

Hazlitt on the Future of the Self

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There are moments in the life of a solitary thinker which are to him what the evening of some great victory is to the conqueror and hero...milder triumphs long remembered with truer and deeper delight. And though the shouts of multitudes do not hail his success ... [yet] as time passes ... [such moments] still awaken the consciousness of a spirit patient, indefatigable in the search of truth and a hope of surviving in the thoughts and minds of other men.¹

William Hazlitt's moment occurred in 1794, when he was sixteen years old. In that moment Hazlitt thought he realized three things: that we are *naturally* connected to ourselves in the past and present but only imaginatively connected to ourselves in the future, that with respect to the future we are *naturally* no more self-interested than other-interested, and that for each of us our future selves should have the same moral and prudential status as that of anyone else's future self.

Whether these realizations are genuine is, of course, debatable. Some today would say that they are. What is not debatable is that when in his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* Hazlitt explained and defended these realizations, he sketched theoretical possibilities and drew explosive morals from them that would not occur to other personal identity theorists until our own times.² For instance, he was the first to see in what are now called fission examples a basis for questioning whether the preservation of identity is what matters primarily in an individual's "self-interested" concern to survive. He

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¹ William Hazlitt, *Essay on the Principles of Human Action and some Remarks on the Systems of Hartley and Helvetius* (London, 1805; reprinted, with an introduction, by John R. Nabholz, Gainesville, Fla., 1969), 133 (page numbers noted parenthetically refer to 1969 reprint).

² *Ibid.*

was also the first to suggest a genuinely modern developmental account of the origin of our self-concepts. It is not too much to say that had Hazlitt's views received the attention they deserved, the philosophical discussion of personal identity may well have leaped ahead one hundred and fifty years and the psychological discussion have been significantly advanced.

Hazlitt's views did not receive the attention they deserved; far from it. Keats's idea of the "negative capability" of the imagination was based on a careful study of Hazlitt's *Essay*. Coleridge once mentioned the *Essay* in print but only briefly.³ In the seventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* Mackintosh remarked in a footnote to his discussion of Butler that "the very able work" done by Hazlitt in the *Essay* "contains original views" on the nature and origin of "the private appetites."⁴ But few others, and no mainstream philosophers, seem even to have noticed. Discouraged, Hazlitt turned from metaphysics to painting, politics, and aesthetic criticism.

In the twentieth century, especially during the last few decades, Hazlitt's star has risen. His writings have been reprinted, additional correspondence has been published, and there have been several books written about him. However, it is as critic and stylist and not also as personal identity theorist that Hazlitt's reputation has grown. Most commentators on his thought have been reluctant even to discuss the *Essay* in detail. Howe, an early and influential biographer, called it "a book by a metaphysician for metaphysicians" and added that "the few words we may say of it here" concern only "its relation to Hazlitt's other works and to his character."⁵ More recently, Jones begins his account of Hazlitt's life and thought with Hazlitt's marriage, in 1808, three years after the publication of the *Essay*!⁶ Among those who have considered the *Essay* in detail, Kinnaird, who had as his professed aim to write "a biography of [Hazlitt's] mind," does not mention Hazlitt's discussion of fission examples.⁷ Nor does Bromwich, in his otherwise excel-

³ On Hazlitt's influence on Keats, see W. J. Bate, "The Sympathetic Imagination in Eighteenth-Century Criticism," *English Literary History*, 12 (1945) and his *John Keats* (Oxford, 1966), 239f; D. Bromwich, *Hazlitt* (Oxford, 1983), 374. Coleridge's comment on Hazlitt's *Essay* is in his *Lay Sermons* (London, 1817; Cambridge, 1972), 187.

⁴ Sir James Mackintosh, "Dissertation on the Progress of Ethical Philosophy, Chiefly during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Miscellaneous Works of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh* (Philadelphia, 1847), 94-198.

⁵ P. P. Howe, *The Life of William Hazlitt* (London, 1947), 76.

⁶ Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life* (Oxford, 1989). Prima facie, Hazlitt's views in the *Essay* had a profound effect on his philosophy of art, a major preoccupation of which is the artist's ability to transcend his or her own limited identity and enter into sympathetic union with an object of contemplation. John L. Mahoney, *The Logic of Passion* (Salzburg, 1978), 108, says that "It is this sense of projection, of widening ... our sympathies..., and of representing this new range of sympathy with concreteness and vitality, that one sees the essence of Hazlitt's theory." James Engell, *The Creative Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 199, says that Hazlitt's *Essay* provides "the psychological basis for his criticism."

⁷ J. Kinnaird, *William Hazlitt* (New York, 1978), 24-30, 58.

lent study, except briefly and in a footnote.⁸ More importantly, no mainstream personal identity theorist, so far as we know, has ever even mentioned, much less discussed, any aspect of Hazlitt's views.

In sum, Hazlitt as personal identity theorist, like Vico before him, is a fascinating example of what is sometimes dismissed as a romantic fiction: the original and penetrating thinker whose insights and perspectives are so far ahead of his own times that they drop through the cracks of history. The purpose of the present paper is to retrieve Hazlitt's account of personal identity and to explain the importance of his insights, particularly in terms of the ways in which he anticipated subsequent developments in philosophy and psychology.

