Personal Identity

Section 1: Persons

1. Various mental phenomena – qualia and consciousness, thought and intentionality
2. Descartes’s basic contention – the mind is irreducible to the brain or body
3. The central materialist argument – the argument from causation
4. Interaction problem – how it could possibly get in causal contact with the body?
5. Occasionalism, parallelism, or epiphenomenalism
6. Metaphysics of dualism – Cartesian dualism has something in common with materialism: a mechanistic concept of the material world in general, and of the human body in particular.
7. alternative construal of dualism
8. the problem of personal identity

Section 2: Personal Identity

1. The problem of personal identity is the problem of explaining what it is that accounts for the fact that a person remains the same person over time despite dramatic changes in his or her bodily and psychological characteristics.
3. Continue to exist after death – as a disembodied soul, say, or perhaps in a cloned body into which her memories have been transplanted.
4. What makes the same person throughout?
5. How to know that one is dealing with the same person from day to day, or even from moment to moment?
6. Appeal to a person’s psychological traits – memories, behavioral tendencies, or personality quirks – won’t help, since perhaps these have “jumped” from one immaterial substance to another since yesterday.
7. The “problem of other minds”: How do I know you’re not a zombie?
8. An epistemic gap between knowledge of the physical states of a person’s body or brain and knowledge of the person’s mental states.
9. Materialist answer: most contemporary philosophers adopt an approach to personal identity that involves reducing it to some kind of bodily and/or psychological continuity. According to them what makes a person the same over time is ultimately a matter of maintaining continuity of physical features – being associated with the same body, or at least the same brain.
10. The “animalist” approach, which holds that persons are identical to human beings considered merely as living organisms, appears to entail that if your cerebrum were taken from your body and transplanted into someone else’s, then you would, nevertheless, continue to exist in your now mindless but still living body even though your thoughts, memories, and personality traits would now exist in the body of the person who got the transplant.
11. Psychological continuity theories stress the centrality of psychological characteristics – memories, personality traits, and behavioral dispositions – to personal identity
12. The problem with these theories is that it seems conceptually possible that more than one person could be psychologically continuous with some earlier person.

13. “teletransportation”:

14. These two people can’t be identical with each other – they’re in different points in space, will soon develop different memories, and might go out of existence at different times. In that case, though, how can either be identical with the original Ethel (since it is a law of logic that if $A = B$ and $B = C$ then $A = C$)?

15. non-branching continuity – it is not just psychological continuity that is necessary for, personal identity but non-branching continuity: the person who walks out of the machine on Mars will really be Ethel only if she is the only one who walks out (that is, if there aren’t two or more duplicates made by the machine).

16. One problem with this is that it seems ad hoc.

17. Another is that it makes your personal identity depend in part on completely external factors: whatever you continue as the same person tomorrow depends on whether someone makes an exact psychological duplicate of you tonight. If someone does, you will no longer exist as the same person – in a sense, you will die – even if absolutely nothing happens to your body and even if your thoughts will continue just as they would have anyway (because you never found out about the duplicate). This hardly seems plausible.

18. Derek Parfit has argued, whatever version of a reductionist theory one adopts, it seems clear that one will be committed to abandoning any robust concept of personal identity; indeed, one will really be abandoning the concept of the person as it has traditionally been understood.

19. All one can truly say given such theories is that there exists in some later person (or persons) some greater or lesser degree of psychological and bodily continuity with some earlier person – and that’s it. There is no “further fact” about the person, over and above the facts concerning physical and psychological continuity. The degrees of psychological and bodily continuity are all that objectively exist, and they might exist in more than one later body (as in the teletransportation case).

Section 3: Consequences of mechanism

1. The upshot of both Cartesian and reductionist theories of personal identity seems to be the complete disappearance of personhood in both Cartesian dualism and materialist-reductionist monism – nothing “immaterial” is identified independently

2. Is it a form of ‘begging the question’ fallacy?

3. The reason for this consequence: the mechanistic conception of the human body that Cartesian dualism shares with materialism.

4. Modern science has tended to explain the phenomena by carving off any aspects tied to the ‘subjective first-person’ point of view of the ‘conscious subject’.

5. The objective reality being merely that certain organs have survived because those organisms which lacked them tended to die out, and so on.

6. Materialists and Cartesian dualists alike have tended to draw the conclusion that matter must be inherently devoid of anything irreducibly mental.

7. Indeed, this seems to be the essence of the materialist concept of matter.

8. Then, actually comes the initial question again in forth: what is matter? Is matter something like a non-matter-like matter? Then, is ‘something’ like a non-matter matter is really a mater, or metaphysical dualism is right?
9. Matter comes to be defined precisely in terms that contrast it to mind; indeed, by definition, it comes to be seen as devoid of anything inherently mental. Cartesian dualists have essentially endorsed this definition, and conclude from it that what is irreducibly mental must therefore inhere in a non-physical substance; while materialists conclude that there is nothing irreducibly mental – what seems to be so are really just complex material processes.

