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DEATH, IMMORTALITY AND ETERNAL LIFE

Edited by
T. Ryan Byerly

DEATH, IMMORTALITY AND ETERNAL LIFE

This book offers a multifaceted exploration of death and the possibilities for an afterlife. By incorporating a variety of approaches to these subjects, it provides a unique framework for extending and reshaping enduring philosophical debates around human existence up to and after death.

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This volume allows for a variety of philosophical and theological perspectives to be brought to bear on the end of life and what might be beyond. As such, it will be a fascinating resource for scholars in the philosophy of religion, theology, and death studies.

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THE BRITISH SOCIETY FOR THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION SERIES

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In loving memory of David Efird (1974–2020)

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THE TRUE SELF AND LIFE AFTER DEATH IN HEAVEN

Eleonore Stump

It is part of the traditional doctrine of the major monotheisms that there is life after death. But this doctrine has been thought to raise challenging problems having to do with the nature or the identity of the human being that is supposed to persist after death.

One familiar set of problems has to do with the metaphysical identity of what is supposed to survive bodily death. This is a version of the general question about the metaphysical identity conditions for the persistence of a human being. The particular version of the metaphysical problem raised by the doctrine of the afterlife is a function of the way in which life after death is conceived.[1]

There are analogous problems regarding psychological identity. For example, on Christian doctrine, after death some human beings go to heaven and are united with God there. To be united with God includes at least enough connection to the mind of God to see oneself in the mind of God. So consider an ordinarily flawed human being, Paula. For Paula to see herself in the mind of God entails Paula's seeing as clearly as possible her own past failings and morally wrong acts. But how could Paula be blissfully happy in heaven with such a vision? It seems rather that to be happy in heaven Paula would need to have all her past failings and wrongs forgotten. And in fact in some biblical texts, what is promised to human beings who are in heaven in the afterlife is just such a forgetting.[2] But if Paula in heaven has forgotten large parts of her earlier life, then is it clear that in heaven she is the same self she was before death? This is a version of the general question about the degree of psychological continuity needed for the persistence of a person. If there is not enough psychological continuity between a person before and after death, then in what sense has that person, in the self she had before death, survived after death? [3] This is one kind of question about the psychological conditions for the identity of the self that are raised by the doctrine that there is life after death, and there are others as well.[4]

These problems about the identity of a human being and the nature of the self are familiar.[5] But in this paper I want to consider the implications of the doctrine that there is life after death in heaven[6] in order to focus on a different kind of question, a question not about the identity of a human being or the nature of the self but rather about the nature of the *true* self. We do commonly speak of a human being's having lost himself either through his own self-destructive practices or perhaps even as a result of the depredations of others. By way of contrast, if a human being lives after death in heaven, she must survive not just as the human being or the self she was before death, but rather as her *true* self. But what is that? In this paper, I will not try to answer this question. My aim is only to elucidate the question and to show what will not work as an answer.

Disability and life after death

To begin to understand the question, it helps to consider a smaller-scale corollary question. In a moving video posted on the internet,[7] Kevin Timpe asks various people this question: "Is there disability in heaven?"

Although it is not clear in the question or the video, I think it is assumed that the kind of disability at issue is limited to conditions that do not overwhelm a person with persistent severe pain. Conditions that are intensely painful and enduring in their painfulness might be counted as disabilities, but no one would ask whether they would continue in heaven.[8]

It is also helpful to note in this connection that even an impediment to the proper functioning of a human body and a consequent loss of some kind of physical thriving does not necessarily count as a disability. Striving for a workable account just of physical disability, Elizabeth Barnes says affirmingly,

> The disability rights movement tends to count a physical condition as a disability (and therefore as something they're working to promote justice for) if it has some sufficient number of features such as: being subject to social stigma and prejudice; being viewed as unusual or atypical; making ordinary daily tasks difficult or complicated; causing chronic pain; causing barriers to access of public spaces; causing barriers to employment; causing shame; requiring use of mobility aids or assistive technology; requiring medical care; and so on. As with most cluster concepts, there will no doubt be vagueness and borderline cases.
>
> *(Barnes 2016, 45)*

Barnes seems to me right in this characterization. But heaven is universally taken to be an environment perfectly adapted to every person who is in heaven. So when the respondents in Timpe's survey are asked whether there is disability in heaven, it seems that what they are really thinking about is whether in heaven there are still impediments to or impairments in the functioning of some part of a human body or human mind. And that is also how I will understand disability in what follows. While I accept Barnes's view of disability, for my purposes here, in discussion of

Timpe's question, I will take "disability" in a narrower sense just to refer to impediments or impairments of body or mind.

