

Locke on Being Self to My Self

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Penultimate version

Abstract

John Locke accepts that every perception gives me immediate and intuitive knowledge of my own existence. However, this knowledge is limited to the present moment when I have the perception. If I want to understand the necessary and sufficient conditions of my continued existence over time, Locke argues that it is important to clarify what ‘I’ refers to. While we often do not distinguish the concept of a person from that of a human being in ordinary language, Locke emphasizes that this distinction is important if we want to engage with questions of identity over time. According to Locke, persons are thinking intelligent beings who can consider themselves as extended into the past and future and who are concerned for their happiness and accountable for their actions. Moreover, for Locke a self is a person, considered from a first-personal point of view. I show that the concept of self that he develops in the context of his discussion of persons and personal identity is richer and more complex than the I-concept that he invokes in his version of the *cogito*. I further argue that Locke’s moral and religious views explain why he emphasizes the need for a conceptual distinction between persons and human beings. In the final section I turn to the reception of Locke’s view by some of his early critics and defenders, including Elizabeth Berkeley Burnet, an anonymous author, and Catharine Trotter Cockburn.

1. Ideas, perception, and knowledge of my own existence

John Locke (1632–1704) in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*¹ approaches philosophy through a careful study of the human mind. He is interested in understanding how the mind first acquires content, namely ideas, how perception operates, and how simple ideas form the building blocks of more complex ideas, and how they generate belief and knowledge when ideas are arranged in propositional form. Locke commonly uses the term ‘perception’ in a broad sense interchangeably with thinking to include not just sense-perception but all types of mental operations. In the following I will adopt this broad usage.

¹ References to the *Essay* are to John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 [1690]), hereafter cited in the text as “*Essay*” followed by book, chapter, and section number.

Perception for Locke involves ideas, because when I perceive, I perceive something and Locke calls the intentional object of perception an idea (see *Essay* I.i.8). Locke argues that there is no question that we have ideas, because “every one is conscious of them in himself, and Men’s Words and Actions will satisfy him, that they are in others.” (*Essay* I.i.8) Although initially ideas will be acquired through sensation and represent things external to the mind, we can also look into our own mind and observe the mind’s operation (see *Essay* II.i.1–4). Locke calls this latter process reflection. Reflection makes it possible to acquire ideas about the mind’s own operations such as the ideas of perceiving, doubting, reasoning, remembering, imagining, or believing (see *Essay* II.i.4).

Moreover, for Locke all perception or thinking is conscious (see *Essay* II.i.10, 19, II.xxvii.9). He claims that “thinking consists in being conscious that one thinks” (*Essay* II.i.19) and that “[i]t being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive” (*Essay* II.xxvii.9). Although he has sometimes been interpreted as equating consciousness with reflection,² this reading is problematic, because Locke would either have to accept that his view leads to an infinite regress, or he has to give up his claim that it is impossible “to perceive without perceiving, that he does perceive.” Reflection is a higher order state about another perceptual state and this creates a gap between the initial perception and the reflection about it. The regress problem vanishes, if rather than regarding consciousness as a separate mental state in addition to the perception, consciousness is considered to be an inherent part of every perception. On these grounds, several Locke scholars have argued convincingly that such a same order reading is more plausible and to be preferred.³ The proposal is that consciousness can be understood as an “inherent reflexivity”⁴ that is part of every perception.

Given Locke’s understanding of ideas, perception, and consciousness, it is worth asking what Locke has to say about the perceiver, or the subject that is having the perception. One place where engages with this question is in Book IV of the *Essay*, where he offers his version of the *cogito* and maintains that every act of perception gives me intuitive knowledge of my own existence.⁵ He writes:

² For instance, Leibniz reads Locke in this way and objects that Locke’s understanding of consciousness leads to an infinite regress. See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), II.i.19, 118. See also Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, ed. Knud Haakonssen and James A. Harris (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010 [1788]), I.3, 21–22; *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. Derek R. Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002 [1785]), I.5, 58, III.5, 268–269, VI.1, 421.

³ More detailed support for same order interpretations can be found in Angela Coventry and Uriah Kriegel, “Locke on Consciousness,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 25 (2008); Philippe Hamou, “Locke and Descartes on Selves and Thinking Substances,” in *Locke and Cartesian Philosophy*, ed. Philippe Hamou and Martine Pécharman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 121–124; Udo Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 111–118; Shelley Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), ch. 2.

⁴ Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 116.

⁵ For further discussion see Coventry and Kriegel, “Locke on Consciousness,” 236–237; Hamou, “Locke and Descartes on Selves and Thinking Substances,” 124–129; Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke*, 81–83.

As for *our own Existence*, we perceive it so plainly, and so certainly, that it neither needs, nor is capable of any proof. For nothing can be more evident to us, than our own Existence. *I think, I reason, I feel Pleasure and Pain*; Can any of these be more evident to me, than my own Existence? If I doubt of all other Things, that very doubt makes me perceive my own *Existence*, and will not suffer me to doubt of that. ... Experience then convinces us, that *we have an intuitive Knowledge of our own Existence*, and an internal infallible Perception that we are. In every Act of Sensation, Reasoning, or Thinking, we are conscious to our selves of our own Being; and, in this Matter, come not short of the highest degree of *Certainty*. (*Essay* IV.ix.3)

For Locke every act of perception gives me immediate knowledge of my own existence. This means that the act of thinking gives me immediate certainty of the existence of a thinker, or a being that thinks. It is worth noting Locke's version of the *cogito*—just as Descartes's—does not provide a metaphysical description of the thinking subject. In contrast to Descartes, for Locke knowledge of my own existence does not play a foundational role in the acquisition of knowledge.⁶

Relatedly, Locke argues in his correspondence with Edward Stillingfleet (1635–1699), Bishop of Worcester, that thinking requires a substance in which the thinking takes place:

First, we experiment in ourselves thinking. The idea of this action or mode of thinking is inconsistent with the idea of self-substance, and therefore has a necessary connexion with a support or subject of inhesion: the idea of that support is what we call substance; and so from thinking experimented in us, we have a proof of a thinking substance in us, which in my sense is a spirit.⁷

Locke further clarifies that he uses the terms 'soul' and 'spirit' to refer to a thinking substance. While we can know that thinking substance exist on the basis of our experience of thinking, we are not in a position to prove whether thinking substances are material or immaterial.⁸

2. What does 'I' refer to? Locke on person, man, and substance

Through experiences such as sensations, feelings, or reasoning I have immediate and intuitive knowledge of my own existence. However, this intuitive knowledge of my own existence does not extend beyond the present moment when I have said experiences. Nor does it tell me anything about the metaphysical constitution of the being that I am at that present time.

