

freedom to believe in the freedom of the will, we open up a space for careful reflection on our important future decisions. As we enter into critical examination of our own experience in making such choices, we can see if there may be philosophical evidence in favor of libertarian freedom.

Of course this does not solve the question of truth. There is a matter of fact about whether human beings have libertarian free will or are determined in their choices. But the quest for truth in philosophy is based on evidence that goes beyond what the sciences study. Philosophy appeals to common sense, to the wisdom of experience, rational reflection, and intuition in matters that the sciences do not study. So the wise thing to do in such a situation may well be to embrace genuine freedom as a working philosophy of life. In this way we can make further progress in the quest for truth. Such an approach to difficult big questions like this one does not bring an end to our exploring or close the door on the question, but it does open up new pathways for discovery.

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WHO AM I?

I don't know if you have noticed, but country music always seems to be about love, loss, and life. So does most any other kind of music, come to think of it. From Bessie Smith to Bruce Springsteen, this personal, relational focus remains very popular. Even when more serious lyrics sing of racial injustice, poverty, or drug addiction, they are still about *us* in some way. There are few songs about the nonhuman world, or nonhuman anything, for that matter. Of all the lyrics you know, how many are about the wider world? Let's face it: we must find ourselves endlessly fascinating. This is just as true in philosophy as anywhere else.

Who am I? Each person who asks this question asks a slightly different one. Every "I" is, after all, different, right? Each of us is a unique individual. That uniqueness is something we can think about in philosophy, but ironically only in general terms. We can look at the problems, struggles, and characteristics that make us all human, but each individual is unique in her or his specific story of life. Each human person is different, but what we have in common is part of who we are too—part of the unique self that is me or you.

We could answer the "Who am I?" question in song, like the late Robin Williams: "I'm Popeye, the sailor!" Notice something interesting here: Popeye answers first with his name. He then goes on to tell us his purpose, his function in society. Here we can actually find some

traction on this big question about who we are: we have a name. We are a self, a person. Second, there is the question of meaning or purpose: What am I good for? Does my life matter? This starts to explore the issue of significance. Does human life have any such meaning?

The question "Who am I?" contains several types of answers, several ways that we might go about exploring this theme philosophically. Here we will pick up on three things. First, does human life in general have any meaning or purpose? What does it mean to be human? That is one of our oldest philosophical questions, and always a fascinating one to us. Second, we can explore what a human is philosophically—that is, human nature as a living thing with a body and a mind. This will lead us into the philosophy of mind and the character of the soul. Third, we will look at being a *self*, having a personal name that identifies me among all the rest. We call this being a *person* rather than a thing. But what is a person?

Let's start with some facts we are pretty sure about. First, you and I have bodies connected to an intricate web of life on planet Earth, and we are members of a particular species: *Homo sapiens*. Sciences like biology or psychology can tell us a lot about what a human being is, and evolution and ecology can tell us what our species used to have as its primary function in an ecology. But humans left that original ecosystem long ago (not the biosphere, of course, except for astronauts!). We are not looking for that kind of biological purpose or function, like the place of a fish-eagle in a river ecosystem. Our questions go deeper. We want to know about meaning and truth—not a few facts but the very idea of truth. We seek to understand the spiritual, moral, and philosophical purpose to human existence. What is it, and do we all have the same one?

We started out looking briefly at the sciences. Sciences are great, and help expand our mind in many ways. Science and technology make our lives much easier to live, and provide positive contributions as well as cause problems for our world and us. I for one have always loved studying math and science. But I discovered as a young man that I had questions that scientific study could never answer, no matter how much we learned in that area of science. I am sure that you, too, have had experiences, conversations, encounters or education that

has sparked deep questions of the kind philosophy explores. Who am I? Granted, I am a human being: but what does that really mean beyond biology, psychology, and the like?

Philosophy welcomes these questions, and often works together with the sciences. These areas of study can help philosophy get going, and can also provide needed corrections of past beliefs. Philosophy does not dispute the well-established facts of scientific discovery, but it wants to know more, more than common sense or the sciences can tell us. So let us begin where the sciences leave off, looking at what it means to be us.