Timpe canvasses not only those people who are themselves without any disabilities but also those who have considerable life experience as disabled persons. What is notable about his small survey in this video is the divergence of views given by the people surveyed; and what is most surprising about their divergence of views is the correlation between the response given and the presence or absence of disability in the responders. Some people without disabilities confidently and kindly explain that in heaven no one will have any disability; as they see it, in the resurrection every disability will be removed, and the resurrected body of every person in heaven will be perfect. But some disabled respondents react with indignation to such a suggestion. In their view, it will of course be the case that there is disability in heaven.

It is noteworthy that some of the disabled are insistent that there is disability in heaven, because, of course, on the face of it, this is a surprising finding. And yet consider the views of the contemporary disability rights movement. Like the gay pride movement, the disability rights movement wants to celebrate what others have generally pitied or disrespected as the suffering of misfortune. In her *New York Times Magazine* article chronicling her extended arguments with Peter Singer, Harriet McBryde Johnson (2003), who was a disability rights lawyer, describes herself this way:

> I'm Karen Carpenter thin, flesh mostly vanished, a jumble of bones in a floppy bag of skin. … [M]y right side is two deep canyons. To keep myself upright, I lean forward, rest my rib cage on my lap, plant my elbows beside my knees … I am the first generation to survive to such decrepitude.[9]

By her own description, Johnson suffers from significant impediments to the normal or typical functioning of parts of her body. On the other hand, however, her meaningful work and her excellence at it, her very ability to handle exchanges with such opponents of the disability rights movement as Peter Singer with intelligence and courtesy and wit, all testify to her thriving as a human being. And it is hard not to suppose that Harriet McBryde Johnson is the exemplary human being she is because of her life with impairments of body.

But suppose that, in answer to Timpe's question, one had to say that in heaven, in a perfected state, there is no impairment to the normal or typical function of any part of a human being. Then, if there were life after death in heaven, who would it be who survives Johnson's bodily death and is in heaven? What would make the perfected human being in heaven, who has no bodily impairments, be the same as the disabled Johnson of this life? And if in heaven Johnson no longer had any such impairments, then would she also no longer have the superlative generosity and wit that characterized her life with disability? Would perfection in bodily functioning bring with it a diminishment in Johnson in other ways? And if for a disabled person there is a tension between removing a disability and diminishing something else

lovely about that human being, then is it so much as possible for there to be a perfected self after death? If the perfected self of a human being is also somehow her true self, or perhaps her truest self, what would constitute Johnson's *true* self in heaven?

Or if the connection between bodily disability and the human self is too vague to be helpful, consider instead the case of Williams syndrome. Williams syndrome includes a varying array of impairments to the typical functioning of human cognitive capacities. But people with Williams syndrome are often marked by gregarious personalities and sometime also by significant musical abilities. Gloria Lenhoff was born with Williams syndrome but became a successful classically trained concert singer; and, by all accounts, she also moved many people greatly by her kind and loving personality (Sforza and Lenhoff 2006). If in heaven Lenhoff lost the impairments of Williams syndrome, would she thereby also lose her specially loving temperament and her unusual musical abilities? In what sense, then, would she be perfected in heaven?

And even if we suppose for the sake of argument that the character or the special abilities a person formed through a life with disability can remain when the disability is removed, is there nonetheless something about the disability itself that is part of the nature and identity of the true self of Johnson or Lenhoff? If the disability were removed, would Johnson's true self be lost? Would Lenhoff's? Or is the true self of a human being such as Johnson or Lenhoff constructed at least in part by the presence of her disability? For either Johnson, with the impairments to typical functioning of some bodily parts, or Lenhoff, with the impairments to the typical functioning of some cognitive capacities, does the perfection of heaven require that the impairments be removed? Or does perfection require instead that her disability remain, as part of the true self that she had or was in her pre-mortem life?

In all these ways, the disagreement about whether there is disability in heaven highlights the question about the nature of the true self and its perfection. In what follows, I will canvass theories that might be thought to provide answers to this question, and I will argue that they do not yield acceptable accounts of the notion of the true self.

Frankfurt's account of the nature of a person

An attempt to give an answer to a question that is at least very similar to the question about the true self can be found in Harry Frankfurt's well-known account of the concept of a person.[10] Frankfurt wants to distinguish the concept of a person from the broader notion of a human being, and so his concept of a person can seem at least analogous to the notion of the true self of a human being.

