

***Locke and the Scriblerians: Identity and Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, by Christopher Fox; x & 174 pp. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, \$25.00.**

In 1714, the Scriblerians, a gang of Tory intellectuals and politicians got together for evenings of conviviality and literary fun. An invitation to Oxford (the Lord High Treasurer) ran thus: "For Frolick Mirth give o'er affairs of State/To night be happy, be tomorrow great" (p. 81). The fun consisted in making fun — of the disputes, pretensions, and pedantry of other intellectuals, both the disciples of Locke and the remaining scholastics. The Scriblerians concocted a Memoir of one Martinus Scriblerus, a fictitious scholar and controversialist, in which the philosophic debates of the day were satirized. Many years later (1741) one of their number—Alexander Pope— published their proceedings. But the Memoirs of Scriblerus are difficult to understand without some knowledge of the debates at which they were directed. Fox's object is to supply such knowledge, and in the process to illuminate the eighteenth-century conception of the self. For the debates in question were largely concerned with personal identity, an issue raised by Locke.

Locke rejected sameness of (immaterial) substance as a criterion for personal identity and proposed instead the link of consciousness. B is the same person as A if B can remember doing what A did, and B will be the same person as C if C can remember B's doings — and remember them *from the inside*, so to speak. Fox thinks that "we" are so used to the self-in-consciousness that we underestimate its novelty. Locke's contemporaries did not. Hence "the great noise" about "this individuality" (p. 2). Fox describes the noise-makers: the disputes, disputants, and the puzzle-cases. A philosopher interested in personal identity can usefully skim Fox for arguments and puzzle-cases that might repay further study. And it is interesting to see such luminaries as Perry, Parfit, and Lewis anticipated. The Clarke/Collins debate and the case of the Siamese twins are singled out. Both are sent up in the Memoirs. Martinus (playing Clarke) corresponds with the Secretary of the Society of Free Thinkers (playing Collins). The Secretary contends (1) that there is no soul; (2) that consciousness can inhere in whole organisms in virtue of their mechanical composition (though elsewhere he favors the brain); (3) that changes in the material substance of the brain are no bar to continuity of consciousness since "the power of thinking ... is communicated from every particle to its immediate successor" (p. 105). Further, he concedes that an individual is a sequence of selves linked together by continuity of consciousness rather than one self. For though I remember what I did last year, I do not remember all that I remembered last year. Some of it has faded beyond recall. All this is spiced with amusing examples (consciousness lodged in a pair of silk stockings) reminiscent of the banter at Philosophy Conferences — satire perhaps, but hardly critique. There is also a ribald fancy in which Scriblerus conducts a romance with Siamese twins. The philosophical point, presumably, is that the twins share their generative organs and hence their sexual pleasures. There is an overlap of consciousness and their persons are not entirely distinct.

The book is lucidly, even pleasantly written. But I was slightly bored. For Fox is not interested in the truth about personal identity but in historical truth — how identity was discussed. Hence he does not dig deep. For instance, Locke was probably led to distinguish between personal identity and sameness of substance by Descartes. For the Cartesian "I" is a mind without a memory, memory being lodged in the brain. Hence, a Cartesian substance could be punished for an action it did not remember. Fox misses this. Also, it is an odd compliment to a satire to exemplify the vices satirized. For the Scriblerians thought it *absurd* to discuss these questions even when one is interested in the answers. It must be even more absurd to discuss them in order to elucidate a long-forgotten joke.

Charles R. Pigden  
University of Otago