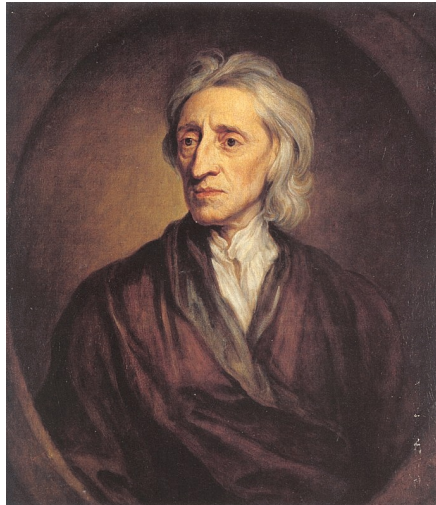


Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

Russell Marcus
Hamilton College
Spring 2014



Class #14 - Locke
Identity and the Self

Four Central Topics in Locke's Work

- ✓1. Arguments against innate ideas
- ✓2. The primary/secondary distinction
- 3. An account of personal identity, including Locke's approach to the mind/body problem
- 4. Locke's philosophy of language, including the doctrine of abstract ideas

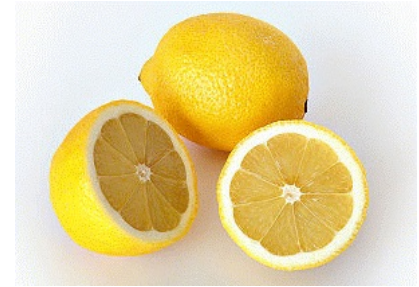
The Mind-Body Problem

- While Locke was suspected of Hobbesian materialism, he is clearly a dualist.
- So, Locke is saddled with a typical mind-body problem.
- Locke does not provide a Cartesian-style solution to the mind-body problem, despairing of any satisfactory account.
- “Supposing the sensation or idea we name whiteness be produced in us by a certain number of globules, which, having a verticity about their own centres, strike upon the retina of the eye, with a certain degree of rotation, as well as progressive swiftness; it will hence easily follow, that the more the superficial parts of any body are so ordered as to reflect the greater number of globules of light, and to give them the proper rotation, which is fit to produce this sensation of white in us, the more white will that body appear, that from an equal space sends to the retina the greater number of such corpuscles, with that peculiar sort of motion... I cannot (and I would be glad any one would make intelligible that he did), conceive how bodies without us can any ways affect our senses, but by the immediate contact of the sensible bodies themselves, as in tasting and feeling, or the impulse of some sensible particles coming from them, as in seeing, hearing, and smelling; by the different impulse of which parts, caused by their different size, figure, and motion, the variety of sensations is produced in us” (IV.II.11).

Locke's Humility

- There are lawful correspondences between physical events and some mental states.
- If these lawful correspondences are possible, it seems possible for matter to think.
- It seems equally unlikely for whatever substance in which thought resides to be the seat of thought as for matter to be the seat of thought.
- “We have the *ideas of matter and thinking*, but possibly shall never be able to know whether any mere material being thinks or not, it being impossible for us, by the contemplation of our own *ideas*, without revelation, to discover whether omnipotence has not given to some systems of matter fitly disposed a power to perceive and think, or else joined and fixed to matter so disposed a thinking immaterial substance - it being in respect of our notions not much more remote from our comprehension to conceive that God can, if he pleases, superadd to matter a faculty of thinking than that he should superadd to it another substance with a faculty of thinking, since we do not know in what thinking consists, nor to what sort of substances the Almighty has been pleased to give that power...” (IV.III.6, AW 393b).
- “*The extent of our knowledge* comes not only short of the reality of things, but even of the extent of our own *ideas*”(IV.III.6, AW 393a).

