

We Are All Loose and Popular. An Argument in Support of Loose and Popular Identity

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Joseph Butler stated that identity can be seen in two ways: a loose and popular one, and a strict and philosophical one. In this paper I will argue that every identity must be seen in the former since it is impossible to have identity in a strict and philosophical sense. I aim to show this by looking at the persistence question arguing that since it is designed to establish identity without accepting change, it fails to give us a useful account of personal identity. I therefore hope to establish what I believe to be a much more useful question, namely that of existence, not persistence.

Keywords: Personal Identity, Persistence, Self, Joseph Butler, Loose and Popular Identity, David Hume, Spatiotemporal Continuity Theory, Animalism, Psychological Continuity Theory

1. Introduction

How can someone be said to be the same from one point in time to another, when so much about them has changed? When I say that I was once a fetus can I be said to be the same today as I was then, despite the changes I have gone through? The standard answer to a questions such as this is that we must find what persists from one time to the next and that is then what constitutes personal identity. We see the word “same” as holding a one-to-one relation of identity. Being the same in this sense means something persists unchanged from one time to another. This type of strict identity seems to be the standard on which we measure personal identity. In this paper I will attempt to argue that identity in time can only be viewed in a loose and popular sense. I will use the term as set out by Joseph Butler^[1] and determine that personal identity must follow a loose and popular identity. I will then argue that the persistence question, is the wrong question to ask about identity since it looks for identity in a strict and philosophical sense. My aim is to conclude that the only identity we have is loose and popular because it follows a simple spatiotemporal continuity of existence, not of persistence. To do this I will rely on the theory of spatiotemporal continuity while at the same time arguing that what we are, are bundles of matter and perceptions in a constant flux.

2. Loose and Popular and Strict and Philosophical Identity

Imagine someone planting an acorn into the soft ground. Years later there is a small tree where the acorn was planted. Years later still an oak tree dominates the area where the sapling tree once stood. The question is, is the acorn the same as the oak tree? Joseph Butler asked this question and argued that there are two ways of viewing identity; a loose and popular way and a strict and philosophical way. Butler argues that ordinary objects do not stay the same over time because of the change they go through. A tree cannot be the same as an earlier acorn if it is not made of the same matter at least not in a strict and philosophical sense:

And if they have not one common particle of matter, they cannot be the same tree, in the proper

philosophic sense of the word *same*; it being evidently a contradiction in terms, to say they are, when no part of their substance, and no one of their properties, is the same; no part of their substance, and by the supposition; no one of their properties, because it is allowed that the same property cannot be transferred from one substance to another.[2]

We do, however, claim the tree to be the “same” despite this fact “For when a man swears to the same tree, as having stood fifty years in the same place, he means only the same as to all the purposes of property and uses of common life, and not that the tree has been all that time the same in the strict philosophical sense of the word.”[3] We see here that Butler describes two ways we use the word “same”, in a strict sense and in a loose sense. In a strict sense of the word we have one thing that stays the same through time. If I say that something is the same from one point in time, to another, in a strict and philosophical sense, I am implying that It has exactly the same properties now as it did then. The loose sense implies a many-one relationship where something can be the same from one time to another, yet still be distinct things at those times. This seems paradoxical. How can something that consists of many things be said to be one thing? Baxter argues that Butler’s theory of loose and popular identity does not run into this sort of problem. “How can a whole be a single thing and yet be identical with a multitude? The answer uses the Butler view of identity. Assume that on strict standards for counting the parts are many and on loose standards they are one. The strictly distinct parts are identical with each other on a loose standard.”[4] The whole, then, is just the parts counted loosely. It is strictly a multitude and loosely a single thing. This is evident when looking at how Butler defines the continued existence of the tree:

And therefore, when we say the identity or sameness of a plant consists in a continuation of the same life communicated under the same organization, to a number of particles of matter, whether the same or not, the word same, when applied to life and to organization, cannot possibly be understood to signify, what it signifies in this very sentence, when applied to matter. In a loose and popular sense, then, the life, and the organization, and the plant, are justly said to be the same, notwithstanding the perpetual change of the parts.[5]

