

LOCKE ON MINDS AND BODIES

REAL ESSENCES vs. NOMINAL ESSENCES

According to Locke our ideas of mind and body refer to the typical set of features they have. He refers to these features as their 'nominal essence.' What they really are, i.e. their 'real essence,' is unknown to us.

Moreover, unlike Descartes, who maintained that x is a body if and only if x is an extended thing, Locke holds only that our *idea* of body implies our *idea* of an extended thing (but there may be extended things which are not bodies—viz. voids.); and also unlike Descartes, who maintained that x is a mind if and only if x is a thinking thing, Locke maintains only that our *idea* of mind is an *idea* of a thinking thing.

“Our idea of body, as I think, is an extended solid substance, capable of communicating motion by impulse. And our idea of soul, as an immaterial spirit, is of a substance that thinks, and has a power of exciting motion in body, by willing or thought.” [p. 317]

PERSONS

PERSONAL IDENTITY

LIFE AFTER DEATH

1. *The Problem of the Nature of Persons: What is a person?*

Locke's worry: Would a parrot who could "reason, discourse, and philosophize" be a person?

And why should the ability to reason matter?

Is the fetus a person?

2. *The Problem of the Personal Identity: What do we mean when we say that a person at one time is the same person as a person at another time?*

Note: This is not a question about a change in personality. We are not asking whether or not a person's personality has changed.

Rather, we want to know whether it is numerically the same person. (Ask, "Is this a case of one person or of two?")

Is Dr. Jekyll today the same person as Mr. Hyde was yesterday?

When someone undergoes a "brain transplant" who are they?

3. *The Problem of Life After Death: Can we survive death?*

Note: We are not asking whether it is likely that a person survive death. We want to know whether or not it is even logically (conceptually) possible.

4. How, if at all, are these problems related to apparently analogous problems about material objects?

<i>Substance Views:</i>	<i>The Nature of Persons</i>	<i>The Nature of Personal Identity</i>	<i>Life After Death</i>
<i>Material Substance Theories:</i>	A person is a living body.	Sameness of person is sameness of body.	Generally speaking, No.
<i>Immaterial Substance Theories:</i>	A person is a soul.	Sameness of person is sameness of soul.	Yes.
<i>Non-Substance Theories:</i>	A person is a collection of person-stages tied together in some way.	Sameness of person is defined in terms of the relation that ties the stages together.	Generally speaking, Yes.

LOCKE ON DIACHRONIC IDENTITY

Locke's Criterion of Identity:

“... one thing cannot have two beginnings of existence, nor two things one beginning, it being impossible for two things of the same kind to be or exist in the same instant, in the same place, or one and the same thing in different places.” [p. 320]

The Identity of Substances:

God: “First, God is without beginning, eternal, unalterable, and everywhere, and therefore concerning his identity there can be no doubt.” [p. 320]

Finite Spirits: “Secondly, finite spirits having had each its determinate time and place of beginning to exist, the relation to that time and place will always determine to each of them its identity, as long as it exists.” [p. 320]

Bodies: “Thirdly, the same will hold of every particle of matter, to which no addition or subtraction of matter being made, it is the same.” [p. 320]

“... though these three sorts of substances, as we term them, do not exclude one another out of the same place, yet we cannot conceive but that they must necessarily each of them exclude any of the same kind out of the same place.” [p. 320]

The Identity of atoms and masses of matter:

Atoms and masses of matter follow the rules above. Thus, in the case of a mass of matter, “... if one of these atoms is taken away, or one new one added, it is no longer the same mass or the same body.” [p. 321]

However, the Identity of living organisms does not consist in this.

“In the state of living creatures, their identity does not depend on a mass of the same particles, but on something else.” [p. 321]

In the case of living organisms their identity depends on “one coherent body partaking of one common life” (or of a fit end).

This holds true of plants, animals, machines, and man.

The Heliogabalus vs. His Hog Case: This shows that the identity of the man does not depend on the identity of his soul.

Trivia: Heliogabalus was a Roman emperor (204-222 AD) who was known for his culinary excesses. For one banquet he had 600 ostrich brains prepared.