Hazlitt's Insights

Hazlitt wrote that he was led to his central realizations by wondering "whether it could properly be said to be an act of virtue in anyone to sacrifice his own final happiness to that of any other person or number of persons, if it were possible for the one ever to be made the price of the other?" The question arose for him as he was reading, in d'Holbach's *System of Nature*, a speech put into the mouth of a supposed atheist at the Last Judgment. Suppose, Hazlitt wondered, I could save twenty other persons by voluntarily consenting to suffer for them. "Why," he asked, "should I not do a generous thing, and never trouble myself about what might be the consequence to myself the Lord knows when?" (133-34).

Hazlitt answered his question on behalf of common sense:

[H]owever insensible I may be to my own interest at any future period, yet when the time comes I shall feel differently about it. I shall then judge of it from the actual impression of the object, that is, truly and certainly; and as I shall still be conscious of my past feelings, and shall bitterly regret my own folly and insensibility, I ought, as a rational agent, to be determined now by what I shall then wish I had done, when I shall feel the consequences of my actions most deeply and sensibly. It is this continued consciousness of my own feelings which gives me an immediate interest in whatever relates to my future welfare, and makes me at all times accountable to myself for my own conduct. (134-35)

⁸ Bromwich, *op. cit.*, 418, n. 32. Nor have philosophers done better. For instance, James Noxon, "Hazlitt as moral philosopher," *Ethics*, 73 (1963), 279-83, gives a sympathetic account of Hazlitt's ethical views and briefly sketches Hazlitt's theory of personal identity but fails to appreciate its importance, and J. B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford, 1977), 148, mentions only that "Hazlitt in his early days wrote philosophical essays in one of which he put forward some original and interesting objections to egoism."

But Hazlitt was dissatisfied with this answer.

I cannot ... have a principle of active self-interest arising out of the immediate connection between my present and future self, for no such connection exists or is possible. I am what I am in spite of the future. My feelings, actions, and interests must be determined by causes already existing and acting, and are absolutely independent of the future. (139)

Where there is no “intercommunity of feelings,” he claimed, “there can be no identity of interests” (139).

Hazlitt conceded that in relation to the past and present, people are naturally self-interested. We remember only our own past experiences and are directly “conscious” only of our own present experiences.

[Any] absolute distinction which the mind feels in comparing itself with others [is] confined to two faculties, viz., sensation, or rather consciousness, and memory. The operation of both these faculties is of a perfectly exclusive and individual nature; and so far as their operation extends (but no farther) is man a personal, or if you will, a selfish being. (110-11)

The reasons for this, Hazlitt insisted, are physiological. Memories depend on physical traces of prior sensations, and these traces are not communicated between individuals. Present sensations depend on the stimulation of one’s nerves, and “there is no communication between my nerves, and another’s brain, by means of which he can be affected with my sensations as I am myself” (111).

In the case of the future, however, Hazlitt stressed that people are neither “mechanically” nor “exclusively” connected to themselves. They cannot be, he thought, since no one’s future yet exists. Instead, people are connected both to their own futures and to the futures of others by means of their faculties of anticipation. These, he claimed, unlike the faculties of memory and sensation, are a function of *imagination* and thus do not respect the difference between self and other:

[Imagination] must carry me out of myself into the feeling of others by one and the same process by which I am thrown forward as it were into my future being and interested in it. I could not love myself, if I were not capable of loving others. Self-love, used in this sense, is in its fundamental principle the same with disinterested benevolence. (3)

In other words, Hazlitt maintained that to feel future-oriented concern for someone, one first must project oneself imaginatively into the feelings of that

person; and imagination, functioning naturally, that is, independently of its having acquired a bias through learning, projects as easily into the feelings of others as into one's own future feelings.

Today it may seem that Hazlitt exaggerated the extent to which memory is independent of imagination and underestimated our mechanical connections to our future selves. Perhaps so. Still, he was right in insisting on there being a crucial difference in our relations at any given time to our past and future selves: we are already affected by our past selves and in a way that substantially diminishes our having to rely on imagination; and even though our present selves will mechanically connect to our future selves we are not yet affected by those connections and hence have to rely more importantly on imagination to connect psychologically to our future selves.

According to Hazlitt, people are naturally concerned about whether *someone* is pleased or suffers as a consequence of their actions (33). This is because "there is something in the very idea of good, or evil, which naturally excites desire or aversion." But, he claimed, before the acquisition of self-concepts people are indifferent about whether those who may be pleased or suffer are themselves or others: "a child first distinctly wills or pursues his own good ... not because it is his but because it is good" (34). As a consequence, "what is personal or selfish in our affections" is due to "time and habit"; the rest is due to "the principle of a disinterested love of good as such, or for it's own sake, without any regard to personal distinctions" (34). Hazlitt thought that these insights provided a basis for founding morality not on self-interest, which he regarded as an "artificial" value, but on the "natural" concern people have to seek happiness and avoid unhappiness, regardless of whose happiness it is. He concluded that "we are not obliged at last to establish generosity and virtue 'lean pensioners' on self-interest" (48-49).

