

LOCKE ON PERSONAL IDENTITY: THE FORM OF THE SELF

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In line with the empiricist project, Locke tries to describe how unconscious encounters with environment yield to the emergence of consciousness. For Locke the self is identical with consciousness and consciousness is accessible empirically. As far as the identity of human is concerned, identity of the self depends on the consciousness of the person. The person is identical to himself to the extent that he is aware of his own perceptions and thinking. The range of the person's memory sets the limits of consciousness. According to Locke, consciousness is an element that accompanies all acts of thinking including act of recollection. Such accompanying consciousness constitutes the form of the identity of the self, whereas memory-ideas may be considered the content of consciousness. Therefore, it is this formal constitutive element that provides constancy of the idea of the self. If so, then it can be claimed that Locke's approach to the question of the self results in admitting the truth of what he intends to reject and it is self-defeating; this is to say that, Locke's methodology pushes him to adopt a Platonic-Aristotelian formal theory of identity in general and of personal identity in particular.

Keywords: Personal identity – Self – Consciousness – Memory – Form – Content – Essence

Both in the metaphysical and epistemological spheres, Locke fought on two main fronts. On the one hand, he had to deal with the remnants of Scholastic Aristotelianism. On the other hand, along with Newton's *Principia*, he addressed the issues which later came to be known as the battle between rationalists and empiricists. He dealt with Neo-Platonist epistemology that had been elaborated by the mechanistic approaches of Cartesians; the latter viewed knowledge in terms of a match between human and divine ideas (McCann 1999, 63, 84).

According to Locke, we are furnished with the ideas through experience and we form our knowledge via experience too. Experience is that upon which 'all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself' (Locke 1975, 104). Mind is determined from within itself, yet the determination it brings about cannot be called innate, because such a development happens as a reaction to externally based impressions, and this is how the mind becomes aware of itself for the first time. There are two aspects of reality toward which experience is directed: the external, sensible objects and the internal operations of the mind. For Locke, there is no qualitative difference between the knowledge of external things that is based upon sense data and the knowledge and the awareness of mind (the self) that is founded upon the so-called operations of this mind. Commenting on the experimental nature of knowledge according to empiricism Yolton states: *The*

empiricist program has been designed to show that all conscious experience 'come from' unconscious encounters with environment, and that all intellectual contents (concepts, ideas) derive from some conscious experimental component. (1963/1968, 40)

Locke's claim is directly opposed to the Cartesian argument that the sensations that are caused by a piece of melting wax require interpretation by the intellect via the innate, non-sensory idea of matter. Another important difference between Locke and Descartes is the conception of our awareness of the operations of our minds (i.e., self-reflection). According to Descartes we can have explicit access to such innate ideas (such as substance, duration, etc.) through self-reflection. For Locke, by contrast, self-reflection is simply a part of experience.

External experience, i.e., sensations or sense data, has a logical as well as physical priority over self-reflection, or the mind's awareness of its own operations. Self-awareness follows from, and comes after, the impressions that are imposed upon the human mind by external entities. The concepts of the mind arising from self-reflection are not innate, but are the consequences of the ideas of the external things that are printed upon the mind starting from birth (Locke 1975, 106). Humans become aware of the outside world, i.e., they form ideas based upon sense data prior to becoming conscious of their inner impressions. They become aware of the external sensations prior to the operations of their minds, which include contemplation. Self-awareness, therefore, requires that the mind be acquainted with the world of objects that are the exterior activity and the affections of the mind. Mind has to operate externally so that the consciousness of such operations arises later.¹

Locke's criticism of the Cartesian identification between soul and thinking anticipates the Kantian notion of the transcendental self (i.e., that awareness which always accompanies the "I think"). He is aware that the soul cannot think perpetually, just as it cannot perceive so. The relation between the soul and thinking and between the soul and perceiving is not similar to the relation between the body and extension, where extension is the essence of spatiality. Rather, it is like the relation between the body and motion. (Apparently, Locke identifies motion with mechanical displacement only.) "The perception of the *Ideas* being to the soul, what motion is to the body, not its Essence, but one of its Operations" (Locke 1975, 107). The soul is not always active just as body is not always in a perpetual state of motion. To be (a person) is not to think but to be conscious of one's thoughts (as well as one's perceptions and other operations of the mind). Contrary to Descartes, Locke distinguishes between existence and the state of being conscious of all that exist.

Locke further argues that human cannot think without being conscious of it. Our being sensible is necessary to our thoughts. What is essential to mind's existence is its awareness that accompanies the act of thinking. This accompanying consciousness is pre-

¹ The soul does not think before senses have furnished it with ideas to think on. The mind first and foremost is involved with situations caused by external objects. The mind employs itself in these operations which can be called perceptions, remembering, consideration, reasoning, etc. (Locke 1975, 117).

sent not only when one thinks, but also when passions and emotions are at work, as it is the case when one feels happiness or sorrow. If the element of consciousness is ignored, we come to the odd conclusion that a man who sleeps is different than the same man while awake. This is to say that, removing consciousness amounts to loss of personal identity: "For if we take wholly away all Consciousness of our Actions and Sensations; Especially of Pleasure and Pain, and the concernment that accompanies it, it will be hard to know wherein to place personal Identity" (Locke 1975, 110). Obviously, personal identity, for Locke, is related to consciousness. The question to ask, then, is what is consciousness? To this Locke answers, "Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a Man's own mind" (1975, 115).

