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MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility Without Identity

By David Shoemaker

IT IS THOUGHT TO BE A PLATITUDE THAT “ONE CAN BE MORALLY RESPONSIBLE ONLY for one’s own actions.” Call this *Platitude*. For many philosophers, *Platitude* entails what I call *Slogan*: moral responsibility presupposes personal identity.¹ In other words, for someone now to be morally responsible for some past action Φ , this person must be *the same person as* the agent of Φ . Those philosophers who accept *Slogan* disagree over specifics. Some believe that what responsibility presupposes is *numerical* identity, while others believe that what it presupposes is *narrative* identity. And in the former group, there is even more disagreement about which specific criterion of personal identity properly applies to responsibility. What they all do agree on, though, is that responsibility presupposes identity of *some kind*, that some version of *Slogan* is true. Nevertheless, *Slogan* is false. Moral responsibility has nothing to do with personal identity, of any stripe. This is the case even granting the truth of *Platitude*. It is my aim in this paper to show why.

Background issues

WHAT IS MEANT, FIRST OF ALL, BY “MORAL RESPONSIBILITY”? THERE ARE MULTIPLE conceptions.² Because most adherents of *Slogan* are primarily interested in discussing the metaphysics of personal identity, though, which conception they have in mind typically remains underspecified. A clear understanding is essential, though. What most often comes out is a worry about *accountability*, and this is sometimes taken to mean the following: I cannot appropriately be held to account, that is, *punished*, for some action (read: “crime”) unless I was the person who performed it.³ This way of putting it might suggest that worries about reasons of justice or fairness are at the root of *Slogan*: I cannot *justly* be punished for someone else’s crimes. This cannot be right, though. For one thing, accountability is not restricted to criminal activity. Not only do we seem to hold each other to account for bad actions that are not crimes (for example, laughing at a “friend” behind his back), but we also hold one another accountable for *positive* actions, actions for which we express our gratitude or admiration, say. For another thing, once we admit this last point, we can see that, while considerations of justness or fairness are surely relevant to our expressions of blame—it would indeed be unjust to sanction someone wrongly, for example, for something *no*

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one in fact did—they do not seem to constitute our most fundamental normative considerations in assessments of accountability. To see what I mean, consider the fact that it would not necessarily be unjust, say, to *praise* someone wrongly for something, for example, for me to express gratitude to you for what I thought was your pushing me out of the way of an oncoming car when in fact that was done by a strong gust of wind. But while my praising you is not unjust or unfair, it is nevertheless inappropriate in another sense. The inappropriateness consists in its not being *fitting*, that is, you do not merit praise. So it must be the *felicity conditions* for one's being praised or blamed for Φ that include one's being identical to the agent of Φ . And if any of the felicity conditions for being held accountable for Φ are not met, that would be sufficient for one's not *being* accountable for Φ .⁴

What, then, are these felicity conditions? I take *Platitude* to state one such condition for being accountable for Φ , namely, Φ must be *attributable* to the accountable agent: the current accountable agent must be its "owner."⁵ It would not be fitting, in other words, for me to hold you accountable for some past action if it were not your own, that is, if it were not properly attributable to you *qua* agent.⁶ Otherwise, holding accountable would be senseless. This is because, in the standard case, *agents*—robust entities still in existence—are held accountable for *actions*—often merely momentary events no longer in existence—so for the latter to ground an assessment of the former, they must be inexorably tied to the former as their expression in the world.⁷ In other words, we do not merely condemn bad actions, say; rather, we condemn bad agents for bad actions, and it makes sense to do so only insofar as these actions are visible, worldly manifestations of those agents in some essential respect. *Platitude* thus ties accountability to attributability.

Slogan, then, ties attributability to identity. The idea seems natural: if some past action is now mine for purposes of my being held accountable for it, then its "mineness" must consist in my being identical to the agent who performed it. This way of putting it thus calls for an explication of ownership/attributability in terms of a criterion of identity, so believers in *Slogan* typically attempt to insert the central feature of their favorite criterion of personal identity directly into *Platitude*, asserting in so doing that what makes an action one's own is just whatever personal identity consists in. After all, if some past action is now mine in virtue of the fact that I was the person who performed it, then what makes that past person's actions now mine is just *whatever made him me*. On this methodology, the plausibility of criteria of identity increases or decreases in tandem with the plausibility of their entailed criteria of attributability. As it turns out, though, and as I will show, all proposed criteria of attributability are implausible. This suggests something deeply flawed about the methodology, a flaw based on a mistaken assumption on which the entire enterprise is founded. In pointing out this flaw, I hope to clear the path for a very different approach to understanding the nature of *Platitude* and the felicity conditions for accountability thereby.

It is worth testing the patience of some readers for the sake of clarity for all, so let me briefly restate the ostensible relation between the various conceptions here. In *Platitude*, attributability is taken to be a necessary condition for accountability. In *Slogan*, the central feature of a criterion of personal identity—its set of necessary and sufficient conditions—is taken to be precisely the central

feature of the criterion of attributability, so determining what makes an action one's own is just a matter of figuring out the right criterion of identity and applying its necessary and sufficient conditions in addition to action ownership. I am here granting the truth of *Platitude*. The theorists earlier cited take *Platitude* to entail *Slogan*. I deny the entailment. To see why, we will allow for now the methodology of these theorists and proceed by attempting to figure out which antecedent criterion of personal identity, if any, best enables us to fill in the following blank: *what makes some past action one's own now is* _____.

Lockean consciousness⁸

JOHN LOCKE WAS THE FIRST TO DRAW AN EXPLICIT CONNECTION BETWEEN ACCOUNTABILITY and personal identity. He called "person" a *forensic term*, "appropriating actions and their merit" (Locke 1694). In other words, a person (as opposed to the organism-referencing term "man") is the only entity to which actions—and praise and blame for such actions—are properly attributable. Because Locke (1694) defined "person" as essentially a self-conscious being—an entity capable of being conscious of its own consciousness—he took the identity of persons across time to consist in a preservation of that same consciousness across time, and so "as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person." Insofar as "consciousness" is typically taken to refer to memory,⁹ the Lockean criterion of identity is thus, roughly, the following: X at t_1 is the same person as Y at t_2 if and only if Y's consciousness extends backwards to X, that is, Y remembers the thoughts and actions of X.

In applying the central feature of this criterion of identity to attributability, Locke filled in the blank as follows: what makes some past action one's own now is *that one now has consciousness—memory—of it*. As he puts it, "[C]onsciousness, as far as ever it can be extended . . . unites existences and actions, very remote in time into the same person, as well as it does the existences and actions of the immediately preceding moment: so that whatever has the consciousness of present and past actions, is the same person to whom they both belong" (Locke 1694). Furthermore, "This personality extends itself beyond present existence to what is past, only by consciousness, whereby it becomes concerned and accountable, owns and imputes to itself past actions, just upon the same ground and for the same reason that it does the present" (Locke 1694). Consciousness thus provides the criterion of attributability in virtue of its provision of the criterion of identity: my consciousness of some past action makes me identical to its agent and so is precisely what renders that action my own, imputable to me for purposes of accountability. Indeed, it is just its purported plausibility in accounting for attributability-with-respect-to-accountability that renders the consciousness/memory relation plausible in the first place as a criterion of personal identity.

In assessing this view (and the others to come), we will be asking the following question: does the proposed criterion of identity in fact deliver the right criterion of attributability-with-respect-to-accountability? If not, and if the plausibility of the proposed criterion of identity depends (at least in part) on its plausibility in accounting for attributability, then the criterion of identity itself loses plausibility.