The Hard Problem



- So, why do the lemons appear yellow?
- We lack an explanation of the connection between my quale and its cause.
- Why is it that such and such motions in the air cause me to hear a symphony?
- Why is it that certain wavelengths of light cause me to see blue?
- “That the size, figure, and motion of one body should cause a change in the size, figure, and motion of another body is not beyond our conception. The separation of the parts of one body upon the intrusion of another and the change from rest to motion upon impulse, these and the like seem to have some *connection* one with another. And if we knew these primary qualities of bodies, we might have reason to hope we might be able to know a great deal more of these operations of them one upon another. But our minds not being able to discover any *connection* between these primary qualities of bodies and the sensations that are produced in us by them, we can never be able to establish certain and undoubted rules of the consequence or *coexistence* of any secondary qualities, though we could discover the size, figure, or motion of those invisible parts which immediately produce them. We are so far from knowing what figure, size, or motion of parts produce a yellow color, a sweet taste, or a sharp sound that we can by no means conceive how any *size, figure, or motion* of any particles can possibly produce in us the *idea* of any *color, taste, or sound* whatsoever; there is no conceivable *connection* between the one and the other” (IV.III.13).

Who Am I?

The Ship of Theseus

- We can replace every plank on the ship, one at a time.
- It changes its material composition completely, but remains the same ship.
- We can make a new ship with the old wood, and find ourselves completely confused about what to say.
- Is the ship that Theseus uses, with all new materials, his ship?
- Or, is the new ship made of the old wood his ship?



The Self

- We might make a distinction between artifacts and natural kinds.
 - Maybe there are no facts about the ship of Theseus.
 - Maybe the ship itself *is* constantly changing.
 - We have a merely practical problem of determining which ship belongs to Theseus.
- For our selves, we have a deeper problem.
 - We remain constant.
 - I have interests in the future of my self that I do not have for other people.
 - There seems to be an underlying haecceity.
- Descartes identified the self with the soul.
 - Reincarnation, Pre-existence, Eternality
- Hobbes identified the self with the body.
- Locke: the self is a moral (forensic) concept.
 - Used for practical purposes of ascribing responsibility

Relative Identity

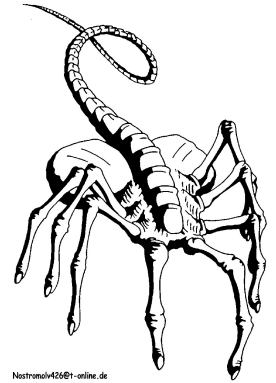
- Identity is relative to a sortal, to a kind of thing
- A lump of plasticine can be the same lump, but a different statue.
- We can not know how to identify something unless we know what kind of thing it is.
- So, we can not know what our identity is until we know what kind of thing we are.



Against Identifying with the Soul

- “Souls [are], as far as we know anything of them, in their nature, indifferent to any parcel of matter...” (§II.XXVII.14, AW 372a).
- Imagine that a soul had two successive incarnations.
- We wouldn’t say that there were only one person.
- “Suppose it to be the same soul that was in *Nestor* or *Thersites* at the siege of *Troy*...which it may have been, as well as it is now the soul of any other man. But he now having no consciousness of any of the actions of either of *Nestor* or *Thersites*, does or can he conceive himself the same person with either of them? Can he be concerned in either of their actions, attribute them to himself, or think them his own more than the actions of any other men that ever existed? Thus, this consciousness not reaching to any of the actions of either of those men, he is no more one self with either of them than if the soul or immaterial spirit that now informs him had been created and began to exist, when it began to inform his present body...” (II.XXVII.14, AW 372a).

Against Biological Criteria



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- Against the simple body theory
 - ▶ An animal is not merely its matter.
 - ▶ The matter remains after death while the animal does not.
 - ▶ Our bodies are constantly changing
 - ▶ Our selves underlie those changes.
- The refined body (or biological) theory
 - ▶ ‘Man’, or ‘human being’, is a type of animal whose identity is determined functionally.
 - ▶ “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” (II.XXVII.6, AW 369a).
 - ▶ This sort, human being, can not serve as the sort of our selves.
 - ▶ A human is identified by the functional organization of the body; it is a biological thing.
- Still, a person is not a biological thing.
 - ▶ “[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...” (II.XXVII.9, AW 370a).
- Aliens and sentient machines could be persons without having our biology.

Locke's Consciousness Theory of the Self

“[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...” (II.XXVII.9, AW 370a).

- Locke identifies the self with the thinking thing.
- Prince and cobbler
- The day and night case of divided consciousness
 - one biological human
 - two different persons
- For Locke, what makes the same person over time, is consciousness, and, especially, connection through memory, which Locke calls consciousness extending backwards.
- Note: Locke's solution is non-substantial.
 - The self is a conceptual construction.