
Postface

LOCKE'S THEORY of personal identity links four fundamental notions: *identity*, *consciousness*, *concern*, and *responsibility*. In this postface I survey the links in a general fashion.

Although Locke's theory of personal identity is part of his chapter on the general subject of identity and diversity, it is first and foremost a theory of moral and legal responsibility.

A theory of moral and legal responsibility requires a theory of personal identity, on Locke's (and indeed most people's) view, because only persons can be morally and legally responsible for anything:

(1) [theory of responsibility → theory of personal identity].

But Locke's theory of personal identity is no less fundamentally a theory of concern or concernment—a theory about what is (necessarily) of concern to each of us, given our interests as creatures “capable of happiness or misery” (§17).

For this reason alone, it must be a theory of moral and legal responsibility. For nothing is of more concern to each of us individually, on Locke's view, than the nature or extent of our legal and moral responsibility.

A sufficient reason for this, in the framework in which Locke is writing, is that one's existence continues on from this earthly life into another life of potentially unbounded duration whose quality, happy or miserable, is determined by what one is morally responsible for in this earthly life.

(2) [theory of concern \rightarrow theory of responsibility].¹

It follows from (1) and (2) that a theory of concern must be a theory of personal identity:

(3) [theory of concern \rightarrow theory of personal identity].

A theory of concern is bound to be a theory of personal identity in being a theory of responsibility.

This, though, is an indirect connection between concern and personal identity. There's a separate and direct reason why (3) is true. It's a matter of simple definition, in Locke's scheme, that what is of concern to one has to do with one-self. It has to do centrally with "one's own person" and, derivatively, with what is related to one (as one's family or one's property, say). Strictly speaking, all that is of concern to each of us, on Locke's terms, is "our pleasure or pain; i.e. happiness or misery; *beyond which we have no concernment*" (4.11.8). To know what concerns one, therefore, one must know what one is; one must know one's boundaries, as it were. One must know what constitutes one or one's self, and to know that, on Locke's view, is to know what constitutes one as a person. (He uses the terms "self" and "person" interchangeably.)

It follows that a theory of concern must be a theory of personal identity, in Locke's framework, even if one's moral responsibility has nothing to do with one's happiness and

¹ One can accept (2) without believing in any afterlife.

misery. (1) and (2) entail (3), but (3) can be established without reference to them. So a theory of what concerns one must be a theory of personal identity twice over, in Locke's scheme. For nothing is of more concern to us (given Locke's Christian eschatological framework) than where we stand in matters of moral responsibility: "nothing of pleasure and pain in this life, can bear any proportion to the endless happiness, or exquisite misery of an immortal soul hereafter" (*Essay* 2.21.60).

On one view, the fundamental chain of ideas begins with the notion of *concern*. It runs from there to the notion of *moral responsibility* and on to the notion of *personal identity* (although the link between concern and personal identity provided by moral responsibility can as noted be skipped). The notion of personal identity links in turn to the notion of *consciousness*, which links back to the notion of *concern* in the way described in chapters 5–6 above. That said, *identity* is the fundamental topic of the chapter in which Locke's theory of personal identity appears, and the four terms are equally crucial.

I've said something about responsibility and concern. What about consciousness and identity? Locke's fundamental and well-known claim about personal identity is that "consciousness makes personal identity" (§10). By "consciousness of x," he means a certain sort of special mental relation that one can have to something x, which involves experiencing x in a certain immediate kind of way in which one can experience something only if it is one's own (chapter 6). More particularly, he means a mental relation one can have to precisely two sorts of things: first, portions of substance, which may be either material or immaterial, and secondly, actions including thought and other mental goings-on.

If you're conscious of something, then, in Locke's special sense of the word, the thing you're conscious of is either (i) you as a whole, the person you are, or (ii) part of what constitutes you as a whole, the person you are, in a sense of "constitute" that allows that your actions and mental goings-on, as well as portions of substance, can be literally part of what constitutes you as a person.

If you're conscious of an action, for example, in Locke's special sense of the word "conscious," then you are (necessarily) the person whose action it is or was, and the action falls under (ii). The action is on Locke's terms part of what constitutes you, the person or moral entity that you are. If you're conscious of a mental going-on, you are (necessarily) the person whose mental going-on it is or was, and the mental going-on again falls under (ii) on Locke's terms, being part of what constitutes you, the person or moral entity that you are. So too, if you're conscious of a portion of matter, the portion of matter is (necessarily) either part of or all of the body of the person you are and falls under (ii), being part of what constitutes you, the person or moral entity that you are. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, if you're conscious of a portion of immaterial "soul-substance."

It's this fact about the special restricted meaning Locke gives to the word "conscious" that explains why his notion of consciousness, i.e. Consciousness (p. 30), connects directly to the notion of concern, in his account. If you're Conscious of something, then it is by definition—necessarily—you, or part of you, as just remarked. And if it's you, or part of you, then it's necessarily of concern to you, in Locke's view. Thus, the fundamental notions form a circle: concern, moral responsibility, personal identity, Consciousness, concern. One can also run the circle differently: Consciousness, identity, concern, responsibility, Consciousness. This characteriza-

tion of the heart of Locke's theory of personal identity may seem at first oblique and hard to understand, when placed next to other more popular characterizations, but it is I think apt.

Presented in this way, Locke's notion of concern—his way of understanding what is of concern to us—may seem narrowly self-interested. But one shouldn't mistake a definition for a moral position. The notion of concern with which he operates plays the theoretical role it's designed to play without excluding wider notions of concern with which Locke would no doubt have sympathized. Above all, it has to be understood in the light of the unique position one is in when it comes to determining one's fate in the "afterlife."