LOCKE ON PERSONAL IDENTITY

Puzzle Cases Locke Is Thinking About:

The Parrot Case: If a parrot could reason, discourse and philosophize, would it be a person?

The Twin Case: Why isn't it morally permissible to punish one twin for what the other twin did?

The Socrates Case: Is the person who claims to have been Socrates the same person as Socrates was?

The Prince and the Cobbler Case: Why isn't it morally permissible to punish one twin for what the other twin did?

Resurrection: Can God recreate us?

Locke's Definition of a Person:

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, 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 anyone to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive." [p. 322]

So the aforementioned parrot is a person, according to Locke.

Locke's Definition of Same Person and Its Consequences:

x-at t_1 is the *same person* as y-at- t_2 if and only if y-at- t_2 remembers (or can remember?) what x-at- t_1 did (said, thought, felt, etc.) as what he himself did (said, thought, felt, etc.) at t_1 .

So, in the twin case punishing one twin for what the other twin did is just as wrong as punishing any person for what another did.

In the Socrates case, if the mayor really remembers having done what Socrates did as what he himself did, then, although different substances are involved, he is Socrates. And the same holds true in the Prince and Cobbler case.

Finally, resurrection is presumably possible. All God needs to do is create a person who remembers having done what you did as what he himself did and that is you.

But what about the drunk driver who kills a pedestrian while driving and then claims not to remember having done so? Must the judge let him go?

Locke's answer to this is cute. Since the judge can't tell whether or not the person is lying, he doesn't know which person ran the pedestrian over, so he punishes the man rather than the person. God, however, knows about the person and will decide on that basis.

PROBLEMS WITH LOCKE'S ACCOUNT

Are oak trees and people substances?

In suggesting that sameness of oak tree does not imply sameness of substance Locke seems committed to denying that an oak is a substance.

And why isn't an oak a substance? Evidently because, unlike an atom, its constituents can vary over time.

Compare this with Leibniz's view.

Similarly, in suggesting that sameness of person does not entail sameness of soul, he seems committed to denying that a person is a substance.

Rather, he claims, it is a "forensic" term, and we can now see why.

Yet elsewhere in the *Essay*, Locke has no trouble referring to oaks as substances, and to people as thinking things.

Problems with Locke's Definition of *Same Person*:

x -at- t_1 is the *same person* as y -at- t_2 if and only if y -at- t_2 remembers (or can remember?) what x -at- t_1 did (said, thought, felt, etc.) as what he himself did (said, thought, felt, etc.) at t_1 .

Reid's Gallant Officer Counterexample: On Locke's definition, x -at- t_1 is the same person as y -at- t_2 , and y at t_2 is the same person as z -at- t_3 , yet x -at- t_1 is not the same person as z -at- t_3 . But this violates the view that the identity relation is transitive viz., if $x=y$ and $y=z$, then $x=z$.

The Circularity Problem: The definition seems to be circular at two points. Can you find them?

1. Who does 'he himself' refer to?

2. Real memory seems to be required. But how does real memory differ from apparent memory, except that the former is a memory belief of the same person who had the original experience, while apparent memory is not.

Compare my remembering that I had eggs for breakfast this morning with a hypnotist who hypnotizes me and claims that when I awake I will "remember" having eaten the eggs that you had for breakfast.

Modern Attempts to Revive Locke's Definition:

x-at-t₁ is the same person as y-at-t₂ if and only if y-at-t₂ has an internal memory belief of what x-at-t₁ did (said, thought, etc.) and y's internal memory belief is caused by x-at-t₁'s experience in the right way (i.e., in the way in which veridical memory beliefs are caused by the original experience).

Perhaps we can then overcome Reid's Counterexample by requiring not that y-at-t₂ needs to have an internal memory belief of what x-at-t₁ did but that he have an internal memory belief of doing what some person-stage did which, in turn, has an internal memory belief of what x-at-t₁, and these are caused in the right way.

But there seem to be problems even here.

In John Perry's Brain Transplant Case we are committed to saying that the person who wakes up from the brain transplant claiming to be the person whose brain she has is the same person who had the original experience, and one might wonder whether or not this is the correct solution to the problem.

