

## Lecture 2

### Locke on Sortals and Psychological Continuity

#### 1. Introduction

#### 2. Locke on Identity (in General)

Chapter XXVII

*For we never finding, nor conceiving it possible, that two things of the same kind should exist in the same place at the same time, we rightly conclude, that, whatever exists anywhere at any time excludes all of the same kind, as is there itself alone. (§1)*

Locke sets out rules for identity, or **principles of individuation** (i.e. *principium individuationis*).

- (i) No two things of the same kind can exist in the same place at the same time.
- (ii) No one thing can have more than one beginning
- (iii) No two things of the same kind can have a single beginning

#### 3. Distinguishing Kinds

Locke argues that when you ask about someone if they are the same thing as they were before, there are in fact **three** different things you could mean:

- (a) Is the **physical matter** the same collection of matter as it was before?
- (b) Is the **human being** the same human being as existed before?
- (c) Is the **person** the same person as they were before?

For a thing at  $t_1$  to be the same **physical matter** (or “body”) as some thing at  $t_0$ , it needs to be made of all and only the same atoms at  $t_1$  as at  $t_0$ . (§3)

For a thing at  $t_1$  to be the same **human being** as some thing at  $t_0$ , it needs to “participate in the same life” at  $t_1$  as at  $t_0$ .

Against rationality condition:

*[...] whoever should see a creature of his own shape or make, though it had no more reason all its life than a cat or a parrot, would call him still a man; or whoever should hear a cat or a parrot discourse, reason, and philosophize, would all or think it nothing but a cat or a parrot; and say, the one was a dull irrational man, and the other a very intelligent rational parrot. (§8)*

### Personhood

*[person stands for] [...] 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**. (§9, my emphasis)*

DEFINITION: x is a person iff x has consciousness.

#### Persistence conditions:

*For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes everyone to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thing things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. **sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person** (§9, my emphasis)*

PERSISTENCE: x is the same person as y iff x and y have the same consciousness.

#### 4. Locke on Consciousness

Following this statement of his position, Locke turns his attention to examining the conditions under which x and y have the same consciousness.

#### Forgetting (§10)

We are not the same persons as the one who performed actions we forgot!

**Consciousness can be gappy.** For this reason, his view is not best understood as a *continuity* view at all. It is better understood as something like a “**Connected Consciousness Theory**” (from Kaufman (2016), “Locke’s Theory of Identity”).

#### Changes to physical body (§11)

Consciousness includes awareness of our bodies, but can survive loss of parts of that body.

*Upon separation of this little finger, should this consciousness go along with the little finger, and leave the rest of the body, it is evident the little finger would be the person, the same person.*

So, persistence of persons tracks the continuation of consciousness, wherever that consciousness goes.

**‘Body transplant’ cases (§15)**

Locke uses his case of the prince and the cobbler to demonstrate that you can have the same consciousness in two different human beings. For instance, if you were to swap the consciousnesses between two human beings (e.g. a prince and a cobbler), the person would go where the consciousness does, and so would be in a different human being. Thus, having the same body (the human being, rather than the particular physical particles at any given time) is not necessary for being the same person.

**5. Body Transplants and Psychological Continuity**

Williams:

First, suppose that the Prince and the Cobbler are told before the procedure that they will undergo a procedure wherein their psychological traits and memories will be transferred. Now suppose they are each told that the Prince’s body will be tortured and the Cobbler’s body will receive a large sum of money. Here, you’d expect the Cobbler, pre-procedure, to be very frightened, and the Prince (again pre-procedure) to be delighted. Moreover, after the procedure, whoever spoke through the Prince’s mouth would say their fears were confirmed. And whoever spoke through the Cobbler’s mouth would say they were right to look forward to their reward.

Now the second version. Forget everything you’ve just heard. If someone were to tell *you* your body will be tortured at some point in the future, it would be rational to fear it. Now suppose that someone told you that *before* your body is tortured, your memories will be wiped. That doesn’t seem to be less reason to be fearful. Now, suppose they also tell you that, after having your memories wiped, but before your body is tortured, your body will receive a new set of memories. It still seems rational to fear the torture. Here then are all the things you’re told in order:

- (a) Your body will be tortured
- (b) Your memories will be wiped before the torture
- (c) Your body will be implanted with new memories before the torture
- (d) The memories in (c) will be those that are currently in a living individual P
- (e) P will have your memories implanted in their body and will get a large sum of money afterward

In other words, it looks like we can just as well understand the mind-transplant case as a body-transplant case.

Where do we draw the line between survival and death in this case?