

Personal Identity - Preliminaries

We now turn to the problem of *trans-temporal personal sameness*, commonly known as the problem of personal identity.

- Is person P1 at time T1 the same person as P2 at T2?

Why the question is important:

- *Accountability for past actions.* It's inappropriate to punish or praise someone now for what someone else did in the past. It is only appropriate if the past person and the present person are, in a relevant sense, the same person.
- *Concern for one's own future welfare.* Will someone be tortured tomorrow or will I be tortured tomorrow? Will someone like me survive death, or will I survive death? In each case it matters greatly to me whether that someone is the same person as me.

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The question of whether P1 and P2 are the same person is commonly understood in terms of **identity**.

Numerical identity

- Does $P1 = P2$? Is P1 *the same individual* as P2?
- In general, $X = Y$ only if X and Y have exactly the same **objective** properties.
- A property is **objective** if and only if it does not pertain *merely* to how things are thought of or represented.
 - *Weighing 100 lbs., being alive, liking chocolate ice cream, owning a cat named Fluffy, and being a U.S. citizen* are all objective properties.
 - *Being thought able to fly by Lois Lane* is a purely subjective property. Clark Kent and Superman differ with respect to it, but they are still *the same individual*.

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Qualitative identity

- Does $P1 \cong P2$? Is P1 *the same as* (exactly similar to) P2?
- In general, $X \cong Y$ only if X and Y have exactly the same objective **intrinsic** properties.
- A property is **intrinsic** if and only if it is not *constituted by* the object's relations to *other things*.
 - *Being just, being 6 ft tall, being happy*, etc. are intrinsic.
 - *Being famous, being a student at Notre Dame, living in the 21st century*, etc. are extrinsic.

Both types of identity share an important feature: **Transitivity**

- If $X = Y$ and $Y = Z$, then $X = Z$.
- If $X \cong Y$ and $Y \cong Z$, then $X \cong Z$.

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An important question to keep in mind is whether we *should* think of numerical sameness of persons over time in terms of *identity*.

A related issue: **trans-temporal sameness of material objects**

- Is object O1 at time T1 the same object as O2 at T2?
- This too is commonly understood in terms of *identity*:
Is O1 at T1 identical to O2 at T2?
- The ship of Theseus
 - Ship A: the original ship
 - Ship B: derived from A as one part at a time is replaced with a new, exactly similar part, until all have been replaced.
 - Ship C: assembled later from the replaced parts of A.



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Which ship, B, C, or neither is *identical to A*? (Why not say *both*?)

- One answer: B, because it's derived from A by very small changes. (Motivation: We judge sameness of plants and animals this way.)
- But are we really judging *identity* over time or just numerical sameness over time? Is there any difference?