

PERSONS AS INDETERMINATE OBJECTS

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What is the topic of your master's thesis?

I am concerned with why there are cases where it appears indeterminate whether a person A at time t_1 is identical to a person B at t_2 . In mainstream philosophy of personal identity, these indeterminate cases are often divided into two broad kinds: Fission and sorites cases. In the former, we are asked to imagine a person being split into two identical versions. In such cases, the main problem is to understand whether said person continues to exist after the splitting, and, if he does, which resulting person he is identical with. In sorites cases, we are asked to imagine a person A gradually changing into a person B, and then judge at which specific point in the transformation A ceases to be/B comes into existence. In order to give cogent, determinate answers to these questions, philosophers have proposed that we revise our concept of personhood so as to make it more determinate. The problem with these revisions, however, is that they are (a) open to counterexamples, and (b) difficult to accept when faced with normative decisions involving the concept.



What do you argue in favor of/against?

I argue that we can make sense of the above-mentioned indeterminacies by taking persons to be ontologically indeterminate. Furthermore, I argue that the only way we can make sense of that claim is by saying that persons are *conceptual*, as opposed to *brute* objects (where conceptual objects are things like *money* and *universities*, whereas brute objects are things like *electrons* and *mountains*). Because conceptual objects are partly constituted by our representations of them they can trivially be ontologically indeterminate (all that is required is representational, or *semantic*, indeterminacy in the relevant constitutive representations).

I also argue that, because our concept of personal identity is likely to be determined by innate perceptual structures, all attempts to cure the concept of indeterminacy are doomed to fail. This, in turn, explains why it can appear (and, indeed, *be*) indeterminate whether a person retains his/her self-identity in fission and sorites cases.

Why should others read your thesis?

I approach these issues in a way that is quite different from large parts of the philosophical tradition. Instead of trying to *solve* fission and sorites cases, I give a theory as to why they *can't* be solved. In doing so, I also say quite a bit about the nature of ontological indeterminacy and the difference between brute and conceptual phenomena – all of which I think are interesting issues.

What are your plans for the future?

I am applying for PhD's wherever I can find them, focusing on Scandinavia, hoping for Oslo. I want to work on topics associated with the nature of concepts, innate concepts or bio-ethics.