⁶ According to Locke, intuitive knowledge is immediate and irresistible and includes knowledge of propositions such as red is not blue, a circle is not a square, or three is equal to one and two (see *Essay* IV.ii.1). Knowledge of my own existence does not have a special status in comparison to other propositions that we can know intuitively. For a helpful analysis of the differences between Locke's and Descartes's versions of the *cogito*, see Hamou, "Locke and Descartes on Selves and Thinking Substances," 124–129.

⁷ John Locke, *The Works of John Locke*, new, corrected ed., 10 vols. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1823), 4:33.

⁸ See *Works*, 4:33–37. See also *Essay* IV.iii.6.

Additionally, we may be interested in understanding what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for my continued existence over time. What explains that I am now the same as the five-year old that I see in a photo in front of me? In order to answer such questions, Locke believes that we have to adopt a more abstract standpoint and first clarify what ‘I’ refers to. Although we often do not carefully distinguish in ordinary language whether ‘I’ signifies what Locke calls a person or a man,⁹ he emphasizes that this conceptual distinction is important if we want to engage with questions of identity over time (see *Essay* II.xxvii.7, 15, 20). For Locke ‘person’ stands for “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” (*Essay* II.xxvii.9). Persons understand themselves as extended into the past and future and who are concerned for their happiness and accountable for their actions (see *Essay* II.xxvii.17, 25–26).¹⁰ By contrast, ‘man’ refers to human beings, though Locke leaves open whether human beings are material living animals, composed of an immaterial substance that is united to a material body, or perhaps even just an immaterial substance (see *Essay* II.xxvii.21, 29).¹¹ According to Locke, we give names to our mental ideas of a *person* or a *man* in order to communicate about them. The immediate significations of the names ‘person’ and ‘man’ are complex abstract ideas, namely ideas that we associate with being a person or man respectively.¹² It is worth noting that Locke’s claim that it is important to distinguish the idea of a person from that of a man does not tell us whether at a metaphysical level there is just one entity at a time that is both a person and a man or whether there are two metaphysically distinct entities.¹³

To see why Locke emphasizes that the idea of a person should be distinguished from that of a human being, it is helpful to turn to examples that motivate his position. Consider someone in an irreversible coma. In such a case, Locke would argue that the individual in the coma is the same human being as they were before falling into the coma, but they are not the

⁹ Locke’s term ‘man’ refers to human beings irrespective of sex or gender.

¹⁰ I offer a more detailed explanation why I believe it is plausible to understand Locke’s characterization of a ‘person’ in *Essay* II.xxvii.9 in conjunction with the characterization that he gives of a person in *Essay* II.xxvii.26 in Ruth Boeker, “The Moral Dimension in Locke’s Account of Persons and Personal Identity,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 31 (2014).

¹¹ Since Locke’s primary aim in *Essay* II.xxvii is to argue that personal identity consists in sameness of consciousness, it is not significant for him to decide which of the different possible meanings of ‘man’ that he lists in II.xxvii.21 is correct. In either case, he believes that it is important to distinguish the idea of a person from that of a man and claims that “personal Identity can by us be placed in nothing but consciousness ... without involving us in great Absurdities.” (*Essay* II.xxvii.21) He also mentions the possibility that ‘man’ refers to the soul alone in *Essay* II.xxvii.5, though there he goes on to say that this is “very strange use of the word *Man*” (*Essay* II.xxvii.5).

¹² See *Essay* III.i–iii, IV.v.

¹³ The question whether there is just one entity that is both F and G or two distinct entities, one F and one G, where ‘F’ and ‘G’ are kind terms, has received much attention in the secondary literature, especially by interpreters who either ascribe a relative identity interpretation or a coincidence interpretation to Locke. I question that Locke’s texts commits him to either reading (see Ruth Boeker, *Locke on Persons and Personal Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming)). For a defence of the coincidence interpretation see Vere Chappell, “Locke and Relative Identity,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 6 (1989). For a detailed summary of the debates and a defence of a relative identity interpretation see Matthew Stuart, *Locke’s Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), ch. 7.

same person as before, because they are unconscious and unable to remember any former experiences. Moreover, it would be unjust to hold someone in a coma responsible for actions done by the same human being at an earlier time if they are unable to understand why they are rewarded or punished for it. This example shows that it is possible for a human being to continue to exist over time even if the person has ceased to exist.

Locke further believes that a person's continued existence over time does not require the continued existence of the same human being. He illustrates this claim with his example of the prince and the cobbler (see *Essay* II.xxvii.15). The example invites us to imagine that "the Soul of a Prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the Prince's past Life, enter and inform the body of a Cobbler" after the soul of the prince and all the conscious experiences that it carries have been removed from the body of the prince. In this case, Locke argues that the being composed of the cobbler's body and the prince's soul is the same person as the former prince and "accountable only for the Prince's Actions" (*Essay* II.xxvii.15). Although the scenario can seem far fetched in ordinary life, the opening sentence of the section suggests that Locke believes that it is possible that at the resurrection a person may have a different body than they had during life on Earth.

Locke assumes in the example of the prince and the cobbler that consciousness is carried by a soul. Yet it is worth noting that Locke does not identify our idea of a person with that of a soul. A soul for Locke is a thinking substance, irrespective of whether it is material or immaterial. Due to our limited understanding of the nature of substances Locke argues further that sameness of substances may be neither necessary nor sufficient for personal identity (see *Essay* II.xxvii.12–14). It is not sufficient, because we cannot rule out that you now have the same soul that once inhabited Socrates's body. However, if it is impossible for you to access and recall any of Socrates's thoughts and actions, then you are not the same person as Socrates (see *Essay* II.xxvii.14). Furthermore, sameness of substance is not necessary, because Locke argues that a person can continue to exist despite a change of substance (see *Essay* II.xxvii.12–13).

