ARE WE ONE SELF OR MULTIPLE SELVES?

IMPLICATIONS FOR LAW AND PUBLIC POLICY

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When we say we know something of ourselves, is not the self we know and acknowledge only one actor, a fabrication, a dime-store definition? So Moosbrugger without his ordinary habits and pattern of life would be unrecognizable even to himself. If an inner demon did it (whatever the deed is), hang him; don’t hang Moosbrugger.1

Some people hate themselves. But if I say, “I hate myself,” who is this “I” that stands apart from “myself”? And notice how in the expression “I am not myself today,” the “I” and “myself” change places. Now it is “myself” who is the authentic, the authoritative, the judgmental “I,” and it is “I” who is the self that is judged and found wanting. Some people talk to themselves; when they do, who is speaking and who is listening?

In examples such as these we speak as if each of us were a composite or committee of several selves existing at the same time (so who is this “each of us”?). Yet in another set of expressions we speak as if each of us were the locus of successive selves, “time sharing” the same body and consciousness. “I am not the man I was.” “I don’t recognize myself at 21.” “I am not the same person I was in high school.” Plutarch speaks of Caesar as “competing

I acknowledge helpful discussions with Richard Thaler and with the members of a philosophy discussion group at the University of Chicago Law School, plus helpful comments on a previous draft by Thaler, Neil Duxbury, Elias Khalil, and anonymous reviewers for Legal Theory. I have discussed various aspects of the multiple-selves question previously in my books AGING AND OLD AGE (1995), esp. pp. 85–94, and OVERCOMING LAW, ch. 25 (1995), but the present paper goes beyond the previous discussions.

with himself, as though he were someone else, and . . . struggling to make the future excel the past."

Not all of this is just loose, metaphoric talk. Some of it is. I am the same person I was in high school, or for that matter in nursery school, because personhood, as the concept is used and understood by virtually everyone, is determined by a particular kind of continuity. I am the same Richard Posner who attended the Walden School in 1941, because I have the same brain (albeit with some different cells). If my brain were copied, and the original then destroyed, the body in which the brain copy was installed would not be me; I would be dead. I have an intuition, anyway, that this is correct, that Parfit’s attempt to divorce personal identity from physical continuity won’t fly. And, looking forward rather than back, I believe that the plans and projects that I embarked on now will unfold in my future, not someone else’s. But these points are not critical to my analysis. What is important is that “self” is a different concept from “person” and that the idea of multiple selves inhabiting the same person either simultaneously or successively (or both) is not inconsistent with the way we think and talk. Put differently, multiple selfishness is psychologically realistic; multiple personhood is not (which is one of the things that makes the idea of the Trinity arresting). It would not be false to say that I am literally several selves.

Simultaneous and successive selves are related in the following way. The commonest case in which we sense multiple selves struggling within ourselves for control is the case of temptation (weakness of will if we yield to the temptation). Often, though not always, the competing selves in such a case are a self that has no future horizon—the tempted, the one who wants to eat the piece of chocolate although he knows that doing so will aggravate his weight problem—and a self that does think about the future, a self for whom the future has weight. The future-oriented self struggles

5. Multiple-selves analysis is not original with me. See Parfit, supra note 3, at 302-06, and other references in Posner, AGING AND OLD AGE, supra, at 84 n. 34. The characters in Edward Albee’s play Three Tall Women: A Play in Two Acts (1995) are three selves—one aged 26, one aged 52, and one aged 92—of the same person.
6. My distinction between the future-oriented and the current self is very similar to the distinction between planner and doer in Richard H. Thaler and H.M. Shefrin, An Economic Theory of Self-Control, 89 J. POL. ECON. 392 (1981). The difference is that Thaler and Shefrin side with the planner (future-oriented self), whom they regard as the rational actor—like the rider relative to the horse. I do not assign priority among the different selves.

