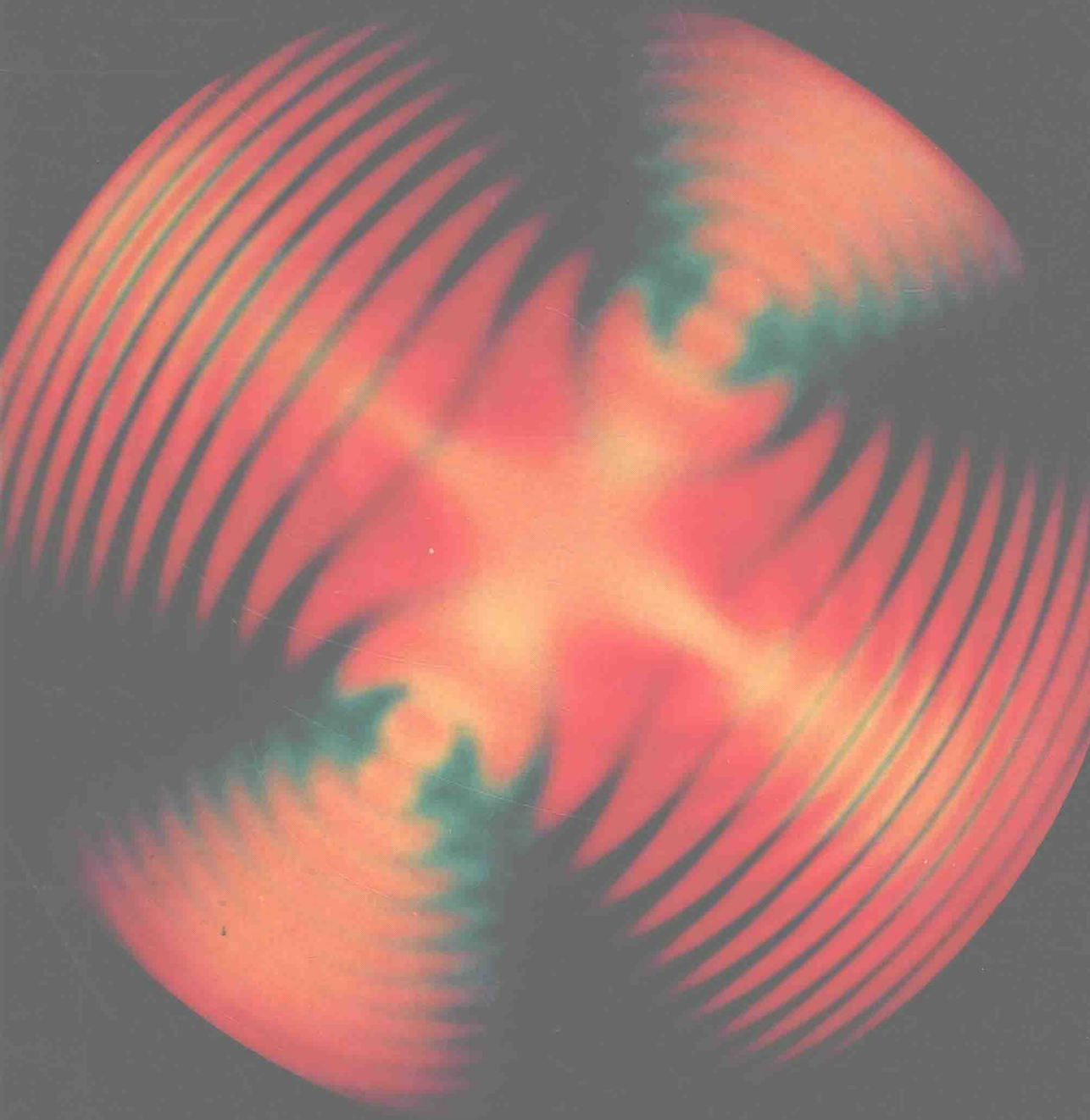


introductory philosophy



ROBERT PAUL WOLFF

introductory philosophy

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Main entry under title:

Introductory philosophy.

Bibliography: p.

