

Locke and Intransitivity

1 Thomas Reid

Suppose a brave officer to have been flogged when a boy at school for robbing an orchard, to have taken a standard from the enemy in his first campaign, and to have been made a general in advanced life; suppose, also, which must be admitted to be possible, that, when he took the standard, he was conscious of his having been flogged at school, and that, when made a general, he was conscious of his taking the standard, but had absolutely lost the consciousness of his flogging.

These things being supposed, it follows, from Mr. Locke's doctrine, that he who was flogged at school is the same person who took the standard, and that he who took the standard is the same person who was made a general. Whence it follows, if there be any truth in logic, that the general is the same person with him who was flogged at school. But 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.¹

2 George Berkeley

Euphranor We will suppose now (which is possible in the nature of things, and reported to be fact) that a person, through some violent accident or distemper, should fall into such a total oblivion as to lose all consciousness of his past life and former ideas. I ask is he not still the same person?

Alciphron He is the same man, but not the same person. Indeed you ought not to suppose that a person loseth its former consciousness; for this is impossible,

¹ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), Ch. 6.

though a man perhaps may; but then he becomes another person. In the same person it must be owned some old ideas may be lost, and some new ones got; but a total change is inconsistent with identity of person.

Euphranor Let us then suppose that a person hath ideas, and is conscious during a certain space of time, which we will divide into three equal parts, whereof the later terms are marked by the letters A B C. In the first part of time, the person gets a certain number of ideas, which are retained in A: during the second part of time he retains one-half of his old ideas, and loseth the other half, in place of which he acquires as many new ones: so that in B his ideas are half old and half new. And in the third part we suppose him to lose the remainder of the ideas acquired in the first, and to get new ones in their stead, which are retained in C, together with those acquired in the second part of time. Is this a possible fair supposition?

Alciphron It is.

Euphranor Upon these premises I am tempted to think, one may demonstrate that personal identity doth not consist in consciousness.

Alciphron As how?

Euphranor You shall judge; but thus it seems to me. The persons in A and B are the same, being conscious of common ideas by supposition. The person in B is, for the same reason, one and the same with the person in C. Therefore the person in A is the same with the person in C, by that undoubted axiom, *Quae conveniunt uni tertio conveniunt inter se*. But the person in C hath no idea in common with the person in A. Therefore personal identity doth not consist in consciousness. What do you think, Alciphron, is not this a plain inference?

Alciphron I tell you what I think: you will never assist my faith by puzzling my knowledge.²

² George Berkeley: *Alciphron: or, the Minute Philosopher* (1752) Dialogue VII, Sec. 8.