

A Process Approach to Identity: Inheritance as the Key to the Transtemporal Knot

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Abstract

Disputations on the transtemporal identity have been a perennial predicament of philosophy. Despite the many array of theories, the persistence of identity through time presents hackneyed and relentless arguments which seeks to suffice our appropriation of identity. Identity is absolute if taken in the strictest sense and in sheer *idem*-identity. But identity, especially of *ipse*-identity, does not just constitute of absolute sameness alone but also of the recognition of self and the inevitable inclusion of temporality. In the gamut of works of Charles Hartshorne held in scrutiny, process philosophy has offered a neoclassical paradigm in approaching this interminable transtemporal knot of identity, i.e., a *partial (personal) identity* through the novel injunction of the concept of inheritance. This study aims to present a tenable option for identity that serves as a plausible alternative to the problem of persistence through temporal passage and of continuity of character without resorting to “substance-like” metaphysics (Aristotelian) and absolute connectedness or absolute discreteness.

Keywords: Transtemporal Identity; Process Philosophy; Identity; Inheritance

1. Introduction

“There is one reality, at least, which we all seize from within, by intuition and not by simple analysis. It is our own personality in its flowing through time - our self which endures” (Bergson, 1912, 9).

Identity is one of the most interminable sources of philosophical perplexity and dispute. The term identity is frequently interchangeably employed to address individuality, or even personhood (with regard to rational/human entities). To identify what is the *same* from what is *different* is to pronounce identity. For the word identity came from the Latin word *idem* which means “sameness”. To say that things are identical is to say that they are the same. “Identity” and “sameness” mean the same; their meanings are identical. In logic, the law of identity states that an object is the same as itself: $A = A[1]$. Therefore, it is, apparently, a simple self-evident truth. But Paul Ricouer in

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his book *Oneself as Another*[2], he discriminates another etymological derivative of the term “identity” with the Latin word *ipse*, understood as “self”. The pronouncement of identity then, is the assertion of the recognition of ‘oneself’. The equivocality of the term ‘identity’, *idem* as sameness and *ipse* as self, leads us to take both understanding as modalities in the treatment of identity. Identity as sameness supports the logical context of comparison whether numerical or qualitative; while identity as selfhood contributes to the peculiarity of its being delineating its identity as opposed to *others*.

In the introduction of the book edited by *Raymond Martin* and *John Barresi*, and as evident in the trend on the issue of personal identity, the pronouncement of identity is what matters in survival [3]. So, *what does it mean for the individual personal identity to persist?* This has been a hackneyed dispute of a many metaphysicians and schools of thought that have argued the persistence of entities and change, namely, the endurantists, perdurantists, worm theorists, stage-theorists, b-theorists, four-dimensionalists, and exdurantists [4]. There also exists a variety of approaches to account the identity through time, e.g., psychological (such as memory criterion), somatic and anticriterialism [5]. Hartshorne’s personal identity will help untie the perplexing transtemporal identity knot. Albeit, this is not an attempt to render a general resolution to the bewildering disagreements and defenses of every theory of time and identity, the author will try to expose and juxtapose, succinctly, only the dominant trends in relation to the existent stand of Hartshorne’s personal identity, i.e., endurance and perdurance theories [6].

2. Persistence: Endurantism, Perdurantism, or Partial Identity?

What, then, does it mean for the entity to persist? It was David Lewis who initially discriminates the theories:

Let us say that something persists if, somehow or other, it exists at various times; this is the neutral word. Something perdures if it persists by having different temporal parts, or stages, at different times, though no part of it is wholly present at more than one time; whereas it endures if it persists by being wholly present at more than one time [7].

Endurantism believe persisting entities are three-dimensional, wholly present at each time at which they exist, and lacking temporal parts. In this theory, the person is wholly present at each moment of time. They believe ordinary objects do not have temporal parts. Objects endure in the context that they are wholly present at every time at which they exist. The entity instantiate itself at different times but holds the same entire reality each time. Just as one’s body has parts, as time moves a long, then, as a whole person move along with all his/her body parts. One moment you are standing in a corner and then the next moment you’ve moved away from the corner. Still the person holds the entirety of his body.

