

Mid-term essay: Individuating souls

Read the passage below by Peter Strawson:

1. It is here that we come ... to the central difficulty in Cartesianism. If we are to talk coherently about individual consciousnesses or minds, or about individual items of any kind whatever, there is one thing at least which we must know. We must know the difference between *one* such item and *two* such items. We must know, that is, on what principle such items are to be counted ...
 2. In general we have no idea what a *so-and-so* is unless we have some idea what a *so-and-so* is. If we have no idea of how the notions of numerical identity and difference apply to individual consciousnesses then we really have no clear concept at all of such items.
 3. Now the anti-Cartesian is able to satisfy this requirement for having a concept of an individual mind or consciousness. Since he regards this concept as secondary to, or derivative from, that of an individual person, he can advance the following simple rule: *one* person, *one* consciousness; *same* person, *same* consciousness. His recipe for counting individual minds is to count people; for him the identification of a mind presents no greater (and no less) a problem than the identification of a person. He does not have to pretend that the question as to what the criteria of personal identity are is an easy or straightforward question. But he can properly point out that we have, and know how to use, adequate criteria for ordinary cases; and that we can perfectly intelligibly discuss how our criteria should be interpreted or adapted for any extraordinary cases which we might encounter or imagine.
 4. But how does the matter stand on the Cartesian philosopher's view? It is essential to his view that the application of the notions of identity and numerability to souls (consciousnesses) should *not* be determined by their application to persons. (The determination must be the other way about.)
 5. But then how *is* the application of these notions to souls or consciousnesses to be determined? Suppose I were in debate with a Cartesian philosopher, say Professor X. If I were to suggest that when *the man*, Professor X, speaks, there are a thousand souls simultaneously thinking the thoughts his words express, having qualitatively indistinguishable experiences such as he, the man, would currently claim, how would he persuade me that there was only one such soul?...
- (From P. F. Strawson, 'Self, mind and body', in his *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, Methuen: London, 1974, pp.173-4.)

Now re-read Carruthers *Introducing Persons* Chapter 3. You might also like to read ONE or TWO of the papers listed at the end of that chapter.

Now write an essay outlining and critically evaluating Strawson's argument

Do not write more than 1500 words in total. Aim for concision and clarity. You may refer to Carruthers or to other writers, but do not get distracted from the main topic. Among the things you should do in the essay are the following:

- Explain whether the problem Strawson highlights in this passage is that of soul *identity* or soul *identification* (in Carruthers' sense of the terms)? Explain why it is important to be able to fix the relevant criteria for souls.
- Outline Strawson's argument in your own words. (Try to set it out in the form of premises and a conclusion.)
- Explain why an identity theorist would not face a similar problem to the one Strawson poses for the dualist.
- Discuss whether Strawson's argument is sound. (Is it valid? Are the premises true?) If it is not sound, could it be revised to make it sound?
- Consider how a Cartesian dualist might reply to Strawson.

End-of-term essay

Answer ONE of the following questions. Your answer should be between 1000 and 1500 words in length.

1. **Is the problem of mind-body interaction a fatal one for Cartesian dualism?**
2. **Explain the difference between behaviourism, type identity theory, and token identity theory. Which theory is preferable and why?**
3. **How serious an objection to identity theories (type or token) is the argument from the felt properties of experience?**

Some optional extra reading

For Question 1:

- P. Smith and O. R. Jones, *The Philosophy of Mind*, Chapter IV.
- J. Hospers *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, Chapter 20, Section B.
- K. Campbell, *Body and Mind*, Chapter 3.

For Question 2:

- P. Smith and O. R. Jones, *The Philosophy of Mind*, Chapters X-XIII (parts).
- K. Campbell, *Body and Mind*, Chapters 4-5

For Question 3:

- P. Smith and O. R. Jones, *The Philosophy of Mind*, Chapters XIV-XV.
- N. Block 'Troubles with functionalism' in N. Block (ed.) *Readings in the Philosophy of Psychology* Volume 1. Also extracts in D. M. Rosenthal (ed.) *The Nature of Mind* and W. G. Lycan (ed.) *Mind and Cognition*.