

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 .

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.

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

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.

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

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 .

Here 'is' = 'is identical to'.

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

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".

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

Would we hold you responsible for his actions?

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