

17. Locke 1690, The psychological criterion of personal identity

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The term 'identity' is used in different ways:

- *Self-conception*: "Christianity is a big part of my identity."
- *Qualitative identity*: "These two pencils are identical."
- *Strict identity*: "Clark Kent is Superman—they're the same person."

Strict identity *across time* can get complex:

The Ship of Theseus. At t , Theseus sets sail in his ship—call it Ship A . Over many years he replaces the individual planks of his ship, till eventually (at t^+) the ship he's on is made of entirely different planks. Call this ship B_1 . As he goes, an industrious ship-builder follows along, gathering the discarded planks and assembling them into a ship, which is completed at t^+ . Call this ship B_2 .

Here 'is' = 'is identical to'.
→ This is what we mean by 'identity'.
It's the relation that everything bears to itself and nothing else.

Q: At t^+ , which ship is Theseus's original Ship A ?

- Continuous-changes criterion: Ship X = Ship Y iff Y came from X via a series of small, continuous changes. Therefore $A = B_1$.
- Same-materials criterion: Ship X = Ship Y iff X and Y are made of the same materials. Therefore $A = B_2$.

We want a criterion like this for *persons*: Person X = Person Y iff ...

Person vs. human

'Person' is a *forensic* concept: locus of fitting praise or blame, reward or punishment, etc.

Why care? Suppose you learned that someone in this room would be in tortuous agony tomorrow. The pressing question: "Will it be *me*?"
Likewise: "uploading into the cloud".

'Human' is a *biological* concept. The baby is clearly the same *human* as the 90-year-old woman. Same *person*?

We want to allow that 'person' and 'human' may not be co-extensive.

Some criteria of personal identity:

Soul criterion: Person A at t_1 is person B at t_2 iff A 's soul is B 's soul.

Bodily criterion: Person A at t_1 is person B at t_2 iff A 's body is B 's body.

Psychological criterion: Person A at t_1 is person B at t_2 iff A and B have the right sort of psychological connection.

Would we hold you responsible for his actions?

Locke against the soul criterion: suppose Achilles' soul pellet is in you, but you have no memory of or psychological connection to Achilles.

Would we punish later-Phineas for earlier-Phineas's actions?

Locke against the bodily criterion: Phineas murders Bill. Shortly after a railroad spike shoots through his brain—his body survives, but his memory is erased, his personality changes completely, etc.

Locke defends a *memory-based* version of the psychological criterion: Person A at t_1 is person B at t_2 iff B at t_2 remembers A 's actions and experiences at t_1 .