While the matter is different at each point in time (a collection of different pieces of matter) we use the word same in a loose sense to collect it all under one thing. The identity we have in a loose and popular sense is then a matter of a continuation of existence more than persistence. We only run into the paradox if we see identity in a strict sense only. If, on the other hand we are willing to see identity in a loose sense we manage to avoid the paradox because we are counting distinct things collectively as one thing using a different meaning of the word “same”. The word “same” in a loose and popular sense implies the object being in a spatiotemporal continuity. The acorn is not then same as the oak in a strict sense but despite the changes in the acorn over time it is still one continued existence. Looking at identity in this way, we see that despite the acorn not being the same substance as the oak tree, the oak *use* to be the acorn.

Butler argues, on the other hand, that persons must be viewed in a strict and philosophical way. Butler writes that: “[...] by reflecting upon that which is myself now, and that which was myself twenty years ago, I discern they are not two, but one and the same self.”[6] But as we have seen, with the acorn and the tree, strict and philosophical identity cannot exist alongside material substance due to its changing nature. This means that personal identity to Butler, must exist outside material substance. Butler states that though consciousness of our present and our feelings are needed for us to be persons, consciousness cannot be necessary for the persistence of persons[7]. The reason for this being that if material substance is what constitutes consciousness, then a change in substance could cause a change in consciousness resulting in a change in person. This would break the rules of strict and philosophical identity.

A further argument for persons having a strict sense of identity is that did we not have a persistent

self in a strict sense, outside of consciousness, we would not feel an interest in actions of the past, and would not be concerned with the future, since these would be actions of other people and not strictly us. Butler presents an argument in response to Locke's memory theory but the argument could include Hume's bundle theory as well since he writes that some have taken Locke's theory to some "strange lengths"[8] and goes on to describe these, almost as if describing Hume's bundle theory, "That personality is not a permanent, but a transient thing: that it lives and dies, begins and ends, continually changing"[9]. From Butler's point of view, it seems that to allow for persons to not persist, by either not having a persisting self as Hume argues[10] or by not remembering a past action and thereby not being the person who performed that action, as Locke would argue,[11] is to say that any interest in the future is entirely unlikely as it would be as if those actions would happen to another person[12]. This may seem a damaging criticism of both Locke and Hume but one could argue that persistence may not be the only reason for us to be concerned about the future. One reason why we may feel concern for the future despite not being the same person in a strict sense, is that we know the person tomorrow *will have been* us and we have a kind of empathy for the future versions of ourselves. After all, that future person will be someone who has a spatiotemporal connection to me now. Similarly, one could imagine people making bad decisions now, because they do not feel they are the people who will need to deal with the consequences (their older selves being the ones who will have to take the blame or pay the bill).

It seems that responsibility also has to be linked to strict identity if we follow the same criticism Butler lays against Locke. If I am not the same person tomorrow (in a strict sense) as I am now, how can I be said to be responsible for any action I have made in the past? Me now, would be a different person to the one who committed the action to which I am said to be responsible. I would argue however that since we are perfectly capable of ascribing identity in a loose and popular sense, we can also hold people responsible even with a loose and popular notion of identity. I am responsible for past actions because it *was* I who committed them. Some may here interject that by saying that it *was* me I am implying that it is not any more, making the punishment unjust. This is, however, only a problem if we think of persistence of a person in a strict sense as the only measure of how we assign identity and thereby responsibility. I have one existence in time, and whatever I do in that existence is my responsibility. I may never be the "same" as a specific point in time, but my causal history has formed who I am now, and it, therefore, falls under my responsibility. It comes down to how we view the pronoun "I". It could be argued that we ought to view it in a loose way. The "I" is a loose term referencing the multiple selves under one pronoun. An argument could here be made that if the "I" is loose, then how do we avoid only being responsible for actions loosely, in the sense that we feel less responsibility due to the relation only being loose?[13] This is a valid argument. We seem to feel less responsible if we are removed from an action by a few links. Imagine John convincing Victor to kick a ball over a fence. If the ball hits a window, John would probably feel less responsible than had he been the kicker as he is removed by one link from the action itself. However, I would argue that responsibility within a loose "I" stays within the same link. We have one existence in time and since each "I" is spatiotemporally connected to the one that follows, we are still within one link. Responsibility follows existence and not persistence. I will feel responsibility because it *was* I who did it (it was one of the I's that is connected to me spatiotemporally and has causally led to the I that there is now).