1. Philosophy—Addresses, essays, lectures.

I. Wolff, Robert Paul.

B21.I57 108 78-11615

ISBN 0-13-500876-X

INTRODUCTORY PHILOSOPHY

Robert Paul Wolff

© 1979 by Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 07632

*All rights reserved. No part of this book
may be reproduced in any form or
by any means without permission in writing
from the publisher.*

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Editorial/production supervision by Fred Bernardi
Interior design by Linda Conway and Fred Bernardi
Cover design by Linda Conway
Manufacturing Buyer: John Hall

PRENTICE-HALL INTERNATIONAL, INC., *London*
PRENTICE-HALL OF AUSTRALIA PTY. LIMITED, *Sydney*
PRENTICE-HALL OF CANADA, LTD., *Toronto*
PRENTICE-HALL OF INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED, *New Delhi*
PRENTICE-HALL OF JAPAN, INC., *Tokyo*
PRENTICE-HALL OF SOUTHEAST ASIA PTE. LTD., *Singapore*
WHITEHALL BOOKS LIMITED, *Wellington, New Zealand*

preface

Let me address these few opening words to you, the students who will be using this book in an introductory course in Philosophy. As the semester or quarter goes by, you will be listening to your instructor, asking questions, arguing with him or her about some of the issues raised in this book, and arguing as well with your fellow-students. But I will not be there to join in the discussion. My contribution is finished before you even begin to study Philosophy. So this is my chance to talk directly to you.

Why study Philosophy? Why, indeed! The course you are taking may be required for graduation, although these days that is unlikely. More probably, it is one of a number of courses that satisfy some sort of distribution requirement. But that simply pushes the question back one step. Why require a philosophy course, or count it towards a distribution requirement? What *is* Philosophy anyway, and what can you, as students, hope to gain from puzzling over it?

Well, the oldest answers to these questions, surprisingly enough, are still the best. Philosophy is the love or pursuit of wisdom, and the only really good reason for studying Philosophy is that it may help you to become wise. (Notice, I did not say that studying Philosophy would make you wise. Only you yourself can do that. But studying Philosophy can help, if you will let it). Wise doesn't mean smart, or clever, or knowledgeable, although there is nothing wrong with being any of those. Wise means reflective, self-aware, conscious of the standards and principles you use in judging, choosing, and acting. Wise also means self-critical, ready to subject your own life to examination, to face up to the implications of your beliefs and the consequences of your actions.

Wisdom, in one form or another, is prized by virtually all the great cultural traditions of mankind. In many societies, wisdom is thought to come simply with age—and with the experience that age brings. In some cultures, wisdom is thought to come from meditation, or from the denial of the flesh, or from the taking of special drugs. The central conviction of western Philosophy, running all the way from the ancient Greeks to our contemporaries in the twentieth century, is that *reason* is the key to true wisdom. Arguments, analyses, reasonings and counter-reasonings—these, rather than age or meditation or drugs, are the true road to insight and self-understanding.

Now, you may have your doubts about the value of reason as a key to wisdom. Indeed, you may even have your doubts about wisdom! But for the duration of this Philosophy course, I ask you to give Philosophy a try. You are going to find it difficult, unusual, even a trifle painful, just as you would a new set of exercises before you were quite used to them. Your instructor, and the authors of the selections in this book, may ask questions, pose problems, or worry about difficulties that at first you have trouble understanding. All of that is to be expected. Countless thousands of Philosophy students before you have experienced the same initial puzzlement—and the same excitement as things become clear and you first see what Philosophy is driving at.

Studying Philosophy is different from studying anything else. I had better warn you now, so that you will be prepared for what is to come. First of all, Philosophy is not a collection of facts or theories that you must learn up and spit back in papers or on exams. Philosophy is an activity. You are going to learn *how to philosophize*. Obviously, the only good way to learn how to do something is to do it. You learn tennis on a court and swimming in a pool. The first time you swing a racket, you are going to look pretty clumsy. Only practice can improve your stroke, and it will be a while before you are able to pull off a killing overhead smash. In the same way, the first time you try to present a philosophical argument, you are liable to make a botch of it. But don't despair. Trying is the only way you'll learn. Naturally, your Philosophy instructor will come right back at you with a counter-argument, just as a tennis instructor will return your volley. And also naturally, his or her counter-argument will be classier than your argument. After all, you are the beginner, the instructor is the pro. But no one ever got to be a first-class tennis player by refusing to play until he could win, and no one got to be a philosopher that way either.