Does human life have any meaning? I suppose we could say that the meaning of life is to "have fun!" I know quite a few people who do live as though that is the right answer. Sure, everyone likes having fun, but does that really give our life meaning and significance? We covered this topic in chapter 2, on the meaning of life and questions of purpose. But it's important to remember that meaning is one aspect of the question "Who am I?" As Socrates rightly said, the unexamined life is not worth living. To think carefully about what makes life worth living is already to enter into philosophy, to be a philosopher.

PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE

In the ancient world of Greece and Rome, philosophy asked and answered these kinds of questions and more. Philosophers before Socrates were interested in what the world is made of. They were **natural philosophers**, a position now occupied by natural scientists. For Socrates philosophy was not a mere academic pursuit. It was part of a way of life, a way that was worth living and dying for. To follow the teaching of a school of philosophy was not about picking among a bunch of topics but about a new orientation to everything. It is in this larger context of living and dying that philosophy can take up the question of the meaning of life, of what makes life worth living.

We have seen that the seemingly simple question "Who am I?" has many dimensions. We picked up on three: Does life have any meaning? What is a human being? And what is a person? Let's see how two great Greek philosophers, Plato and Epicurus, show us that

human nature, human person, and human purpose are not isolated topics but belong together as an organic whole.

Plato

Plato was Socrates' most prolific and creative disciple. We have already discussed his thought elsewhere in this book. Here we will focus on his view of the human person. The ancient philosophers were interested in what it meant to live the good life. Their questions and teachings can be understood as revolving around what makes life worth living. We played with the idea earlier that the meaning of human life might be "fun."

Life is too complex and filled with troubles, and some pain is bound to happen. Pleasure alone does not bring happiness. Indeed, pain is not always a bad thing. Like Aristotle after him, Plato taught that the wise person will seek to live a good life that is modeled on an ideal human character: the virtuous person. But there is a deeper reason why, for Plato, pleasure and pain cannot be the guiding principles of ethics. Plato was a dualist. He believed that human nature was composed of two distinct kinds of things: body and soul. For Plato the soul is not made up of atoms; it is not material. Material things fall apart and decay. The soul does not fall apart over time. However young and strong it may be in youth, the body ages, gets infirm, and dies—not so the principle of life itself, the soul.

Of course for the ancients the body was important in terms of health, beauty, sensations, and experience. They studied an early form of medicine, and bodily virtue and experience was important. But bodily appetites, pains, and pleasures don't provide us with what's important in life, so the body is not a basis for the good life. The soul does that because it is immortal. And in his ethics, Plato emphasized the importance of the soul over the body and how we need to live so as to develop the right virtues in our soul.

For much of Western thought after Plato, the focus has been more on the soul than the body because the soul is where the real "you" lives. It is the center of reason, feelings, and the will. It is the principle of moving, living beings. Other reasons that Plato valued the soul over the body have to do with life after death, his dualist

view of the cosmos, and his understanding of what it means to be a human person. In other words, Plato, like the other ancients, did not divide philosophy up into all kinds of topics of importance only in school. His dualism and what he taught about the soul were not abstract concepts but part of a complex and holistic life philosophy.

For Plato, the world we experience every day was also not the real essence of things. The essence of reality existed in another dimension, the realm of forms (or ideas), where perfect examples of all things existed. Just like our bodies decay and die, so things we experience in the world change and are never perfect examples of their type. We cannot draw a perfect circle. There is no perfect government, and no perfect human, either. There is not even a perfect vacation. But somewhere there must be some truth and so some reality that goes beyond this world of change and holds all things together. There must be some order in the world, but where? Plato postulated a realm of forms, where there existed the perfect, eternal standard for all things and ideas. All the big ideas that mean so much to us, like goodness, beauty, and love, find there a perfect example, a perfect form or idea. The realm of forms is perfect, eternal, and unchanging: beautiful (see chapter 8 on beauty).

Questions about the soul and body are connected with this ideal dimension of reality, for the realm of forms is where our souls come from. This is where we long to return when we passionately seek the truth. This is our true and eternal home. We are all of us "old souls." By contrast, the human body is part of a changing world of matter that decays, becomes corrupted, and falls apart. Plato called this the world of shadows, a world of cheap Xerox copies of the true reality: the ideas (forms) themselves. At death, the soul is in fact liberated from this corruption of flesh to return to the realm of forms from which it came.

