Early Modern Philosophy
Locke and Berkeley

Lecture 3: Locke on Personal Identity
The plan for today…

1. The logic of identity
2. The Lockeian theory
3. The drunk student objection
4. The brave officer objection
5. The presupposition objection
§1. The logic of identity
X is *qualitatively* identical to Y…

…i.e. X and Y are exactly alike or perfectly *similar*.

X is *numerically* identical to Y…

…i.e. X and Y are just one entity, not two.
Numerical identity is an *equivalence* relation…

…it is reflexive…

…symmetric…

…and transitive.

Numerical identity is also a *function*.
How are numerical identity and qualitative identity related?

Necessarily, if X and Y are numerically identical, they are qualitatively identical.

This is the *Indiscernibility of Identicals*.

Necessarily, if X and Y are qualitatively identical, they are numerically identical…?

This is the *Identity of Indiscernibles*. 
Absolute and relative identity…

Clark Kent and Superman are the same person.

…Clark Kent is a person, and Superman is numerically identical to Clark Kent.

It is impossible that Clark Kent and Superman are the same F, but are not the same G.
Absolute and relative identity…

Clark Kent and Superman are the same person.

…Clark Kent is numerically identical\textsuperscript{PERSON} to Clark Kent.

It is possible that Clark Kent and Superman are the same\textsuperscript{F}, but are not the same\textsuperscript{G}.
‘An Oak, growing from a Plant to a great Tree, and then lopp’d, is still the same Oak, And a Colt grown up to a Horse, sometimes fat, sometimes lean, is all the while the same Horse… though, in both these Cases, there may be a manifest change of the parts. So that truly they are not either of them the same Masses of Matter, though they be truly one of them the same Oak, and the other the same Horse.’

(2.27.3, N 330)

So X and Y can be the same oak/horse, but not the same mass of matter…?
§2. The Lockeian theory
What makes it the case that…

…the person currently delivering a lecture on Locke…

…and the person who delivered a lecture on Locke (and Berkeley) in Cambridge this time last week…

…and are the same person?
Why does this matter…?

Only if the Clark Kent and Superman are the same person…

…is it fair to praise/blame, reward/punish Clark Kent for the actions of the Superman.

‘…a Forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit; and so belongs only to intelligent Agents capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery.’
(2.27.26, N346)
‘...since consciousness [is] that, 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...

...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 ’tis by the same *self* with this present one that now reflects on it, that that Action was done.’ (2.27.9, N335)
What makes it the case that X is the same person as Y is the fact that…

…there is an action that Y performed, and that X can remember performing (or vice versa).

‘…let [a man] once find himself conscious of any of the Actions of Nestor, he then finds himself the same person with Nestor.’ (2.27.14, N 340)
How do we actually decide whether or not a given action is one that we performed…?

We see if we can remember performing this action…

We see if our consciousness extends back to this action…

If it does, we conclude that we are the person who performed this action.
Locke rejects the following theories...

Identity of *material substance* constitutes personal identity.

Identity of *immaterial substance* (i.e. soul continuity) constitutes personal identity.

Identity of *man* (i.e. bodily continuity) constitutes personal identity.
‘Could we suppose two distinct incommunicable consciousneses acting the same Body, the one constantly by Day, the other by Night; and, on the other side, the same consciousness, acting by Intervals, two distinct Bodies…

…I ask in the first case, Whether the Day and the Night-man would not be two as distinct Persons as Socrates and Plato; and whether in the second case, there would not be one Person in two distinct Bodies, as much as one Man is the same in two distinct clothings.’ (2.27.23, N 334)
Day-man and Night-man…

P1 If bodily continuity constitutes personal identity, Day-man is the same person as Night-man.

P2 Day-man is not the same person as Night-man.

C Bodily continuity does not constitute personal identity.
The prince and the cobbler…

P1 If bodily continuity constitutes personal identity, the person who wakes up in the prince’s chamber is not the cobbler.

P2 The person who wakes up in the prince’s chamber is the cobbler.

