

## Introduction

We suspect that if personal identity is a well defined notion, then there exists a certain set of criteria which permit unique identification an individual. The intent here is to identify those criteria which prevent the occurence duplicate identities, yet recognize the perseverance of personal identity through trivial changes in an individual's characteristics. We will see that there exists, it seems, only one characteristic which will satisfy these requirements. And its hardly a favorable characteristic: we will see that the capacity an individual has to introspect permits himself or herself to distinguish himself or herself from all others without sacrificing any temporal consistency in identity. The problems arise when we realize that introspection is a capacity that all (or at least most) persons have and does not, from the third person point of view, contribute in any way to a distinction.

This paper is approached from a physicalist standpoint. Any person endorsing some sort of magical world view need not read on because much of this paper will be objectionable.

## Classifications

For membership of an object in a particular class of objects, that object must possess certain properties and, perhaps, be lacking in others. We say that an object is part of a class as long as it fits the bill of the class. And to establish a list of properties defining membership in a class is not a difficult task. For instance, we might impose the following requirements for inclusion of an object in the class of all things called tables:

1. must have four legs
2. must be wooden
3. must provide support for an object of minimum weight 1kg

Although such a list is easily definable (as was just demonstrated) the appropriateness of such lists is often hard to evaluate. In this example, we can clearly see that requirement two is probably inappropriate for the conventional understanding of the notion of 'table'. We all believe that there are objects made of materials other than wood that are also tables. Furthermore, some tables in the conventional understanding have three legs and no

more. Even item three is certainly debatable. Nevertheless, we believe that there are some things that fit the conventional understanding of the word 'table' and others that don't. To maintain a distinction between objects of one class and of objects not of that class, we implicitly assume that there exist defining features that permit membership of objects to that class, while excluding others.

For any class of objects, then, we assume a set of criteria for membership in that class exists. We can subdivide the criteria into several categories. Any one of these criteria will be one of the following:

1. a criterion describing a physical property of a member, i.e. a categorical property; for example, physical dimensions, composition, physical state (solid, gas, etc.),
2. a criterion describing a counterfactual property of a member; for example, the behavior of an object under particular, non-current conditions; such a criterion may be accounted for already in (1.),
3. a criterion describing the a perceptual quality of a member, i.e. a subjective property; such a criterion might describe a member's function or *perceptual* color,
4. a criterion describing the epistemic value of a member; this type of criterion might be accounted for in (3.),or
5. a criterion applicable to members with higher-order ontological status, i.e. a criterion that is applicable to classes of classes of classes, logical statements, numbers, representations, etc; for example, criteria of this sort are the criteria that distinguish prime numbers from non-prime numbers, the criteria which distinguish enumerable sets from non-enumerable sets.

Any particular class is distinguishable from another if and only if at least one criterion for membership in one class is different from all the criteria in the other.

## Personal Identity

Identity of any sort is the inclusion of an article into a class wherein it is the only member; the criteria for classification are exactly those that require

its membership and excludes all other articles. More specifically, personal identity is the notion that there are particular traits about any individual that distinguish him or her from all others. That is, personal identity is the idea that each person is, so to speak, in a class of his or her own. The difficulty encountered here is somewhat different than the difficulty encountered in defining the class which includes all things that are tables and excluding everything else: certainly for any individual we can establish a set of criteria which uniquely identifies that individual at any particular time without running into the problems of generality we encounter when we try to define the class of all tables. However, personal identity is hardly identity unless it perseveres through time. If I eat a tuna sandwich or lose my legs, my personal identity ought not change. In fact, personal identity should endure through many significant changes that might occur during a lifespan. The criteria which adequately characterize an individual over time have, in the past, been much more difficult to identify than the characteristics of a person at one instant. We can imagine a change in any one of our own characteristics while retaining our perception of our personal identity: it seems that none of our characteristics are essential to our identity, yet all of them are a part of it.

