



Locke: Identity And The Self

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Mind/Body

- Like Descartes, Locke is a dualist, and thus he's faced with the mind/body problem
- No one before or after Locke has an adequate explanation for how our minds respond to external stimuli
- Locke acknowledges this shortcoming, he thinks both monists and dualists have overestimated their understanding of the world around them
- “The extent of our knowledge comes not only short of the reality of things, but even of the extend of our own ideas” (AW393)



Personal Identity

- Before Locke, there were two theories of identity:
 - Body Theory (Hobbes)
 - Soul Theory (Descartes, Leibniz)



Body Theory

- We are our bodies
- There are two major problems with this:
 1. Our bodies are constantly changing; there is no continuity of identity
 2. The Problem of Material Constitution: The Ship of Theseus example (old wood vs. new wood)



Soul Theory

- We are “thinking things”, or souls- Descartes
- Leads to the problem of interaction
- Another problem: this depends on the idea that the body and the soul are completely separate, and can live without each other
- Locke agrees about the separate nature of souls: “Souls [are] as far as we know anything of them, in their nature, indifferent to any parcel of matter...” (AW 372)



Locke on Personal Identity

- Locke believes that identity and soul are somewhat independent ideas
 - Like Descartes, Locke believes in three types of substances: 1. God 2. Finite intelligences 3. Bodies
 - Animals and plants are identified by participation in the same continued life, bodies by their material composition.
 - For humans, he creates this distinction
 1. Man (our biological make up, similar to animals)
 2. Person (a “Self”, or what our identity consists of)
- “The identity of the same man consists...in nothing but a participation of the same continued life, by constantly fleeting particles of matter in succession vitally united to the same organized body.” (AW 369)



Consciousness Theory

- Locke aims to create a continuity of self that is independent of a reliance on a substance (body or soul); Responding to several concerns for example, Boyle's cannibalism example
- He posits that what makes us who we are is the continuity of memory (i.e. "consciousness"), rather than a soul or a body, although he acknowledges the existence of both.
- He believes that one individual can have multiple selves (such as people with multiple personality disorder)- identity is independent of soul
- He also believes that a self transferred into a new body remains the same self, and thus keeps the same identity- Identity is independent of body
- Pinky example
- Prince/ Cobbler example



Consciousness Theory

- “Nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person...a carcass may be a person, as well as any sort of substance be so without consciousness.” (AW 374)
- “Consciousness removed that substance is no more itself, or makes no more a part of it than any other substance.” (AW 375)
(this refers to the pinky example)



Examples of Locke's Theory on Self

- Gollum

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLvIFRNbqOs>

- Freaky Friday



Problems With The Consciousness Theory

- Consciousness is not continuous (dreaming, irreparable brain damage, amnesia)
- As everything is always changing, it appears that we can never be exactly the same individual
- Objection by Thomas Reid: “The Brave Soldier”
- It is possible that this theory already deals with these objections, as Locke may believe there are exceptions to this (such as dreaming, memory loss) but he fails to defend this position explicitly which makes his theory appear somewhat limiting