. In both books he mentions fission-like cases.

In Man in Quest of Himself Tucker, in dialogue, pushes his materialist opponent to the position that there must be a "fifth element," a single spiritual "drop" that is the Self and that becomes lodged in the pineal gland where it can make use of the distributed sensory systems of the brain. Then Tucker forces him to admit that the Self-drop can itself be divided, and that were it to divide, mental unity would be dissipated, while the substantial basis of that unity would remain. The opponent replies that the person nonetheless would continue; even though while so divided the person may not be able to have experiences, his substantial base would still be existing and if at a later

time his Self-drop were brought back together (as it surely could be) then he would reacquire the ability to experience. At this point Tucker introduced a variation on fission and fusion:

You know the almighty power of Chance, and how in the course of infinite ages she must produce all possible combinations. Now one possible combination is this; that some thousands of years hence half your drop and half mine should join in one pineal gland, and the other halves in some other pineal gland. Will these two compounds be persons having knowledge of their own existence? - I make no doubt of it. - Will they be distinct and different persons from one another? - Certainly - Which of them will be one of us? - Neither (204-5).

The opponent is forced to conclude: "I can never bring myself to believe that I can become another Person, or part of another Person, or perceive his perceptions, much less by the perceptions of two" (205). From this position the opponent finally concede that any such Self-drop may vary in substance even during his life and as a result that his numerical self-identity cannot be based on such a compound material unity.

Tucker's chapter, "Existence of Mind," in The Light of Nature Pursued was greatly admired by Hazlitt. In it, after arguing that matter is essentially divisible, Tucker turned to our intuitions of our own individuality and uniqueness noting that no matter how skeptical a man becomes none "ever doubted of his existence, at the instant time when he reflected on it" (III.67). He then argued against the notion that the mind or perceptive substance could be a compound, like material substance, on the grounds that "if composition prevailed in Mind too, every Self must contain a number of little Selves, every Mind many little Minds, and every Sentient principle a multitude of Sentient principles."

But this is a supposal that will not bear the mentioning, for who would not be shocked to hear talk of a half or a quarter of a man's self? Besides, if things

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sentient were divisible, the parts might be dispersed throughout the four quarters of the world, and a man might have perceptions at the same time in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America (69-70).

Tucker next rejected the idea that the self could be composed of a compound of non-perceptive components or atoms. Then, continuing to pursue another version of this possibility he suggested that his opponent might reply "that mind is not so much a collection of particular atoms, as a figure or harmony resulting from the order wherein they lie, and therefore may continue the same although some, or all of the atoms be shifted" (72). Consideration of this possibility led Tucker to reflect on fission-like replication:

Besides, where shall we place personality? for there is no difference between similitude and identity in forms. . . . therefore two minds composed of atoms, having an exactly similar disposition, must be the same person, and thus there may be a thousand same persons in so many different parts of the globe, as there may be a thousand same forms and harmonies (73).

Tucker took this argument as showing that the identity - or rather particularity and uniqueness - of mind cannot be maintained by its form alone. He also argued that changes of the form through activities of the mind would imply that we are constantly changing our identities as we perceive and think, as well as grow and change character throughout our lives. He thought such a conclusion "contrary to the apprehensions of all mankind who esteem themselves the same person from cradle to grave, notwithstanding any variations of character and capacity they may have gone through in the interval" (75).

Tucker next argued against Locke's view of personal identity, which he interpreted as implying that identity depends on a quality rather than on a being and that on this account "a man loses his existence or personality every time he loses his

consciousness by falling asleep" (76). Like Reid, Tucker saw consciousness as providing evidence of our identity rather than as constituting it. He argued that since the same or perfectly similar conscious states can occur in different persons conscious states per se cannot determine identity but must, rather, presuppose the person whose particular conscious states they are. Finally, in arguing against Locke's suggestion that "the faculty of thinking may be annexed to a system of matter" Tucker entertained problems associated with unity of consciousness, and the impossibility that conscious judgments could be distributed spatio-temporally within a system of matter (77). Using a fission argument similar to that developed earlier when considering "form" he stated:

