

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics
Prof. Funkhouser
Shoemaker, "Persons and their Pasts"

I.

- Shoemaker will defend a memory, or Lockean, account of personal identity. Memory gives us special access to our pasts. Consider the following example:

... it could not be the case that I have a full and accurate memory of the past incident but am mistaken in thinking that the person I remember shouting was myself. (338)

II.

- Q: Could one have direct memories of the prior cognitive states of a distinct (non-identical) person? Or, as Shoemaker puts it:

Is it conceivable that we should have, as a matter of course, knowledge that is related to past experiences and actions other than our own in just the way in which, as things are, our memory knowledge is related to our own past experiences and actions?

This question motivates the 'quasi-remember' terminology:

Whereas someone's claim to remember a past event implies that he himself was aware of the event at the time of its occurrence, the claim to quasi-remember a past event implies only that someone or other was aware of it. (340)

III.

- In order to remember something, there must also be a *causal* relationship between a past cognitive/sensory state and the current remembering.
- On p. 341 (right column), Shoemaker distinguishes quasi-remembering "from the outside" from quasi-remembering "from the inside".
- Should the skepticism expressed in the following passage be of any significant concern for those in worlds with mere quasi-remembering?

If, as I have been arguing, someone's quasi-remembering from the inside the *action* sequence *X*-followed-by-*Y* provides no guarantee that *X* and *Y* were done by the same person, then by the same reasoning someone's quasi-remembering the *event* sequence *X*-followed-by-*Y* provides no guarantee that *X* and *Y* were witnessed by the same person, and therefore no guarantee that they occurred in spatial proximity to one another. (344)

IV.

- Q: Is Shoemaker's treatment of branching cases (e.g., fission and fusion), on pp. 345–346, satisfying? Or, is the exception he makes for branching cases *ad hoc*?

And, what are we to make of comments like this?:

There are serious objections to identifying me with either Brown or Smith, but it seems clear here that if anyone now alive is identical with either Brown or Smith, I am. (346)

Conclusion:

But this implies that if a person quasi_c-remembers an action from the inside, then, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, he is entitled to regard it as more likely that the action was done by him than that it was done by any other given person. (347)

V.

- Fission and split-brain cases would be examples in which people apparently have memories “from the inside” of the actions of *other* people.

This point can be used to avoid the *circularity charge* against accounting for personal identity in terms of memory.

VI.

- “But while an action I remember_w from the inside can fail to be mine, there is only one way in which this can happen: namely, through there having been branching in the M-type causal chain linking it with my present memory.” (349)

VII.

- In worlds with branching the concept of a person would likely be modified, and we might care about past/future persons who are distinct from us in the same way that we care about ourselves.