Two great actions of mind are perception or thinking and volition or willing. Locke calls the power of thinking "understanding." Thinking and perceiving are identical. Therefore, understanding, fundamentally, is passive (Locke 1975, 128). Perception of simple ideas is indispensable; mind cannot avoid it. "In the reception of simple Ideas, the Understanding is for the most part passive" (Locke 1975, 118). It cannot refuse to be imprinted by ideas of the objects just a mirror cannot help but reflecting images of what is set opposite to it. Understanding can make new complex ideas to an almost infinite variety out of simple ones. Yet, it is not able to produce from within itself one single simple idea or to destroy them (Locke 1975, 120). Perception is the first faculty of mind that exercised about our ideas. It is the first and simplest idea we have of reflection, and may be called "thinking" in general. Perception happens *in* the mind (Locke 1975, 143) and is the faculty that distinguishes animals from other "inferior" parts of nature, e.g. plants, vegetables. It is in some degree in all sorts of animals (Locke 1975, 147).

The Lockean consideration of the process of thinking suggests that the mind is not a ready-made substance that has certain properties and/or qualifications. Rather, it appears to be an entity that evolves toward a process of understanding. It is by permanent proximity of mind to sense data that the mind starts to distinguish the familiar from the non-familiar. Through continuous contact with sense data, a person forms the idea of objects and of other people by receiving their impressions upon his mind. At the level of experiencing external objects and simple ideas then, the mind is passive (Locke 1975, 118).² It is through awareness of this external source of knowledge that humans form a second source, namely self-reflection as awareness of the operations of the mind. In this latter case, the mind is not only affected but is active.³

² H. H. Pierce writes: "[It is] historically false that the empiricists thought the human mind passive. It would be more just to criticize them for making it more active than it can possibly be" (*Thinking and Experience*, p. 199, note1, quoted at Yolton 1963/1968, 41).

³ "Locke has shown how all ideas arise *after* experience, that is after the organism has encountered the environment and been stimulated into neurophysiological and mental activity." He never "claimed that ideas arise in the organism in the absence of mental operations, (although some ideas) require relatively few and simple mental operations" (Yolton 1963/1968, 48-9). However, Yolton's consideration of activity of mind is problematic and distorts Locke's approach to passivity and activity of the mind. Passivity of the mind, according to Locke, does not correspond to lack of neurophysiological activities, just

Memory is essential in acquisition of knowledge. “Memory is the storehouse or our ideas” (Locke 1975, 150). Memory is the awareness of ideas by virtue of repeating and fixing them in the mind. Yet memories are in a constant process of dissolution and weakening, and unless the mind has ideas repeatedly impressed upon it, it will lose them (Locke 1975, 151). Since Locke ends up relating personal identity to consciousness and to memory, it is possible to say that, if understanding is not repeatedly presented with the idea of self-identity, it would lose this idea.

To understand what personal identity consists in, we must understand what the word “person” designates. A person is a “thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places” (Locke 1975, 335). This he does only with consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking; indeed, it is essential to it. We are our own selves through the knowledge, that is, the awareness or consciousness of our acts of perception and sensation. The question here is not whether the self resides in the same or in different substances, because, the core of personal identity is consciousness. “A person is a single center of consciousness” (Atherton 1983, 274). The limit of such an identity is as far as the memory of a person can reach back in time. As far as it can reach to those thoughts and feelings of the past, so become these same thoughts and feelings part of personal identity; and so in this way the person as he was in the past is one with the person as he is in the present.

However, the question may be raised that no one ever has a complete memory of his past; therefore one’s personal identity is subject to being interrupted due to such lack of completeness. This question, however, tends to equate personal identity with the substantial thinking thing, hence falls short of understanding the nature of personal identity. As was mentioned earlier, according to Locke, personal identity does not consist in substance, be it matter or mind, but in consciousness (and memory) (Locke 1975, 336). Although Locke uses the terms “memory” and “consciousness” interchangeably, we should be aware that there is a difference between the two.⁴ It is not thinking which makes me the self that I am; thought is not the essence of self. It was mentioned earlier that, for Locke,

as the mind’s activity does not simply mean the presence of such processes. The mind’s passivity, with regard to initial experiences that involve external objects, signifies lack of consciousness and not lack of mental activity. Yolton fails to distinguish between different senses in which Locke has used the word “idea.” Locke’s notion of idea stands not only for sensory items but also for intellectual items namely thoughts or concepts. This is not an ambiguity; rather Locke “holds as a matter of theory that the mental items that come into mind, raw, in sense perception are – after a certain kind of processing – the very items that constitute the basic materials of thinking, believing, and the like” (Bennett 1994, 91).

⁴ Antony Flew suggests a similar point, yet he draws a different consequence from it; he maintains, “consciousness is not used by Locke clearly and constantly” (1951/1968, 159). On the contrary, he claims that mainly consciousness is equal to memory and remembrance. However, such a reading is reductionist and cannot give a full account of Locke’s response to the question of personal identity. There are numerous instances where Locke uses the term “consciousness” in a completely different sense than what the term ‘memory’ signifies. For instance, “[t]hinking consists in being conscious that one thinks’ where ‘Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a Man’s own Mind” (Locke 1975, 115).

thinking is an activity of the mind. Memory, too, is another form of mind's activity; it is the recurrence of ideas without perception, since it is a mode of thinking. Consciousness, on the other hand, is that which accompanies thinking. It represents the state of awareness with regard to the operations of the mind.⁵ Locke states: "It being impossible for anyone to perceive, without perceiving that he does perceive" (1975, 335).⁶ Hence, consciousness should accompany the act of remembering, too.⁷ As Hegel states, "Locke maintains thought to be existent in consciousness as conscious thought, and thus brings it forward as a fact in his experience, that we do not always think" (Hegel 1995, 305).

