

Exre Colloquium - May 30th

Personal Identity and the First-person Perspective: Kant's Conception of a Person

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between personal identity and the first-person perspective in light of Kant's conception of a person. Following the rationalist tradition, Kant defines (psychological) personhood in terms of the consciousness of one's own personal identity throughout time. While it is undisputed that Kant rejects the rationalist arguments for such consciousness of personal identity, it remains controversial what – according to Kant – the source of such consciousness may be. Some argue that Kant's conception of conceptual self-consciousness, i.e., consciousness of oneself as thinking subject (expressed by the phrase "I think"), implies the consciousness of one's personal identity from the first-person perspective. Others argue that for Kant consciousness of personal identity necessarily depends on the persistence of the human body and can be recognized only from the third-person perspective. By contrast, this paper argues that Kant offers a positive conception of a person that centrally builds on the notion of psychological continuity and that is primarily accessible from the first-person perspective. Yet unlike the Lockean criterion of continuous consciousness, this notion is not inferred from present and past experiences. Rather, psychological continuity must be presupposed in order for the experience of oneself as particular individual with changing mental states to be possible. By reconstructing Kant's argument for this presupposition of psychological continuity, this paper suggests that Kant's conception of personhood may be an attractive alternative to both rationalist and empiricist accounts, including the Lockean conceptions prevailing in the current literature.

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University, Miséricorde
Room MIS04 4122