Perdurance, on the other hand, hold that persisting objects are four-dimensional, spread out in time, and composed of temporal parts. An object is a spatially extended three-dimensional thing that also extends across the fourth dimension of time. This four-dimensional object is made up of three-dimensional time-slices. These are spatially extended things that exist only at individual points in time. An object is made up of a series of causally related time-slices. All time-slices are identical to themselves. And the whole aggregate of time-slices, namely the four-dimensional object, is also numerically identical with itself. But the individual time-slices can have qualities that differ from each other [8]. It may correspond to the way a play is extended in time: Act II is not present when Act I is. But the entirety of acts extended through time corresponds to the whole play. Partition is a common construct that is usually employed in space. An entity is usually thought to be made up of spatial parts. But perdurantists think of entities as made up of, not just spatial parts but temporal parts that perdure. An entity is usually thought to be made up of spatial parts. But perdurantists think of entities as made up of, not just spatial parts but temporal parts that perdure [7].

Allegedly, an object which either endures or perdures can be said to persist. But the confounding part is the justification of temporal passage or ‘becoming’ whether an endurant or perdurant perspective. Identity over time is a controversial notion, because time involves change. Notice that the endurance theory adheres to a sort of “substance” metaphysics as its locus of persistence that is wholly present in every time-slice. It maintains a visage of Aristotle’s “accidental properties” to account the temporal passage. The change that is incurred by the entity through time is superficial or a change in the external properties. However, it has been evident to us that there exists a change which is also essential to the entirety of the object, i.e, a change in internal properties. This conceptuality, hence, has been rendered problematic by the foregoing. Aside from the fact that this kind of persistence exemplifies numerical identity which is symmetrical, corollary to this is the unaccountability of temporary intrinsic [7]. While

the way of describing the position of the perdurance theory, then, is to say that it denies the existence of a distinct ontological category of persisting things, i.e., substances. Although, perdurance assents to the recognition of temporal parts as its justification of temporary intrinsics, the summation of these parts or stages appertains to the entity itself. Following the inference of perdurance, the entirety of stages or moments of a person's life sums up the identity of the person, hence, to isolate a time-slice is to capture a temporal part, that is, no more than a mere part. Each time-slice is a segment and not the absolute self. Albeit, perdurance argues that the episodic experience is no less an experience of self, still, it lacks the conscious self-unifying consciousness.

Personal (partial) identity, on the other hand and as a synthetic resolution to the endurantists and perdurantists' sides, proposes a new paradigm without compromising the concepts of temporary intrinsic, change, self-unifying element and persistence. What is called for is an identity that accedes to the inevitableness of temporal accumulation and at the same time not at the expense of persistence of a unifying continuity of character. Hence, partial identity qualifies under these criterions. For personal (partial) identity is the persistence of certain defining characteristics in a very complex reality which constantly changes [6]. Personal identity is literally partial identity and therefore partial non-identity, the non-identity referring to the changes incurred through temporal passage while the asymmetrical cumulative prehension of the previous linear order or society grants its genetic identity. Holding partial identity also resolves the temporary intrinsics' problem, for the fulcrum of the problem lies on treating an object with a persisting entity. For the presupposition and bias is that the 'enduring substance' can never sustain change in its intrinsic property and at the same time maintaining its identity through time. This is the product of the perception of the absoluteness of identity, and a univocity of the term identity. Identity is not sheer sameness of entity through time. The uniqueness of the unity of character through time prehended by a single individual or entity pronounces this kind of identity.

3. *Inheritance* and Defense of Event Pluralism

The startling feature of Hartshorne's process philosophy is its conception of individual personal identity which abandons entirely the "substance" metaphysics of the self as held by Plato, Augustine, Kant and other classical Western metaphysicians. In the most *concrete* terms, according to Hartshorne, there is no permanently or continuously enduring self-identical soul that persists unchanged from conception to death and perhaps beyond [9]. Hartshorne does not say that personal identity through change is unreal or illusory, but he does assert that it is an *abstraction* and not a concrete entity. Absolute identity then is impossible, while partial identity is the only tenable option of individual identity. For personal identity, each new experience, if added to the old self, would make that self a new totality that is different from the previous self by virtue of the newly added experience. In partial identity, I am partly identical to myself in virtue of the prehended past, but at the same time, I am partly non-identical to myself due to the novel incurred reality. The synthesis of the old self and that of the novel self constitute partial identity. Therefore, each moment of experience of the *idem*-identity (self) must make it a slightly different and novel self. The new self of each moment partly includes the old experiences through memory, provided it is clearly understood that the old self is contained within the new experiences and not the converse [10].