On this test, the Lockean view fails pretty miserably, as it is susceptible to some very persuasive counterexamples. Consider *Drunken Mel*: suppose Mel has gotten very drunk and then, when pulled over by the cops, goes on an anti-Semitic tirade against the arresting officer. When he wakes up in jail the next morning, Mel truly does not remember a thing. Is the tirade the night before still attributable to him for purposes of moral assessment? Most people would say yes without hesitation. Locke, however, explicitly says no: if he genuinely did not remember saying what he said, then he's not accountable for it, precisely because it was not his action. But this assessment is deeply counterintuitive. Indeed, there is a further, more troubling point to be made here. As it turns out, some criminal actions may actually *cause* memory loss. In particular, up to 45% of murderers black out after the crime and wind up losing all memories of it, and this is true of the perpetrators of other violent crimes as well, such as rape and aggravated assault.¹⁰ Clearly, though, we do not want to let these criminals off the hook. These are still *their* actions, we want to say, regardless of whether or not they remember them. Consciousness is thus not necessary for ownership.¹¹

It is also not sufficient. Consider *Criminal Carl*: suppose Carl steals a car and then has his memory trace of that action copied into Innocent Ida's brain. Ida then wakes up from the surgery and seems to remember furtively looking around an unfamiliar street one night, smashing open a nearby car's window with a tire iron, hotwiring it, and then driving away. This action is clearly not "hers" for purposes of moral assessment, even though she now has consciousness of it.¹²

The central feature of Locke's proposed criterion of identity—consciousness—cannot constitute the central feature of the criterion of ownership for *Platitude*. It would seem, then, that this inadequacy renders his criterion of identity less plausible, and so what we need is just a better criterion of identity to deliver the content of *Slogan*.

The biological criterion

ACCORDING TO THE BIOLOGICAL CRITERION OF PERSONAL IDENTITY, X , A PERSON, AT t_1 IS THE SAME INDIVIDUAL AS Y AT SOME OTHER TIME IF AND ONLY IF X IS BIOLOGICALLY CONTINUOUS WITH Y ¹³. In other words, as long as some humans X and Y have the same essential animal nature, they are one and the same metaphysical object. Inserting this central feature into the criterion of ownership, then, we get the following: what makes some past action one's own now is that it was performed by an individual human organism with whom one is now biologically continuous.

This view seems to account for both counterexamples to Locke. In response to *Drunken Mel*, we want to say that the drunken tirade is attributable to sober-Mel, even though he does not remember it, and appeal to the Biological Criterion could explain this by pointing out that it's his action in virtue of its having been performed by the same human organism he is now. The view could also account for *Criminal Carl*, for even if Ida has consciousness of Carl's thievery, it would still not be *her* action insofar as she is not biologically continuous with Carl.

Nevertheless, the account is quite flawed. Consider *Cerebrum Transfer*: suppose that I have robbed a bank, and then my entire cerebrum is transplanted

into another body's brain (itself devoid of a cerebrum). Stipulate that the person who wakes up will be exactly like me psychologically, that he will have apparent memories of the crime, that he will share all of my criminal values, and that he will have inherited my intention to go on a spending spree after waking up (and does so). On our application of the Biological Criterion, he will not be me—my human organism will just not be his—and so consequently my actions will not be his either: it would thus be a mistake to attribute the crime I committed to him. But this conclusion will strike most of us as itself a mistake.¹⁴ Instead, there is still a significant relation between him and me—a psychological relation—that seems clearly to make it appropriate to attribute my actions to him (and thus to hold him accountable for what I have done). To say that my actions are not his will be a great joke to him, believing as he will that he has gotten away scot free with the crime. Biological continuity is thus not necessary for attributability.

Now an advocate of the Biological Criterion might respond, as David DeGrazia (2005) in fact does, by saying that "in the world as we know it," biological continuity is in fact necessary for the sort of psychological relation on which we seem to be relying. But this reply misses the point. What we are looking for is a *criterion* of the ownership of actions, an explanatory story about what makes various past actions properly attributable to one's current self. Biological continuity, even if one necessary ingredient in real-life cases, fails to provide any relevant *explanation* of what is obviously a psychological matter, though: attributability, and thus accountability, obviously has to do with one's performance of actions—the execution of certain intentions—as well as one's being a legitimate subject of various assessments for them, that is, one's being in a position to hear, be receptive to, and respond to praise or blame, along with one's being subject to experiencing various emotions associated with these reactions and judging the fairness or appropriateness of the original assessments. But all of these are psychological states, and they are the only states that are relevant to a criterion of attributability.

Biological continuity is also not sufficient for attributability. Consider *Sudden Fugue*: suppose Johann abruptly enters into a fugue state that lasts two years, during which time he is called "Sebastian." Sebastian is very different from Johann psychologically, and he spends his time moving from place to place and committing minor immoralities. After two years, Johann abruptly wakes up again without a clue as to where he is or where he's been. He eventually finds his family but never remembers what happened during the missing two years, despite seeing pictures of Sebastian from various surveillance cameras. If we insist on applying the Biological Criterion to *Slogan*, the Sebastian-actions would have to be attributable to Johann, but this seems false. A biological approach to ownership just will not do.

The psychological criterion

THE NATURAL MOVE AT THIS POINT, THEN, WOULD BE TO EMBRACE AND APPLY THE Psychological Criterion of personal identity, according to which X , a person, at t_1 is the same individual as Y at some other time if and only if Y is uniquely psychologically continuous with X , where psychological continuity consists in

an overlapping chain of a sufficient number of direct psychological connections (which includes memory connections but also appeals to other psychological connections: intentions fulfilled in action, persisting beliefs/desires/goals, and similarity of character traits).¹⁵ Inserting this account into the criterion of ownership, then, we get the following: what makes some past action one's own now is *its having been performed by someone with whom one is now uniquely psychologically continuous*.

Even if we restrict our attention to cases "in the world as we know it," the Psychological Criterion is much more directly relevant to attributability, and thus to accountability, than the Biological Criterion, for it includes those features we think essential to responsibility-assessments, namely, intentions, beliefs, emotional dispositions, and so on. And it is because the Psychological Criterion is also constituted by these other relations, in *addition* to the memory relation, that it is able to account for all our previously troublesome cases. For instance, it allows us to maintain in *Drunken Mel*—even more plausibly than in the application of the Biological Criterion—that despite the fact that sober-Mel remembers nothing of his tirade, those are still his actions in virtue of the fact that he is psychologically continuous with drunken-Mel: the two stages remain strongly psychologically connected in all the psychological relations *other than* memory (compare, Glannon 1998). Furthermore, with respect to *Criminal Carl*, the application of the Psychological Criterion helps us see why Locke's view gives the wrong answer: it takes much more than a single memory of an action for it to be one's own; instead, psychological continuity with that agent requires a significant number of overlapping psychological connections. Alternatively, were there a significant number of those connections actually in place, the psychological continuity established would thereby be sufficient to attach ownership of actions to the psychological continuant, so this view can also explain ownership in *Cerebrum Transfer*. Finally, in *Sudden Fugue*, it looks as if there just is no psychological continuity between Johann and Sebastian, and so there would be, on the psychological continuity approach, no ownership relations between Johann and the Sebastian-actions, which also seems correct.

Notwithstanding these successes, though, the view still faces worrisome counterexamples. Consider *Gradual Fugue*: suppose that the transformations from Johann to Sebastian and back occur gradually (the product of a tumor that grows and then wanes, say), such that psychological continuity is preserved all along. Regardless of such continuity, the Sebastian-actions still do not seem to belong to Johann: while he now remembers them, he nevertheless repudiates them as the actions of someone with a very different psychological make-up and motivational set, actions that seem to Johann as those of a stranger, inexplicable in motivation and justification. Nevertheless, a psychological continuity view of ownership implies that the Sebastian-actions *do* belong to Johann. Psychological continuity is thus insufficient for attributability.