Locke also discusses against attributing identity of the person to the body of that person. Body, he states, is in constant flux, and if body was the principle of identity of person then it would be impossible for a man to be the same man two moments together (Locke 1975, 111). This is further evidence that consciousness, as the principle of the identity of person, is a formal principle in contrast to particles that compose a body and in contrast to memory-ideas as content of consciousness.

Reducing consciousness to mere memory-ideas results in forcing Locke to go back to a position he is critical of, namely, identification of mind with its contemplative activity, be it thought or memory. The accompanying consciousness can be formulated as the general form of the mind's activities in contrast to the content of the mind's operations. As Yolton says, "[t]o be aware is to be aware of some content of the mind" (Yolton 1963/1968, 43). In the case of memory, the memory-ideas form the content and the consciousness of the existence of such ideas is what makes possible the apprehension of such ideas as memory-ideas. "Consciousness always accompanies thinking, and 'tis that, that makes everyone to be, what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things" (Locke 1975, 335).

Locke argues that memory is next to perception (thinking) in its importance for an intelligent being (1975, 153). If we were only limited to ideas present to us in the moment we would not be able to produce knowledge beyond the scope of the given. There is also a parallel between perception (thinking) and retention: Locke argues that consciousness, and not thinking, is the essence of human mind and person. He argues against the Cartesian thinking thing and emphasizes that humans do not perpetually think. Therefore, if the identity of the person is not to be considered discontinuous, then not thinking but some other aspect should be considered to be the essence of personhood. This essence happens

⁵ "It also is clear that sameness of consciousness is the basic relation making the personal identity, and that memory has its special role to play in personal identity *only because* of its connection with sameness of consciousness" (McCann 1999, 76, italics added).

⁶ "One is conscious of one's current self by being conscious of what is now thinking and doing. This does not in any way involve memory" (McCann 1999, 77).

⁷ McCann's formulation of Lock's theory of personal identity suggests a reading that runs parallel to mine. In the case of plants and animals the notion of life serves as the principle that organizes the parts as the causal basis of the living thing. In the case of personal identity, consciousness serves as such a principle: "Simply put, consciousness is the life of the persons. Less simply put, consciousness makes for personal identity in just the way life makes for animal or vegetable identity" (McCann 1999, 75-6).

to be consciousness. To the extent that memory is concerned, memory-ideas, akin to perception or thinking, therefore cannot be considered constituent essence of personality. Rather, they should be considered to be the content that fills in consciousness, since they are secondary ideas of formerly acquainted things or performed actions.

Moreover, Locke states that animals such as birds have perception alongside memory, that is, the ability of retaining ideas (1975, 154). So be the case, we can judge that to the extent that memory-ideas are concerned, memory makes the content of personal identity. If personal identity were derivable from this content, then we would have to attribute personality to birds and animals with perception and retention. This content, however, is subject to change and does not essentially determine personality. Rather, it is consciousness that accompanies acts of perception, thinking, and retention that forms the essence of personal identity.

Therefore, it is the constancy and identity of the form of memory, i.e., the continuity of consciousness that provides the constancy of self-identity. "Locke's idea of what preserves personal identity can be understood simply in terms of consciousness by interpreting this as playing a role analogous to life for an organism" (Atherton 1983, 283). Hence, the change in the content of memory cannot result in the disappearance of personal identity. That a "philosophizing" cat is a cat, be it an intelligent one, and not a person is further evidence showing that Locke differentiates between the content and form of consciousness.⁸ Thus, Reid's criticism of Locke, which tries to show that the unavoidable fluctuation of memory would result in the dissolution of identity of the self, heads in the wrong direction, since it has not taken the difference between form and content of memory into account (Reid 1785/1975, 109-110). Reid's syllogism misses the point by reducing consciousness to mere memory-ideas. It is true that what the person remembers at one moment might be different from what that person will remember at another. However, what is constant and what keeps the identity of a person continuous, is not *what* he remembers but the fact that he is *conscious* that *he* remembers. Each and every time a person recalls something the conscious "I," the general name for the self,⁹ accompanies this activity of the mind.

Personal identity can subsist in different substances as long as it carries the same consciousness.¹⁰ The substance might change over time, yet the person would be the same

⁸ This formality is also evident in case of "man" that signifies the organic unity that serves the continuation of the same life: The idea of man, to which the term "man" is attributed, 'is nothing else but an animal of such a certain *Form*' (Locke 1975, 333, italics added).

⁹ Locke clearly states that "[p]erson is the name for the self" (1975, 346).

¹⁰ "The identity of substance is not required for identity in every case" (Noonan 1978, 345). Therefore, Butler's criticism against Locke misses the point since he suggests substantial sameness as the principle that guarantees identity of the person and supposes that Locke's account of personal identity works upon the same supposition. Butler infers that consciousness of being the same *person* is consciousness of being the same *substance*, or the same property of a substance, where, in the latter case, the constancy and sameness of the property is the sign of constancy and sameness of the substance. The substance of the self, for Butler, is something like the truth, pure and permanent, and perhaps it is the soul. For details, see Butler's "Of Personal Identity" reprinted in *Personal Identity*, ed. John Perry, 99-105.

person given the continuous consciousness of his own personality.

Personal identity reaches no further than consciousness reaches. Even if the supposedly immaterial substance or soul of a Socrates or a Plato is claimed to be residing in someone's mind, still personal identity will be limited to those acts and memories presented to the consciousness of this person. "As far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the identity of the *person*" (Locke 1975, 335). The reason for this is that the acts of consciousness are attached to individual agents and there is always a reflexive aspect to such activities. Since reflexivity is a mode of experience for Locke, such acts of consciousness should always be accompanied by personal acts of perception. Only those activities are part of my personal identity that are part of my personal experience, whether they be reflexive or object oriented perceptions. Those activities, to which I do not have access, even if they are my own activities, do not partake in the formation of personal identity.