It might be questioned whether all cases of weakness of will involve a conflict between present and future selves, in which the victory of the present self is the proof of weakness of will. Might it not be weak willed to refuse a risky, exciting job for a dull one that promised a financially secure future? But I think that in such a case we would say, rather, that the person was excessively risk averse—in a sense, too future-regarding.
Are We One Self or Multiple Selves?

with the current self, often losing, as when the current self, by refusing to save for “his” (really “their”) old age, hurts the future self. The lack of a future sense is something we associate with animals and infants, perhaps unjustly, because much behavior of animals and infants is future-oriented, though presumably instinctively so rather than with a sense of inner struggle. The absence of consciousness of the future argues a lack of imagination and therefore a degree of mental underdevelopment. This may be why we so often feel guilty when the current self beats the future-oriented self. We feel incompletely adult; we have failed to “grow up,” as we were told to do so many times when we were children (that is, when we were just children).

Suppose, then, that in most so-called adults there are two selves rather than one: a “child” self that has no future horizon, no concept of deferred gratification, hence an infinite discount rate; and a fully “adult” self that has a keen awareness of and interest in thriving in the future and a low discount rate, perhaps a discount rate no higher than necessary to reflect the chance of not surviving to a given future period. The behavior of the individual will be the outcome of a struggle between these two selves. I need not posit some controlling force—some third self—that awards the palm in this struggle. I assume that it is pure, unrefereed struggle, like war, where victory goes to the side that is stronger or has better tactics. It may be that very intelligent people have more vivid imaginations, making their adult selves more tenacious in struggling for a happy future, or are more sophisticated intellectually, and thus understand that the sum of many small things (a piece of chocolate every night for ten years) can be momentous (a blocked coronary artery), or are more adept at outfoxing the child self through various commitment strategies. If imagination is developed in part through experience, this would explain the weakness of the adult self in a young person, whereas the well-known “childishness” of many elderly people may reflect the weakening of one’s future-oriented self as one’s remaining future becomes truncated by the proximity of senility or other disability and of death.

In this analysis, phenomena such as weakness of will, shortsightedness, reckless disregard of future consequences, and both first and second childhood are not signs or scenes of irrationality. They are products of the fact that human behavior is the result of conflict between these two selves that each person has—the future-oriented self (“adult”) and the present-oriented self (“child”)—both of which are fully rational in the economic sense. The qualification “in the economic sense” is important. We do not in casual speech attribute full rationality to animals or young children. That is be-

7. Emphasized in Thomas C. Schelling, Self-Command in Practice, in Policy, and in a Theory of Rational Choice, 74 AM. ECON. REV. PAPERS & PROC. 1 (May 1984). Schelling’s article is the best introduction I know to the economic version of multiple-selves analysis, the version I am trying to elaborate in this paper.
cause they lack full (human) adult consciousness. But if rationality is defined, as economists and evolutionary biologists are wont to do, in purely instrumental terms, as the best available fitting of means to ends, then there is no paradox in regarding animals and young children as fully rational and the human adult as a composite of a rational adult and a rational child. If for child we substitute animal, the analogy to traditional mind-body dualism becomes perspicuous. And with or without the substitution, an analogy to Freudian psychology is also apparent.

I am not advocating freedom for animals and children. Rationality is not synonymous with intelligence (or, as I have already suggested, with imagination), let alone with knowledge. Radical intellectual or information deficits provide a relatively uncontroversial basis for countermanding the impulses of a current self. But the child’s orientation to the present is not a result merely of these deficits, for as adults we frequently act “childishly,” not because of lack of information but because of the continued existence (or coexistence) of the child’s self in the adult’s body.