Plato's psychology develops out of his view of the human soul (*psyche* in Greek). And this, in turn, is caught up with what it means to be human, what it means to live a good life. We may think living the good life has to do with success, pleasure, and wealth. But Plato had a very different idea. The good life is one in pursuit of justice and nobility, true goodness, virtue, and beauty: the virtues of the soul. For

the Greeks the virtues include both body and soul, both the physical and mental sides of who we are. The Greeks were in fact all about beauty: beauty of body and form, to be sure, but also inner beauty, a beautiful soul. But what does a good soul look like?

Let's go back to Socrates, Plato's beloved teacher. For Plato, if anyone had a beautiful soul, it would have been Socrates. And Socrates believed in discussion and the quest for truth. Reason guided his life, his calling, and the way he faced death. In the dialogue dealing with his own death, the *Phaedo*, Socrates tells his disciples that a true philosopher should not fear death. He reasons to the conclusion that the soul is immortal; it cannot die even though the body does. So death is but the liberation of the soul from bodily needs and problems. This naturally leads Plato to his view that life according to reason—in the quest for beauty, truth, and justice (or the good)—is the way that our soul can be beautiful and our life meaningful.

For a philosopher like *Descartes*, the essence of the soul is to be a thinking thing (reason). Today most philosophers speak of the soul in terms of the mind. But over his philosophical career Plato developed a more complex theory of the soul. He viewed the human as having three souls that correspond to three sets of functions: plant (growth and health), animal (sensation and desire), and uniquely human (reason and will). In his psychology, he connected the body with our appetite and sensations—our desire for and feelings about things. Desire is truly powerful in animals of all kinds, including us. It can guide our behavior in many ways. For example, the need for food and the desire for shared enjoyment and personal intimacy are common human desires that motivate a lot of our behavior. It's one reason that parties can be so much fun.

Plato also found that will is not the same faculty of the soul as appetite. I can desire something but choose not to fulfill that desire. I might turn down that slice of pizza, perhaps, and choose to eat a salad instead; it's not likely, but some people do. But why would people choose to go against their own desires? We would need a pretty good reason to do so, right? And this leads to Plato's last faculty of the soul: reason.

As we noticed before, one of the major concerns of ancient philosophy was about meaning or purpose—living a good life. For Plato the

good life can only be lived according to reason. When reason controls the will, and will reigns in desire, shaping our appetites to guide our actions, that is the kind of good life for which a true philosopher would live and die. In the end it's all about ordering our soul in the right way. If we let desires run the show, that leads to a real mess. Just watch any reality TV show if you don't believe me. If we let the will take over, we could make lots of decisions, but would they be good ones? When I choose something just because I can, that may lead to grave injustice and suffering, for myself or for others. Insisting on my way just because it's my choice can get people hurt. No, reason should be in control, guiding our will and allowing the will to channel our appetites toward healthy, helpful behaviors.

As a life philosophy, Platonism might seem a bit too idealistic and virtuous for most high-tech capitalists in Western cultures today. It did have a large influence on the ancient world of the Greeks and Romans, though, and even more on Christian thought over the millennia. We kind of buy into an immortal soul today, or maybe some of us do, but how about your desires and choices always being controlled by reason? What about seeking virtues before pleasure? And while the realm of forms sounds like *X-Files* (and so could be cool), how many of us can believe it, really? In our day and culture we like material objects: Apple watches, cool cars, nice clothes, good food. We tend not to love ideas for their own sake. Plato's dualist **idealism** is about as unhip as you can get.

Seek Pleasure: Physicalism and Epicurus

Enter *Epicurus* (341–271 BC). In our time an epicurean is someone who knows about good food and wine, but originally an Epicurean was a follower of the philosophy of Epicurus. Like others of his day, for Epicurus philosophy was part of a whole way of life. The Epicurean philosophy starts with a **monism** of all reality. Monism simply means that something is only made of one kind of stuff. Epicurus believed in a natural philosophy of atomism: everything is made up of atoms, or matter, we would say today. Epicurean philosophers believed that the soul was material, too. If everything is material, there is no realm of forms, no meddling gods, and no fate. So why should we be morally

good? Epicureans find their life goals and highest goods in seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. We call this philosophy **hedonism**.