Hartshorne contextualizes 'inherit' as the causal inclusion and/or assimilation of the past in to the present. It is the recognition of how the present experient occasion prehends the past. He indicates that we take human experiences causally to 'inherit' directly from some bodily processes, and these to inherit directly from our experiences, inheriting in each case implying temporal 'following', rather than sheer 'accompanying'. Thus the general principle of causality is all we need. And since individual genetic identity is explicable as a distinctive special case of the way in which concrete actualities are caused by, follow, and include others, sharing abstract factors in common, the concept of 'substance' is shown to be no absolute addition. Causality, substance, memory, perception, temporal succession, modality, are all but modulations of one principle of creative synthetic experiencing, feeding entirely upon its own prior products [11]. At a given moment, each individual is almost entirely a product, not simply a producer. The route of *Inheritance* garners what is given from its own previous actuality (inherence) and the inclusion of the *feeling* of others to the nascent self (insistence), and these synthesis successively occur moment by moment, ever increasing accumulation of the inherited whole, of which each moment generates an entirely new individual more than its mere aggregation. Inheritance must not be construed as an 'uninterrupted' link from the past to the present but a recognition of the prehended series to the new self which no other individual possesses. It is given that what persists from the past into the present is the past itself [11]. Inheritance is the process of causality of the past. It is the integration of inherence and insistence of the past actualities to provide a continuous framework of

inheritance. Inheritance must not be construed as prehension for it refers to their persistence in the present. Prehension involves that recognition of the act of inheritance. The principle of inheritance validates an ongoing society in every individual identity. That without which, the event-sequence or experient occasions do not just fall isolated, remote from, and devoid of any personal series. Inheritance is akin to a conceptual line that links the common ancestry of one's personal society or linear series. This ongoing society is the property of the individual alone, for which this individual holds an exclusive route of inheritance that no other entity possesses.

Adhering to the reasoning of individual identity as a sequence of actualities, there emerges an ethical challenge, i.e., responsibility is lost. It follows that there is no-sense of keeping a promise if it was made by another actuality. Or even paying of debts by the current actuality owed by a previous one. Again, Hartshorne's refutation to this argument is that they both represent the same ongoing society. Each of the successive selves of an individual represents himself/herself as such a society [11]. Each such self-identity (*ipseity*) inherits from its predecessors (previous actualities) and that includes purposes, and the more it can accept and execute these purposes, the richer and more harmonious will be its own content. The route of inheritance is the one responsible for this causal order and at the same instance generates a certain substantiality of process. Becoming is continuous in a creative synthetic fashion.

4. Conclusion

Identity, then, is the repository of all that has been inherited; and becoming is not a special mode of reality, rather it is its overall character. Each act of prehension is a creative synthesis of all actualities available to the individual which also attest to the cumulative process of inheritance – the route of inheritance garners what is given from its own previous actuality (inherence) and the inclusion of the *feeling* of others to the nascent self (insistence), and these synthesis successively occur moment by moment, ever increasing accumulation of the inherited whole, of which each moment generates an entirely new individual more than its mere aggregation. Inheritance must not be construed as an 'uninterrupted' link from the past to the present but a recognition of the prehended series to the new self which no other individual possesses. Hartshorne's inheritance is a form of 'unbroken continuance'; although it must be emphasized that what is being referred to is not an absolute continuity or strict intrinsic connectedness of series, as well as its contrary, absolute discreteness. Hence, identity becomes not an absolute predication akin to substance, but an integrated process. This unity of process institutes the unity of self. That every acclamation of the self is the affirmation of identity through this special strand of stream of experiences, not as an instantaneous concrete reality but of the entire process itself. The many becomes one and are increased by one. This becoming itself gives way to its (partial) identity.

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