

PERSONAL IDENTITY

- What is "personal identity"? We know from intuitive self-awareness that personal identity exists. It's a fact of conscious life, as common as the word "I."
- How is it defined?
- The problem of personal identity over time is the problem of giving an account of the logically necessary and sufficient conditions for a person identified at one time being the same person as identified at another.

Three Issues of Personal Identity

- What makes one person one person? (The question of unity)
- What makes someone the same person? (The question of identity over time)
- What makes something a person? (The question of personhood)

Criteria of Personal Identity

Two separate issues:

- What is it to be the same person?
- Criteria as evidence for a single person over time: How do we know if x is the same person as y?

Materialist and Dualist Criteria

- Body theory - to be David Cameron is to have this body that you identify as David Cameron. (Materialist)
- Soul Theory - what makes a person the same person through time is that they have the same immortal soul or mind; this is separate from the changing body. (Dualist)

Some Initial Questions

- What does it take for you to persist through time?
- How do we find out whether you have persisted through time? (This is a question of evidence.)
- What is it to be a person? What is required for something to count as a person, as opposed to a non-person?
- At what point in your development from a fertilized egg did you come to be a person? (This has moral implications concerning arguments about whether or not abortion is morally permissible but I will leave these for now).

Memory Criterion/Psychological Continuity

A person should be defined as a thing that has certain mental features. John Locke, the famous empiricist philosopher, wrote that a person is '*a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places*'.

This means that a past or future person is you *only* in the case that you can now remember an experience the past-individual had then, or the future-individual can then remember an experience you are having now. In short (PTO):

- X is the same person as Y if they share the same memories of themselves as oneself.
- Memory functions as evidence for psychological continuity.

Problems with Psychological Continuity/Memory Thesis

One can, of course, have false memories or one's memories can, over time, become corrupt. What we may recall may not be exactly how things actually were. But does truth matter in this respect? Provided I have some memories that are traceable through a narrative, perhaps it doesn't matter as to the veracity of the memories themselves? Why should it matter provided I can reconcile my current self with what has gone before?

Thomas Reid's 'Gallant Officer' example: *There is an old general who remembers a courageous military escapade he engaged in as a young officer, but he does not remember being caned at school as a boy. The young officer remembered the caning.*

The memory test for a single consciousness implies that the boy and the general are not the same person, but that the general and the young officer are the same person, and that the boy and the young officer are the same person.

A further difficulty is that physical persistence through time does not seem to help here because our cells renew and replace themselves every seven years or so. Thus, the general is, physically speaking, materially distinct from the officer and the child.

How might you resolve this? (Discuss)

Derek Parfit's Teletransporter

"I enter the Teletransporter.. This machine will send me at the speed of light.. When I press the button, I shall lose consciousness, and then wake up at what seems a moment later. In fact I shall have been unconscious for about an hour. The scanner here on Earth will destroy my brain and body, while recording the exact states of all my cells. It will then transport this information by radio. Travelling at the speed of light, the message will take three minutes to reach the replicator on Mars. This will then create, out of new matter, a brain and body exactly like mine. It will be in this body that I shall wake up." (Reasons and Persons: p.199)

- Does Parfit's example show that I am not identical with my body?

Consider the above question then consider the following scenario: I have just committed a robbery in Earth. I enter the teletransporter to escape to Mars. The police are waiting to arrest me at the other end. However, the person who steps out of the Mars teletransporter claims not to have committed the crime. He could not have, since he is physically distinct from the person who committed the crime on Earth. Am I guilty?

Next week we try to resolve some of these problems!

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