3. Being a person, being self to my self

So far I have explained why Locke emphasizes that we should distinguish the idea of a person from that of a human being and that of a substance. However, how do these ideas relate to our concept of self? Throughout his discussion of persons and personal identity in *Essay* II.xxvii.9–27 Locke switches between using the terms 'person' and 'self' and several interpreters argue that he regards the two terms as synonymous.¹⁴ For instance, the following passage supports this reading:

¹⁴ See Vili Lähteenmäki, "Locke and the Metaphysics of "State of Sensibility", " in *Philosophy of Mind in the Early Modern and Modern Ages: The History of the Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Rebecca Copenhaver (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 165; Galen Strawson, *Locke on Personal Identity: Consciousness and Concernment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); "The Secrets of All Hearts': Locke on Personal Identity," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 76 (2015): 113; Stuart, *Locke's Metaphysics*, 342, n. 3; Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke*, 147, n. 7; "The Metaphysical Fact of Consciousness in Locke's Theory of Personal Identity," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50 (2012): 388, n. 5. A notable exception is Udo Thiel, "Personal Identity," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge:

Self is that conscious thinking thing, (whatever Substance, made up of whether Spiritual, or Material, or Compounded, it matters not) which is sensible, or conscious of Pleasure and Pain, capable of Happiness or Misery, and so is concern'd for it *self*, as far as that consciousness extends. (*Essay* II.xxvii.17)

While in many passages the term 'self' can easily be replaced by 'person', and vice versa, Weinberg notes that in some places the term 'self' is used to express a first-personal point of view, while 'person' denotes a third-personal point of view.¹⁵ Acknowledging the difference of perspective helps make sense of the following passage:

"*Person*, as I take it, is the name for this *self*. Where-ever a Man finds, what he calls himself, there I think another may say is the same *Person*." (*Essay* II.xxvii.26)

To further substantiate why it is plausible to regard Lockean selves as persons, at least in the context of the chapter "Of Identity and Diversity" (*Essay* II.xxvii),¹⁶ I want to return to his version of the *cogito* (see *Essay* IV.ix) and explain how his concept of self in II.xxvii is richer and more complex than the I-concept that he invokes when he claims that my thoughts give me intuitive and immediate knowledge of my own existence. In order to establish my own existence, a singular thought in the present moment is sufficient.¹⁷ By contrast, the self that Locke describes in *Essay* II.xxvii regards multiple thoughts and actions as their own, or as Locke would say appropriates them (see *Essay* II.xxvii.16–17, 26).¹⁸ Furthermore, a self experiences multiple thoughts and actions as unified, not only at a time, but also over time:¹⁹

For it is by the consciousness it has of its present Thoughts and Actions, that it is *self* to it *self* now, and so will be the same self as far as the same consciousness can be extended to Actions past or to come (*Essay* II.xxvii.10)

Cambridge University Press, 1998), who argues that "Locke's position is that 'man' and 'person' denote different abstract ideas which may be applied to the self" (889). This reading is motivated by his relative identity interpretation of Locke. In his later book *The Early Modern Subject*, Thiel uses 'human subject' in the sense in which he uses 'self' (or 'human self') in his earlier work (for instance, see *The Early Modern Subject*, 107.)

¹⁵ See Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke*, 147, n. 7; "The Metaphysical Fact of Consciousness," 388, n. 5. See also Lähteenmäki, "Locke and the Metaphysics of "State of Sensibility",", 165.

¹⁶ Locke's chapter "Of Identity and Diversity" (*Essay* II.xxvii) was added to the second edition of the *Essay* in 1694 upon the recommendation of his friend and correspondent William Molyneux. Since Locke does not explicitly distinguish the idea of a person from that of a human being in the first edition we cannot assume that he regards selves as persons in other parts of the *Essay*.

¹⁷ See *Essay* IV.ix.3.

¹⁸ Although some interpreters, including Antonia LoLordo, *Locke's Moral Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch. 2., interpret Locke's account of personal identity in terms of appropriation, I question recent so-called appropriation interpretations in Ruth Boeker, "The Role of Appropriation in Locke's Account of Persons and Personal Identity," *Locke Studies* 16 (2016).

¹⁹ See also *Essay* II.xxvii.16, 23, 25.

Let me further illustrate the unity—or as we may also say togetherness—of different experiences that Locke describes in this claim. In the present moment I may read a book and as I perceive the words on the page I simultaneously hear birds singing outside my window. Locke would say that same consciousness makes it possible to experience the visual and the oral perceptions as unified into one self. Moreover, I may remember cooking dinner last night or helping a friend two weeks ago. As I recall these former experiences I am not only aware of previously cooking dinner or helping my friend, but this perception is accompanied by the awareness that I have had the experience before (see *Essay* I.iv.20, II.x.2).²⁰ This means that memory²¹ makes it possible to access past experiences. Moreover, I can ascribe them to my present self and in virtue of the unifying aspect of same consciousness past and present experiences are united within the same self. Same consciousness makes it possible not only to experience thoughts and actions as unified, but also bodily parts, and even substances, can be united with the self (see *Essay* II.10–11, 16, 23–25). For instance, if my hand feels cold, the intimate feeling makes the hand a part of my self (see *Essay* II.xxvii.11,17–18, 25).

Locke further writes that a self has a continued duration:

This every intelligent Being, sensible of Happiness or Misery, must grant, that there is something that is *himself*, that he is concerned for, and would have happy; that this *self* has existed in a continued Duration more than one instant, and therefore 'tis possible may exist, as it has done, Months and Years to come, without any certain bounds to be set to its duration; and may be the same *self*, by the same consciousness, continued on for the future. And thus, by this consciousness, he finds himself to be the *same self* which did such or such an Action some Years since, by which he comes to be happy or miserable now. (*Essay* II.xxvii.25)

Duration makes it possible to experience the different thoughts and actions, bodily parts, and perhaps also substances, that are unified within one self as temporally ordered.

Locke argues repeatedly that personal identity consists in sameness of consciousness, or that same consciousness makes me self to my self. In these contexts, he often uses the expression 'same consciousness'. I take it that his notion of same consciousness that plays a

²⁰ See also Don Garrett, "Locke on Personal Identity, Consciousness, and "Fatal Errors"," *Philosophical Topics* 31 (2003): 100.