If Self be not a substance but a system of substances ranged in some particular order, there appears no such necessary connection between any one Self and any precise collection of substances or percipient form . . . but that they might have contained any other Self . . . and we must look for some cause yet undiscovered to assign each system its personality. This cause then, before I was existent, might have assigned my personality to any other similar substances disposed in the like order in some distant part of the globe: now why may not this cause do the same at the present instant? . . . therefore there might have been two Myselves some thousands of miles apart. But if such a supposition would shock the ears and understanding of every man it will necessarily follow that every Self must be a substance numerically distinct from all others, of whose identity no other substance nor system of substances can participate. And if a substance, it must be one uncompounded of parts: for I am nothing else besides Myself, nor can contain any thing that is not Me, nor yet can I have parts which are neither me nor any thing else (80-1).

Two hundred years later we are no longer shocked at the supposition of "two Myselves." Only slightly different examples of fission, in which there is a more direct Fission Examples [23] page 18

connection between the original and its continuers, such as we shall soon consider in Hazlitt's writings, have revolutionized our conceptions of personal identity and what matters in survival.

### **Joseph Priestley**

Priestley did not have a lot to say about personal identity and did not even discuss fission in his main contribution to the personal identity debate (he discussed it in his correspondence with Price). Yet, his understanding of related issues that have concerned us in this paper and that have played an important part in the personal identity debates in our own times was more subtle and clear-headed than perhaps that of any other eighteenth century thinker. His thoughts on personal identity are primarily his attempt, in response to criticisms from other, more conservative Christians, to show that his materialism is compatible with the Christian idea of resurrection.

Priestley's views on the resurrection were influenced not only by Locke but also, indirectly, by two dissenting ministers, Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge. Like many others, Watts was concerned over the apparent implication of Locke's account of personal identity that the resurrected person might be discontinuous with his or her earthly counterpart. He felt that any discontinuity in the thinking activity of the spirit or soul implied a cessation of existence, and thus that any "resurrection" after such a discontinuity was not a resurrection of the same person but rather the beginning of a new one. He conceded that God could create such a new person with a consciousness qualitatively similar to that of the old but, like Clarke before him, he thought that if such a newly created being "should suppose itself to remember things done in a former state, before it had any existence" this "would be properly a false apprehension, and error and not a real memory of what was done before, and would lay no just foundation for the recompenses of vice or virtue" (Watts, 1789, 265-6).

Doddridge, in lecture notes on personal identity that would be used to teach the

young Priestley at Daventry, sided with Watts against Locke:

[T]o conclude, if God should utterly destroy the soul and body of any man whom we know, and afterwards create a new spirit, united to a new body, and in form resembling the other, and give to it the exact consciousness of the man whose body and soul was destroyed, and should reveal to us what he had done, we could not converse with this new produced man as the same man we formerly knew, or approve that as an equitable conduct, by which he should be rewarded or punished for the actions of the annihilated man. This abundantly shows the impropriety of Mr. Locke's manner of stating the question, and how much Dr. Watts's is to be preferred to it (ibid.; emphasis added).

Doddridge here was suggesting that there is a social dimension to the question of determining whether personal identity obtains, a point Priestley would also use, but to different effect, in defense of his alternative view.

Priestley's own thoughts about personal identity began by dismissing what he regarded as the strange hypothesis, found in Clarke, among others, that the immaterial soul is extended. "How anything can have extension and yet be immaterial without coinciding with our idea of mere empty space," Priestley said, "I know not" (1777,163). He, thus, concluded that "the sentient principle in man, containing ideas which certainly have parts and are divisible and consequently must have extension, cannot be that simple, indivisible and immaterial substance that some have imagined it to be but something that has real extension and therefore may have the other properties of matter" (163). As a follower of Hartley's brain-based associative psychology Priestley thought that the sentient and thinking principle in man rather obviously must be "a property of the nervous system or rather of the brain" (160). But he went further than Hartley in suggesting not only that the brain was necessary for human mentality but that it was sufficient as well. In Priestley's view, there was no need to postulate any

immaterial substance to account for human behavior since it was scientifically useless.

