

The Problem of Personal Identity

Minds and Machines

What am I?

- 'I' am a human being?
- 'I' am a person?

Who am I?

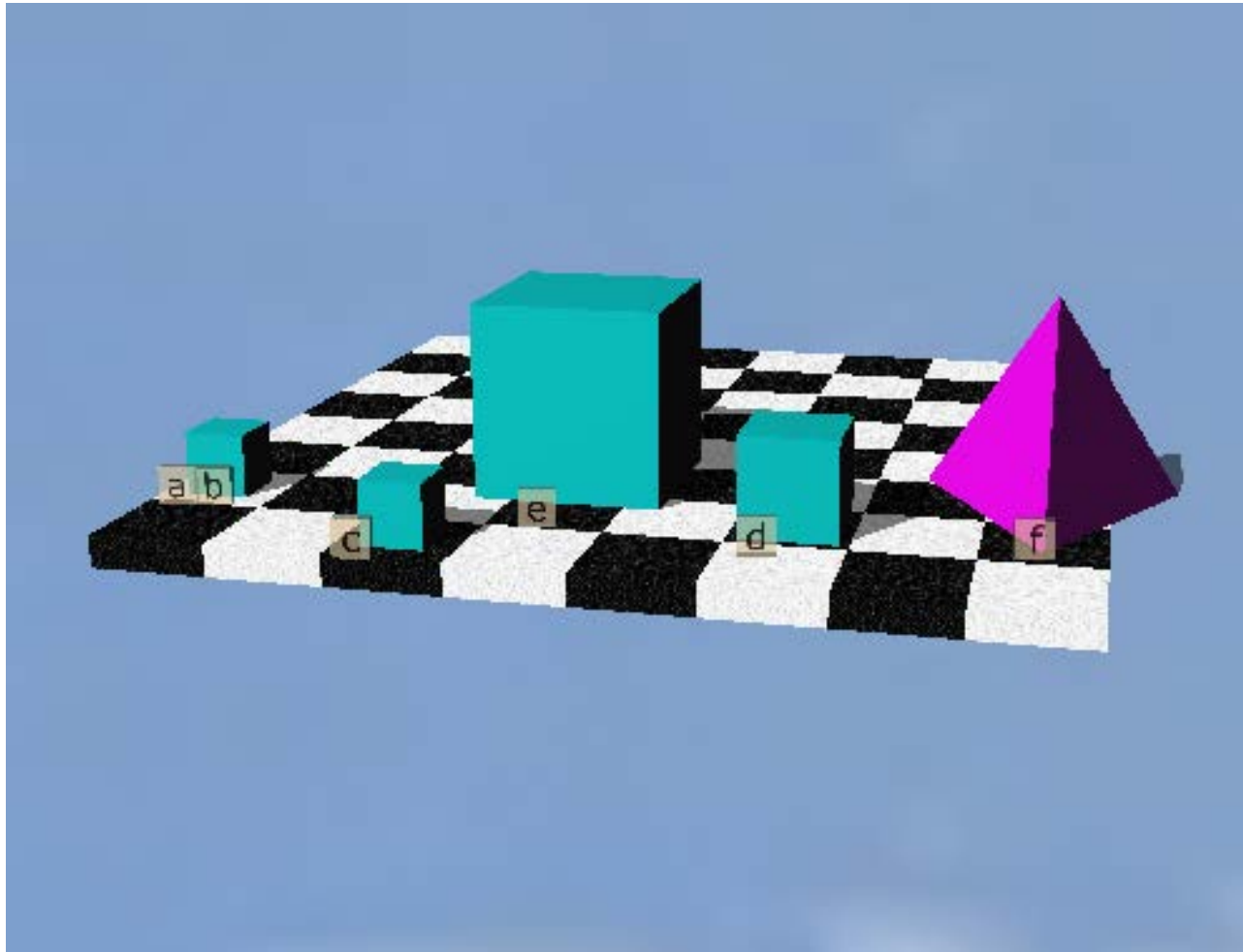
- 'I' am unique; there is only one of 'me'
- 'I' have a *personal identity*
 - 'I' am 'I', 'I' am not 'you', and 'you' are not 'me'
- But what is my personal identity?

