

Reid

Of Identity



The Simple View

- In answering the question, What is essential to one's persistence through time?, Reid says there are no necessary and sufficient constitutive conditions for persisting through time
- The self is simple, irreducible, and intuitively known

Intuitive Conviction of the Self

- “The conviction which every man has of his identity, as far back as his memory reaches, needs no aid of philosophy to strengthen it....”
- The conviction of the identity of one's self is
 - necessary for thought and reason
 - essential to memories of our past experiences
 - assumed by the claim “I exist”

Identity Relation

- Identity is a relation
 - Between a thing that exists at one time and a thing that exists at another time
 - Are these two things the same?
 - Everyone understands the question because the concept of numerical identity is something that each person intuitively understands

Defining Identity

- Reid states he cannot define personal identity because it is too simple a notion; It just is (period).
- Identity entails continued, uninterrupted existence and cannot be applied to or made up of pleasures/pains, thoughts, or any operations of the mind since these are all successive in nature
- Persons cannot be broken into parts.
 - It is absurd to imagine that a severed leg has rights to one's property or to participate with the person once removed
 - Persons are indivisible, unified beings

What is This Self?

- “Whatever this self may be...I am not thought, I am not action, I am not feeling; I am something that thinks, and acts, and suffers....but that *self*, or *I*, to which they belong, is permanent, and has the same relation to all the succeeding thoughts, actions, and feelings which I call mine.”
 - The self admits of no explanation.
 - In answer to an earlier question, Does everything have an explanation?, Reid would answer that the self does not have an explanation over and above it being what it is.
 - If there is no explanation, then why think that the self is as Reid says?

What Evidence Is There for the Self?

- Why think this self exists if it has no explanation?
- Because we have evidence in memory
 - We have memories of past experiences and these memories are our memories, they did not happen to anyone else
 - Having memories of past experiences entails that the present self existed in the past
 - “If it was done by me, I must have existed at that time, and continued to exist from that time to the present....”

Memory as Evidence and Not Constitutive of Self

- In direct opposition to Locke, Reid argues that conscious memory does not constitute one's personhood
 - Constitutive definition: a definition that attempts to provide the essential elements of the thing being defined
 - My conscious memory of having performed an action does not make me a person that acted any more than my believing that the world was created actually made it to be created
- Rather, memory is evidence that there is a person

Nature of Self Memory

- The evidence one has of one's self is "irresistible evidence of my being the identical person that did such a thing"
- However, the evidence of other minds and objects is based on similarity
 - The reason we think an object or person we now perceive is the same person we've observed in the past is because that object or person is similar to what we've observed in the past
 - One identifies the horse as hers because it resembles the horse that was stolen
 - Evidence grounded in similarity admits of mistakes
 - Evidence grounded in memory of the self is undoubtedly certain

Questions

- Is it true that the self is indivisible? What about multiple personalities?
- What about people who have uncontrollable limb movements and report that there is another person in charge of their limb's actions?
- Why does memory of self differ from other cognitive abilities? Is a memory about oneself certain or can one be mistaken?
- Is Reid's claim that the self is simple and irreducible itself a mysterious claim?
 - Has he really told us anything about what this self is or has he just avoided answering the question?