²¹ Although memory certainly plays an important role in Locke's account of personal identity, I do not think that his notion of sameness of consciousness can be reduced to memory. On the contrary, Locke has good reasons for claiming that personal identity consists in sameness of consciousness. Consciousness is not restricted to past experiences, but includes awareness of present experiences and can extend into the future. Other interpreters who argue that for Locke sameness of consciousness does not reduce to memory include Margaret Atherton, "Locke's Theory of Personal Identity," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 8 (1983); Samuel C. Rickless, *Locke* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), ch. 8; Strawson, *Locke on Personal Identity*, ch. 9; Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke*, ch. 4; Gideon Yaffe, "Locke on Ideas of Identity and Diversity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding"*, ed. Lex Newman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Memory interpretations can be traced back at least to Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, III.6, 277. For a recent defence of a memory interpretation see Stuart, *Locke's Metaphysics*, ch. 8.

central role in his discussion of personal identity is richer than the conscious awareness that is built into individual perceptions. Same consciousness not only allows me to experience thoughts and actions as mine, but also as unified at a time and over time, and temporally ordered. Thereby I am self to my self and extend into the past and future.

4. Personal identity, moral accountability, and the afterlife

Locke advances the philosophical debates about selfhood, persons, and personal identity by insisting that we have to distinguish the idea of a person from that of a human being. In this section I aim to show that his moral and religious views offer helpful explanations why he argues that we need the concept of a person in addition to that of a human being.

If we reflect for a moment on Locke's larger philosophical project, it will become clear why it is helpful to consider his account of persons and personal identity in the context of his moral and religious views. Locke argues that many metaphysical truths such as truths about "the internal Fabrick and real Essences of Bodies" (*Essay* IV.xii.11) remain unknown to us as humans due to the limitations of human understanding.²² However, he believes that limited insight into metaphysics does not undermine morality and religion (see *Essay* IV.iii.6, IV.xii.11) and argues that we make best use of our capacities if we devote our time to morality and religion. Indeed, he claims that "that *Morality is the proper Science, and Business of Mankind in general*" (*Essay* IV.xii.11).²³

Locke is interested in developing an account of persons and personal identity that is suitable to answer questions of moral accountability. As the example of a patient in a coma above has shown, the patient in a coma continues to exist as a human being, but Locke would argue that it is unjust to hold them accountable for actions formerly done by the same human being. For him, persons rather than human beings are subjects of moral accountability (see *Essay* II.xxvii.13, 15–16, 18–20, 22, 26). This is most explicit in *Essay* II.xxvii.26 where Locke claims that 'person' is a forensic term, which means that persons are moral and legal beings.²⁴ They are "intelligent Agents capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery." (*Essay* II.xxvii.26)

Let us consider more closely what role questions of moral accountability play in Locke's thinking about persons and personal identity. It is widely accepted that moral accountability presupposes personal identity. However, philosophers who accept this proposition disagree how we can best understand the persistence conditions for persons. Some accept that a person continues to exist in virtue of the continued existence of the whole human being, others focus on bodily or biological continuity, again others may argue that personal identity consists in the

²² It is worth noting that Locke does not reject metaphysical knowledge entirely. For instance, he accepts that we can know that God exists (see IV.x), or that substances exist (see Locke, *Works*, 4:32–33).

²³ For helpful further discussion of Locke's philosophical project see Victor Nuovo, *John Locke: The Philosopher as Christian Virtuoso* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²⁴ For a more detailed analysis see Boeker, "The Moral Dimension in Locke's Account of Persons and Personal Identity." Edmund Law, *A Defence of Mr. Locke's Opinion Concerning Personal Identity; in Answer to the First Part of a Late Essay on That Subject* (Cambridge: Printed by J. Archdeacon, 1769), is one of Locke's early interpreters, who emphasizes, that for Locke 'person' is a forensic term. See also Jessica Spector, "The Grounds of Moral Agency: Locke's Account of Personal Identity," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 5 (2008).

continued existence of an immaterial soul, and a further option is to follow Locke and claim that personal identity consists in sameness of consciousness, or some other psychological relations.²⁵ To see why Locke favors his proposed view, namely that personal identity consists in sameness of consciousness, it is helpful to examine his understanding of moral accountability and show how it informs his thinking about personal identity over time.

Locke thinks about moral accountability in particular and controversial ways, as becomes clear in his remarks about accountability for crimes committed while drunk. The question is whether someone is responsible now for a crime which was done in a state of drunkenness and which the person now is unable to remember. Locke compares this case with sleepwalking and argues that both cases should be treated on par (see *Essay* II.xxvii.22).²⁶ For him it is unjust to be accountable for an action that a person now is unable remember as their own.

This view troubled his contemporaries, including his friend and correspondent William Molyneux (1656–1698), who first suggested to him that he write the chapter, which became the chapter “Of Identity and Diversity” (*Essay* II.xxvii).²⁷ Locke sent Molyneux a draft of the chapter before it went to the press and in subsequent correspondence Molyneux challenges Locke’s views about drunkenness. According to Molyneux, “Drunkenness is it self a Crime, and therefore no one shall alledge it in excuse of an other Crime.”²⁸ Drunkenness is voluntary and thus Molyneux believes that one should be held accountable for any consequences of getting drunk, including criminal actions.

Despite the opportunity to react to Molyneux’s criticism prior to the publication of the chapter Locke does not revise his theory. Rather the fact that he insists that a person, who is now held accountable for a past action, must have been conscious at the time when the action was done and must now be able to remember it shows that it is important for him that a person from the inside can regard the action as their own, which enables them to understand why they are justly rewarded or punished for it. Otherwise punishing a person for an action that they are entirely unaware of would be like punishing “one Twin for what his Brother-Twin did, whereof he knew nothing, because their outsides were so like, that they could not be distinguished; for such Twins have been seen.” (*Essay* II.xxvii.19) Locke further compares punishment for actions of which one “could be made to have no consciousness at all” to “being created miserable” (*Essay* II.xxvii.26).

One may worry that Locke’s view makes it too easy for a criminal to get off the hook if they pretend not to remember doing a crime that is ascribed to them by others. Locke is well aware that his consciousness-based account of personal identity is of limited practical use in ordinary human law courts, because a human judge cannot look into another person’s mind to find out whether they are actually able to remember a past crime. Indeed, he acknowledges that human law courts follow other practices:

²⁵ This list of options is not meant to be exhaustive.

²⁶ See also John Locke, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E. S. de Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976–1989), letter 1693, 4:785–786.

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of Locke’s and Molyneux’s relationship see Ruth Boeker, “Locke and William Molyneux,” in *The Lockean Mind*, ed. Jessica Gordon-Roth and Shelley Weinberg (Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming).

²⁸ Locke, *Correspondence*, letter 1685, 4:767. A similar criticism can be found in Leibniz, *New Essays*, II.xxvii.22, 243.