So far, learning Philosophy sounds rather like learning a sport or a musical instrument. But now we come to the special feature of Philosophy that makes it unique. When I study the piano, it is under-

stood that there is a right way to play, and my piano teacher knows it. That is why I am taking lessons. But Philosophy is the activity of rational self-criticism and analysis. When you engage in it, *no one* can ever take your place as the judge of what is true or false, valid or invalid, right or wrong. You must be your own judge in those matters, for if you give up the final say to someone else—to a teacher, a parent, or a minister—then you will only seem to be wise, you will not actually be wise.

Don't be misled! I am not saying that any opinion is as good as any other. Only a fool would think such a thing. But I am saying that you must accept the responsibility of judging for yourself. So your Philosophy instructor can be your guide, your coach, your helper along the path to wisdom and self-knowledge, but you will have to decide which path to take.

The philosophers represented in this book have all ventured in search of wisdom. Some followed false trails and ended up in tangled confusions and contradictions. A few achieved genuine wisdom. (Here too, of course, you must judge for yourself which are which). All of them have in common three characteristics that mark the philosopher. First, they are careful, precise reasoners, who strive for clarity and logical rigor. Second, they all put their faith in the power of reason, even though only a few of them could, in the technical sense of the term, be called "rationalists." And third, all of them are seekers of the *truth*, whatever it may be and wherever it may lie. If you will attempt to acquire those three traits, then you too can become philosophers. And some few of you, like the best of the philosophers in this book and in the world, may achieve wisdom.

Good luck! Work hard at being a philosopher, insist always on clear thinking and rigorous arguments, never be afraid to ask a question or raise an objection, and most important of all, never say "I see" until you really *do* see. I hope the book challenges and stimulates you to wonder about things you might otherwise have ignored. From here on in, it is up to you, your classmates, and your instructor to make your first Philosophy course a successful quest.

*Northampton, Mass.
August, 1978*

ROBERT PAUL WOLFF

contents

CHAPTER **One**
PERSONS AND THINGS
I

- 1** DESCARTES
The Nature of the Mind / 9
- 2** LOCKE
Person, Man, and Substance / 18
- 3** MEAD
The Social Origins of the Self / 28
- 4** WILLIAMS
Personal Identity and Bodily Identity / 46
- 5** STRAWSON
The Primitiveness of the Concept of a Person / 65
- 6** PUTNAM
Robots, Humans, and Consciousness / 75

CHAPTER **Two**

FREEDOM, DETERMINISM,
AND RESPONSIBILITY

94

- 1** d'HOLBACH
Man Is a Being Purely Physical / 102
- 2** HUME
Of Liberty and Necessity / 110
- 3** KANT
Freedom as Rational Causality / 119
- 4** SCHLICK
When Is a Man Responsible? / 130
- 5** CAMPBELL
Is "Freewill" a Pseudo-Problem? / 140
- 6** TAYLOR
Prevention, Postvention, and the Will / 150
- 7** SARTRE
Freedom, Action, and Responsibility / 163

CHAPTER **Three**

THE ROLE OF REASON
IN CHOICE
AND EVALUATION

176

- 1** PLATO
The Role of Reason in the Virtuous Soul / 183
- 2** HUME
Reason as the Slave of the Passions / 190

- 3** RAWLS
Rational Plans of Life / 196
- 4** TOULMIN
Reason, Faith, and Limiting Questions / 204
- 5** HARE
A Moral Argument / 214
- 6** FOOT
Moral Arguments / 225
- 7** OAKESHOTT
Rational Conduct / 238

CHAPTER **Four**

PERCEPTION AND
OUR KNOWLEDGE
OF OBJECTS
257

- 1** DESCARTES
What Can I Know with Certainty? / 264
- 2** BERKELEY
To Be Is to Be Perceived / 270
- 3** PRICE
The Nature of the Given / 292
- 4** LEWIS
The Logical Structure of Empirical Beliefs / 300
- 5** BARNES
The Myth of Sense-Data / 313