In his original paper on the subject, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" (1971; reprinted in Frankfurt 1988), Frankfurt argued that the hierarchical structure of the will not only is an essential feature of the will's freedom but is also constitutive of a person. So, for example, he says,

> It is my view that one essential difference between persons and other creatures is to be found in the structure of a person's will [1988, 12] …; it is having second-order volitions … that I regard as essential to being a person.
>
> *(1988, 16)*

And he distinguishes persons from human beings who are what he calls "wantons". For Frankfurt,

> the essential characteristic of a wanton is that he does not care about his will. His desires move him to do certain things, without its being true of him either that he wants to be moved by those desires or that he prefers to be moved by other desires.[11]
>
> *(1988, 16)*

To illustrate his thesis about persons and wantons, Frankfurt gives an example of two drug addicts. Each has a powerful desire for the drug to which he is addicted. One addict, however, hates his addiction and struggles against it, though he always fails in the struggle. He is an unwilling addict. Frankfurt says, "[This addict] has conflicting first-order desires; he wants to take the drug, and he also wants to refrain from taking it" (17). But he has a second-order volition as well: "He is not a neutral with regard to the conflict" between his conflicting first-order desires. "It is the … desire [to refrain from taking the drug] that he wants to constitute his will." On Frankfurt's concept of a person, then, this addict counts as a person. The other addict does not care what his will is. Even if he suffers a conflict among his first-order desires with respect to taking the drug, he does not have a preference about which of the conflicting desires wins. And it is just for this reason, on Frankfurt's view, that this addict is a wanton and not a person.

Although Frankfurt's account of a person has been influential, it also suffers from serious and by now much-discussed problems. For example, there is what is sometimes called "the problem of authority". What is it about desires for desires that makes them authoritative for a human being? Why should one set of desires be more authoritative than any another? Why should we think that a person is to be constituted by his desires about desires? Why should he not be constituted by whichever of his conflicting desires he acts on?[12]

Or, to put the fundamental question for Frankfurt a different way, when a human being is divided against himself, how do we – how does he – determine which of the divided parts of himself constitutes him as a person and which parts give expression to what *he* – the person – really cares about? If a human being acts on desires that he does not identify with, why not suppose, *contra* Frankfurt, that those very lower-order desires on which he acts are expressive of what he himself really wants and cares about?

So there are problems with Frankfurt's explanation of his concept of a person. But if these problems could be overcome and if the notion of the true self were the same as Frankfurt's concept of a person, then the true self of a human being would

be constituted by the integrated and hierarchically ordered structure of her will, which is or indicates what she cares about.

On this way of thinking about the true self, the answer to the question whether there is disability in heaven would turn out to be relative to persons. For example, if Lenhoff desired to have the constellation of impairments and enhanced musical abilities often found together in Williams syndrome, and if she desired to have these desires, then her personhood, that is, her true self, would be constituted by these second-order desires. And since her personhood, her true self, would be perfected in heaven, then, it seems reasonable to suppose, these desires of hers would be fulfilled. For her, then, her perfected true self in heaven would include Williams syndrome because she desired to desire that her life include Williams syndrome.

On the other hand, one of Helen Keller's doctors, speculating on her apparent lack of fear of death, said of her,

> Perhaps Miss Keller is different from other persons in her lack of fear concerning disease and death, because she firmly believes that with the passing of this life she will enter another in which all of those senses whose privileges she has here been denied will be restored to her in full, and she will then be able to hear, and to see, and to extol the glories of a new world then revealed to her.
>
> *(Herrman 2007, 244)*

And she herself said to a friend whom she thought of as a religious guide,

> I feel weary of groping, always groping, along the darkened path that seems endless. At such times the desire for the freedom and the larger life of those around me is almost agonizing. But when I remember the truths you have brought within my reach, I am strong again and full of joy. I am no longer deaf and blind; for with my spirit I see the glory of the all-perfect that lies beyond the physical sight and hear the triumphant song of love that transcends the tumult of this world.
>
> *(Hermann 2007, 130)*

For someone such as Helen Keller, who apparently wanted, and wanted to want, her disability to disappear in heaven, there would be no deafness or blindness in heaven.

So, on the hypothesis that the true self is a person in Frankfurt's sense, then whether a person's disability remained in heaven or not would depend on whether she wanted it to remain in heaven, and wanted to want it to remain. And, in general, the nature and identity of what persists in heaven after bodily death – that is, a human being's true self – would be constituted by the hierarchically structured and harmonious desires of that human being's psyche. Consequently, what perfects the true self would be an entirely subjective matter if being a person – in Frankfurt's sense of "person" – is the same as being the true self of a human being.

Objections to Frankfurt's concept of a person as an account of the true self

In varying philosophical discussions, Frankfurt's concept of a person has proven to be rich and fruitful; but, as it stands, it cannot serve as an acceptable account of the true self or provide the identity of what persists in life after death in heaven, on Christian accounts of the afterlife.