Soul or the immaterial substance alone cannot make the same man; yet consciousness unites the experiences and the existences remote in time and space into the same person. Therefore "whatever has the consciousness of present and past actions, is the same person to whom they both belong" (Locke 1975, 340). The self depends on consciousness. Since it is the unity of past and present existence and experiences, it is subject to pain and pleasure, happiness and misery. "Self is that conscious thinking thing, which is sensible, or conscious of Pleasure and Pain, Capable of Happiness or Misery, and so is concerned for it self, as far as that consciousness extends" (Locke 1975, 341). Consciousness joins the body and the soul and forms the person. The self-consciousness of that person will result in his selfhood. The limit of the self is the limit of consciousness. Therefore, whatever is in the reach of consciousness, be it in the past or present, is a part of the person.

Loss of memory results in loss of identity; yet one should be aware that the absence of memory does not correspond to the absence of the content of memory-ideas. Memory is in fact subject to constant fluctuation. However, regardless of this, we still speak of the identity of a person as being continuous and constant. Rather, loss of memory indicates loss of consciousness; it is a symptom of being in the state of unconsciousness. Locke's example regarding juridical practices that may exempt the madman from being punished, and furthermore, the English expression, 'one is not himself' are in agreement with such an interpretation. Earlier in his *Essay* Locke speaks of the madman as being someone who makes incorrect inferences and incorrect propositions. He suggests that the madman maintains his identity although the content of his mind is confused whereas, with respect to the idiot, the identity is non-existent. What the English expression suggests is not a literal lack of memory but a lack of consciousness, or a lack of access to the content of the mind, which is a sign of lack of communication between the content of the consciousness, that is, the memory-ideas, the acts and habits of the person, and the person himself. Regardless of being related to some immaterial substance, consciousness determines personal identity. Hence, the diversity and identity of selves does not result from the diversity of substances, but it is determined only by identity of consciousness. Consequently, any substance that is united within the vital unity of our consciousness is a part of our selves.

Upon the separation of man and his consciousness, that is to say, the moment that he is not communicating with his consciousness, the latter is no longer a part of the self. It follows that “person” signifies the very conscious self that exists now.

Where ever a man finds, what he calls himself, there I think another may say is the same person. It is a Forensic Term appropriating Actions and their Merit; and so belongs only to intelligent Agents capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery. (Locke 1975, 346)

Locke’s formulation of experience is limited and restricted.¹¹ He shares the opinion that perceiving is, in one way or another, having a duplicate image of something that enters into the mind. Locke states, “Our senses, conversant about particular sensible Objects, do convey into the Mind, several distinct Perceptions of things.... [T]hey from external objects convey to the mind what produces there those perceptions” (Locke 1975, 105).

Although the mind is active when forming complex ideas, yet, in the most general way and on a larger scale, it is passive. The mind simply obeys the orderliness and regulations that are dictated to it by rules of objectivity, as applicable to physical entities. According to Hegel, Locke takes both the particular and the individual as his principle (1995, 296). Locke takes existence as individual – be it the object or the self – as granted. His method tends to show how substantiality results from subjective, individual perceptions of objects. Lockean experience does not apply concepts to or reflect them onto objectivity; on the contrary, concepts are simply to be derived from a multitude of singular experiences. For Locke, to know something by experience, ideally, means to know, to perceive, to conceive, or to get acquainted with every single instance of that thing. Locke does not regard the active, willful aspect of experience. He simply relies on the empirical.¹² The question is: how do we come to conceptualize individual, distinct experiences as being experience as such?

Although Locke distinguishes experience from abstraction, yet both rely on the senses, i.e., on the impressions that are imprinted on the mind from outside. Simple ideas

¹¹ Yolton suggests that there is an “extended concept of experience” to be found in Locke, which covers both sensation and introspection. Apparently, if such an extended picture is accepted, then the claim that the Lockean notion of experience is limited does not hold. However, in the Lockean framework, most of the ideas that are formed out of experience in its extended sense should be traced back to encounters with the physical environment. As Yolton admits “consciousness for Locke arises out of unconscious encounters with the environment, *but not all mental contents are traceable to some experiential component*” (1963/1968, 50, emphasis added). It is in this sense that Locke’s notion of experience is limited and restricted, since it reduces experience to the organism’s encounter with the physical environment and leaves no room to include other intellectual activities such as thought experiments, reading fiction, etc.

¹² I am thankful to Pinar Sumer who brought this general shortcoming of the empiricist conception of experience – which is widely borne out by common sense too – into my attention. Cowley, similarly, speaks of this defective feature of empiricism: “Empiricists have discussed at length how sense-experience should be spoken of and described, and have distinguished the meanings of terms in which we do so, but remarkably few have discussed our sense-experience of language, and this is intimately connected with the fact that, from Hume to Ayer, the sense-experience they discuss is over-whelmingly visual.... Our sense-experience, on this view, does not include our hearing funny stories, threats, songs, voices like saws, loving murmurs, or witty remarks” (1968, 150).

come directly and immediately from sense-impressions; complex ones, on the other hand, come from the operations of the mind. Complex ideas express something in the thing that is experienced yet they cannot completely exhaust it. Locke proposes that we do not know the essence of things that is supposed to be reflected in simple ideas; what we do know is the form of the things that are inferred from the nominal essence of things, which is mediated through complex ideas. Locke's major concern, as Hegel expresses, is "to describe the *manner* in which thought accepts what is given to it" (1995, 310); Locke deals with the forms of attaining knowledge, i.e., his major concern is to attain the forms of the things.