Hazlitt proposed such ideas in an era when English moral theory was still dominated by the need to come to terms with psychological and ethical egoism. In the view of several philosophers, including Hazlitt, Butler had already refuted Hobbes, but the idea that humans are naturally selfish had been revived and popularized by Helvetius and d'Holbach and the new economists, following Mandeville's lead, were increasingly giving scientific sanction to the idea that the pursuit of private interest promotes the public good, thereby encouraging a tendency to base public morality on a view of humans as fundamentally self-interested. The mature Adam Smith, for instance, conceded that "it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest," which, he thought, is constrained by "the invisible hand" of competition to promote the common good.⁹

Among others whose views Hazlitt took seriously, Locke, Tucker, and Paley had held that humans are originally selfish but can subsequently

⁹ Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edward Cannon (New York, 1937), 14.

develop benevolent motives.¹⁰ Hazlitt, of course, did not accept that humans are originally selfish. Hume, Hartley, and Priestley were, like Hazlitt, sympathetic to the view that humans are neither originally selfish nor benevolent; however, they believed that humans become either selfish or benevolent by empirical “associations” of pleasure and pain. Hazlitt rejected associationism, partly on the grounds that one could not always explain through associations how people respond so quickly and competently to things they see for the first time (143–69). Butler, on the other hand, anticipated Hazlitt in thinking that humans are naturally disinterested, but he was committed to a traditional, substantial account of personal identity and rejected as patently absurd the idea that each of us does not have an absolute interest in our future selves.¹¹

Others before Hazlitt had considered the possibility that a person’s so-called future self is metaphysically an “other.” In the early eighteenth-century debate between Clarke, Boyle Lecturer and “chief lieutenant of Newton,” and Collins, a friend of Locke’s and at the onset of the debate a relative unknown, Clarke argued that on Locke’s theory personal identity would be destroyed since consciousness is not indivisible but “a Number of Particular Acts” which “perish the Moment they begin,” in effect, a “Multitude of distinct and separate Consciousnesses.”¹² This debate went through two editions by 1712 and was reprinted in 1731 and again in 1738. Hazlitt may well have been aware of it.

Nor was Hazlitt even the first to wonder about fission examples. Surprisingly, Locke was: “... it must be allowed, that if the same consciousness ... can be transferred from one thinking substance to another, it will be possible that two thinking substances may make but one person. For the same consciousness being preserved, whether in the same or different substances, the personal identity is preserved.”¹³ Reid had even commented on fission examples, albeit briefly: “This doctrine [Locke’s view of personal identity] hath some strange consequences, which the author was aware of, Such as, that, if the same consciousness can be transferred from one intelligent being

¹⁰ Howe, *op. cit.*, 77; Kinnaird, *op. cit.*, 24–25.

¹¹ Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed* (London, 1852), II, 6–8; see also, Leonard M. Trawick III, “Sources of Hazlitt’s ‘Metaphysical Discovery,’” *Philological Quarterly*, 42 (1963), 280.

¹² As soon as Locke’s views on personal identity were published they provoked a storm of protest. In addition to Clarke and Collins the disputants included Stillingfleet, Shaftesbury, Berkeley, Mandeville, Prior, Watts, and such lesser-knowns as Henry Lee, Richard Burthogge, Thomas Burnet, Catherine Trotter, Winch Holdsworth, Henry Felton, John Sergeant, and Peter Browne, as well as anonymous pamphleteers and writers in *The British Apollo* and *The Spectator*. For a few details see Christopher Fox, *Locke and the Scribblers* (Berkeley, 1988), ch. 3.

¹³ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A. C. Fraser (Oxford, 1894), bk. 2, ch. 27, sec. 13.

to another, which he thinks we cannot shew to be impossible, than two or twenty intelligent beings may be the same person.”¹⁴

Yet Hazlitt’s innovations...even apart from his revolutionary discussion of fission...are still genuine. He can be distinguished from all of his predecessors, including those who, like him, may have rejected the idea that humans are naturally selfish, first, by the degree to which he emphasized (and the uses to which he put) the thesis that people are mechanically related to their own presents and pasts but only imaginatively related to their futures: second, by his insistence that the natural use of imagination does not respect the distinction between self and other; and third, by his account of the growth of selfish motives in humans by appeal to their acquisition of self-concepts. Because of the first two of these elements in his view Hazlitt was led to ask a question which did not arise as starkly or in the same form for any of his predecessors and to which the third element was his answer: if people connect to the future through imagination, which does not respect the difference between self and other, why is the force of habit almost invariably on the side of selfish feelings?

Hazlitt answered that when very young children behave selfishly it is not because they like themselves better but because they know their own wants and pleasures better (34-35). In older children and adults, he thought, it is because they have come under the control of their self-concepts, which is something that happens in three stages. First, young children acquire an idea of themselves as beings who are capable of experiencing pleasure and pain. Second, and almost “mechanically” (since physiology insures that children remember only their own pasts), children include their own pasts in their notions of themselves. Finally, imaginatively, they include their own futures.

Hazlitt thought that to progress through all three of these stages the child must form a self-concept and that this requires that it first discriminate its own mental activities from those of others. This involves “perceiving that you are and what you are from the immediate reflection of the mind on its own operations, sensations or ideas” (105).

