

The Psychological-Continuity Account of Personal Identity

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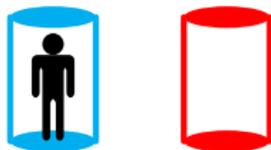
Numerical and Qualitative Identity

A is qualitatively identical to B if and only if *A* and *B* are exactly similar.

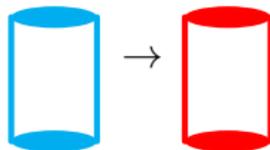
A is numerically identical with B if and only if *A* and *B* is the same thing.

Teletransportation

Scan



Elimination & transmission



Creation



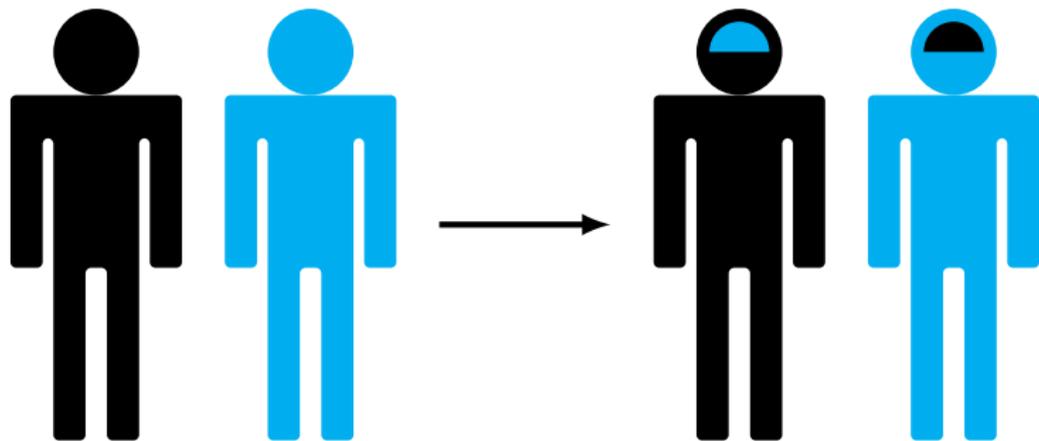
The philosophical discussion of personal identity has focussed on giving necessary and sufficient criteria for numerical identity of persons over time.

A first example:

The Bodily Criterion of Personal Identity

A person P_1 who exists at t_1 is identical to a person P_2 who exists at a later time t_2 if and only if P_1 at t_1 has the same body as P_2 at t_2 .

Brain Transplant



The Traditional Interpretation of Locke

The Memory Criterion of Personal Identity

A person P_1 who exists at t_1 is identical to a person P_2 who exists at a later time t_2 if and only if P_2 at t_2 remembers any of the thoughts or actions of P_1 at t_1 .

(Not what Locke actually meant; see Gustafsson (2010).)

The Circularity Objection

Joseph Butler (1736 / 1975, p. 100):

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

If memory presupposes personal identity, it is circular to analyse personal identity in terms of memory.

Sydney Shoemaker (1970):

You have a *memory* of a past experience if and only if

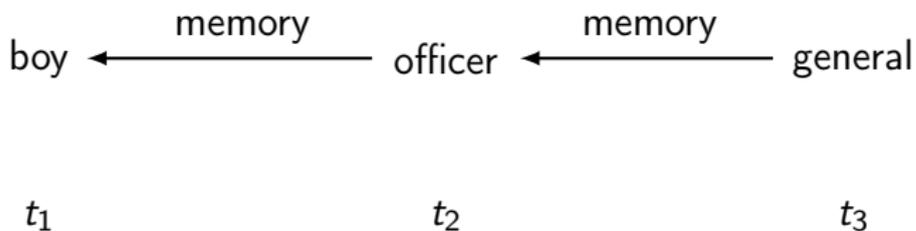
- (1) you seem to remember having an experience,
- (2) someone did have this experience,
- (3) your apparent memory is causally dependent, in the right kind of way, on that past experience, and
- (4) you are identical to the person who had the experience.

You have a *quasi-memory* of a past experience if and only if

- (1) you seem to remember having an experience,
- (2) someone did have this experience, and
- (3) your apparent memory is causally dependent, in the right kind of way, on that past experience.

Thomas Reid (1785 / 2002, Essay III, Chap. VI, p. 276):

The Brave Officer



Psychological connectedness is the holding of particular direct psychological connections.

Strong connectedness is when there is at least as many psychological connections as there hold over every day in the lives of nearly every actual person.

Psychological continuity is the holding of overlapping chains of strong connectedness.

The Psychological-Continuity Criterion of Personal Identity

A person P_1 who exists at t_1 is identical with a person P_2 who exists at t_2 if and only if P_2 is at t_2 psychologically continuous with P_1 at t_1 , this continuity has the right kind of cause, and it has not taken a 'branching' form.