To see the problems, consider first that, on Frankfurt's view, in principle a human being's will could be integrated around virtually anything. For Frankfurt, structural harmony in the will is possible no matter what it is that is being desired. Suppose, for example, that a teenager who is intellectually gifted and athletically talented drops out of sports and fails at his studies because he is devoting all his time and energy to collecting Elvis Presley memorabilia. Suppose also that he desires to concentrate his life on this collecting and that he also desires to desire it. His distressed parents will suppose that he has lost himself, and they will seek help anywhere they can find it. What they will not suppose is that this collecting mania reflects their son's true self. And their view seems intuitively right. If it were not right, we could imagine a good and wise counselor telling the parents to accept their son's choices as appropriate for him in virtue of representing his true self; but, developed in this way, the story of this example would be highly implausible.

Furthermore, on Frankfurt's view, it is possible to be integrated even around evil. The high-ranking Nazis are our most thoroughly studied examples of people who would be the best candidates for persons integrated around evil if any persons ever were; and they are as remarkable for their psychological dysfunction as for their evil. There were, of course, eminent Nazis who were regarded by some of their peers as happy and cultured family men; but that appearance now seems to historians to have been only a thin covering for inward disturbance and distress.

Consider in this regard the most gregarious of the Nazi elite, Herman Goering. By the time he died by suicide at the age of 53, there was ample evidence not only that Goering desired to do the evil things he did, but that in fact he desired to desire them. Although his crimes were manifest to everyone at the Nuremberg trials, the reports of others then present testify to the absence of any feeling of shame or guilt in him over the horrors he helped to perpetuate. If there is a case to be made that a human being could be integrated around evil, Goering would be an example of such a person.

And yet one of his biographers says about him: "Few got close to him. Indeed for all his excessive sociability he remained an outsider, keeping people at a distance … his sociability was a mask" (Overy 1984; reprinted in Overy 2003, 15–16). Goering may have been integrated around evil to one extent or another; but he was also isolated and self-alienated. In this condition, he seems more nearly like a man who has lost his true self than like a person exemplifying his true self. When Christ says, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36), Goering seems a good illustration of the point of the saying.

So if Frankfurt is right in thinking that a human being could be integrated around evil, then that claim is another reason to suppose that Frankfurt's concept of a person cannot constitute an account of the true self.

Finally, Frankfurt's concept of a person gives only static, synchronic conditions for being a person. But it seems more nearly intuitive that a person's true self depends on diachronic conditions, that is, on a persisting history. To see this point, consider a person suffering from severe Korsakoff's syndrome. Korsakoff's syndrome arises when damage to the brain prevents the brain from forming short-term memories and turning them into long-term memories. A pianist with severe Korsakoff's syndrome might remember how to play the piano, and he might even remember much of his life before he was afflicted with Korsakoff's syndrome. But he will have trouble remembering what he did five minutes ago. Because of this severe anterograde amnesia,[13] every moment of his life will seem to him like a new awakening, a kind of new birth. Each new awakening will be one episode in his life's story, one might say, but he himself seems to have lost access to the whole story. Nonetheless, at each moment, it is possible for the Korsakoff's patient to meet Frankfurt's conditions for being a person. In each moment, there could be a harmonious and hierarchically ordered structure of his will. And yet it seems as if the patient with Korsakoff's syndrome has somehow lost his true self, because he cannot bring the on-going episodes of his life into one coherent story of his life that is psychologically available to him.

And so for all these reasons, it seems that Frankfurt's concept of a person does not capture the notion of the true self.

Narrative and the true self

The example of the Korsakoff's patient might tempt one to suppose that the true self of a human being is constituted not by a static structure of will but rather by something centered on the diachronic history of that human being's life. Consequently, we might try thinking of the true self in terms of the narrative of a human being's life.[14] On this way of thinking of the true self, even those desires and acts of will that are not in harmony with a human being's second-order desires can count as part of his true self.[15] So perhaps the true self of a human being is the narrative self.

