

# Philosophy 203

## *History of Modern Western Philosophy*

**Russell Marcus**  
**Hamilton College**  
**Spring 2016**



Class #23  
Locke, Reid,  
And Hume  
On the Self



# Business

- Revised Schedule?
  - RAT5: Next Tuesday, April 26
    - Still on the first (shorter) reading
  - Peer Evals, Tuesday, May 10
  - Option A:
    - Second Paper: April 28
    - Unit 5 WA: May 13
  - Option B
    - Unit 4 WA: April 28
    - Final: May 13
- Thursday
  - Finish Unit 4
    - I'll hand out the end-of-unit questions.
  - A little intro to Kant

# Topics in Hume

- ✓ 1. Causation and Induction
- 2. Free Will and Compatibilism
  - We'll return to compatibilism on Thursday
- ☛ **3. The Bundle Theory of the Self**

# Locke and Berkeley on the Self

- Locke presented a conceptual, non-substantial theory of the self.
  - not a thing
- We identify with our conscious experiences, linked by memory.
  - The prince and the cobbler
  - The day/night person
- Reid thinks that Locke is confused about the nature of consciousness

# **Team Activity**

## **Reid on Locke**

- Match Locke's claims about personal identity with Reid's criticisms.

# Locke 1, Reid C

- Since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self...in this alone consists personal identity... And as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person (Locke, AW 370a).
- When, therefore, Mr. Locke's notion of personal identity is properly expressed, it is, that personal identity consists in distinct remembrance; for, even in the popular sense, to say that I am conscious of a past action means nothing else than that I distinctly remember that I did it (Reid 347b).

## Locke 2, Reid E

- As far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self as it was then... As far as any intelligent being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness it had of it at first...so far it is the same personal self (Locke, AW 370a–b).
- Is it not strange that the sameness or identity of a person should consist in a thing which is continually changing, and is not any two minutes the same? Our consciousness, our memory, and every operation of the mind, are still flowing like the water of a river, or like time itself (Reid 348a).

# Locke 3, Reid D

- It is by the consciousness it has of its present thoughts and actions that it is self to itself now, and so will be the same self, as far as the same consciousness can extend to actions past or to come...the same consciousness uniting those distant actions into the same person (Locke, AW 370b)
- It is to attribute to memory or consciousness a strange magical power of producing its object, though that object must have existed before the memory or consciousness which produced it (Reid, 347b)



# Locke 4, Reid A

- Suppose it to be the same soul that was in Nestor or Thersites at the siege of Troy...as well as it is now the soul of any other man. This consciousness not reaching to any of the actions of either of those men, he is no more one self with either of them than if the soul or immaterial spirit that now informs him had been created and began to exist, when it began to inform his present body... (Locke, AW 372a)
- If the same consciousness can be transferred from one intelligent being to another, then two or twenty intelligent beings may be the same person. And if the intelligent being may lose the consciousness of the actions done by him, which surely is possible, then he is not the person that did those actions; so that one intelligent being may be two or twenty different persons, if he shall so often lose the consciousness of his former actions (Reid 347a).

## Locke 5, Reid B

- Should the....consciousness of the prince's past life enter and inform the body of a cobbler...everyone sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions (Locke, AW 372b)
- The general's consciousness does not reach so far back as his flogging; therefore, according to Mr. Locke's doctrine, he is not the person who was flogged. Therefore the general is, and at the same time is not, the same person with him who was flogged at school (Reid 347a).

# Team Activity

## Reid's Irreducibility Theory

### A. Reduction as translation

- ▶ “An object (or concept) is said to be reducible to one or more objects if all statements about it can be transformed into statements about these other objects (Carnap).

### B. Reduction as derivation

- ▶ “One reduces the laws of the theory into those of a base theory by derivation (Hempel).

### C. Reduction as explanation

- ▶ All of the observations explained by a reduced theory can also be explained by the base theory.

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1. Anything we can say about lightning, we can say about electrical discharge.

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2. The laws of chemistry can be inferred from the laws of physics.

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3. We can say what it means to be conscious by discussing neural states.

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4. The theorems of mathematics can be written in the language of set theory.

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5. We can account for all heat-related phenomena by talking about molecular motion.



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6. The nature of our 43-person class can be elucidated by talking about each of the  $43 \times 42/2 (= 903)$  different 1-1 interpersonal interactions.

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7. We can replace all statements about salt with claims about NaCl.

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8. Instead of talking about apples, we can talk about the molecules (e.g. long chain carbohydrates, monosaccharides like fructose, malic acid, water, etc.) which compose them.

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9. We can prove all biological laws from the basic physical laws.