It is also unnecessary. Consider *Disproportionately Disciplined Doug*: suppose that Doug gently mocks a young girl and then is beaten up so badly by her parents that the beaten-up inheritor of Doug's body in the morning is psychologically discontinuous with Doug (given that there is an insufficient number of psychological connections between him and Doug), but nevertheless

suppose the beaten-up person retains a memory of mocking the child and still has a small number of beliefs, desires, and character traits that were nevertheless essential to his being moved to mock her. Here I suspect we would agree that the mocking-action is still attributable to the assault survivor, despite the fact that he is not psychologically continuous with Doug (and so is not Doug, on this view).

What this suggests is that only a certain *subset* of psychological relations is relevant to ownership. The puzzle, then, is to figure out how to identify that subset. One popular way to do so is with reference to the agent's *attitudes* toward certain psychological relations.

The narrative criterion

THE *GRADUAL FUGUE* AND *DISPROPORTIONATELY DISCIPLINED DOUG* CASES, SO DIFFICULT for an application of the Psychological Criterion to handle, seem tailor made for showing off the strengths of what is known as the *narrative identity* view. On this account, the type of personal identity relevant to practical concerns like moral responsibility is not a matter of our answering a *reidentification* question—"What makes X at t_1 numerically identical to Y at t_2 ?"—but is rather a matter of our answering a *characterization* question—"What makes various experiences and actions occurring at different times those of one person?" That is to say, on the characterization conception the question of identity and the question of attributability amount to precisely the same question, and the sense of identity involved in the answer given will be the one to which we refer when talking about an *identity crisis*, an uncertainty about who one really is. To understand the unified personhood delivered by an answer to the characterization question, consider by way of contrast a living, thinking, persisting human organism, something to which various experiences merely *happen* over time. The difference between such an individual and a full-fledged person is that the various experiences in a person's life are somehow going to be unified in virtue of them all being *attributable* to her. To find a criterion of attributability, then, is just to find a criterion of (characterization) identity.

What is that criterion? According to the narrative identity theorist, what makes various experiences properly attributable to one person is that they are "part of a single identity-constituting narrative" (Schechtman 1996). On this view, the unity of narrative persons (or narrative egos) is provided by the agent's subjective attitude towards—his tale-telling incorporation of—his actions. Consequently, this account of identity just amounts to the following criterion of ownership: what makes some past action one's own now is *its being correctly included as an event in the self-told story of one's life*.¹⁶ As Schechtman (1996) puts it, "What it means for an action to be part of someone's narrative is for it to flow naturally from the rest of her life story—to be an intelligible result of her beliefs, values, desires, and experiences," and "[t]he more an action seems to stem from a coherent and stable pattern of values, desires, goals, and character traits, the more it seems under a person's control [and so determines the degree of accountability assigned]." Alternatively, the more inexplicable some action—the harder it is to fit within the narrative of one's life—the less accountability one has for it, insofar as it is difficult to see it as one's own, as flowing from one's genuine self. Another way some narrative theorists put this is in terms of *identification*: to the extent one

actively identifies with some past action, that is also the extent to which one owns it and is thus eligible for accountability for it.

How does this view resolve the previously puzzling cases? In *Gradual Fugue*, Johann would not be taken to own the Sebastian-actions, given how inexplicable those actions were within the self-told narrative of his life as a whole. They did not at all flow from the beliefs, values, and desires he now has (or had prior to the tumor), and so are in no way representative of *him*, of the genuine self that Johann had developed (and has since regained). He does not, and likely cannot, identify with Sebastian. In *Disproportionately Disciplined Doug*, on the other hand, insofar as Doug's mocking-action flowed from the motivational beliefs, values, and/or desires that persist in the beaten-up person—and he still remembers mocking as well—that beaten-up person may still identify with that action; it thus still belongs to him. In either case, then, the degree of psychological connectedness itself that obtains is far less important than the person's *attitudes* toward those various connections.

Narrative identity seems to handle all the other cases as well. In *Drunken Mel*, insofar as the drunken action flowed from his persisting beliefs and values, Mel could easily incorporate it into the narrative of his life, regardless of whether or not he remembers performing it (as long as he was informed about it—see below), so he would come to own that action, rendering it part of his unified person-life and rendering him eligible for accountability for it thereby. In *Criminal Carl*, the one action of Carl's that Ida "remembers" is so incongruent with her own set of beliefs and values that it could not intelligibly be included in her life story, a result again compatible with our intuition that she does not own Carl's action. Finally, in *Cerebrum Transfer*, the inheritor of my cerebrum will be exactly similar to me psychologically, and so of course he will inherit the beliefs, values, and desires that were central to my action. Indeed, insofar as he will continue to think he's me, it will be no surprise when he incorporates my actions into his life's narrative, rendering them, on this theory, his own.

There are problems with the theory on its own terms (not the least of which is its vagueness), but the main problem for our purposes is that it goes too far in the subjective direction. Suppose Johann comes to identify with the Sebastian-actions after all by incorporating them into his biography (perhaps to explain his current charitable contributions to tumor research). Just because he claims to take on ownership of the Sebastian-actions, however, this does not yet seem sufficient to render them his: we are likely inclined to continue judging them as being just as much not attributable to him as we were when he was alienated from them. Subjective incorporation into one's narrative is insufficient for ownership.

It is also unnecessary. In constructing my narrative, I may forget several details, edit some out as unimportant, or deceive myself about their happening to me in the first place. Do those actions then cease to be attributable to me? Of course not. Suppose Mel were never informed about his tirade. His failure to remember it, and thus his failure to incorporate that action into his life story, would nevertheless be irrelevant to the fact that he still owns that action.

The mistake being made here is found in an assumption linked to the narrative identity theorist's sole emphasis on the subjective, first-personal

nature of the narrativity at issue, namely, that the process by which various characteristics become properly attributable to me is both active and reflective. In other words, the narrative view says that various past actions are mine only insofar as I *gather them up* via my active storytelling about my life. But this is a serious mischaracterization of the ways in which our selves are often actually constructed, for much of who we are is determined *passively*, a process during which we also *lack* self-knowledge.

Identification, the process by which some psychological trait, experience, or action is rendered one's own, has long been thought of as distinctively active, a product of my reflective endorsement.¹⁷ But it's easy enough to think of cases where this is not the way it works at all, cases in which all that reflection does is *reveal* to the agent what he's already identified with and in which active endorsement is more like a command of the British queen to do what her parliament has already enacted: redundant and ineffectual.¹⁸ To see this, return to *Drunken Mel*. Suppose once Mel sobers up he both fails to remember the anti-Semitic tirade and he actively rejects ownership of his actions. Even after he views the Cop-Cam recording of the incident, he continues to reject ownership, but at that point he nevertheless starts to notice little things about himself, such as the fact that he has, over the years, avoided friendships and working relationships with Jews who had given him repeated opportunities to do so, that he had a few anti-Semitic jokes in his "repertoire" that he did not think were that offensive, and that he often had negative thoughts about Jews when he would see certain names in print. He eventually comes to recognize, then, that he *does* identify with that anti-Semitic guy on the Cop-Cam, indeed that *he had all along*, and that that was precisely the action he should have expected he would perform when his inhibitions were lowered with alcohol. This recognition, though, does not involve an active endorsement at all; instead, it's just an admission of a *pre-existing* identification, one that in fact he had been actively trying to deny, to no avail. It is his action whether he likes it or not, in other words, whether it fits intelligibly into his overall narrative or not.

Now a narrative theorist might well respond that we have shown precisely how Mel's drunken tirade in fact *does* fit into an intelligible narrative, that it makes sense only within the framework of an even much longer story, likely including his experiences as a child, listening to his deeply anti-Semitic father denying the Holocaust, say. This response misses the point, however, for just because one might be able to provide an intelligible narrative within which various experiences and actions are united, that's not at all to say that it's the narrative itself that *unites* them, that makes those experiences and actions one's own, events with which one identifies. Instead, as Mel's case makes clear, any narrative told in this sort of instance will merely be a way of pointing out *preexisting patterns*, a recounting and categorization of identifications, not a creation of them. This sort of case, then, is one of passive identification, identification that takes place without one's knowledge or active consent, and as such it is an objective matter, a fact independent of one's active endorsement, self-conception, or storytelling abilities.

