

## Personal Identity, Part IA: *Metaphysics*.

Lecture II, *Psychological Approaches: Memory, Basic Problems, Continuity*, 12th October  
Christopher J. Masterman (cm789@cam.ac.uk)

Psychological views answer the reidentification question by outlining some psychological conditions which must hold for the continued existence of a person. These views are typically motivated with cases like:

**Brain Transplant:** Suppose that full brain transplants become medically possible and Alice's brain is removed and placed into a new body. Alice's memories and personality are preserved in the procedure.

\* It seems right to say that Alice survives, though she now 'inhabits' a new body.

Variations on this kind of case: Locke's Prince/Cobbler, Teletransporter cases. Each of these cases strongly suggest that physical factors are dispensable, and psychological ones are not so dispensable.

### 1. *The Memory Criterion.*

1.1. An influential psychological account is Locke's. For Locke, a person is

... a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places... (Locke, 1689: II, xxvii, §9)

For Locke, then, personal identity alone consists in *consciousness*, or memory:

... 'tis that [consciousness], that 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*...' (Locke, 1689: II, xxvii, §9)

1.2. To make this more precise, we first distinguish *factual* and *experiential* memory. For example, I have a factual memory of when my birthday is, but I have the experiential memory of my birthday last year.

**Simple Memory Criterion (SMC):** Person *A* at  $t_1$  is identical to person *B* at  $t_2$  if and only if *B* remembers an experience had by *A*. (Kind, 2015: §2.1)

For example, Person *A* = me (now) and Person *B* = me (a year ago). By (SMC), it follows that  $A = B$  because I remember experiencing my birthday last year. Since I do not have memories of Gore Vidal's birthday in 1962, or indeed any of Gore Vidal's experiential memories, by (SMC), it follows that  $A \neq$  Gore Vidal.

1.3. Locke is critical of views which take personal identity to consist in the continued existence of some special kind of entity like a soul or a Cartesian Ego. Consider the following kind of case.

**Elvis's Soul:** Suppose immortal souls exist. Further suppose that you happen to have the immortal soul of Elvis Presley. Despite this, you have no experiential memories of doing any of the things Elvis did.

Locke (rightly) thinks that having someone else's soul in this way is not enough for you to be identical to them. Rather, one must have experiential memory of being them. Locke's example involves Nestor and Thersites in (Locke, 1689: II, xxvii, §14), but the example involving Elvis works just as well.

## 2. Problems: Transitivity and Circularity

2.1. There are two influential criticisms of (SMC). The first concerns the transitivity of identity.

**Transitivity of Identity (ToI):** Generally, if  $a = b$  and  $b = c$ , then  $a = c$ .

The problem is that the simple memory criterion seems to entail a violation of (ToI) since the relation of  $x$  remembers an experience had by  $y$  is not transitive. Given the simple memory criterion, nor is identity! The earliest statement of this problem is found in (Reid, 1785).

The solution: formulate the Memory Criterion in terms of the *continuity* of memory or what is known as the transitive closure of  $x$  remembers an experience had by  $y$ . There's continuity of memory between  $A$  and  $Z$  if there are some people, e.g.,  $B$ ,  $C$ , and  $D$  such that  $A$  remembers an experience had by  $B$ ,  $B$  remembers an experience had by  $C$ , and  $C$  remembers an experience had by  $Z$ .

**Memory Criterion\*:** A person  $A$  at  $t_1$  is identical to person  $B$  at  $t_2$  if and only if there is a continuity of experiential memory from  $A$  to  $B$ .

2.2. The second problem concerns the circularity of memory criteria. The right notion of memory—experiential memory—seems to presuppose personal identity. This is raised in (Butler, 1736).

There are a couple of well discussed solutions to this problem. One might appeal to *causal constraints* so that  $A$ 's memory of some event is appropriately causally related to that event, see (Kind, 2015). More commonly, there is an appeal to so-called Quasi-Memory, rather than the problematic ordinary notion:

**Quasi Memory**  $A$  has a quasi-memory of some event  $E$  if (i)  $A$  seems to remember having experience  $E$ ; (ii) someone did have this experience; and (iii)  $A$ 's apparent memory is appropriately causally dependent on that past experience.

## 3. Psychology Beyond Mere Memory.

3.1. The Memory Criterion was a good start, but the consensus now is that a broader range of psychological phenomena can, and should, be appealed to. We appeal more broadly to the continuity of *overall psychology*.

**Psychological Criterion:** A person  $A$  at  $t_1$  is identical to person  $B$  at  $t_2$  if and only if there is a continuity of psychology between  $A$  and  $B$ .

This broader notion of psychological continuity will involve a continuity in beliefs, intentions, desires, etc., and not just involve the continuity of memory. Crucially, only continuity is required and sufficient.

3.2 The Psychological Criterion is formulated with psychological continuity here to avoid the transitivity objection. Of course, the circularity objection still applies, since continuity of psychology at least in part involves memory, as well as other first-personal psychological states. Therefore we must also define psychological continuity using Quasi-Memory and Quasi-Mental-States where appropriate.

## References

- Butler, Joseph (1736). *The Analogy of Religion*.  
Kind, Amy (2015). *Persons and Personal Identity*. Malden, MA: Polity.  
Locke, John (1689). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.  
Reid, Thomas (1785). *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*.