Let's exist again (like we did last summer)

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ABSTRACT
This paper is a defence of a psychological view of personal identity against the attack Peter Unger launches against it in his *Identity, Consciousness and Value*. Unger attempts to undermine the traditional support which a psychological criterion of identity has drawn from thought-experiments, and to show that such a criterion has totally unacceptable implications – in particular, that it allows that persons can go out of and come back into existence. I respond to both aspects of this criticism, arguing that the relevant thought-experiments (and the support they appear to offer) survive Unger's attack intact, and that he does not establish his case against intermittent existence.

In *Identity, Consciousness and Value*,[1] Peter Unger attacks what has come closest to being the received view among philosophers on what constitutes the identity of a person. While allowing that considerations of psychological continuity are important where identity is concerned, Unger argues that physical continuity is of prior importance. My aim is to defend a psychological criterion from Unger's attack. Unger's book is a long and densely argued one, and one of its main targets is the now standard psychological view. Nevertheless, the core of his case against that view is surprisingly brief and straightforward. My paper is concerned specifically with those core arguments.

Unger's strategy against the psychological criterion is twofold. First, he attempts to undermine positive arguments for that criterion by suggesting that we should not be persuaded as we have been by the thought-experiments its champions propose. Second, he argues that there is a powerful negative case: this is based on the point that the psychological criterion allows that we can go out of and then come back into existence. Unger insists that the idea of such a gap is so counterintuitive that it warrants rejection of any theory of identity that tolerates it. With this twofold case Unger seeks to dissolve any dilemma involving a choice between the intuitive force of the psychological view's thought-experiment and the consequence of the possibility of intermittent existence. I also wish to relieve us of that dilemma, but in the opposite way from Unger. I will defend the intuitive acceptance of the possibility of a body-swap, and I will also argue that Unger's case against our being able to come back into existence is not at all convincing.

1 All references are to this work unless otherwise indicated.

SECTION 1

It has seemed intuitively clear to many ever since Locke brought the subject to the fore that a continuity of beliefs, desires, projects, emotional attitudes, (apparent) memories and so on is crucial to making you the same person over time. At the least, such psychological continuity has seemed more important than continuity of body or brain. These intuitions have been brought out and sharpened through the use of thought-experiments in which people apparently swap bodies – if you can swap bodies with somebody else, then having the same body or any aspect of that body cannot be a necessary condition for your identity. Rather, what seems necessary is a unique relation of psychological continuity. Derek Parfit fills in the details along the following sort of lines.

> *Psychological continuity* is the holding of overlapping chains of *strong* connectedness ... For X and Y to be the same person, there must be over every day *enough* direct psychological connections. Since connectedness is a matter of degree, we cannot plausibly define precisely what counts as enough. But we can claim that there is enough connectedness if the number of connections, over any day, is *at least half* the number of direct connections that hold, over every day, in the lives of nearly every actual person. (Parfit 1984: 206)

Unger's alternative to this view is not a crude physical criterion demanding that all there is to identity is the existence of the same human body. Nor does he even require the continuous existence of one's brain. He accepts that to count as the same person, one needs to retain one's *core psychology* – which is roughly the psychological capacities that all conscious humans share. But he denies that the *distinctive psychology* on which the psychological criterion places all the emphasis is crucial at all. For Unger, X=Y iff there is sufficiently continuous (and unique) realization of a core psychology between the physical realizer of X's core psychology and the realizer of Y's core psychology (109). But the details of Unger's theory are not central to the issue I wish to pursue; no matter how sophisticated the physical criterion at stake, it will run up against the apparent plausibility of a body-swap.

Let us look briefly at two body-swap thought-experiments which are central in the literature. Locke put his thought-experiment like this:

> should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon as deserted by his own soul, every one sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions: but who would say it was the same man? (Locke 1694: II,xxvii,15)

Should you wake up one morning and find someone else's face looking back out of the mirror at you, you would not say, 'Oh look, I'm somebody else' – you would be appalled at what had happened to *you*. It is precisely such intuitions which do the work Locke requires here in undermining the importance of physical realizers to our identity.

