The Cartography of Personal Identity
Mapping a Course for the Future
The Philosophical Problem of Personal Identity
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- The Reidentification Question (the problem of diachronic identity for persons):
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• The Characterization Question:
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• The Characterization Question: which of the properties of persons are those around which the life of the person should be organized?
Reidentification and Characterization Questions Compared

• Both questions address issue of what we should identify with
  – Indian philosophers take this question as key to solving problem of existential suffering

• Characterization question presupposes that persons endure in some non-problematic way

• Reidentification question requires that we address the question how persons might endure
Parfit’s Taxonomy of PI Theories

• Non-Reductionism
  – a. the person is a separately existing entity
  – b. the continued existence of the person is a further fact

• Reductionism: the continued existence of a person just consists in the occurrence of certain impersonal entities and events
The Buddhist Taxonomy of PI Theories

- Eternalism (śāśvatavāda)
- Annihilationism (ucchedavāda)
- The Middle Path between these extreme views: the continued existence of a person just consists in a causal series of psychophysical elements (skandhas), none of which is of the nature of a self
Putting the two taxonomies together

• Non-Reductionism:
  – a person is an entity existing over and above the individual psychophysical elements;
  – continued existence of a person is continued existence of that entity

• Reductionism:
  – a ‘person’ just consists of psychophysical elements properly arranged;
  – continued existence of a ‘person’ just consists in a causal series of psychophysical elements

• Eliminativism:
  – a ‘person’ just consists of psychophysical elements properly arranged;
  – a ‘person’ exists only as long as the present set of psychophysical elements continue to exist and be properly arranged
The Self-Person Distinction: to what does ‘I’ refer?

self: that part of the person that is the essence

‘I’

person: the whole consisting of psychophysical elements properly arranged

Then Non-Reductionists might hold:

a. the self is the ‘true’ person; continued existence of a person just is the continued existence of the self;

or

b. the person is the whole that exists when there are psycho-physical elements properly arranged, but is distinct from those elements.
Explaining the Scare Quotes

- Reductionists and Eliminativists agree that strictly speaking there are no persons, only impersonal psychophysical elements properly arranged.

- Explaining the error:
  - folk theory says where there is a causal series of properly arranged psychophysical elements there is a person

- Reductionist:
  - strictly speaking there is no such entity, folk theory is nonetheless useful (up to a point)

- Eliminativist:
  - folk theory is useless, should be replaced by alternative theory that referent of ‘I’ exists only as long as same psychophysical elements are properly arranged

- Note that Non-Reductionist and Eliminativist agree that ‘I’ has a referent; their disagreement concerns how long it endures
Buddhist Reductionism

- Denies the existence of a self
- Holds that the person is not ultimately but only conventionally real (is a mere conceptual fiction)
- The chariot analogy and mereological reductionism
- It is conventionally true that I continue to exist as long as this causal series of properly arranged psychophysical elements continues
- What is ultimately true is just that these impermanent psychophysical elements occur in a causal series
- The folk theory of persons as a useful fiction
Non-Reductionism:
the referent of ‘I’ is an entity existing over and above the individual psychophysical elements;
continued existence of a person is continued existence of that entity

The entity in question might be
a. impartite (i.e., a self)

or
b. partite, i.e., the person, or some suitably complex proper part of the person such as the brain

Most Indian Non-Reductionists hold (a)
Some modern Non-Reductionists hold some version of (b)
the relation between the person and the psychophysical elements:
emergence
inherence

Parfit’s ‘further fact’ form of Non-Reductionism
non-reductive supervenience
the case of Pudgalavāda
‘properly arranged’

Two possible Non-Reductionist ‘partite-person’ views as to when psychophysical elements are properly arranged:
1. when they support psychological continuity
2. when they continue to support a life (physical continuity)

Two tests
Teletransporation
brain transfer
Psychological vs. Physical Continuity

• Both Reductionist and Non-Reductionist might hold either Psychological Continuity or Physical Continuity view about diachronic PI

• But Reductionist denies that ultimately there are necessary and sufficient conditions for the continued existence of a person
  – two sorts of difficulty for the partite-person Non-Reductionist:
    • 1. sorites difficulties: the chariot of Devadatta
    • 2. mereological difficulties

• Given these difficulties, Reductionist claims persons cannot be ultimately real
  – hence necessary and sufficient conditions for continued existence of person cannot be stated in terms of facts about psychophysical elements

• Hence for Reductionist, choice of Psychological Continuity or Physical Continuity only reveals pragmatic constraints on folk theory of persons
Challenges for Non-Reductionism

- **Self theory:**
  - not perceptible, hence requires inferential support;
  - inferences defeasible on grounds of lightness
- **Partite Person theory:**
  - Psychological Continuity approach
    - fission, multiple realizability and the ‘only x and y’ principle
    - indeterminacy
  - Physical Continuity approach
    - Fission
    - indeterminacy
- **Possible Responses**
  - Relative identity and unrestricted summing
  - Indeterminate identity
  - The Nyāya solution and the retreat to Eliminativism
- **Further Fact theory**
  - The over-determination argument against non-reductive supervenience
Challenges for Reductionism

- **Circularity**
  - can there be conventions without conventioners?
- **Making do without the first-person perspective**
  - the specter of Micawberism
- **What is reduction?**
  - the two-truths strategy precludes our being able to say what reduction consists in
- **Can there be an ultimate ontology?**
  - Madhyamaka arguments for the emptiness of all dharmas
- **Physicalism and the problem of qualia**
  - if mental properties are to be reducible to physical properties, then some solution must be found to the ‘what Mary doesn’t know’ problem
- **Self-cognition**
  - what performs the activity of cognizing in the absence of a cognitive agent?
Challenges for Eliminativism

• What is the alternative to the folk theory of persons?
  – impermanent selves?
  – impermanent set of properly arranged psychophysical elements?
    ultimately real?
    merely conventionally real?

• What good is the folk theory of persons?
  – Locke: ‘person’ is a forensic term
  – the Buddha: karma-rebirth ideology, moral motivation and prudential rationality