All of this will sound quite modern to us. However, what is truly sophisticated and innovative in Priestley's treatment of personal identity is the way he downplays the importance of personal identity per se and highlights that of the functions that belief in our own identities actually serves. He began this part of his discussion by considering an objection, which he says was made to "the primitive Christians, as it may be at present" that "a proper resurrection is not only, in the highest degree, improbable, but even actually impossible since, after death, the body putrefies, and the parts that composed it are dispersed, and form other bodies, which have an equal claim to the same resurrection" (165). He continues: "And where, they say, can be the propriety of rewards and punishments, if the man that rises again be not identically the same with the man that acted and died?" (165). In reply, he first makes it clear, as if just for the record, that in his opinion "we shall be identically the same beings after the resurrection that we are at present." Then, "for the sake of those who may entertain a different opinion," he proposes to "speculate a little upon their hypothesis" to show that "it is not inconsistent with a state of future rewards and punishments, and that it supplies motives sufficient for the regulation of our conduct here, with a view to it" (165).

In other words, the task that Priestley sets himself is that of showing that even if after death "resurrected selves" [our term] are not strictly identical to anyone who existed on Earth it doesn't make any difference since identity is not what matters primarily in survival. That this is Priestley's project becomes especially clear when he continues: "And metaphysical as the subject necessarily is, I do not despair of satisfying those who will give a due attention to it, that the propriety of rewards and punishments, with our hopes and fears derived from them, do not at all depend upon such a kind of identity as the objection that I have stated supposes" (165). Specifically, then, what Priestley plans to show is that neither the propriety of divine rewards and punishments

nor our anticipatory hopes and fears with regard to the resurrection depends on their being resurrected persons who are identical with us.

In arguing for this radical new idea Priestley begins by distinguishing between "the identity of the man" and "the identity of the person." He noted that it is only the latter - personal identity - that is relevant to the present discussion. He then claims that even if people universally and firmly came to believe that over the course of a year there was a complete change, "though gradual and insensible," in the matter of which they were composed it "would make no change whatever in our present conduct, or in our sense of obligation, respecting the duties of life, and the propriety of rewards and punishments; and consequently all hopes and fears, and expectations of every kind would operate exactly as before (166). "For," he continues, "notwithstanding the complete change of the man, there would be no change of what I should call the person" (166). So far as personal identity is requisite either for the propriety of rewards and punishments or for the concern that we take for our future selves, Priestley continued, endorsing Locke, "the sameness and continuity of consciousness seems to be the only circumstance attended to by us". But then Priestley made it clear that, in his view, whether identity per se obtains is of no great consequence:

Admitting, therefore, that the man consists wholly of matter, as much as the river does of water, or the forest of trees, and that this matter should be wholly changed in the interval between death and the resurrection; yet, if, after this state, we shall all know one another again, and converse together as before, we shall be, to all intents and purposes, the same persons. Our personal identity will be sufficiently preserved, and the expectation of it at present will have a proper influence on our conduct (166-7, emphasis added).

Priestley, in this passage, more successfully than anyone had before, separated the question of whether we will be identical with someone who exists in the future from that

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of whether it matters. And in considering whether it matters he separated three issues: first, people's so-called self-interested concerns for their own futures; second, societal concerns that the prospect of future rewards and punishments motivate people to behave themselves; and, third, theological concerns about the propriety of divine rewards and punishments. Thus, toward the end of the eighteenth century and perhaps without inferring anything from fission examples (although almost surely, as we shall see, he knew about them) Priestley introduced and embraced one of the key ideas - that identity is not primarily what matters in survival - that has been central to the revolution in personal identity theory in our own times.

Following the publication of the Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit, in which Priestley put forth this interpretation of what matters in survival, he engaged in a debate through correspondence with Richard Price, another dissenting minister, and published this correspondence the following year (Priestley and Price, 1778/1977). Price presses Priestley on his knowledge of Clarke's views and explicitly asks him whether he has read Clarke's debate with Collins. Priestley answers that he has "carefully read all Dr. Clarke's metaphysical works" (56-9). Then, by discussing replication, Price pursues Priestley on Priestley's interpretation of the resurrection:

Suppose it [the soul]...to be merely the organization of the body; would not the change in the matter of the body make *another* body? And would not *another* body make *another* soul, though the same organization should be preserved?...Would not, in short, any number of living bodies be one soul, one sentient principle, supposing their organization the same? (77)

Priestley answers "that different systems of matter, organized exactly alike, must make different beings, who would feel and think exactly alike in the same circumstances. Their minds, therefore, would be exactly similar, but numerically different" (77-8).