It is by comparing the knowledge that I have of my own impressions, ideas, feelings, powers, etc. with my knowledge of the same or similar impressions, ideas, etc. in others, and with the still more imperfect conception that I form of what passes in their minds when this is supposed to be essentially different from what passes in my own, that I acquire the general notion of self. If I had no idea of what passes in the minds of others, or if my ideas of their feelings and

¹⁴ Thomas Reid, *Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, 1785, *The Works of Thomas Reid*, ed. William Hamilton (Edinburgh, 1863). Also G. W. Leibniz, *New Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, tr. A. G. Langley (New York, 1891), 255-56.

perceptions were perfect representations, i.e., mere conscious repetitions of them, all proper personal distinction would be lost either in pure self-love, or in perfect universal sympathy. (108)

Hazlitt here is addressing the delicate issue of how the child's formation of self-concepts is related to its development of empathy and sympathy. So far as we know, no one had considered this issue before. As we shall see, developmental psychologists are preoccupied with it now.

Why, though, since our "mechanical" connections to ourselves are entirely restricted to present sensations and past memories, do young children imaginatively include only their own futures and not the futures of others in their ideas of self? Hazlitt's answer was that it is the "greater liveliness and force with which I can enter into my future feelings, that in a manner identifies them with my present being." This notion of identity being once formed, he adds, "the mind makes use of it to strengthen its habitual propensity, by giving to personal motives a reality and absolute truth which they can never have" (140). This happens, he thought, because "we have an indistinct idea of extended consciousness and a community of feelings as essential to the same thinking being"; as a consequence, we assume that whatever "interests [us] at one time must interest [us] or be capable of interesting [us] at other times" (10-11).

Hazlitt rejected as "wild and absurd" the idea that we have an "absolute, metaphysical identity" with ourselves in the future. He claimed that a bias in favor of ourselves in the future could never "have gained the assent of thinking men" but for "the force" with which a future-oriented idea of self "habitually clings to the mind of every man, binding it as with a spell, deadening its discriminating powers, and spreading the confused associations which belong only to past and present impressions over the whole of our imaginary existence" (6). We have been misled, Hazlitt thought, by language: by "a mere play of words" (6, 27).

In Hazlitt's view both children and adults fail to look beyond the common idioms of personal identity and as a consequence routinely mistake linguistic fictions for metaphysical realities. To say that someone has a "general interest" in whatever concerns his or her own future welfare "is no more," he insisted, "than affirming that [he or she] shall have an interest in that welfare, or that [he or she is] nominally and in certain other respects the same being who will hereafter have a real interest in it" (10-11). No amount of mere telling "me that I have the same interest in my future sensations as if they were present, because I am the same individual" can bridge the gulf between the "real" mechanical connections I have to myself in the past and present and the merely verbal and imaginary connections I have to myself in the future (28-29).

Since people have no mechanical connections to themselves in the future, it follows, Hazlitt thought, that so far as a person's "real" interests are

concerned, one's self in the future is essentially an other. So, for instance, if you've injured yourself (in the past), you may suffer as a consequence (in the present).

[But] the injury that I may do to my future interest will not certainly by any kind of reaction return to punish me for my neglect of my own happiness. In this sense, I am always free from the consequences of my actions. The interests of the being who acts, and of the being who suffers are never one. (31)

In sum, so far as your real self-interest is concerned, it makes no difference "whether [you] pursue [your] own welfare or entirely neglect it" (31). Your suffering in the future is only nominally your suffering.

The Philosophy of Personal Identity

From Plato until the late seventeenth century almost all Western personal identity theorists relied on the notion of a person's soul, or on some sort of non-material substance, to explain personal persistence.¹⁵ Spinoza was the first European thinker to break with this tradition, but he had only an implied theory of personal identity. Locke was the first influential personal identity theorist to develop a relational, rather than a substance, account.¹⁶ Remarkably, though, Locke accepted on faith that people have immaterial souls. His point was that even if they do, personal identity cannot be understood by appeal to them. Instead, he thought, it must be understood by appeal to something that is at least indirectly observable: a person's psychological and/or physical relations to earlier and later stages of him or herself.

Since Locke, all influential personal identity theorists have given a relational account. Until recently their battles with each other have been mainly over which relations...psychological or physical...are primary. In Locke's view psychological relations, particularly memory relations, are primary. He used his prince and cobbler example to show that because someone could remember having had experiences that he or she had while in another body people could switch bodies, a consideration thought by many to refute physical-continuity theories of *identity*. Eventually, however, physical-continuity theorists, who have tended also to give pride of place to memory, turned the tables on Lockean by giving a physical-continuity account of *memory*. Martin and Deutscher, for instance, argued in an influen-

¹⁵ There were exceptions, such as the medieval Aristotelian, Gersonides, but none that had an important impact on the subsequent personal identity debate. See Rabbi Levi ben Gershom, *The Logic of Gersonides: A Translation of Sefer ha-Heqqesh ha-Yashar*, ed. Charles H. Manekin (Dordrecht, 1992).

¹⁶ Spinoza, *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata* (c. 1679), in *Spinoza Opera*, ed. C Gebhardt (4 vols.; Heidelberg, 1924); Locke, *op. cit.*

tial paper that only genuine (as opposed to mere-seeming) memories could sustain personal identity and only memories brought about by their normal physical causes could be genuine.¹⁷

In the late 1960s a second revolution in personal identity theory was precipitated by the attempt to understand the implications of fission examples. In David Wiggins's initial illustrations a person divides amoeba-like into two or more physically and psychologically equivalent descendant persons.¹⁸ Since each such descendant bears the same relation to his or her common pre-fission ancestor, each has an equal claim to be regarded as the same person as that ancestor. Yet if both fission-descendants were the same person as the pre-fission ancestor, then by the transitivity of the identity relation...the rule that if A is identical to B, and B to C, then A is identical to C...each fission-descendant would also be the same person as the other. Since it would be bizarre to regard two (or more) such fission-descendants as the same person as each other (think, for instance, of the legal and moral complications) many theorists concluded that none of the fission-descendants is the same person as the pre-fission ancestor.