To consider this point more carefully, we can imagine a situation wherein technology permits an exact duplicate of an individual to be made. This hypothetical technology is so advanced that the individual's duplicate has all the same beliefs, emotions, thought patterns, intelligence, and so on, besides having an exact physical resemblance as the original version does. Such a situation imposes severe strain on the individual's personal identity, for all those things that have seemed to demarcate the individual as an individual now occur in exactly the same fashion in the duplicate.

## **Introspection**

We might suspect, though, that introspection will play a dominant role in the way in which the individual will distinguish himself or herself from the duplicate: the direct access that one has to the contents of one's brain, (and the ability to control one's body) is the only distinction that remains. When asked, "what makes you different from your duplicate?", the only reasonable response is "I have control over my body and direct access to my brain but I have no control over my duplicate's body, and I have no access to

his/her brain.”. It is the epistemic value attributable by the individual to the contents of his or her brain that is the source of the distinction. In essence, it is the unique type of access that he or she has to the contents of his or her brain that permits himself or herself to be able to classify himself or herself differently than he or she classifies his or her duplicate.

Although introspection achieves a distinction between an individual and a duplicate, it ought to be called a pseudo-distinction. On one hand, introspection is a characteristic of an individual that seems to solve the problem of personal identity: it is a characteristic which seems to fulfill the requirements of identity. It uniquely identifies a person as the only possible member of a class while not sacrificing the temporal perseverance of that person in that class with trivial changes in an individual’s characteristics.

On the other hand, introspection is a capacity occurring in both the individual and the duplicate. Introspection permits the individual to distinguish himself/herself from his/her duplicate, but then both the individual and the duplicate are both capable of introspecting the same contents (they are, again, exact duplicates). From the third person point of view, introspection is insufficient, and in fact plays no role, in distinguishing the individual from the duplicate. In essence, introspection is a subjective criterion for classification: classification of the individual and the duplicate into distinct categories is valid only for individual and the duplicate. Classification into distinct classes of the individual and the duplicate is invalid from the third person point of view. We should conclude that introspection is valid only for subjective classification. It is a criterion of type 3. and/or 4. We can establish no other satisfactory criterion for personal identity, as all others tend to require a change in identity when inappropriate (for example when I eat a tuna sandwich or lose my legs).

Various mental disorders lend support to the hypothesis that introspection is essential personal identity, while other personal traits are irrelevant. Consider, for example, cases of Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD). We observe personality distinctions among the various personalities in a particular case of MPD. Yet we must ask what is the source of this distinction. There are two approaches that can be taken here: either that of a physicalist, or not, and not both. We will not even bother to entertain the possibilities posed by a non-physical approach.

The physicalist standpoint requires that any distinctions that occurs among the personalities in any case of MPD must occur in the absence of a distinction in mental furnishings, as any case of MPD is clearly limited a

single brain. Consider the contrary: suppose that it is the furnishings of a particular brain that determines the occupation of the brain in question by a certain one of the various personalities associated with that particular case of MPD. Then for each personality there is an associated set of required mental furnishings and an associated set of excluded mental furnishings. Whenever, and only whenever, the contents of the brain under consideration is occupied by those furnishings, and in the absence of the necessarily excluded furnishings, does the associated personality manifest itself. The replacement of one personality with another is achieved only through the replacement of a set of mental furnishings with another set. The manifestation of any personality is achieved only through the satisfaction of these requirements.

However, we observe in various cases of MPD that a replacement of one personality with another occurs under varying circumstances, rather than via the satisfaction of a specific set of mental furnishings. In fact, mental furnishings are often of little significance in any exchange of personalities. Consequently, we can conclude that mental furnishings have little or nothing to do with personal identity and so we must ask what is the cause of such an exchange of personalities? This question is equivalently a question about the cause of personal identity: "What is the fundamental criterion essential to personal identity?".

