

Personal Identity:

What Makes You the Same Person Over Time?

- **Central question:** what makes you the same person across change?
- **Over a lifetime:** body, memory, roles, and values all shift
- **Identity is numerical sameness**, not just similarity of traits
- **Why it matters:** law, medicine, promises, relationships, self-understanding
- **Roadmap:** distinctions, continuity theories, cases, reflection
- **Reflect:** what would have to change for you to no longer be you?



Why the Question Matters

- Legal identity: contracts, criminal responsibility, and continuity of rights and obligations
- Medical identity: advance directives, dementia, and continuity of consent
- Relational identity: promises, commitments, forgiveness, and accountability
- Common misconception: identity is not just a name, a body, or a memory
- Identity over time is a debated philosophical problem with practical stakes



Core Concepts and Distinctions

- **Numerical identity:** being one and the same entity, not two
- **Qualitative identity:** sharing traits or exact similarity
- **Persistence conditions:** what must remain for a person to continue?
- **Diachronic identity** over time vs. **synchronic** identity at one moment
- **First-person** vs. **third-person** perspectives on the self
- **Reductionism** vs. **non-reductionism:** is identity a further fact?



The Psychological Continuity View

- Locke: identity extends as far as conscious memory reaches
- Neo-Lockeans: overlapping chains of memory, intention, belief, character
- Strength: explains why amnesia and radical character change matter
- Problem: Reid's brave officer paradox — memory is not transitive
- Problem: false memories and the circularity objection
- Parfit: connectedness is a matter of degree; continuity is not



The Bodily Continuity View

- **Body criterion:** same living organism or same brain across time
- **Animalism:** we are essentially human animals, not minds or souls
- **Brain and cerebrum** transplant cases challenge ordinary bodily intuitions
- **Strengths:** avoids memory puzzles, grounds identity in biology
- **Problems:** split-brain cases, gradual replacement, remnant-person problem



Thought Experiments and Puzzles

- Ship of Theseus: gradual replacement—is it still the same ship?
- Teleporter: destroyed and replicated—travel or death?
- Fission: brain split, two survivors—which one is you?
- Swampman: accidental duplicate with no causal history
- These puzzles test our intuitions about persistence and identity



Narrative Identity and the Self Over Time

- Narrative identity: an internalized, evolving life story of the self
- Integrates reconstructed past, perceived present, and imagined future
- Gives life a sense of unity, purpose, and continuity
- Ricoeur: human time is narrative time; we understand ourselves through stories
- MacIntyre: the unified self is embedded in traditions and communities
- Strengths: captures lived experience, change, and meaning-making
- Problems: fragmentation, unreliable memory, and cultural variation
- Revising your story can change who you are



Identity, Memory, and Change in Real Life

- **Dementia and Alzheimer's:** K.R.'s trait self-knowledge persisted, even when memory faded
- **Embodied selfhood:** body memory, habits, and familiarity persist in late-stage dementia
- **Amnesia and fugue states:** identity can survive without autobiographical memory
- **Transformation:** recovery and conversion — is it a new self or the same? (Parfit)
- **Digital identity:** data persists, inviting questions about digital afterlives



Case Study: Dementia, Consent, and Advance Directives

- The puzzle: Margo's directive refuses treatment; demented Margo seems happy
- Psychological view: lost connectedness weakens the earlier directive's force
- Biological view: same organism persists, so the directive remains hers
- Dworkin: respect prior critical interests; dementia patients cannot revise them
- Jaworska: respect present capacity to value and enjoy daily life
- Metaphysical identity has real stakes for medical decisions



Case Study: Responsibility, Amnesia, and Identity

- Amnesia after a crime: does it excuse responsibility or affect competency?
- Courts treat amnesia as relevant to fairness, not a standalone defense
- Dementia and historic offences: no longer psychologically continuous with the offender?
- *Madison v. Alabama*: memory loss alone does not bar execution
- Key lesson: identity theories connect directly to legal responsibility



Practical Strategies for Thinking About Your Own Identity

- Map your identity across time using key memories, roles, and values
- Distinguish what has changed from what has remained stable
- Apply psychological, bodily, and narrative theories to your own continuity
- Write a short personal identity statement and revise it over time
- Peer discussion: what makes you the same person you were ten years ago?



SAME
PERSON.
A RICHER
STORY.