Moreover, David Parfit has imagined a case where people engage in fusion. Suppose, then that the two people who exist after fusion both have internal memory beliefs caused in the right way of doing what the person before the fusion did. Aren't they both her? Yet they are clearly not the same person as one another.

There is a wonderful article here written by Daniel C. Dennett, entitled “Where am I?” and published in Reason and Responsibility (reprinted from his book Brainstorms, pp.310-323)

My Take on This:

We have two criteria which we use in cases of personal identity: 1) Apparent memory beliefs; 2) Bodily identity. But when these criteria conflict, bodily identity is the criterion of last resort.

BOOK 3

LOCKE'S PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

THE PURPOSE OF BOOK 3

In this book Locke attempts to do two major things:

- 1. He attacks the Aristotelian view that words for natural kinds (abstract ideas) identify essences.**
- 2. He lays the foundations for his claim in *Book 4* that knowledge is possible in mathematics and ethics, but not in metaphysics and the natural sciences.**

**LOCKE'S ACCOUNT OF ABSTRACT IDEAS,
GENERAL TERMS AND NOMINAL AND REAL
ESSENCES**

The Purpose of Words:

“But though Words, as they are used by Men, can properly and immediately signify nothing but the Ideas that are in the Mind of the Speaker, yet they in their Thoughts give them a secret reference to two other things.

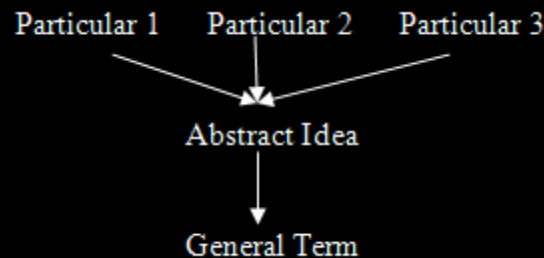
First, they suppose their Words to be Marks of the Ideas in the Minds also of other Men, with whom they communicate: For else they should talk in vain, and could not be understood.... But in this, Men stand not usually to examine, whether the Idea they, and those they discourse with have in their Minds, be the same: But think it enough, that they use the Word, as they imagine in the common Acceptation of that Language;..

Secondly, Because Men would not be thought to talk barely of their own Imaginations, but of Things as really they are: therefore they often suppose their Words to stand also for the reality of Things.” [Book 3, Chapter 4-5]

General Terms:

In order for language to fulfill its function of recording and communicating information, it must employ general as well as particular names. Our language, then, must contain general terms. Yet only particulars exist in nature. How, then, do words become general?

“Words become general, by being made the signs of general Ideas: and Ideas become general, by separating from them the circumstances of Time, and Place, and any other Ideas, that may determine them to this or that particular Existence. By this way of abstraction they are made capable of representing more Individuals than one; each of which, having in it a conformity to the abstract Idea, is (as we call it) of that sort.” [Book 3, Chapter iii.6]



Thus, on Locke’s account, an abstract idea is a conception formed by omitting from the very complex idea that is the experience of a particular object features that determine it to a particular time and place, thereby leaving features it may share with other particular objects existing at other times and places.

However, since “General and Universal, belong not to the real existence of Things; but are the Inventions and Creatures of the Understanding, made by it for its own use, and concern only Signs, whether Words, or Ideas.... When therefore we quit Particulars, the Generals that rest, are only Creatures of our own making....” [Book 3, Chapter 3.II]

Real and Nominal Essence:

According to Locke, there are “several significations of the Word *Essence*.

Essence may be taken for the very being of any thing, whereby it is, what it is.” This he identifies as a thing’s *Real Essence*.

On the other hand, “Things are ranked under Names into sorts or Species.” In this sense, “the *Essence* of each Genus, or Sort, comes to be nothing but the abstract Idea, which the General, or Sortal ... Name stands for....” And this he refers to as a thing’s *Nominal Essence*.

Unfortunately, although the real and nominal essences of mixed modes are always the same, in the case of substances Locke claims that they are always different.

And in these cases, not only do we not know enough about the constitution of things to be able to identify their real *Essence*, even if we did know more we would still have to have to make decisions about what was and was not important in identifying it.