But the Epicurean philosophy is not a free-for-all party or a pleasure garden. This is because Epicurus believed, like Plato and Socrates before him, that life should be lived according to reason. His philosophy of life focused on wisdom, or prudence. The wise person lives in moderation, with a balance of pain and pleasure, so as to live a long life. The wise person seeks to be free as much as possible from suffering and a troubled soul. So his philosophy is a version of hedonism; that is, ethical good or bad is based upon avoiding pain in the long run and only then seeking pleasure. A drunken party will bring a good deal of pain the next morning, so the true Epicurean will drink in moderation, and especially not drink and drive. That can get you dead, and the dead know no pleasure. Epicureans may not be party animals, but they will seek to live a long, if somewhat prudent, life so as to enjoy pleasures all the more. So unlike **utilitarianism**, discussed in chapter 6, which focuses on maximizing the good for the most number of people, Epicurean hedonism focuses on the rational maximization of long-term pleasure with a minimum of pain for the individual. For them this is the good life, the meaning of life, and what makes life worth living.

BODY AND SOUL

We have seen how two ancient philosophers brought together issues of human nature with thoughts about ethics, the good life, and the nature of the cosmos. All of this can be seen to flow from our initial question, "Who am I?" We have explored some answers to the question of the meaning of life, one dimension of this question. Let's focus now on another part: What is a human being? In the ancient world the answer was straightforward: we are a complex unity of a human body and a human soul. Our interest here, however, is on human nature. We keep bringing up questions of life and purpose to show that these are intimately related to questions of what a human being is.

Dualism in anthropology teaches that mind and body are two different kinds of things. They may never be separate, but mind and body are distinctly different for the dualist. As we said before, Plato's

dualism is not very popular today. In our time the view of Epicurus on human nature is more popular than dualism. For the original Epicurean, the mind or soul is made up of atoms like everything else. Today we would claim that the mind or soul is made up of matter-energy: the most basic physical element known to us. To believe that everything is made up of matter is **materialism**. To believe that we humans are all made up of matter is **physicalism** (other folks call it materialism, too). Physicalism has been on the rise for some time, in no small part because of biology.

The rise of neuroscience (the science of the brain and nervous system) has contributed to the popularity of physicalism in the **philosophy of mind**. Philosophy of mind is a specialty in philosophy that deals with theories of the soul or mind. Modern philosophy tends to focus on mental function rather than spirituality or personality, at least since Descartes. Most neuroscientists are physicalists when they think about their philosophy at all. But the sciences alone will never answer the fundamental questions we ask in the philosophy of mind because they are metaphysical. Remember that **metaphysics** deals with truths about reality that go beyond the sciences while also engaging in and accepting scientific knowledge. With respect to human nature, physicalism is for the most part an assumption many scientists bring to their work. It is not a conclusion that many have derived logically from their theories and data.

Still, when we start thinking about human nature, we move into an area that draws on both science and philosophy. Philosophy as a rational inquiry begins where merely empirical studies end. Questions about moral goodness, the reliability of logical reasoning, beauty—all of these issues and more cannot be answered by any science. And despite the way we often talk, there just is no such thing as one Science with a capital S. Science certainly is not a kind of cultural god that represents all reliable knowledge of the past, present, and future. There are only specific sciences, and even taken all together they cannot prove the assumptions they need to operate. For example, all the sciences simply assume the reliability of human reasoning and perception, like "It is good to be honest." Of course it is good to be honest, but knowing that is neither scientific nor unscientific. Such

knowledge is outside of science. In other words, scientific work is a human enterprise like any other and has its own focus and limits. We love science and technology. But science and technology, while very valuable, make terrible gods. I might make scientific work a central part of my life, but I don't want to worship it. Science and technology cannot bear the full weight of our ultimate concerns, nor are they the source of all truth. Questions like the ones we explore in this book are often based on scientific knowledge, to be sure, but they are not settled by the sciences. So philosophers accept the best theories and facts from scientific learning, then go on to reason under, on top of, around, and beyond them. The metaphysical nature of the mind, which we are exploring here, is a question like this.