While considering the complex ideas of substances, Locke deals with the question concerning the cohesion (amalgamation) of certain primary qualities that form particular substances. He considers ideas of corporeal and incorporeal substances, that is, ideas of matter and spirit. What is inherent in his discussion is that there is a particular form of cohesion of certain parts or qualities that form a complex, which we apprehend as a substance. It is a particular form of composition of corpuscles that identify a substance as a unique substance differentiable from others. That is the reason he is at pains to answer the question "what is the intelligible cause of the cohesion of the solid parts of the matter?" (1975, 309) According to Locke, whatever keeps these particles together should be a factor that is external to the body. Thus writes Locke, "If matter be finite, it might have its Extremes; and there must be something to hinder it from scattering asunder" (1975, 311).

A similar line of reasoning is followed when Locke considers spirit, which he takes to be the substance that has active powers. Thinking and power to act are the two fundamental qualities of spirit. Similar to the case of unknowability of the cohesion of parts of corporeal things, we do not know how qualities of thinking and power to act cohere in order to form the substance of spirit. Moreover, the supposition of plausibility of the claim about the existence of an incorporeal substance, which can think and will, alongside the assertion of two substances, i.e., matter and spirit, implies the idea that human being is a composition of these two substances. This implies that humanity, at a substantial level, is the cohesion of matter and spirit. How these two substances come to cohere? Perhaps, coherency requires that we assert such cohesion to be the result of some external factor.

Locke's formalism resonates in his consideration of the notion of personal identity. What makes the identity is the form of the thing in question. What makes a bridge is the form of the bridge that perhaps may be named 'bridge-ness,' so is the case with the identity of plants and animals (as the organization of the parts towards nourishing and conserving the whole).¹³ The formation of an oak, from the time it is a seed to the point it

¹³ Locke's formalism is in agreement with the *structural* character of mechanistic explanation of natural phenomena. Mechanical philosophers, and Locke, whose explanations of certain phenomena may be considered mechanical in loose sense of the term, rejected the Aristotelian idea of immaterial "substantial forms" as unintelligible. The form of material bodies, in mechanistic view, is a function of the relation between its components. "This is to say, the characteristics and behavior of a complex natural entity are to be explained by pointing to its composition – its constituent parts, their makeup, and their behavior" (Shapin 1996, 56). However, as Shapin, following Alan Gabbey, maintains, it is dubious whether mechanical philosophers could really offer anything different from, and inherently more intelli-

becomes a tree, indicates that there exists a form of this particular oak tree regardless of its age, which is reflected in the perception of the organization of it.¹⁴ In the case of personal identity, the form is represented by consciousness that accompanies thought and other operations of the mind. Locke is successful in rejecting the existence of innate ideas; however, his own methodology pushes him toward adopting a Platonic-Aristotelian position with regard to the question of identity.¹⁵ In contrast to Kant who refers the existence of the forms, including the form of consciousness, to the transcendental self, Locke does not supply any explanation about the origin of these forms. It seems that, unless he admits their independent existence, this question must remain unanswered.

Identity of corporeal substance, according to Locke consists in the organization of its constituting particles. Identity of plants consists in the organization of its different parts in order to continue the individual life. He asks, "For example, what is a watch? 'Tis plain 'tis nothing but a fit organization, or construction of parts, to a certain *end*, which, when a sufficient force is added to it, it is capable to attain" (1975, 331, emphasis added).

Identity of man requires an identical body. As for personal identity, Locke openly subordinates it to consciousness and also maintains that this consciousness should accompany any act of thinking and perception.

[A person] is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seems to me essential to it: It being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving that he does perceive. (Locke 1975, 335)

Locke further argues that whether the substance of the person that is claimed to be identical with itself undergoes change or not is irrelevant to question of personal identity. It is obvious that consciousness is interrupted, for instance, by deep sleep, by drugs, or by forgetting past memories. However, Locke dismisses these cases because they are related

gible than Aristotelian explanations of natural phenomena: "The phenomena to be explained [by mechanical philosophers] were caused by entities whose structures were such that they caused the phenomena. Previously [as it was conceived by Aristotelians], opium sent you to sleep because it had a particular dormitive quality: now it sent you to sleep because it had a particular corpuscular micro-structure that acted on your physiological structures in such a way that it sent you to sleep" (Shapin 1996, 57).

¹⁴ "Although Locke's notions of substance and matter are so manifestly unaristotelian, something like Aristotle's *substantial form* holds a prominent place in his thought, at least with respect to living creatures" (Noonan 1978, 344). However, I believe that such substantial forms are traceable back to material (non-living) structures, as is the case of a bridge whose parts are constantly replaced.

¹⁵ Antony Flew introduces a number of sources of Locke's mistake in formulating the personal identity. The fifth source of his mistake, says Flew, is "the assumption that there is some real essence of personal identity, that it is possible to produce a definition and a definition furthermore which can guard us against every threat of future linguistic indecision" (1951/1968, 178). Earlier Flew suggests that the root of such a mistake is Locke's "Platonic-Cartesian conviction that people essentially are incorporeal spirits" and that Locke "takes for granted that people are souls; which, presumably, conceivably could thus transmigrate" (1951/1978, 169).

not to identity of the person but to identity of the substance, which always thinks in the person. The identity of person consists in organization of parts – body and soul – the unity of which is provided by consciousness. This is similar to the case with uniting different bodies – different organs and chemicals – into one and the same animal life. In the latter, the continuation of the same life is responsible for the continuation of the same animal identity; in the former the continuation of consciousness makes the man the same self to himself (Locke 1975, 336). So be the case, we can propose that consciousness, as the external unifying and identifying factor responsible for the production of the idea of the self and personal identity is a formal or structural principle. Similarly, organization toward continuation of the same animal life is a formal principle. Consciousness is the element of unification of past and present actions and existences so that the identity of person is constructed (Locke 1975, 340).