Given different views about what is the right kind of cause we get three versions of the criterion:

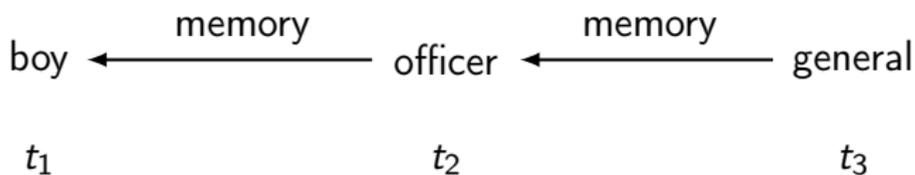
- the Narrow version, where it must be the normal cause,
- the Wide version, where it could be any reliable cause, and
- the Widest version (Parfit's view), where the cause could be any cause.

The direct psychological connections that provides psychological connectedness are, according to Parfit (1984, pp. 205–206), not just experience memories:

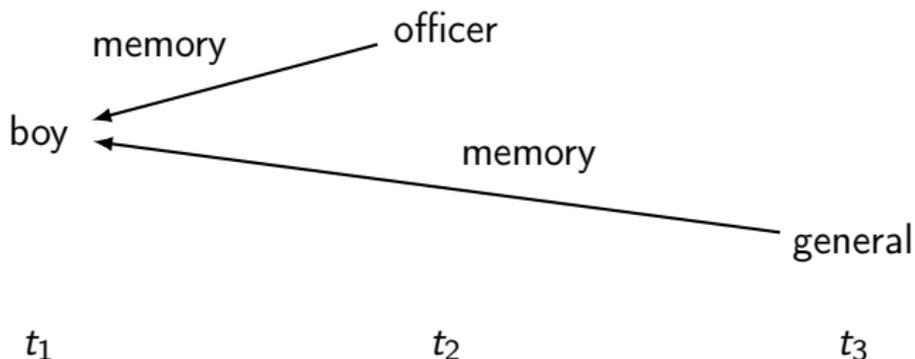
Besides direct memories, there are several other kinds of direct psychological connection. One such connection is that which holds between an intention and the later act in which this intention is carried out. Other such direct connections are those which hold when a belief, or a desire, or any other psychological feature, continues to be had.

People who defend the psychological-continuity criterion of personal identity differ on whether the psychological continuity is required to be temporally ordered.

The Brave Officer



The Senile General



Parfit thinks that we could survive teletransportation.

This might seem highly counter-intuitive.

One might feel that this type of case instead supports a physical criterion.

The Physical Criterion of Personal Identity

P_1 at t_1 is one and the same person as P_2 at some later time t_2 if and only if enough of P_1 's brain continued to exist, and is now P_2 's brain, and this physical continuity has not taken a 'branching' form.

Problem for the Physical Criterion

Derek Parfit (1984, p. 474):

Suppose [...] that I need surgery. All of my brain cells have a defect which, in time, would be fatal. But a surgeon can replace all these cells. He can insert new cells that are exact replicas of the existing cells except that they have no defect. We can distinguish two cases.

In Case One, the surgeon performs a hundred operations. In each of these, he removes a hundredth part of my brain, and inserts a replica of this part.

In Case Two, the surgeon follows a different procedure. He first removes all of the parts of my brain, and then inserts all of their replicas.

Reductionism

The physical and the psychological continuity criteria of personal identity are forms of reductionism.

Parfit (1984, p. 210) defines *reductionism* as the combination of the following claims:

- (1) *that the fact of a person's identity over time just consists in the holding of certain more particular facts,*
and
- (2) *that these facts can be described without either presupposing the identity of this person, or explicitly claiming that the experiences in this person's life are had by this person, or even explicitly claiming that this person exists. These facts can be described in an impersonal way.*

The Psychological Spectrum

The psychological spectrum start with Parfit unaltered, and then as we move through the spectrum his psychology gradually replaced with Napoleonic delusions. And the spectrum ends with a person that has a complete set of Napoleonic delusions, with none of Parfit's memories left.

The Physical Spectrum

The physical spectrum starts with Parfit's body and brain unchanged. As we move through the spectrum more and more of the cells in his body and brain are replaced with duplicates. And in the end all cells in his brain and body have been replaced.

The Combined Spectrum

In this variation both psychology and body is changed. The combined spectrum starts with Parfit and changes gradually until it ends with Greta Garbo.

Three Possible Reactions to These Spectra

- (1) We could hold that in the middle of these spectra its an empty question whether one has survived.
- (2) We could believe that there is a sharp borderline between two cases. If the surgeons replaced only certain cells, the resulting person would be me. If instead they replaced just a few more cells, the resulting person would not be me, but would merely be exactly like me. There must be this sharp borderline somewhere in this range of cases, even though we could never discover where this line is.
- (3) We could believe that, in all of these cases, the resulting person would be me.

Parfit thinks that the first of these reactions is the most plausible and that this supports reductionism.

References

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