C Bodily continuity does not constitute personal identity.
Am I Socrates...?

P1 If soul continuity constitutes personal identity, I might be Socrates.

P2 It is not the case that I might be Socrates.

C Soul continuity does not constitute personal identity.
§3. The drunk student objection
The drunk student objection

‘But is not a Man Drunk and Sober the same Person, why else is he punish’d for the Fact he commits when Drunk, though he be never afterwards conscious of it?’ (2.27.23, N343)
The drunk student objection

P1  If Locke’s theory is correct, it is unfair to punish the student for streaking through the Court.

P2  It is not unfair to punish the student for streaking through the Court.

C   Locke’s theory is not correct.
The drunk student objection

‘Humane Laws punish [a drunkard] with a Justice suitable to their way of Knowledge: Because in these cases, they cannot distinguish certainly what is real, what counterfeit; and so the ignorance in Drunkenness… is not admitted as a plea…

…but in the great Day, wherein the Secrets of all Hearts shall be laid open, it may be reasonable to think, no one shall be made to answer for what he knows nothing of…’ (2.27.22, N 344)
When choosing a theory of personal identity for use in legal contexts, there may be other relevant considerations apart from truth.

It also matters whether we can be sure that the conditions of personal identity are/aren’t satisfied.

Unlike God, we cannot be sure which actions people can remember performing.

So we need a different theory of personal identity for use in legal contexts.
The drunk student objection

P1  If Locke’s theory is correct, it is unfair\textsuperscript{G} to punish the student for streaking through the Court.

P2  It is not unfair\textsuperscript{H} to punish the student for streaking through the Court.

C   Locke’s theory is not correct.
§4. The brave officer objection
The brave officer objection...
The brave officer objection...

P1 If Locke’s theory is correct, the retired general is the same person as the brave officer.

P2 If Locke’s theory is correct, the brave officer is the same person as the naughty schoolboy.

P3 If Locke’s theory is correct, the retired general is not the same person as the naughty schoolboy.
If X is the same person as Y and Y is the same person as Z, X is the same person as Z.

If Locke’s theory is correct, the retired general is the same person as the naughty schoolboy.

Locke’s theory is not correct.
Response 1…

What makes it the case that the retired general is the same person as the naughty schoolboy…

…is the fact that there is a chain of persons, starting with the retired general and ending with the naughty schoolboy, where the first person can remember doing something that the second person did, and the second person can remember doing something that the third person did, and so on.
Response 2...

When it comes to determining moral responsibility, ‘…personal identity is not what matters…’ (Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p.241)

What makes it the case that the retired general is *morally responsible* for the actions of the brave officer is the fact that the retired general can remember doing something that the brave officer did.
The brave officer objection…

P1 If Locke’s theory is correct, the retired general can be praised for what the brave officer did.

P2 If Locke’s theory is correct, the brave officer can be blamed for what the naughty schoolboy did.

P3 If Locke’s theory is correct, the retired general cannot be blamed for what the naughty schoolboy did.

Is this so implausible?
§5. The presupposition objection
The presupposition objection...

‘...one should really think it self-evident, that consciousness of personal identity cannot constitute personal identity: any more than knowledge, in any other case, can constitute truth, which it presupposes.

(Joseph Butler, *Analogy of Religion*)
The presupposition objection...

What makes it the case that the retired general *is* the same person as the brave officer is the fact that...

...the retired general *knows* that he is the same person as the brave officer.

Part of what makes it the case that the retired general *knows* that he is the same person as the brave officer is the fact that...

...the retired general *is* the same person as the brave officer.
What makes it the case that the retired general *is* the same person as the brave officer is the fact that...

…the retired general *remembers* doing something that the brave officer did.

Part of what makes it the case that the retired general *remembers* doing something that the brave officer did is the fact that...

…the retired general *is* the same person as the brave officer.
The presupposition objection...

Response 1...

Deny that memory presupposes identity...

Response 2...

Introduce quasi-memory (which is like memory, but doesn’t presuppose identity)
Next week…

…Locke on substance and essence