Personal Identity & Mind/Body

Descartes to Michaels
What is the problem?

- Personal Identity: *Who am I?*
- Different ways to think about the question:
  - What is it that stays the same through all the changes I go through?
  - What links my past selves with my present self?
  - How am I distinguishable from other selves?
  - How do others identify me as me and is it any different than the way I identify myself to myself?
What is the problem?

- Mind/Body: *What* am I?
- Different ways to think about the question:
  - Am I just matter in motion?
  - Do I have a soul that is not physical?
  - If I have a soul is it connected to my body in some fashion?
  - Is it possible that I don’t have a body – and am just an immaterial soul?
Descartes...again

- P1) Identity must be found in whatever remains identical to itself over time
- P2) The material body is ever changing
- P3) The immaterial soul remains the same throughout time

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- C) The material body cannot be what identifies us
- C2) The immaterial soul is the source of our identity
Descartes: Why must the body be distinct from the soul?

3 Arguments: All 3 take the general form of “Leibnitz’s Theorem”: if one finds two incompatibly different attributes then there must be two distinct substances which bear them.

Example: if we both know a person named “Sam” it cannot be the same person if the one I know is dark-haired, female and 5’2” and the one you know is blond, male and 6’4” – these attributes are incompatibly different.
Descartes: Why must the body be distinct from the soul?

1) The mind is a conscious, thinking unextended (does not extend through space or time) substance; the body is extended but not conscious. Something cannot simultaneously be extended and unextended, conscious and unconscious.

(Remember Descartes had no concept of the subconscious – this idea doesn’t arrive until the late 19\textsuperscript{th}, early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries.)
2) The mind is “transparent to itself” - access to one’s own mental states is privileged (only you can know your own private mental events) and claims about mental states such as beliefs and desires are incorrigible (cannot be corrected by others) while the body can be doubted and claims about it are public and corrigible (can be mistaken and corrected by others).
Descartes: Why must the body be distinct from the soul?

3) The mind is indivisible but the body is divisible. Descartes’ concept of the mind was something that was a substance that could view the entirety of itself with no hidden or separate compartments – as in conscious thinking (cogitare) and awareness of sensations (sentire). The body is clearly composed of divisible individual parts.
Explanatory Advantages of Cartesian Substance Dualism:

1. Descartes can explain why mental states (thoughts, beliefs, desires, etc.) are privileged – they are not attributes of a physical, material substance so they have no physical properties. Because the mind is immaterial, only you have access to your own mind.

2. Descartes can explain things like “phantom pains” – an experience often reported by recent amputees. The “pain” is a property of the mind while the injury which originally gave rise to it is a separate event occurring in the body. They are two separate events occurring in two separate substances.

3. Descartes can also explain why we can’t be corrected about our mental state claims – they are incorrigible – we just cannot be wrong about what we are consciously thinking and no one else has access to our mind so no one else can tell us that we aren’t confused if we feel confused!
Cartesian Causal Interactionism:

- Descartes argued that the mind and body causally interacted - mental events like a decision to come to class caused body events like walking and stubbing one’s toe caused mental events like a perception of pain. This is how he accounted for conscious behavior.

- The problem here is that if the two substances are completely separate and distinct, then they have no point in common and therefore cannot be causally related! If like causes produce like events (a core rule of causation), then only physical events can produce physical effects and immaterial causes can produce only immaterial effects. This is pretty much a fatal flaw for Descartes’ theory!
Descartes’ Solution:

The Pineal Gland!

What Descartes said it did:

It was the “seat of the soul” and functioned as a translation point between the mind and brain. This is where causal interaction took place.

Why it **cannot** do what Descartes needs it to do:

For it to do this, it would have to be *both* immaterial and material...but Descartes argued that these two kinds of substances were utterly distinct and separate!

An endocrine gland located in the brain which secretes melatonin, is strongly regulated by light stimuli, and is an important component of the circadian timing system.
Locke...again

- P1) Consciousness is key to identity
- P2) Identity must be found in how we identify ourself to ourself - i.e. consciousness of self
- P3) I identify myself as the same self through memories of prior events –
- C) Memory is the source of self identity
Locke on identity:

“For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and 'tis that, that makes every one to be, what he calls self; and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal Identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational Being: And as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that Person...”

(An Essay Concerning Human Understanding)
Locke on Identity:

Locke is agnostic about the immateriality and immortality of the soul and he claims we don’t need this concept to posit (explain) personal identity – Descartes’ theory fails the test of Ockham’s Razor or the theory of parsimony. If one has two theories that explain a phenomena equally well then, all other things held equal, the theory that is simpler, with a lighter explanatory burden is to be preferred. For Descartes, the existence of an immaterial soul must be proven; for Locke, all we need is what we already experience – conscious memories.
Locke on Identity:

The Man/Person distinction:

“For should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince’s past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon as deserted by his own soul, every one sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable for the prince’s actions; but who would say it was the same man?”
Descartes vs. Locke:

**Descartes**
- Consciousness is key – it is the conscious substance - the mind - that gives us identity.
- Our identity is continuous, never changes and never really dies.

