Teleology & Personal Identity
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The Story of Phineas Gage
A typical, mild-mannered individual, Phineas Gage was a blasting foreman for a railroad construction company. Having set and ignited a blast, he was distracted by workers, as a layer of blasting powder ignited, rocking a tamping iron clean through his skull. But he survived. A neuropsychological marvel turned moral miscreant.

Competing Hypotheses

Moral Valence
(De Frietas, Tobia, Newman, & Knobe; Strohminger & Nichols; Tobia)

Teleology
(Taylor, Kalbach, & Rose)

The Question:
What accounts for the intuition that he is “no longer Gage”?

Implications:
(1) We have added Teleology to the discussion of personal identity.
(2) Across three studies, we found that teleological and not moral considerations play a direct role in generating judgments of personal identity.
(3) Teleology, then, should serve as a constraint of discussions of personal identity.