

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

The Subjective Character Argument/Personal Identity

Announcements

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- 1. Reading for Tuesday: John Locke, selection from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

The Problem of Consciousness for Identity Theory

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- Consciousness
 - ▣ Being awake or aware
 - ▣ Central feature of having a mind
 - ▣ Something we value deeply

- One Aspect of Consciousness
 - ▣ Phenomenal consciousness
 - Clearest cases: conscious states of sense perception that have particular qualitative features, i.e. “there is something that it is like”
 - Qualia (def): The distinctive “feel” of sensory mental states, e.g. smelling coffee
 - Qualia are:
 - Ineffable
 - Directly and immediately knowable to me
 - Private, i.e. accessible only from a first-person point of view

The Subjective Character of Experience

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Some philosophers argue that phenomenal consciousness is essentially connected with a single point of view

They call this the “subjective character of experience”

The subjective character of experience is the experience of “what it’s like to be me”

All beings with conscious states have a subjective character of experience



Jackson Pollock, *Convergence*, 1952

The Subjective Character Argument

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- 1. Materialism claims that everything in the universe can be explained in physical terms.
- 2. The subjective character of experience is essentially a first-person perspective.
- 3. Materialist theories are objective, and so cannot capture this perspective.
- 4. Therefore, materialism can never capture the subjective character of experience.
 - ▣ (Argument presented by Thomas Nagel, in “What is it like to be a bat?”)

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Personal Identity

The Problem of Personal Identity

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- What is it for a person to persist from one time to another?
- The problem of PI is a problem of numerical identity
 - ▣ “Is x the same as y ?”
- Is Norma Jean Baker one and the same person as Marilyn Monroe?

The Problem of Personal Identity

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- Metaphysical question: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a person P2 at T2 to be one and the same as the person P1 at T1?
 - ▣ This is our focus

- Epistemic question: How do we know if a person P2 at T2 is one and the same person P1 at T1?
 - ▣ Any reasonable view must not entail that PI is unknowable

Why is Personal Identity important?

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- 1. Moral responsibility
 - ▣ To attribute praise/blame for a past action
- 2. Legal responsibility
 - ▣ Punishment for crimes
- 3. Survival after death
 - ▣ John Locke: Persons are saved “according to the doings in this life,” (*Essay*, IV.iii.6).
- 4. Concern and anticipation for a future self

Theories of Personal Identity

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- 1. The Bodily Criterion
- 2. The Soul Criterion
- 3. The Memory or Consciousness Criterion
 - ▣ John Locke
- 4. The Psychological Continuity Criterion
- 5. The Narrative Criterion
 - ▣ Marya Schechtman

Personal Identity

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The Bodily Criterion of PI

- A person P2 at T2 is the same person P1 at T1 if and only if P2 has the same body as P1 had.
- Persistence through time consists in retaining the same functional organization
- Advantages of this view:
 - ▣ Consistent with ordinary experience
 - ▣ Addresses epistemic concern