The Problem of Personal Identity

Minds and Machines
Who am I?

• ‘I’ am a human being
• ‘I’ am a person
• ‘I’ am unique
• ‘I’ have a personal identity
  – ‘I’ am ‘I’, ‘I’ am not ‘you’, and ‘you’ are not ‘me’
‘Things’ and Kinds of ‘Things’

• What is a ‘Thing’

• ‘Things’ have a ‘qualitative’ identity
  – They are that ‘kind’ of thing

• ‘Things’ have a ‘true’ identity
  – Two things are two things, even if they are qualitatively exactly alike
Qualitative vs True Identity
Change

• 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)?

• 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?
- 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
Personal Identity

- I am a unique person. As a person, there is exactly one ‘me’.
- But what is a person?
Body View

• The ‘I’ is my body

• I am 5’11” tall. I weigh 150 lbs. I can run a mile in 6 minutes. Etc.
Mind View

- The ‘I’ is my mind

- I believe that philosophy is cool. I prefer strawberry ice cream over chocolate ice cream. Etc.
Personal Identity through Time

- If I am my body, would any change to my body mean that I no longer exist?

- No, because again those are mere qualitative changes ... in terms of true identity, that body is still my body, and hence it is still me.

- (same goes for the mind view: my mind may go through qualitative changes, but it is still my mind, and hence still me)

- OK, so some change is ok ... but what about more radical change? What is the ‘end’ of ‘you’?
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:**
  – Oh yeah? Suppose you had some serious cosmetic surgery ... or were in a serious accident. ... 

• **Body View:**
  – Oh yeah? Suppose you have some serious brain injury because of the accident ... or suffer from Alzheimer’s ... or split personality disorder...

• **Mind View:**
  – Oh yeah? What if I swap the brains of persons A and B, i.e. let C be the brain of A inside the body of B, and let D be the brain of B inside the body of A. Now clearly C is A, right? So: identity is where the brain, i.e. mind goes.

• ...
Quiz 1

• “In mitosis, a single cell divides into two identical cells”

• Here, by ‘identical’ we mean:

• A. qualitatively identical
• B. truly identical
Quiz 2

• Consider these two claims:
  • I. If A and B are qualitatively identical, then they are truly identical
  • II. If A and B are truly identical, then they are qualitatively identical

• 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