

Personal Identity

Questions to Ponder

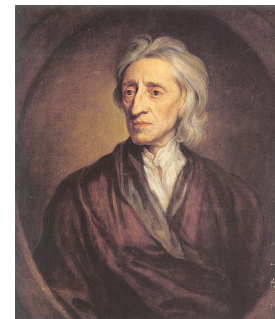
- 1. Who are you?
 - What makes you who you are?
 - What properties or attributes are distinctly you, and no one else?
 - Can you lose whatever property makes you you?
 - How many of you are there sitting in your chair?

Questions to Ponder

- 2. Do you persist through time?
 - Imagine yourself in high school. Now, imagine yourself 20 years from now looking at your picture in your high school yearbook.
 - What makes you think you are the same person now as then?
 - What thing(s) determine that you are that person in the yearbook and not some other person?
 - How can you be sure that you even existed back in high school?
 - Can you, based on your answers above, survive biological death?

Locke

Personal Identity



Distinction

- Numerical vs. Qualitative Identity
 - Numerical identity: what is required for some past, present or future entity to be you
 - Why is there only one you instead of several (past you, present you, and future you)?
 - Qualitative identity: two things are qualitatively identical when they have all the same properties
 - The desks in this room are qualitatively identical
 - Are the desks in this room numerically identical?
- No person remains qualitatively identical over time, although they do remain numerically identical

Persistence Through Time

- The attempt to explain what makes you the same person through time concerns numerical identity
 - What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for you to remain the same thing through time?
 - Are you the same person now as when you were a fetus?
 - Will you be the same person in some future vegetative state as you are now?
- What makes you the person you are now?

Locke's Psychological Answer to the Persistence Question

- Locke distinguishes between the "man" and the "person"
 - "Man" is the human animal and is understood as the biological body
 - "Person" is the thinking being that reasons, reflects, and ponders about identity through time
- What is it about being a person that allows for persistence through time?
 - Consciousness -- consciousness is essential to thinking

Consciousness/Memory Constitute Personal Identity

- "For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e., the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done."

Consciousness/Memory Constitute Personal Identity

- Why does Locke think the college-you is the same as the high-school-you?
 - The college-you is the same as the high-school-you if and only if the college-you is conscious of the high-school-you
 - If the college-you remembers the high-school-you's experiences, then the college-you and the high-school-you are the same person (sufficient condition), and
 - If the college-you and the high-school-you are the same person, then the college-you remembers the high-school-you's experiences (necessary condition)

We Aren't Always Conscious

- Locke immediately considers the obvious criticism: We are not always conscious.
 - If remembering and being conscious of my experiences is what makes me the same person over time, then what happens when I fall asleep, thinking about something else, and even forget things? Am I the same person?
- What matters is that (i) the consciousness is the same consciousness and (ii) one can remember one's past experiences with the same consciousness with which the experience originally happened
 - "For it being the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself, personal identity depends on that only...For as far any intelligent being *can* repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness if had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present action; so far it is the same personal self."

Same Self, Different Body

- Locke argues that the conscious self stays the same even though the body changes
 - Remove a limb or two and the conscious self stays the same
 - Get a new body and the conscious self stays the same
 - Implant into a cobbler the consciousness of a prince and the cobbler's body is the same person as the prince
 - The new princely cobbler is now responsible for the prince's actions

Same Self, Different Soul

- Locke argues that the conscious self stays the same even though the soul changes
 - Locke thinks the conscious self resides in an immaterial substance or soul, but that the same person is not identical with the soul
 - "For as to this point of being the same self, it matters not whether this present self be made up of the same or other substances—I being as much concerned, and as justly accountable for any action that was done a thousand years since, appropriated to me now by this self-consciousness, as I am for what I did the last moment...."

Initial Problems?

- Does one lose personhood...
 - when one falls asleep?
 - if one is particularly forgetful?
 - if one blacks out?
 - when one has Alzheimer's?
 - if one falls into a vegetative state?
- Is this a threat to Locke's account of personal identity?
 - Yes: the appeal to conscious memory entails that having no conscious memory of oneself at a particular times entails that one is not a person

Reid

Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity



Strange Consequences

- Reid argues that Locke's account leads to strange consequences
- Are these consequences just too strange to hold?

Multiple Selves

- Suppose you could take that part of your brain which houses your consciousness and plant it into another, like the cobbler and prince
 - Now, suppose you could implant your conscious memory in two or twenty different people
 - Now, there are two or twenty "you's", two or twenty beings who are the same person
- Then, suppose some of the new "you's" start to lose their memories of past actions
 - Now, what was taken as the same person is many different people since there is no memory of the past actions
 - And, won't there be lots of new persons after a each entity starts collecting it's own experiences and memories?

Lack of Transitivity of Conscious Memory

- Suppose that you as college graduate received an Outstanding Student award when you were in elementary school and you later earned a PhD
 - Suppose that when you got your bachelor's degree you remembered receiving the Outstanding Student award
 - And, suppose that when you received your doctoral degree you remember receiving your bachelor's degree but have lost all memory of your elementary school award

Lack of Transitivity of Conscious Memory, II

- According to Locke's memory criteria for personal identity
 - The person who received the bachelor's degree is the same person who received the elementary school award
 - And the person who received a doctoral degree is the same person who received a bachelor's degree
 - So, one should conclude that the person who received the doctorate is the same person who received the Outstanding Student award
 - But, the conscious memory of the person who received the doctorate does not "reach so far back as" the elementary school award
 - Therefore, the doctor is and is not the same person who received an Outstanding Student award

Reid Clarifies Locke

- Reid correctly clarifies Locke's position: personal identity through time is based on memory of one's experiences--conscious awareness is a different faculty than memory
- What makes the person in the first place?
 - If memory makes the person, then how can it be that one is ever a person at the moment one has a conscious experience? How does memory create persons?
 - Consciousness and memory are evidence for one being a person. Why think that the evidence is what makes a person?
 - If one is a person prior to the memory, then why is memory essential to personal identity through time?

Reid's Stolen Horse

- Suppose someone found your lost horse and you claim it is your property because it looks the same as your horse
 - "But would it not be ridiculous from this to infer that the identity of a horse consists in similitude only?"
- Likewise, Reid thinks that personal identity that consists only in a person having the same memories of experiences which one performed at some earlier time is not enough to constitute personal identity
 - What more is needed?

Causal Dependence (not Reid's suggestion)

- Shoemaker argues that what is needed for personal identity through time is psychological continuity
 - One is the same person today as yesterday because the person today has today's psychological states in large part because of the psychological states that person had yesterday
 - Today's psychological states are causally dependent on yesterday's psychological states
 - If one's current psychological states are causally continuous with one's previous states, then one is the same person through time