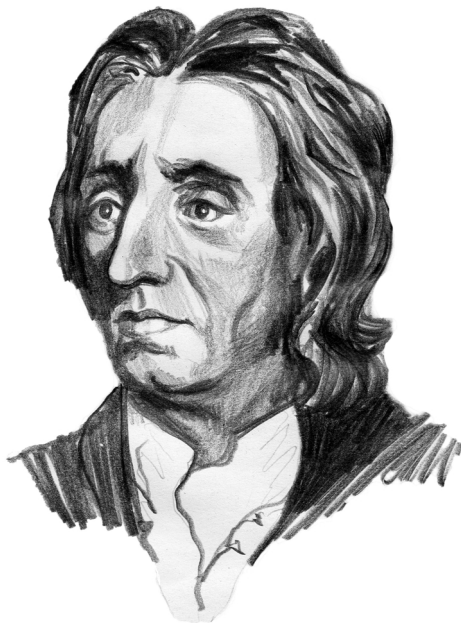
One may intend to reject attribution of formality to identity in Locke's framework by reference to the notion of "real essence." This amounts to reformulating the thesis about identity in general, as "what makes the identity of a thing is the real essence of that thing." A close reading of Locke's discussion about nominal and real essences and their relation will show such a reformulation implausible.

According to Locke abstract ideas are the essences of sorts (1975, 414). These ideas are made by understanding. Understanding observes the similitude among things, makes the abstractions, sets the general ideas in mind, and annexes names to them as patterns or forms. The particular things agree to these forms are thus classified. General names are united with particular things through the mediation of these abstract ideas or the nominal essences (Locke 1975, 415).

Elaborating on the relation between nominal and real essences Locke states, It having been more than once doubted, whether the fetus born of a woman were a *man*, even so far, as it hath been debated, whether it were, or weren't to be nourished and baptized: which could not be, if the abstract *idea* or essence, to which the name man belonged, were of nature's making; and were not the uncertain and various collection of simple ideas, which the understanding puts together, and then abstracting it, affixed a name to it. So that in truth *every distinct abstract idea, is a distinct essence*: and the names that stand for such distinct *ideas*, are the names of things essentially different. (1975, 416)

What makes a man, man is the nominal essence of man. That is, man is man because it has to right to the name man. In other words, the nominal essence *is* the thing that makes a particular thing that particular thing, at least to the extent that the genus of things is concerned. One may argue that nominal essences determine only the class of things and not the particular, individual entities, which are those particular things due to their real essences. If Locke maintains such a view, his argument becomes tautological. Applied to case of personal identity it becomes something like this: the nominal essence of personality or personhood determines me as a person meaning that I belong to the class of those beings who have the right to the name (general term) person. Whereas, what makes me this particular individual person is my particular personality, that is my particular consciousness. This means that my particular consciousness is the consciousness of particular

acts and experiences. If we stop at this point we do not state anything but that what makes me the person that I am is the person that I am. Or what makes my consciousness this particular consciousness is this particular consciousness. What makes these particular acts and deeds these particular acts and deeds are these particular acts and deeds. Locke definitely does not want to stop at this point, since he already maintains that limiting ourselves to particularities does not contribute to knowledge. In other words, limiting ourselves to particularities we will not be able to learn the essence of things that are responsible for the features and characteristics peculiar to those things.



John Locke

Moreover, while discussing different meanings of the word essence, Locke clearly states that the idea of “real essence” corresponds simply to the presence of the thing: The word essence is sometimes used in order to signify “the real internal, but generally in substances, unknown constitution of things, whereon their discoverable qualities depend.” He further states, “Essentia, in its primary notation signifying properly being” (1975, 417). Locke also discusses that in case of parcels of matter the real and the nominal essences are obviously different. The real essence of things is unknown to us since it depends on “the real constitution of its insensible parts” (1975, 419). However, the properties of parcels of matter that we know, the very nominal ones that we have particular ideas of them, make them to be what they are, or give the right to their names. The right to the name that follows from applica-

tion of nominal essence resonates in the thesis that “personal identity is a forensic term.”

The idea of inalterability of essences in contrast to mutations and changes in particular entities also is further evidence that the consciousness responsible for the emergence of personal identity cannot be identified with the real essence of the individual person’s particular consciousness. Otherwise, the continuity of the identity of the person to the extent of the scope of consciousness would not make any sense. Locke writes,

Essences being taken for ideas, established in the mind, with names annexed to them, they are supposed to stay steadily the same, whatever mutations the particular substances are liable to. For whatever becomes of *Alexander* or *Bucephalus*, the ideas to which man and horse are annexed, are supposed nevertheless to remain the same; and so the

essences of those species are preserved whole and undestroyed whatever changes happen to any or all of the individuals of those species. (1975, 419)

One may still claim that the nominally essential consciousness that produces personal identity is responsible for the production of the genus of personally identical entities or persons. In other words, that it is the genus of personal identity that is produced by this nominal essence. What about the particular person and his/her particular personal identity? The answer is that Locke prioritizes the existence of the genus over the particular, thus the existence of the nominal essence over the real essence: “The essence of a species rests safe and entire, without the existence of so much as one individual of that kind” (1975, 419).

Personal identity is a relation. Name of relations are made arbitrarily, since the idea of relations is often before the existence. Although the complex ideas of modes are made arbitrarily, yet they are so made in order to serve the purposes of the mind the best. “Though these complex *ideas* be not always copied from nature, yet they are always suited to the end for which the abstract *ideas* are made” (Locke 1975, 431). These ideas are always made for convenience in communication.