To the list of phenomena that the conflict between selves explains, I should add asceticism, the martyr complex, and a suicidal obsession with honor or posthumous fame, to show that the future-oriented self is as capable as the present-oriented self of being “self-destructive.” In a normal person, the claims of the two selves are balanced, rather than either holding the whip. A richer concept of rationality than ordinarily employed in economics might insist not only that each of our selves be rational in the means-end sense, but also that there be some balance among the selves—that the “voice” of each be “heard” whenever a person must make a choice. A related point is that the hypertrophy of the moral self (as where a person treats with utter impartiality the interests of his or her own family and the interests of complete strangers) is as questionable as its failure to develop at all (the case of the psychopath). 8

I have said nothing as yet about contingent selves, which is to say future (more precisely possible future) as distinct from future-oriented selves. The adult self and the child self are both in the arena, tugging the levers that control the hand as it reaches toward the piece of chocolate. They both have power. The possible future selves have no power, save as frightening spectres to keep the current self in line. One of our infinite number of possible future selves is the self we will be if we are crippled in a terrible accident. Our future-oriented present self may have a most vivid picture of that contingent self but may not like it (which is why the prospect of becoming it may enable the future-oriented self to keep the present-oriented self from acting recklessly) and therefore may not internalize its values. As a result, our future-oriented present self—or perhaps I should say even our future-oriented present self—may not attempt,

8. The theme of Williams’s important essay, supra note 4.
through savings or disability insurance, to allocate as many resources to that possible future self as the latter would like if it had any power over the allocative decisions of the present self, which it doesn’t, being contingent rather than actual. Similarly, while the future-oriented self may be acutely concerned with the health consequences of eating chocolate, the horizon of those concerns may be limited to say the next thirty years, at the end of which time the individual will be, let us suppose, 80 years old. This current future-oriented self may not value years after 80 highly and therefore may not allocate as many resources to that future 80-and-older self as the latter—having no other years to which to allocate consumption—would like.

Thus, I do not see forced savings, or compulsory accident insurance, as a response to a lack of self-control. A person may be firmly in the grip of his adult, future-oriented self—so firmly as to be immune from temptations—yet that self still may rationally disvalue certain possible future selves. The government steps in through social security or Medicare to protect these selves from the rational indifference of current, fully adult, fully “self-controlled” persons.

There is still another sense in which we are multiple selves rather than a single self. We have a private, interior self and a public, exterior self.9 The private (“inner”) self is the domain of fantasy, inarticulate feeling, and interior monologue, whereas the public (“outer”) self is the domain of speech, role-playing, deception, and behavior. The public self, the self that does not dream or plan but that speaks and acts, is the self we turn to the social world and is itself as multiple as the number of roles we play in that world. The private self is normally concealed, although portions (sometimes large portions) of it may be revealed to a spouse and to other intimates. Because the opportunities for and the advantages of transacting with other people decline with age, we spend less time “keeping up” our public self and as a result become more “like ourselves.” This way of speaking assumes, though I believe arbitrarily, that the private self is in some sense more authentic than the public self; that it is the “real” self and the public self is pretense.

The distinction between the private and the public self is parallel to that between the present-oriented (“child”) and future-oriented (“adult”) selves. The private self often is a bursting reservoir of egotistical aggressiveness and

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9. This aspect of multiple-selves analysis was pioneered by William James and Erving Goffman. For a recent example of this analysis, see Eileen M. Donahue et al., The Divided Self: Concurrent and Longitudinal Effects of Psychological Adjustment and Social Roles on Self-Concept Differentiation, 64 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOLO. 834 (1993); and for general discussion, see Martin Hollis, MODELS OF MAN: PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS ON SOCIAL ACTION, ch. 5 (1977). An application to literature is the distinction between the actual and the implied author of a work of literature, where the latter is the impression of the author that the actual author would like readers to form from the work. See, for an influential discussion, Wayne C. Booth, The RHETORIC OF FICTION 71–76, 86 (2d ed. 1983).
hostility, resembling in its egoism the child self. The public self is to a much greater degree planned and calculated, and so a project in which the adult self plays the primary shaping role. It is the fact that the public self is constructed, in a way that the private self seems not to be, that led the Romantic poets and philosophers, with their cult of the natural, and hence (as in Wordsworth’s poetry) their privileging of the child over the adult, to consider the private self the more authentic, more the “real” we. And yet the constructed self, being a project of the adult self, the future-oriented self, might equally well be considered the more authentic of the two selves.

