

This Is Philosophy - Chapter 5 : 5.54

Summary

Self

Tackling personal identity.

The Problem of Difference and the Problem of Sameness

The Problem of Difference

"The problem of difference is easy to answer, right? Yes it is. The real challenge is how to give a plausible answer while also solving the following conundrum, the problem of sameness. What makes this pair of puzzles especially tricky is that any solution to the first problem seems to preclude a solution to the second problem and vice versa."

The Problem of Sameness

"what makes you the same person as that baby of 20 (or whatever) years ago?"

How do you know that you are the same person that you were before?

How can you be the same if by definition you are different than you were before?

Principle of the Non-Identity of Discernibles - Small differences between person A and person B prove that A and B are not identical.

"The mystery of personal identity is figuring out how we can solve both the problem of difference and the problem of sameness at once."

Preliminary Positions

"A natural thought is to look for some property that (1) doesn't change, (2) only you have, and (3) you have from birth until death. That's the thing that makes you who you are. Such a trait would solve the problem of difference (because you uniquely have this quality) and the problem of sameness (because you've always had this quality) in one fell swoop."

The luz bone

"The luz bone was supposed to be an unchanging, immutable thing that made each person who they were."

Fingerprints

A modern day "luz bone" if you will. They would solve the our problem if they were static and unique for people but:

"While it is frequently asserted that fingerprints never change, that claim is false. They do change."

Some people don't have fingerprints or even fingers for that matter...are they still people? This argument fails because the physical nature of fingerprints makes them bad candidates for staticness.

"The deeper point is that something as arbitrary and meaningless as fingerprints has nothing to do with the person that you are."

DNA

"What makes you different from your friends and neighbors? Each of you has a distinct genetic blueprint. What makes you the same over time despite change? The information in your DNA—the recipe of you—stays the same."

Provides a static "luz bone", but fails in the identity and uniqueness department:

"Unfortunately, DNA won't work as an account of personal identity because it does not ensure uniqueness. Identical twins have the same DNA, as do clones (cloning is essentially delayed twinning)."

The Soul Criterion

"Before we can begin to evaluate the idea of a soul as a serious proposal for solving the problems of personal identity, we must first try to get some sense of what a soul is."

Conceptions of the Soul

1. Soul: soul = mind

"soul" simply means 'mind' ... the view that soul mind doesn't provide an alternative theory of personal identity; it just is a cumbersome way to state the psychological criterion of the self."

2. Soul: soul = ghost