

Personal Identity – Part I

I. Personal Identity: Why Care?

This week and next we'll be discussing the following question:

(PI) Under what possible circumstances is a person existing at one time identical with something existing at another time?

Here are some topics that personal identity might be thought to be relevant to:

- Law—especially punishment
- Ethics, e.g., questions of promise-keeping
- Practical Rationality

It may help to keep the above issues in mind when thinking about personal identity—often a helpful way of trying to get a grip on the question of whether some later person is the same person as some earlier person involves asking whether the earlier person should try to ensure that the later person is well off, or whether the later person should be punished for the crimes of the earlier person, or whether the later person is obligated to keep the promises of the earlier person.

II. Perry's Argument that there can be no afterlife:

1. After death (+some time of rotting, etc), a person's body ceases to exist. (Assumption)
2. A person just is her body. (Assumption – the body hypothesis)
3. After death a person ceases to exist. (1,2)
4. There is no afterlife. (3).

III. Some Cases to Consider with Regard to Premise (2)

Prince and Cobbler: There are lots of cases like Locke's case of the prince and the cobbler. Imagine a version of such a case where person X's brain is put in Y's body, and vice versa. After the transplant, who's who?

Teletransportation: You get beamed over to another planet by having your body scanned, and a new one showing up on the other planet. Is this true? Is it still the same person?

Major Amputations: You find out that your entire body is going to be removed, except for your head, with your brain in it. You'll be connected to prosthetic devices and still be able to navigate the world.

Major Amputations + Brain Replacement: Not only will your whole body be removed, but your brain, which was damaged in a car accident is going to be scanned into a computer, and the information will be transferred to a silicon replica of your brain which will then be attached to the prosthetic devices.

IV. An Alternative To Premise (2)

The Soul Hypothesis: A person is just her soul.

Perry's objections to The Soul Hypothesis: I know that I'm the same person that was in lecture on Wednesday. But how could I know that the same soul is inhabiting this body as was inhabiting lecture on Wednesday? I can't! So I can't be a soul.

Response: I can infer from the sameness of body – Perry's response: chocolates example

Response: I can tell from the inside – Perry's response: how? Maybe God sticks a new soul in you each morning?

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