Qualitative Identity vs True Identity

'Things' and Kinds of 'Things'

- 'Things' have a 'qualitative' identity
 - They are that 'kind' of thing
 - This book is a book
- 'Things' have a 'true' identity
 - Two things are two things, even if they are qualitatively exactly alike
 - This book is this specific book

Qualitative vs True Identity



Personal Identity

Body View

- The 'I' is my body .. my 'physical self'
- The 'body' view focuses on 'outward' and 'observable' physical features, characteristics, behaviors. Typically a very 'physical' or 'biological' view:
- I am 5'11" tall. I weigh 150 lbs. I can run a mile in 6 minutes.
- I have a headshot on my driver's license, and I can be uniquely ID'd with my DNA and fingerprints.
- Are some 'bodily features' more important than others?

Mind View

- The 'I' is my mind ... my 'mental self'
- I believe that philosophy is cool. I prefer strawberry ice cream over chocolate ice cream. Etc.
- 'I' control my body. My 'personality' is in my mind.
- I can get a prosthetic arm, a new heart, or blood transfusion, but I can't get a brain transplant.
- Are some mental features more important than others?
 - Traits? Skills? Beliefs? Memories?

Identifying and Differentiating People

- Body view:
 - My body is how people identify me
 - One body -> one person
 - Two different bodies: two different persons
- Mind view:
 - Your body may be how people recognize you, but that's just a useful heuristic
 - E.g if you were to put a different mind in that body, others would quickly realize they're talking to a different person
 - Maybe Alzheimer's is kind of like that: there's a different mind in the same body -> different person!
 - Also, do I *know* you just because I recognize your body? I need to talk to you, and get to know your preferences, values, beliefs, etc. to get to know who /what *you* are
- Body view:
 - Oh yeah? On that Alzheimer's thing: If you say 'John got Alzheimer's, then clearly you are saying it is still the *same* person, but someone who got Alzheimer's ("poor John!") ... and why *is* it still John? Because it's still the same body!

Other Views

- 'Social' view:
 - I am son of my parents
 - I am married to my wife
 - I teach at RPI

Sense of Self

- 'I' = Sense of Self?
- Problematic:
 - Things without mind, and hence without sense of self still have true identity
 - I can have 'wrong' sense of self
 - E.g. I may think I am Jesus!
- Still: sense of self is a kind of 'narrative self' or 'biographical self' ... mostly formed by memories
 - Memory theory of personal identity:
 - Same (truly identical) person = same (truly identical) memory

Identity Through Time

Change and Identity Through Time

- How can something change?
- How can something no longer be the same (because it changed), yet still be the same (because it is still there)?
- Our answer: Because it only changes its qualitatively identity, but not its true identity

Persistence of identity through time: More Difficult Cases

- Disassembly and Reassembly (e.g. computer)
 - Does something ever cease to exist?
 - When there is the possibility of ‘restoring’ something, it isn’t gone, i.e existence is relative to technological capability?
- Splits (e.g. break piece of chalk in two)
- Mergers (e.g. merge two heaps of sand)
- More difficult splits (e.g. mitosis)
- More difficult mergers (Tuvix!)
- Combinations thereof (Ship of Theseus!)

Ship of Theseus



Problem of Personal Identity ≠ Mind-Body Problem!!

- These are different problems:
 - Mind-body problem: what is mind?
 - Problem of Personal Identity: what is ‘you’?
- For example, one can say and argue that personal identity is defined by one’s mind without saying anything about whether that mind is something physical or non-physical.

Materialism and Dualism

- Still, there **are** some correlations ...
- A dualist is likely to go with the mind view
- But a materialist can still go both ways:
 - A materialist who thinks that the brain holds the ‘essence’ of who we are holds a mind view, not a body view.

Personal Identity through Time on the Body View

- If I am my body, would any change to my body mean that I no longer exist? E.g. if I lose a hand ... or even a hair?
- No, because those are mere *qualitative* changes ... in terms of *true* identity, that body is still that body, and hence it is still me.
- OK, so some change is ok ... but what about more radical change, like losing all limbs? What is the 'end' of 'you'?

Personal Identity through Time on the Mind View

- If I am my mind, would any change to my mind mean that I no longer exist? E.g. if I lose or gain a memory?
- No, because those are mere *qualitative* changes ... in terms of *true* identity, that mind is still that mind, and hence it is still me.
- OK, so some change is ok ... but what about more radical change, like getting Alzheimer's? What is the 'end' of 'you'?

Quiz 1

- Biology text: “In mitosis, a single cell divides into two identical cells”
- Here, by ‘identical’ the biology text means the cells are:
 - A. qualitatively identical
 - B. truly identical

Quiz 2

- Consider these two claims:
- I. Qualitative identity implies true identity
- II. True identity implies qualitative identity

- A. I is true and II is true
- B. I is true and II is false
- C. I is false and II is true
- D. I is false and II is false