- 1** BENTHAM
The Principle of Utility / 338
- 2** SMART
Utilitarianism / 346
- 3** McCLOSKEY
Utilitarianism and Punishment / 359
- 4** KANT
The Categorical Imperative / 371
- 5** ROSS
Prima Facie Duties / 378
- 6** WESTERMARCK
The Relativity of Ethics / 389
- 7** HUDSON
On the Alleged Objectivity of Moral Judgments / 403

- 1** PLATO
Philosophers Must Be Kings / 418
- 2** POPPER
The Philosopher King / 434
- 3** ENGELS
The Materialist Conception of History / 447

- 4** HAYEK
The Conflict Between Socialism and Freedom / 461
- 5** SKINNER
Utopia Through Psychological Conditioning / 472
- 6** SZASZ
The Myth of Mental Illness / 486

CHAPTER **Seven**

GOD AND RELIGIOUS
EXPERIENCE
497

- 1** AQUINAS
Five Ways to Prove that God Exists / 504
- 2** ANSELM AND GAUNILO
The Ontological Argument / 508
- 3** HARTSHORNE
The Necessarily Existent / 522
- 4** PALEY
The Argument from Design / 533
- 5** HUME
A Refutation of the Argument from Design / 545
- 6** SMITH
Do Drugs Have Religious Import? / 561
- 7** MACKIE
The Problem of Evil / 576
- 8** The Old Testament (Genesis 22: 1–19):
The Trial of Abraham's Faith
- 9** KIERKEGAARD
A Panegyric upon Abraham / 590

CHAPTER **One**

PERSONS AND THINGS

(Focal Issues)

- 1. What Is a Person?*
- 2. Do I Know Myself in the Same Way That I Know Other Persons?*
- 3. What Are the Roles of Reason, Goal Orientation, Consciousness, and Memory in the Definition of a Person?*

INTRODUCTION

“Know thyself!” was the message of the Delphic Oracle in Ancient Greece, and for more than two thousand years since that time, philosophers have been wrestling with the problem of the nature of the self and the possibility of self-knowledge. What am I? What is a human being? What is a person? Is there something about persons that sets them off from all other beings, that makes them different, special? If there is, does it follow that we ought to treat human beings differently from the way we treat other things, living or dead?

Let us suppose that we have just landed on a planet in a distant solar system (thanks to an as yet undiscovered way of traveling faster than the speed of light), and that we find ourselves facing some sort of—well, some sort of things. What would it take to convince us that we had been *met* by a reception committee, and not simply that we had landed in a field of objects?

First of all, if we saw *people*, ordinary men and women just like the men and women we had left back on Earth, and if those people stepped forward and greeted us with a welcoming speech in English, we would conclude that we were indeed facing entities like ourselves. It would be something of a puzzle how they had gotten there, of course, but so long as they looked like us, talked like us, responded roughly as we ourselves might, gave coherent answers to our questions in colloquial English, and asked coherent questions in turn, we would have very little doubt that we were talking to people. It would follow, I think we can agree, that we would be wrong to kill these creatures idly, as we might swat flies or break up rocks. Depending on our moral convictions, we might also agree that we ought not to lie to them in our conversations, or make false promises to them, or cause them needless, pointless pain.

But now suppose that the “things” we encountered were *not* completely like ourselves. What then should we conclude? In true science fiction fashion, we can imagine a sort of continuous scale or spectrum of creatures, ranging all the way from people indistinguishable from ourselves to “things” very different indeed! If the reception committee merely had pointed ears, say, and greenish skin, but in every other way (including speaking English) were like ourselves, we would surely conclude that they were persons, just as we are. Their physical characteristics could be pretty bizarre without shaking our belief in their “personhood,” so long as they spoke

understandable, colloquial English and gave comprehensible, coherent replies to our questions. Indeed, we would probably be equally sure that they were, in some sense, people even if they spoke a very odd language that took the linguists among us a long time to learn.

The question would become very confusing if the creatures with which we communicated did not have *bodies* in the sense that we do. For example, we might discover after a while that it was the breeze with which we were communicating, not the lumpy objects squatting in front of us. We might discover this by tapping out a numerical sequence, such as "one tap, two taps, three taps," and then noticing that the breeze blew in four gusts, five gusts, six gusts. Would we, *could* we, believe that on this planet the breeze was a person? Or would we feel forced to conclude that some creature was *using* the breeze to communicate with us, even though we could never observe anything but the breeze? Would we feel obliged to be truthful and forthright with the breeze?