When Collins was asked a similar question by Clarke, he provided the somewhat

puzzling response that at the resurrection the fissioned descendants of a common ancestor must all be one person since they all would have the same consciousness. In contrast, Priestley here asserts that duplicated persons must be different since they are composed of different matter, which determines a numerical difference in identity, in spite of their having similar consciousnesses. Although Price continued to ask questions about these multiple men who have the same soul Priestley declined to provide further comments saying: "I professedly argue on an hypothesis that is not my own, and submit the force of the argument to the judgement of the reader" (108-9,113). Later Priestley is "happy to concur" with Price's insistence that the same matter will make the same person in the miracle of the resurrection, though it seems that its being the same matter is more important to Price than to Priestley (120).

### **William Hazlitt**

Of all of the philosophers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Hazlitt made the most original and modern use of fission examples. However, he wrote against the backdrop of a century's worth of discussion of them and he had the advantage of good teachers. Hazlitt went to Hackney College, which was founded by Price, and where he was taught by Priestley. In essays written later in life Hazlitt mentions several times the controversy between Priestley and Price discussed above (e.g., Hazlitt,1967, vol xx,237-8). Hazlitt greatly admired Tucker and in Hazlitt's abridged version of The Light of Nature Pursued he specifically mentions the chapter on Consciousness wherein examples of fission are presented, saying of Tucker: "[H]e believed with professor Kant in the unity of consciousness, or 'that the mind alone is formative,' .... His chapter on consciousness is one of the best in the whole work; and is perhaps as close an example of reasoning as is anywhere to be met with" (1967,I.130)

Although today Hazlitt is known primarily as a literary critic his first book, Essay on the Principles of Human Action (1805), was a profound contribution to personal



identity theory (see Martin and Barresi, 1995). Hazlitt's consideration of fission examples occurred in the context of his critique of the Lockean idea that one's identity extends as far as one's consciousness extends. What, Hazlitt asked, would a theorist committed to this idea say "if that consciousness should be transferred to some other being?" How would such a person know that he or she had not been "imposed upon by a false claim of identity?" (1805,135-6). He answered, on behalf of the Lockean, that the idea of one's consciousness extending to someone else "is ridiculous": a person has "no other self than that which arises from this very consciousness." But, he countered, after our deaths:

this self may be multiplied in as many different beings as the Deity may think proper to endue with the same consciousness; which if it can be so renewed at will in any one instance, may clearly be so in a hundred others. Am I to regard all these as equally myself? Am I equally interested in the fate of all? Or if I must fix upon some one of them in particular as my representative and other self, how am I to be determined in my choice? Here, then, I saw an end put to my speculations about absolute self-interest and personal identity (136).

Thus, Hazlitt saw that, hypothetically, instead of psychological continuity continuing in a single stream it might divide. In asking the two questions - "Am I to regard all of these as equally myself? Am I equally interested in the fate of all?" - he correctly separated the question of whether identity tracks psychological continuity from that of whether self-concern tracks it. Finally, in direct anticipation of what would not occur again to other philosophers until the 1960s, he concluded that because of the possibility of fission neither identity nor self-concern necessarily tracks psychological continuity.

Hazlitt also used fission examples to call into question whether in cases in which there is no fission a person's present self-interest extends to his or her self in the future. First, he asked, "How then can this pretended unity of consciousness which is only

reflected from the past, which makes me so little acquainted with the future that I cannot even tell for a moment how long it will be continued, whether it will be entirely interrupted by or renewed in me after death, and which might be multiplied in I don't know how many different beings and prolonged by complicated sufferings without my being any the wiser for it, how I say can a principle of this sort identify my present with my future interests, and make me as much a participator in what does not at all affect me as if it were actually impressed on my senses?" (138) He answered that it cannot:

It is plain, as this conscious being may be decomposed, entirely destroyed, renewed again, or multiplied in a great number of beings, and as, whichever of these takes place, it cannot produce the least alteration in my present being - that what I am does not depend on what I am to be, and that there is no communication between my future interests and the motives by which my present conduct must be governed (138-9).

