

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class Sec. \_\_\_\_\_

## Homework – Personal Identity

**Instructions:** Use the attached reading on the next page to answer the questions below. Please answer in complete sentences. Make sure to explain your answer for full credit.

1. How does the scenario with Wanda and Schwanda challenge our understanding of personal identity; what problem does the story present?
2. Why does the author share the story about Dr. Nefarious and the torture experiment, and what is the author trying to persuade you to believe using it?
3. According to the passage, what is Aristotle's theory of self and of personal identity?
4. What does the reading have to do with the philosophical belief called "essentialism"?

**READING ON THE NEXT PAGE [EXCEPT FOR THE LAST]**

## **Persons, Brains, and Bodies**

By Meredith W. Micheals

One night, after a serious bout with the library, you, and your best friend Wanda Bagg (or Walter if you prefer) decided to indulge yourselves at the College Haven. Before you can stop her, Wanda steps out in front of a steamroller that happens to be moving down Main Street. Wanda is crushed. Witnessing the horror of the accident, you have a stroke. Fortunately, Hagendaas, the famous neurosurgeon who has been visiting the campus, is also on the way to the College Haven. Taking charge, he rushes you and Wanda to the Health Center, where he performs a "body transplant." He takes Wanda's brain, which miraculously escaped the impact of the steamroller, and puts it in the place of yours, which was, and of course, severely damaged by the stroke.

After several days, the following battle ensues. Wanda's parents claim that they are under no obligation to continue paying tuition [tuition is the cost of college classes]. After all, Wanda was killed by a steamroller. Your parents claim that they are under no obligation to continue paying tuition, after all, you died of a stroke.

It is clear, then, that a basic question is in need of an answer, who is the person lying in bed in the Health Center? Is it Wanda? Is it you? Is it someone else altogether? For the sake of discussion, let us call the person lying in the bed Schwanda. What reasons do we have for believing that Schwanda is Wanda? Given that one's self-consciousness, one's thoughts, beliefs and feelings are all mental phenomena [properties], we might naturally conclude that a person goes wherever her brain goes (on the assumption that our mental characteristics are more likely "located" in the brain than in, say, our smallest left toe).

Schwanda will remember having set off for the College Haven with you; she will remember receiving the college acceptance letter addressed, "Dear Wanda, We are happy to inform you that ..."; she'll remember being hugged by Wanda's mother on the afternoon of her first day of school. That is, Schwanda will believe that she's Wanda. Nevertheless, the fact that Schwanda believes herself to be Wanda does not in itself guarantee that she is. Do we have any basis for insisting that Schwanda is Wanda and not someone who is deluded into thinking that she's Wanda?

How can we determine whether Schwanda's Wanda memories are real and not merely appearance? As we came to realize in our discussion of Locke's Memory Theory [a theory that what makes you who you are is your memory], it is not legitimate at this point to appeal to the self-identity of Schwanda and Wanda, since that is precisely what we're trying to determine. In other words, in attempting to establish that Schwanda's Wanda memories are genuine memories, we cannot argue that they are real, genuine, and legitimate on the grounds that Schwanda is Wanda.

Perhaps it is possible to stop short of circularity. Why couldn't we say that Schwanda's Wanda memories are genuine because the brain that is remembering is the same as the brain that had the original experiences? Thus, the experiences are preserved in the very organ that underwent them. Though at first there is a plausibility [believability] to this response, it fails to solve our problem.

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Suppose that Schwanda is Wanda remembering the experience of learning to ride a bicycle. Though the brain in question is indeed the same, it is nonetheless clear to all of us that brains alone do not learn to ride bicycles, or, indeed, do brains alone remember having done so. People learn to ride bicycles and people remember having done so. And the question we are trying to answer is whether Schwanda (who is remembering) is the same person as Wanda (who did the bicycling). The appeal to the fact that the same brain is involved in each event does not provide us with a way out of [an explanation that memory is necessary or essential].

