

Journal Entry #3

In this journal entry I will be discussing the issue of personhood and how we define it. Lizza gives us three possible definitions of person, which he terms the species definition, the qualitative or functionalist definition, and the substantive definition. I believe that the species definition, closely related to the somatic definition of death (that is, somatic death could be seen as the ceasing to be of a person, person meaning a human organism), has been shown to be completely inadequate. It fails to recognize too many of the non-physical characteristics that we identify as fundamental to personhood.

Thus we are left to consider the other two definitions. Lizza describes the functionalist position as one which views the mind or self as a “function” which can be defined independently of its material substrate. They do *not* claim that the mind is a substance; they hold that it is dependent on the substrate (in our case the nervous system) for existence. Yet it is *distinguishable* from this substrate, in that we can define the qualities, properties, and functionality of “mind” separate from the substrate. Any sufficiently complex substrate can, in theory, develop the “function” of mind.

His last definition of person is rather unclear. He calls it the “substantive” definition and is “the actual self or being of a man or woman; individual personality” (40). This is all very well and good for the dictionary from which he quoted, but in terms of a philosophically sound definition of personhood it is far too vague. Further exposition fails to clear up what exactly Lizza means by his substantive definition. He does split the substantive definition into materialistic and dualistic definitions, which are standard categories of philosophies of mind; yet he does not explain what it is that makes certain materialistic definitions and certain dualistic

definitions “substantive,” or at least not in a way that sufficiently distinguishes the substantive definition from any other definition.

Even if we exercise the principle of charity and do our best to define Lizza’s substantive definition, problems still arise. I think that “personal identity” is not an unfair characterization of his idea – and on this premise I shall proceed. When he discusses the functionalist definition of personhood, Lizza is in fact talking about two separate things. One is the functionalist view of mind (which is equated with personhood in the sense that a person is a mind or a being with a mind) previously described; the other is the functionalist view of identity as psychological continuity. This notion, as Lizza points out, originated in Locke. It is the view that a person’s identity is defined as their thoughts, memories, and the other contents of their minds. Thus if a prince and a cobbler swap memories, the cobbler will literally be in the prince’s body and vice versa.

The kind of definition of personhood we are seeking is, I think, a criterialistic one. That is, a definition of what is and is not a person, so that we can determine when an entity has ceased to have personhood. The first part of the functionalist definition is of this type. Psychological continuity, however, is of this second type: definitions which are about identity, that is, not *what* is a person, but *which* person this is. I would argue that Lizza’s substantive definition also falls into this category, and moreover that it does not necessarily conflict with the idea of psychological continuity. In any case, if I am correct, the substantive definition is not the kind of definition we’re looking for.