

Outline: A Substance-Based Account of Personhood

1. Introduction

In modern political philosophy, some are utilizing a notion of the person that is incomplete. This is the notion of performativism, as exemplified in List and Pettit's *Group Agency*. List and Pettit argue for a performative notion rather than an intrinsicist notion, suggesting that persons are agents capable of having demands made upon them, and of making reciprocal demands in turn, within a system of norms" (ch 9).

However, in this paper I will first explain the intrinsicist and performative perspectives before noting that a gap in the philosophical literature exists between the performative and intrinsicist perspectives. From here, I will introduce the Aristotelean notion of substance. Finally, I will argue that this notion of substance is appropriate in filling the gap between the performative and intrinsicist perspectives. I will conclude by responding to two objections.

2. Intrinsicist and Performative Perspectives

"According to [intrinsicist perspective], there is something about the 'stuff' that persons are made of that distinguishes them from non-persons; something that makes persons stand out" (List and Pettit, 171). This is an essence-based notion of personhood. It is intrinsic features of a person that provide it with the capacity to perform actions (List and Pettit, 2011 and Ema Martinelli, 2020).

By contrast, per the 'performativist' conception, "what makes an agent a person is not what the agent is but what the agent does, the mark of personhood is the ability to play a certain role to perform in a certain way" (171). List and Pettit discuss throughout the remainder of the chapter their reasons for adopting the performative conception of personhood. This draws upon Hobbes who argued "what gives an organism a mind, and what makes an agent a person, is not the presence of any non-material substance but the fact that the agent's material substance is organized in a manner that makes certain performances possible" (171 from Pettit 2008b). In this manner substance merely is used as a tool toward performative sFurther they support this view with Locke who argues what makes an agent a person is the capability of "contracting obligations by entering into legal and other conventional arrangements with others" (173).

3. Criticisms of Intrincist and Performative Perspectives

However, I am critical of this view on two counts. First, it is a false dichotomy to create such a distinction between intrincism and performativism. The List and Pettit account does not sufficiently recognize this. Consider the case of somebody who takes performance-enhancing drugs in advance of a sport competition. Following the utilization of such drugs, the body and mind is effectively changed. For instance, changes in testosterone and estrogen levels are linked to mood instability and potentially feelings of sadness. Similarly, studies have shown that women's attitudes and preferences change following pregnancy [src]. Further, consider the case of individuals who lack a particular degree of cognitive capacity, such as babies or disabled

persons. Such individuals should not have their legal rights of personhood removed on the basis of their limits in rational thinking.

My second criticism is that this Lockean view is overly performativistic. It does not give sufficient value to the 'body,' instead focusing on the mind. The problem here is that we have a notion of 'person' that is incomplete. There is something *missing* if we do not include a notion of substance, or a body. With such a performativistic notion, persons are reduced merely to their psychological actions, which is incomplete.

Consider for instance the famous brain transplant scenario.¹ Per this case, imagine Jessica has tragically passed into a coma following a near-fatal accident where a moose charged her while she was looking for hazelnuts in the Canadian forest. All parts of her body apart from her brain lack functionality. When she is taken to a well-endowed Canadian hospital, she is given the body of Paulina who died a natural death and whose organs remain fully functional apart from her brain. The question per this famous Shoemaker case is *who* is this person? Is it a) Jessica with a new body, b) Paulina with a new brain, c) an entirely new individual, or d) nobody at all (see Parfit's nihilistic argument).

It is not the case that the new person is simply Jessica with a new body. The reason for this is that Jessica's thoughts are altered in reaction to her new body. If she previously was highly fit, young and healthy but now was in an overweight and older body, then this would influence the way she goes about her actions. If these actions and thoughts are altered from what they would be if she had remained in her previous body, then she cannot be said to be the same person. A person's psychological self is extremely tied to the biological self.

¹ Per Sydney Shoemaker

The performativism mentality is well captured by Parfit's Embodied Person (EP) view. Per this view, there must be a non-derivative part of the body (e.g. the smallest bit of brain or mind) present within a body. This part is the 'person.' (Animalism pg. 12). This idea is powerful because it retains the traditional intuition that the person in the new body is Jessica. However, Parfit's Embodied Person view is still reductionistic because it gives insufficient weight to the body. Too much weight is given to the 'rationality' aspect of personhood.

The articulate further, the problem with the EP view is that it does not sufficiently connect the mind and the body. Parfit responds by arguing "we already [can explain our connection to the physical properties of our bodies]" in the sense that we "distinguish ourselves and our bodies, as when I say that I am 6 foot tall and weigh 160 pounds because my body has these properties" (43). However, in doing so Parfit completely disconnects the mind from the body. This is contradictory with the notion of a mind being connected in part to the body, as the notion of 'embodiment' implies.

4. The Aristotelean Account

I will then recommend a revisit to the Aristotelean notion of substance.² Following Anna Marmodoro, I argue "the metaphysical unity of a substance is achieved by a process of generation whereby the substantial form is solely responsible for what each part and the whole of a substance are" (Vivarium 2016, pg 1).

² Marmodoro are using Aquinas' interpretation of substance here. Thus, while the material is Aristotelean, it is Aquinas' interpretation of Aristotle that is being noted.

“For whatever accrues to a thing after its complete being accrues thereto accidentally, since it is outside its essence. Now every substantial form makes a complete being in the genus of substance, for it makes an actual being and this particular thing. Consequently, whatever accrues to a thing after its first substantial form will accrue to it accidentally” (pg. 11). Marmodoro follows up, noting “if a substance is a component of an entity other than itself, that entity cannot be a substance, as in the example of a society” (11). This notion of substance is useful because it fills a gap in the Embodied Person (EP) view.

5. Objections

I will conclude by considering two objections. First, that Aristotlean notions are not applicable for the modern political philosophy scene. Second, that the gap between the performativist approach and the intrinsicist approach has already been filled by List and Pettit. Note that List and Pettit distinguish two branches of the performativist approach. There is first the “realist” approach, which flirts with essentialism as it is indifferent to the presence of underlying substantial grounding on relevant performances. The second is the functionalist approach, which reduces substances to performances.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I first explain the intrinsicist and performative perspectives before noting that a gap in the philosophical literature exists between the performative and intrinsicist perspectives. From

here, I introduce the Aristotelean notion of substance. Finally, I argue that this notion of substance is appropriate in filling the gap between the performative and intrinsic perspectives.