II

So I want to distinguish between a present-oriented (or child) self and a future-oriented (or adult) self, between a present self and possible future selves, and between a private self and a public self. All persons have two or more selves along each of these three dimensions. The next question to consider is the relation among the three dimensions. I see it as follows. The present-oriented and future-oriented selves are the components of the private or inner self. Together they create the public self, the self that actually acts. The future-oriented component of the private self, having by definition a greater awareness of the person’s possible future selves, will give some weight to the interests of those selves in “instructing” the public self how to act but less weight than the future selves would themselves give to their interests. A person is said to be “selfless” when he subordinates both his present and his future selves to the interests of other people.

This analysis can help identify factors that are likely to influence the choices people make. One factor is the relative strength of the present-oriented self versus the future-oriented self. The strength of the present-oriented self is a function of the intensity of present gratifications and can therefore be expected to fade with age. The strength of the future-oriented self is a function of both the power to imagine future states and the likelihood, imminence, and content of those future states. Concerning the last point, namely the content of the future states, an imaginative person vividly imagining dying from the fatal disease that he has just been diagnosed as having may decide to kill himself, whereas a less imaginative, more present-oriented person may not. This suggests that, as imagination is a component of intelligence, a more intelligent person will be more future-oriented than will a less intelligent one. Which is not to say that the more intelligent person is likely to be the more selfless—his imaginatively heightened concern is for his own future selves, not necessarily for anyone else.

It might seem that intelligence would also strengthen the future-oriented self by suggesting clever strategies for outfoxing the present-oriented self. But it is equally the case that intelligence will enable the present self to
Are We One Self or Multiple Selves?

29

develop rationalizations that may deceive the future-oriented self. Many highly intelligent people have engaged in “self-destructive” behavior—that is, behavior calculated to extinguish their future selves. It is true that we do not often observe the present self trying to defeat the future-oriented self through precommitment strategies, like those employed by the future-oriented self—for example, buying a lifetime supply of cigarettes in order to reduce the marginal cost of smoking in the future. But in those last three words (“in the future”) lies the explanation. The present self by definition is interested in the present, not the future. It is not interested in the pleasure of future selves just because those selves will one day be present selves.

Intelligence is to a considerable degree innate, but culture, as well, can affect the relative strength of one’s present-oriented and future-oriented selves. A culture that disparages pleasure and paints future states in rosy hues will strengthen the future-oriented self. Traditional Christianity strongly favors that self, for it disparages pleasure, and while it emphasizes negative as well as positive future states (hell and purgatory as well as heaven) it teaches how to avoid the former and it also teaches how better to imagine both, through meditation and other techniques of developing the religious imagination.10 We can perhaps understand the traditional Christian aversion to lending money at interest (“usury”) as an aversion to enjoying the present at the expense of the future, although looked at from the lender’s standpoint what is involved is a sacrifice of present for future consumption. It is no surprise that the ban on lending at interest was first relaxed with regard to business borrowing, which facilitates investment, a future-oriented activity.11

I have just been speaking of culture in the sense of ideas. At least as important is the material culture—the opportunities available in a society to revel in present enjoyments on the one hand or to bring about happy future states on the other. A heavy tax on consumption will weaken the hand of the present-oriented self by increasing the cost of pleasure to him (less chocolate is bought the costlier it is), whereas inflation, insofar as it operates as a tax on savings and therefore an inducement to present consumption, will weaken the hand of the future-oriented self. A generous system of governmentally guaranteed pensions will, by “taking care” of the future, weaken the future-oriented self’s “argument” for behaving prudently in the present; but at the same time, by taxing current consumption heavily to finance the pensions and by reserving consumption for the future, the system will strengthen the future-oriented self relative to the present-oriented self. A reduction in the accident rate will weaken the

future-oriented self by reducing the benefits from being oriented toward a contingent future crippled self, but an increase in the returns to education will weaken the present-oriented self by increasing the opportunity cost of foregoing an education in order to enjoy the present.