Various contemporary philosophers have attempted to use the notion of narrative as a way to explain the nature of the self. They have given differing accounts of the narrative self; but, in general, their accounts have certain common features. On the view of the self as narrative in character, the experiences of a human being's life can become woven together into a story; and that on-going story is what constitutes or produces or is requisite for the narrative self.[16]

Shaun Gallagher characterizes the concept of a narrative self this way:

> the narrative self has a diachronic character. It extends over time and thereby involves the issue of identity over time, or personal identity. As such it is

> sometimes considered a way to account for a personal identity that accommodates change over time
>
> *(Gallagher 2014, 406)*

As the notion of the narrative self is typically understood, the differing experiences of the narrative self are not disjoined, as the experiences of a Korsakoff's patient are. Rather, they are joined together into one organic and evolving narrative. Accounts of the self that focus on narrative commonly emphasize the need for such a narrative to have coherence and meaningfulness of some kind for the human being whose narrative it is. So, for example, arguing for a narrative view that seems as if it could be a characterization of the true self, Jennette Kennett and Steve Matthews say,

> according to the narrative view we favor, an important source of normative reasons is to be found in considerations of what would constitute the best, or something approximating the best, continuation of a life story. The narrative unity thus secured by reasons that extend across time permits a kind of well-being – the living of a valuable life understood as a coherent biography – which is unavailable to non-agents.
>
> *(Kennett and Matthews 2008, 213)*

It is not so easy to spell out the notion of coherence at issue here, but perhaps for now it can just be left vague and intuitive. The basic point, on this view, is that in a coherent narrative of a life there is some overarching and persisting unity to the psyche that has the differing experiences in the narrative. That is why the subject of such a narrative is the self, which is unified by being the subject of the coherent, meaningful narrative.

So we might try supposing that the narrative self understood roughly in this way yields an acceptable account of the true self.

On this way of thinking about the true self, the answer to the question about whether there is disability in heaven depends on two things: (1) whether a human being with a disability has integrated that disability into a coherent, meaningful narrative of her life, and (2) whether losing her disability in an afterlife in heaven would render the narrative of her life somehow incoherent or lacking in meaning for her.

Manifestly, both Lenhoff and Johnson integrated their disabilities into lives that were not only coherent and meaningful for them but in fact joyful and flourishing. With respect to such people, then, it seems that losing their disabilities at entry into heaven would constitute an abrupt break in the coherent and meaningful narratives of their lives. Consequently, for such people, on this view of the true self as the narrative self, whether or not there is disability in heaven would not be a subjective matter. It would not depend on whether or not human beings with disabilities had structured their wills in such a way as to identify with their desires for their disabilities to continue. Rather, on the narrative view of the true self, whatever

Lenhoff's or Johnson's desires might be about their condition in heaven, for them the answer to the question whether there is disability in heaven would have to be "Yes, there is!" That is because losing the disability in heaven would render the narratives of their lives somehow incoherent and would also make their lives less meaningful in virtue of the loss of the disability that had given meaning to their earthly lives. And it seems that, contrary to what she herself seems to have desired very much, the same thing would have to be said about Helen Keller. In virtue of her having integrated her disability so successfully in a narrative of her life that was coherent and meaningful for her, her disability has to be counted as part of her true self. For that reason, she would lose her true self if she lost her disability; and that is why one should conclude that her disability, like that of Lenhoff and Johnson, would persist in heaven, on Christian doctrine.

Finally, it is worth noting that if Frankfurt's account of a person constitutes an acceptable account of the true self, then what perfects the true self in heaven is an entirely subjective matter. But if the narrative account of the self constitutes an acceptable account of the true self, then what perfects the true self in heaven is an objective matter, not a subjective one.

Objections to the theory of the narrative self as an account of the true self

The notion of the self as narrative is rich and suggestive, and it has been influential in recent philosophical discussion. But I do not think that it does better than Frankfurt's concept of a person as an account of the true self. Whatever the true self is, it is not the same as the narrative self, not even if one insists that the narrative of the narrative self has to be coherent and meaningful for the human being whose narrative it is.

To begin to see the problems, consider an older alcoholic who has spent most of his adult life in unsuccessful attempts to achieve sobriety. Describing such a life as he himself experienced it, the philosopher Norman Care says,

> The characterization of its phenomenology requires not the terminology of disease or genetics, but … such heavy moral-psychological words as isolation, despair, worthlessness, and the classic triad anger, resentment, and fear, as well as the negative staples of guilt, shame, regret, and remorse. This is the condition … [the alcoholic] is in.
>
> *(Care 1996, 135–136)*

Care is focused on the philosophical issues associated with such a life; but it is clear that he is also narrating his own life in doing so. So, for example, he says,

> Some, perhaps many, of us suffer constitution-affecting luck that places us outside the mainstream model of the in-control agent to some degree or other, for one period of time or other … What is meant here by saying that

> inclination, capacity, and temperament are matters of luck is …. that these elements of the self … are the "built-ins" of my nature. [footnote omitted] As such, they are … considered to be logically prior to the power of my will as expressed in my choices. These luck factors … form, in a phrase I borrow from Harry G. Frankfurt, "necessities of the will".
>
> *(Care 1996, 76)*[17]

