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Bioethics Lecture 6 Handout – Personal Identity

When do we come into existence and cease to exist? We can answer this if we have a theory of personal identity over time, of the form:

The General Form of a Theory of Personal Identity Over Time

Person A at t_1 is the same as person B at t_2 iff...

What do we mean *the same*? We are not talking about *qualitative identity*. We are talking about *numerical identity*.

X is *qualitatively identical* to Y when X and Y share a great number of properties.

X is *numerically identical* to Y when X is Y, when there's one thing here, not two.

The Animalist Approach

Person A at t_1 is the same as person B at t_2 iff A at t_1 and B at t_2 are the same organism

The Same-Soul Approach

Person A at t_1 is the same as person B at t_2 iff A at t_1 and B at t_2 have the same soul

The Psychological Approach

Person A at t_1 is the same as B at t_2 iff A at t_1 is psychologically continuous with B at t_2 .

People-at-times are *psychologically connected* if they share enough beliefs, desires, memories, character traits. People-at-times are *psychologically continuous* if they are psychologically connected, or they are linked by a chain of psychologically connected intermediaries.

If the psychological approach is correct then we are not organisms. The approach is very attractive, but Olson has an argument against it.

- P1** You are a thinking thing.
- P2** There is an organism in your vicinity.
- P3** The organism is a thinking thing.
- P4** There are no other thinking things in your vicinity.

C You are an organism.