

Book One, Question 13

Does that which grows remain the same absolutely (*simpliciter*), before and after?

It is argued that it does not:

- 5 1. The whole is its parts, as is generally said. The parts do not remain the same, however, but instead come and go. Therefore the question itself is a false one.²
2. If we let that which comes today through growth be called *a*, and the remaining whole be called *b*, it is clear that Socrates is now *a* and *b* together. And yet Socrates yesterday was not *a* and *b*, but *b* alone. Therefore Socrates is not the same today that he was yesterday.
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3. That which grows is not the same according to matter, because the material parts come and go, as Aristotle says,³ and they do not remain the same. Therefore it is not the same according to form, because in a different matter there must be a different form, since form does not pass from matter to matter but is instead drawn from the potentiality of its matter. Therefore it is concluded that it is not the same absolutely, since it is, substantially, its matter and form together.
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4. If that which grows were to remain the same despite the fact that some of its parts come and others go, it would follow by the same reasoning that the flame of a candle would remain the same up until when the candle melts away. That this is false is clear, since the flame is continuously generated anew and the preceding flame corrupted. Therefore it is not the same before and after. The initial inference is clear, because just as in something living there is a certain continuity of succession between the parts coming and going, so it is in the flame. Therefore if such continuity were to suffice for material sameness (*identitatem*), that flame would be the same continuously up until the end.
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Aristotle says that the opposite should be maintained.⁴ And this is argued for by reason:

- 30 1. It cannot be said that something grows unless it is less before and greater afterwards. This, however, cannot be if it does not remain the same before and after. For what was not before, was not less before.
2. If a given person did not exist yesterday, then he was brought into existence anew. But that is absurd.
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3. The term 'Socrates' would not be a discrete or singular term, inasmuch as it would signify many things. For yesterday it would have been suppositing for one thing, and now for another.

¹ Ed. Michiel Streijger (Brill, 2010) pp. 111-15.

² That is, it contains the false presupposition that a thing can grow.

³ *Gen. et Cor.* I 5, 321b25-27.

⁴ *Gen. et Cor.* I 5, 321a21-25.

So *the first conclusion*, then, is that what grows remains the same in species before and after. This is so with regard to the species that is its substantial kind, because if before it was a human being then it is still a human being, and if before it was a donkey it is still a donkey. It is also so with regard to the species of its shape, both for the whole and for its limbs, at least after those limbs have been formed.

The *second conclusion* is that the precise thing that is Socrates today is not entirely (*totaliter*) the same as that which was precisely Socrates yesterday, because that which was precisely Socrates yesterday lost some parts and gained other parts from without. But a thing is not entirely the same before and after if something has been removed and something added.

This is confirmed in the way it was argued as before:⁵ let that which was precisely Socrates yesterday be *a*, and let that which comes to it, through which it grows, be called *b*. It is clear that Socrates is now composed of *a* and *b*. Therefore Socrates is not entirely the same as *a*, and yet he was entirely the same as *a* yesterday. Therefore it is clear that Socrates now is not entirely the same as was Socrates yesterday.

Seneca expressly holds this view. Hence he says that “It is striking that we take such care over a thing that is as thoroughly fleeting as is our body. For it flows as rivers do and is not the same today as it was yesterday.” Indeed he says: “I, while I speak, am changed, and with respect to my body I am not entirely the same as he who began to speak.”⁶

The *third conclusion* is that a human being, from the start of his life up until the end, remains the same partially – indeed, remains the same according to the most noble and principal part, since he remains the same with respect to his intellective soul, which remains entirely the same forever.

From this we can conclude that absolutely speaking and without qualification (*sine addito*) a human being remains the same from the start of his life up until the end, because we customarily (*solemus*) pick out a thing, absolutely and without qualification, from its most principal part – especially if that most principal part is highly excellent, in the way the intellective soul excels the body. Hence Aristotle expressly says in *Ethics* VII and IX⁷ that a human being is principally his intellect or intellective soul. And thus a human being is said to be the lover of himself, if he loves his intellectual part. And this is what our faith truly holds, that although the bodies of the saints are corrupted and their souls alone are in paradise, still we say that Saint Peter is in paradise, and we say in the litany “Saint Peter, pray for us.”

But I believe that something else should be said about horses and dogs. For I believe that this full-grown horse that precisely exists today, even if it is partially the same as that which was precisely born from its mother’s womb, still it is not the same with respect to its greater part or even with respect to its more principal part. For in the full-grown horse the matter added since its birth is

⁵ See initial argument n. 2.

⁶ *Epistulae ad Lucilium* LVIII 22-23.

⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.6, 1150a1-4; IX.8, 1168b31-34.

much greater than the matter that was with it at birth – whether we are speaking of the matter in its head, its heart, its brain, or any other bodily part. And since in the case of material forms – that is, those drawn from the potentiality of matter – a form does not pass from matter to matter, so in that full-grown horse there is much more of the substantial form (both in the heart and in the brain) that did not exist at birth than there is of the substantial form that did exist. And so it follows that even if there is a partial sameness (*identitas*)⁸ between this precise thing and that precise thing, the sameness holds in virtue of lesser or fewer parts. And [it follows] likewise that there is more difference here than sameness.

Next, so as to see how a horse remains numerically the same, let us return to Seneca’s view and speak of the horse as we do of a river – except that, as Seneca nicely puts it, a river more quickly and obviously passes and changes, and does so according to more parts at once, whereas a horse does so more slower and according to fewer parts, and thus less obviously – indeed, it does so imperceptibly.

Hence just as ‘Brunellus’ is a discrete term with its own proper quality, so is the term ‘Seine.’ From this one has to concede that in some way there remains numerically the same thing for which it supposits. And I believe that this numerical identity is determined by the continual succession of parts arriving anew while the prior parts pass away. So if I say that “the Seine has endured for a thousand years,” the sense is that for a thousand years there have been parts continuously succeeding other parts. And so it is too for horses and dogs, together with the fact that in such a succession the same or a similar shape always remains. And even if there is no identity there absolutely, still common folk, to whose senses the coming and going of parts is not apparent – especially in the case of living things – say absolutely and without qualification that the animal remains the same.

With this in view, here is my response to the initial arguments.

The first arguments establish that these things do not remain absolutely the same in such a way that it is true to say that the whole that precisely exists today existed entirely the same yesterday.

The other arguments, for the opposite, establish that a thing remains partially the same, or at least that it remains the same by an identity asserted from the continuity of the succession of parts succeeding one another through time. They also establish that a thing is commonly said to be the same – speaking absolutely and unqualifiedly – on account of the imperceptibility of the change.

There is no need, on account of these arguments, to concede anything more. Nor is there any force to those appeals in the human case asserting that if you are not the same as you were, then you were not baptized. For it was said that a human being does not remain the same absolutely, but does remain according to his most principal part. This is not so in other cases.

⁸ Throughout, when Buridan asks whether two things are “the same,” he is using the ordinary word ‘*idem*.’ Here, he switches to the abstract noun ‘*identitas*.’ One could of course translate the whole discussion in terms of whether that which grows remains *identical* (*idem*) or preserves its identity (*identitas*).