Complex ideas are made by mind and do not represent any such things as real essences of things. Moreover, names of complex ideas are the knots that keep these particular ideas connected. So be the case, given that personal identity is a complex idea, the word “person” or the “self” is that nominal essence that ties a complex of ideas that collectively represent the self or personality.

Sometimes, in case of corporeal substances, although the nominal essence is made by mind, the combined ideas seem to have some sort of supposed union in nature, i.e., they look as species whether the mind name them or not. Yet, Locke states.

But in mixed modes, at least the most considerable parts of them, which are moral beings, we consider the original patterns, as being in the mind; and to those we refer for the distinguishing of particular beings under names. And hence I think it is, that these essences of the species of mixed modes, are by a major particular name called notions; as by a peculiar right, appertaining to the understanding. (1975, 436)

Although one may discuss that “man” can be thought as a real essence – since it correspond to some corporeal being – the term person definitely does not refer to any such real essence. Even the claim that “man” represents some real essence of man may also be rejected on the ground that “man” is also a complex idea.¹⁶ Locke openly states that in

¹⁶ Locke states that the term “man” stands for a complex idea that structures voluntary motion, sense, reason, and a particular shape (form) of the body. He also states that this term signifies the nominal essence and not the real essence of man: “yet no body will say, that that complex idea is the real essence and source of all those operations which are to be found in any individual of that sort” (1975, 439-40). He also states, “To say, that a rational animal is capable of conversation, is all one, as to say, a man” (1975, 450). This is further evidence that “man” signifies not a simple substance but a complex idea or a nominal substance, which is denominated by a name. See also §33, 1975, 460.) However, he emphasizes that real essences are unknowable to human reason (also see §9, 1975, 444). In case that we had the knowledge of real essence of man “our idea of any individual man would be so far different from what it

case of mixed modes and relations it is very likely that the nominal and real essences are the same: “the name of mixed modes always signifie (when they have any determined signification) the real essence of their species... and so in these the real and nominal essence is the same” (1975, 436-7).

Although Locke overtly subordinates man and its referring complex idea to its real essence, yet, his use of clock analogy (1975, 440), which has been so dear to mechanical philosophers, clearly relates the “real essence” to some formal structure, a formal organization or unity of separate parts, which in principle are unknown to humans. Moreover, it raises the question about the make of an individual member of a sort or species. What, for instance, makes this particular man this very man? Reference to real essence that is principally unknown leaves us with an answer that renders to something like “it is the individual make or structure of the invisible parts of that man that makes him that particular man.” If the emphasis is put on “individual” this answer will not be more than a mere tautology. To avoid such redundancy the “structure” is to be emphasized. So be the case, follows Locke’s statement, That essence, in the ordinary use of the word, relates to sorts, and that it is considered in particular beings, no farther than as they are ranked into sorts, appears from hence: That take but way the abstract ideas, by which we sort individuals, and rank them under common names, and then thought of any thing essential to any of them, instantly vanishes: we have no notion of the one, without the other: which plainly shews their relation. (1975, 440)

Locke further argues against the fruitlessness of such a tautological approach when maintaining that the internal constitution of a substance or its real essence is not responsible for the specific difference that differentiates an individual member of a species from other members of that sort.

[O]nly we have reason to think, that where the faculties, or outward frame so much differs, the internal constitution is not exactly the same: But, what difference in the internal real constitution makes a specifick difference, it is in vain to enquire; whilst *our measure of species* be, as they *are*, only *our abstract* ideas, which we know; and not that internal constitution, which makes no part of them. (1975, 451)

If one claims, what makes a specific “I” or an individual is the specific experiences this “I” or individual has she should resolve two difficulties: in concordance to Locke’s framework, what unifies this specific experiences, which allegedly yield to this individual is the nominal essence of that individual, or the specific name “individual,” “man,” or “person.” Moreover, this nominal essence of “individual” or “specific experiences” has nothing to do with the specific content of these experiences (if the phrase “specific content” is taken to designate something internal to the experience that is independent of the nominal essence of the experience). Locke states, [W]e shall not find the nominal essence of any one species of substances, in all men the same; no not of that, which of all others

now is, as is his, who knows all springs and wheels and other contrivances within, of the famous clock at Strasburg” (1975, 440).

we are the most intimately acquainted with. It could not possibly be, that the abstract idea, to which the name man is given, should be different in several men, if it were the nature's making. (1975, 453)

Unity of substances can also be discussed in light of the unity of corporeal substances. What, for instance, makes this one watch a specific sort different from that clock that supposedly belongs to another sort? Locke states that ordinarily this question is answered with reference to specific internal make or composition of certain parts that belong to these different species. However, he argues, if one has one name for them both then they would belong not to two species but to only one (Locke 1975, 463). Yet the question remains, what designates this particular watch as different from the other, which is similar to it in its make and structure? Perhaps, it is its specific bodily form, that is, the fact that it occupies another space. Although this may answer the question concerning the individuation of the member of a species with reference to some real essence – of course in a tautological way – it does not resolve how this particular member of a species remains as identical to itself in face of, for instance, change of its parts. Moreover, it does not answer how, in an initial state, this particular thing is identified as a particular thing differentiated from others. These questions can only be resolved with reference to complex ideas attached to the species to which these particular individuals belong. Before being *this* man or *that* horse, one should be specified as *man* or *horse*. This is to say that, the name “man” or “horse” as representations of complex ideas of man and horse should be annexed to these entities. Furthermore, if this particular being serves the same structural unity, for instance the same life, or body, or consciousness, then it might be considered specifically different from others and identical to itself.