Of course active identification may well still occur. My point here is simply that narrative identity is irrelevant for attributability, and thus accountability. It

incorporates both too much and too little: too much, insofar as there may be actions that are part of a narrative that are not properly attributable to the narrator; too little, insofar as it ignores cases of passive identification, and if it does incorporate them it does so only by overlaying a narrative structure onto a pre-existing set of identifications with the actions in question. But in any event narrative identity has nothing to do with what *makes* various actions my own. Thus, because the narrative identity theorists have explicitly made their theory of identity stand or fall with the plausibility of their criterion of attributability, it falls.

Two Universally Troublesome Cases

WE HAVE BEEN EXPLORING WHETHER ANY THEORY OF IDENTITY CONTAINS AS ITS CENTRAL feature some relation that could plausibly serve to explain attributability in a way that grounds the move from *Platitude* to *Slogan*. I have argued that none of the theories of identity—psychological, biological, or narrative—does so. On their admitted methodology, then, these theories of identity must be rendered less plausible.

Perhaps, though, there are responses to the counterexamples I have raised, so that one or more of the theories can still deliver *Slogan*. In this section I want to offer a couple of cases that are going to be difficult for any such *Sloganeer* to handle, and in the next section I want to diagnose the fundamental problem with *Slogan* itself. The cases I will discuss here are familiar, but they are targeted at theories of *numerical* identity, so I need to say something briefly about why narrative identity will not just escape the net. While narrative identity indeed is not a theory of numerical identity itself, nevertheless it in fact presupposes some such theory. After all, in order to persist as narrating persons, we ourselves (the metaphysical units constituting or giving rise to the narrators) must continue to exist (DeGrazia 2005). Consequently, whatever theory of numerical identity it presupposes (it is actually compatible with both psychological and biological views) will have serious trouble with the following two cases.

Start with *Physical Fission*: suppose that I split down the middle and my two halves re-grow their missing halves, resulting in two people who are exactly similar to me, both psychologically and biologically.¹⁹ Given that the numerical identity relation is one-one, and my relation to the fission products is one-many, the relation between them and me cannot be numerical identity. So it looks as if the only plausible account of this case from within any standard view of numerical identity is that I do not survive, that the two fission products are two new individuals. Adopting any of the criteria of personal identity for the criterion of ownership, then, yields the conclusion that neither fission product owns any of my actions (and if narrative identity presupposes numerical identity, none of the post-fission actions or experiences could be narratively unified with my pre-fission actions or experiences). So if I had performed some immorality and then undergone fission, that pre-fission action could not be properly attributable to anyone anymore, despite the fact that *two* people would “remember” doing my deeds and relish the feeling of having gotten away with them (and they would, in addition, be exactly like me in every respect). And if attributability is necessary for accountability, neither fission product could be accountable (to any degree) for my actions. This will strike many of us as the wrong answer, however—surely

my actions are (at least partially) attributable to *both* fission products—and so the fission case seems to thwart the viability of any relationship between accountability and numerical identity.

One way to deal with *Physical Fission* could be to maintain that there were actually two people all along. This is the four-dimensionalist reply (see, for example, Lewis 1976, Noonan 1989, and Sider 2001). Very roughly, the view is that persons have not only spatial parts but also temporal parts. This allows there to be overlapping temporal stages of two (or more) distinct persons. Just as two different roads may overlap for certain spatial stretches, so two different persons might spatially overlap for certain temporal stretches. Indeed, this is the purported resolution of the fission puzzle: my two fission products simply overlapped pre-fission. Both persons were in existence all along, but their temporal stages spatially coincided up until the time they were separated at fission. In this way, then, we can preserve the alleged relation between accountability and identity while also preserving our intuitions about attributability in the fission case: an action performed by the shared person-stage pre-fission is properly attributable to both fission products insofar as both performed it. Indeed, claims Sider (2001), the success of the four-dimensionalist view in accounting for this puzzle case (while preserving all the relevant intuitions and platitudes) provides key support for the view.

In reply, it is important to note first of all that four-dimensionalism is a general ontological picture and not a criterion of numerical identity. Indeed, on four-dimensionalism, the question of what makes some individual at t_1 numerically identical to some individual at t_2 is simply the wrong sort of question to ask. A person (or human individual, say) is typically thought of as a four-dimensional space-time worm, an object numerically identical only with itself, and any such individual to which we may point at any specific moment in time is technically merely a time-slice, or person-stage, of that general four-dimensional object. The question of identity across time, then, becomes a question about *unity-relations* for the four-dimensionalist: what makes a person-stage at t_1 part of the same person as a person-stage at t_2 , that is, what *unifies* those temporally-distinct stages into those of one person?²⁰

What’s relevant for our investigation is that the four-dimensionalist ontological view implies nothing whatsoever about the nature of that unity relation (compare, Sider 2001). It could be a biological relation, a memory relation, a more robust psychological relation, or a narrative relation; none is favored by the ontology itself. But what this means is that if one appeals to four-dimensionalism to handle the fission case en route to establishing a relation between identity and accountability, that ontology alone fails to provide any explication whatsoever of what identity (or unity, in this case) consists in. Instead, one must bring to the table one or the other criteria of identity/unity in order to *supplement* it with the four-dimensionalist ontology. But then the other counterexamples already discussed are still relevant: someone who wants to insert a Lockean, Biological, or Psychological Criterion into the criterion for ownership still has to find a way to deal with *those* cases. In other words, because four-dimensionalism is silent about the nature of identity/unity, it is silent about the nature of ownership or its relation to accountability. All it does is (perhaps) help one get out of the fission

jam, but this is not going to be sufficient to help the theories of identity we have discussed get out of their other attributability-related jams. Consequently, while some advocates of four-dimensionalism have touted its facility in dealing with the fission-and-accountability case as a boost for the prospects of the ontology, it actually seems that because of their prior need for a plausible unity relation explicating the relation between identity and *attributability* (granting that they accept *Slogan*), these advocates have jumped the gun.

Nevertheless, suppose an advocate of one of our theories of identity were able to construct a unity relation adequate for dealing with all the counterexamples. Were one then to couple that theory of identity/unity with four-dimensionalism, it seems one might well be able to deal with fission, and one could have defended *Slogan* in so doing. This hypothetical strategy is undermined, however, by consideration of *Branch-Line* (a variation on Parfit 1984 and Olson 1997). Suppose that I perform some immoral action today and then while I sleep tonight I am secretly duplicated by some mad scientists who then kill me in a few days, cremate my body, and secretly insert the duplicate into my place. The duplicate, it seems clear, cannot be me.²¹ Nevertheless, it seems that my actions are still attributable to him for purposes of accountability. The pull of this intuition has its most compelling source in a vivid representation of the phenomenology of the duplicate. He will come into existence full-blown thinking he is me, and he will (quasi-)remember my actions, will delight in thinking that he's gotten away with the immorality, will carry out my intention to celebrate the immorality, and so forth. Once we imaginatively project ourselves into his mental terrain and appreciate that he is psychologically exactly similar to the *real* me, it becomes extraordinarily difficult to resist the verdict that my actions are properly attributable to him as well, that he is just as eligible for being held accountable as I am.

Here our intuitions about attributability are essentially the same as they are in the initial fission case, but now a four-dimensionalist rejoinder will lead one astray. This is because identity simply does not obtain between the duplicate and me, so any effort to hitch one's identity wagon to four-dimensionalism in order to explain how my actions are attributable to the duplicate will wind up with a very implausible criterion of identity/unity (a criterion Olson 1997, p. 60, calls incoherent). No plausible criterion of identity, therefore—even if it can avoid the earlier counterexamples and is supplemented (as a unity relation) by a four-dimensionalist ontology—provides an adequate account of how accountability presupposes personal identity.