It is at this point that philosophers begin to reconsider the Aristotelian position... that self-identity is essentially bodily identity [physical identity]. If the Body Theory of Personal Identity is true, then the person lying in bed at the Health Center is you, deluded into believing that you are Wanda. That is, Schwanda is self-identical to you.

You might wonder, at this point, whether there are any positive reasons for endorsing the Body Theory, or whether it is simply a place to which one retreats only in defeat? The following case is designed to persuade you that there is at least some plausibility to the Body Theory.

Suppose that an evil scientist, Dr. Nefarious, has selected you as his prime subject for a horrible experiment. You are dragged into his office. He says, "Tomorrow at 5:00, you will be subjected to the most terrible tortures. Your nails will be pulled out one by one. Rats will be caged round your head. Burning oil will drip slowly on your back. The remainder I leave as a surprise." Are you worried about what will happen to you at 5:00 tomorrow? If you have any sense, you are. You think of the excruciating pain and suffering you will undergo and would surely do just about anything to avoid it. But now, Dr. Nefarious says, "Tomorrow at 4:55, I will use my Dememorizer to erase your memory of this conversation." Are you still anxious about what is going to happen to you tomorrow at 5:00? Surely you are. After all the fact that you won't, between 4:55 and 5:00, be anticipating your torture doesn't assume that the torture itself will be any less painful.

When you forget that your math professor told the class there would be a test on Friday, you aren't thereby spared the experience of taking the test (in fact, in that case the experience is made worse by your not having had the opportunity to anticipate it). Now, Dr. Nefarious says, "Tomorrow at 4:57, I will use my Dememorizer to erase all of your memories." Are you still anxious about what will happen tomorrow at 5:00? Isn't it natural to describe the situation as one in which you will undergo horrible torture, though you won't know who you are or why this is happening to you? You will still experience your fingernails being pulled out, your back being burned, your face being eaten up by rats. Surely, those experiences are ones you would like to avoid.

Finally, Dr. Nefarious says to you, "Tomorrow at 4:58, I am going to use my Rememorizer to implant in your brain all of Ronald Reagan's [a former president's] memories." Though this may not please you for personal or political reasons, the relevant question remains this: are you still worried about what is going to happen tomorrow at 5:00? Isn't it again perfectly natural to describe the situation as one in which you will undergo horrible torture, all the while believing that you are Ronald Reagan.

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Do you not now remain concerned that you will experience excruciating pain and intolerable suffering? Look at your fingernails while you consider your answer to this question. What this story demonstrates is not the conclusive superiority of the Body Theory over the Memory (or Brain) Theory, but rather the importance of our bodies to our self-identity.

This is something that tends to get lost in the traditional conceptions [beliefs] of personal identity. Furthermore, returning to the case of Schwanda, we can now see that it is not altogether crazy to argue that Schwanda is indeed you, deluded into believing that she is Wanda. In other words, anyone who wishes to dismiss that possibility must also dismiss the possibility that the person who undergoes the torture is indeed you, deluded into believing that you are Ronald Reagan.

While it is true that we tend to identify ourselves with and by our thoughts, beliefs, inclinations and feelings, our discussion of the Body Theory should remind us that there are reasons for believing that our bodies are, at the very least, important to who we are. Some philosophers would argue that our bodies are who we are, that self-identity is bodily identity.

In considering these admittedly fanciful problem cases, we have seen that we lack a concept of self-identity that allows us to predict when we would or wouldn't persist through time. This might suggest to us that our concept of self-identity is not an all-or-nothing one, that, in fact, our concept is one which admits of degrees. If so, we are no longer talking about identity *per se*, which is an all-or-nothing concept, but rather about some other relation of psychological and physical connectedness.

Nevertheless, we can now see first, that the answer to the question "Who ought to pay Schwanda's tuition?" will depend upon which theory of personal identity we are inclined to endorse and second, that the answer may not be as clear and unequivocal as we would like it to be.