Finally, Hazlitt concluded:

I cannot, therefore, have a principle of active self-interest arising out of the immediate connection between my present and future self, for no such connection exists, or is possible. . . . My personal interest in any thing must refer either to the interest excited by the actual impression of the object which cannot be felt before it exists, and can last no longer than while the impression lasts, or it may refer to the particular manner in which I am mechanically affected by the idea of my own impressions in the absence of the object. I can therefore have no proper personal interest in my future impressions . . . The only reason for my preferring my future interest to that of others, must arise from my anticipating it with greater warmth of present imagination (139-40).

Hazlitt thus accomplished what, except for Priestley, others who had been sympathetic to Locke's views had resisted. He used fission examples, which previously others had

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employed only to criticize Locke, to motivate a view that went beyond Locke altogether. In effect, Hazlitt embraced and developed what Butler had claimed were decisive criticisms of Locke. However, Hazlitt's ideas never received the attention they deserved. Keats and Coleridge at least knew of his views. But few others, and no mainstream philosophers, seem even to have noticed. Such ideas as Hazlitt proposed would not be taken seriously again until the 1960s.

### **The Hiatus: 1805 to 1968**

So far as the issues we have been tracking are concerned, after 1805 the consideration of self and personal identity took a turn for the worse. In the nineteenth century, Mill looked back primarily to Hume, whose merits, whatever else they may have been, did not include advancing discussion of the ideas that came to fruition in Priestley and Hazlitt; and Kant, whose enormous influence for nearly a century all but obliterated the sort of empirically based speculation that dominated the eighteenth century, took the discussion of self and unity of consciousness into a different direction entirely. As a consequence a great deal that was progressive in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries discussion dropped from sight, including the Clarke-Collins debate, the surprisingly modern views of Priestley and Hazlitt, and even the basic idea that fission examples are important to theories of personal identity. As we have seen, fission examples had been mentioned casually and ambiguously in Locke and Reid, who continued to be read. But neither Locke nor Reid had made the importance of fission examples clear. And, because twentieth century empirically-oriented theorists became - and still are - mesmerized by Hume, they tended, with the major exception of Locke and the minor ones of Butler and Reid, to neglect other eighteenth century personal identity theorists.

Interestingly, many of the same questions regarding the importance of personal identity that concerned Priestley and Hazlitt could have been provoked even without

fission examples, although perhaps not as dramatically, merely by sympathetic attention to the view that personal identity consists not in the persistence of a substance but in relations among earlier and later persons (or person-stages). But, ironically, in the eighteenth century and even in the nineteenth century there wasn't that much sympathy for a relational view. Instead, the substance view had a long, lingering demise, and wherever its influence was still felt it tended to terminate reflection on the importance of identity. For instance, toward the end of the nineteenth century Sidgwick mused, in a passage reminiscent of Hazlitt and one that may have influenced Parfit: "[I]t must surely be admissible to ask the Egoist, 'Why should I sacrifice a present pleasure for a greater one in the future? Why should I concern myself about my own future feelings any more than about the feelings of other persons?'" (1874,418). Sidgwick persisted: "Grant that the Ego is merely a system of coherent phenomena, that the permanent identical 'I' is not a fact but a fiction, as Hume and his followers maintain; why, then, should one part of the series of feelings into which the Ego is resolved be concerned with another part of the same series, any more than with any other series?" (ibid.). As we have seen, this is the question that Priestley answered and that Hazlitt, although he was no doubt aware of Priestley's answer, asked again and answered somewhat differently. However, Sidgwick, without the prod of fission examples and with substance accounts of identity still a respectable option, managed to set this question aside. In our own times, with fission examples back on the table and substance accounts of personal identity no longer a respectable option, contemporary philosophers have found such questions impossible to set aside.