In the section above we have seen how Butler distinguishes between loose and popular identity and strict and philosophical identity[14]. It still remains unclear how Butler believes persons are capable of existing without change. One guess is that Butler believes we persist in time because our self exists beyond the physical world. It seems impossible for something to persist without change otherwise. Butler's intuition about persons does illustrate why the persistence question is so popular. The intuitive idea that we *must* be the same seems so strong that we ignore the incompatibility of change and sameness in a strict sense of identity. In what follows I will sketch out

some other answers to the persistence question in an attempt to show that viewing identity in a strict and philosophical sense is problematic.

3. What is the persistence question?

It seems that what a satisfactory theory of personal identity must do is explain what it is that ensures our persistence over time. In much of the literature on the subject of personal identity, the debate is therefore often boiled down to finding an answer to the Persistence Question. This question asks how X at time t1 can be said to be the same as Y at another time t2.^[15] Or, what must persist over time for X at t1 to be the same as Y at t2. The question comes about because despite the obvious changes we go through we have an intuitive feeling that we, as persons, persist in time in a strict sense. Because of this we try to reduce what a person is down to its necessary and sufficient conditions for its persistence. There are many answers to this question. Below I will sketch out some of the most common answers to the persistence questions. This will not be a comprehensive guide and will merely introduce some of the main ideas about the different theories of personal identity.

3.1 The Immaterial Substance Theory

The immaterial substance theory is the view that we persist in time as persons because of our unchanging immaterial substance such as a soul (however it could be any immaterial thing). As mentioned above, this seems to be the only way for a strict and philosophical identity can occur. Immaterial substance does not follow the same rules of change as does material substance and we can therefore say that something is the “same” in a strict sense because nothing will have changes over time. Thomas Reid prescribed to this view arguing that:

My thoughts, and actions, and feelings, change every moment; they have no continued, but a successive, existence; but the *self*, or the *I*, to which they belong, is permanent, and has the same relation to all the succeeding thoughts, actions, and feelings which I call mine.^[16]

Reid is here saying that while his thoughts and feelings are coming and going, the thing that has them, namely the self, stays the same. This is also the view I would ascribe to Butler as he is clearly arguing for some theory which puts personal identity outside of change. The immaterial substance theory has many variations, far too many to go into in this paper, but the general argument is that X at t1 is the same person as Y at t2 if Y at t2 has the same immaterial substance (be it a soul or otherwise) as X at t1. Our persistence is linked to something outside of material substance, which explains why Butler argues that personal identity does not follow the same loose and popular standard that hold for the acorn and the oak tree.

3.2 The Biological Theory

The Biological view, as the name suggests, argues that personhood follows the existence of our physical body. This view is as varied as the one above so for convenience this paper will focus on one of the most popular versions of this theory namely Animalism. Animalism states that what makes us persist over time is being the same Human Animal. Animalists aim to change the persistence questions from: “Under what possible circumstances is a person existing at one time identical with (or the same person as) a person existing at another time?”^[17] to “Under what possible circumstances is a person who existed at one time identical with *something* that exists at another time (whether or not it is a person then)?”^[18] Olson argues in *Was I Ever a Fetus?*^[19] that our identity lies in the persistence of human-animal life. The theory goes as follows: „If we are human animals, and human animals persist by virtue of some brute physical continuity that does not involve anything psychological, then we persist by virtue of some brute physical continuity that does not involve anything psychological.”^[20] For Olson, a human animal persist in time and if we are human animals, we do as well.

