

WILL IT BE ME?

IDENTITY, CONCERN,
AND PERSPECTIVE



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A SPECIAL KIND OF CONCERN

Kierkegaard's Drunken Peasant

The tale is told of a peasant who came barefooted into the capital, and who had enough money to buy himself a pair of stockings and shoes with enough left over to drink his fill – it's said that as he drunkenly tried to find his way home, he ended up lying in the middle of the road and fell asleep. Then a carriage drove up, and the driver shouted to him to move, or else he would drive over his legs. The drunken peasant woke up, looked at his legs and, not recognizing them because of the shoes and stockings, said: "Ah, let him drive, they're not my legs." (Kierkegaard, 2006: 169)



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A SPECIAL KIND OF CONCERN

Egocentric Concern

- “irreducible to the importance I attach to my distinctive characteristics” (Dainton, 2008)
- “so deeply ingrained that most of us fail to even notice it” (Kind, 2004)
- Defeasible?
- Moral concerns
- Metaphysical concerns: does it track *identity* or something else?

A SPECIAL KIND OF CONCERN

Responses to the Identity Problem

1. Continue the search for an account of personal identity that would justify (most) egocentric concern
2. Accept that egocentric concern tracks something other than (strict numerical) personal identity)
3. Try to overcome egocentric concern

THE SORROWS OF A

- (i) A is subjected to an operation which produces total amnesia;
- (ii) amnesia is produced in A, and other interference leads to certain changes in his character;
- (iii) changes in his character are produced, and at the same time certain illusory 'memory' beliefs are induced in him;
Same as (iii) but the character and memories replicate those of B
- (iv) Same as (iv) except the result is produced by putting information into A's brain from B's brain, leaving B as he was before;
- (v) Same as in (v) except B is not left the same as a similar operation is performed in the reverse direction.

(Williams, 1973: 55-56)

THE SORROWS OF A

No Room for Undecidability?

- Being told there is no answer “may intellectually comfort observers of *A*’s situation; but what is *A* supposed to make of it? To be told that a future situation is a borderline one for its being myself that is hurt, that it is conceptually undecidable whether it will be me or not, is something which, it seems, I can do nothing with; because, in particular, it seems to have no comprehensible representation in my expectations and the emotions that go with them.” (Williams, 1973: 58)
- “There seems to be an obstinate bafflement to mirroring in my expectations a situation in which it is conceptually undecidable whether I occur” (Williams, 1973: 61)

LIVING WITHOUT CONCERN

“Is the truth [of reductionism] depressing? Some may find it so. But I find it liberating, and consoling. When I believed that my existence was such a further fact, I seemed imprisoned in myself. My life seemed like a glass tunnel, through which I was moving faster every year, and at the end of which there was darkness. When I changed my view, the walls of my glass tunnel disappeared. I now live in the open air. There is still a difference between my life and the lives of other people. But the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my own life, and more concerned about the lives of others.”
(Parfit, 1984: 281)

“...one becomes one of those who is present wherever and whenever future persons are found. One quite literally lives on in the onward rush of humankind”
(Johnston, 2010: 49)



IDENTITY AND ANTICIPATION

Can we anticipate the experiences of others?

- Martin (1998), Swinburne (1984) suggest we can.
- But we would then identify with others “not in the sense that the anticipators regard the others as the same people as themselves, but in some sense close to that” (Martin, 1998: 50).
- Can there be such a ‘middle ground’?



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IDENTITY AND ANTICIPATION

Affective Identification

- Affective responses (such as fear, pride etc.) that are normally self-reflexive aren't evidence *of* identity, nor are they a form of self-constituting psychological continuity
- Rather such a response contains *in itself* a phenomenal sense of the remembered/anticipated self *being me*. They are not simply affects that tend to go with relating to some future person as being oneself; they are *ways* of relating to some future person *as being oneself*.
- Martin is right that we affectively appropriate past and future selves to ourselves, but we do so in a way that implicitly *makes them us* on the phenomenal level.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF

Four questions:

q1. Is it rational or prudent for person p at time t_1 to be egocentrically concerned with the quality of the experiences of person q at time t_2 ?

q2. Is it rational or prudent for person p now to be egocentrically concerned with the quality of experiences of person q at time $t_{\text{now}+n}$?

q3. Is it rational or prudent for me at time t_1 to be to be egocentrically concerned with the quality of the experiences of person q at time t_2 ?