In discussing the difference between recovering and non-recovering alcoholics, Care says about the alcoholic who does not achieve on-going sobriety,

> There are cases in which a person has apparently altered his or her character and other cases in which, despite strenuous effort, change was not realized … so that whether one can change remains unsettled. I do not mean to suggest that parts of character are determined in any sense that is interesting for philosophy. I mean rather, and simply, that there are aspects of character that are so salient in one's makeup, so fixed as a matter of practical fact, that the prospect of changing them (at any rate, to the person involved) is tantamount to the prospect of changing one's identity at the deepest level.
>
> *(Care 1996, 28)*

As Care sees it, then, the narrative of the life of an alcoholic unsuccessful in achieving sobriety is coherent and organic, in the way that narrative accounts of the self emphasize. And certainly as Care's moving words about his own life in this account make clear, this narrative is highly meaningful to Care. So, on the narrative account of the self, such a narrative of a life with alcoholism can constitute Care's self.

But what this account seems inadequate to capture is the notion of the *true s*elf. Speaking of the pain afflicting those who have experienced such a life, Care says,

> when my past is seen to be flawed (it contains wrongdoing by me) and amends are not feasible (in some cases not even possible), peace of mind is pushed out of reach …. It may be that some people are able to meet the conditions of the backward-looking index of peace of mind … [But] when the [backward-looking] index is misused, people may be left without peace of mind insofar as their lives come to be flawed via contingencies grounded in factors over which their control [as the kind of persons they are] was nil or controversial. In certain cases a person may suffer a deep loss of peace of mind involving the pain not only of bad feeling over particular actions but also of distress over the kind of person he or she apparently is.
>
> *(Care 1996, 28–29)*

As Care sees it, such a life is as painful as it is at least in part because the non-recovering alcoholic is alienated from his true self. So, for example, commenting on the depredations of alcoholism on a person's life, Care says,

> the lives of many of us simply turn out … to have in them very problematic parts whose survey we are unable to bear; and then, insofar as our lives contain these problematic parts, we are left with the worry and suspicion that we do not fit the conceptions of ourselves by which we mean to govern ourselves …. [T]he human condition is such that many of us are or will be condemned by our pasts to be without peace of mind.
>
> *(Care 1996, 23–24)*

Insofar as Care is severely alienated from some part of his life's narrative, it seems that his true self is not constituted by the whole narrative. In fact, insofar as the narrative is characterized by a war between parts of Care's psyche, it seems that it could not constitute *one* self, let alone one *true* self. If that narrative is somehow constitutive of Care as a person, it seems to yield two selves unhappily melded in one human psyche.

As for life after death in heaven, what self is it that would persist after the bodily death of a person such as Care, whose life is marked by such inner struggle? On Christian doctrine, a human being in heaven is not only a perfected version of himself, but also is in a maximally joyful condition. Insofar as, on his own account, Care's life was marked by great pain, then the self yielded by the whole narrative of Care's experiences in his earthly life could not be the true self that persists in heaven.

And this is not yet the end of the problems with the hypothesis that the true self is the narrative self. The true self is supposed to be somehow what a human being is in himself; that is, the true self of a human being is that human being's own, truly his own, and constituted of characteristics true to what that human being is in himself. So, intuitively, whatever exactly the true self is, a human being is most nearly his true self when he is autonomous, free, in control of himself, or something else along these lines.

But this point is problematic for Frankfurt's concept of a person considered as an account of the true self. That is because nothing prevents a mad neuroscientist or an invading alien from controlling a human being's higher-order desires, or any part of the process by which, on Frankfurt's view, a human being identifies with some parts of his hierarchically structured will.[18] But a human being whose desires are completely controlled by another intelligent being lacks a true self of her own since nothing in her psyche counts as her own; all of it is only a reflection of the alien's will and intellect.

And an analogous problem afflicts the narrative theory of the self considered as an account of the true self. Clearly, there could be a coherent, organic, naturally evolving narrative of the life of a human being who from birth is enslaved by her human master, so that her life story is a reflection only of the will of her master, and not of any will on her part. Or, if the example of an enslaved person is unconvincing because we can think of defiant and independent escaped slaves such as Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, then take an example from science fiction.

