

G9645 Persons

Rovane

Spring 2012

The course will take up the question whether and why we ought to agree with Locke that personal identity is not the same as (human) animal identity. Much of the twentieth century literature about personal identity focused on the question whether the life of a psychological subject might come apart from the biological life-span of a given human being – somehow remaining the same while becoming lodged in a new and different body. Defenders of Locke's distinction have portrayed personal identity over time as grounded in 'sameness of consciousness', 'personal memory', and certain forms of 'psychological relatedness' over time.

Traditionally, opponents of Locke have charged that his view leads to logical and metaphysical absurdities; another source of legitimate complaint has been that defenses of Locke's distinction have rested too much on thought experiments and too little on actual scientific understanding of the mind; more recently, it has been objected that the various psychological phenomena that neo-Lockeans take to ground personal identity must be situated in a particular animal's life. But there is a way to defend Locke's distinction that escapes all these charges, by arguing that persons are *agents*, and that groups of human beings and parts of human beings can function as individual agents in their own rights – with the result that persons can fall one-many and many-one with respect to human beings. There are real challenges for this line of argument, however, insofar as it requires an adequate account of agency and rationality, and needs to be situated in relation to broader metaphysical and moral issues. The course will explore all of these matters.

Course Requirements: Faithful attendance at and participation in class; one class presentation; one term paper.

Readings:

The organizing text for the first half will be Rovane, *The Bounds of Agency*, going through one chapter per week.

1. Ch. 1: (Preview of arguments to come)
2. Ch. 2: (The dispute about Locke's distinction is a stalemate)
3. Ch. 3: (An Ethical Criterion of Personhood)
4. Ch. 4: (The case for group persons)
5. Ch. 5: (The case for multiple persons)
6. Ch. 6: (The first person)

The second half of the course will be devoted to pursuing issues of special interest to the class in the wake of the arguments of the first half – generally via student presentations. Here are some possibilities, in no particular order:

*Can groups really function as individuals? How does this relate to the more standard philosophical disputes about whether group agents are irreducibly *social* phenomena or whether *methodological individualism* is correct?

*Can fragmentation really be non-pathological?

*What follows if agents are not ends in themselves?

*How should theories of rights affect philosophical accounts of personal identity – ought we to distinguish *personal* rights from *human* rights?

*Can we really hold group agents (and multiple agents) responsible? Can we punish them? If not, how should this affect any claims about their reality and responsibility?

*What is the role of consciousness in mental life and agency?

*Should we be persuaded by accounts of first person thought and reference that require them to be situated in animal life?

*What is the nature of personal memory?

*What is the unity of consciousness (if there is such a thing)?

*What does a philosophically adequate account of intentions and the will show about personal identity?

*Must there be 'basic' actions and if so does this speak in favor of animalism?

*What philosophical lessons are to be drawn from the history of the concept of the self?

Required texts:

Rovane, *The Bounds of Agency* (available as e-book from Princeton University Press)

Texts you are strongly urged to acquire:

Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*

Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution and Agency*

Historical texts you should already own:

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; *Second Treatise on Government*

Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*; *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*; *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Rousseau, *The Social Contract*
Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*

Useful Anthologies:

Perry, *Personal Identity*
Rorty, *The Identities of Persons*
Martin & Kolak, *Self and Identity*
Martin & Barresi, *Personal Identity*

Many contemporary authors have written important work on topics of interest to the course, which you might want to track down depending on your interests. Here are some rough guides, though you will want to do more tracking down on your own:

Logical and metaphysical problems for Locke's distinction
(Shoemaker, Perry, Lewis, Noonan, Wiggins)
Group agency and responsibility (French, Searle, Gilbert, Bratman,
Petit, Kutz)
Dissociative Identity Disorder (Radden, Hacking)
Unity of Consciousness (James, Nagel, Chalmers, Bayne, Tye)
Functionalism (Dennett, Fodor, Block)
History of the 'self' (e.g. Taylor, Bynum, Martin, Sellars, G.
Strawson)
Defenses of animalism (Wiggins, McDowell, Johnston, Olson)
The First Person (Anscombe, Evans, McDowell, Burge)