**Locke**
- Consciousness is key – it is consciousness of one’s experiences brought forward to the present moment as a memory that gives us identity with our prior self.
- Because memories are being made all the time and because we don’t always remember the same things all the time, our identity is fluid, constantly changing, discontinuous and can die - even though the body lives on - as in the case of complete amnesia.
Certain challenges for Locke:

- If we don’t remember some prior event with sufficient liveliness and clarity, then we cannot claim that we are the same person who experienced that event. Does that mean that if we don’t remember something then it wasn’t us? Would a policeperson recognize that defense from a drunk who didn’t remember wrecking their car on the way home last night?

- Sometimes we misremember stuff – if that memory is very lively and clear but the event didn’t happen, are we now identified with a person who didn’t exist?
The problem of false and implanted memories:

In a seminal study Loftus and Pickrell (1995) recruited 24 participants who were to be presented with four stories from when they were between 4 and 6 years old, three of which were true, and one false. To get the true stories, the researchers spoke to participants’ relatives to get three events for each person which had really happened. The events were chosen so that they were not traumatic or emotionally difficult to recall. Each family was also asked to provide the circumstances of another event that could possibly have happened, but didn’t. In each case the false memory was for getting lost in a shopping mall. Relatives provided details of a specific shopping mall it could have been along with other details to make the fake story plausible. They also confirmed that an event like this had not actually occurred.

Participants themselves were told they were involved in a study about their ability to recall details of childhood memories. Each participant was first sent a written description of the four events their relatives had outlined - three being real and one fake. They were then asked to write down which events they remembered and more details of the events those events. Then, soon after, participants were interviewed. At this point they were reminded about the four memories and asked to recall as much as they could about them. At a second interview a week later, a similar procedure was followed. At the end of both interviews participants rated the clarity of their memories. It was then revealed to them that one of the memories was false and they were asked to guess which one it was. Of the 24 participants, 5 falsely recalled the made up ‘lost in the mall’ event as a real memory, although participants understandably found the implanted memory much less clear.

This may seem like quite an unimpressive proportion, but considering the very low level of suggestion or coercion involved in the interviews, it does at least show the possibility of implanting false memories.

A later study with more participants which examined a wider range of memories was carried out by Ilyman and Pentland (1996). This found that, depending on experimental variables, at least some kind of false memory could be implanted in between 20% and 40% of participants.

But psychologists have done better. In a fantastically titled paper, ‘A picture is worth a thousand lies’, Kimbereley Wade and colleagues used a doctored photograph of a fictitious balloon flight to implant false memories (Wade, Garry, Read & Lindsay, 2002). Using similar interview procedures to Loftus and Pickrell (1995), they found that 50% of participants created either complete or partial false memories of the flight.
Hume...again

P1) If we are or have a self it must be an object of perception: “It must be some one impression that gives rise to every real idea” (p. 456)

P2) the self cannot be perceived: “For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, lover or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception and never can observe any thing but the perception.” (p. 457)

C) We cannot claim to have or be a self. “This identity which we ascribe to the mind of man is only a fictitious one,...” (p. 458)
Kant...again

- Kant agrees with Descartes, Locke and Hume that consciousness is key to identity and that the body is not part of personal identity.

- Kant disagrees with Descartes and agrees with Locke and Hume that the immaterial soul cannot be proven “except in death” and therefore cannot be used to posit identity.

- Kant disagrees with Locke and agrees with Hume that the self is not to be found in experience.

- Kant disagrees with Hume’s conclusion that there is no self – the reason the self cannot be found in experience is that Hume was looking for it in the wrong place! For Kant the self is not in perception... it is behind perception.
For Kant, the self is not something we have... it is something we do.

There are two senses of identity:

**Empirical ego**: how others identify us – this is our body, what we look like, how we sound, etc... This is the self which makes us an individual.

**Transcendental ego**: how we identify our self - this is an activity of consciousness which Kant calls the “transcendental unity of apperception” - this is the self which unifies and organizes the act of perceiving – we are constantly updating and organizing our individual experiences - an event which cannot be related through consciousness to other events is useless to us. In a sense we form our identity just as someone might string a collection of pearls. (Be careful here as the metaphor is a bit off since there is no “string” in our transcendental ego – it is just the organization which is not separate from the experiences but is what makes it possible to make sense of the things we experience. Kant argues that **this is the self which makes us human** – remember to be human is to be rational for Kant and in order to be rational, we must organize our ideas and experiences in a logical fashion.
Meredith Michaels

- She disagrees with Descartes, Locke, Hume and Kant that the body plays no essential role in personal identity – that we do not identify with our bodies.

- Note that Michaels is not claiming that bodily identity is sufficient...only “that our bodies are, at the very least, important to who we are.” (p.486)

- Her argument isn’t presented in a linear analytic format – she’s inviting you as an expert in your own personal identity to engage in two thought experiments. This is a way to consult your own intuitions about how much you might identify with or be indentified by your body.
Michaels: 2 puzzling cases

Dr. Hagendaas and Wanda/Schwanda

- Wanda is hit by a steamroller – destroying her body but leaving her brain and memories intact.
- You have a massive stroke, leaving your body intact but brain fatally destroyed.
- Wanda’s memories are implanted into your body
- Who is Schwanda?

Dr. Nefarious and the experiment of the dememorizer/rememorizer.

- Tomorrow, at 4:57p you will be dememorized
- At 4:58p someone else's memories will be placed in your body.
- At 5:00p your body will be horribly tortured.
- Who will be tortured? Does it matter that it was your body?
Switch:

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jI45TjtXKhE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jI45TjtXKhE)

- Would it matter to your sense of who you are if you woke up in an alternately gendered body?