Two points about nominal essences and Locke's basis of classification may be worth mentioning here:

- 1. At one point he claims that we classify substances according to their nominal essences, and not their real essences. At another point, however, he claims that we classify them according to their observable properties, not according to their real essences. These two claims are different. Nominal essences are constructions of the human mind, while observable properties are features of objects. But we form nominal essences by observing the properties of objects, so he is not really contradicting himself here.**
- 2. Our views of nominal essences may vary. Your idea of gold may be different from mine because you think that gold must be fusible.**

And two brief comments about his account of mixed modes may also be worth noting:

- 1. Unlike substances, whose real and nominal essences are always different, the real and nominal essences of mixed modes (actual or possible properties of substances that are represented by a complex rather than a simple idea) are, according to Locke, always the same. (Note: This is going to make a huge difference when it comes to his discussion of knowledge.)**
- 2. The assumption he makes here is questionable. Sociologists, for example, aren't just concerned to examine our concept of suicide, they are also worried about the nature of suicide.**

LOCKE'S ATTACK ON ARISTOTELIANISM

FIRST:

Aristotle had assumed that the most salient qualities of objects in our perceptual experience--e.g. whether they are hot or cold, wet or dry--are those that are most fundamental in scientific explanation.

Locke's defense of the corpuscularian hypothesis obviously requires that he reject this view.

So he argues that the salient features of our ideas of objects often do not resemble the features of the objects that cause those ideas.

Even if the most obvious characteristics of objects are their secondary qualities, scientific explanation should be provided in terms of their primary qualities.

SECOND:

Aristotle had assumed that there were a fixed, unchanging, determinate number of natural forms (species) and that our classification of natural objects into kinds or species merely reflects these forms.

Locke argues against this by claiming that when we use general terms to group things into kinds or species we are not attempting to discover species that exist independently of our classification of them, but are merely selecting from among many possible similarities.

Locke presents at least three arguments that are intended to show that Aristotle was wrong to suppose that our terms for natural kinds capture the real essence of their referents. Instead, he contends that these terms capture only their nominal essence. Thus, for example, in the case of gold we don't know its inner essence, so all we can do is identify it by means of our ideas of its qualities.

1. THE ARGUMENT FROM THE EXISTENCE OF BORDERLINE CASES:

P1) If all things in nature were produced according to certain forms, there wouldn't be any borderline cases.

P2) Borderline cases exist.

“The frequent productions of monsters, in all the species of animals” testifies to this.

C) So not all things in nature are produced according to certain forms.

[Note: Leibniz responds to this that maybe the “monsters” are a separate species. Moreover, it isn't clear that the Aristotelians would accept the first premise.]

2. THE ARGUMENT FROM THE PLETHORA OF RESEMBLANCES:

P1) From the plethora of resemblances we must inevitably select those which we deem important enough to constitute species.

P2) Nature cannot do this for us.

C) We construct species.

This argument is invalid as it stands. The question is how, if at all, can it be fixed?

3. THE ARGUMENT FROM THE NATURE OF ABSTRACT IDEAS:

P1) The essence of the species is identical with the abstract idea.

P2) Abstract ideas are man-made.

C1) The essence of species are man-made.

C2) Nature does not classify species.

As we will see, Berkeley has some major objections to Locke's notion of abstract ideas, and if his account of abstract ideas fails this argument will go down with it.

Some Potential Problems/Confusions:

1. Is Locke confusing meaning and reference? (Do 'the morning star' and 'the evening star' signify the same idea? What does he mean by 'signify'?)

He is not contending that all our words do is *refer* to ideas in our own minds, though this is their immediate signification, but also that they *refer* to objects in the world.)

The old view here is that when Locke says that words 'signify' ideas he is claiming that words *refer* to ideas. This evidently commits Locke to the view that ideas are images, and that the words that signify them *refer* to them. However, this view is open to objection. As Mill pointed out, "when I say, 'the sun is the cause of the day,' I do not mean that my idea of the sun causes or excites in me the idea of day."

The more modern interpretation, on the other hand, views Locke as claiming that ideas are meanings and words refer to them, rather than to images.

2. Does his view make communication impossible?

No. Although your word refers to an idea in your mind, and mine refers to an idea in my mind, they both also end up referring to a common object in the world.

But how do they manage to do that?