It may be objected that analyzing personal choice in terms of a struggle between a present-oriented and a future-oriented self adds nothing to a more conventional economic approach in which the individual chooses among possible actions by using a discount rate to reduce future costs and benefits, whenever they are expected to be realized, to a present value, thus enabling comparison among the future states and between each of those states and the present. The conventional approach, however, implies impartiality between present and future consumption; and discount rates are much too high for an inference of impartiality. Impartiality implies discounting future costs and benefits at a rate equal to the probability of still being alive when the future state in question arrives.

For most people at most ages, this probability is much greater than is implicit in a discount rate of 2 to 4 percent, the usual range of estimates of the real (that is, inflation-adjusted) riskless discount rate. The present value of $1 to be received in 40 years is only 21 to 45 cents at discount rates of 2 to 4 percent. This implies, on the assumption of impartiality between present and future consumption, that the average 30-year-old has only a 21 to 45 percent probability of living to 70. In fact that probability is 75 percent. My explanation for this discrepancy is that the 40-year-old's future-oriented self is unable to dominate his present self, is incompletely altruistic toward the individual's future 70-year-old self, or is both.

Most academics have had the experience of accepting a speaking engagement or other commitment far in advance and then experiencing sharp regret when the time comes to fulfill it. The reason, I suggest, is that accepting the commitment confers a benefit on the present self, if only the benefit of not disappointing the person asking for the commitment, whereas the costs are shoved off on a future self. Invitation-givers understand this and therefore tender their imitations as far in advance as possible—another reason being, however, that it is more difficult to plead a prior commitment plausibly if the invitation is received long in advance.

12. Another approach, this one closer to the multiple-selves approach, distinguishes between a person's "preferences" and his "metapreferences" (see, e.g., Albert O. Hirschman, Against Parsimony: Three Easy Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Discourse, 1 ECON. & PHIL. 7, 8–9 [1985]), with the former corresponding to the preferences of what I am calling the present-oriented self and the latter to the preferences of what I am calling the future-oriented self.


14. The implicit discount rates used by people are often much higher. See, e.g., Thaler and Shefrin, supra note 6. This strengthens my point.
I have suggested that multiple-selves analysis is plausible because it corresponds to the way in which we think about ourselves, although not the only way. But that is not an adequate justification for the analysis. It would make the analysis simply a redescriptions or translation of a psychological state. Its real value is in offering a framework for explaining certain psychological and social phenomena and for evaluating certain public policies. I gave the example of discount rates; the traditional single-self analysis does not explain our partiality to the present in allocating consumption between present and future. Here is another example: In thinking about the future, we discount pleasures more heavily than pains. We believe, for example, that if we have osteoporosis or cataracts or a hearing impairment in old age, it will be we who experience these things, whereas if we enjoy in old age shuffleboard or gossip or penny-pinching or garrulous reminiscence it will be some future self, not "we," who will be enjoying these things. The difference, I suggest, is that the impairments are physical, which is to say of the body, and the body is common to all our selves, whereas the distinctive pleasures of the elderly are (from the standpoint of the younger self) the pleasures of a different self. This analysis implies, incidentally, that if society wants people to save more it should subsidize treatments and cures for the characteristic infirmities of the old rather than subsidize the distinctive pleasures of the old, because the former type of subsidy is more likely than the latter type to strengthen the hand of the future-oriented present self.