In the opinion of many philosophers, what this means is, first, that although in the situations depicted in such examples the relation between any one fission-descendant and his or her pre-fission ancestor *intrinsically* may have all that is required to preserve identity, still identity is lost (that is, the pre-fission person does not persist); and yet, second, that the pre-fission person nevertheless may obtain what matters primarily in his or her "self-interested" concern to survive. The latter can happen since from the pre-fission person's selfish point of view, transforming into fission-descendants might in the circumstances be a better selfish choice than ordinary survival.¹⁹

Such science-fiction fission scenarios had a basis in real life situations. In the late 1930s psychosurgeons began performing an operation in which they severed the corpus callosums of severe epileptics in an effort to reduce the severity of their seizures. This procedure had the bizarre side-effect, not discovered until the 1960s, of creating two independent centers of consciousness within the same human skull. These centers lacked introspective access to each other and could be made to acquire information about the world and to express it behaviorally independently of each other. Most dramatically they sometimes differed volitionally, expressing their differences using alter-

¹⁷ C. B. Martin, and Max Deutscher, "Remembering," *The Philosophical Review*, 75 (1966), 161-97.

¹⁸ David Wiggins, *Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity* (Oxford, 1967), 50.

¹⁹ David Lewis (*Philosophical Papers* [New York, 1983], I, 55-77), has questioned whether fission does undermine identity. Raymond Martin has argued ("Identity, Transformation, and What Matters in Survival," D. Kolak and R. Martin [eds.], *Self & Identity* [New York, 1991], 289-301) that non-fission examples can be used to show the relative unimportance of identity. We here stick to the fission case, asking the reader to focus on what is crucial about it...not fission but the apparently egoistically motivated trading of continued identity for other benefits.

nate sides of the same human bodies they jointly shared. For instance, one patient was reported to have hugged his wife with one arm while he pushed her away with the other; another tried with his right hand (controlled by his left, verbal hemisphere) to hold a newspaper in front of himself, thereby blocking his view of the television, while he tried with his left hand to knock the paper out of the way.²⁰

Typical of the sort of hypothetical fission examples that philosophers have considered is one in which you are asked to imagine that you have a health problem that will result soon in your sudden and painless death unless you receive one of two available treatments.²¹ The first treatment is to have your brain removed and placed into the empty cranium of a body that is otherwise qualitatively identical to your own. The second is to have your brain removed, divided into functionally identical halves (each of which, imagine, is capable of sustaining your full psychology), and then to have each of these halves put into the empty cranium of a body of its own, again one that is brainless but otherwise qualitatively identical to your own.

In the first treatment there is a ten-percent chance the transplantation will take. If it takes, the survivor who wakes up in the recovery room will be physically and psychologically like you just prior to the operation except that the survivor will know that he or she has had the operation and he or she will be healthy. In the second there is a ninety-five-percent chance both transplantations will take. If they both take, the survivors who wake up in the recovery room will be physically and psychologically like you just prior to the operation except that each of them will know that he or she has had the operation and each will be healthy. If the transplantation in the first treatment does not take, the would-be survivor will die painlessly on the operating table. If either transplantation in the second treatment does not take, then the other will not either, and both would-be survivors will die painlessly on the operating table. Everything else about the treatments...suppose...is the same and as attractive to you as possible: for instance, both are painless, free of charge, and result, if successful, in survivors who recover quickly.

Many philosophers, as we have seen, believe that identity would be retained in the first (non-fission) treatment but lost in the second (fission). But if you would persist through the first treatment but not the second, then only by sacrificing your identity can you greatly increase the chances of *someone's* surviving who is qualitatively just like you. Would it be worth it...that is, would it be worth it for egoistic (or self-regarding) reasons? Most who consider this example feel strongly that it would be, hence (apparently) that being continued by fission-descendants can matter as much, or almost as

²⁰ For more details see the essays by R. Sperry, R. Puccetti, T. Nagel, and D. Parfit, in Kolak and Martin, *ibid*.

²¹ See Sydney Shoemaker, "Personal Identity: A Materialist Account," S. Shoemaker and R. Swinburne (eds.), *Personal Identity* (Oxford, 1984), 119.

much, as personally persisting. As a consequence philosophers have been forced to face the possibility that one might survive *as someone else* whose existence one values as much as one's own and, hence, they have also been forced to divide two questions they had previously treated as one: the traditional question, "What are the necessary and sufficient conditions under which personal identity is preserved (over time)?" and the new one, "What are the conditions under which one secures (over time) what matters primarily in survival?"

Depending on which theorist is asking this new question, it may mean, "What are the conditions under which one secures what *actually does* (or, *would*, on reflection) matter primarily in survival?" or it may mean, "What are the conditions under which one secures what *rationally ought* to matter primarily in survival?" Among contemporary theorists, Shoemaker, Nozick, and Lewis have tended to focus on the former, psychological version of the new question, while Parfit and, more recently, Sosa and Unger have tended to focus on the latter, normative version.²² Neither version had been raised earlier, except by Hazlitt, who slid back and forth in his own discussion between concern with how one actually does feel about one's future self and with how "one ought as a rational agent" to feel. Until the 1960s all other personal identity theorists simply assumed that one's persisting as the same person one now is must be both what does and what should matter primarily in survival, an assumption that, if true, would guarantee that both the traditional question and the new one have the same answer. No personal identity theorist *assumes* this any more.