In hindsight, and with all else overshadowed by the towering figures of Locke and Hume, it may seem natural to assume that from Locke to the present all influential personal identity theorists have championed the merits of relational accounts of personal identity and that until recently their battles with each other have been mainly

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over which relations are essential to identity. This is an anachronistic reading of history. It was mainly only scientific materialists, such as Priestley and budding developmental psychologists, such as Hazlitt, to whom substance accounts of personal identity had entirely lost their appeal. As the example of Sidgwick makes clear, at least until the late nineteenth century substance accounts remained a respectable option. It was not until the first quarter of the twentieth century that they were finally given the ax, on one side by the positivists and on the other by the phenomenologists, but particularly Heidegger. Yet, until the 1960s, no one asked again the sorts of questions that Priestley and Hazlitt had asked and that after the 1960s have become such a mainstay of the personal identity debates.

### **Why the Theoretical Revolution Was So Long in Coming**

Since fission examples were discussed throughout the eighteenth century why didn't the same sort of theoretical revolution that has occurred in our own time occur then, at least in the work of those who were sympathetic to a relational account of identity? In other words, why, in the eighteenth century, didn't the ideas that precipitated the theoretical revolution in our own times ever really catch on? As we have seen, eighteenth century theorists had everything they needed to make the moves that would not be made by theorists generally until our own times. So, for fission examples to precipitate the post 1960s revolution in personal identity theory it wasn't necessary to await the development of other theories, such as the semantics of modal logic, that were not available until recently. Yet seriously questioning the importance of personal identity, which seemingly is so easily provoked by the consideration of fission examples and can arise independently of them, apparently did not occur to anyone before Priestley and Hazlitt, nor to anyone after them until our own times. Why not?

An important part of the answer is that, as we have seen, there were not many influential eighteenth century self and/or personal identity theorists who were

sympathetic to a relational account of personal identity: really only Locke and Hume, and Hume chose not to dirty his hands with discussion of the kinds of examples that might have led him to anticipate post-1960s developments. Collins was not an important philosopher and in the eyes of some may even have set the cause back by allowing himself to be upstaged by Clarke. Berkeley, Butler, Reid and Tucker were substance theorists. And Priestley and Hazlitt had the misfortune of writing just before Kant burst on the scene and changed the topic. In short, the revolution in personal identity theory that has occurred in our own times required that thinkers go beyond the relational view of personal identity. But before thinkers can go beyond that view they first have to accept it. And, surprising as it may sound to us today, the relational view wasn't generally accepted until the twentieth century, by which time fission examples, despite the brief mention of them in Locke and Reid, had been largely forgotten.

Another part of the answer is that, in the eighteenth century, fission examples pretty consistently were introduced into the debate over personal identity as an objection to the Lockean relational view. Those, like Collins, who were sympathetic to Locke, were intent on defending the Lockean view against a threatened retreat back into what they regarded as obscurantist metaphysics. And they saw fission examples as a possible motivation for such a retreat. So, the context was not conducive to their seeing that fission examples, rather than an objection to a relational approach, were a way of pushing that approach to even more radical conclusions. In short, followers of Locke wanted to save the territory they had gained rather than push their new found advantage as far as it would take them. In the eighteenth century self and personal identity wars, followers of Locke were Eisenhowers, rather than Pattons.

Finally before many thinkers could seriously question the importance of personal identity the influence of Christianity had to be blunted. From the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries most important western thinkers who took self and personal identity

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theory seriously were Christians and as such accepted the idea that there will be a resurrection attended by divine rewards and punishments. Few had Priestley's ability, or even motivation, to envision how those rewards and punishments might on a relational view, let alone in the absence of personal persistence, still serve the cause of justice. Even, in our own times, well-regarded philosophers have expressed doubts about whether in the absence of personal persistence such a theological view can be worked out (Ayers,1991,II.272). Today, in the opinion of many thinkers, including some of the most influential, our bodies, or at least the physical mechanisms that underlie our consciousness, which almost all thinkers assume must exist continuously for us to persist, have replaced the immaterial soul as the bedrock on which our destinies, if anywhere, can rest secure. The more things change the more they stay the same.

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