So, we have a biological persistence in time. It is important to distinguish between person and

animal here because dependent on what you think we fundamentally are, the answer to the persistence question is very different. Olson wants to argue that there cannot be any form of numeric identity if a person is what we fundamentally are.[\[21\]](#) If we are people then that means, according to Olson, that we could have never been a fetus and we will never be a human animal in a vegetative state since neither of these can be described as person. This leads to a problem because if we fundamentally are people, then what was the fetus if not me? And what will the human animal in the vegetative state be, if not me? Olson's answer as we have seen is to change the question and argue that persistence should not be persistence of person but persistence of human animal.

3.3 Psychological Continuity Theory (PCT)

There are many versions of PCT. The most basic being the theory that we are the same persons over time if we have overlapping chains of psychological connection with a past person. Locke famously argued that it is memory that is necessary for the persistence of a person.[\[22\]](#) Other theories argue for other psychological connections such as beliefs, hopes, intentions, and so on. In its simplest form the PCT argues that for X at t1 to be the same person as Y at t2 there needs to be some overlapping psychological connections between X at t1 and Y at t2. You can be said to persist as a person iff you share some psychological connection across time. Having the same physical brain may be enough to ensure persistence. Thought experiments are often set up to test our notion of personal identity by imagining whether a brain transplanted into a new body would retain its original personal identity. For others the necessary element of identity lies in the psychological chains even in a branching form as we see in cases of fission.[\[23\]](#) Still others believe we, as persons, are constituted by a human animal just as a statue is constituted by a piece of clay but our persistence conditions are different from the substance we are constituted from.[\[24\]](#) Shoemaker argues that we persist in time if we have a causally dependent psychological connection to a past person. The psychological connection had by me now, would be causally dependent on the past person's experiences (by way of memory of other psychological connection).[\[25\]](#)

4. The problem with the persistence question

All these views present possible answers to the persistence question. The entire debate about personal identity seems to rest upon an answer to this very question. The problem with the persistence question is that it looks at identity in a strict and philosophical sense. If something is to persist from one moment to the next there would have to be no change in the persisting thing from one moment to the next and this seems logically impossible. That being said, there is an intuitive feeling prevailing in many of us that makes us cling to the persistence question. Hume uses the example of a river to explain why the persistence question is so appealing;

Secondly, We may remark, that tho' in a succession of related objects, it be in a manner requisite, that the change of parts be not sudden nor entire, in order to preserve the identity, yet where the objects are in their nature changeable and inconstant, we admit of a more sudden transition, than wou'd otherwise be consistent with that relation. Thus as the nature of a river consists in the motion and change of parts; tho' in less than four and twenty hours these be totally alter'd; this hinders not the river from continuing the same during several ages. What is natural and essential to any thing is, in a manner, expected; and what is expected makes less impression, and appears of less moment, than what is unusual and extraordinary. A considerable change of the former kind seems really less to the imagination, than the most trivial alteration of the latter; and by breaking less the continuity of the thought, has less influence in destroying the identity.[\[26\]](#)

By defining the river as something that naturally changes we are giving it more freedom to change. If, for example, we were to see the same rapid change in a stone or a house, we would not accept it. But because we are used to rivers changing massive amounts of water in a couple of hours, we do not question the identity of the river over time despite its change. That same applies to persons. We tend to allow changes in people (and trees and animals) because we are used to it happening. We

are used to people changing over time and therefore it is part of their criteria of identity. How do we then couple this intuitive need for identity with a naturally changing thing? We look for something that does not change, something we can reduce identity down to, something we can point at and say "that is what makes me, me". The resemblance between our fleeting perceptions make this illusion complete. This is also why sudden changes are considered more serious than gradual changes are.

Returning to the potential answers to the persistence question illustrates this illusion. The arguments for persistence regarding some immaterial substance is complex and not one I have the space to devote enough time to in order to do it justice. In a strict and philosophical sense I believe Butler is right. The only way to have strict and philosophical identity is to eliminate change over time; this can only be done by reducing what a person is, down to something that does not change. From my point of view I have yet to see a good argument, for accepting this premise. The theory seems to work backwards. We have an intuitive notion about our own identity in time (that we must persist), and so we seek confirmation by appealing to some immaterial substance which satisfies our initial intuition. That being said, the immaterial substance theory is probably the only theory capable of claiming that we, as persons, have a strict and philosophical identity over time.