Bernard Williams (Williams 1970) has brought Locke's thought-experiment into the twentieth century, removing souls as the causal mechanism of body-swap from the picture. A machine has been created which is able to extract and record all of the information stored in your brain which is relevant to and determines your mental life (what has come to be called, following Shoemaker (1984), a *brain-state transfer device*).

Two individuals A and B are subjected to this process, and the information from A's brain is then fed into B's brain and vice-versa. After the process, the person in B's body seems to remember having A's experiences, has A's beliefs, desires, projects, and so on. Likewise, the person in A's body has the psychological features previously associated with B. The obvious intuitive response to this scenario is that a body-swap has occurred: the person in the A-body is now B, while A occupies the B-body. This intuitive response strongly supports the view that our concept of personal identity turns on psychological continuity, and that physical continuity is not necessary for identity.

Williams reinforces this conclusion by considering the likely responses of the individuals involved. As Williams sets the case up, A and B are told about the process that is to be carried out on them and are told that one of the emerging persons will be tortured and the other rewarded. They must each make a choice beforehand as to which is to receive which treatment, presuming that this choice will be made on purely self-interested grounds. The support for the psychological criterion comes from the judgements the two persons would make as to how wise their earlier choices were once the operation is complete and the torture and reward handed out. For instance, had A chosen that the A-body person be tortured and the B-body person rewarded, the B-body person would seem to remember making this choice and, if this is indeed what happens, he would be satisfied that *his* choice was the wise one (Williams 1970: 48-49).

Unger remains unconvinced by these thought-experiments for reasons we will see in the section to follow. But not only does he not see the need for his theory to accept the cost of flying in the face of the strong intuitive case embodied in Williams and Locke's writing, he sees even greater cost in accepting the theory which that writing seems to support. The cost is that mentioned above: if being the same person is a matter of psychological continuity, then it follows that a person can cease to exist and come back into existence later, as long as they take up psychologically where they left off. Our intuitions, according to Unger, just will not allow a gap in our existence. He supports this claim with his own thought-experiment. Consider someone who has an (at present) incurable disease. Rather than considering her being frozen and later thawed when a cure is found, Unger asks us to imagine

> a purely informational taping process. In this taping process, a person's brain and body are quickly decomposed as detailed information concerning their molecular arrangement is recorded and stored on tape for as long as needs be. The tiny bits of matter that composed her are cast to the winds. Perhaps ten years later a cure is found. Then the device uses the stored information to make, out of a new batch of appropriate matter, a person who is, at the least, almost precisely like the original person last was. Qualitatively, this lately constructed person is more like the original, overall and in all important respects, than you now are like you were just a minute ago. The cure is applied to this constructed person, who then goes on healthily to live at least another twenty years. (22)

Had the person simply been frozen and thawed, Unger suggests that we would have no hesitation in saying she survives. But to the detailed story outlined he says we have a strong response that she does not. She has been destroyed and replaced by a duplicate, and the whole process could be of no more than instrumental value to her. Our concept of identity cannot tolerate gaps: 'At any time that you exist, there must be realized, not just mental capacities exactly like yours, but *your very own particular mental capaci-*

ties' (25). What makes them yours is the continuity of the physical entity – usually your brain and body – in which they are realized. That is why we would survive freezing and thawing. And, he suggests, it is because there is no such *physical* continuity in the purely informational taping case that we respond negatively to the question of survival there. The psychological criterion implies a positive answer to the informational taping case – the resulting person is *psychologically* continuous with the destroyed person: beliefs and (apparent) memories will take on where the originals left off. Since a positive answer is so counterintuitive, the argument is that the psychological criterion must give way to Unger's physical one.

SECTION 2: Where Locke and Williams have gone wrong

Unger denies that we should be influenced into accepting the psychological criterion on the strength of thought-experiments like those of Locke and Williams. This is not because he rejects the method of thought-experiment – far from it; his book trades on more thought-experiments than any other in the literature. But he is an advocate of the *careful* use of such fictions, and contends that those above which might be used against him break some important methodological rules. Locke's prince and cobbler case, for instance, says Unger, is just too lacking in 'relevant realistic detail' to be taken seriously. Even viewed charitably, all it involves us in are 'fruitless guessing games of the worst sort' (158).

