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.

Locke must say \( G = O \), and \( O = B \), but \( G \) is not \( B \).
That's impossible! Identity is transitive.
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 \textit{chains}!
- \( B \text{ at } t_2 = A \text{ at } t_1 \) iff there are intermediate people \( A_1, \ldots, A_k \) such that \( B \) remembers \( A_k \)'s experience and \( A_k \) remembers \( A_{k-1} \)'s experience and \ldots \( A_1 \) remember's \( A \)'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.
Neo-Lockean criterion of personal identity (1st stab)

- Later person $B = \text{earlier person } A$ 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"