Many people hold that physicalism is the only theory that is compatible with all the amazing things we are learning about our brains and how they work as part of our body, environment, and experience. The physicalist argues that a human mind is just a functioning human brain/body with all of its complex history and environmental factors. Despite the cool black-and-white science fiction movies my wife and I like (*Mystery Science Theater 3000*, anyone?), we now know that the brain alone or even a head kept alive by an evil scientist will not function as a human mind. But this is not a problem for physicalism. As long as the mind is composed at bottom of the same stuff as everything else in nature—in other words, as long as the mind is not some kind of nonphysical, immaterial thing—then physicalism in some form will be true. Physicalism will be happy to accept that the brain by itself is not enough to make a mind.

Notice that I just wrote “physicalism in some form.” Like a lot of the views we present in this book, things get pretty messy when we start to dig deeper. There are, in fact, several types of physicalism and dualism. This can be confusing to philosophers young and old. To get a taste of these debates and differences, let's look at two arguments, one for physicalism and one for dualism. Who knows, you may develop a taste for this kind of thing. After all, you learned to like coffee as you grew up, right?

Physicalism usually starts its criticism of dualism with the assumption that a nonphysical mind is just plain odd. Modern science has

taught us that everything else we encounter in the natural world is made up of the same kind of stuff. Why would our mind be any different? An animal is, of course, a very different kind of thing from a star, but at bottom they are material. They are physical objects made up of matter-energy. So why believe anything different about the human mind? Consider the problem of interaction. If the mind is immaterial, how can it cause material changes in the brain? We know that bodily movements connect our muscles and nerves to the brain. Movements, sensations, and feelings all correspond to certain states of the brain. How can an immaterial mind actually change the brain, to make things happen? How would a nonphysical thing ever interact with a physical thing? How is brain-mind causation even possible? It doesn't seem to make any sense.

Now physicalism seems to have science on its side, but don't be too hasty. Science may just be the problem. For what physicalism has a problem with is human experience, especially conscious experience, thoughts, and sensations. My own direct experience of the world is, after all, what I know with the greatest degree of certainty. Now the brain is a complex organ, with several different parts. But my conscious experience is unified. Everyone reading this page—and we hope that will be lots of people—has a unified consciousness. Sure, we all know of times when we have conflicting emotions. Do I want to do my homework or should I go to that dance? (Hint: the dance often wins.) Sure, any mature self is complex and has many layers, like an onion, or parfait. Nevertheless, there is a powerful, unified “I,” a central self. I experience a noise, and at the same time I feel a bit gassy in my stomach and experience a pain. These are not separate things experienced apart; they come at the same time and as part of a unified, conscious experience. What is more, this unified conscious self is unified over time as well as within a single moment. How is all of this possible if these experiences are generated by different parts of the brain, at different times? If my mind reduces without remainder to cellular activities in the brain, in different regions of it, how could there possibly be a unity to consciousness?

As both of these arguments make clear, physicalists tend to assume a materialist world view, questioning dualist theories on the grounds of

their assumptions about reality and the strangeness of an immaterial mind. Dualists tend to point to our conscious and direct experience of the reality of ourselves as solid data in this debate, as certain as anything can be. They rely on philosophical arguments and common human experience and will question the reduction of mental processes to physical ones. Yet while these debates can be technical, and might seem remote from everyday concerns of life, they grow out of classical philosophical roots. They are organically connected to larger questions, like what makes life worth living or whether there is life after death.

We have spent some time driving through the land of philosophy of mind and visiting a few of the prominent locales. Yet our discussion of physicalism and dualism were all along connected to our original question: Who am I? Now we need to journey to the third dimension of that question and get personal.

ME, MYSELF, I

You might be surprised to know that our modern concept of “person” did not exist in the ancient world. For Plato or Aristotle, the individual was not a central philosophical topic. To be sure, they valued their friends and family like everyone else, but both saw the individual as part of a larger whole—the city (society). They were interested in humans in general rather than the individual person as such.

As Christianity entered into the classical world, it needed to develop the concept of the person. “Person” became an important category for Christian thought, and it still is. The Christian God is one Being in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the first Christmas, God the Son becomes an individual person, Jesus of Nazareth, who is at once both fully human and fully divine. To develop their theology, Christians needed a concept of the person, of the individual who is distinct from other persons just like the Father is distinct from the Son and both are distinct from the Holy Spirit.

