

5: No-self and personal relations

What are the implications of the no-self view for my thought about *others*? It seems to imply that the idea of love or friendship for another rests on a confusion. Recent defences of a modified version of the no-self view suggest that this conclusion – at least in any objectionable form – does not follow. Since:

1. Since there is some stability in a person's psychological characteristics we can say that they do, more or less, survive in the important sense – at least over limited periods.
2. If my love for another is what it should be it is their psychological characteristics that will matter to me; in so far as these change I will acknowledge that this is not, in the important sense, the same person.

The suggestion is that a modified 'no-self' view fits well with personal relationships as properly understood. But this doesn't seem to be right. The tragedy of cases in which there is radical psychological change lies largely in the fact that there is a crucial sense in which it is clear that this *is* the same person. Love requires the idea of a person who can survive through change.

'For why, after all, do we bother to identify people so carefully? What is unique about individual people that is important enough for us to call them by individual proper names? In our general relations with other human beings their bodies are for the most part intrinsically unimportant. We use them as convenient recognition devices enabling us to locate without difficulty the persisting character and memory complexes in which we are interested, which we love or like.' [A. Quinton, 'The Soul, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1962, p 402]

'On the best conception of the best kind of love, I ought to love this individual [a perfect replica of a person I love.] She is fully psychologically continuous with the Mary Smith I loved, and she has an exactly similar body. If I do not love Mary Smith's Replica, this could only be for one of several bad reasons. On the true Reductionist View, we should regard replication as being about as good as ordinary survival. Since Mary Smith chose to be replicated, we can assume that this is her view. On this view my love should be transferred to her Replica. If my love is not transferred, there could be two further explanations. Williams suggests that loving a person is, basically, loving a particular body. But this kind of love, or lust, is at most extremely uncommon. What is more common is a purely physical or sexual obsession with a person's body, an obsession that is not concerned with the psychology of this person. But this is *not* love of a particular body. As Quinton writes, "in the case of such obsessions, no particular human body is required, only one of a more or less precisely demarcated kind". Suppose that I was physically obsessed with Mary Smith's body. This obsession would transfer to Mary Smith's Replica. This would be like a case in which the body with which I am obsessed is that of an identical twin. If this person dies, my obsession could be transferred to the body of the other twin. Ordinary love could not be so transferred. Such love is concerned with the psychology of the person loved, and with this person's continuously changing mental life. And loving someone is a process, not a fixed state. Mutual love involves a shared history. This is why, if I have loved Mary Smith for many months or years, her place cannot be simply taken by her identical twin. Things are quite different with her

Replica. If I have loved Mary Smith for months or years, her Replica will have full quasi-memories of our shared history.’ (Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p 295)

Some questions:

- (i) What does Quinton mean when he describes the body as a ‘convenient recognition device’? Should we agree?
- (ii) Do you agree with Parfit’s claim that ‘On the best conception of the best kind of love, I ought to love’ a perfect replica of a person I love?