Responsibility without identity

WHAT EXPLAINS THE REPEATED FAILURE OF ATTEMPTS TO LINK IDENTITY WITH accountability? I believe it is the fact that, while accountability does presuppose attributability, attributability simply does not entail identity. In this section I will offer two general arguments for this point. The first is that there is a key structural difference between the attributability and identity relations. The second is that attributability may obtain in real-life cases of *non*-identity.

Start with the structural point. One of the essential general requirements of numerical identity is uniqueness. Numerical identity is a one-one relation,

obtaining between one and only one individual at two different times. Ownership/attributability, on the other hand, may be one-many. There are several ways to see this point.

I begin (perhaps rather weakly) with an analogy. Note that the ownership relation in other contexts does not entail identity for precisely this reason. The point is most obvious in the case of property ownership. Consider this platitude: *I can be taxed only on my own property, and never on someone else's*. In one sense this is true, but in another sense it is false. It is true that I cannot be taxed on your property if it is *exclusively* yours; it is false that I cannot be taxed on your property, however, if you and I *share* ownership of the property in question. We could accept, then, that a person can only be taxed on her own property, and that one person cannot be taxed on anyone else's property, without having to accept that taxation presupposes exclusive property ownership: identity must be one-one, while property ownership may be one-many, so property ownership does not entail identity.

Similarly, then, we could accept that a person can only be accountable for her own actions, and that one person cannot be accountable for anyone else's actions, without having to accept that accountability presupposes numerical identity. The reason is that there are two senses in which to take the phrase "I cannot be accountable for someone else's actions." It is true that I cannot be accountable for actions that are *exclusively* yours; it may be false, though, that I cannot be accountable for actions of which we *share* ownership. Indeed, this seems to be the most plausible description of what occurs in *Fission*: if I commit an immorality and then undergo fission, both of my fission products would own my actions, even though neither would be me. Identity is a one-one relation, while action ownership, like property ownership, may be one-many, so action ownership—attributability—does not entail identity.^{22 23}

Perhaps *Fission* is too controversial to do the heavy lifting here, though. Turn, then, to everyday examples of non-exclusive action ownership. These are what we call *joint actions*, for example, singing a duet, having sex, building a house, suing as a class, performing a play, (gang-) robbing a bank, engaging in or winning a tug of war (or any of a variety of team actions).²⁴ While each of these presupposes individual contributions, the end result, the *action*, is irreducibly joint. These are actions only a *we* performs—"Remember when we sang that duet?"—and such actions render us joint agents in the performing. Accordingly, such actions are attributable to the joint agent, that is, the team, the troupe, the gang, the class. Nevertheless, as individual members of these collectives, we each share in the ownership of the actions of the collective, and so may be assessed thereby.

But then here is the key point: it will not be true of me that if I share in the ownership of some joint action, there must be some past agent who performed *that* (*joint*) action who is numerically identical to me, for the agent of that past action was a *we*, not an *I*.²⁵ If ownership of such actions entailed numerical identity with the original agent, then by transitivity all the members of the joint agency would have to be identical with one another. Ownership of actions thus does not entail personal identity, for ownership is not a uniqueness relation—a single piece of property may have multiple owners, as may a single joint action.

But if this is true, *Slogan* is without warrant: *Platitude* simply does not entail that responsibility presupposes identity. All that we need to talk about is the relation between attributability and accountability directly. Talk of identity just gets in the way.

Perhaps our doubts about *Slogan* could have been reached much more quickly and easily, however. This would be the case if one thinks *Platitude* itself is false, so that one is not in fact accountable only for one's own actions. A pertinent possible example comes from the case of parents, who we might think are accountable for the actions of their children.²⁶ If parents are indeed accountable in such circumstances, then neither identity *nor* attributability is relevant to accountability.

This is too quick, however. The advocate of *Platitude* need merely point out that in discussing such cases, we need to be careful to determine the precise target of the relevant assessments. So suppose you have brought your young children to my house, and while they are running around making a ruckus, they knock over and break one of my favorite Lladro porcelain figures. The young children are not accountable for this action. Are you? To the extent that I find you blameworthy (says the advocate of *Platitude*), it is actually for a *different* action, namely, your failure to rein in your children, or, more generally, your lax parenting. But in such cases, then, you are accountable for *your own* actions, that is, the actions properly attributable to you. Of course, you may be morally obligated to replace the figurine or pay me for the damage, but that's a point about compensation, not responsibility: you may indeed be required to compensate someone for the destructive actions of someone else.²⁷ But even if I have a right to compensation from you for the actions of your children, that's not yet to say that you are *blameworthy* for those actions. The advocate of *Platitude* thus has a ready reply to such cases.

Nevertheless, there are relevant cases in the neighborhood to consider, and this leads to the second general argument against *Slogan*. Consider *Evil Parent*: suppose an evil parent secretly told his children to run around and then break my Lladro. Now this parent *is* blameworthy. But again, this case does not necessarily cast doubt on *Platitude*, for the breaking of the Lladro now actually seems properly attributable *to the parent*. This point may become more obvious when we consider *Ordering General*: suppose a general commands his troops to "take the bridge." Despite the variety of individual actions performed by the general's soldiers that together wholly constitute that action, the taking of the bridge is properly attributable to the general: to the extent he is praiseworthy or blameworthy for that action, it is his.²⁸ Consequently, even if one does bear an exclusive ownership relation to some action, one does not necessarily have to be involved in the actual *performance* of the action at all. Here attributability obtains despite one's complete *non-identity* with the agent.

What really undercuts *Slogan* is the fact that accountability merely presupposes attributability, and attributability is just a relation between an accountable agent and an action. Identity, by contrast, is a relation between a person and a person (or a person and an individual). These are, then, just different relations about different sorts of entities, so it's no wonder that identity and attributability go their separate ways. A criterion of identity is just about the

wrong kind of relation and the wrong kind of entities to be relevant to moral responsibility.

Responsibility with identification

IDENTITY IS NOT NECESSARY FOR ACCOUNTABILITY, BUT WE ARE ASSUMING, ALONG WITH *Platitude*, that attributability is.²⁹ What, then, does attributability consist in, if not the central features of personal identity? This is just to ask the characterization question again, albeit without the problematic narrative identity as its answer. In this final section, I will briefly and sketchily explore an alternative answer to this question, one that builds on the work in the first part of the paper, as I take it to be a condition of any plausible theory of attributability that it account for all the cases we have discussed.

Accountability presupposes the attribution of an action to an *agent*, something which renders the agent open to moral appraisal (praise or blame) for the action.³⁰ What is an agent, though, at least with respect to accountability? It might seem as if agents are necessarily performers of actions, but this is doubtful. There could be, after all, continually *frustrated* agents, those who simply are not able (for whatever reason) to execute their wills in action. What does seem essential to agency instead, however, is at least the capacity to *have a will* to act in the first place.

Now as I said early on, insofar as an accountable agent—a robust entity—is susceptible to being praised or blamed for some action—typically a momentary event—that action must implicate her agency, must somehow be an expression of who she is. It must be, in other words, an action with which she is *identified*: the agent herself must, in some crucial sense, be found in the action. What, then, does such identification consist in?

Here is where we butt up against a mountain of contemporary literature. The search for the conditions of identification has become, to some extent, like the search for the Holy Grail: many have taken on the quest, numerous seekers have gotten horribly lost in the pursuit, and it remains entirely unclear that the object of desire even exists.³¹ I will certainly not try to grasp the cup myself here; rather, I merely want to articulate a few conditions on any future searches. In other words, I want to lay out some of the *formal* conditions for carving out the nature of identification as it pertains to accountability, given what we have learned to this point.