For though punishment be annexed to personality, and personality to consciousness, and the Drunkard perhaps be not conscious of what he did; yet Humane Judicatures justly punish him; because the Fact is proved against him, but want of consciousness cannot be proved for him. (*Essay* II.xxvii.22)

Locke does not attempt to revise the practices of human law courts, but rather his view is ultimately directed towards a divine last judgement, as the next sentence of the quoted passage shows:

But in the great Day, wherein the Secrets of all Hearts shall be laid open, it may be reasonable to think, no one shall be made to answer for what he knows nothing of; but shall receive his Doom, his Conscience accusing or excusing him. (*Essay* II.xxvii.22)

Locke believes that any injustice that can occur in human law courts can be corrected in a divine law court.²⁹ It is worth noting that Locke understands a divine judgement, at least in part, as a self-judgement, because he claims that a person's "Conscience [is] accusing or excusing him." (*Essay* II.xxvii.22) In contrast to some other philosophers, who believe that it is sufficient that God—regarded as an external judge—knows all the facts and rewards and punishes resurrected persons based on their past deeds,³⁰ Locke emphasizes that a person at the great day will be conscious of all the relevant former thoughts and actions once "the Secrets of all Hearts" have been laid open. A person's consciousness of their former thoughts and actions makes it possible that they from the inside understand whether they deserve reward or punishment and thus their conscience is involved in reaching the final judgement.

It is time to return to the question as to how Locke's views about moral accountability inform his thinking about personal identity. There is no doubt that his understanding of moral accountability is controversial and impracticable in human law courts, but the fact that Locke emphasizes that a person from the inside should be able understand why they are held accountable explains why he regards sameness of consciousness as necessary for personal identity. Molyneux, who argues that a drunkard should be held accountable for a crime done under the influence of alcohol, even if they are unable to remember it afterwards, cannot appeal to Locke's consciousness-based account of personal identity in order to show that the person who committed the crime is identical with the person who is now accused of it. Instead Molyneux has to explain a person's continued existence over time differently, for instance, in terms of bodily continuity, assuming he accepts the commonly held view that moral accountability presupposes personal identity.³¹

Although Locke's understanding of moral accountability explains why he regards sameness of consciousness as necessary for personal identity, it is by itself insufficient to explain

²⁹ See Udo Thiel, *Lockes Theorie der personalen Identität* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1983), 144–151; "Personal Identity," 894–896; *The Early Modern Subject*, 130–134.

³⁰ Such a view is held, for instance, by Leibniz, *New Essays*, II.xxvii.22, II.xxvii.26, 243–244, 246.

³¹ I believe that Locke is well aware of these implications of Molyneux's view, as he writes in response to Molyneux's proposal that "it overturns [his] hypothesis" (Locke, *Correspondence*, letter 1693, 4:785.) For further discussion see Ruth Boeker, "Locke and Hume on Personal Identity: Moral and Religious Differences," *Hume Studies* 41 (2015); *Locke on Persons and Personal Identity*.

why he emphasizes the conceptual distinction between persons and human beings. Alternatively, one can propose that personal identity consists in the continued existence of a human being³² and personal identity is one among other necessary conditions for moral accountability. This alternative view, in contrast to the view that Locke offers, does not require a distinction between persons and human beings. Moreover, this alternative view has the resources to accommodate Locke's claim that moral accountability presupposes the ability to be conscious of the action in question, because it can be added as a necessary condition for moral accountability. This means that one can argue that moral accountability does not only require the continued existence of a human being, but additionally that the human being was conscious of doing the relevant action at the initial time and is now able to remember the action, and possibly additional necessary conditions may have to be satisfied for moral accountability, for instance, that one was free to perform the action rather than being coerced to doing it. To be clear, Locke does not endorse this alternative view, but rather insists, first, that the idea of a person should be distinguished from that of a human being and, second, that personal identity consists in sameness of consciousness.

Why does Locke favor his view? I believe that he has good reasons to prefer his view, because he is a Christian believer and aims to offer a theory of personal identity that can make sense of the possibility of a person's continued existence in the afterlife.³³ His predecessors who do not distinguish persons from human beings or substances either face metaphysical difficulties to explain how human beings are resurrected and continue to exist in the afterlife or their views can lead to serious moral injustice.³⁴ If materialism is correct and human beings are material living organisms, then those who fail to distinguish persons from human beings face difficulties to explain how human beings, who cease to exist at bodily death continue to exist in the afterlife. If immaterialism is correct, it may seem that the continued existence of an immaterial substance is sufficient to explain the afterlife. However, Locke would disagree, because he argues that merely tracing the continued existence of an immaterial substance can lead to moral injustice. For instance, if you now have the same immaterial substance that once inhabited Socrates's body, it is possible that an individual at the last divine judgement will be held accountable both for Socrates's actions and your actions. Assuming that your consciousness is entirely unconnected with Socrates's consciousness, Locke considers it to be unjust to hold one (resurrected) individual to be accountable for entirely unconnected conscious experiences.³⁵ Furthermore, for him the afterlife is "a state of sensibility." He already adopts this view in 1682 and claims in a journal entry that by "immortality ... is not meant a state of bare substantial existence and duration but a state of sensibility."³⁶ He continues to conceive of the afterlife as a

³² At this stage I leave open whether human beings are material living organisms, immaterial substances, or unions of material bodies and immaterial substances just as Locke does in *Essay* II.xxvii.21.

³³ See *Essay* IV.xviii.7.

³⁴ For a more detailed discussion see Ruth Boeker, "Locke on Personal Identity: A Response to the Problems of His Predecessors," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55 (2017).

³⁵ Locke describes similar cases by speaking of "two distinct incommunicable consciousnesses" (*Essay* II.xxvii.23, see also II.xxvii.20).

³⁶ John Locke, *An Early Draft of Locke's Essay, Together with Excerpts from His Journals*, ed. R. I. Aaron and Jocelyn Gibb (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 121.

“state of Sensibility” in *Essay* IV.iii.6, where he argues that “[a]ll the great Ends of Morality and Religion, are well enough secured, without philosophical Proofs of the Soul’s Immateriality.”

5. Locke’s early critics and defenders

Locke’s new account of persons and personal identity is widely discussed soon after its publication and many of Locke’s early critics reject or question it on metaphysical and religious grounds.³⁷ For instance, they worry that Locke’s view undermines immortality and the Christian belief in the resurrection. However, Locke’s critics often neglect his distinctions between the concepts of person, human being, and substance and often assume that persons are human beings or immaterial substances. It remains to ask why many of his critics rejected, or failed to acknowledge, the innovative aspects of his view.