In assessing Hazlitt's philosophical accomplishments and potential impact it is important to remember that the seemingly new ideas that were mainly responsible for ushering in this most recent 1960s-phase of philosophical theorizing about personal identity do not require for their appreciation that one looks at the issues through the lens of any late twentieth-century philosophical theory, such as the semantics of modal logic. To be sure, some philosophers have appealed to such theories to grapple with the puzzles which fission examples have provoked. But the examples could easily have provoked the same puzzles if they had occurred to anyone a hundred or even two hundred years earlier. We now know that they did occur to someone and that they did provoke many of the same puzzles. They occurred to Hazlitt.

Over a hundred and fifty years before fission examples entered the philosophical mainstream Hazlitt asked essentially the same questions that

²² Sydney Shoemaker, "Persons and Their Pasts," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 7 (1970), 269-85, and *ibid.*; Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), ch. 1; David Lewis, *op. cit.*; Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," *The Philosophical Review*, 80 (1971), 3-27 and *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford, 1984), part III; Ernest Sosa, "Surviving Matters," *Nous*, 24 (1990), 305-30; Peter Unger, *Identity, Consciousness, and Value* (New York, 1991).

provoked the recent revolution in personal identity theory. How would the subsequent debate over personal identity have been different if mainstream theorists such as Mill and Sidgwick had grappled with Hazlitt's questions and examples? We can only speculate. So far as we know, none of them ever read Hazlitt's *Essay*. But virtually everything that produced the theoretical revolution in the 1960s was already present in Hazlitt's work. So, the ingredients were in place for Hazlitt to have had a profound affect.

It was not just in his asking the new question and in inventing a fission example to support his answer to it that Hazlitt anticipated subsequent developments. As we have seen, he also stressed that when someone remembers in any actual circumstance, there is a "mechanical" and "natural" relation between his or her memory episode, which is in the present, and the original experience of the events remembered, which is in the past. This observation by itself came close to anticipating Martin and Deutscher's influential point, made in 1966, about the implications for personal identity theory of a physical-continuity account of memory. But unlike Martin and Deutscher, Hazlitt did not use his observation about the physical basis of memory against Locke. Instead, he took seriously the possibility that in certain hypothetical circumstances, involving, say, divine intervention, "consciousness" might be continued (and hence, perhaps, memories might be preserved) by an unusual, non-physical, causal mechanism. This consideration led him directly to fission examples, which gave him a much more powerful objection to Locke.

Hazlitt's consideration of fission examples occurred in the context of his critique of the Lockean idea that one's identity extends as far as one's consciousness extends. What, Hazlitt asked, would a theorist committed to this idea say "if that consciousness should be transferred to some other being?" How would such a person know that he or she had not been "imposed upon by a false claim of identity?" (135-36). He answered, on behalf of the Lockeans, that the idea of one's consciousness extending to someone else "is ridiculous": a person has "no other self than that which arises from this very consciousness." But, he countered, after our deaths:

this self may be multiplied in as many different beings as the Deity may think proper to endue with the same consciousness; which if it can be so renewed at will in any one instance, may clearly be so in a hundred others. Am I to regard all these as equally myself? Am I equally interested in the fate of all? Or if I must fix upon some one of them in particular as my representative and other self, how am I to be determined in my choice? Here, then, I saw an end put to my speculations about absolute self-interest and personal identity. (136)

What these extraordinary observations mean is, first, that Hazlitt saw that, hypothetically, psychological continuity might not continue in a single

stream but instead might divide. Second, in asking the *two* questions...“Am I to regard all of these as equally myself? Am I equally interested in the fate of all?”...he correctly separated the question of whether *identity* tracks psychological continuity from that of whether *self-concern* tracks it. Finally, in direct anticipation of what would not occur to other philosophers until the 1960s, Hazlitt concluded that because of the possibility of fission neither identity nor self-concern necessarily tracks psychological continuity. Thus, he used his theological speculations in the same spirit and to the same effect, as philosophers in our own times have used hypothetical examples drawn from science-fiction scenarios.

Hazlitt also used fission examples to call into question whether in cases in which there is no fission a person's present self-interest extends to his or her self in the future. He began by asking:

How then can this pretended unity of consciousness which is only reflected from the past, which makes me so little acquainted with the future that I cannot even tell for a moment how long it will be continued, whether it will be entirely interrupted by or renewed in me after death, and which might be multiplied in I don't know how many different beings and prolonged by complicated sufferings without my being any the wiser for it, how I say can a principle of this sort identify my present with my future interests, and make me as much a participator in what does not at all affect me as if it were actually impressed on my senses? (138)

His answer was that it cannot.

