

## PHI315 : New Unit – Personal Identity, Consciousness, Reality

We have just finished the section or unit about artificial intelligence and artificial life. This was an interesting section, I think a section highly pressing, and one that is most important to address. I would like to now steer our class toward a more speculative region of inquiry, but one that is also on the way. I am referring to artificial or virtual reality, mind uploading, digital immortality, and so on. These issues are real issues because, if you keep up with technology and where companies are headed, VR is big. There are also brain-computer interfaces on the rise, and even the possibility of neuronal digitizing.

However, to address these issues in full, to extract wisdom from the science fiction that we will cover, we first need to get comfortable with the philosophical studies of these things first. Remember how when we covered AI and AL, we first started by looking at the philosophy of it. This week and next we will do the same. Here is the schedule so far:

Today - Personal Identity I Wednesday - Personal Identity II Friday - Metaphysics of VR/AR Monday - Metaphysics of VR/AR II

So, let us turn to personal identity.

### Personal Identity

So, what do I mean when I say personal identity and continuity? Let us look at some “intuition pumps” as a philosopher Daniel Dennett calls them—thought experiments that reveal what our intuitions are about the issue.

#### Theseus Ship

An old example is the ship of Theseus. There was a man in ancient Greece named Theseus, who had a ship. He used that ship a lot, and so it frequently needed repairs. A clever ship repairman came up with an idea. Every time Theseus came to port and asked for repair, the repairman would take the broken part and put it in a warehouse, while putting a new part onto the ship. Suppose that after 15 years of this, every single piece of Theseus’ ship was replaced. On this final day, the repairman runs to the warehouse and assembles a ship out of the old parts. There are now two ships in the harbor. The ship Theseus presently owns, and a ship assembled out of all the pieces that once made up the ship Theseus had. Which of these is the **REAL** ship of Theseus?

Now, this does not seem like a question about personal identity—we are not ships after all—but the question is about **identity** and **change** and **time**.

#### Teleporter

Suppose teleporters become ubiquitous throughout society on our planet. There are different ways they could work. Let us consider some:

**Particle Destructor** In this method, all of your physical particles and their states are scanned, saved, your particles are destroyed, and, on the other end,

new particles of the same type (carbon == carbon) are formed in the exact same way. So, all the particles type-wise are identical prior to and after the teleporter.

Is it you that comes out on the other end?

Suppose the teleporter malfunctions, and instead of being destroyed, the particles are left. Now there are two persons. Which one is you?

**Particle Shipper** In this method, the same particles are transferred instead of being destroyed. In other words, all of your particles are pulled apart, transported at light speed, and then reassembled at the end. Is it you that comes out on the other end?

### Neuronal Replacement

Suppose that one of your neurons starts malfunctioning, causing an issue with perception. Suppose that neuron is replaced with an electric digital facsimile that performs the exact same function the biological neuron performed.

Are you now a different person or are you still you?

Most would say if it is just one neuron, you are still you. Okay, but then at which point in the replacement process are you a different person? Is there such a point?

### Intuitions formalized

What these intuition pumps are supposed to do is jog your intuitions about what personal identity is—it is your continuity over time. Obviously we change as time goes on, we change both in terms of our physical constitution and psychologically as well. Yet, we tend to think that we are the same person. Right? Maybe we do not—I do not think that I am the same person I was ten years ago, truth be told. But, most people, even when they are 80, will say stuff like “When I was 7 year old...” meaning that the person at 7 years of age is the same person that now at 80 utters that.

Leibniz has this interesting metaphysical law about identity, discernability and properties. It looks like this:

(LL):

$$\forall x \forall y ((Px \iff Py) \iff (x = y))$$

This is actually two laws, one controversial and one not.

The non-controversial law is the indiscernability of identicals:

(InI):

$$\forall x \forall y ((x = y) \implies (Px \iff Py))$$

The controversial law is the identity of indiscernibles:

(IdI):

$$\forall x \forall y ((Px \iff Py) \implies (x = y))$$

The idea is this. InI means the following: for any  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $x$  is identical to  $y$ , then anything that is a property of  $x$  must necessarily be a property of  $y$ , and vice versa. Property here means predicate, meaning that which can be predicated of  $x$  and  $y$ , said of them. Crucially, the property in question must be an essential or intrinsic property that is crucial to  $x$  or  $y$  being what it is. For example, say you have a baseball that at  $T_1$  is not covered in paint, but at  $T_2$  it is covered in red paint, that baseball is identical to itself overtime. So  $B@T_1 = B@T_2$ . But suppose that intrinsic to the Statue of David is being made of marble, and that this statue is scientifically transformed into Bronze. Then, that statue becomes essentially different, and the original statue is no longer there. In humans, this is tricky—nobody knows for sure what makes us who we are.

Some think that it is the particular physical arrangement. Meaning that all of your particles arranged exactly the way that they are is what makes you who you are. However, this view is not sustainable. It is not sustainable because our particles change over time, and moreover, our physical structure changes over time as well. Perhaps there is something to be said about gradation, but it is unclear what it is that is to be said. Perhaps if all of our particles change suddenly, then we do indeed become different. But if they are changed piecemeal, then there is continuity.

Others think that what accounts for personal identity is psychological continuity. If there is some kind of psychological identity over time, then you are the same person that you were. If your psychology and in turn behavior radically changes, then perhaps you are no longer identical to who you once were. But this view is not sustainable. Sometimes when people get into accidents and get amnesia, they become radically different people. We still, however, view them as who they were. Moreover, if psychological continuity is the principle, consider the following scenario:

A teleporter malfunctions, and now there are ‘two’ Nikitas, one that comes out on the other end who thinks nothing has gone wrong, and one who did not get de-materialized and who is groggy. On the psychological continuity view, the one who stepped out, since he is not groggy, is more continuous with me who entered, and hence is the real me, while me who stepped in, since I am groggy, am less continuous with who stepped in.

Again, there are no answers to this quandary, and since this is metaphysics, we simply do not have the answers to these questions. We will talk about these things more in-depth Wednesday.