**CONCEPT OF PERSON**

Abstract

Person, an individual capable of moral agency. Although the details of their theories of human nature differ widely, Descartes, Locke, Kant and Strawson, all accepted a functional description of the person that includes both mental and physical features: the attribution of responsibilities to a moral agent requires both the ability to choose and an ability to act on that choice.

One of the central problems of metaphysics is what it is to be a person. The answer ought to account for central phenomena of personhood; traditionally, command of language, self-consciousness, control or agency, and moral worth or title to request are amongst the salient characteristics that have been thought to distinguish persons from other forms of life. In Lock, “person” is a

“forensic term, applying for moral reasons.” A dualistic approach regards a person as an amalgam of an essentially separate mind and body, with the resulting problem of reinventing their unity in the living person, monistic theories, such as that of Strawson’s Individuals (1959), work with a primitive concept of a person, as someone think logically capable of being described in bodily or mental terms. A popular modern analogy is with the compatible software and hardware descriptions of a computer.

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| **Descartes, Rene (1596-1650):** French philosophers. Descartes’s efforts to achieve certainty in the face of scepticism mark the origins of modern epistemology.  **Locke(1632-1704):** English Philosopher. Lock was born in Wrington and educated at Oxford, where he seemed destined for a career in medicine.  **Kant, Immanual(1724-1804):** German philosopher who revolutionised modern philosophy, in an effort to counter the sceptical arguments of Hume and provide a firm basis for human knowledge and morality. Kant used transcendental arguments to show that human beings apply synthetic a priori judgements as the preconditions for any possible experience.  **Strawson, Peter F. (1919- ):** British philosopher who applies the methods of analytic philosophy to traditional philosophical problems. Strawson criticised Russell’s theory of descriptions in “On Referring” (1950) and developed the notion of descriptive (as opposed to revisionary) metaphysics in reference to problem of reidentification of particulars in Individual: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics (1959). His The Bounds of Sense (1966) is an extended commentary on the critical philosophy of Kant. |

The concept of person is closely related with the concept of personal identity. Person is a term that has various technical and semitechnical use in philosophy. It is derived from the Latin word ‘persona’. Boethius, a Roman philosopher meant by person “an individual substance of a rational kind. “. The concept of rationality has occurred in subsequent accounts of person. In the modern period the definition of person has been given clearly by Locke, the eminent British empiricist philosopher. Locke began his discussion by raising the question-what personal identity is? Such identity, Lock tells us, is purely a matter of consciousness. It rests upon the continuity introduce into consciousness by memory. Locke wrote, “in this alone consists personal identity, that is, the sameness of a rational being; and as far as these can be extended backwards to any past action of thought so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now as it was them” Therefore, we might add even supposing that there were reincarnation, the reborn soul, though the same thinking substance, would not be even the same person any longer, since in this reincarnation he has forgotten his former lives. Thus Locke defined ‘ person’ in terms of memory continuity.

A number of subsidiary points have now to be considered. Can this continuity of consciousness and memory be preserved, when the substance underlying it is changed? Locke replies that since the body can be mutilated and altered and even completely renewed without interfering with personal identity, continuity of consciousness is not dependent upon permanence of organic constitution. So, too, there is no reason why it should not be independent of changes in thinking substance, or the soul. There is no certainty that one and the same consciousness and the personal identity might not be “transferred from one thinking substance to another”, in which case “it will possible that two thinking substance may make but one person. For the same consciousness being preserved, whether in the same or different substances, the personal identity is preserved,”

Supposed, however, “I wholly lose the memory of some parts of my life beyond a possibility of retrieving them yet am I not the same person that did those actions, had those thought that I was conscious of, though I have now forgotten them? ‘No’ Locke replies. I am the same man but not the same person. Thus Locke introduces a significant distinction between person and man. One and the same man might be a number of different persons. “If he had distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times.”

So, Locke argued that to remain the same man (or woman) is to keep the same body ( but of course with renewed material), to remained the same person is to keep the same mind, with its ability to remember its past, while to remained the same immaterial substratum is for something pretty much incomprehensible and unverifiable to happens . According to Locke, it is person, not man, who is morally responsible.

Locke’s understanding of the nature of a person has been critised by many philosophers.