10. **Materialists’ red herring fallacy:** If the materialist conception of explanation entails always stripping away from the phenomena to be accounted for anything that smacks of subjectivity, meaning, or mind-dependence, then a materialist “explanation” of the mind itself will naturally seem to strip away the very essence of the phenomenon to be explained.

11. **Eliminative materialism.** Some professedly non-eliminativist (physicalist) philosophers of mind come close to admitting this: Fodor, for instance, has famously written that “if aboutness [that is, intentionality] is real, it must be really something else.”

12. If such interaction becomes mysterious for Cartesian dualists and materialists alike, so too does personal identity.

13. **Russellian metaphysics** seems, for one thing, to entail panpsychism—which would seem a rather high price to pay to get a view of matter more congenial to mind more to the present point, it seems also to be no less immune to epiphenomenalism than are Cartesian dualism and materialism.

**Section 4: Hylomorphism**

1. Hylomorphism—Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas. The term “hylomorphism” derives from the Greek words *hyle,* meaning “matter,” and *morphe* meaning “form,” and the central idea of the view is that a concrete substance is a composite of matter and form, and cannot properly be understood except as such.

2. **Form is understood in a realist way:** it is abstract and universal, irreducible either to any particular material thing or to some aspect of our classificatory practices.

Form exists in some sense out there, independent of our minds.

3. **Hylomorphists are generally Aristotelian rather than Platonic realists,** that is, their view is that form generally exists in the substances it informs rather than subsisting in a kind of Platonic “third realm”.

4. ‘Nothingness’ or ‘no-thing-ness’? hylomorphism entails that no material thing can be said to be “nothing but” a collection of particles (or whatever), after the fashion of materialistic reductionism.

5. If form generally does not exist apart from matter, neither does matter exist without form; and thus, **without grasping a material object’s form, we cannot understand it.**

6. In the **classical hylomorphism,** a full explanation of a material substance involves identifying at least **four irreducible causal components:** its (1) material cause, its (2) formal cause, its (3) final cause, and its (4) efficient cause.

A heart, for example, cannot be understood except as being an organ having a certain material constitution (its material cause), as possessing a certain form or principle of organization (its formal cause), as serving a certain function – to pump blood (its final cause) and as having been brought about by antecedents such as the genetic programming inherent in certain cells that led them to develop into a heart rather than a kidney or liver (its efficient cause).

7. **Materialism and Cartesian dualism alike eliminate formal and final causes from the explanation of material things,** replacing the classical hylomorphic conception of material substances as inherently purposive composites of matter and form with a conception of them.
as collections of particles or the like devoid of either intrinsic purpose or objective, irreducible form, and explicable entirely in terms of efficient causation.

8. **Living things have form no less than chairs and the like**, and the form of a living thing is precisely what a hylomorphist means by the **soul**. There is a sense in which plants and non-human animals have souls just as human beings do.

9. **The nutritive soul** is the sort which informs the matter of which plants are composed, and imparts to them powers of nutrition, growth, and reproduction.

10. **The sensory soul** is the kind of soul possessed by animals, and includes the powers of the nutritive soul as well as its own distinctive powers of perception, appetite, and locomotion or movement.

11. Finally, **the rational soul** is the kind of soul possessed by human beings. Incorporating the powers included within the nutritive and sensory souls, it also imparts the further characteristics of intellect, will, and memory.

12. **The rational soul is the substantial form of the human body**, in virtue of which human beings are what they are: rational animals.

13. This is a very different concept of the soul from that of the Cartesian dualist, who regards it not as a substantial form – which is, in the hylomorphic view, only one aspect of a complete substance – but rather as a complete substance in its own right, devoid of material properties but nevertheless (somehow) capable of efficient causation.

14. in the hylomorphic view, just as the form of a chair is not a chair, neither is the soul of a person a person; and just as the matter of a chair is, apart from the form a chair, not a chair, neither is a person’s body qua body a person. **A person is essentially a composite of soul and body**.

15. Another consequence of the hylomorphic view is that there is no mystery about how soul and body get into causal contact with one another, for the **soul-body relationship is just one instance of a more general relationship existing everywhere in the natural world**, namely the relationship between forms – the form of a chair, the form of a tree, the form of an animal and the matter they organize.

16. Is it something like, **common mistakes are not mistakes at all**? If this general relationship is not particularly mysterious, neither is the specific case of the relationship between soul and body.

17. The mistake of Cartesian dualists and materialists alike, according to the hylomorphist, is to think of all causation as efficient causation. When it is allowed that there are other irreducible modes of explanation – in particular, explanation in terms of formal causation -the interaction problem disappears.

**Section 5: Thomistic dualism**

1. hylomorphism, associated as it is with an Aristotelian-Thomistic **conception of form**, takes forms to exist in some sense, “in” the material objects that instantiate them.

2. Forms in general do not exist as concrete particular things; apart from their instantiation in matter, their reality is purely abstract.

3. The form of the chair may continue to exist in an abstract way, but that particular chair itself is gone forever.

4. The forms of all other material things are utterly dependent on the matter that instantiates them for their operation.