Animalism on the other hand, seeks to bridge the gap between persistence and change by shifting the focus of the persistence question away from the persistence of persons and on to the persistence of Human animals, yet it is still asking us to determine persistence in time in a strict sense. I can say that I am the same as the fetus because I am now the same Human animal as that fetus. But in a strict and philosophical sense this makes no sense. The fetus and I now are totally different. We have neither the same materials nor anything the same from then to now. The only relation that holds between us is that of a causal spatiotemporal continuity but this is not enough to establish identity in a strict and philosophical sense. I cannot be said to be the same human animal as I was then. I cannot be said to be the same as the fetus. In a loose and popular sense however, I can be said to have been the fetus once. Like the acorn and the oak tree, I too have grown and become something different but at one time I *was* a fetus but I am not anymore that human animal. I am a different one that is a product of the past one and so on, and so on. In a loose and popular sense Animalism seems logically sounder, yet I am not sure the Animalist would agree that the theory should be viewed as such.

For psychological continuity we see a similar problem. We cannot have a persistence of person because that would imply the psychological connections to hold through time. Butler also argued this point in his critique of having personal identity lying in the consciousness

For it is self-evident, that the personality cannot be really the same, if, as they expressly assert, that in which it consists is not the same. And as, consistently with themselves, they cannot, so, I think, it appears they do not, mean, that the person is really the same, but only that he is so in a fictitious sense: in such a sense only as they assert; for this they do assert, that any number of persons whatever may be the same person.[\[27\]](#)

If the body is subject to change, the consciousness which lies in it must also be subject to change. This is what leads Butler to believe that people holding such a theory must be using the word "same" in the wrong way. This does not have to be as problematic for the PCT as Butler would have it. A loose and popular version of PCT is perhaps conceivable, and the proponents of PCT could argue that their theory makes sense when using the word "same" loosely, yet that is outside of the scope of this paper.

Another problem for PCT is that we cannot reduce what we are down to mental properties, because even those do not persist. Hume argued that any perception we form is fleeting and does not last. If it did, we would have to hold it in our minds

It must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference. 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.[\[28\]](#)

We often think we are holding on to the same perceptions because of the resemblance they have to previous perceptions. If my personal identity persisted because I had a continuity of beliefs about certain things, this would imply that I were to hold the same thoughts about the same belief in my mind because losing them would mean an end to my person. But when we think about our beliefs we are forming new thought that resemble the original ones bringing about the illusion of one long perception of that belief. The identity relation between persons in time must therefore be loose and popular because a strict and philosophical identity would require us to keep holding those perceptions and we would only persist as long as we did so. We may have many different perceptions but we count them as one perception in a loose sense. That is not to say that we are not persons. There are persons and selves but we are never the same self from one time to the next. Like the acorn and the oak we change and learn and grow and we are only therefore the same person in a loose and popular sense.

5. Spatiotemporal continuity in a loose and popular way

Some may argue that there can be no identity if not strict and philosophical. If identity has to hold in a strict sense then any change would destroy identity. What is the relation that must hold between X at t1 and Y at t2 for X and Y to be the same? The answer (if we are willing to accept identity in a loose way) is spatiotemporal continuity. The only Identity-relation we have that can have any meaning is that of spatiotemporal continuity. The theory of spatiotemporal continuity can be seen as a bit shallow for some philosophers. Theodore Sider points out that this theory does not really go into the essence of what personal identity is.[\[29\]](#) For Sider, the theory of spatiotemporal continuity is more of a practical guide to find out if the same person is present at two different times. In other words, Sider argues that spatiotemporal continuity fails to tell us what is necessary and sufficient for us to persist. Sider uses the following example to illustrate his point,