The demand for realistic detail stems from Unger's view of the general method of thought-experiment. He pays fairly close attention to questions of method; such attention is inevitable in the light of the critical backlash which has come the way of thought-experiments in the recent past.[2] Thought-experiments are not to be seen as a direct route to metaphysical reality. Rather their central function is to draw out our most strongly-held beliefs about the conditions of our survival. They can serve to make explicit what are often implicit principles in our conceptual scheme, and in cases where such principles conflict they can show to which we are most strongly committed. This is the central part of Unger's 'sensibly balanced methodology', and as it stands is hardly exceptionable. But Unger also hopes for more from his thought-experiments. He thinks that although they are a direct route only to our *beliefs about* the conditions of our survival, they are an indirect route to those conditions themselves. This is because our explicit and implicit world view has been shaped by the course of science over the last few hundred years. As a result this scientific world view has also permeated the intuitions we have about ourselves and our survival, and insofar as the scientific world view is correct, so our deepest beliefs about our survival will be the correct ones. It is this second aspect of Unger's methodology which leads him to stress that thought-experiments should be realistic despite their inevitably counterfactual nature. And it is thus that he rejects Locke's prince and cobbler case as one which 'comports poorly with our world view' (158).

He is certainly correct that the mechanism which Locke proposes for his body-swap – that of the soul carrying a person's consciousness entering another body – is not one which finds a place in contemporary physics. In that way, Locke's story does lack realistic detail. But that charge is much less obviously true of Williams's thought-

2 The following list gives some idea of those who have expressed misgivings about the method of thought-experiment in this context: Baillie (1990), Elliot (1991), Johnston (1987), Lowe (1990), White (1989), Wiggins (1980), Wilkes (1988).

experiment. Williams's envisaged machine which can scan a brain and extract all the information stored there comports very well with our computer-influenced world view. Here Unger's complaint is different, however. The problem is not a lack of detail or of realism, but simply that when one thinks carefully about it, the intuitive response suggested above – that a body-swap has occurred – is *not* the intuitive response one actually has. He writes,

> As I have always responded to the example, and as is Williams's main response as well, that is just a case in which people exchange distinctive psychologies, so to speak, including personalities. (159)

In that way, Unger wants to argue that Williams's imagined machine provides no support for the psychological criterion, but merely elicits a response consistent with the physical one. That leaves the psychological criterion in the doubly bad position of being without its standardly accepted intuitive support, and with the burden of being counterintuitively wedded to the possibility of intermittent existence.

SECTION 3: In defence of body-swapping

Despite his widespread use of a range of thought-experiments and close attention to the method of argument involved, Unger's treatment of Locke's and Williams's ones is summary to say the least. Unger acknowledges their central place in the literature, and yet this does not sway him into giving them a fairer hearing. As this suggests, I think he does justice to neither of them, and thus vastly underestimates what his theory is up against. That is what I will argue in this section.

There are two central strands to his rejection of Locke's prince and cobbler argument: that it lacks relevant detail and that it comports poorly with our world view. I will deal with the second strand first. As I spelt out above, this charge gets its force from Unger's tenet that a thought-experiment tells us about the conditions for our survival as well as about our beliefs in that regard, because the world view of science has become entrenched in our commonsense conceptual scheme. Thus a clash with that world view seems a serious problem. But on closer inspection this starts to look like a case of Unger wishing to have his cake and eat it.

Unger's claim that the (more or less true) scientific world view has become entrenched in our conceptual scheme implies that a strongly-felt intuitive response, or a response that has far greater appeal than alternatives, reflects a true condition of our survival. In Locke's case we have a very strong intuition along the lines that Locke suggests – that the person in the cobbler's body is the prince. And yet Unger wants to deny that intuition any force. What is more, he wants to deny it on the very grounds that his methodological views suggest *provide* it with force. This seems, at the least, to commit Unger to acknowledging a serious contradiction in our conceptual scheme. It would not be so bad if Unger simply acknowledged that sometimes thought-experiments yield unequivocal responses which we nevertheless have to reject because they have too high a cost in terms of their implications for our scientific theories. Indeed, that seems a sensible methodological point; but to grant it also raises serious questions about Unger's hopes of a route to reality through thought-experiments which reveal our deep intuitions.

