Wednesday, 29 October 2025 // filmosofia 12 at Rozz-Tox // *The Fly* (1986 Cronenberg, dir.) & "Survival and Identity" (Lewis 1976)[1]

Agenda:
- pre-screening discussion (about 6:30pm, informal)
- film starts 7:00pm
- 10 minute break
- post-screening discussion of Lewis reading selection and film from 8:45pm to 9:45pm

Pre-screening discussion (6:30pm)
- general remarks about our filmosofia series:
  - roughly every other month we screen a film and we pair it with a famous philosophical text that examines themes related to that film
  - the 2025 filmosofia schedule is on instagram (@rozztox_qc & @casuallyinefficacious) and on the Rozz-Tox website; stay tuned for updates about the 2025 philosophy events
  - the final filmosofia 2025 screening will be Wednesday 17 December: Kubrick's (1972) *A Clockwork Orange*, and the reading will be Derk Pereboom's (2005) "Defending Hard Incompatibilism"
    - free print articles for filmosofia are in the front of the café

- More details on the four main branches of philosophy:
  - metaphysics: the theory of reality
    - notable sub-fields: ontology (the study of what exists), philosophy of mind (theory of the nature of consciousness)
  - epistemology: the theory of knowledge
    - notable sub-fields: analysis of 'knowledge' (challenges to the "Justified True Belief" model), debates over the a priori vs. a posteriori justification (whether there is justification independent of experience)
  - axiology: the theory of value
    - notable sub-fields: normative ethics (theory of right/wrong), aesthetics (theory of good/bad art), social and political philosophy
  - logic: the theory of right reasoning
    - notable sub-fields: classical logic (modern formal theory of entailment), non-classical logics (formal theories that reject assumptions in classical logic, such as the principle of explosion (*ex falso quodlibet*) in paraconsistent logics)

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[1] Lewis, David. "Survival and Identity." (1976) *Identities of Persons*. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, ed. University of California Press. p17-40.

- tonight's topic: personal identity (metaphysics)
  - our discussion concerns the reality of the self, with a specific focus on the following question: **Who survives the teleportation in *The Fly* (1986): Brundle, the Fly, Brundlefly, or something else, or nothing?**
  - tonight's discussion might be viewed as a sequel to our first filmosofia event, which concerned the film *The Prestige* (2006, Nolan dir.) and Parfit's "What We Believe Ourselves to Be" (from *Reasons and Persons* 1984)
  - our discussion tonight overlaps heavily with the topics, themes, and scholarly literature examined in Luca Barba's Philosophy Pub session (30 July 2025) "What is Called 'I'?"

Post-Screening Discussion (8:45pm)
- tonight's topic: personal identity (metaphysics)
  - we are focused primarily on NUMERICAL identity, not qualitative identity
    - x and y are numerically identical if and only if (iff) x and y are one and the same object
    - qualitative identity: two objects are qualitatively identical iff they have all the same (relevant) properties
      - often the expression "personal identity" has to do with social/political/relational concepts, such as one's identity as a vegan, or an anarchist, or a raver, or boxing fan, etc.
  - our discussion concerns the DIACHRONIC puzzle of personal identity
    - diachronic puzzle: what are the criteria for determining the numerical identity of a person over time? (persistence over time)
    - synchronic puzzle: what are the features that allow us to specify the nature of a person at a time?
  - The primary guiding question for us concerns the diachronic puzzle for the main character in the film: **Who survives the teleportation in *The Fly* (1986): Brundle, the Fly, Brundlefly, or something else, or nothing?**
    - I am also curious about the following application of these topics to our lives: what does thinking about teletransporter cases show us about our own persistence over time, even in ordinary, non-teleportation scenarios?

- diachronic puzzle of personal identity: some views
  - the no self-theory:
    - person x at some time t_1 is never the same person as y at some later time t_2 because there is no such thing as persons in the first place
      - seems to fit with some religious traditions, Buddhism perhaps (Hume, Parfit)
      - seems to fly in the face of common sense, maybe hasty?

- ○ the soul theory:
  - ■ x at t_1 is the same person as y at t_2 iff x and y have the same immaterial soul
    - ● very few professional philosophers take this view seriously
    - ● seems to require an implausible ontology of non-physical objects, and flies in the face modern science, which has a promising track-record and seems to show that we are material beings (in some sense)
- ○ the brain theory:
  - ■ x at t_1 is the same person as y at t_2 iff x and y have the same brain
    - ● seems promising, given the centrality of the function of the brain for relevant mental phenomena such as memory, personality, thinking, etc.
    - ● seems also to fail because it's just pushing the problem back a step: the brain changes over time, too
    - ● also: there are problems of fission and fusion: split brains and removed hemispheres, etc.
- ○ the memory theory:
  - ■ x at t_1 is the same person as y at t_2 iff y remembers (accurately) being x
    - ● memory seems to be an important ingredient, but there are problems…
    - ● one problem: failure of transitivity–the old man remembers being the young man, the young man remembers being the boy, but the old man does not remember being the boy
- ○ the psychological continuity theory:
  - ■ x at t_1 is the same person as y at t_2 iff y has relevant psychological traits that are causally related to x through time (stands in R-relation)
    - ● the most favored view of personal identity for the past 330 years (Locke)
    - ● has problems in teletransporter scenarios, though:
      - ○ fission cases: malfunction causes a duplicate to exist at the same time
      - ○ fusion cases: malfunction causes to individuals to merge (the basis of the plot of *The Fly*)
- ○ the four dimensional theory (Lewis, Heller, Sider): all of the above approaches are going about the puzzle in the wrong way; looking merely at individual times (the "3D" view) is the wrong approach
  - ■ rather, on the 4D view, the person is an entity extended in time just as our bodies are extended in space (we are 4D spacetime "worms", see Hawley)