I do not have the scope here to rehearse all the many objections that have been raised against Locke’s view. Instead I want to focus on one concern, namely the question whether a person’s existence over time can be interrupted by gaps in consciousness. For instance, unconscious sleep or the state between death and resurrection are probably periods when a person is not actually thinking. Many Locke scholars accept that for Locke a person’s existence over time can have gaps due to periods of unconsciousness.³⁸ It is possible to argue that a person continues to exist during a period of unconscious sleep, because they continue to have the ability to think and remember their former experiences, even if they are not actually thinking. However, the same type of response is not as easily available with regard to the period between death and resurrection. Locke remains agnostic whether thinking substances are material or immaterial (see *Essay* IV.iii.6). If it is the case that thinking inheres in a material substance, then not only actual thoughts, but also the ability to think would cease at bodily death. Consequently, if materialism is correct, Locke should accept that it is possible that not only actual thinking, but

³⁷ See Thiel, "Personal Identity," 897–899; "Religion and Materialist Metaphysics: Some Aspects of the Debate About the Resurrection of the Body in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain: New Case Studies*, ed. Ruth Savage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); *The Early Modern Subject*, chs. 5–8.

³⁸ See Vere Chappell, "Locke on the Ontology of Matter, Living Things and Persons," *Philosophical Studies* 60 (1990): 30; Christopher Hughes Conn, *Locke on Essence and Identity*, Philosophical Studies Series (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 70–71, 79; Joshua Hoffman, "Locke on Whether a Thing Can Have Two Beginnings of Existence," *Ratio* 22 (1980); Nicholas Jolley, *Locke's Touchy Subjects: Materialism and Immortality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 101; Dan Kaufman, "The Resurrection of the Same Body and the Ontological Status of Organisms: What Locke Should Have (and Could Have) Told Stillingfleet," in *Contemporary Perspectives on Early Modern Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Vere Chappell*, ed. Paul Hoffman, David Owen, and Gideon Yaffe (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008), 208–211; Lähtenmäki, "Locke and the Metaphysics of "State of Sensibility"," 163–165; Stuart, *Locke's Metaphysics*, 378–383; Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 124–125, 139, 217; Gideon Yaffe, "Locke on Consciousness, Personal Identity and the Idea of Duration," *Noûs* 45 (2011). A notable exception is Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke*, 156–157; "Locke on Personal Identity," *Philosophy Compass* 6 (2011): 402–405; "The Metaphysical Fact of Consciousness," 393–394. However, Weinberg does not directly engage with the challenge that a person may cease to exist between death and resurrection.

also a person's ability to think is interrupted between death and resurrection, which would be a genuine gap in a person's existence over time.

The question whether a person or a soul thinks uninterruptedly is lively debated by Locke's contemporaries and predecessors. Descartes, for instance, accepts that the soul always thinks and writes in a letter to Hyperaspistes: "I had reason to assert that the human soul, wherever it be, even in the mother's womb, is always thinking."³⁹ Descartes argues that this follows from his view that thinking is the essence of the soul. Locke does not want to be committed to Descartes's metaphysical views about substances and essences, because he believes that real essences of substances are unknown to us due to the limitations of human understanding. Locke does not deny that souls always think, because this claim is a hypothesis and neither it nor the opposite can be demonstrated, but rather he argues that it is highly unlikely that the soul always thinks. This means that he takes seriously the possibility that a substance can cease to think, for instance, during unconscious sleep or between death and resurrection (see *Essay* II.i.9–19).⁴⁰

Locke's view that a person's existence over time can have gaps worried several of his contemporaries. One of them is Elizabeth Berkeley Burnet (1661–1709), who is a close friend of Locke and started corresponding with him in 1696.⁴¹ She is also a close friend of Stillingfleet. Stillingfleet's publication of his *A Discourse in Vindication of the Trinity*⁴² in 1697 started a heated public correspondence between Locke and Stillingfleet. Burnet (then Berkeley) closely follows the dispute between her two friends and adopts a mediating stance, but also makes clear her points of philosophical disagreement.⁴³ In a letter to Locke, dated 17 October 1699, she reflects on the question whether consciousness can be interrupted between death and resurrection and writes:

Since my coming into the Countrey reflecting on some discourse I had in Town, concerning the state of the soul after death, I seet my self to read the new Testement as heedfully as I could with a regard only to that perticuler, and I confess I find many texts

³⁹ René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham, et al., trans. John Cottingham, et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–1991), AT III:423–424/CSMK III:189–190. See also *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, AT V:192–193/CSMK III:354–355; AT VII:356–357/CSM II:246–247.

⁴⁰ For further discussion see Boeker, "Locke on Personal Identity," 420–422; Hamou, "Locke and Descartes on Selves and Thinking Substances.,"; Jolley, *Locke's Touchy Subjects*, ch. 2.

⁴¹ For further background see Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of Seventeenth-Century England: Selected Correspondence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), ch. 4. See also "Selfhood and Self-Government in Women's Religious Writings of the Early Modern Period," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 27 (forthcoming); Frances Harris, "Burnet [Née Blake; Other Married Name Berkeley], Elizabeth (1661–1709)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴² Edward Stillingfleet, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity: With an Answer to the Late Socinian Objections against It from Scripture, Antiquity and Reason. And a Preface Concerning the Different Explications of the Trinity, and the Tendency of the Present Socinian Controversie* (London: Printed by I. H. for Henry Mortlock at the Phoenix in S. Paul's Church-yard, 1697).