Although I grant that we should accept the defeasibility of thought-experiments, I still do not agree with Unger that we are free to ignore Locke's thought-experiment.

This takes us back to Unger's point about the lack of relevant detail in the story outlined. Locke's account of how the prince is to get into the cobbler's body is indeed vague. However, the experiment only becomes dubious if the omitted detail is really relevant to the aims of the experiment and if any attempt to fill in the detail would reveal deep problems – that is, if a serious difficulty is being hidden from us by the omission of details. On both counts I think Locke is innocent.

In the normal course of things, physical and psychological continuity coincide. Locke is asking to which we are more strongly committed when it comes to identity or survival; that is, he is asking which one we would more readily give up were we faced by a choice – even if in we will in fact never face such a choice. That we do not know exactly how this will happen is (in this case at least) not relevant. Our ready understanding of Locke's story and straightforward response to it are strong evidence that the concepts of physical and psychological continuity can indeed come apart, and that is all the aim of the thought-experiment requires. As long as they are not directly relevant to the aims of the thought-experiment, impossibilities can be allowed. In just such a way it is misguided to ignore Einstein's claims about what he would see were he to travel on the end of a beam of light on the grounds that he could not travel so fast.

In further defence of Locke, the details of how the swap is to occur *can be* provided without hitting deep problems. Precisely what Williams's thought-experiment does is to provide such details. The prince's psychology can get into the cobbler's body by the use of Williams's brain-state transfer device. Why then pick on the neat crudity of Locke's version of the case? Let us now turn to Unger's response to the Williams case.

Unger holds that his and Williams's response to the scenario of A's psychology being fed into the brain of B and vice-versa is that A remains in the A-body and B in the B-body. 'Each man stays put!' they apparently respond (159n7). As a result, this is not to be seen as a case of a body-swap at all, and thus presents no threat to the physical criterion. But this bravado is no kind of argument. In the first place, that is *not* Williams's intuitive response to the thought-experiment. Williams outlines at length (1970: 47-51) that the obvious response is that A and B swap bodies. He reinforces this with the test to which Unger himself is committed: faced before the operation with a self-interested choice as to which survivor should be tortured and which rewarded, the rational choice is for A to choose that the A-body (after the operation) should be the tortured one. After long subsequent reflection – far removed from the simple reporting of an intuitive response to the thought-experiment described – Williams suggests, very tentatively, that if you were offered the operation you should put your bets on remaining in the same body (1970: 62-63). Now, it is a fair enough methodological point that you should be prepared to reject your intuitive responses to one thought-experiment in the light of other more compelling thought-experiments, and that is how Williams presents his own response. But that is not the kind of support that Unger wishes to glean from 'The self and the future', and not at all how Unger presents the facts he claims support his case, as the quotes above make plain.

Worse still for Unger is the point that Williams only adopts his final tentative stance against this representing a body-swap because he understands the thought-experiment to be simply a version of *another* thought-experiment which does on the face of things lead to the conclusion that each stays put. This is bad for Unger since it is not at all clear that Williams's other thought-experiment is just a redescription of the one that we have discussed. That other thought-experiment has a completely different form from

our one. It is not simply a story which requires our intuitive response, but a complex thought-experiment made up of a series of stages at each of which we are challenged to explain how enough has changed to warrant a claim of a change of identity (Williams 1970: 55-56). Not only does the second thought-experiment have this distinct form, but it only suggests that each stays put if what is at stake in each stage of the description is carefully fudged. The detail of this latter point needs argument which I provide elsewhere (Beck 1998), but the point that the two thought-experiments at stake are different does not, nor does the point that Unger is claiming a degree of support from an authority who simply does not provide it.