The essence, in the final analysis, is subordinate to the complex ideas and not something *in* the particular thing. This relation of subordination adds to the formality of the essence. Essence is not something substantial, but something nominal, which also refers to the form of relation between ideas, that is, it signifies how certain simple ideas are structured in order to produce a complex idea or the nominal essence of a thing. In reality, this complex idea or nominal essence is prior to real essence: “None of these [qualities] are essential to the one, or the other, or to any individual whatsoever, till the mind refers to it some sort of species of things; and then presently, *according to the abstract idea of that sort, something is found essential* (Locke 1975, 440, emphasis added).¹⁷

Locke also maintains that categorization of substances takes place only with reference to nominal essences: “Why do we say, this is a horse, and that a mule; this is an animal, that an herb? How comes any particular thing to be of this or that sort, but because it has that nominal essence, or, which is all one, agrees to that abstract idea, that

¹⁷ See also 1975, 441, where Locke discusses how essential is rationality for humanity of a being. Further, Locke states, “That therefore, and *that alone* is considered as *essential, which makes a part of the complex idea the name of a sort stands for*, without which, no particular thing can be reckoned of that sort, nor be intitled to that name” (1975, 441, emphasis original).

name is annexed to?” (1975, 443)¹⁸ The actual individual, then, is actualization of the nominal essence or the complex idea, both in epistemological and ontological sense of the term. Actual individual is subordinate to “sortal” name (Locke’s term) or the abstract idea: what is responsible for the being of an animal is the nominal essence “animal,” which may be rendered to “animality;” or what is responsible for the being of a bridge is the nominal essence “bridge,” or what I call the form “bridge-ness.”¹⁹

When it comes to individual things it is better to speak about “specifick essences” rather than real essences. This to say that, what makes the individual that particular individual is the specific essence, “to which our name belongs, and is convertible with it; by which we may at least try the truth of nominal essence” (Locke 1975, 450). Name is the formal element that is responsible for the formation of the whole – complex idea – that is an external and mechanical unity. “The essence of any thing, in respect of us, is the whole complex *idea*, comprehended and marked by that name; and in substances, besides the several distinct ideas that make them up, the confused one of substance, or of an unknown support and cause of their union, is always a part” (Locke 1975, 450). Name, therefore, is the formal cause or formal factor that is externally annexed to substance and produces the unity of substance.

Locke revolutionizes our understanding of the notion of the self. Perhaps, he is the first thinker that openly intends to reject that objects and subjects are qualitatively different. He is at pains to show dependence of the notion of subjectivity upon representation of external objects that are acquired through sense-impressions. The reality of the self, in this view, is deduced from the fact of its being an object of representation. Moreover, conceptualizing the self as a forensic term is another indication of his general tendency to define selfhood and personal identity as external, objective facts. With Locke the self is posited not as something internal, not as some immediate intimacy but as some totality, which is given through senses, and which is subject to reflexive knowledge, i.e., self-awareness or consciousness.

Yet, in absence of a proper notion of human action and activity along with lack of any reference to the social dimension of the notion of the self, he fails to exploit the potentials that are provided by his non-substantialist inclinations. Thus, he oscillates between two poles of Platonism-Aristotelianism and abstract subjective idealism. Defects of mechanical materialism, as well as abstract approach of subjective idealism to the notion of human activity, which Marx criticizes in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, are detectable in Locke’s theory of personal identity.²⁰ To the extent that Locke is an objectivist regarding

¹⁸ See also §13, 1975, 448.

¹⁹ Locke openly rejects the idea of substantial forms, but his rejection of this idea is epistemological, that is, he rejects such an idea because substantial forms or real essences are, in principle, unknowable and unintelligible (1975, 445). However, this does not exclude the desirability and plausibility of nominal essences, which may be called “sortal forms.”

²⁰ “The main defect of all hitherto-existing materialism — that of Feuerbach included — is that the Object [*der Gegenstand*], actuality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the object [*Objekts*], or of contemplation [*Anschauung*], but not as human sensuous activity, practice [*Praxis*], not subject

the self, that is, to the extent that he defines the self in terms of external impressions, he fails to explain how the notion of self is produced. In other words, to the extent that the mind is defined with reference to sense data and as an objective construct, it is explained as passive and is reduced to simple sensory reactions. Thus, it is an enigma how such a passively formed totality acquires consciousness and is differentiated from other totalities that are formed in reaction to other sense data. For instance, what element differentiates that particular totality, which is called human from another particular totality, such as a dog?

Although, in case of plants and animals, the notion of nutrition as the principle of organization of life functions as an external but non-formal principle of identity, Locke fails to provide any such principle that constitutes personal identity. Therefore, he is obliged to simply assert the existence of such a form, as something objective but ready-made, which in turn pushes him toward Platonism (objective idealism) and Aristotelianism.

On the other hand, to the extent that he emphasizes the subjective element – consciousness – in the formation of the notion of the self, Locke defines human activity as mere sense-activity. This is to say, to the extent that the mind is supposed to be active, all its activity is considered pure sense perception and thus pure contemplation. In such a case the aforementioned empty, objective form acquires some content. Locke, then, becomes susceptible to the criticism that has been put forward by Reid and Butler. Moreover, consciousness that is supposed to accompany the act of “I think” becomes indistinguishable from Cartesian “*cogito*.” So be the case, his criticism of Cartesianism becomes trivial; replacing *cogito* with *consciousness*, i.e., replacing the “I think” with the “I am conscious” appears as an arbitrary replacement. Consequently, Locke is pushed towards Cartesian dualism and idealism.

Unless a socially determined notion of objective human activity is introduced, the aforementioned tension remains unresolved and Locke inevitably oscillates between Platonism and Cartesianism.

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tively. Hence it happened that the active side, in opposition to materialism, was developed by idealism — but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such” (Marx 1845/2002, 3).

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