

## Handout #3

### Parfit's Reasons and Persons (2nd of 4)

Locke's suggestion

Person A who exists at  $t_1$  = person B who exists at  $t_2$  iff B at  $t_2$  can remember (most/some of) the experiences of A at  $t_1$ .

(Locke: "[A]s far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person").

One of Thomas Reid's objections to Locke. A general who recalls winning a battle with the enemy as an officer. When an officer, he could remember being flogged as a boy; when a general, he can't. So, if we take Locke's suggestion at face value, the general = the officer, the officer = the boy, but the general  $\neq$  the boy! In effect, the objection is that the relation 'x remembers the experiences of y' is not transitive.

Another objection (cf. Parfit's discussion of Bishop Butler, sect. 80; and the Dialogue, pp. 29-30) is this. Suppose I seem to remember being at the beach. What makes it the case that this is a case of genuine memory, rather than just seeming to remember? At least this: that it was me who was at the beach. So cases of genuine (experiential) memory are distinguished from cases of mere apparent memory by appeal to personal identity. Memory presupposes personal identity (says Butler) and cannot be used non-circularly to define it.

Neo-Lockeans like Parfit have responses to these objections.

Circularity: y quasi-remembers doing A iff

- (i) y seems to remember doing A;
- (ii) someone did A;
- (iii) the causal connection between (ii) and (i) is the same kind as that involved in genuine memory.

How does this avoid circularity? (See Parfit sect. 80; Dialogue, pp. 30-1.)

Also: y quasi-executes-the-intention-to-B iff

- (i) y does B;
- (ii) someone intends to B;
- (iii) the causal connection between (ii) and (i) is the same kind as that involved in genuine intentional action.

Transitivity: x is psychologically continuous with y iff x is related to y via overlapping chains of psychological connectedness. x is psychologically connected ["strongly connected" in Parfit] with y iff y quasi-remembers many of x's experiences, and/or y quasi-fulfills many of x's intentions, and/or [insert various other psychological relations, either forward- or backward-looking, as desired]. How does this avoid the transitivity problem?

The psychological (neo-Lockean) criterion of personal identity (first stab)

Person A who exists at  $t_1$  = person B who exists at  $t_2$  iff A at  $t_1$  is psychologically continuous with B at  $t_2$ .

But there is still a problem: what if A at  $t_1$  is psychologically continuous with two people at  $t_2$ ?