

## Knowledge and Reality B: Lecture One

### 1. 'Is'

The word 'is' in English suffers from *ambiguity*. There (at least!) two ways to use the word 'is', and people often get them confused in philosophical debates. The first 'is' is the 'is' of predication. The second 'is' is the 'is' of identity.

*The 'is' of predication*

We sometimes use 'is' to *predicate* things of objects.

*Example:* The chair is blue; The ball is heavy; That panda is a mammal; The cup of tea is hot.

In each case, we are predicating things of certain objects.

*The 'is' of identity*

'Is' also expresses the relationship of 'numerical identity' (sometimes called *strict* identity). This is when we assert of one object that it is one and the same as some other object.

*Example:* The Prime Minister of Britain is Gordon Brown; Cassius Clay is Mohammed Ali; The Morning Star is the Evening Star; The man standing before you is the same man who gave a lecture to you last week.

### 2. Identity

The first is *qualitative identity*:  $x$  is qualitatively identical to  $y$  when  $x$  and  $y$  have all of their qualities (i.e. their *properties*) in common.

*Example:* The chair over there is identical to the chair over here; This pen is identical to that pen; Joey's Hugsy is identical to the new Hugsy.

The second type of identity is *numerical identity*. We've already seen examples of that above in the 'is' of identity. So qualitative identity is when you have *two* objects that have the same properties. Numerical identity is when you take a thing and then again take a thing and say *that they are one and the same thing*. So there's only *one* thing there.

*You are well acquainted with the difference between the two!* You must *ensure* that you are not confusing the two.

*Example:* Stealing from the sofa shop.

### 3. The Problem of Personal Identity

Under what circumstances do we remain one and the same person? In other words, the demand is to fill out the right hand side of the following:

Person  $x$  (at one time) is the same person as  $y$  (at another time) if and only if ...

### 4. Why Should You Care?

Why is this question interesting? Most people should find it at least somewhat intriguing to begin with. We hold quite dear whether we will be alive tomorrow – whether we will *survive* till tomorrow. So an interest in the conditions under which we will survive is quite natural. Equally, then, it's quite natural to be interested in the question of personal identity. But it becomes a question of great practical interest in certain cases: Were you once a foetus?; Are those suffering from diseases such as Alzheimer's the same person as they were before?; What about people suffering from memory loss?

### 5. The Memory Criterion

Locke argues that the answer as to when you are the same person is if they partake in the same consciousness. Most people interpret that as meaning that they share memories. That is, I am identical to myself yesterday because I *remember* various things that I did yesterday. I am identical to my eleven year old self because I *remember* various things I did when I was eleven. Call this the *Memory Criterion*.

So for Locke, memory is paramount. Do we then judge someone who doesn't even remember what their crime was? Locke says no, and sticks firmly to that viewpoint. If I murder someone, and 50 years later cannot remember the murder, it is unjust to prosecute me for it.

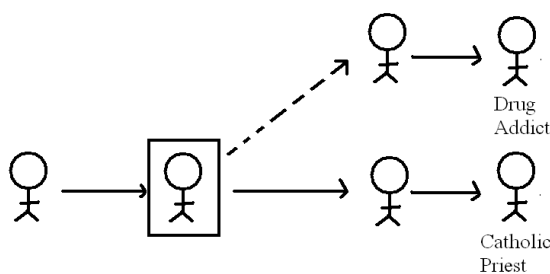
*Objection One: Thomas Reid on Transitivity of Identity*

Imagine that a young boy steals some apples. Later in life, as a middle aged man, he becomes a soldier. Finally, he becomes an old man. The soldier can remember what the young boy did. The old man can remember what the soldier did. But imagine the old man *can't* remember what the young boy did.

The problem here is that according to Locke's memory criterion, the soldier is identical to the young boy. The old man is also identical to the soldier. But the old man doesn't remember being the young boy. So according to the memory criterion, as it is *necessary* as well as sufficient for them to be the same person that they have a connection via memory, *the young boy isn't the old man*.

But, so the objection goes, that's not right at all! Numerical identity is *transitive*. If *a* is identical to *b*, and *b* is identical to *c* then *a* is identical to *c*. So the old man *must* be identical to the young boy. But the Memory Criterion says that he isn't!

*Objection Two: Fission Cases*



We get similar problems in what are called *fission* cases. Imagine I stick you in a machine that reduces you to your constituent atoms and sends details of how these atoms are arranged to Mars. On Mars, some other atoms are reassembled to make someone just like you. Some people find it intuitive that the person reassembled, who now walks and talks exactly like you would, is in fact you. Indeed, this is exactly what the Memory Criterion demands. That person would have memories of having been you, so this 'reconstituted' person would then, literally, *be* you.

Whatever you think of *that*, the problems really kick in when we consider a slightly different scenario. Whereas previously you were disassembled and sent to Mars, imagine that we just *didn't* disassemble you. There's now *two of you*! One is an abuser of drugs, a deviant, an immoral man of ill repute. The other one just uses drugs.

But if identity is transitive, then the drug addict is identical to the person who stepped into the machine. Moreover, the Catholic priest is identical to the person who stepped into the machine. So the drug addict and the Catholic Priest are, by the transitivity of identity, one and the same person! But that's not right! Surely they're two *totally* different people?! They're not one and the same person! If one commits a crime, you can't get hold of *the other one* and hold him responsible for it! But this appears to be a commitment of the Memory Criterion. I leave it to you to think of ways out of these two objections.

**6. The Bodily Criterion**

Locke's answer has a competitor. Maybe we're identical when we have the same *bodies* (or, if you'd rather, the same brains). So if my body(/brain) is the same as some kid from 20 years ago, then I am that child. Call this the *bodily criterion*.

Given the bodily criterion we *should* prosecute people who have forgotten about their crimes (and, indeed, arguably *were* foetuses etc.) Now, with the two objections above, we have a resolution. First, since the old man has the same brain as the soldier, and the soldier has the same brain as the child, then they are all identical. Second, since the man who is sent to Mars is made up of new atoms, he doesn't seem to have the same body as the man who stepped into the machine.