Locke and Berkeley

Lecture 3:
Locke on Personal Identity

§1. The logic of identity

X is qualitatively identical to Y iff X and Y are exactly alike or perfectly similar.

X is numerically identical to Y iff X and Y are just one entity, not two.

Numerical identity is an equivalence relation.

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

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

Absolute and relative identity…

Clark Kent and Superman are the same person iff Clark Kent is a person, and Superman is numerically identical to Clark Kent.

T1 ‘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, N330)

§2. The Lockean 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, are the same person?

Person is…

T2 ‘…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)

T3 ‘…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
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).

T4 ‘...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)

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

T5 ‘Could we suppose two distinct incommunicable consciousnesses 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 344)

*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

T6  ‘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)

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.

T7  ‘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.

§4. 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.
P4  If X is the same person as Y and Y is the same person as Z, X is the same person as Z.
C1  If Locke’s theory is correct, the retired general is the same person as the naughty schoolboy.
C2  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…

Response 2…

When it comes to determining moral responsibility…
T8 ‘…personal identity is not what matters…’ (Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p.241)

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.

§5. The presupposition objection

T9 ‘…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*)

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.

But 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.

Response 1…

Deny that memory presupposes identity…

Response 2…

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

References