In the second place, to insist that each stays put is to downplay the intuitive significance of the facts that the B-body person will think he is A and have all and only A's attitudes, emotions and so on, and in a way that seems unique to Unger. The other opponents of the psychological view seem to share the body-swap intuition with its supporters: we have seen Williams's discussion in Section 2, and even Eric Olson who argues for the irrelevance of all psychological issues to identity is moved by it (Olson 1997: 44). This makes Unger's response, without some further backup, sound like mere perversity. I do not mean to claim that who you think you are is the final consideration in determining who you are, but it is very important and far more important than Unger acknowledges. Our intuitions may just allow that the person who has lost all of their distinctive memories is still you, but only if she displays other traits of character, and so on, that you used to display. As all of these distinctive psychological features go, our intuitive response that this is still you goes too – as is reflected in our moral judgements concerning responsibility for past actions.

As far as Unger's case against body-swapping in *Identity, Consciousness and Value* is concerned, I think that is all that needs to be said. Nevertheless, he does raise an argument elsewhere (1992: 161-162) which appears to provide some backup to this response to the thought-experiments. Unger may well be right that, faced with the scenario of myself suddenly being turned into an amnesiac moron, I would say that the moron would still be *me*. Since that individual has no connections of distinctive psychology to myself before the unfortunate incident, the suggestion is that reliance on distinctive psychology is misplaced, and that retention of my core psychology is enough to explain the intuitive response. But I suspect that calling the moron *me* is no more telling about my concept of my identity than my calling the dead body that will exist after I die *me*. Unger himself writes,

> And what of our everyday talk of people? Not only do we often say of a person recently dead that he no longer exists, but, in other moods, we say that he is in the funeral parlor. Whatever the linguistic analysis of these utterances, the former sort of discourse is, by far, the expression of our more serious, and more accurate, thought about ourselves. (133n14)

In just such a way, calling the moron *me* is best seen as only a metaphorical extension of the concept of my identity, and one which cannot bear enough weight in this argument. If there is a choice as to who I am between (ceteris paribus) someone who is psychologically continuous with me – in the sense of distinctive psychology – and the amnesiac moron in what was my body, then I go with my mind – that is, with my distinctive psychology.[3]

This can be supported by a thought-experiment which brings out a much clearer intuitive response than Unger's amnesiac moron. Brown and Robinson (yet one more time) have their brains removed from their bodies. Using a brain-state transfer device, distinctive psychologies are swapped between the removed brains. Now Robinson's brain is placed into Brown's body and vice-versa. In Robinson's body is someone who thinks they are Robinson; in Brown's body is someone who thinks they are Brown. The question as to who they really *are* seems to receive a straightforward answer. The crucial point to notice, though, is that Brown-body has *Robinson's core psychology*, given the continuity of its realizer – Robinson's brain. The same goes, mutatis mutandis, for Robinson-body. Is there *any* temptation to say that a body-swap has occurred here in line with Unger's physical criterion? The great future pain test certainly provides no support for such a description. The only diagnosis for someone who insists that Brown is now in Robinson's body would be that they have fallen into the trap that Unger warns us against (13), and have allowed too great an 'attachment to a certain approach' to warp their intuitions.

But even if all this works, a problem still looms. There does seem to be a strong case for arguing that we are deeply committed to a psychological criterion, but there remains the apparently counterintuitive consequence of the possibility of coming back into existence.

SECTION 4: Existing again

Unger repeatedly insists that there is no possibility of a gap in someone's existence. His substantive case against the psychological criterion hinges on this principle alone. He presents no other argument for it significantly different from the one set out in Section 1. It is, he thinks, intuitively obvious. We have a deep-seated belief, stronger than any that I have appealed to towards the end of the previous section, that we cannot go out of existence and then come back in again.

