

Lecture 06: Central Themes

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1. Does Identity Matter?

If ‘the relations of practical concerns that typically go along with our identity through time are closely connected with psychological continuity [...], then the Biological Approach does have an interesting ethical consequence, namely that those practical relations are not necessarily connected with numerical identity’ (Olson 1997, p. 70).

2. Psychological Continuity and Fission

Inconsistent quartet, personal identity:

1. Beatrice is not identical to Caitlyn.
2. Ahmed is psychologically continuous with Beatrice.
3. Ahmed is psychologically continuous with Caitlyn.
4. The Psychological Continuity View of personal identity is true.

If fission is possible, the Psychological Continuity View of personal identity is false.

2.1. Is Fission (Metaphysically) Possible?

1. The removal of one brain hemisphere would not break psychological continuity.
 - 2a. You might have an identical twin whose brain had been removed.
 - 2b. Your brain could be transplanted into the body of your debrained twin.
 - 2c. Successfully transplanting your brain into your twin’s debrained body would ensure psychological continuity.
 - 2d. The removal and destruction of one brain hemisphere followed by transplant of the other hemisphere would ensure psychological continuity.
3. You could be psychologically continuous with two distinct future individuals.

2.2. Survival vs Identity

‘What this must mean, then, is that the identity relation just is not what matters (or is not what matters very much) in survival; instead, what matters has to consist in psychological continuity and/or connectedness (what Parfit calls “Relation R”). As long as that relation holds between me-now and some other person-stage—regardless of whether or not it holds one-one—what happens to me is just as good as ordinary survival. Call this the Identity Doesn’t Matter (IDM) view’ (Shoemaker 2019).

3. Personal Identity, Buddhist Monks and Death

‘Buddhist philosophers argue that the illusion of a persisting self underlies our fear of death. Once we recognize that there is no self that persists across the lifespan, fear of death should be alleviated, since its very foundation has been undermined. Similarly, Derek Parfit argues that coming to believe that there is no unitary enduring self should lead to changes in practical attitudes, including [...] fear of death (1984, 281–2, 347, 451)’ (Nichols et al. 2018, p. 315).

‘On every measure we used, the monastics deny the existence of the self. So why do they fail to show the expected reduction in fear of death?’ (Nichols et al. 2018)

“minimalism implies that any metaphysical view of persons which we might have is either epiphenomenal or a redundant basis for our practice of making judgements about personal identity and organizing our practical concerns around this relation” (Johnston 1997, 150)’ (Shoemaker 2019).

4. Personal Identity: Other Views

‘consider the search for the criterion of personal identity over time. I say there is no fact of the matter whether the correct criterion is bodily or psychological continuity. There exist two candidate meanings for talk of persisting persons, one corresponding to each criterion, and there is simply no fact of the matter which candidate we mean’ (Sider 2001, p. 189).

References

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