With this last example I veer into a rich field of legal and other public-policy implications of the multiple-selves approach. Here are a few others. It is not, as a number of economic analysts of law have contended, an economic mistake that the law of torts, in calculating monetary damages for a crippling injury, does not use the valuation of such an injury that is implied by the meager amount of disability insurance that most people buy. The reason for the low demand for such insurance is that the marginal utility of income is lower in the crippled than in the healthy state. When a person is healthy, which is his state when he buys disability insurance, he imagines the value to him of a dollar when because of disability his consumption opportunities may be curtailed. He decides that after a relatively few dollars have been expended for the necessities of life in the disabled state, further expenditures will yield little utility, and he calculates his needs for disability insurance accordingly. To use this calculation as the basis for a jury's assessing damages for a crippling accident would overlook the fact that the crippled self, a possible future self made actual by the accident, has

his own interests, which are different from those of his now-vanished healthy predecessor self. From the crippled self’s standpoint, the utility calculations of the healthy self are irrelevant. He will be undercompensated if that healthy self’s preferences are allowed to influence the award of damages. Yet if those preferences are disregarded entirely, it is the present self that will be entitled to complain—that he is being made to pay astronomical prices for goods and services to finance tort damages calculated with sole regard for the welfare of his possible future selves. So if, for example, a person were blinded in a tortious accident, and tort law is neutral between successive selves, we would expect the damages award to exceed the proceeds of the average disability insurance contract, but to fall short of the amount that would actually compensate the person for the loss of his sight.

The underlying problem, as should be clear by now, is that the self that has to decide to buy or not to buy disability insurance is not the future disabled self, and the two selves have different preferences. The denial of such differences explains such propositions as: “In the case of the individual, pure time preference is irrational: it means that he is not viewing all moments as equally parts of one life.” Who is the “he” in this sentence? Not a single unchanging self, if the assumption of the single self is dropped, but a locus of successive selves each of which has a different interest. This makes the optimum time preference of an individual as complicated an issue as the optimum social rate of savings.

Multiple-selves analysis has implications for a number of other issues of public policy as well as tort damages; social security (not the details of it, but the principle of an entitlement that cannot be waived in advance to an old-age pension) is only the most obvious. Social security prevents the younger self from selling the older self down the river, although at the same time it weakens the future-oriented self by reducing the benefits of thrift—as does the heavy taxation of decedents’ estates, which by encouraging people either to consume or to give away as much of their wealth as possible during their lifetime strengthens the hand of the present-oriented self against the future-oriented self.

Notice how the interaction of social security with heavy death taxes operates to deliver our future elderly selves into the control of the government. Notice also how multiple-selves analysis undermines the justice of heavy death taxes. For in that analysis the choice between saving in order to be affluent in one’s old age and saving in order to be able to make bequests at death is a choice between conferring benefits on a future self


18. Rawls, supra, at 295.
Are We One Self or Multiple Selves?

and on a completely different self (the intended beneficiaries of one's bequests), and why should the former be privileged over the latter?

Multiple-selves analysis can help us see why it is not a violation of Millian liberalism to try, at least within limits, to discourage suicide. Like failing to save for one's old age, suicide is a wrong to a future self. Or put in the terminology of economics, once the existence of multiple selves is recognized it becomes apparent that many suicides impose external costs. The benefits are borne by the present-oriented self, which is spared whatever physical or mental distress lies behind the decision to commit suicide, but the costs are shifted, in part anyway, to any "happy" future selves that the person might someday be. We therefore try especially to discourage impulsive suicides, or suicides by very young people, because in both cases the future-oriented self is weak and hence the likelihood that the welfare of future selves is being ignored in the decision to commit suicide is considerable. As people grow older and wiser, the balance between the present-oriented self and future-oriented self grows more even, and the case for discouraging suicide weakens.

A similar analysis supports efforts to discourage drug addiction, which could be thought almost as inconsiderate of future selves as suicide. The point is not that addiction is irrational; it is rational (at least in the means-end sense of rationality) provided the prospective addict balances with accurate foresight future pains against present pleasures. The objection to addiction is that it gives radically insufficient weight to the interests of the addict's future selves. It is another argument for a definition of rationality that incorporates some sense of balance among present and future selves.