Suppose you are captured, put into a pot, and melted into soup. Although we can trace a continuous series from you to the soup, the soup is not you. After being melted, you no longer exist; the matter that once composed you now composes something else. So we had better refine the spatiotemporal continuity theory to read as follows: persons are numerically identical if and only if they are spatiotemporally continuous via a series of persons. You are connected to the soup by a continuous series all right, but the later members of the series are portions of soup, not people. [\[30\]](#)

Sider's argument rests on what the word "you" refers to. It seems that when Sider is using the word he is referring to a person, and therefore argues that spatiotemporal continuity is not a theory about personal identity, since the soup is obviously not a person. However, if we do not see persons as what we fundamentally are, the theory of spatiotemporal continuity makes sense in this example. Sider's argument is only correct if we agree that "you" refers to a person essentially, and that certain elements between X at t1 and Y at t2 have to remain unchanged. If we, on the other hand, use the word to refer to an existence in time in a loose sense, then it makes no difference if there is a person in the beginning and soup in the end. Some may argue here that what I am proposing is not a theory of personal identity but merely a theory of identity. I see no difference between the two. It would probably be possible to argue that someone could be the same person in a loose and popular sense, but this would just be another type of spatiotemporal continuity.

Spatiotemporal continuity is the only necessary and sufficient condition that can explain identity in time while recognizing the fact that nothing stays the same over time. Consider a bundle of matter in time. The matter changes at random intervals, adding and discarding all the while continuing in time. If we were to analyse the bundle of matter at different times on its path we would see that it is never the same from point to point (the smallest amount of change possible being a difference in time). Nevertheless, it has a causal history and a spatiotemporal continuity. In a loose and popular sense there is one bundle because each moment in time is spatiotemporally continuous with the next. Spatiotemporal continuity is a theory of loose and popular identity. It is a theory of existence, not persistence, in time. What is the relation that must hold between X at t1 and Y at t2 for X and Y to be the same? The answer to this question is; Y at t2 must be a casually determined continued existence of X at t1. The theory thus far laid out has tried to illustrate the limitations of a strict and philosophical view of identity. In what follows I will sketch out what I believe we ontologically are, given our inability to exist in a strict sense of identity.

6. We are all bundles

The only theory of what we are, that is compatible with this type of loose and popular identity is bundle theory. Bundle theory states that we are bundles of matter and perceptions in a constant flux. We are spatiotemporally continuous in time yet there is no persistence of anything from one time to another. As we have seen earlier with Hume, sameness of this sort is an illusion, a trick of the mind. There certainly are Human Animals, but there is never any persistence between them. They exist through time, and one could argue for a "self" being present at each moment, yet there is no sameness, only different moments in time huddled so closely together that they are seen as one continuous line. Bundle theory as laid out by Hume in 1739, is a theory which comes about when Hume analyses the notion of a persistent self. Hume argues that it must be impressions which give rise to ideas, so to have an idea of a persistent self, we must have a perception of such a self. Hume looks inside himself to see if he can find an impression of such a thing and realizes that there is no *one* impression that we are, and that we hold multiple impressions in our mind at one time or another, none of which lasts long.^[31] What we call "self" is therefore a bundle of perceptions coming and going in an ever-changing flux. Hume uses the example of a theatre saying that; "The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance ; pass, re-pass, glide away."^[32] Because of these passing, re-passing and gliding perceptions, the self is ever-changing and there is no persistence in a strict sense from one self to the next.

This theory as laid out by Hume is very similar to the loose and popular identity theory Butler lays out. The difference here is that Hume seems to apply the theory to persons as well as objects where Butler holds a strict identity for persons. Hume specifically writes that, "The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies. It cannot, therefore, have a different origin, but must proceed from a like operation of the imagination upon like objects."^[33] this makes it clear that there is nothing special about the identity of persons over that of vegetables and animals. ^[34]

While proponents of the biological theory of personal identity agree that personal identity hold no special place over that of vegetables and trees, they disagree with Bundle theory. Olson, for example, argues that what Hume proposes is that we are only thoughts, and not material substances like bones and sinew.^[35] This is a very narrow reading of Hume's theory. Hume never argues that we are only thought, he argues that everyone is a bundle of perceptions in constant coming and going. Hume is saying that there is no *one* thing that we are through time, no *single* continuous thing. Hume never states *what* we are; his quarrel is with continuous impressions. It all boils down to the assumption that whatever is in time must be subject to change. If persons are in time, they too, are subject to change. We are therefore not the "same" throughout our lives, at least not in a strict sense of identity.

