

*Staying one and the same thing
over time*

Reason, Relativism, and Reality

Spring 2005

Identity =?

- ...the relation everything bears to itself and to nothing else.
- People get confused about this.
- Sometimes what is called identity isn't; sometimes what is not called identity is.
- Try your hand at these examples.

Illusions of (non-)identity

- Take care retrieving your baggage. Many suitcases are *identical*.
- $2+2$ is a sum, 4 is a number. Still $2+2$ *equals* 4.
- She's a *different* person since that year in the ashram.
- I can't believe you're wearing that sweater, I have the *same identical* one.
- The *difference* between Superman and Clark Kent is that one is a superhero and one is a mild-mannered reporter.

Leibniz's Law(s)

- *Identity of Indiscernibles*: if x and y have the same properties, then $x = y$.
- This might tempt you into calling distinct items identical. (Is it true?)
- *Indiscernibility of Identicals*: if $x = y$, then they have exactly the same properties.
- This might tempt you into calling identical things distinct. (Is it true?)

"Leibniz's Law" is henceforth *indiscernibility of identicals*

Good or bad argument?

Before the ashram, Sam was bossy.

Now he's sweet (and thinner).

So pre-ashram Sam has different
properties from post-ashram Sam.

So by Leibniz's Law, pre-ashram
Sam is not identical to post-ashram
Sam.

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Pick your properties carefully!

- The two Sams have the *same* properties.
- True, pre-ashram Sam has the property of being bossy in 2001; but post-ashram Sam remembers being bossy then too.
- True, post-ashram Sam is sweet in 2003; but the same holds of pre-ashram Sam.

Persistence vs. Identity

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- Our topic is the nature of things like ourselves: persons
- What sorts of changes can we undergo and still "be there" at the other end?
- This is strictly speaking a question about *persistence* not identity.
- But we can frame it in terms of identity: What sorts of changes can a person A undergo such that after those changes there is a person B in existence who is identical to A?

Same question

- What does it take for person B existing at a later time to be A's future self?
- Under what conditions is person A existing at an earlier time B's past self?
- What makes A, existing at time t_1 , identical to B, existing at time t_2 ?

Remember...

- Our topic is *numerical* identity, meaning x and y are one and the same thing
- This is different from *qualitative* identity, meaning x and y are exactly alike
- The two are connected by Leibniz's Law but they're still *entirely distinct notions*

Parfit's argument

The *first* part is about our nature as persons, as this is manifested in our identity-conditions over time.

The *second* part draws various startling consequences about "what really matters" from the conclusion of the first part.

This week and next we concentrate on the first part.

The goal: a criterion of personal identity

- Person A who exists at time t_1 = person B who exists at time t_2 if and only if.....AB.....
- A criterion of personal identity is an informative and necessarily true way of filling in the blank

How identity-conditions can illuminate a thing's nature

- A criterion of set identity is: $A = B$ iff A has the very same members as B
- That their identity reduces to the identity of their membership tells us a lot about what sets are
- A criterion (??) of species identity: $A = B$ iff As and Bs can mate resulting in fertile offspring
- This if true would say a lot about what species are

An example from John Locke

- Mass of matter m_1 existing at t_1 = mass of matter m_2 iff the atoms composing m_1 at t_1 are the same as the ones composing m_2 at t_2
- Locke noticed that a criterion like this cannot be given for animals or vegetables. Why not? What about artefacts?

Cartesian criterion of personal identity

- "Cartesian" because named after Rene Descartes.
- Person A at t_1 = person B at t_2 iff A's immaterial soul at t_1 = B's immaterial soul at t_2
- This might seem to create "epistemological" problems
- How would you know if the person lecturing now is the same as the one last week? Have you been checking my soul when my back was turned?

Bodily criterion of personal identity

- $A \text{ at } t_1 = B \text{ at } t_2$ iff A has the same body at t_1 as B has at t_2
- There's also a version that homes in on the brain: ...iff A has the same brain at t_1 as B has at t_2
- This is not conceptual analysis; Aristotle thought the brain was for cooling blood
- We're trying to figure out *what it really is* to be identical; this may go beyond (or even conflict with) what our concepts say about it

Reductionism, weak and strong

- Reductionists try to reduce the identity of persons to "something else," something prior and independent
- *Weak* reductionists are content to reduce the identity of persons to identity-facts about non-persons (souls, bodies, brains)
- *Strong* reductionists want to reduce the identity of persons to *non*-identity facts about non-persons
- That's for next time

Readings

- Keep on with Perry. Notice where Gretchen asks Sam how he knows that "she" has the same soul as last week. How is she herself to know it's the same soul? Does a similar problem arise for the bodily criterion?
- Keep on with Parfit, ch. 10. His *Psychological Criterion* is supposed to be strongly reductionist, but as he says, this has been questioned.