5. But the **rational soul**, uniquely in all of nature, does not fully depend on the matter that it informs for its operation.
6. The evidence the Thomistic dualist would give for this claim would be arguments for the irreducibility of thought and intentionality to material processes.

7. If the rational soul operates independently of the body, it cannot depend for its continued existence on the continued existence of the body.

8. Unlike the souls of plants and animals and unlike any form of any other kind, the human soul is a subsistent form: it is capable, in principle anyway, of continuing in existence as a particular thing after its separation from the body in death, and even after the destruction of that body.

9. It is important to emphasize that the human soul does not, in this view, continue on as a complete person, for a person exists only as a union of soul and body.

10. Rationale for the traditional theological doctrine of the resurrection of the body: If the person whose soul it is the soul of is ever to exist again as a whole person, the soul must be reunited with its body.

11. Philosophy, in Aquinas’s view, can demonstrate at most the immateriality and immortality of the soul, and thus the possibility of resurrection.

12. The actuality of resurrection presupposes the existence of God and the truth of an alleged divine revelation of God’s intent to bring it about.

Section 6: Merits of Thomistic hylomorphism

1. It suggests a possible solution to the interaction problem, thus undermining the most important objection to dualism.

2. It arguably solves the re-identification problem, since the connection between soul and body is so close that a body just wouldn’t be the body it is without the presence of its soul.

3. If the mind were as independent of the brain as Cartesian dualism implies, then we shouldn’t expect that brain damage could so severely impair mental functioning. But on the Thomistic view, the soul is (almost) as close to the body as the form of a chair is to the matter of the chair.

On the Thomistic version of dualism, that damage to the body and brain would impair mental functioning.

4. Sensation and perception are, unlike the higher intellectual mental operations, purely material processes which cannot exist or function independently of the body.

5. A solution to the problem of other minds: since someone’s body, according to hylomorphism, wouldn’t be a body at all if it had no soul, and wouldn’t be that person’s body in particular if it didn’t have that person’s soul.

6. The Thomistic view entails that zombies are not possible – because any creatures with bodies like ours would necessarily have to have immaterial souls like ours.

Thomistic dualism, if true, would undermine the materialist “duplication argument“.

If a person’s living body was duplicated molecule for molecule, this wouldn’t show that a person had no non-material components, for the duplicate wouldn’t count as a living human body at all (much less as a human body capable of meaningful speech and the like) if it lacked a rational soul.

7. The self and the space-time boundary: Thomistic dualism also seems immune to the materialist’s argument that whatever is in time must also be in space, which poses a challenge to Descartes’s claim that the soul is outside space but not time.

In the hylomorphic view, forms – and thus souls – are in a sense “in” the matter they inform, so that a soul cannot be said to be utterly outside space after the manner of Cartesian immaterial substances.
8. Consciousness problem: Thomistic dualism seems better placed than Cartesian dualism to explain how the self could persist when unconscious.

For Descartes, consciousness is of the essence of an immaterial substance; it thus becomes mysterious how such a substance, and the self it is identical with, could ever become unconscious as we surely, sometimes do.

But in the Thomistic view, a soul, being the form of the body, doesn’t cease to exist when the person it is the soul of becomes unconscious.

“Analytical Thomism,” some are – Elizabeth Anscombe, John Haldane, and James F. Ross.

Section 7: Philosophy of mind and the rest of philosophy

The materialists’ response to a Thomistic approach:

1. it constitutes a very radical departure from the metaphysical assumptions made by most contemporary philosophers.
2. it undermines the standard interpretation of modern science
3. Such a departure raises as many questions as it answers.

Defending Thomistic interpretation:

1. One would need to present a detailed case for the general realism about form that is rejected by many contemporary philosophers.
2. Philosophers who favor such a departure from current mainstream assumptions differ over the precise nature it ought to take.
3. from the point of view of Thomistic dualists, going to require not only a return to hylomorphism, but also to the incorporation of theism into our metaphysical picture of the world.

For only an appeal to God’s intervention can in their view adequately explain the origin of immaterial rational souls within the world of material beings.

4. Some non-Thomistic dualists, such as the Cartesian dualist Richard Swinburne, would also endorse this appeal to theism.
5. Atheistically inclined dualists like Karl Popper and David Chalmers would suggest instead that a revision of our concept of scientific method and/or of the basic laws of physics might be sufficient to account for the relationship between physical and non-physical reality.

Other proposals:

1. A reconsideration of idealism.
2. Argumentum ad futuris: mainstream materialists would reject all such proposals. They continue to insist that a more thorough application of current assumptions and methods will eventually vindicate their position.

Philosophical problems are interconnected:

Clearly, the dispute between materialists and dualists over the nature of the mind ultimately cannot be settled conclusively without attention to broader issues – issues in metaphysics and epistemology, and perhaps even in philosophy of religion and philosophy of science.

Sellars’ comment:

Wilfrid Sellars famously wrote that “the traditional mind-body problem is … a veritable tangle of tangles. At first sight but one of the ‘problems of philosophy,’ it soon turns out, as one pick at it, to be nothing more nor less than the philosophical enterprise as a whole.”