First, because of the relation between action and agent presupposed by accountability, for an agent to be identified with an action for purposes of accountability (for it to be attributable to her), the action must bear some dependence relation to the essential component of her agency, namely, her will. This is not to say, however, that the action in question must be performed by the agent on whose will it is dependent. The children in *Evil Parent* and the soldiers in *Ordering General* perform actions that depend—at least in part—on the wills of the parent and the general respectively: it was in virtue of their willing it that the various actions were performed. In both cases, the children and the soldiers execute the wills of those to whom their own wills are subordinate. Of course, whether or not they insert their own wills into this process (and endorse or reject the subsequent actions) makes a difference for whether or not they themselves

identify with (and so own) the actions, but it's perfectly possible that their endorsement (say) of their leaders' wills could also leave the original dependence relation intact, such that their actions are overdetermined (by both their own and their leaders' wills) and their leaders' ownership of and accountability for those actions is thus not reduced one whit.³²

Wills are not freestanding mechanisms, however. Rather, they operate and are embedded within a much wider volitional web, a web of beliefs, judgments, desires, attitudes, and cares. Indeed, these are the sorts of psychological elements necessary to accountable agency. A computer, after all, could be said to have a will it executes, but that is insufficient for the kind of agency we have in mind. This is because, in being accountable, the agent is open to praise or blame, but it is not the agent's *will* that is the appropriate object of these attitudes; rather, they target a complex psychological creature, an entity capable of understanding the point of the appraisal, reflecting on and evaluating its past deeds and its current character in light of the appraisal, and responding (often emotionally) to the demands implicit in the appraisal. We appraise a *self*, in other words.

For the self to be sensibly implicated in such appraisals, though, it must now be implicated in the will on which the relevant action depends. Take the self's *volitional web* to refer to those psychological features that shape, incline, and perhaps even determine its will. The aspects of the self relevant to identification will thus be found in that web. Indeed, the motivating task of many of those dubbed "Real Self View" theorists (see Wolf 1990) has been precisely to identify "the" privileged subset of psychic elements within this volitional web that are truly representative of the agent's "real" self. Various contenders have arisen, including higher-order desires (desires about what one's will is to be) (for example, Frankfurt 1971), evaluative judgments (judgments about actions worth willing) (for example, Watson 1975), and cares (for example, D. Shoemaker 2003). Which one is correct is, again, not my concern here. Instead, I am simply adopting the more neutral stance that it is within one's volitional web that the real self is to be found, and so when that real self is expressed in one's will, one is *identified with that will*. Consequently, when some action is dependent on that will, one is identified with that *action* thereby, and it is this relation between an agent's real self and an action that makes the action attributable to the agent.

Nevertheless, this accounts only for attributability in the moment of action (where the agent at the time of action has a direct identifying relationship to that action). But judgments of attributability are much more typically made at a later time: some past action is attributable to the agent now. And this fact, I think, is what makes drawing the link to personal identity for the *Sloganeers* most tempting. Indeed, how can we make sense of it *without* reintroducing personal identity? Suppose *Evil Parent* occurred a week ago but I just now discovered the truth. I now hold the parent accountable for those week-ago actions of his children. Given what was said above, though, this would suggest I believe those actions are now attributable to him because (a) those actions depended on a will with which some agent identified last week, and (b) the agent now before me is *identical to that week-ago agent*.

Unsurprisingly, I disagree. Notice, first of all, that if any identity is involved here, it is just not *personal* identity of any plausible stripe. To see why,

consider *Fissioning Faye*: suppose Faye assaults a child and then undergoes fission, and because of a botched procedure, both fission products wind up psychologically discontinuous from Faye while still retaining the central aspects of Faye's volitional web that both motivated the original assault and allow the fission products to replay it over and over again with a tingle of excitement. Neither fission product could be identical to Faye on either the Biological or the Psychological Criterion (and insofar as narrative identity presupposes one of these criteria, its possibility adds nothing here). Nevertheless, both, it seems, are accountable for the assault in virtue of their ongoing ownership of her actions. But then personal identity cannot be doing any of the relevant work.

What might be more plausible, then, is to suggest that *agential* identity is necessary for accountability. In other words, perhaps there is an identity relation for agents, rather than persons, that unites the evil parent now with the week-ago entity on whose will the children's action depended, rendering current accountability-assessments of him coherent. The problem with this move is that it plays fast and loose with the term "identity." We have already seen that the attributability relation necessary for accountability may adhere to neither the uniqueness nor the transitivity requirements of an identity relation, so at best the label would be highly misleading.

However, it is clear that there must be *some* relation between the current accountable agent and the past agent on whose will the action depended. What precisely that relation consists in, though, is less than clear. I will here merely suggest a plausible possibility, put in terms of *Evil Parent*: given that the accountability of the week-ago agent for the actions of his children presupposes that he identified with their actions then (that is, they depended on his will), that agent's accountability may be transferred to the current agent in virtue of the current agent's identification *with that week-ago agent*.

This introduces a third target of identification. I have already discussed (1) identification with actions and (2) identification with wills. Now I am talking about (3) identification with agents. The three are intimately related insofar as they all contribute to an explanation of attributability, and thus accountability, with respect to past actions. But they each have different formal conditions. I have suggested that identification with actions centrally requires a dependence relation running from action to will. I have suggested that identification with wills centrally requires the expression of an agent's self via some shaping or dependence relation between a privileged subset of elements in the agent's volitional web (the real self) and the agent's will. I now want to suggest that identification between a present agent and some past agent centrally requires a *similarity* relation between the privileged subsets of the current and past agents' volitional webs, a similarity relation that obtains in virtue of a causal dependence relation running from the present agent's real self to the past agent's real self.

There are a few elements here to explain. First, a current agent cannot be said to identify directly with a past *action*, given that that action could not have depended on his will—there is no backwards causation. What the original agent's identification with his action consisted in, though, was not just the action's dependence on his will but also his will's dependence on his real self. But insofar as the current agent may identify (or be identified) with that past agent's real self, he

could be said to have adopted or inherited the actions dependent on that original self as his own, providing the necessary condition for him to be accountable for them thereby. What I am suggesting is that this last sort of identification occurs in virtue of the (presumed) similarity between the current agent's real self and last week's real self, where the current agent's real self is the way it is *because* last week's agent's real self was the way it was.³³

This general approach accounts for all of our previous cases. It tracks similarity of psychological states and so properly allows for attributability in cases where biological continuity is absent. It also properly allows for attributability in cases where psychological continuity is absent, for it focuses on the similarity only of a certain privileged *subset* of psychological states whose continuity alone may be insufficient to preserve full-blown psychological continuity. And it properly allows for attributability where narrative identity is absent, for its focus is on similarity between the features of agents' volitional webs that are *in fact* relevant to motivation and expressive of the agents' real selves, regardless of those agents' subjective attitudes toward those features.

Is this account just another way of smuggling identity back into the picture, though, perhaps by offering an alternative account of identity itself? In other words, perhaps the intuitions buttressing my proposal make it plausible only insofar as they are really about identity themselves, albeit now about identity grounded in my sort of identification, where it involves the persistence of volitional webs or their privileged subsets. I want to make absolutely clear one last time that this cannot be what's going on here, for two simple reasons. First, the numerical identity relation must obtain uniquely (be one-one), whereas the diachronic aspect of attributability (the third sense of identification) need not. Multiple persons may identify with some past agent's real self, as in the fission case. Second, the identity relation must be transitive, whereas attributability of the sort I have been discussing is not. I may identify with some past agent's real self, and that past agent may identify with some other more distantly past agent's real self, but it may not be the case that I identify with the latter insofar as our two selves are not sufficiently similar. Another way to put this point: the similarity constitutive of the third sense of identification is scalar, whereas numerical identity is not.