This analysis provides a reason for doubting that old (or dying) people receive "too much" medical care just because they would not, when young (or healthy), have been willing to buy health insurance sufficiently generous to cover the expense of that care. On the basis of such an argument, Ronald Dworkin has proposed to limit the amount of medical care for the old to what the young would, under conditions of complete information and a just distribution of wealth, be willing to pay for health insurance when old. What is overlooked are the interests of the old self. While it is no doubt true that most young people would not buy an insurance policy that required heavy premiums in order to defray the expected cost of dramatic but usually futile medical interventions in the last few months, weeks, days, or even hours of life, the perspective of the dying person is different and, if multiple-selves analysis is accepted, deserving of some

19. Not all; recall my example of the suicide engineered by the future-oriented self to spare the future self from suffering. Yet this could be viewed as a case in which the future self imposes a cost on the present self, without paying compensation.

respect. The dying person, unless he has a strong desire to leave a large bequest, will not incur substantial opportunity costs by making heavy expenditures on prolonging his life (even if his medical care has not been paid for in advance), as there probably is nothing else for him to spend his money on.

This example shows, however, that, as I remarked earlier in connection with asceticism, the "selfishness" of the present self has a parallel in the future self or selves. Our elderly self, if somehow firmly in control throughout the life course, might make the young self miserable in order to maximize the resources available to the elderly self. We get a balance of sorts between the interests of the various selves through the political process because both young and old vote. To the extent that the present old vote for policies that favor elderly selves in general, democracy benefits future elderly selves, even though the voter is of course the present oldster, not some future self. Democracy may actually weaken the future-oriented self, the internal protector of the old, by fostering institutions such as social security that replace the internal protector with an external one, although the weakening effect is not certain, for reasons explained earlier.

The concept of the selfish future self has a further utility. It shows why multiple-selves analysis does not imply that contracts should be unenforceable because they are attempts to bind a future self or that dangerous criminals should not be punished with long prison terms because the cost of such punishment falls on a future self—the 50-year-old who is languishing in prison because of the murder that his 20-year-old predecessor self committed. The future self, when he materializes, would like to shuck off all the onerous commitments of his predecessor selves. In many cases, he will have a good argument for doing so; he is a different "person," in some sense, from the person who made the contract or committed the crime with insufficient regard for the consequences for his future selves. We disregard the argument and insist on a concept of personhood that embraces the succession of selves because to do so promotes social welfare overall by maintaining what are considered socially valuable institutions, such as contract and criminal punishment.

Institutions do not work perfectly, precisely because they are trying to influence the present self through the future self. Elongation of imprisonment can be expected to have a rapidly diminishing deterrent effect, since the elongation visits punishment on increasingly remote future selves. So multiple-selves analysis provides a basis for possible criticism of the current trend in penology to ever-longer prison sentences.

The suffering that modern imprisonment imposes is psychological rather than physical. If my earlier point about the different effect on the future-oriented present self of future (bodily) pains versus future (psychological) pleasures is correct, it implies that increasing the length of imprisonment would have greater deterrent effect if imprisonment involved physical suf-
fering. Traditional concepts of hell similarly emphasized the physical torments that the damned would experience for eternity.

Society allows children to disaffirm their contracts when they reach adulthood and generally releases child criminals when they reach adulthood. In both cases we act as though we recognized that the individual had attempted to commit his future selves at a time when his future-oriented self was insufficiently developed to operate as a proper counterweight to the present-oriented self.

IV

Many questions are left unanswered by multiple-selves analysis in its present rather rudimentary state of development, and I want to close by simply mentioning some of them. One is the biological origins of the concept of self; and is there an evolutionary story that might explain the multipleness of the sense of self? Second is the effect of education and income on the multiple-selves phenomenon. Does education strengthen the future-oriented self? Does diminishing marginal utility of income make people more generous to their future selves? Are saving and altruism, then, the same phenomenon? Are there any rules to channel and constrain the struggle between the present-oriented and the future-oriented self? Is this struggle truly a focus of religious and political history? Can multiple-selves analysis be used constructively—for example, to deal more effectively with addiction? This is a sample of the interesting questions that taking the multiple-selves perspective seriously can bring into view.