- just as "you" are located where your hand is and "you" are located where your torso is, likewise "you" are located in spacetime five years ago and "you" are located in spacetime at this moment
    - you (x) at past moment t_1 and you (y) at present moment t_2 are each "time-slices", or "person stages"
    - on this view, the personal identity really becomes just another puzzle under the heading of puzzles of identity over time (see Gallois), only the relevant characteristics that determine the identity of the 4D object are psychological, whereas for other material objects it might be different features
- the problems of fission and fusion, revisited:
    - $2 \neq 1$, and yet fission and fusion cases seem to suggest that it's possible that $2 = 1$
    - four dimensionalism to the rescue: the fly and Brundle are not literally the same entity, but they share temporal parts or "stages"
        - introduces a new I-relation: x at t_1 is I-related to y at t_2 iff x is a temporal part of the same entity as y
        - Lewis argues that two stages are R-related iff they are I-related
    - highway analogy, from "Survival and Identity" by Lewis (1976):
        - "In the problem cases, however, it may happen that a single stage S is a stage of two or more different continuant persons. Worse, some or all of these may be persons to a diminished degree, so that it is questionable which of them should count as persons at all." (p23)
        - "It may seem far-fetched to claim that we ever count persons otherwise than identity simpliciter. But we sometimes do count otherwise. If an infirm man wishes to know how many roads to cross to reach his destination, I will count by identity-along-his-path rather than by identity. By cross Chester A. Arthur Parkway and Route 137 at the brief stretch where they have merged, he can cross both by crossing only one road. Yet these two roads are certainly not identical." (p27)
- returning to my guiding question, the 4D view suggests an answer:
    1. We are four-dimensional entities, distinguishable from other four-dimensional entities by the R-relation.
    2. At the start of the film (t_1), there is Brundle and there is a non-person animal that is a fly.
    3. In the middle of the film (t_2), Brundle and the fly merge through teleportation (this is analogous to how highway A and highway B merge and share some space for a stretch but are not identical).
    4. Thus, after the teleportation (t_3), Brundlefly exists and has merged with Brundle, but they are not numerically identical four-dimensional entities.

- some points worth noting:
  - clearly neither Brundle, the fly, nor Brundlefly survive at the end.
  - there is a humorous variation of this plot in *The Simpsons*, "Treehouse of Horror VIII: Fly vs. Fly" (Season 9 episode 4, 1997), in which Bart's head is shrunken and switched with a fly's, which is enlarged to fit Bart's body.
    - what's noteworthy about this is that clearly the two maintain their R-relation more cohesively, so it's easier to say "that's Bart but with a fly's body" after the teleportation event
  - *nota bene*: this outcome is strange, but if the 4D view is correct, then personal identity allows for more strange consequences than one might have supposed
- What about our own case? Surely teleportation scenarios are still a ways out, so we have nothing to fear, right?
  - WRONG: there are efforts to develop brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) that threaten our personal identity with fusion cases (see Schneider 2019, Chapter 5 "Could You Merge with an A.I.?")
    1. Suppose a tech company succeeds in developing a BCI that would enable person A to upload their thoughts, memories, etc. to the cloud, and that would allow person B to download those thoughts, memories, etc.
    2. If that's possible, then it's possible for A and B to overlap in R-related ways.
    3. If it's possible for A and B to overlap in R-related ways, then fusion scenarios might be realized with BCI technology.
    4. If fusion scenarios might be realized with BCI technology, and if the 4D view of personal identity is correct, then fusion scenarios are not so far-fetched.
    5. Therefore, if such BCIs are developed and the 4D view is correct, then fusion scenarios are not so far-fetched.
  - again, this outcome is strange for us because we rarely encounter such mergings, but that doesn't mean it's not possible

Recommended Further Reading/References:

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9. Locke, John. (1694/1975) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Nidditch, ed. Oxford University Press.
10. Olson, Erik. (1997) *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology*. Oxford University Press.
11. Parfit, Derek. (1984) *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press.
12. Perry, John. (1977) *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*. Hackett Publishing Company.
13. Schneider, Susan. (2019) *Artificial You: AI and the Future of Your Mind*. Princeton University Press.
14. Sider, Ted. (2001) *Four-Dimensionalism*. Oxford University Press.
15. Williams, Bernard. (1973) *Problems of the Self*. Cambridge University Press.