Today we often think of “person” as just the same as a human being. But is the concept bigger than this? Sure, every human being is a person, but is every person a human being? Could there be other living things that are people? I once knew a pair of dogs named Flash and Zeke that—I swear—thought they were people. Am I just being

sentimental? Many philosophers argue that the concept of “person” today applies just to humans. But the very idea of intelligent aliens in science fiction—that is, a being from another planet that is person but not human—shows that we have bigger things in mind with this concept. Another cool idea from science fiction, shared by many experts in robotics, is that someday a robot might become so complex, self-organizing, and intelligent that it becomes a person. We might one day create AI: artificial intelligence. And people matter, even if they are not humans. We intuitively feel that the difference between a person and a thing is real and significant. But what is a person, anyway? Maybe a person is a self. That might seem to be some progress, but the idea of “self” is just as complex and difficult as that of person! Person and self do seem very connected, though. If I am a self, and I assume that you are too, then I am also a person and so are you. It’s hard to imagine a person without a concept of self. While the idea of a self is intuitive and interesting, it leads us right back to pondering “person.” So let’s just focus on “person” to make things simple and leave aside “self.”

Usually we don’t get personal in academics. It’s considered bad form or bad manners, like blowing your nose in the middle of a lecture. But we will ignore that and ask some personal questions. First, is there a good philosophical definition for person? Second, do we remain the same person over time, or do we change? The two questions are linked but still distinct. In this chapter we will focus on the concept of “person” and talk more about **personal identity** when we get to the next chapter on life after death. But in philosophy we will need to keep an eye on both topics to get a good view of the person.

Just to confuse things, the concept of person is used in many disciplines besides philosophy. Law and psychology, in particular, have ideas about what a person is and how it functions. We are interested here in a philosophical analysis of what a person is. Still, we can borrow some common-sense notions from psychology. A human person will always have feelings—that is, emotions: Plato’s “appetite” again. That seems true, but could there possibly exist a person without feelings? We are not talking here about sensory equipment, or the five senses. We are talking about emotions. Do persons need

emotions to be people? This is a hard question to answer since we have no actual examples of persons who don't have emotional lives. But if a person in fiction makes good sense in every other way but does not have emotions, that counts as logical evidence for what is logically possible. Now in the fictional world of *Star Trek* there is an intelligent android named Commander Data. His inventor or "father" did not give him an emotional chip. In *Star Trek* stories, Data operates as a person in every way for the purposes of the narrative, but without emotions. Some characters, of course, doubt his full personhood (he gets the emotion chip later). Our question is this: Is Commander Data a person even before he received that emotion chip? Did that addition now make him a person? Or was he one already but is now more human? Whether it made him more human is fascinating, but it's a distraction; that is not our issue here. Even when we focus on our question, the question of personhood, it seems rational intuitions simply differ on this point. We might just have to keep an open mind about emotions being essential to personhood as we understand it. It might be safest to think something like this: some analogy or similarity to what we call emotions will be central to being a person, even for robot persons (again, if that is even possible). After all, to be a person means to be able to have personal relationships, and something like emotions would seem to be important to that activity. But again, it's hard to be certain and we should not press the point.

Let's keep moving in the Platonic set of three "souls" up to will for more examples of what might go into being a person. Some kind of choice or will would seem to be essential to personhood. Perhaps we could call this self-determination. This may not be *free* will: a person could be determined by external factors in all of their choices. We don't have to solve the vexed problem of free will for humans to claim that self-determination is essential to personhood. And it is hard to imagine any possible scenario where a person does not have the ability to will, at least internally, even when their body is being restrained in some way. A person in a straightjacket could still *will* to get out, even when that is not possible.

At the top of Plato's view of human nature there is reason. Again, it would be hard to imagine any plausible scenario when a person did

not have reasoning capacities. We might want to add not only the ability to reason but a capacity for self-awareness. To know oneself as a self is likely to be essential to being a self.