⁴³ For instance, she reminds Locke of the importance of interacting charitably with his critics (Locke, *Correspondence*, letter 2491, 2511, 6:483, 509–511.). For further details see Broad, *Women Philosophers of Seventeenth-Century England*, ch. 4.

that seem very favourable to that opinion that suspends the happenesse of the soul to the generall Resurrection and reunion with a Body, yet I think few of them are so express but that another sense may be given, and that for the more received opinion of its keeping an uninterrupted self consiousness some places are very express and full, I own I am not quit an indifferent examiner!⁴⁴

Burnet makes clear that, although the Bible is not decisive, she believes that there are reasons to prefer the view that self-consciousness continues uninterruptedly.⁴⁵ Her criticism of Locke's view finds further expression in her private *Religious Diary*⁴⁶ where she worries in a passage addressing "Mr L" that if a person's (or soul's) existence is interrupted, then it is hard to make sense of the resurrection, because after a person (or soul) has been annihilated it would have to be recreated, rather than resurrected:

If your notion implys an extengusing [extinguishing] that breath or flame of life is not that the same with Anihilation, & then life would not be resurection but recreation, is it not more probable the spirit or principle of life exists with God or hovers in an imperfect state, in expectation of a more perfect one at the resurection nor can any strong arguement be drawn from the words breath life soul, being used only for the present life in some places since they are used in others by those who beleaved & intended to express them to represent the soul as a separat substance (*Religious Diary*, fol. 143r–143v)

This shows that Burnet believes that in order to make sense of the religious belief in the resurrection it is important that a person, self, or soul continues to exist without any gaps. Whether Locke has a satisfying response to this worry depends on how we spell what he means by sameness of consciousness—a question that is still controversially debated among Locke scholars.⁴⁷

Does Burnet fall back to an immaterial substance view of self? In my view there is not sufficient textual evidence to support (or rule out) this reading. Locke and Stillingfleet repeatedly discuss questions concerning the individuation of human beings and persons and consider what distinguishes Peter from John.⁴⁸ In a letter to Locke, dated 22 September 1697, Burnet admits that she finds it difficult to see "where the true strength of this dispute rests."⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Locke, *Correspondence*, letter 2627, 6:707.

⁴⁵ See *Correspondence*, letter 2627, 6:707–708.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Berkeley Burnet, "Religious Diary," (Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, MS Rawlinson D 1092, n.d.).

⁴⁷ Some recent proposal by Locke scholars include Atherton, "Locke's Theory of Personal Identity."; Garrett, "Locke on Personal Identity, Consciousness, and "Fatal Errors"."; Jolley, *Locke's Touchy Subjects*; Lähteenmäki, "Locke and the Metaphysics of "State of Sensibility"."; LoLordo, *Locke's Moral Man*, ch. 2; Strawson, *Locke on Personal Identity*; Stuart, *Locke's Metaphysics*, ch. 8; Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke*, ch. 4; Kenneth P. Winkler, "Locke on Personal Identity," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29 (1991).

⁴⁸ See Locke, *Works*, 4:24–25, 72–74, 85–93, 161–180, 429–441.

⁴⁹ *Correspondence*, letter 2315, 6:203. The letter continues:

I want to draw attention to another passage from her “Religious Diary” where she speaks of “that self cons[c]ious princeple which alone is properly us or our selves” (“Religious Diary,” fol. 145r). Although at first sight this description looks strikingly similar to Locke’s view, she discusses sin and evil in the same and surrounding sentences. The context reveals that her primary concern is moral and religious self-improvement, which intimates that for her being self-conscious has a moral dimension. Burnet believes that we can escape external evils, but that sins are internal and not easy to escape. Yet the presence of sin and evil can bring us closer to ourselves. While Burnet’s view may be inspired by Locke, she certainly develops her own approach to the self and focuses on the role that self-consciousness can play with regard to moral and religious self-improvement.

Let us return to the question whether a person’s existence over time can have gaps. This issue worried not only Elizabeth Berkeley Burnet, but also plays a central role in anonymously published *Remarks Upon an Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*.⁵⁰ The author, whom I will hereafter call “the Remarker,”⁵¹ criticizes Locke for making two problematic assumptions: First, that Locke “suppose[s] that the Soul may ... be sometimes absolutely without thoughts of one kind or other; and [second] that God may, if he pleases ... give, or have given to some Systems of Matter, a Power to conceive and think.” (*Remarks*, 8) Given these two assumptions, the Remarker objects, that a proof of the immortality of the soul is undermined.

Locke is not impressed by the arguments of the Remarker and, besides a short postscript that he added to the publication of his second letter to Stillingfleet, he does not respond publicly.⁵² Meanwhile the Remarker, who is still hoping for a response from Locke,

for by what my Lord [Stillingfleet] sayed of the common Nature of man I thought he had placed it in the likeness or sameness of that internall frame, or unknow substance which was peculiar to that order of Beings, but in this definition of person, methinks he makes that internall fram to deffer in every individual, and theirin to place personality; for if I suppose no externall difference, then the difference must be internall or none at all; except by this *peculiar maner* of *subsistance* is ment not a different internall substance, but distance of place, seperat existence and self consiousness, tho methinks the two first are external differences; I am by this convinct I neither understand the terms or what is ment by them (*Correspondence*, letter 2315, 6:203).

Here she comments on Stillingfleet’s views, who believes that one person differs from another by an internal difference. As Burnet analyses his view, he leaves open whether persons are individuated by a different internal substance or by self-consciousness, but rules out the other two options, namely distance of place or separate existence, because they are external criteria.

⁵⁰ Anon., *Remarks Upon an Essay Concerning Humane Understanding in a Letter Address'd to the Author* (London: Printed for M. Wotton, 1697).

⁵¹ I follow Catharine Trotter Cockburn in referring to the author of *Remarks* as “the Remarker.” Although Thomas Burnet has until recently been assumed to be the author of *Remarks upon an Essay concerning Humane Understanding*, J. C. Walmsley, Hugh Craig, and John Burrows, “The Authorship of the *Remarks Upon an Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*,” *Eighteenth-Century Thought* 6 (2016), argue convincingly that this attribution lacks evidence and that it is more likely that Richard Willis, successively bishop of Gloucester, Salisbury, and Winchester, is the author.

⁵² See Locke, *Works*, 4:185–189. We have evidence, however, that Locke read *Remarks*, because he added handwritten marginal notes in his own copy of the pamphlet. See *Marginalia in Anon. Remarks Upon an Essay Concerning Humane Understanding (1697)* (Yale University: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library).

develops the arguments against Locke's view further in *Second Remarks*⁵³ and *Third Remarks*.⁵⁴ Catharine Trotter Cockburn (1679–1749) believes that Locke has been criticized unfairly and her *Defence of Mr. Locke's Essay of Human Understanding*⁵⁵ offers clever arguments of her own in response to the Remarker's objections and in support of Locke's philosophy.