The second of the two of these questions has already been addressed. We have hypothesized that it is introspection that is crucial for the maintenance of personal identity in the absence of other distinguishing characteristics. And we suspect that this might provide an answer to the first question. It seems that it ought to be the method of access of information that must change in any personality exchange in a case of MPD, as mental furnishings themselves are not responsible in general. Cases of MPD can provide significant insight into the nature of personal identity

## **Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Communication**

Discussions of introspection tend to include a section which aims to identify the nature of introspection itself. They try to identify reasons that make introspection particularly special. Well, it ought to be clear why introspection is so special: it permits access to some information in an apparently direct

manner. On the other hand, access to information outside of one's own brain seems much more crude. We rely the vibrations of air molecules, for example, to gather acoustic information. Any communication among individuals is clumsy; as a result, it is tremendously easy to distinguish oneself from others. We have no difficulty communicating with ourselves, but communication with others requires us to fumble around with words or symbols. Interpersonal communication requires representation, whereas, it appears that intrapersonal communication is direct. This directness is the apparent preferential position held by introspection.

But introspection, like speech for example, is the transmission of information. We must remember that transmission of any information relies on that transmission through a medium. And from a neurological perspective, we must assume that introspection is equivalent to the transmission of an electrochemical signal via an electrochemical pathway (we are not concerned with a nonphysical approach). In essence, introspection is information encoded in a particular signal. In that respect an electrochemical signal, and thus introspection, is not fundamentally different than, say, an acoustic signal. We can identify introspection as communication whose mechanism is electrochemical and is censored from all members of society except the first person. This censorship owes its severity to the localization of the transmission medium to individual brains. But we ask, then, what effect on personal identity results if this censorship is relieved?

## The Machine

Consider more hypothetical technology of the future. The technology is advanced enough to permit the construction of a machine that connects multiple brains in such a way that electrochemical signals can be exchanged among the brains in an appropriate way. More specifically, imagine that this machine works to deliver the same message to an auxiliary brain as is delivered within one brain. Then anytime one of the people hooked up to this machine feels sad, for example, anybody else connected to the machine feels sad too. In fact, we imagine that the connections in the machine are so intricate that all brain processes are common among all those connected. So we have to ask, what is the meaning of the term *introspection* now. Does introspection still apply only to individual brains, even in this situation? Supporters of some magical account of the mind might have an affirmative answer to this

question. But for those physicalists out there, we must reply with a negative answer; we all believe that introspection is equivalent, dare I say reduceable to, an electrochemical signal. And the restrictions on the localization of these signal has been lifted by the machine. Then all thoughts, emotions, perceptions, etc. are common among those connected. Introspection, too, extends to all connected brains.

## **The Machine and Distinguishability of Persons**

What about personal identity? Introspection is no longer limited: we have access to the contents of all those brains hooked up to the same machine. But certainly the bodies associated with each brain remain distinct while the brains are connected. It appears, at first sight, that personal identity remains intact despite the loss of the preferential position held by introspection. Its not as simple as that: although the bodies remain distinct, personal identity suffers a fatal blow with the connection of more than one brain to the machine. Any thoughts occurring in any brain are common and can be uniquely associated with one body. If one was among those connected to the machine, one would not be able to determine whose eyes it is most appropriate to use, or whose memories are whose, or whose beliefs are whose. This is exactly the annihilation of personal identity.

Although we do not generally regard introspection as an essential ingredient to our identity, it seems to be of fundamental importance. Its importance is disguised in the fact that introspection is a capacity held by all (or most) humans and so, from an objective point of view, plays no role in distinguishing persons. But we have seen that when all else fails, it is my ability to introspect the contents of my brain that allows me to distinguish myself from you no matter how similar we might be. I can not legitimately think I am anyone else as long as I have access to the contents of my brain and those contents are not available (at least not in the same way) to other people. Should this censorship be lifted with the use of our machine then, we can no longer talk about the distinguishability of those persons connected to it. If our machine is intricate enough, and it is, hypothetically, then we can no longer make use of the bodies to which the brains are attached for any distinction. It is clear that the bodies are still distinct, but play no role in personal identity, as the distinguishability of persons, and therefore personal identity are no longer applicable concepts to this situation.