It is not obvious that no things can exist again. Some things do do just that. A society can do it, for instance. The Flat Earth Society of Pietermaritzburg may be disbanded and its members dispersed, but then started up again forty years later when two of them return. A feeling can do it too: 'I suddenly felt again the creepiness I had only experienced in Rochefort's dungeon'. Natural kinds can also do it, as Tyrannosaurus Rex did in Jurassic Park, and (according to the billboards there) as the kwagga is about to do on the slopes of Table Mountain. Perhaps we are not things like societies, feelings or natural kinds, however – despite the best efforts of Hume, Parfit and the Buddha to convince us otherwise. Perhaps it is only *types* like those that can exist again, not particular things like persons, and it is to particulars that Unger's principle applies.

Even there, though, the principle does not have obvious application. Familiar particular things like a watch or a video recorder can also come back into existence. When a technician takes your VCR apart into its thousands of tiny components, it is no longer a VCR. But when she puts it together again it *is* one and, what is more, it is *your* one – precisely the same individual. Here you may object that the many tiny components on the technician's table *are* your VCR – they are just your VCR *in pieces*, but

3 Shoemaker presents an alternative argument for this conclusion in his (1992) to which Unger's argument about the amnesiac moron is presented as a response.

I think the point can be defended even against someone who quibbles as much as you. Take Unger's own example of a nail (131ff).

Consider our taking a nail and, having made a precise record of all the relations between its component molecules, breaking it down into those molecules, keeping a track of each one in its separate laboratory compartment. After a period (ten years, say) we put them all back together again in precisely the same positions that they were before. We will have a nail. Is it the same nail? Yes, of course it is. Even Unger agrees with us here. Agreement that the nail survives this decomposition and later reconstruction demands acknowledgement that even particular objects can go out of and come back into existence. After all, in the middle stage there *is* no nail, only a set of disconnected molecules. Any sense that there remains some sort of connection between the molecules as a result of their being actively tracked can be removed without disturbing the intuition that the same nail exists afterwards by labelling each molecule with a record of its position instead, thus allowing it to be put back in precisely the same place relative to the other molecules in the nail. In such an extreme case there is no sense to be found in calling *it* a nail in pieces, but no intuitive temptation to insist that the reconstructed nail is a different nail. What this means is that the support-base for Unger's principle is rapidly diminishing. If so many kinds of things *can* survive gaps, then how can the intuition that *we cannot* be so strong? And must such an intuition not be guilty of Unger's own charge of conflicting with the scientific world view?

Unger still maintains that we cannot survive a gap in existence. Your survival demands the continuous realization of your capacity to think. A nail can survive the non-existence of its characteristic features, but not so a thinking, experiencing creature like yourself. What is it about being a thinking thing that makes this so? That Unger does not explain, other than to stress the disanalogy between thinking things and others and to fall back on the intuitions generated by his thought-experiment of the informational taping process for confirmation of this disanalogy (134).

Now it is time to ask some hard questions about that thought-experiment, however, to see whether what is operating there is not just dogma. Might one not just as well insist that the afflicted person *does* survive the purely informational taping process? Unger's stock test for survival (or rather, for whether you believe you will survive) is whether you would be willing to undergo relatively small pain now before whatever is envisaged is done in order to avoid the person who results experiencing much greater pain after whatever-it-is has been done. Thinking self-interestedly, if you had the terrible disease would you not undergo some pain now in order for the person reconstructed from the taped information to avoid great pain? That does not seem so wildly counterintuitive or an option open only to the extremely charitable. As a result, it seems that our intuitive response to the purely informational taping case is much more equivocal than it is to the case of the brain-state transfer device. Unger's argument for the falsity of the psychological criterion depends on the principle that we cannot come back into existence, and that principle's support depends on our response to the purely informational taping process. When so much hangs on a single case that does not yield anything like an unequivocal response, we seem entitled to ask for more than we are getting. Our entitlement grows in the light of the above points about how other things *can* come back into existence.