Comparing the Theories: Strengths and Weaknesses



Psychological continuity: strong on memory, character, survival; weak on circularity and fission



Bodily continuity: grounded in biology; struggles with brain transplants and radical change



Narrative identity: captures lived experience and meaning; weak on fragmentation and false memory



Parfit: identity may not be what matters; connectedness and continuity may **matter** more



Many philosophers defend hybrid views rather than one single criterion



Assessment and Key Takeaways



Four main theories: psychological continuity, bodily continuity, narrative identity, reductionism



Open questions remain: persistence conditions, fission, and what matters in survival



Assessment options: short essay, case analysis, or reflective journal



Final takeaway: identity has multiple defensible answers, not one single fact



Keep reading, and debate respectfully with others



Further Reading and Next Steps



- Start with the Stanford Encyclopedia and Internet Encyclopedia entries on personal identity



- Accessible books: Amy Kind, Harold Noonan's Personal Identity, John Perry's anthology



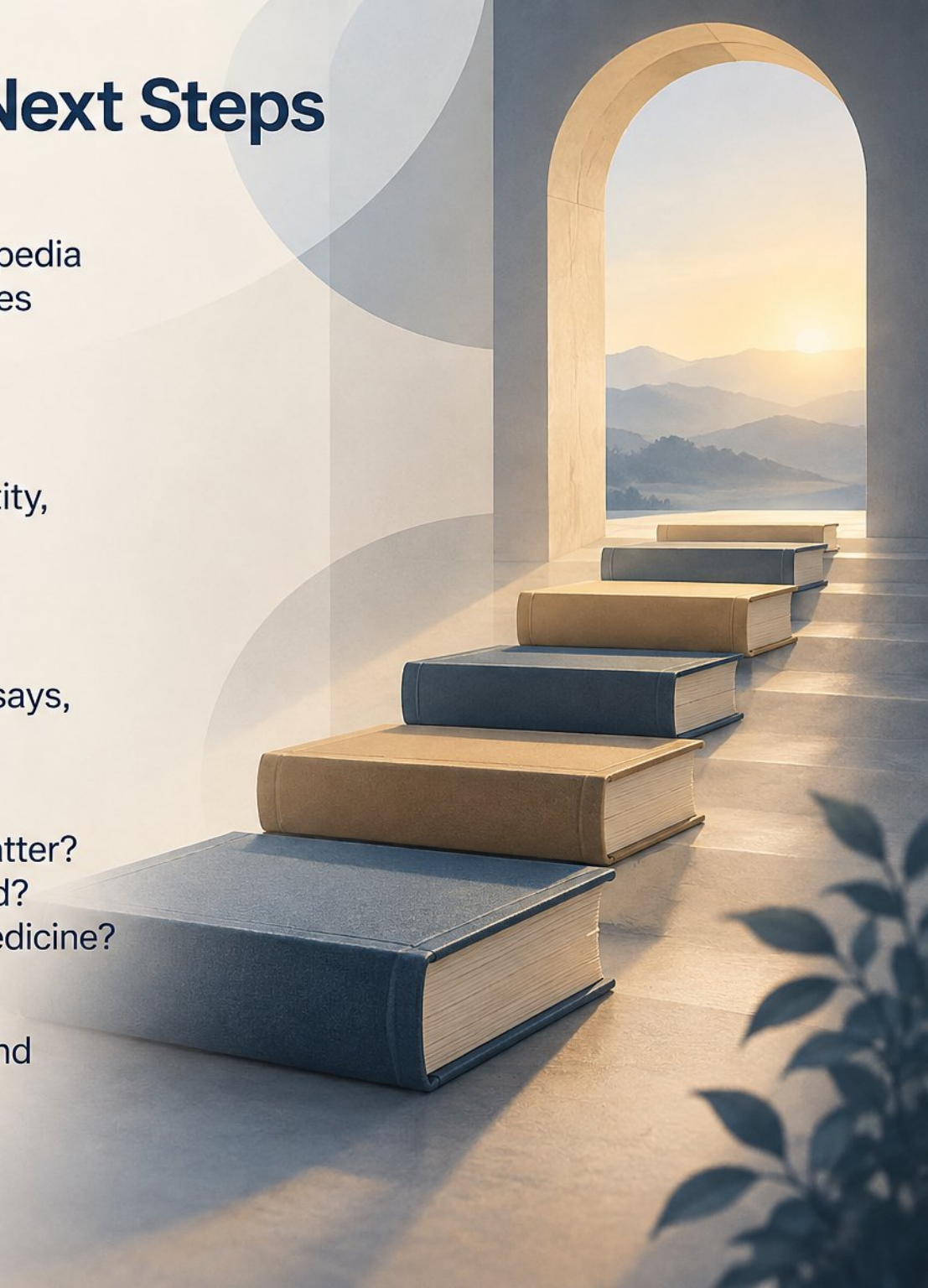
- Primary texts: Locke's Essay (Book 2, Chapter 27), Reid's Essays, Parfit's Reasons and Persons



- Carry forward: Does identity matter? What would you want preserved? How should it shape law and medicine?



- Next step: choose one theory and test it against a real-life case from this course



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