

Book One, Question 10

5 Is Socrates the same today as he was yesterday, supposing that today something has been added to him through nutrition and converted into his substance, or supposing that today some part has been removed from him – for instance, if his hand has been amputated?

[*Initial Arguments*]

10 1. It is argued first that he is not the same, because it would then follow that the whole would be the same as its part, and thus the whole would be its part, the opposite of which was asserted in another question.² The inference is proved by positing that what was added to Socrates today be called *a*, and the remaining whole be called *b*. It is clear that Socrates yesterday was that *b*, and if today he is the same, then he is still that *b*. But yet *b* is a part of him, distinct from *a*.

15 2. If the hand that is amputated today be called *b*, and the remainder *a*, then Socrates yesterday was *a* and *b*, since the whole is its parts.³ But today he is not *a* and *b*, since *b* has been cut off. Therefore he is not the same as yesterday.

20 3. It would follow that a whole that was corrupted would remain the same as before. But this is impossible, since it was said in *De generatione* II [338b16-17] that what is corrupted cannot return numerically the same. The inference is proved by positing a situation where a jar is full of wine, which wine is posited to contain a hundred or a thousand drops. Then if those thousand drops will have been corrupted, the whole wine will be corrupted, and yet this same wine will remain. This is
25 proved by positing a situation where, every hour, one of those drops falls out from the bottom and is corrupted, while through the mouth at the top one drop is added to replace it. It is then clear that after the removal of the first drop and its replacement by another, it will still be the same wine as
30 before – just as, by parity of reason, Socrates is the same even if something is previously added through nutrition and something else lost when burned off by heat. Also by parity of reason, if a further drop is removed and another added it will still be the same wine, and so on without end. Therefore, over the course of a thousand hours all those thousand drops will be corrupted and so the whole of that wine will be corrupted, but yet the same wine will still remain.

[*Arguments to the contrary*]

35 1. The opposite is asserted, because Heraclitus's view would then return – namely, that it is not possible for the same person to enter twice into the same river, because he would continuously change through continual nutrition and would be other than he was before.

40 2. It would follow that the term 'Socrates' would not be a discrete term, because it would supposit

¹ John Buridan. *Quaestiones super octo Physicorum* (Venice, 1509: repr. Frankfurt: Minerva, 1964). Corrected from the text established in notes 14-26 of Olaf Pluta, "Buridan's Theory of Identity," in J. Thijssen and J. Zupko (eds.) *The Metaphysics and Natural Philosophy of John Buridan* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 49-64.

² In fact, the previous question, *In Phys.* I.9: Is the whole its parts? (This question has never been translated).

³ Again this relies on *In Phys.* I.9.

for many distinct things – albeit prior and posterior as the term ‘time’ does.

3. That which grows remains the same, as Book I sets out.⁴ But grows occurs through the addition of parts through nutrition.

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4. It would follow that I have at no other time ever seen you, the one whom I see now; rather, I have seen someone else. Acts of injustice would cease, as would retribution for good acts. For you are not the one who struck me yesterday or who defended me yesterday from my enemies. On what basis, then, would I seek amends from you, or on what basis ought I to recompense you?

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5. It would follow that you who are here have not been baptized, but rather someone else was. Therefore you are not a Christian.

6. It would follow that on any one day many Socrates would be corrupted and many others generated, because at this hour that Socrates exists and at the previous hour he did not, but rather some other Socrates existed, who now does not exist. Therefore he was generated today and he, that same one, was corrupted, since generation is change from non-existence to existence, and corruption is the converse.

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[*Main Reply*]

We are asking not about sameness (*identitas*)⁵ with respect to species or genus, but about numerical sameness, according to which ‘this being the same as that’ means that this *is* that. And then the question is easily solved by drawing a distinction. For we are accustomed to say in three ways that something is numerically the same as something.

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The first way is by being entirely (*totaliter*) the same – namely, because this is that and there is nothing belonging to the whole of this that does not belong to the whole of the other and vice versa. This is numerical sameness in the strictest sense. According to this way it should be said that I am not the same as I was yesterday, for yesterday there was something that belonged to my whole that has now been dissolved, and something else that yesterday did not belong to my whole which later, by nutrition, was made to belong to my whole substance. And this is what Seneca said in the letter to Lucilius (the one that begins with “Quanta verborum”): “No one is the same youth and old age, indeed not even yesterday and today. For our bodies are swept along as rivers are.”⁶ In this sense Heraclitus well said that we are so continuously changed that it is not possible for someone who is entirely the same to enter twice into a river that is also entirely the same. And when we take ‘numerically the same’ in this way, the arguments go through that were made at the start of the question to prove that Socrates is not the same today as he was yesterday.

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In a second way, however, one thing is said to be the same as another *partially* – namely, because this is part of that (and this is especially said if it is a major or principal part), or else because this and that share (*participant*) in something that is a major or principal part of each. For in this way Aristotle says

⁴ *De generatione* I.5, 321b11-15.

⁵ 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*).

⁶ *Epistulae ad Lucilium* LVIII 22.

85 in *Ethics* IX [1168b31] that a human being is, above all, the intellect, and a city and every community is, above all, its most principal member, as was set out in the preceding question. From this, too, springs our denominating a whole by denominating its part. And thus a human being remains the same through the entirety of his life because the soul remains entirely the same, and the soul is a principal – indeed the most principal – part. A horse, however, does not remain the same in this way, and indeed neither does the human body. And in this way it is certainly true that you are the same one who was baptized forty years ago – especially since this holds of us principally because of the soul and not the body.⁷ Also, I can pursue you for injuries or be required to repay you, because harmful or meritorious deeds also come principally from the soul and not from the body.⁸ So too we do not say that you were generated yesterday because we do not say that something is generated absolutely (*simpliciter*) unless it is generated as a whole or with respect to its major or principal part.⁹

95 But in a still third way, less strictly, one thing is said to be numerically the same as another according to the continuity of distinct parts, one in succession after another. In this way the Seine is said to be the same river after a thousand years, although strictly speaking nothing is now a part of the Seine that was part of it ten years ago. For thus the ocean is said to be perpetual, as is the world around us, and a horse is the same through its whole life and likewise so is the human body. And this mode of identity suffices for a significant term to be called discrete or singular according to our common and customary mode of speaking.¹⁰ Strictly, however, this mode of speech is not true, For it is not strictly true that the Seine that I see is the one that I saw ten years ago. Still the proposition is conceded in the sense that the water that we see, which is called the Seine, and the water that I saw then, which was also called the Seine, and also the waters that were there during the intervening times, each was called in its time the Seine, and each was in continuous succession with the others. It is based on “identity” spoken of according to this sort of continuousness that the term ‘Seine’ is a discrete and singular term, although it is not as strictly discrete as it would be if it remained entirely the same before and after.

110 Through these claims it is plainly apparent how one should respond to all the arguments that were made, and how they go through in their own ways.

⁷ Compare the fifth argument above to the contrary.

⁸ Compare the fourth argument above to the contrary.

⁹ Compare the sixth argument above to the contrary.

¹⁰ Compare the second argument above to the contrary.