# Berkeley and Hume

- Berkeley worried that given Locke's constraints on our capacities to acquire beliefs, we have no sense of self.
  - ▶ “There can be no idea formed of a soul or spirit; for all ideas whatever, being passive and inert... they cannot represent unto us, by way of image or likeness, that which acts...The words *will, soul, spirit* do not stand for different ideas or, in truth, for any idea at all, but for something which is very different from ideas, and which, being an agent, cannot be like or represented by any idea whatsoever - though it must be admitted at the same time that we have some notion of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind, such as willing, loving, hating, inasmuch as we know or understand the meaning of those words” (Berkeley, *Principles* §27, AW 452b).
  - ▶ Berkeley abandoned his strict policy of never admitting an object that was not first in the senses to posit the self in order to unify our experiences.
- Hume, like Reid, worries that the common notion of self outruns our memories.
  - ▶ “Memory does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity by showing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions. It will be incumbent on those who affirm that memory produces entirely our personal identity to give a reason why we can thus extend our identity beyond our memory” (*Treatise* I.4.6, AW 530b).
- Unlike Reid and Berkeley, Hume welcomes a more skeptical approach.

# Team Activity

## Hume's No-Self View

- “If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same through the whole course of our lives, since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions or from any other that the idea of self is derived, and, consequently, there is no such idea... When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception” (*Treatise* I.4.6, AW 526a).
- Which of the following interpretations, of this passage and others, best captures Hume's view about the self?
  - ▶ A. We have no idea of the self, but we can infer the existence of a self as the thing which has experiences.
  - ▶ B. Since my experiences are constantly changing, my self is changing over time, too.
  - ▶ C. There is no such thing as the self, despite our commonsense beliefs.
  - ▶ D. There is a self, but we must take its existence as a matter of faith.
  - ▶ E. Since I can observe my perceptions, what I call myself is just a series of perceptions.

# A Functional View

- Hume's claim that there is no self relies on his premise that a self should be precisely identical over time.
  - ▶ Too strong?
  - ▶ As we age and acquire more experiences, we have different properties.
  - ▶ Certain experiences are cathartic, change us.
  - ▶ Metaphoric?
- A biological theory of the self can accommodate these changes without giving up on an enduring self by relying on the functional organization of the body as a criterion for identity over time.
- The self as a collection of loosely-related individual instances of bodies, each just a moment of time wide
  - ▶ Related biological entities
- Hume's account of our ordinary conception of self is similar to this functional view.

# Loose Connections of Experiences

- Though we never perceive a self, we do have experiences.
- Whatever we call ourselves must be related to our series of experiences.
- Our experiences are joined by a variety of psychological connections among our ideas.
  - resemblance, contiguity, cause and effect
- These psychological connections govern all of our thoughts.
- They do not connect our ideas in some underlying substance.
- They conjoin our experiences over time.
- Memory too demonstrates mere conjunctions.



# The Diverse Self

- Instead of being a paradigm of unity, Hume thus argues that the self is an exemplar of diversity.
- Just as Berkeley argues that the apple is merely a bundle of independent sense experiences, its taste independent from its roundness and its crunch, we are just a collection of various, separate experiences.
- As far as we know, even the world itself is just a loose collection of events unconnected by causal laws.
- Everything is particular and all the particulars are independent.
  - ▶ “Every distinct perception which enters into the composition of the mind is a distinct existence and is different and distinguishable and separable from every other perception, either contemporary or successive” (AW 529b).
- The self is dissolved.
  - ▶ “When we attribute identity, in an improper sense, to variable or interrupted objects, our mistake is not confined to the expression, but is commonly attended with a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable, or at least with a propensity to such fictions. What will suffice to prove this hypothesis to the satisfaction of every fair enquirer, is to show from daily experience and observation, that the objects, which are variable or interrupted, and yet are supposed to continue the same, are such only as consist of a succession of parts, connected together by resemblance, contiguity, or causation...” (AW 527b).

# The No-Self Theory and the Bundle Theory

## Two ways to view Hume's theory of the self

- It is a no-self theory because he denies any experience of a self.
  - There is no I, beyond the experiences.
  - Against the Cartesian claim that the cogito yields the existence of a thinker.
  - We are just thought.
  - Buddhist view
- We can call it the bundle theory of self for his claim about our loose connections.
  - A bit misleading: it might be interpreted as claiming that there is an enduring self which unites the bundle.
- We have a practical interest in maintaining a notion of the self over time.
- But the claim that there is a self underlying the experiences, some haecceity, is, strictly speaking, false.
  - Or anyway we can have no knowledge of any self.