

## Lecture 1

### What is the Problem of Personal Identity?

#### 1. Introduction

##### Recommended reading

Olson's (2002) "Personal Identity"

(see reading list for bibliographical details)

#### 2. Problems Concerning Persons

- "Identity" outside of philosophy: Features of us that we take to be important to who we are (especially in social contexts).
  - E.g. My identities include: being a woman, being a person of colour, being queer, being Canadian.
- "Identity" in philosophy: The conditions under which some  $X$  is identical to some  $Y$ . In this case, the conditions under which person  $X$  is identical to person  $Y$ .
  - **Numerical identity** v. **Qualitative identity**: The former, and not the latter, obeys Leibniz's Law.

Various questions that have, at times, come under the heading of questions on "personal identity"...

##### Persistence

What does it take for a person to continue exist over a period of time?

**Persistence conditions:** The conditions under which  $X$ -at-time- $t_1$  and  $Y$ -at-time- $t_2$  are *the same person*.

**Leibniz's Law:**  $x = y$  iff, for all properties  $P$ ,  $Px$  iff  $Py$

- How does this allow for persistence through *change*?

### Ship of Theseus:

Suppose a ship is made up of the following parts: Hull (H), Mast (M), and Sail (S).

If the ship can survive the replacement of one of its parts, then:

$(H+M+S)$  is the *same ship as*  $(H^*+M+S)$

Question: What if each of the parts was replaced one at a time?

$(H+M+S) = (H^*+M+S)$

$(H^*+M+S) = (H^*+M^*+S)$

$(H^*+M^*+S) = (H^*+M^*+S^*)$

$\therefore (H+M+S) = (H^*+M^*+S^*)$

**Kinds and survival.** Consider:

"Through which changes does the lump of clay persist?"

v.

"Through which changes does the statue persist?"

##### Personhood

What is it to be a person? Or, what are the necessary and sufficient conditions of personhood?

- Olson notes that some take all other questions about persons to reduce to these ones (2002: 353)

##### What are we?

What kind of metaphysical entity are we?

### Population

How many *persons* are there?

- Related to the matter of numerical identity
- Distinct from the question “How can I *tell* whether to count some X and some Y as one?” (This is what Olson calls a question about **evidence**. It is an epistemological question about the metaphysical matter at issue.)

**\*\*In this set of lectures, we’ll look primarily at the *persistence* question.\*\***

**Tip:** When doing the readings, constantly ask yourself, “To which question is this point/argument/thought experiment relevant?”

### 3. The Persistence of Persons

We think that it is the case that we can persist over time. Indeed, this belief is of great importance to us for a number of different reasons.

- **Responsibility** for past actions.
- **Plans/Rationality** with respect to future selves.

**NOTE!** This is not a question about how we *would* feel under different conditions; but rather about a metaphysical fact about persons that our feelings may or may not track.

- Methodological question: How should **hypothetical thought experiments** bear on our answer?
  - **Defeasible evidence** for an answer
  - **Data** to be explained