So far we have a nice set of properties necessary for personhood. Emotions (maybe), will, reason, and a sense of self: we can make very plausible arguments that these are essential to being a person. All of these are what philosophers call psychological traits. And in the modern period, this has been a common view of what makes for personhood; in fact, it's called the **psychological criterion of personal identity**. This identity is not about showing your driver's license but about being the same person over time and change.

Now this psychological view is so modern that it was not even articulated in Western thought until the Enlightenment, by none other than the "father" of the English Enlightenment, *John Locke*. Using such clear and lucid prose as "can consider itself as itself," he published the first modern psychological theory of personal identity. The notion of person is caught up here with the notion of what it means to be the same person over time. But while popular in our day and culture, does the psychological theory work as a theory of identity? It has some serious problems, as we will see when we consider life after death in the next chapter.

But even in this life, it would seem we are not always a person in Locke's view. When we are asleep or if we are in a coma (God forbid), then we don't have these mental capacities, do we? Now we can solve this problem by simply stipulating that if one is ever a person, then one is always a person until one is dead. Still, that seems a bit arbitrary. And what about diseases like Alzheimer's, or brain damage that causes loss of memories and radical personality changes? What about the psychological disease of multiple personalities—that is, dysfunctional personality? Do those who suffer from these diseases or accidents become different persons? Legally they are the same, but maybe not in terms of their emotions and memory. But to *assume* that is what makes them persons is a mistake, because we are being critical of the psychological criterion. It's not fair to smuggle it back in as an assumption (that's called begging the question in philosophy—a

logical fallacy). So just like me when I visit my psychologist, the psychological criterion has a few issues.

Let's try going retro, then, back before modernity to the classical age. Here we meet Epicurus and Plato again. They will provide us with two contrasting theories, dualism and physicalism. Last time we started with Plato, so it's only fair we begin with Epicurus. He was both a physicalist about human beings and a materialist about the universe. His view of the person, the mind, and the soul (if any) was that they are made up of atoms; that is, a person is a kind of material thing. Now a person does have to be alive, right? We call living material things animals. A person, then, is a particular and complex type of animal. Just as different animals have different bodies, powers, and abilities, so a person is an animal with just the right mix of "creature powers" (à la Wild Kratts). Today we call this the **somatic criterion of personal identity**. Maybe in deference to Epicurus we use the Greek word for body (*soma*) to name this theory. Have we found a good theory of the person?

Now for physicalism and the somatic criterion, a person is just a certain kind of living material body. If humans have souls and minds, they will have to be material ones, a dimension of a living human animal. Robot persons, if they are possible, would have a different kind of body. A robot is not a human animal but could still be a person, or so we argued earlier. This somatic criterion would solve problems like loss of memory, radical personality disorders, and the like that plague psychological views. But the somatic view may have problems of its own.

Our bodies change. We know scientifically that we don't have the same cells we did when we were born. All the cells in our body are in fact replaced over time, apart from some in our brain. So how can I be the same human person I was before if my body is not the same? This common problem has a standard reply that works well. All that is necessary is that your current body is connected step by step to previous bodies that were also you (see further the *Enterprise* discussion in chapter 9). And this connection has to be material and also causal. No one thinks you are a different human being because, say, you lose your teeth and have them replaced by implants. If so,

dentists would be broke, because who would they bill? You could claim in court that the new you, the person at trial, did not have the dental surgery! That leads to a real mess. On the other hand, the new you would be broke, since all the money belonged to the old you. But no one thinks that replacing all your teeth replaces one person with another. So changing our body does not change our self.

So the somatic criterion allows for changes in the body over time, as long as there is physical continuity. That may solve the first problem, but are there any others? Imagine the following possible scenario. Remember, this story only has to be logically possible—that is, the concepts in the story do not contradict each other. It does not have to be real.

So imagine that in the far future medicine is greatly enhanced. A woman named Gonzales has a terrible radiation sickness from being in outer space. Over a long period of time, every body part has to be replaced with something artificial. All her limbs, bones, and bodily organs are replaced by things made in a lab. Eventually none of her body except her brain is made from any part of her old body. Finally, parts of her brain become diseased and all her brain cells (neurons) are replaced, slowly, with artificial ones but without loss of memory—or at least not much. After all of these bodily changes, no part of Gonzales is biologically human. Is Gonzales now a human? No biologist would think so! But why would she not be the same *person*? Legally, she would be. In her advanced society, she would also socially be the same person. And let us say that psychologically she is the same person, too. Her memory losses and other changes are no more than to be expected with a human of her age. But her body is totally different and not even animal. She does not even look human. But she is alive, and she is legally, ethically, and psychologically the same person she was before the space launch. Does the somatic criterion fit this (logically) possible story?