I believe this bare-boned account is quite promising. I also recognize that the account is still pretty bare-boned. "Sufficient" and "similarity" are all vague terms, for one thing, and I do not yet know how to precisify them in a satisfactory way. For another thing, my neutrality on what psychic elements are privileged in the volitional web (that is, the nature of the real self) prevents us from giving actual attributability conditions in any specific case, so the theory has of yet no practical payoff. Nevertheless, these are not so much faults as they are (gaping) gaps, challenges for those who find the formal aspects of the theory, such as it is, attractive.

There is one last point that may increase the attractiveness of the approach and it has to do with its causal component, which is vague, but deliberately so. Now it's of course important to include some such causal requirement, because without it, one could find that certain actions are attributable to one solely in virtue of one's utterly coincidental similarity to some stranger who performed

them. The causal component at least rules out this possibility. One might think, though, that this component could then be met only in virtue of the relevant psychological states being manifested from their persistence in the same *brain* (or relevant part of the brain), but this would be too narrow a conception. I think it is important to allow for the possibility of my identification with other agents (even strangers), those who do not share my brain but who nevertheless *have* had a significant causal impact on the formation of my real self, through my interaction with them or their ideas.³⁴ To the extent that their volitional selves have become mine by this causal route, then, so too have their actions. Of course, given our simultaneous existence, one could only say in such cases that attributability for their actions has been *extended*, not transferred, to me.

The implications of this point may now be clear. Not only may I identify with another agent, I may also identify with *collections* of agents, as long as they have a sufficient number of psychological elements in their volitional webs in common and the relevant similar features of my own volitional web are dependent on my causal interactions with them. When these other agents or their representatives engage in certain behavior, then, their actions may be attributable (as well) to me, rendering me eligible for accountability for their actions. This is the notion of distributive collective responsibility, or *shared* responsibility, a notion to which some theorists are attracted but which is itself very difficult to explicate.³⁵ The analysis given here may thus shed some light in this arena.

Regardless, though, of whether or not my schematic theory of identification and attributability is successful, we should not lose sight of the main point here: to understand the nature of *Platitude*, we must understand the nature of attributability, and while we may not yet be entirely sure of what it does consist in, we at least know what it does not consist in, namely, personal identity. Clearing *Slogan* from our path may thus afford us a fresh and unobstructed look at the actual conditions of this central feature of our moral practices.³⁶ ◻

Notes

¹The following is a partial list of those who accept or advocate this entailment (either implicitly or explicitly): J. Butler, "Of Personal Identity" in *Personal Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975) pp. 104; D. DeGrazia, *Human Identity and Bioethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 88–89; W. Glannon, "Moral Responsibility and Personal Identity," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1998): pp. 231–249; V. Haksar, *Equality, Liberty, and Perfectionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 111; J. Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity" in *Personal Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 39–51; G. Madell, *The Identity of the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), pp. 116; E.T. Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 65–70; D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 323–326 (on the Extreme Claim); D. Parfit, "Comments," *Ethics* 96 (1986): pp. 832–872; T. Reid, "Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity" in *Personal Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 116–117; T. Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 4–204; and M. Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 14.

²For detailed explication and analysis of these conceptions, see D. Shoemaker, "Attributability, Answerability, and Accountability: Toward a Wider Theory of Moral Responsibility," *Ethics* 121 (2011): pp. 602–632.

³T. Sider explicitly operates with this sort of understanding. See T. Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism*

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), for example pp. 4, 204.

⁴I draw talk of the distinction between the moral objectionableness and the (non-)fittingness of various attitudes from D'Arms and Jacobson 2000. I draw talk of the felicity conditions for fittingness from Darwall 2006, pp. 52–55 and 74–76. I draw talk of being accountable as a function of being held accountable from suggestions in Strawson 1963, and interpretations thereof, including Watson 2004, pp. 219–259, and D. Shoemaker 2011.

⁵On the relation of attributability to responsibility generally, see T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 248–294; A.M. Smith, “Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life,” *Ethics* 115 (2005): pp. 238; and D. Shoemaker 2011.

⁶For this sort of formulation, see V. Tadros, *Criminal Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 23 (and Chapter 1 generally).

⁷Whether or not the relevant source of agential expression is the agent’s character, as Hume thought, or some complicated dispositional cluster, as Sher has argued, I leave open. See G. Sher, *In Praise of Blame* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁸In this and the next few sections, I draw from, clarify, and expand upon, D. Shoemaker 2009a. See D. Shoemaker, *Personal Identity and Ethics: A Brief Introduction* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2009), pp. 207–229.

⁹Whether or not Lockean “consciousness” is synonymous with “memory” is a matter of some controversy, however. See M. Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 106–114.

¹⁰See J. Bradford and S.M. Smith, “Amnesia and Homicide: The Padola Case and a Study of Thirty Cases,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 7 (1979): pp. 219–231. For some skepticism about the interpretation of some of these sorts of cases, though, see M. Cima, et al., “I Can’t Remember Your Honor: Offenders Who Claim Amnesia,” *German Journal of Psychiatry* 5 (2002): pp. 24–34 and M. Cima, et al. “Claims of Crime-Related Amnesia in Forensic Patients,” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 27 (2004): pp. 215–221.

¹¹If it is not already obvious by this point, I will be using the terms “attributability” and “ownership” (and their variants) interchangeably throughout the paper.

¹²See M. Schechtman, “Personal Identity and the Past,” *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 12 (2005): pp. 12. Some might object to calling this a case of genuine memory, and those that do may call it “quasi-memory” instead, following S. Shoemaker, “Persons and Their Pasts,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1970): pp. 269–285.

¹³For various formulations of, and arguments for, this view, see E.T. Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and D. DeGrazia, *Human Identity and Bioethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁴And Olson seems to agree it would be a mistake. See E.T. Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 57–62.

¹⁵See D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 207. The uniqueness clause is necessary to avoid serious worries related to the fission case. Glannon, in adopting a version of the Psychological Criterion, allows that the “sufficient” number of psychological connections needed to preserve identity could be fairly low; see W. Glannon, “Moral Responsibility and Personal Identity,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1998): pp. 231, 237–243.

¹⁶See D. DeGrazia, *Human Identity and Bioethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 83. The “correctness” condition constrains more fanciful narratives; see pp. 85–86. Also see M. Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 119–130.

¹⁷For the classic treatments of identification as active, see various articles in H. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). In subsequent work, Frankfurt backed off of this stance to allow that identification might indeed be a passive process (having to do with what he called psychic “satisfaction”). See, for example, H. Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion” in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁸On this point, see D. Shoemaker, “Caring, Identification, and Agency,” *Ethics* 114 (2003): pp. 88–118.

¹⁹This case obviously draws from D. Wiggins, *Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), pp. 50, and D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 253–261. I discuss this particular version in D. Shoemaker 2009a; see D. Shoemaker, *Personal Identity and Ethics: A Brief Introduction* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2009), pp. 131–132.

²⁰The unity relation is also known as the “genidentity relation” or the “I-relation.” See, for example, D. Lewis, “Survival and Identity” in *The Identities of Persons* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976) or T. Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 194.

²¹There is one theory that might suggest the duplicate is me. On what Parfit calls the Widest Psychological Criterion, the psychological continuity sufficient for preserving identity across time may have any cause (see D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 207. Perhaps, then, upon my death, the stream of unique psychological continuity preserving my identity would jump to my duplicate. Such a view would imply, though, that the duplicate was not me until I died, despite there being no internal discontinuities or any change whatsoever in his psychological life when that occurred. Further, this would render his memories of his life in the days while I was still alive as, suddenly, delusions, and my actions, which were not his until I died, suddenly become attributable to him. This makes it quite an implausible view, then.

²²Perhaps, though, there is a disanalogy insofar as property ownership is conventional, whereas action ownership is not. (Thanks to Peter Barry and Steve Wall for pressing this point.) It’s just not clear to me, though, that action ownership is not conventional too. Attributability may be a product of various practices and traditions. Think, for example, about the way in which practices of legal responsibility—a matter of convention in many key respects—often bleed over into the moral (cf. S. Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Moral Responsibility” in *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 46–62). For example, consider the evolving attitudes, in both legal and moral responsibility, towards the insane or the retarded.