Perhaps the extra support I claim is missing here can come from Unger's positive case for a physical criterion of identity – from his assertion that our core psychology

will not survive without a *continuous* physical realization. But what reason backs up this assertion that a core psychology has to be continuously realized? Unger's answer, as rehearsed in Section 1 is that it is only that which will make it *your* core psychology which survives rather than another core psychology exactly like yours (113-117). But this is all much too thin. Unger has dispensed with distinctive psychology as a necessary condition for a person's survival, seeing only the need for a basic core. *Core psychology* includes the capacities for reasoning, self-consciousness and for forming simple intentions: capacities shared by all normal human beings (68). The contrast with *distinctive* psychology is telling here – it means that the core psychologies of all people are more or less exactly the same. It is up to continuous physical realization of this to make it unique – and to constitute your identity over time. But can that plausibly be claimed to be *enough* to distinguish different people – enough to constitute my identity and to support the moral baggage that identity carries? This question becomes especially acute when one considers that Unger requires no particular realizer – it need not be the body, the brain or any part of the brain that you now have.

The answer is that this has all gone too far. If core psychology is common to everyone there can be nothing interestingly unique about it, and no facts about its physical realization are going to make any difference to that. A much more plausible view is that it is your core psychology in that it is the core of your distinctive psychology – the capacity for consciousness and so on without which there could not be the continuing memory-experiences, beliefs, desires, projects and emotions which make you the same person over time. These mental features can indeed have different realizations without affecting identity. They can also, at least on the face of things, survive a gap in realization without affecting identity.

Thus Unger's case against a person's existing again fails to convince. But there may be other relevant factors here which are being overlooked. Perhaps there are other costs in accepting intermittent existence which rule it as an unacceptable consequence for a theory of identity.

One such cost has been suggested by Berent Enc (1975: 12). He argues that the notion of something's coming back into existence makes no sense. This becomes clear, he thinks, when one considers the case of a thing going out of existence and, after a gap, *two* things – qualitatively indistinguishable from each other and from the original thing – coming into existence in the place where the original had been. In this latter case, according to Enc, there is no sense to be made of a question as to which is identical to the original. And since there is no relevant difference between the cases – what happens in the second is precisely the same as what happens in the first, barring the existence of *another* thing which is extrinsic to the question of any particular thing's identity – questions of identity are also incoherent in the first case.

Incoherence is certainly a high cost to pay. But it is less than clear that we must pay this cost in accepting the possibility of intermittent existence. The problem which Enc has raised is in essence the problem raised for theories of identity by the possibility of fission – of one thing's somehow splitting into two. This has been the central problem of the personal identity debate over the last twenty or so years. But it is not a problem beyond solution. Take Parfit's famous example of the three identical twins who are involved in a car crash (Parfit 1984: 254). The body of one is fatally injured as are the brains of the other two. The surviving brain is then split into two and each half is placed in one of the unharmed bodies. Assuming that each half-brain is capable of performing the tasks of the other, each resulting person will believe he is the brain-donor, seem to remember that person's life, and so on. Now we face what is exactly Enc's problem when we ask which one is identical to the original brain donor – it seems we cannot sensibly say that both are (because of the logic of identity), nor that neither is (because there are *two* of him). And we have no grounds on which to base a choice of the one being the original rather than the other. Parfit resolves the quandary by explaining that the question is empty rather than meaningless: answering either that the original is both or neither is as good an answer as the other. His point is that you cannot use the concept of *identity* in describing the relation between the original and the survivors since there are two of them, but that is merely a semantic problem, for you can nevertheless describe all the facts about that relation without that concept and without leaving anything out. If there were only one survivor then the concept of identity could be used, but (apart from the importance of the individual who does not survive) that is not a significant difference.

Exactly such a response can be provided for Enc's problem. His question as to which thing coming into existence is the one that went out is an empty one. Both things are some sort of descendant of the first, exactly like the first, and that describes all the relevant facts. We cannot *talk* of identity here as we could in the case of one thing coming into existence where the original disappeared, but that is of no more than semantic importance. *Identity*, we could reply with Parfit, *is not what matters*. The upshot of all of this is that Enc has not put his finger on a cost which would make accepting that persons can survive a gap in existence too expensive.

Conclusion

Unger has not established that the psychological criterion of identity is wrong and a physical criterion correct. The body-swap thought-experiments he disallows deserve more respect than he grants them. And he is far from showing that we cannot exist again. As a result, the psychological criterion of personal identity or survival withstands Unger's attack.

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