It is a staple of stories in popular science fiction, such as that exemplified by Robert Heinlein's *The Puppetmasters*, that an alien takes over the mind of a human being and operates it for his own purposes. Imagine a case in which an alien controls the mind of a human being at every time in that human being's life. Suppose also that the alien is trying to evade detection by other human beings, so that the alien produces life experiences for the controlled human being that look very like ordinary human life experiences. In that case, the controlled human being would have a narrative self, in the sense that his life experiences would be connected into a coherent, meaningful story. But he still would not have a true self, because everything that might otherwise make up his true self is entirely controlled by the alien who is trying to write a coherent meaningful narrative of a life for that human being in order to escape detection as an alien.

So, for these and other reasons as well, it seems that the narrative theory of the self does not capture the notion of the true self either.

Conclusion

On Christian doctrine, a human being in heaven is not only perfected but even joyful; she flourishes in her true self, with all the things inimical to her true self fallen away. But *who* or *what* it is that is perfected and what exactly falls away from the perfected true self is hard to say, because the notion of the true self is difficult to spell out. In current discussion, Frankfurt's concept of a person and the narrative account of the self each look promising as explanations of the true self. But, on examination, it emerges that neither one is a good candidate for the notion of the true self.

If we take Frankfurt's concept of a person as an account of the true self, it yields an account that has unacceptable implications because of its static character and its subjectivity. On Frankfurt's account, any psyche that is integrated at a time could count as a person's true self at that time, however short that time is; and a human psyche could in principle be integrated around anything at all, however trivial or even evil. But these claims yield counterintuitive results if Frankfurt's concept of a person is taken to be an account of the true self. On the other hand, although the narrative account of the true self has the advantage of being diachronic, it yields a counterintuitive account of the true self too. On the narrative account of the true self, the narrative self of a human being whose life was lived largely in anguished internal conflict could count as a human being's true self, even if that life was characterized by an ineffective and unsuccessful longing for one side in the internal warfare to be victorious.

Furthermore, neither Frankfurt's concept of a person nor the narrative account of the self can explain why a human being completely controlled by an alien intelligence could not count as having or being his true self.

Regardless of one's views about the actual existence of an afterlife, there ought to be an account of the true self which gives a principled and plausible answer to the question of whether, on the supposition of an afterlife in heaven, there is

disability in heaven. The answer to this question, however, depends on first finding an answer to the question about the nature of the true self. But the two most obvious and promising theories that might yield accounts of the nature of the true self turn out not to work. Understood as an account of the true self, neither Frankfurt's concept of a person nor the narrative account of the self seems able to explain the nature of the true self. And therefore it remains an open question what it is that persists after death if there is life after death in heaven.

Notes

1 Sometimes life after death is supposed to be made possible because human beings have immortal souls which persist after the bodily death of those human beings. It is not clear that a disembodied soul, a human mind made out of nothing, is so much as possible. But if it is possible, what would the relation be between a soul persisting after the death and the human being who existed previous to bodily death? A human being is an embodied thing. So how could an immaterial soul be metaphysically identical to a human being? Could something which is material in its nature be the same thing as a soul, which is immaterial? If all that survives a human being's bodily death is an immortal soul, why think that what persists is that human being? On the other hand, if we think of life after death not as the existence of a disembodied soul but rather as the existence after death of a resurrected body, there is an analogous set of questions about the metaphysical identity of what is supposed to persist after death. So, for example, Richard Swinburne says,"if I come to live again, the question arises as to what makes some subsequent human me, for [at death] my body will be largely if not entirely destroyed. If the answer is given that (most of) the atoms of my original body will be reassembled into bodily form, there are two problems. First, many of the atoms may no longer exist; they may have been transmuted into energy. And second, what proportion of the atoms do we need? Sixty per cent, seventy per cent, or what? If it is mere atoms which make some body mine and so some living human me, then no body will be fully mine unless it has all my atoms. Yet some of my atoms, even if not destroyed, will have come to form other human bodies." (Swinburne 1999).
2 See, for example, Isaiah 54:4. For detailed discussion of the effect of forgetting on the persistence of the self, see (Merricks forthcoming, chapter 1).
3 In this connection, think about death-bed repentance. On Christian doctrine, it is possible that a person, Jerome, who has spent most of his life in evil acts repents all that evil on his death-bed. Then, sooner or later (depending on one's views of the existence or non-existence of purgatory) Jerome will actually be in heaven. But if in heaven Jerome will not remember his wrongdoing, then it seems that Jerome will have virtually no memory of his life before death since most of his earthly life was spent in evil acts. In what sense, then, is the human being in heaven the same person as Jerome, the evil person who existed before his bodily death? Is it possible for personhood to be preserved through such a great psychological break in memory? If the person who was Jerome and then comes after death to exist in heaven has virtually none of Jerome's memories, has Jerome survived his death?
4 There are also questions about life after death which are raised by the claim that a human being in heaven is not able to engage in any moral wrongdoing. Before death, every human being is characterized by freedom of will, regardless of how we understand that freedom; and it is a mark of that freedom that before death it is up to a human being whether or not he does a morally wrong act. But in heaven a human being no longer has the power to do what is morally wrong. Could a human being who is necessarily good be the same person as the pre-mortem human being whose psyche was able to do wrong or to refrain? How much psychological discontinuity of character is compatible with the persistence of a human person?