²³If the advocate of four-dimensionalism attempts to explain this example of “one action-multiple owners” by appealing to a shared pre-fission stage, we can appeal again to Branch-Line, wherein the pre-duplicate crime seems attributable to both my duplicate and me after his creation, despite the fact that identity obtains only between me and the original criminal. Here four-dimensionalism provides no help, for if the pre-duplicated me is not identical to the duplicate, there would not be the possibility of any of the shared temporal stages for which we might want a four-dimensionalist explanation in the first place.

²⁴For other examples, see Bratman, “Shared Cooperative Activity,” *The Philosophical Review* 101 (1992): pp. 327–341. For an insightfully developed account of genuinely human shared agency, see B.W. Helm, “Plural Agents,” *Nous* 42 (2008): pp. 17–49.

²⁵Thanks to Steve Wall for this way of putting the matter and for fruitful discussion of this point.

²⁶A view suggested, for example, by E.T. Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 59.

²⁷This is just what seems to be involved when someone *takes responsibility* for someone else’s actions. When I take responsibility for my children’s destructive behavior, then, this merely involves my expressing willingness to compensate you for the damage they’ve caused. Notice that it makes no sense to talk of taking responsibility for one’s children’s behavior where no such damage has been caused.

²⁸Another illustrative case is that of Tom Metzger, the leader of a group of neo-Nazis in the western U.S., who was held responsible for a race-based murder performed by some of his young followers under the legal doctrine known as “vicarious liability,” which, according to the Wikipedia entry on “Secondary Liability,” “attributes the act itself to the third party (as if the conduct were the act of that third party) by virtue of the relationship with the actor” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secondary_liability). Thanks to Christian Coons for discussion of this point.

²⁹Might there be reason to doubt Platitudes on this score? I suggest that there is one important sense in which it’s false, but a very thin sense in which it remains true; see D. Shoemaker,

"Responsibility and Disability," *Metaphilosophy* 40 (2009): pp. 438–461.

³⁰See, for example, A.M. Smith, "Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life," *Ethics* 115 (2005): pp. 238 and T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 248.

³¹As noted earlier, Frankfurt first mentions identification in this context in H. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* LXVIII (1971): pp. 5–20. He then discussed and repeatedly refined the notion in several articles across three decades. See his "Identification and Externality" and "Identification and Wholeheartedness" in H. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and "The Faintest Passion" in H. Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Others who have undertaken the quest include Bratman (see M. Bratman, "Identification, Decision, and Treating as a Reason," *Philosophical Topics* 24 (1996): pp. 1–18 and M. Bratman, "Hierarchy, Circularity, and Double Reduction" in *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 65–85), D. Shoemaker (see D. Shoemaker, "Caring, Identification, and Agency," *Ethics* 114 (2003): pp. 88–118), Stump (see E. Stump, "Sanctification, Hardening of the Heart, and Frankfurt's Concept of Free Will," *The Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1993): pp. 395–420 and E. Stump, "Persons: Identification and Freedom," *Philosophical Topics* 24 (1996): pp. 183–214), Thalberg (see I. Thalberg, "Hierarchical Analyses of Unfree Action," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 8 (1978): pp. 211–226), Velleman (see J.D. Velleman, "Identification and Identity" in *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 91–123), and Watson (see G. Watson, "Free Agency," *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975): pp. 205–220). In "Free Action and Free Will," Gary Watson expresses doubts about his own earlier conception of identification and notes, pessimistically, that "[w]e are left with a rather elusive notion of identification and thereby an elusive notion of self-determination" (see G. Watson, *Agency and Answerability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 169). Alternatively, it may be that there are multiple notions of identification in play.

³²Moral responsibility generally is not zero-sum: two (or more) people can each be fully moral responsibility (accountable) for something.

³³Similarity is a matter of degree, of course, but this may help explain various scalar features of our responsibility practices. Sometimes the less similar an agent is to his past real self, the less we are inclined to blame him for some past action, or, perhaps better, the less vociferous is our blame. There are various ways one could go here. One plausible route is to think of attributability as a threshold concept, such that some past action is (still) attributable to me now only if my real self is sufficiently similar to the action's past agent. Once such attributability is established, then, the degree to which one is accountable for it (or the degree to which one is appropriately blamed for it) may vary depending on the degree of similarity (above the threshold) that obtains.

³⁴For a somewhat similar view of the causal influence of others on one's self, see D. Brink, "Self-Love and Altruism," *Social Philosophy & Policy* 14 (1997): pp. 122–157. Brink is trying to establish interpersonal psychological continuity, though, whereas I am talking only about the shaping of a certain privileged subset of the psychic elements from which psychological continuity is drawn.

³⁵See, for example, C. Striblein "Guilt, Shame, and Shared Responsibility," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 38 (2007): pp. 469–485 and L. May and T. Raimo, "Introduction," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 38 (2007): pp. 365–368.

³⁶Many people have provided insightful remarks on earlier incarnations of this paper. In particular, I'm grateful to Peter Barry, Elizabeth Brake, Sean Foran, Peter Jaworski, Ray Martin, Michael McKenna, Marya Schechtman, David Silver, Matt Talbert, Steve Wall, and the members of both my Spring 2009 graduate seminar on moral responsibility and the self at Bowling Green State University and my Fall 2009 seminar on the same topic at Tulane University. A special debt of thanks goes to David Hershenov, who gave me the most detailed and generous set of comments I have ever seen. I'm also grateful to audiences at the Fall 2007 Pacific Northwest Conference, the Spring 2008 Southern Society of Philosophy & Psychology Conference, the December 2008 Sydney Conference on Conventionalism in Personal Identity, and the November 2009 Philosophy Department Colloquium at Union College. For financial support while writing an early draft of this paper (along with the provision of an incredibly congenial working environment), I thank the Center for Ethics & Public Affairs, part of the Murphy Institute at Tulane University, as well as the

audience members at my seminar presentation there in 2007. Finally, I'm grateful to the ever-clever commentators on the ethics blog PEA Soup, on which I posted some of these ideas early on and got very helpful feedback (<http://peasoup.typepad.com/peasoup/2007/09/responsibility-.html>)

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Context and Use

By Jason Bridges

1. Contextualism

ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING DEVELOPMENTS IN RECENT ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY is the enormous popularity of the approach to meaning and content known as “contextualism.” Contextualist theories are key players in a range of current debates in philosophy of language, epistemology, moral philosophy, the philosophy of logic, metaphysics, and elsewhere. An orientation that 25 years ago had at most a handful of adherents is now mainstream, in some precincts verging on orthodoxy.

What is contextualism? What it is to have a contextualist view of something? Consider the following three cases:

- 1) Imagine two acquaintances of a certain Mary, Naomi and Didi, who have independently learned that Mary has won a million dollars in the lottery. Didi is impressed by Mary's windfall, and says to one of her friends, “Mary is rich.” Elsewhere, Naomi, who moves in more rarefied circles, says to one of her friends, “Mary is not rich at all.” Both Naomi and Didi have probably spoken the truth, for “it is very plausible that the truth of their claims about wealth turns on whatever standards prevail within their conversations” (Richard, 2004, p. 218).
- 2) Pia has a Japanese maple. She does not cotton to the reddish hue of its leaves, so she paints them green. The task completed, she says, “That's better. The leaves on my tree are green now.” She has spoken the truth. A few moments later her botanist friend Bill calls, soliciting samples for a study on the chemistry of green leaves. Pia says, “The leaves on my tree are green. You can have them.” Now she has spoken a falsehood (Travis, 1997, p. 89).
- 3) Suraj and his wife drive by their bank on a Friday to deposit a paycheck. But the lines are long and there is no particular rush to get the check deposited. Suraj suggests bringing it by the next morning. His wife points out that many banks are not open on

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