

Philosophical Naturalism—Week 10

1. “Or would it be enough (to count as a “naturalist”) to think that the token even of writing the unclear paragraph is identical with some token physical event (á la Davidson)? (Would thinking that “token identity” has no clear definition at all make one a “nonnaturalist”?)” [p. 60]
2. “The mereological sum of the atoms in my body exists whenever those atoms exist, and this means that the mereological sum of the atoms of my body existed a thousand years ago. By Leibniz’s Law [BB: the indiscernibility of identicals, not the more controversial identity of indiscernibles], if I am that mereological sum, it follows that I existed a thousand years ago.” [p.68]
3. “What alternatives are there, however, to “an ontology of time-slices of atoms (or of particles, or of fields and particles) and mereological sums thereof”? Kripke would say that I am not *identical* with the mereological sum of the atoms that are parts of me (or with the mereological sum of time-slices of atoms). I am a different thing from my matter, although I *consist* of my matter. I am a thing with different persistence conditions from my matter, and different identity conditions across possible worlds. I consist of certain matter, as things actually are, but had things been different, had I had pot roast for dinner last night, I would consist of different matter, but would be the very same person.” [p.69].
4. “I agree with this much, but in addition I am attracted to an idea that I know Kripke does not like, the idea of ‘sortal’ identity: that is, the idea that things can be *identical in a respect, but not in another respect*. For example, I am inclined to say (still idealizing the physics, by the way) that a certain mereological sum of time-slices of atoms *is*, as things actually stand (I didn’t have pot roast for dinner last night), *identical to me qua physical system, but not identical with me qua person*. This doesn’t rescue the ontology of basic physical entities and mereological sums thereof, at least as usually understood, because as usually understood the identity of formalized ontology isn’t sortal identity. And if we do allow sortal identity, then the ontology only tells us what there is *in a respect* (say what there is, *qua* physical objects); sortal identity is essentially *pluralistic*, and unless we postulate that the number of *sorts* can be limited in advance—which I would deny—sortal identity *subverts* the question “What is there?” by countering: “What is there in *which respect*?” [ftnt 27 to the passage above on p. 69, on p. 289.]

All quotations from:

Hilary Putnam, “The Content and Appeal of ‘Naturalism’”, pp. 59-70 in Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (eds.) *Naturalism in Question* [Harvard University Press, 2004].