To go back for a moment to the original reception committee of ordinary-looking men and women, what would we think if they spoke colloquial English but gave irrelevant answers to our questions? More bothersome still, what would we think if we somehow discovered that beneath their quite ordinary-looking skin were masses of transistors, wires, gears, and levers? If I make a solemn promise to such a "man," am I released from its binding force by the discovery that he has a nuclear energy unit where I have a stomach, and a tiny computer where I have a brain? Would I agree that *he* had been released from *his* promise to *me* merely because it turned out that I had blood vessels where he had copper tubing?

We have introduced the problem of the nature of *persons* by means of an example from science fiction, but the problem itself remains puzzling and important even if we ignore such fancies. Historically, it is our religious beliefs that have posed the issue in the most pressing manner. The Christian tradition teaches that human beings have value, have significance in the scheme of things, because they have *souls*. In some fundamental sense, it is claimed, I *am* my soul. The soul is the seat of life, and after the body has died and decomposed, the soul lives on, either blissfully or in eternal torment. According to other religions, the soul moves from body to body, leaving one body and being reborn into another. In all of these views, the soul is a thing of some sort (though not a physical or material thing). So to a believer, the relevant question to ask of the creatures on another planet would not be whether they looked like us, or spoke like us, or even could communicate with us, but simply whether they had souls.

We have touched on a number of the themes that turn up repeatedly in philosophical discussions of the nature of persons. In the science fiction example, we focused mainly on the ability to *communicate*, because that is the way in which the problem would

present itself to us most naturally as space explorers. But a little reflection on what it means to communicate will reveal at least three characteristics that are centrally important in our notion of what it is to be a person.

First of all, if I can truly communicate with a creature, then it must be able to *think*—that is, it must be able to understand a question and select a suitable or relevant answer (even though the answer may be false!). If I ask (using English, or taps, or breezes, or whatever), “Is this your native planet?” and the creature replies, “No, we come from far away,” then whether it is telling the truth or not, I can tell that it has understood me, for its answer is a relevant or suitable or appropriate answer to my question. On the other hand, if I ask my question and it sends back a sign that I thought we had agreed upon for the number five, then I will have grave doubts that I am in touch with a thinking being!

Another way to say that the creature can think is to say that it is *rational*. Part of what we mean by this, of course, is that it can reason, i.e., it can draw conclusions from premises, inferring things that are implied but not explicitly stated. For example we might say, “There were twenty of us when we began our long journey, but two died on the way.” If it replied, “Then you are now eighteen; but only seventeen are present—where is the other one?” we would know that it had carried out a two-stage reasoning process (first, that we were twenty minus two, or eighteen; second, that one was absent, inasmuch as only seventeen were present). Similarly, if at one time we told our new friends that we had an oxygen-based metabolism, and later told them that we did *not* have an oxygen-based metabolism, and if they then replied that one of our statements must be wrong, we would conclude that they understood and could employ the notion of contradiction, which is one of the marks of the power to reason. So communication implies rationality, and rationality is at least part of what we mean by “being a person.”

Second, communication seems to imply the *having of purposes, intentions, goals*. Communicating is an activity. When I try to communicate, I start doing something, at a specific moment in time, with the aim of conveying a thought or a question to some other being. Typically, I complete my act of communication and then wait for a reply. There is an appropriate sequence to a communicative exchange: a question is followed by an answer, for example, not preceded by it. Insofar as I am attempting to communicate, there must be some state of affairs I am trying to bring about—namely, a reply, or at least the receipt of my communication. So I must be able to conceive of a future state of affairs, adopt it as my end, and then choose some action that I believe is a means to that end.

There are several component parts to the having of a purpose. There is the end, the goal at which I am aiming. It may be some rearrangement of physical objects in my vicinity (such as the building of a stone wall), or an experience (such as the pleasure from eating

a piece of chocolate cake), or a rather complicated combination of states of affairs and experiences (such as the general enjoyment that results from my telling a good joke), but in any case I must be able in some manner to envision it as a situation that I wish to bring into being. Another component to the having of a purpose is the network of beliefs about the world in general, and situations like this one in particular, which I call upon in reflecting on the best way to achieve my end. Typically, this network includes a number of beliefs about what the results will be if I *do* something, such as lifting a rock, or saying some words, or putting a piece of cake in my mouth and chewing it. Still another component is my doing of one of the things that my beliefs tell me will help to bring about my goal.

