

5: Imagination: am I located in my body?

The three views we have considered – (i) simple soul, (ii) memory, (iii) no-self – all give central place to the first person point of view, and attach no importance to the body. We might suggest: what is required for it to be true that this is the same person as the one who was here yesterday is that it is the same human being – the same bodily being.

The defender of the no-self view will say that this makes no difference, since the body is in a constant process of change too. But the assumption that only what is unchanging can be ('strictly speaking') the same thing is one considered and rejected in lecture 1.

We are strongly tempted to think of the real person as somehow *located inside* the human being. The temptation may arise in part from the idea that we can easily imagine coming apart from our body. For example, it seems that I can imagine waking in a different body. But is it obvious that that is the way the imagined case is to be described? (Remember teletransportation.) What is the difference between imagining what it would be like for you to wake in TB's body, and imagining what it would be like for TB to wake under the delusion that he is you? But suppose that the switch was brought about by a brain swap? Would it not, in that case, be clear that we must say that the people have swapped bodies? Perhaps not: (i) If the idea here is that I *am* my brain, other examples can make it highly implausible (cf Daniel Dennett, 'Where am I?', in his *Brainstorms*); (ii) Placing brain swapping beside cases of 'brain mapping' (cf Williams, 'The self and the future') may make the idea that the first involves a transfer of the person from one body to another implausible.

We should not assume that an emphasis on our bodily nature must involve undermining what is of value in life. It may be the reverse: only by emphasising our bodily nature do we leave room for forms of deep commitment to others.

'For 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, everyone sees he would be the same *person* with the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions.' (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book Two, ch xxvii, section 15)

'[Consider the idea that] I might survive bodily death. What imaginings lie behind this? Well, perhaps I can imagine looking at the funeral, with my coffin, and the family mourning. Perhaps I am skulking at the back of the church. Perhaps I am miffed that the congregation does not seem all that upset. Perhaps I would like to tell them that it is not so bad after all. Perhaps being dead I have X-ray vision, so I give myself a glimpse of my body lying inside. All very sad. How old I look. But wait! Here are the pearly gates and there is grandmother waiting to greet me ...

'In imagining all this, I rehearse for myself the experience of looking at my coffin and so on. And this I can surely do: I can understand what it would be like to see it, after all (not unlike seeing other coffins). I can understand what it would be like to glimpse inside it – a gruesome sight. But, and this is the crucial point, these exercises of understanding do not transport a 'me' who is doing the seeing, whilst the human being Simon Blackburn is dead. It is I here and now who am doing the imagining, but there is *no I* who is being imagined doing the viewing. The only relic of me in the scenario is the dead body.' (Simon Blackburn, *Think* (1999), pp 141-2)

Some questions:

- (i) Describe in more detail the case that you think Locke is asking us to imagine in the first of the above passages. Is it clear that we should all agree with what Locke says 'everyone sees'?
- (ii) Is there a difference between 'imagining my own funeral' and 'imagining myself witnessing my own funeral'? (See the Blackburn passage.) If there is, what is its importance?