

WIU CENTENNIAL HONORS COLLEGE
Thomas E. Helm Undergraduate Research Day 2022

Abstract

Podium

Major Physics

Faculty Mentor: Gordon Pettit

Persistence of a Person Throughout Changes in Time

Alaric Evans

For my presentation, I will be discussing how a person persists through changes over time. The question in particular I will discuss is "How is it that a 21-year-old graduate student learning astrophysics is the same person as someone who was an infant who was learning to walk?" I will present two possible answers to this question. One is the physicalist approach endorsed by Sidney Shoemaker, which establishes that there are only physical components to the self, and that the self persists through changes by means of continuity of body and memory. The other answer is the dualist approach, which establishes that there is at least one component to a person that is non-physical that may not change. I will argue that the dualist approach is more complete, provided that it also establishes a physical continuity of self alongside the nonphysical components. While the physicalist approach does have an effective answer for persistence over time, it fails when the possibility of duplication of selves is considered. Dualism does not seem to fail in this regard, and is metaphysically consistent with our own experiences, common ideas about the self, and, to an extent, science. While it has epistemological problems, I would argue that it is a more complete metaphysical theory, and thus more defensible than physicalism.