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Michael Quante, *Person*

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Michael Quante's book *Person* offers a systematic and argumentative assessment of the question what a person is and accounts for the multiple aspects that play a role in our everyday understanding of the term. Quante is skeptical about the possibility of constructing a purely psychological account of the person and proposes to base the diachronic unity conditions of persons on the human organism. At the same time he acknowledges that psychological considerations, including the notion of a person's personality, are important for practical purposes.

The book sensibly distinguishes three basic questions. First, it asks which properties and capacities persons have to display in order to count as persons. Second, it asks under which conditions a being at one point in time is identical to a being at another point in time. Third, it investigates the normative or evaluative sense of the concept.

The discussion of the first question occupies one of the ten chapters. In this chapter, Quante advocates the existence of necessary and sufficient conditions of personhood. By listing necessary conditions for personhood such as rationality and being a subject of propositional attitudes, and sufficient conditions like communicative abilities and self-consciousness, Quante aligns himself with Daniel Dennett and Carole Rovane. Due to the broader scope of the book and the nature of his own argument, this chapter does not set out to present detailed arguments for why the particular conditions have to be seen as necessary rather than sufficient or vice versa. Quante asks readers who are curious about such justifications to turn elsewhere.

Chapters three through seven discuss the question under which conditions a person at one point in time is identical to a person at another point in time. While chapter three is dedicated to the historical proposal by John Locke, chapters four and five give the reasons why Quante remains skeptical about the possibility of constructing a purely psychological account of the diachronic existence of persons. First, he dismisses distinctly first-personal persistence conditions on the basis of self-ascriptions such as remembering one's past or anticipating one's future. The central problem he sees is that there are gaps in a person's diachronic self-ascriptions. He argues that these gaps cannot be closed without introducing

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elements that are not accessibly from a first-personal perspective—elements that require the introduction of an observer perspective.

Next, he discusses psychological accounts that incorporate such an observer perspective. These accounts insist there can be psychological continuity that extends beyond a person's limited actual recollections or anticipations. However, Quante believes such continuity theories cannot be saved from circularity charges, unless an additional physical persistence condition is added. Likewise, in the face of the well-known thought experiments of body swaps and persons dividing like amoebas, Quante remains skeptical whether mental episodes can really be individuated at all without referring to something physical. Moreover, he argues that complex psychological theories that include objective and potentially physical elements will always be vulnerable to hypothetical thought experiments in which the various components of the account come apart.

Having set up his skeptical position about psychological approaches, Quante moves on to explicate how the persistence of the human organism can serve the purpose of providing the needed diachronic unity conditions that he thinks a purely psychological approach cannot provide. His view about the relation between the human organism and the person consists in the thesis that human animals are persons during those parts of their existence during which they satisfy the conditions of personhood outlined in the earlier chapter about necessary and sufficient conditions of personhood.

In a further chapter Quante discusses the influential account by Derek Parfit and considerations by his commentators. The discussion of Parfit focuses on those aspects that are of relevance to Quante's own approach. The arguments in this section may come across as dense in some parts and are not designed to introduce unfamiliar readers to the entire range of Parfit's considerations or the way in which his view changed over time.

In the remaining chapters Quante discusses the evaluative notion of personality. He insist that the use of the term identity for issues of personality development does not provide diachronic persistence conditions in the ontological sense either, even though it is relevant to various practical considerations such as personal autonomy. In a final chapter, Quante elaborates on some of the ways in which persistence and personality considerations are intertwined, and inspects the impact of his account on the possibility of life after death.

Quante's book offers a broad and critical overview of our everyday concept of the person. One of his central proposals is certainly to seek persistence conditions in the human organism rather than in a purely psychological approach. However, as Quante himself acknowledges, the book does not explicitly defend the organism view. This means critics could insist that this view suffers from similar disadvantages as the psychological approach, which would leave Quante with an entirely skeptical view. One may also want to ask why he proposes the human organism as the remedy for the alleged shortcomings of the psychological approach, rather than merely a physical continuity requirement of the brain or the cerebrum. While Quante could have been more explicit about this point, the reader may guess that the intended advantage and in fact the virtue of his solution consist in answering two problems in one swoop: providing persistence conditions for human persons while clarifying the relationship between persons and human organisms at the same time.