

A vertical grey bar with a halftone pattern is on the left side of the slide. A horizontal blue bar with a halftone pattern crosses it in the middle.

Persistence for persons

Reason, Relativism, and Reality

Spring 2005

"Reductionism"

- Who is identical to whom boils down to prior and independent facts
- Locke was the first to say how this might work: "As far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person."

Locke's theory

- Person A at t_1 = person B at t_2 iff B at t_2 can remember (most? some?) of the experiences A had at t_1 .
- Does this sound OK? Does anything need to be clarified?

Transitivity Objection (Thomas Reid)

General recalls being a dashing young officer.
Officer recalls being flogged as a boy.
General can't recall being flogged as a boy.

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copyright reasons.

Locke must say $G = O$, and $O = B$, but G is not B .
That's impossible! Identity is transitive.

Circularity Objection (Butler, see section 80)

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Is it *real* memory or *seeming* memory? It needs to be real to define identity. But now the theory is circular, because a memory is "real" only if the remembered person = you.

Neo-Lockeans think they can answer Circularity

- Say real memory presupposes identity. It doesn't matter because we can switch to quasi-memory!
- B quasi-remembers having experience e iff
 - (i) B seems to remember having e ;
 - (ii) someone really did have e ; and
 - (iii) the causal connection between (ii) and (i) is the same kind as occurs in genuine memory.
- How does that help?

Neo-Lockeans think they can answer Transitivity

- Allow memory *chains*!
- B at t_2 = A at t_1 iff there are intermediate people A_1, \dots, A_k such that B remembers A_k 's experience and A_k remembers A_{k-1} 's experience and \dots A_1 remembers A's experience
- How does that help?

Neo-Lockeans also add new kinds of psychological glue

- B is *psychologically connected* with A iff B quasi-remembers A's experiences and/or B quasi-fulfills A's quasi-intentions, and/or B quasi-regrets A's mistakes, and/or ...
- B is *psychologically continuous* with A iff they are linked by overlapping chains of psychological connectedness

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Neo-Lockean criterion of personal identity (1st stab)

- Later person B = earlier person A iff B is *psychologically continuous* with A
- This seems to solve Transitivity and Circularity
- Can you think of new problems? What would Parfit say about amnesia?

Next time

- What if A is continuous with *two* later people?!?

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- Read Parfit, ch. 11, "How We Are Not What We Believe"