

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W

Fall 2014

Russell Marcus

Class #12 - Introduction to Personal Identity

Business

- The Compare and Contrast assignment is due now.
- Next writing assignment:
 - Argumentative Essay
 - with peer review
- Movie Night
 - Looper or Blade Runner?
 - This Saturday?
 - Or, send a doodle?
- Today:
 - A few comments on vagueness and personhood
 - On to identity

The Classic Argument Against Abortion

AA1. Every person has a right to life.

AA2. The fetus is a person.

AA3. So the fetus has a right to life.

AA4. The right to life, for the fetus, is stronger than the right to choose what happens in and to one's body, for the mother.

AAC. So, abortion is impermissible.

- Depends on controversial premises, especially AA2.
- Noonan argues in favor of AA2.
 - The probabilities argument
- Warren argues against AA2.
 - The five criteria
- One problem: there are no broadly accepted criteria for personhood.
- Maybe the problem lies in the vagueness of the concept.

Vagueness and Distinctions

- The problem of finding points of distinction is a general problem, not merely in the case of personhood.
- Let's take a moment to consider the sorites paradox and the related phenomenon of vagueness.
 - 'Sorites' is Ancient Greek for 'heap', and the paradox is often constructed in terms of heaps.
- Many predicates admit of borderline, or vague, cases.
- Vagueness exercise (bald, tall, short)

Vagueness



- An average person has 100,000 -150,000 hairs on his/her head.
- Is the line at 10,000 hairs? 5000 hairs? 1000 hairs?
- You don't turn a bald person into a non-bald person by adding one, tiny hair to her head.
- There are bald people.
- There are non-bald people.
- Any point of distinction will be arbitrary.
- But, that doesn't mean that there is no distinction.

Is 'Human Being' Vague?

- Noonan provides a point of distinction between human beings and non-human beings.
- He defends that point of distinction by claiming that it is non-arbitrary.
- But, 'human being' may be a vague predicate.
- If 'human' is vague, then we can not expect a non-arbitrary distinction between humans and non-humans.
- Noonan's argument, depending on a preference for a non-arbitrary distinction, may thus be unmotivated.

Biology and Moral Personhood

- Noonan's stated goal is a definition of 'human being', rather than personhood.
 - ▶ 'Human being' is a biological category.
- Genetic humanity is not sufficient to establish moral personhood.
 - ▶ Some humans are not persons.
 - Brain dead humans, and strictly dead ones
 - Human cancer cells have the genetic code of human beings.
 - ▶ Some persons are not, or may not be, humans.
 - aliens and sentient machines
- We need criteria for personhood that go beyond merely biological factors.
- Space travelers: friend or food?



Humanity and Personhood

- We need criteria for personhood that go beyond merely biological factors.
- Genetic humanity is not sufficient to establish moral personhood.
- Some humans are not persons.
 - ▶ Brain dead humans, and strictly dead ones
 - ▶ Human cancer cells have the genetic code of human beings.
- Some persons are not, or may not be, humans.
 - ▶ aliens and sentient machines

Warren's Five Concepts of Personhood

- WP1. Consciousness (of objects and events external and/or internal to the being), and in particular the ability to feel pain;
- WP2. Reasoning, (the *developed* capacity to solve new and relatively complex problems);
- WP3. Self-motivated activity (activity which is relatively independent of either genetic or direct external control);
- WP4. The capacity to communicate, by whatever means, messages of an indefinite variety of types, that is, not just with an indefinite number of possible contents, but on indefinitely many possible topics;
- WP5. The presence of self-concepts, and self-awareness, either individual or racial or both (Warren 359b)

Applying the Concepts to Abortion

- We need not possess all of WP1 - WP5 to be a person.
 - ▶ The paradigms are us adult humans.
 - ▶ A person is like us in some ways, but need not be like us in all ways.
- “All we need to claim, to demonstrate that a fetus is not a person, is that any being which satisfies *none* of [WP1 - WP5] is certainly not a person. I consider this claim to be so obvious that I think anyone who denied it, and claimed that a being which satisfied none of [WP1 -WP5] was a person all the same, would thereby demonstrate that he had no notion at all of what a person is -perhaps because he had confused the concept of a person with that of genetic humanity” (Warren 360a).
- “In the *relevant* respects, a fetus, even a fully developed one, is considerably less personlike than is the average mature mammal, indeed the average fish” (Warren 361a).