Now the defender of the somatic criterion could claim that there was bodily continuity, since an artificial part was also placed inside of a larger human body. That body then became a human person, Gonzales, at that moment. Then another part is replaced, and the new body becomes a human person, the same one as before.

Eventually, over a long time, all her biologically human body parts are replaced. But because of the material connection with earlier, partly human bodies, she is still a human person but in this odd instance without a human body. That seems a very strange paradox, to say the least. And if there is life after death, there may be more problems in store for the somatic criterion, as we will see in our chapter on that topic.

Both of the previous two theories of personal identity seem to have some problems. Are there any others? There is only one classical theory left and, you guessed it, it's Plato's. This is a dualist theory, which we can call the **metaphysical criterion of personal identity** (you may as well learn these three criteria now: we use them again in the chapter on life after death!). A person just is their soul (not their body), and to be the same person is to have the same soul over time. This might seem like something similar to the psychological criterion. But in fact the dualist can affirm that you or I am the same person even if we have damaged and radically altered our memories, personality, or capacity for rational thought. All that matters, on this criterion, is that this is the same soul over time, not that we have the same memories, personality, and the like. Remember, for the dualist the soul is a thing different from a body, even though they are intimately connected.

Alas, philosophers have found a problem with this theory, too. The problem has to do with causal connection. If the mind is a very different kind of thing or substance from the body, how can they possibly interact with each other causally? Why would movement in a nonmaterial mind (say a new thought) affect a physical, biological organ like the brain? Likewise, how could the brain cause changes in the soul? We know enough about brains now to know that there must be a very close, highly regulated connection between body and mind. This would be no problem if both were physical, since both would be regulated by the laws of nature. But if the mind is nonphysical, this causal interaction seems to make no sense. This is still a serious problem for any dualists in our day.

It seems no concept of the person (or associated theory of personal identity) is without problems. None is generally accepted by

philosophers, although physicalism is popular. In the end, however, this is not a problem for believing that persons are real. You and I and others we know are persons. We start there. Our problems with definition do not change this fact. The reality of the person is important for ethics, and for questions like "Who am I?" And that's the question we began with. So we may just have to accept the best concept of what it means to be a person while also knowing that our best may not be good enough. And that, too, is a very human thing!

CONCLUSION

We started out asking one of the very big questions of life: Who am I? When we ask this question, we think about our own particular lives, relationships, feelings, dreams, and problems and wonder if human life has a purpose and meaning. We remember our commonalities, such as having a human body and a human nature, while also recognizing that we are very different and individual people. That we have bodies and brains we can agree. But is there something more? Do we have a soul? Is the mind more than the brain? We can also agree that we are persons, and have personal identity over time. I am the same self I always was, at least in some sense, even when my personality, beliefs, and body change. I can say, "I was a different person back then," but I mean I was a different personality or character. I had different emotions or beliefs. I was still the same *self* even back then.

Like most thoughtful people, Christians are interested in these questions too. The Christian faith championed the very notion of an individual person as important for philosophy. Christian thought has long absorbed and altered the dualism of Plato, although modern theology is less enamored of dualism. And like the other great world religions, Christian thought provides an answer to questions about the meaning of life. Life has meaning when we follow Jesus Christ, and love God first, then the wider world, and finally ourselves. A significant Christian life is dedicated to the City of God, rather than Plato's republic, but the goal of a virtuous life remains. Even some of the virtues in Christianity are borrowed from Plato: the cardinal ones of temperance, prudence, courage, and justice. And Christians

will see themselves as connected importantly to a Creator God: our life itself is a gift. These beliefs deeply shape a Christian sense of who we are and what meaning our lives have. We will think of philosophy as part of a way of life, but for believers it is also part of a way of worship and discipleship. Christians will therefore find the question "Who am I?" fascinating, as should every thoughtful human being.