All of these—and much more—are involved in the having of purposes, intentions, or goals. Insofar as someone or something communicates with me, I can be sure that it and I both are creatures capable of purposive behavior. Now, you might object that somewhere in the universe I could come upon a perfectly rational creature that simply had no interest in communicating, or in doing anything else, for that matter. It might have the *ability* to engage in purposive activity, but no interest in doing so. Quite true. But then I would never know it! For either such a self-sufficient creature would choose not to do anything at all, in which case I would have no way of telling that it was anything but a nonpurposive, nonrational entity, or else it *would* choose to do something (perhaps just to let me know, by a single act of communication, that it existed but did not choose to act), in which case it would, by that single act, have forfeited its standing as a nonactor. (This, of course, is the problem with the traditional theological conception of God. If God is really perfect and fully self-sufficient, then He won't *do* anything, because He won't lack anything that He wants or needs, and then we won't know that He exists. But if He lets us know of his existence, by so much as a single act of revelation, then it can only be because there *is* something He wants—namely, that we should know of His existence—in which case He cannot be perfect.)

The third characteristic involved in being a person is *being conscious*, or more precisely, being *self-conscious*. Most of the time (when I am awake), I am aware of things around me, but at least some of the time I am also aware of myself. I can notice my own thought processes (as when I observe that I am not thinking too clearly on an exam, or reflect on the fact that my foot has gone to sleep), I can answer a question, and I can also think about the fact that I am answering a question. I can see a tree outside my window, and I can inspect my seeing of the tree, so to speak, in order to determine whether I see the tree more or less clearly than I see the mountains in the distance. Thinking about thinking, or self-consciousness, is clearly a part of what it is to be a person, for it is precisely the lack of reflective awareness on the part of animals that makes us doubt they are persons. Many animals give signs of being

conscious, in the sense of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, or feeling pain, but only in a few highly intelligent species do we see behavior that suggests any sort of reflective self-awareness. When we *do* observe such behavior, in the great apes or in dolphins, we begin to have serious moral qualms about our treatment of these personlike animals.

Thus far, we have explored the question, "What is a person?" entirely from the standpoint of an observer trying to decide whether something *else* is a person. Now let us turn the question in on itself. When I think about myself—when I self-consciously reflect or introspect—what is it about me that convinces me that *I* am a person? And what convinces me that I am *one* person, not two or three or a whole colony? What distinguishes me from rocks and trees, from a breeze, from a pony, or, for that matter, from the color yellow or a right angle?

Thinking or reasoning, having purposes, and being self-conscious all suggest themselves as marks of my own personhood. Self-consciousness in particular seems central, somehow. If you told me that after my physical death I would go on making plans and drawing conclusions from premises, but that I would no longer be aware of myself doing those and other things, I would have serious doubts about whether what was going to survive was myself as a *person*. But there is at least one more element that enters into my consideration now, namely *memory*. In addition to being conscious from moment to moment, I am also conscious of being the same thing, person, or self over extended stretches of time. I can remember at least some experiences from my childhood, as well as numerous events and experiences from intervening times. Consequently, I am aware of myself as being the *same* person over many years, despite the most thoroughgoing changes in my knowledge, personality, and experiences. How do I know that it was *I* who traveled with my parents from New York to Colorado when I was only four, and not someone else? I know because I can *remember* it. I do not consult old family albums, or question surviving witnesses, or do any of the other things I might hit upon to check the story of someone else. I simply remember *myself* taking the trip.

We now have at least four characteristics of personhood, namely thinking or reasoning, having goals and purposes, being self-conscious, and having memory. Clearly they are very closely inter-related. When I set myself to pursue some plan or carry out some intention, I am aware of myself as the author of that plan. I must think through the best way of proceeding, and when I reach my goal, I must be capable of remembering that it is the goal I set out to reach. If any of these elements is missing (as sometimes happens, for example, in cases of brain damage or severe mental illness), then it would be very difficult to think of me as being, in the full sense, a person.