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| **Boethius, Anicius Manlius Severinus (480-524):** His commentary on the *Isagoge of Porphyry* (itself a discussion of Aristotle’s Categories) carefully distinguished Aristotelian essences from Platonic Forms, setting the basic terms employed in subsequent mediaeval discussion of the problem of universals. De consolation philosophae (The consolation of Philosophy), written during the imprisonment that preceded his execution, considers the possibility of achieving human happiness despite the in escapable presence of evil, extols the benefits of reason even in the face of misfortunate and bad advice and proposes a compatibilist account of human freedom in the face of divine foreknowledge. |

In the philosophy of Hume the term ‘person’ is employed in the sense of mind. It is a restricted framework. Here a person is nothing but a bundle of impressions and ideas. Hume rejected the possibility of the existence of one continuing substance underlying the multiplicity of perceptions. The question at this stage may be raised-what criterion should applied to decide that a particular being is a person? Two criteria are generally applied by philosophers; one is the criteria of bodily identity. According to it we reidentify a person on the basis of bodily continuity. This criterion, as we have seen, was employed by Locke.

It has been commented that there are several ways in which the bodily criterion is more fundamental than the memory criterion. A few points are to be noted here-

Although both criteria are sufficient only bodily identity is necessary.

The bodily criterion is more extensive. It is matter of chance that men remember the tracks of their lives that they do remember rather than those they do not and we can apply the memory criterion only when there are memories to use. But in a clear sense the bodily criterion can always be used, for the body is always present whenever the person is.

P.F. Strawson has given a very influential definition of person in the contemporary period. He says that the concept of a person is a logically primitive concept. Person is that to whom both mental and physical attributes can be ascribed. Person is, in other words. The entity underlying both the physical and mental attributes.

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| **Hume (1711-76):** Scottish philosopher, historian and essayist. Hume is the most influential Thoroughgoing naturalist in modern philosophy. |

We have seen how the positing of physical objects leads to our drawing a distinction between the objects as they are in themselves and the experiences through which we come to know them. The objects are thought to retain their perceptible properties whether or not anyone is actually perceiving them. When percepts do occur they are treated as sensations which belong to the observer in the same way as the thoughts and images and feelings that do not supply material for the construction of the physical world. The question which we must now try to answer is how these various elements are brought together and how they are related to the body by which the observer is identified.

In saying that the observer is identified by his body, we have to employ physical criteria for the identification of other people will hardly be disputed, but it may well be denied that this applies also to our identification of ourselves. Descartes is not the only philosopher, much less the only person, to have believed that in being self-conscious one is aware of a spiritual substance which is housed contingently and perhaps only temporarily in the body.( Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part-V). This view may not be tenable, but it surely deserves to be examined

Self-consciousness is not a primitive datum, or in other words that the observer’s experiences are not intrinsically marked as his own. They are distinguished as his experiences only by contrast with the external world and with the experiences of others who also inhabit it. But then to arrive at these contrasts he must, as we have seen, distinguish the central body from other physical objects, and in particular from those other objects which are also the sources of signs. It is, as I said, his ability to interpret these signs as corroborating his main account of the world but not as corroborating his subsidiary accounts, and also as giving subsidiary accounts which he cannot corroborate, that leads him to think of the central body as sharing with other bodies the property of being the focus of an independent series of experiences. His own experiences are thus initially characterized as those of which the central body is the focus. Once this point has been reached, it may be possible to proceed to a more sophisticated theory in which the attachment of experiences to a body, or to a particular body, is not conceived to be necessary, or even to a theory in which they are assigned a different sort of owner. Whether any such theories are tenable remains to be seen.

It is also of importance that the observer’s identification of himself goes together with his identification of other persons and with their identification of him. He takes the signs which emanate from these other bodies as a ground for attributing experiences to the persons with whom he now associates them, and he realizes that these persons take the signs which emanate from the central body as a ground for attributing experiences to him. Seeing himself, as it were, through their eyes, he regards the central body as belonging to him in the special way in which their bodies belong to them, and he thinks of his body not only as a contributory cause of his percepts but also as the medium through which his entertainment of them, and indeed of his experiences in general, is made known to others.

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| **Descartes, Rene (1595-1650):** French philosopher. Descartes’s efforts to achieve certainty in the face of scepticism mark the origin of modern epistemology  **Consciousness:** the subjective phenomenon of self-awareness that normally accompanies human experience. Correct analysis of consciousness is a central goal in the philosophy of mind. |

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