

Locke on Personal Identity

Philosophy 322: Modern Philosophy
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I IDENTITY

1. Identity vs. similarity

2. Two assumptions about identity

(a) EQUIVALENCE. “=” denotes an equivalence relation; i.e., a relation that is:

i. REFLEXIVE: $\forall x(x = x)$; i.e., everything is identical with itself.

ii. SYMMETRIC: $\forall x\forall y(x = y \rightarrow y = x)$; i.e., if x is identical with y , then y is identical with x .

iii. TRANSITIVE: $\forall x\forall y\forall z((x = y \& y = z) \rightarrow x = z)$; i.e., if x is identical with y , and y is identical with z , then x is identical with z .

(b) LEIBNIZ’S LAW. Where F denotes a genuine property, $(\forall x\forall y)(x = y \rightarrow (Fx \leftrightarrow Fy))$; i.e., if x and y are identical, then x and y have exactly the same genuine properties.

3. Locke’s big idea about identity

(a) Whether $a = b$ depends upon the kind of thing a and b are. (“[It is] one thing to be the same *Substance*, another the same *Man*, and a third the same *Person*” (2.27.7))

(b) What kind of thing something is determines its *identity conditions*. If a and b are things of kind K , then $a = b$ iff they satisfy the identity conditions for things of kind K .

4. A related idea

(a) RELATIVE IDENTITY. Any instance of “=” is actually an instance of “= F ”, which means something like “is the same F as”.

(b) Then there can be cases where $a =_F b$ but $a \neq_G b$; i.e., where a is the same F as b but not the same G as b .

(c) If there are cases like this, then either EQUIVALENCE OF LEIBNIZ’S LAW is false.

(d) Not clear whether Locke believed in RELATIVE IDENTITY.

2 IDENTITY OVER TIME

1. Ancient puzzles about identity over time

(a) Chrysippus’ puzzle

(b) Ship of Theseus puzzle

2. Locke on identity of bodies: “And whilst they exist united together, the Mass, consisting of the same Atoms, must be the same Mass, or the same Body, let the parts be never so differently jumbled: But if one of these Atoms be taken away, or one new one added, it is no longer the same Mass, or the same Body” (2.27.3).
 3. Identity of plants: “That being then one Plant, which has such an Organization of Parts in one coherent Body, partaking of one Common Life, it continues to be the same Plant, in a like continued Organization, conformable to that sort of Plants.” (2.27.4).
 4. Identity of animals: similar to plants: “one continued Body, all whose organized Parts were repaired, increased or diminished, by a constant Addition or Separation of insensible Parts, with one Common Life” (2.27.5)
 5. Locke on identity of “man”: just like any other animals “nothing byt a participation of the same continued Life, by constantly fleeting Particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized Body” (2.27.6).
- 3 LOCKE’S PSYCHOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF PERSONAL IDENTITY
1. A person = “a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places” (2.27.9).
 2. So “For it being the same consciousness that makes a Man be himself to himself, personal Identity depends on that only” (2.27.10): so long as person A at t_2 is conscious of having been person A at t_1 , A at $t_2 = A$ at t_1
 3. Some troubles involving the factivity of memory.
 4. A bit more carefully:

MEMORY CONDITION. If person B at t_2 has first-person memories as of being person A at t_1 , then A at $t_1 = B$ at t_2 .
 5. The prince and the cobbler (2.27.15)
 6. Reward and punishment; drunkenness and amnesia (2.27.22)
 7. Against the “Cartesian” view that personal identity goes with thinking substance (2.27.23-24)
 - (a) Suppose man A and man B switched thinking substances but didn’t switch consciousness. Would we say that A and B were different persons than they were before the switch? No.
 - (b) Suppose man A and man B switched consciousness but didn’t switch thinking substances. Would we say that A and B were different persons than they were before the switch? Yes.
 8. Transitivity problems
 - (a) Reid’s challenge: the case of the Brave Officer
 - (b) A fix to respond to Reid’s challenge
 - i. Let’s say that B at t_2 is *memory-connected* to A at t_1 iff B at t_2 has first-person memories as of being C at some earlier t_n , and C at t_n has memories as of being A at t_1 . Insert more links in the chain if needed.
 - ii. MEMORY CONDITION (REVISED). If B at t_2 is memory-connected to A at t_1 , then A at $t_1 = B$ at t_2 .
 - (c) Fission cases

(d) Two responses to fission cases

- i. FISSION = DEATH. The relevant memory-connections must be sustained *in the normal way*. So the pre-fission person ceases to exist at the moment of fission.
- ii. MULTIPLE PERSONS. Allow that, if fission is in *A*'s future, *A* is not now one person, but multiple persons having identical experiences.