Summary

- Noonan and Warren present competing criteria for personhood.
- We should not decide between the two criteria on the basis of the conclusions they yield.
 - ▶ One should not argue for Warren's criteria just because you believe that abortion is permissible.
 - ▶ One should not argue for Noonan's criteria on the basis of the claim that abortion is impermissible.
- A theory of personhood based on the possession of a human genetic code would be chauvinist.
- Still genetic material seems essential to our conception of self.
- Perhaps we need a particularly human definition of personhood before we can develop more abstract criteria for aliens and sentient machines.
- The questions of personhood are the central questions of the next portion of the course: what is it that makes me myself?

Who are We?

- What makes us the same people that we were when we were young?
- What makes us the same as we grow older?
- Is there a core set of properties that are consistent over our lives?
- Is there even something called the self, or are we just a bundle of properties, with no unifying thing?
- Haecceity: thisness

The Body Theory

- One answer is that we are identical with our bodies.
 - consistent with our general, contemporary preference for materialism
- But our bodies are changing constantly.
 - skin
 - hair
- Every seven years, all (or so) the cells in our bodies are replaced.
- If we identify ourselves with our bodies, we are not the same persons we were, say, a moment ago.
 - You are what you eat
- The debtor's paradox



AMERICAN DEBTORS' PRISON

Problem of Material Constitution 1

- The ship of Theseus
- We can replace any rotten plank without making a difference to the object; it's still Theseus's ship.
- But what if we replace all of the planks, one at a time?
 - Each replacement yields the same ship.
 - All the material in the ship is different.
- Imagine that the planks we replaced were not rotten.
 - We can reconstruct the original ship with the planks we removed.
 - Now we have two ships.
 - Which one is Theseus's ship?
 - If they are both the single ship of Theseus, then it seems as if the same material object can exist in two places at once.
- My sukkah



Problem of Material Constitution 2



- Chrysippus's Dion and Theon
 - Dion is a normal person.
 - Theon is all of Dion except the right foot.
- Remove Dion's right foot.
- No two material objects can be in the same place.
 - If Dion remains, we violate the principle that one place can't house two different objects.

Problem of Material Constitution 3

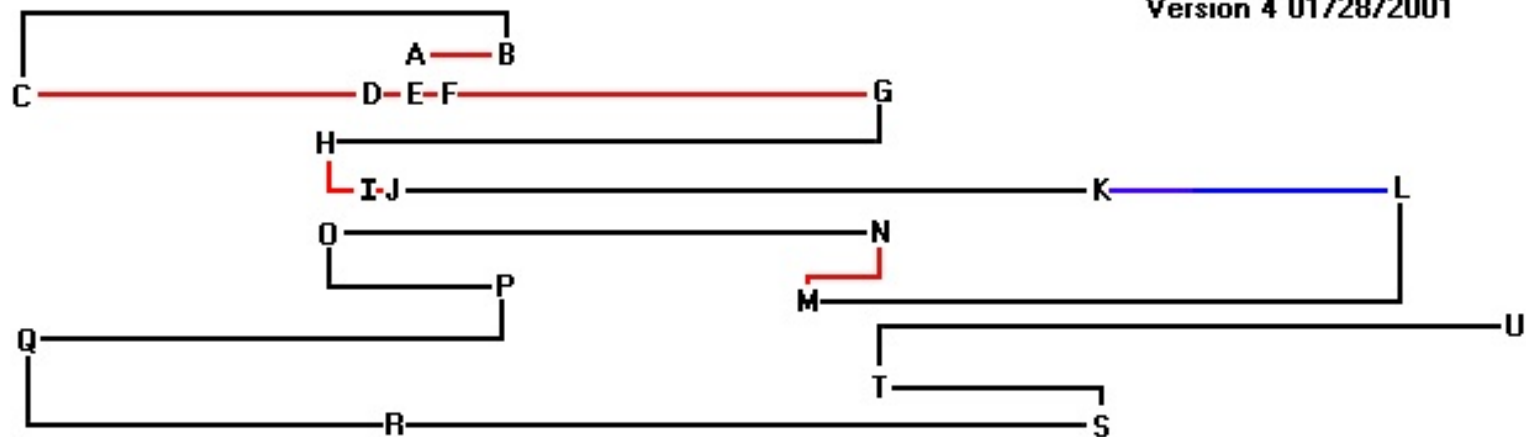
- Lump and Joan
- Is Joan different from the lump?
 - They were created at different times.
 - Lump isn't destroyed, when Joan is.
- We might admit coincidental objects.