It is plain, as this conscious being may be decomposed, entirely destroyed, renewed again, or multiplied in a great number of beings, and as, whichever of these takes place, it cannot produce the least alteration in my present being...that what I am does not depend on what I am to be, and that there is no communication between my future interests and the motives by which my present conduct must be governed. (138-39)

Hazlitt concluded:

I cannot, therefore, have a principle of active self-interest arising out of the immediate connection between my present and future self, for no such connection exists, or is possible.... My personal interest in any thing must refer either to the interest excited by the actual impression of the object which cannot be felt before it exists, and can last no longer than while the impression lasts, or it may refer to the particular manner in which I am mechanically affected by the idea of my own impressions in the absence of the object. I can therefore have

no proper personal interest in my future impressions,... The only reason for my preferring my future interest to that of others, must arise from my anticipating it with greater warmth of present imagination. (139-40)

Such ideas were not be taken seriously again until the 1960s.

The Psychology of Empathy, Sympathy, and Identification

The theoretical consideration of empathy, in something close to the way contemporary psychologists understand it, began with Spinoza but has its most significant roots in Vico and Herder, who highlighted it in their attempts to characterize historical understanding.²³ Empathy was given its classic psychological formulation by Lipps.²⁴ The theoretical consideration of sympathy began in earnest with the British moralists, especially with Hutcheson, and was discussed in England throughout the eighteenth century. It was later considered by Schopenhauer in his investigation of "compassion."²⁵ Sympathy received its classic formulation in Scheler's famous study.²⁶

In its current theoretical sense empathy occurs when one person understands a situation from another's perspective. Ordinarily this understanding has both a cognitive and an affective component. For instance, if another person is in an embarrassing situation, then to be empathic with his or her embarrassment we must understand from the embarrassed person's point of view why the situation is embarrassing as well as represent to ourselves somehow his or her embarrassed feelings. But to be empathic we do not have to feel embarrassed ourselves or feel any urge to help the other.

Sympathy requires more...not only that we be empathic with the other but also that we adopt for ourselves at least some of the other's relevant objectives through a process of identification with the other. So, for instance, if embarrassment causes someone to want to remove him or herself from an embarrassing situation, then, all else being equal, the sympathetic person will also want that the embarrassed person be removed from the situation and will be disposed to help him or her accomplish that objective.

²³ Spinoza, *op. cit.*, Pr. 27; G. B. Vico, *The New Science*, tr. T. G. Bergin and M. H. Frisch (Ithaca, 1986); L. Wispe, "The distinction between sympathy and empathy: To call forth a concept a word is needed," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50 (1986), 314-21, and *The Psychology of Sympathy* (New York, 1991).

²⁴ T. Lipps, "Einführung, inner Nachahmung, and Organempfindungen," *Archiv für die gesamte psychologie*, 2 (1903), 185-204.

²⁵ A. Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, tr. E. F. J. Payne (New York, 1965).

²⁶ M. Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, tr. P. Heath (London, 1954); cf. P. Mercer, *Sympathy and Ethics: A Study of the Relationship between Sympathy and Morality with special reference to Hume's Treatise* (Oxford, 1972).

Some contemporary theorists have supposed that both empathy and sympathy involve an appreciation of the psychological orientation of another through imaginative simulation. An empathic or sympathetic person simulates another person's point of view by imagining having that point of view, that is, either by imagining being him or herself in the other person's situation or by imagining being the other person in the other person's situation.²⁷ In both cases the empathic or sympathetic person uses his or her own mind, "off-line," to imagine the other's point of view.²⁸ In the case of sympathy such off-line empathic simulation comes partially on-line in the form of identification with the other, which includes a disposition to help the other.

Currently, there are two major theoretical alternatives to simulation accounts of empathy. According to one, empathic social understanding depends not on simulation but on appeal to a "theory of mind." According to the other, it depends on one's adopting a certain sort of "intentional stance" toward the other by which one attempts to rationalize the other's activities.²⁹

For present purposes the important point is that on any of these theoretical perspectives (simulation, theory inference, or stance adoption), for people (or animals) to appreciate the mental states or activities of another they have somehow to be able to translate a *third-person perception* of the other into something like a *first-person representation* of the other's point of view. This skill apparently requires a self-concept of some sort that can be applied to others as well as to oneself, that is, it requires a way of representing the other that is also applicable to oneself and that deserves to be called a self-concept when it is applied to oneself. Barresi and Moore have theorized that the acquisition of such a self-concept requires the prior development of an interpersonal representation of mental activities, which is formed initially to facilitate a person's conceptualization of behavioral activities that he or she engages in jointly with others. That is, in their view it is by reflecting on coordinated first- and third-person aspects of an overt activity that an agent

²⁷ G. G. Gallup, "Self-awareness and the emergence of mind in primates," *American Journal of Primatology*, 2 (1982), 237-48; Alvin Goldman, "Empathy, Mind, and Morals," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 66 (1992), 17-41; "Ethics and Cognitive Science," *Ethics*, 103 (1993), 337-60; and "The Psychology of Folk Psychology," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 16 (1993), 15-28; P. L. Harris, *Children and Emotion* (Oxford, 1989); and "From Simulation to Folk Psychology: The Case for Development," *Mind & Language*, 7 (1992), 120-44; N. Humphrey, *Consciousness Regained* (Oxford, 1984); R. Gordon, "Folk Psychology as Simulation," *Mind & Language*, 1 (1986), 158-71.

²⁸ S. P. Stich and S. Nichols, "Folk Psychology: Simulation or Tacit Theory?" *Mind & Language*, 7 (1992), 35-71.