Another criticism of this sort of thinking is leveled against Hume by Chisholm.^[36] The criticism goes that since we use the word “I” when we speak about ourselves, we are thereby illustrating that we persist in time. This is in direct contrast to what Hume argues about identity in *Treaties*. Chisholm makes this case against Hume’s bundle theory in his book *Person and Object a Metaphysical Study* from 1979. Chisholm argues that when Hume writes in *Treaties* his use of the word “I” shows us that there is something that has the experiences and perceptions. Chisholm tries to make the point that for Hume to look for a persistent self, there must first be *something* that is looking and that something, is the self that Hume claims cannot be found.^[37] This is an interesting argument but Chisholm is missing an essential element in Hume’s theory. Hume is arguing that the self is examining itself. We are perfectly capable of having an ever-changing chain of selves, all examining themselves and concluding that there are no perceptions or impressions that persist in time. It is therefore not a contradiction to use the word “I” in the sentence, because we are always an “I” or a “self” just not the same one through time. Hume’s whole argument is that the persisting self is an illusion, and it is no great leap to imagine that the language we use when speaking about the self will reflect that illusion. Also worth mentioning is that we normally speak about the self as if it is distinct from the mental processes it has. If this is true we seem to allow some sort of substance dualism. The self does not *have* perceptions and experiences, the self *is* those perceptions and experiences. Could Hume have written this more clearly? Probably, but given that the everyday language we use builds around the pronoun “I” being distinct from the mental processes it has, it must have been a challenge to articulate an alternative theory within the self same language. Hume is not out to change the nature of the language we use, and it could be argued, that the language we would have to adopt to satisfy Hume’s theory would be cumbersome at best. While this is true, it is important to remember that Hume was trying to discover what we are ontologically. That the language we use differs from Hume’s ontology is not an argument for or against it.^[38]

Chisholm goes on to point out that when Hume states that he cannot find a perception of the self, he is not saying anything about the truth of such a self, but only that he could not find it.^[39] Once again Chisholm’s argument seems to rest on a misunderstanding of what Hume presents in *Treaties*. It is evident (at least in my reading of Hume) that he is arguing for the impossibility of anyone having a self that is constant, and not just the fact that he cannot find it. The simple fact that Hume uses language in this way does not disprove his argument however. One could also argue that when we use the word “I” we are not referring to a person in a strict sense but an existence in time. If we think of the word as having two meanings in the same way the word “same” has according to Butler. When someone says “I” they are referring back to the same spatiotemporal existence that consists of many “I” but are loosely collected under one “I”.

7. Conclusion

Butler’s theory of identity is important because it forces us to look at what we mean when we use the word “same” and how we handle the challenge presented by persistence and change. This is an aspect of the discussion I believe is missing from the current debate about personal identity, and confusion results from this. I have attempted to show that all identity must be loose and popular because of how we change over time. Having something persist, on the other hand, requires something to stay the same over time and we have seen how that is impossible given the nature of change. The consequence of this is that the only theory of identity we can have is that of spatiotemporal continuity of existence, where we have many things counted as one thing given their spatiotemporal relation to each other. If one was to deny the existence of loose and popular identity, arguing that we are simply putting a name to the illusion of distinct objects being so similar that they, for us, look like one object persisting in time, I would be sympathetic to this claim. It is not important whether loose and popular identity is a “real” type of identity or merely a convention used to name how we treat identity in time. What is important is to establish the impossibility of things persisting in a strict and philosophical identity, such as the types we have seen when discussing the

persistence question. I have therefore proposed that the only question we can ask regarding identity in time, is a question of existence not of persistence. Persistence requires sameness (in a strict sense), existence does not. I have also argued that what we ontologically are, are bundles of perceptions and matter in an ever changing stage of flux. At each moment in time there is a self, yet this self is not the same (in a strict sense) as at any earlier time. I believe this forms a very coherent and logical theory of identity, despite not being the most intuitive.