Time Travel and the Self

Problems for Time Travel

- Time travel happens every moment, one moment at a time.
 - But ‘time travel’, we ordinarily mean leaping around in time.
- Time-travel stories seem to presume B-theories of time, or at least a moving-spotlight version of the A-theory.
 - We travel through time, a given block, as through space.
 - The past and future must be as real as the present.
- That’s no argument for the B-theory (or moving spotlight theory).
 - Time-travel (in the way it’s depicted in science fiction) is likely impossible.
- An argument that time travel will never happen:
 - If people ever discover time travel, they will use it.
 - In particular, they will eventually come back here.
 - So, if it ever were to be discovered, we would already know it.



A = Baby Jane Born to E

B = Baby picked up by bartender P

C = Baby dropped at orphanage by bartender Q

D = Jane meets male self I and has sex

E = Jane has baby A

F = Jane has sex change

G = Jane as "Unmarried Mother" meets bartender N

H = UM taken to 4/3/63 by bartender O

I = UM meets female self D and seduces her

J = UM picked up by bartender R

K = UM dropped at Rockies base by bartender S

L = UM has career in Time Corps and at some point returns to M to become bartender

M = Sometime prior to 11/7/70

N = Bartender meets UM G

O = Bartender takes UM H to 4/3/63

P = Bartender returns to 3/10/64 to pick up baby Jane B

Q = Bartender returns to 9/20/45 to drop off baby Jane C

R = Bartender picks up UM J

S = Bartender drops off UM K at Rockies base

T = Bartender returns to 11/7/70 2301, arranges sale of bar

U = Bartender returns to 1/12/93 at Rockies base

Vertical lines represent same point in linear time

C - Q 9/20/45

H - O 4/3/63

D - I 4/24/63

J - R 4/24/63 (later)

A - E 2/10/64 (approx)

B - P 3/10/64

G - N 11/7/70 2217

K - S 8/12/85

Legend — Normal time flow

— Time travel

— Normal / Other time trips

Identity, Material Objects, and Persons

- One difference between the questions about the identity of Theseus's ship and the identity of the protagonist in "All You Zombies" is that the former concerns a material object and the latter concerns a person.
- Material objects can be divided into two kinds:
 - ▶ artifacts are things that we make
 - ships and cell phones
 - ▶ natural kinds are things that we discover
 - trees and animals
- Identity conditions for artifacts are tricky to construct.
 - ▶ We can replace a plank in the ship without much caring about whether the ship is the same one or not.
 - ▶ Insurance companies
 - ▶ Practical solutions
- Questions about the identity of some natural kinds are more interesting.

Who Am I?

- Questions about identities of persons seem to be much more important to us than questions about the identities of artifacts.
- Am I the same person that I was when I was little?
- Is there some core of me which remains constant over time?
- Lose some skin or gain some weight
- Even if I lose a limb, it is me who is losing a limb and me who gains an artificial one.
- Or are people just like artifacts for which there may be no facts about identity over time?

Memory and Identity

- One phenomenon which leads us to believe that we maintain an identity over time is memory.
- No one really knows how memory works.
- But it does seem to be largely constructed; [article here](#).
- Some movies, especially *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, do a good job of evoking the reconstruction of memory.
- One question for us concerns the relation of memory to our identity, a question we will see explicitly in our discussion of Locke and Reid.