²⁹ For references and discussion of these alternative views, see Goldman, *op. cit.*, 1992.

later becomes able to interpret *third*-person information about another's behavior in the same way as *first*-person information about him or herself.³⁰

Only humans and perhaps great apes seem to have this skill. Lower organisms, even as high as monkeys, while they may have a sophisticated repertoire of behaviors that are provoked by a third-person perception of another's activities, are unable to interpret activities of self and other from a homologous point of view. Thus, any self-concepts that lower animals may have do not provide a third-person perspective of their own activities or a first-person perspective of the activities of others. That is why lower animals cannot recognize themselves in mirrors even though they can recognize others in mirrors and also why they cannot imitate novel activities of others.

This difference between humans (and perhaps great apes) on the one hand and lower animals on the other, shows up in the relation between emotional contagion, which is widespread in both humans and animals, and empathy or sympathy. In emotional contagion...so-called "animal sympathy"...one acquires an emotion simply by observing it in another. For instance, very young infants may respond to the crying of other infants by crying themselves. Such contagion is not real empathy or sympathy, in our use of the terms, since it requires neither an understanding of the emotion as belonging to the other nor concern for the other.

Even though in emotional contagion the others whose emotional (and, sometimes, cognitive) attitudes are adopted tend to be conspecifics with whom the individual has bonded, theorists believe that lower animals always, and higher animals often, adopt these attitudes without understanding why they adopt them. If this is right, then emotional contagion is no more than a sharing of emotional orientation cued to the other's activity. That is, the sort of primitive social understanding that is available to lower animals, even though it involves distinguishing significant others from other organisms and objects, does not involve an empathic appreciation of the other's point of view or a sympathetic response to that point of view. For instance, although a maternal monkey may respond helpfully to the cries of its infant, in this view it does not interpret these cries as an expression of the infant's distress. Rather the cries simply arouse distress in the mother about the infant's situation. Support for this view comes in part from the observation that in situations where the infant monkey may be in danger but does not express its fear the mother may not act to help the infant. Thus, animal altruism based purely on emotional contagion may be just a response to the activity of others based on third-person knowledge of relations between expressive characteris-

³⁰ John Barresi and C. Moore, "Sharing a Perspective Precedes the Understanding of that Perspective," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 16 (1993), 513-14; "Knowledge of the psychological states of self and others is not only theory-laden but also data-driven," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 16 (1993), 61-62; and "Intentional Relations and Social Understanding," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, in press.

tics and likely causes or consequents. By contrast truly empathic organisms can appreciate the needs of others as such whether or not the others themselves are aware of their own needs. This is because empathic organisms can interpret the meaning of situations from another's point of view even in the absence of expressive activity by the other.

In humans, unlike lower animals, emotional contagion is typically a stage on the way to affective empathy and sympathy. As Hoffman in particular has shown, there is in a human child, from about ten to eighteen months of age, a gradual development of its ability to understand the source of its contagiously acquired emotions.³¹ For instance, an infant of ten months typically responds to the distress (crying) of another by becoming distressed itself, but then it consoles only itself while ignoring the other. Later, apparently realizing that it shares a common emotion with the other, it intermittently consoles the other as well as itself. Eventually, the infant may no longer cry itself but, now recognizing that it is the other who is sad, may simply try to console the other. Subsequently, the normal child's sympathetic responses show an increasing sensitivity to the particular needs of the other, not merely by consoling the other but by responding more specifically to the other's mental states and motivations based on a better appreciation of the other's point of view.

In sum, when lower animals either provide aid to those under their care or take advantage of others in situations where identity of interests does not occur, it is due not to concern or lack of concern for the other but to their pursuing ends toward which they are moved by the situation, without regard to whether these ends are in their own or another's interests. That is, lower animals and, as Hazlitt suggested, very young humans are simply unaware of the distinction between their own interests and those of others since they are not even aware of interests as such. However, at the critical developmental transition of a year and a half the human child is perfectly balanced between egoism and altruism. It is able to recognize that its spontaneous "animal" sympathy to another's distress is not a response to its own situation, which it can now recognize as different from another's, yet it still feels an impulse to relieve the distress it experiences by helping the other. Such spontaneous altruism sometimes issues in actions apparently against the child's own long-term self-interest, such as when the child gives its favorite doll to the other. It is only with repeated experience that the child can begin to recognize the potential for conflict between its current sympathetic response to others and its own current or long-term interests, and it is only through acquiring a habit of thinking about and identifying with its own current or future interests that the child learns to inhibit spontaneous sympathy in favor of self-interest.

³¹ M. L. Hoffman, "Empathy, its development and prosocial implications," C. B. Keasey (ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Social Cognitive Development* (Lincoln, 1977), XXV.

Contemporary studies, then, suggest that initially children are neither self-interested nor other-interested, neither altruists nor egoists, but only later become so. Such studies thus support Hazlitt's claim that children are "naturally disinterested," at least in relation to the future. They also suggest that he was substantially correct in emphasizing the importance of acquiring self-concepts in the development of self-interest as a motivating force. In addition, by assigning an important role in empathy to representing others' points of view and in sympathy to determining appropriate responses to others' needs, such studies support Hazlitt's insistence on the importance of imagination in the development of moral sensibility. Finally, such studies tend to confirm Hazlitt's view that learning to be self-interested depends on the development of forms of identification that connect the child to itself in the future and separate it from others.

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