5 For a good recent introduction about the nature of the self, see (Gallagher 2011).
6 I restrict consideration to life after death *in heaven* just for the sake of simplicity, in order to avoid the complications attending any discussion of hell.
7 Posted by the Center for Philosophy of Religion, University of Notre Dame: www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4a4IxLtEEA.
8 In two papers, Timpe discusses this issue and others related to the topic of disability in heaven: (Timpe 2020) and (Timpe 2019). I am grateful to Timpe for sharing these papers in advance with me. David Efird also discusses the issue of disability in heaven. He argues that whether a disabled person remains disabled in heaven depends on whether the disability is part of what Efird calls her "practical identity", where her practical identity is in part determined by the hierarchical structure of her will. See (Efird 2020).
9 See Harriet McBryde Johnson, "Unspeakable Conversations," *New York Times Magazine*, 16 February 2003, www.nytimes.com/2003/02/16/magazine/unspeakable-conversations.html.
10 For a discussion of whether Frankfurt's concept of a person should be considered as an account of the self and an evaluation of Frankfurt's concept if it is so considered, see (Velleman 1999, chapter 11).
11 It isn't clear that there are any normally functioning adult human beings who are wantons in Frankfurt's sense. To be denied personhood in virtue of being a wanton, a human being needs to be utterly without any care about what sort of character he has, and it's hard to imagine even a depraved or specially thoughtless human being who had no such care at all, however mistaken or irrational it might be. Such care can be found even among human beings whose cognitive capacities aren't functioning normally, such as the cognitively impaired elderly or the mentally ill. It is true that, in this sense of "person", those whose cognitive capacities are very far from those of a normal adult human being (infants, those in a permanent vegetative state, and so on) do not count as persons. But in the case of such human beings, we all recognize that they need to be accorded some special status; we think it is morally acceptable in their case, for example, that others make medical decisions for them. We might mark our concern that such human beings nonetheless be treated as ends in themselves by insisting that they count as persons; or we might simply point to their humanity as the basis for the respect and care they ought to have, thereby reserving "person", as Frankfurt does, for normally functioning adult human beings.
12 Gary Watson puts the point this way: "Since second-order volitions are themselves simply desires, to add them to the context of conflict is just to increase the number of contenders; it is not to give a special place to any of those [desires] in contention." (1975, 218).
13 Anterograde amnesia is the inability to form new enduring memories, with the result that the recent past cannot be recalled, although long-term memories may be intact.
14 Shaun Gallagher defines narrative this way: "In sum, narrative is an interpretive account that selectively connects events across time on the basis of their significance or meaning to oneself and/or to others. It's possible that such a narrative is fictional if the events are fictional, or the connections are fictional, or the others involved are fictional. Literary narratives may be fictional in any of these ways. Real (non-fictional) narratives are interpretive accounts of events that actually happen to real people; the connections are real if they are based on the having of significance or the making of meaning, from the perspective of self or others." (Gallagher 2014, 405.) For a good summary of the narrative view of the self, see (Schechtman 2011, 394–416).
15 As Irving Thalberg asked in his objections to Frankfurt's account, why should we identify ourselves with our higher-order desires? Have psychologists not shown us that the "darker, savage, and nonrational aspects [of ourselves] are equally – if not more – important"? (Thalberg 1978, 224).
16 For recent articles reviewing and discussing some of this literature, see (Gallagher 2017) and (Gallagher 2014).

17 Care cites this essay of Frankfurt's: "Rationality and the Unthinkable," in (Frankfurt 1988, 177–191). I do not think Care is right in assimilating the constraints on the will at issue for him to Frankfurt's necessities of the will, but I point out the connection Care makes to such necessities of the will to help underline the power of the constraints on the will to which Care rightly wants to call attention. On the other hand, it is worth reflecting on the relation between the inability of a post-Fall person to will the good, on anti-Pelagian views, and Frankfurt's necessities of the will, because on the anti-Pelagian view something that is within the will itself makes a certain kind of willing impossible, in the sense of the modality at issue for Frankfurt. But I raise this issue only to leave it to one side.

18 This claim is not universally accepted. For an argument for the claim and detailed discussion of the surrounding issues, see (Stump 1999).

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