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Notes

- [1] BUTLER, JOSEPH.: *The Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and the Course of Nature, to Which Are Added Two Brief Dissertations: I. On Personal Identity. II. On the Nature of Virtue*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott 1873. Appendix 1.
- [2] Ibid., App 1, p. 319.
- [3] Ibid., App 1, p. 319.
- [4] BAXTER, DONALD L. M.: Identity in the Loose and Popular Sense. *Mind*, Vol. 97, 1988, no. 388. p. 580.
- [5] BUTLER, JOSEPH.: *The Analogy of Religion*, op. cit. App 1, p. 319.
- [6] Ibid., App 1, p. 317.
- [7] Ibid., App 1, p. 318.
- [8] Ibid., App 1, p. 320.
- [9] Ibid., App 1, p. 320.
- [10] HUME, DAVID.: *A Treatise of Human Nature*. SELBY-BIGGE, L.A. (ed.). Oxford: Clarendon press 1888, Book 1 Part 4, Sect 6, pp. 251-263.
- [11] LOCKE, JOHN.: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. NIDDITCH, P. H (ed.): Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1975, P . 328-348.

- [12] BUTLER, JOSEPH.: *The Analogy of Religion* op. cit., App 1, p. 320.
- [13] I am indebted to an anonymous referee for bringing this objection to my attention.
- [14] It would seem as though Butler is operating with two versions of identity; one loose and popular and one strict and philosophical. It is not the scope of this paper to argue whether Butler believed in different kinds of identity or merely tried to argue that the way we see cases of identity comes in two forms.
- [15] For a more comprehensive debate of the Persistence Question, see Olson 2003a
- [16] REID, THOMAS.: *The Edinburgh Edition of Thomas Reid: Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. BROOKES, D. R. - Haakonssen, K. (eds.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002, Essay 3, Ch. 4, p. 264.
- [17] OLSON, ERIC T.: Personal Identity. In: STICH, S.P. - WARFIELD, T A. (eds.): *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2003a, p. 356
- [18] Ibid., p. 357.
- [19] OLSON, ERIC T.: Was I Ever a Fetus? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 57, 1997, no. 1.
- [20] Ibid., p. 11.
- [21] OLSON, ERIC T.: Personal Identity. In: STICH, S.P. - WARFIELD, T A. (eds.): *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2003a,
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- [26] HUME, DAVID.: *A Treatise of Human Nature* op. cit., Book 1 Part 4, Sect 6, p. 258.
- [27] BUTLER, JOSEPH.: *The Analogy of Religion* op. cit., App 1, p. 321.
- [28] HUME, DAVID.: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, op. cit., Book 1 Part 4, Sect 6, pp. 251-252.
- [29] SIDER, THEODORE.: Personal Identity. In: *Riddles of Existence: A Guided Tour of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005, pp. 1-21.
- [30] SIDER, THEODORE.: Personal Identity op. cit., p.13.
- [31] HUME, DAVID.: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, op. cit., Book 1 Part 4, Sect 6, pp. 251-252.
- [32] Ibid., p. 253.
- [33] Ibid., p. 259.
- [34] It should be noted here that Hume himself does not mention loose and popular nor strict and philosophical identity by name, but speaks about what he calls "perfect identity" (T. 1. 4. 6. SBN 254). It is hard to say whether Hume would agree to there being two senses of identity. The type of perfect identity Hume describes in *Treaties* seems similar to what Butler would call a strict and philosophical sense of identity.
- [35] OLSON, ERIC T.: An Argument for Animalism. In: *Personal Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003b, p. 323
- [36] CHISHOLM, RODERIC M.: *Person and Object: A Metaphysical Study*. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company 1976.
- [37] Ibid., p. 40
- [38] There may be multiple reasons as to why the language we use differ from the ontology Hume lays out. Unfortunately there is no space for such a discussion.
- [39] Ibid., p. 41

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