Personal Identity:
Lewis, “Survival and Identity”

1.

(a) **With Parfit:** *What matters in survival is mental continuity and connectedness.*
What I mostly want in wanting survival is that my mental life should flow on (a “continuing succession of mental states”)

(b) **Against Parfit:** *What matters in survival is identity.*
When I wonder whether I will survive, I care whether I myself—the very same person now thinking these thoughts and writing these words—still exist?

According to Lewis, it can’t happen that what matters in survival in (a) is present while what matters in survival according to (b) is lacking.

**His task:** to show that the alleged opposition between what matters and identity is no opposition after all.

2.

In both (a) and (b), we are speaking about different relations. Their *relata* (the things doing the relating) are different. We should have never thought that they were the same.

(a) **What matters in survival is mental continuity and connectedness.**
Here, we are speaking about a relation among person-stages. Lewis is a four-dimensionalist. He believes in temporal parts, or stages.
So, *P* at *t* has what matters in survival if there are later person-stages with ‘appropriate future successors’ of the ‘experiences, thoughts, beliefs, desires and characters’ of *P* at *t*. In short: if there are later person-stages *R*-related to the person-stage of *P* at *t*.

(b) **What matters in survival is identity (or something close enough).**
Here, we are speaking of temporally extended continuant persons with stages at various times. This is, strictly speaking, not identity (identity is a one-one relation and this is a part-whole relation and, as we shall see, can also be a one-many relation). But, it functions much like identity—in any way that ought to be important to us.
So, *P* at *t* has what matters in survival if there are later person-stages who are parts of the same continuant person as the person-stage of *P* at *t*. For short: if there are later person-stages *I*-related to the person-stage of *P* at *t*.

He says that necessarily, two stages are *R*-related if and only if they are *I*-related.

3.

**The Fission Case:**

It is undeniable that, after fission, we have two numerically distinct things. According to Lewis, these are two numerically distinct person-stages at *t*. But what about at *t*?
A bears the $R$-relation to PB; A bears the $R$-relation to PC. As we have learned from Parfit, the $R$-relation does not have to be one-one.

But, according to Lewis, the $I$-relation does not have to be one-one. If it ever happens that two persons share a stage, then that stage will bear the $I$-relation to stages of the two people that do not themselves bear the $I$-relation to each other.

This is what happens in the fission case. Two people—call them PB and PC—share a person-stage at $t$—namely, A. A bears the $I$-relation to PB and A bears the $I$-relation to PC. PB and PC do not bear the $I$-relation to each other.

According to Lewis, then, PB and PC were already present in the body of A at $t$. There were two things at $t$ all along! At $t$, two distinct persons, temporarily occupying the same body, go their separate ways.

(What view about time does Lewis accept—eternalism or presentism?)

The so-called ‘fission’ case does not involve fission, or splitting, at all.