Against the Remarker's worry that gaps in consciousness undermine the immortality of the soul, she first points out that Locke never intended to prove immortality, because our belief in immortality is a matter of faith that cannot be demonstrated.⁵⁶ Moreover, she points out that the Remarker neglects that for Locke the terms 'person,' 'man,' and 'soul' have different significations.⁵⁷ Locke's conceptual distinctions make it possible to ask questions that are otherwise unintelligible. For instance, Locke asks whether two different persons could at different periods of time exist within the same human being (see *Essay* II.xxvii.19). If the terminological distinctions between 'person' and 'human being' (or 'man,' as Locke would say,) are neglected, the question makes no sense. Putting aside the Remarker's failure to adopt Locke's new terminology, it is nevertheless worth examining the Remarker's objection and Cockburn's responses more closely.

The Remarker finds it incomprehensible how there could be "a *thoughtless, senseless, lifeless Soul*"⁵⁸ and challenges Locke by asking how a soul can begin to think again after a period without thinking:

However, you ought to tell us, how you bring the Soul out of this unintelligible State. What Cause can you assign able to produce the first Thought at the end of this Sleep and Silence, in a total Eclipse and intermission of Thinking? Upon your Supposition, That all our Thoughts perish in sound Sleep; and all Cogitation is extinct, we seem to have a new Soul every Morning. (*Second Remarks*, 16–17)

Cockburn offers a series of arguments in response. First, she emphasizes our ignorance of mental operations and writes:

Do you understand *how* the soul thinks at all? *How* it passes from one thought to another? *How* it preserves its treasure of ideas, to produce them at pleasure on occasions? And recollects those it had not in a long time reflected on? *How* it moves your body, or is affected by it? These are operations, which I suppose you are not so skeptical as to doubt of; nor yet pretend to understand how they are done (*Defence*, 57)

⁵³ Anon., *Second Remarks Upon an Essay Concerning Humane Understanding in a Letter Address'd to the Author, Being a Vindication of the First Remarks against the Answer of Mr. Lock, at the End of His Reply to the Lord Bishop of Worcester*. (London: Printed for M. Wotton, 1697).

⁵⁴ *Third Remarks Upon an Essay Concerning Humane Understanding in a Letter Address'd to the Author* (London: Printed for M. Wotton, 1699).

⁵⁵ See Catharine Trotter Cockburn, *A Defence of Mr. Locke's Essay of Human Understanding*, in Catharine Trotter Cockburn, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Patricia Sheridan (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2006 [1702]).

⁵⁶ See *Defence*, 53–54. See also Locke, *Essay* IV.xviii.7 and Jessica Gordon-Roth, "Catharine Trotter Cockburn's Defence of Locke," *The Monist* 98 (2015).

⁵⁷ Cockburn, *Defence*, 55–57.

⁵⁸ Anon., *Second Remarks*, 16.

Second, she draws an analogy between cogitation and soul, on the one hand, and motion and body, on the other hand.⁵⁹ Motion cannot be restored and thus a new motion is numerically distinct from a previous motion. However, it is implausible to infer from this that a new body comes into existence whenever a new motion is produced. By analogy it is just as problematic to assume that whenever a new thought is produced a new soul comes into existence.⁶⁰

Moreover, she offers a *reductio* argument to reveal the absurdity of the Remarker's assumption. She argues that if we accept the assumption that a new soul comes into existence each morning, we will similarly have to accept that a new soul comes into existence whenever our soul moves from one thought to another. Since this is an absurd consequence, the assumption should be rejected. Cockburn accepts that when I wake up in the morning my thoughts are numerically different from the thoughts I had yesterday, but it does not follow from this that a new soul (or a new person, as Locke would prefer to say,) has come into existence.⁶¹

The question whether souls or minds perpetually think continues to be a topic of controversial debate throughout the eighteenth century.⁶² As we have seen Locke is committed to the view that all thinking is conscious and, on this basis, he regards it as likely that there are periods of unconsciousness, for instance during dreamless sleep. This means that for Locke it is highly probable that during certain periods minds or thinking substances exist without actually thinking. However, other philosophers, especially philosophers committed to the view that the mind is immaterial, are reluctant to give up the claim that the mind or soul is always thinking. Some accept that the mind or thinking substance must be active. Moreover, it is active in virtue of thinking. This means if a mind ceases to think, it ceases to be active, which for them means it ceases to be a mind. Philosophers who are committed to the claim that the mind always thinks, often offer conceptions of consciousness that differ from Locke's understanding of consciousness. For instance, if contrary to Locke's view, consciousness is identified with reflection, then it is possible to argue both that the mind is always thinking, including during periods or sleep, and that we lack consciousness of many thoughts that we have during sleep. The clue is that we do not reflect on all of our mental states. Another option is to argue, as Leibniz does, that some of our perceptions are unconscious. If many of our perceptions during sleep are unconscious, then there is no mystery why we are not aware of them and unable to remember them afterwards.

Although Locke's early critics offer interesting alternative concepts of selves and thinking substances, many of them fail to give proper credit to the novelty of Locke's conceptual distinctions between persons, human beings, and substances. Locke's early critics offer advanced proposals to explain how souls can perpetually think that overcome problems that concerned Locke. Often these proposals reject Locke's view that all thinking is conscious. Even if Locke

⁵⁹ This argument is a response to *Second Remarks*, 17.

⁶⁰ See Cockburn, *Defence*, 57–58. See also Gordon-Roth, "Catharine Trotter Cockburn's Defence of Locke," 69–70.

⁶¹ See Cockburn, *Defence*, 57–58.

⁶² Philosophers who engage with the debate include Anon., *Vindiciae Mentis. An Essay of the Being and Nature of Mind* (London: Printed for H. Walwyn, at the Three Legs in the Poultry, the corner of Old Jury, 1702), 33–39; Leibniz, *New Essays*, Preface 53–56, II.i.9–19, 111–118, II.xxvii.14, 239–240; Isaac Watts, *Philosophical Essays on Various Subjects* (London: Printed for Richard Ford and Richard Hett, 1733), Essay V, 114–131.

was willing to give up his view that all thinking is conscious, I believe that Locke would, nevertheless, insist on the importance of distinguishing the concepts of a person, human being and thinking substances, because for him persons are moral agents who are held accountable for their actions. By contrast, perpetually thinking substances, as his critics understand them, may at times be thinking without conscious awareness. For Locke the continued existence of a perpetually thinking being (in the sense of his critics) is not sufficient for moral accountability, because he insists that moral accountability for an action requires that a self from the inside can be conscious of the action in question and regards it as their own. Thus Locke's distinction between persons, human beings, and thinking substances cannot be neglected as easily as some of his early critics did.⁶³

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⁶³ I would like to thank Jacqueline Broad for sharing her forthcoming work and for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

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