

Béatrice Longuenesse. Abstract for “Kant on Persons.”

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In the Third Paralogism of Pure Reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant criticizes what he takes to be a sophistical argument rationalist metaphysicians are guilty of. According to that argument, being conscious of one’s own identity at different times merely as a thinking being, capable of thinking ‘I think,’ is a sufficient condition for being a person. I argue that in the course of his refutation of the rationalist derivation of the concept of person, Kant offers resources for developing a notion of person as an embodied entity endowed with unity of apperception and with the capacity for moral accountability. This is not, however the notion of person Kant himself defends. Rather, his conclusion is that his criticism notwithstanding, the rationalist notion of a person as a thinking being immediately conscious of her own identity at different times can be preserved, albeit on behalf of the practical rather than the theoretical use of reason. I offer an analysis of this surprising about-face on Kant’s part, connecting it to Kant’s own pre-critical attempt to derive a notion of person from the mere analysis of our use of ‘I’ in ‘I think’ and ‘I do.’ I compare my interpretation of Kant’s argument and Kant’s concept of person to Strawson’s, and argue that the notion of a person as an embodied entity for which I claim to find resources in Kant’s refutation of the rationalist paralogism is richer than Strawson’s. For the notion I derive from Kant’s refutation is not only that of an entity endowed with material and psychological properties (Strawson’s notion of person), but also that of an entity having unity of apperception and the capacity for second order assessment of the motivations of her actions. This puts Kant’s concept of a person closer to Harry Frankfurt’s than to Strawson’s, albeit differing from Frankfurt’s in offering a criterion for the second order assessment of one’s actions: the categorical imperative of morality. In closing, I suggest that Freud’s structural account of the mind offers resources for a developmental account of the naturalized notion of person I derive from Kant’s refutation of the rationalist notion. This will be the topic of the next lecture.