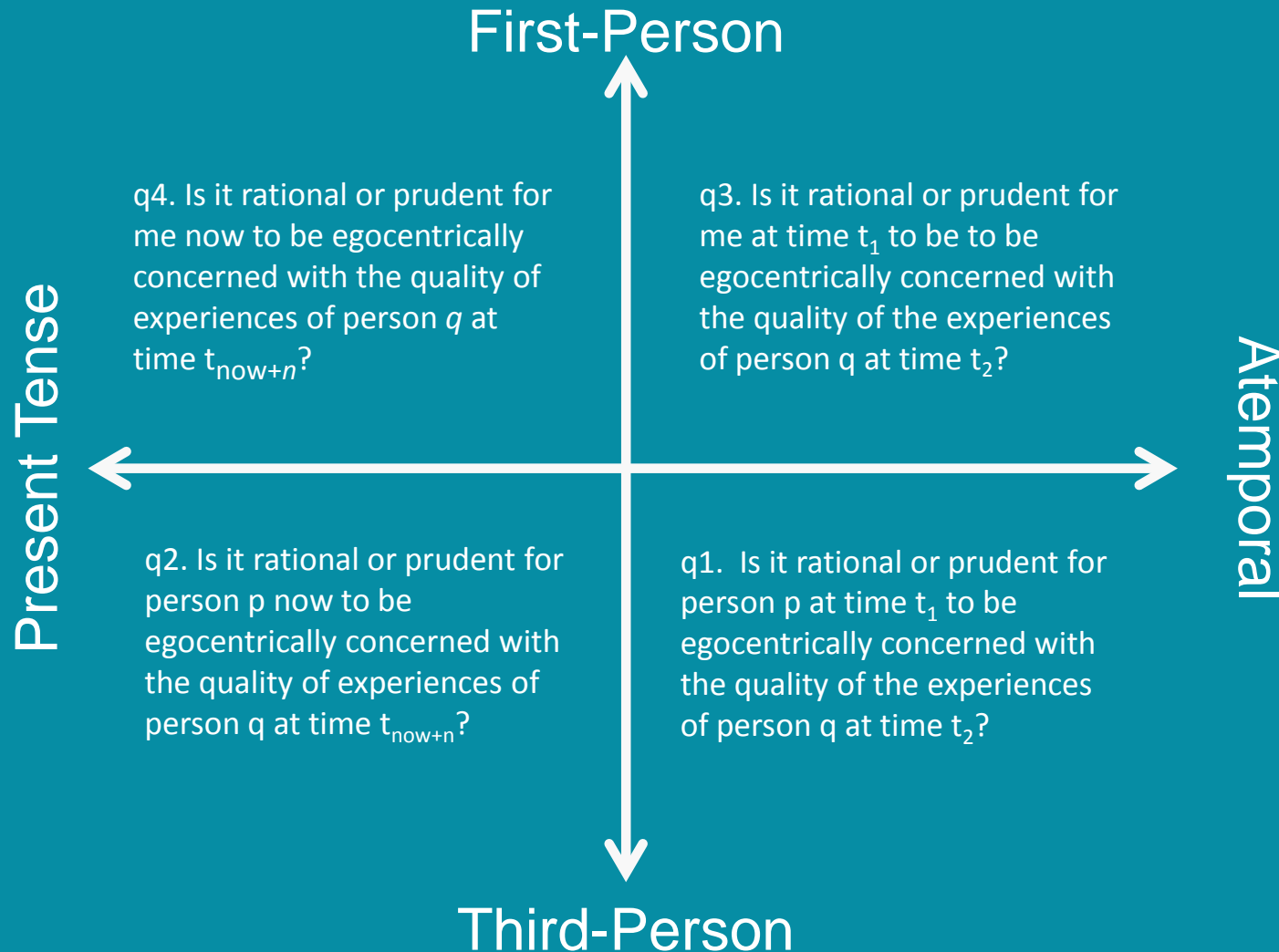
q4. Is it rational or prudent for me now to be egocentrically concerned with the quality of experiences of person q at time $t_{\text{now}+n}$?

PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF

Four questions:

- First/third person makes a difference (hence q1 and q3 turn out to be very different questions)
- But what about whether the question is asked *from here and now* or *atemporally*? Is there a corresponding difference between q2 and q4?

PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF



PHENOMENAL IDENTITY FACTS?

- “I do not care for some future experiences because they will be mine; rather, the fact that I care for some future experiences in a particular way [...] is part of what makes these future experiences mine should they occur.” (Slors, 2004: 186).
- Question about *synchronic character* of present experience rather than *diachronic duration*
- Self/Person split (cf. Zahavi, Schechtman, G. Strawson, Johnston): selves as irreducibly *present tense*, persons as *diachronic*

AFFECTIVE ALIENATION

- A's distress points to disconnect between the phenomenal (first-person here-and-now) experience of self and reflective awareness (first-person atemporal) of the diachronic extension of the person.
- Is such a disconnect *always* there, even if usually not salient?
- Real-world examples of 'slippage' between these forms of identity: severe anterograde amnesia (cf. Christman, 2008); no longer identifying with the concerns of the person we remember being (cf. Schechtman, 2001); anticipating in horror the changed person we fear we'll become (cf. Parfit, 1984: 327).
- "I'm no longer that person!" – not simply a metaphor

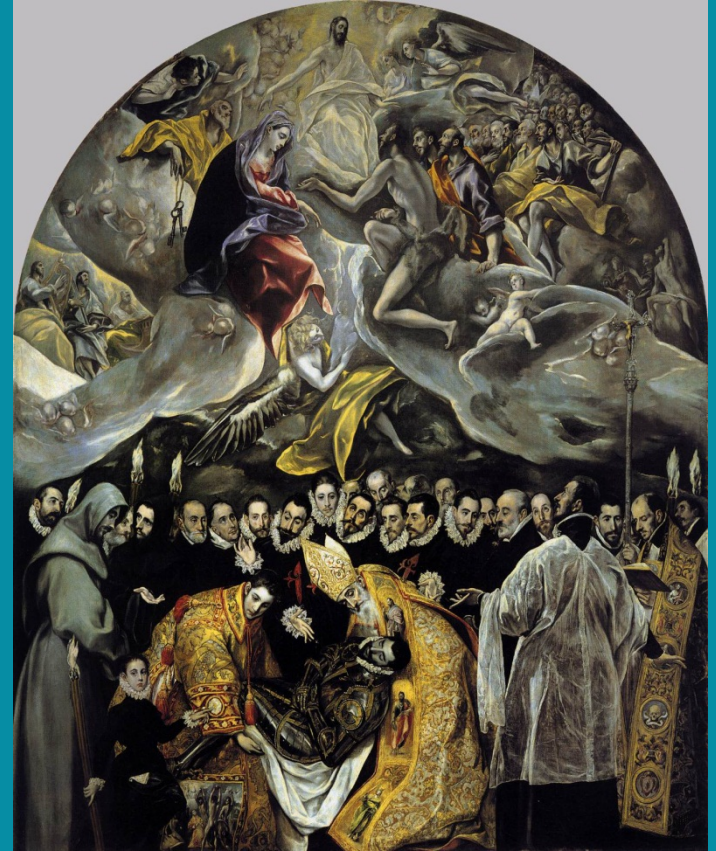
PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF

- Some purposes for which criteria of public *reidentification* are indispensable.
- Temptation to assume there is *one* common object that objective and subjective understandings of selfhood must converge upon, and that the third-personal perspective will be more fundamental.



PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF

- Yet in a sense the *first-person* perspective is more fundamental: facts about diachronic person-identity must be appropriated by a *here-and-now self*.
- The questions that motivate personal identity discussions (moral, prudential, soteriological) are motivated by first-personal concern



WHAT ABOUT POOR A?

- Seems A will need to *choose* a continuer.
- However A's situation is artificially simple – in reality there may be other (practical, ethical, emotional, religious) factors that would make A see one of the two post-operation persons *as being him*.
- This secures *phenomenal* identity – and we should resist the temptation to collapse phenomenal and 'objective' identity into a single account.