

Locke on the Ontology of Persons
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The Southern Journal of Philosophy, forthcoming

Introduction

One of the most important contributions Locke makes to the philosophical dialogue of his time is his discussion of persons. After Locke adds the “Identity and Diversity” chapter¹ to *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* a long and colorful debate over the persistence of persons follows, with Locke at its center. But what exactly are Lockean persons? Are they substances? Are they modes? Does Locke think persons can be classified into either category? He does not explicitly say.

Getting clear on Locke’s stance on the ontological status of persons is important for a number of reasons. To start, this is a fundamental aspect of his view. We should know whether Locke thinks persons are substances or modes. Likewise, we should know if Locke has a principled reason to remain agnostic about the matter. Being able to come to a correct and viable interpretation of Locke on persons depends on having this information. Additionally, the way the early modern debate over personal identity is usually described is as one between those who think that sameness of substance matters when it comes to the persistence of persons, and those who do not—or those who think that persons are substances, and those who do not.² It is important to see which side Locke is on, and whether this characterization of the debate is accurate, or whether a more nuanced picture of the early modern debate over personal identity is needed.

¹ 2.27

² See Martin and Barresi (2000 and 2006), etc.

Recently several commentators have argued that Lockean persons are modes.³ In this paper I will swim against the current tide in the secondary literature and argue that persons are substances. Specifically I will argue that what Locke says about substance, power and agency in other parts of the *Essay* commits him to the claim that persons are substances.⁴ I will also show that the passages mode interpreters cite do not imply that Lockean persons are modes. Finally I will show that a substance interpretation can withstand the most difficult objections mode interpreters can raise against it—giving us sufficient reason to conclude that a substance interpretation of Locke on persons can be both sympathetic and viable. To get started toward this end, I will begin by giving a brief outline of Locke’s substance/mode distinction and his definition of “person.”

1. Why Lockean Persons are Substances

The distinction Locke draws between substances and modes is difficult to pin down. Here are the basics: When Locke first introduces the terms “substance” and “mode” he claims, “...*Modes* I call such complex *Ideas*, which however compounded contain not in them the supposition of subsisting by themselves; but are considered as Dependences on, or Affections of Substances...” (2.12.4).⁵ On the other hand, “[t]he *Ideas* of *Substances* are such combinations of simple *Ideas*, as are taken to represent distinct particular things, subsisting by themselves...” (2.12.6). Examples of the former include the ideas we call “murder,” “gratitude” and “war.” Instances of the latter include the ideas we call “gold,” “horse” and “man.” There is much to be

³ These include Antonia LoLordo (2012 and 2010), Udo Thiel (2011 and 1981), William Uzgalis (1990), Ruth Mattern (1980), and arguably Galen Strawson (2011) though this can be traced back to Edmund Law (1769).

⁴ This of course implies that I do not think Locke is agnostic about the ontological status of persons.

⁵ All quotations from Locke’s *Essay* come from Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Peter Nidditch. Oxford: 1975. (Book, chapter, section)

said about these definitions. The initial point I would like to emphasize, however, is that ideas of substances represent particular subsistent things, but ideas of modes do not.

In 2.27, Locke claims that “*Person* stands for...a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places...” (§9). Given that Locke thinks our ideas of substances represent particular subsistent *things*, and Locke claims the idea we call “person” is an idea of a *thing* or *being*, it might seem fair to conclude that the name “person” marks an idea of a substance. Put more plainly, it appears that Lockean persons are substances. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Locke does not use these terms to refer to substances alone: Locke refers to modes as “things” or “beings” on more than one occasion in the *Essay*.⁶ We thus cannot discern Lockean persons’ ontological status from Locke’s definition of “person” and his initial definitions of “substance” and “mode” alone. Fortunately for us, Locke goes on to make many claims about substance and mode throughout the *Essay* and his correspondence with Stillingfleet that will help us determine the ontological status of persons.

Locke claims that when we make ideas of modes, we put scattered and independent ideas together as we see fit. We do not assume there is an entity in the world which we aim to represent and we do not assume there is anything in the world holding the simple ideas we combine together. Our ideas of modes are thus not copies of beings or what Locke calls “patterns” in nature.⁷ Rather they are originals, as Locke explains in 2.31:

...*Complex Ideas of Modes*...are Originals...not Copies, nor made after the pattern of any real existence, to which the Mind intends them to be conformable, and exactly to answer. These being such collections of simple *Ideas* that the Mind it self puts together, and such Collections, that each of them contains in it precisely all that the Mind intends that it should...(2.31.14).

⁶ See, for instance, 2.25.6 and 3.5.5.

⁷ 2.32.17, 3.9.7, 3.6.9.

Sometimes, however, we make complex ideas to capture what is in nature. We thus notice which simple ideas go constantly together and combine them accordingly. This is what we do when we make ideas of substances. When we get the simple ideas we call “yellow” and “shiny,” we also usually have the idea we call “solidity.” Additionally we assume that the qualities or powers which cause these simple ideas in us have some sort of support. This is because we cannot imagine how yellowness, solidity and the like could subsist together unsupported. We combine said ideas together to represent what we have observed in the world and this results in an idea of a substance.⁸ In this case, the idea we arrive at is the idea we call “gold.” Our ideas of substances thus not only include the simple ideas we get together via experience but also the idea of support.

I would argue that when we make and name the idea we call “person” we engage in an activity that is more like what we do when we make and name the idea we call “gold” than what we do when we make and name the idea we call “murder.” This is because when we make and name the idea we call “person” we do not put simple ideas together as we see fit. Instead, we aim to represent actual beings that subsist in the world—like ourselves. I contend that this points us in the direction of persons being substances. Nevertheless, Locke oscillates some when it comes to the difference between the way that we make ideas of substances and the way that we make

⁸ “The Mind being, as I have declared, furnished with a great number of the simple *Ideas*, conveyed in by the *Senses*, as they are found in exterior things, or by *Reflection* on its own Operations, takes notice also that a certain number of these simple ideas go constantly together; which being presumed to belong to one thing, and Words being suited to common apprehensions, and made use of for quick dispatch, are called so united in one subject, by one name; which by inadvertency we are apt afterward to talk of and consider as one simple *Idea*, which indeed is a complication of many *Ideas* together; Because, as I have said, not imagining how these simple *Ideas* can subsist by themselves, we accustom ourselves, to suppose some *Substratum*, wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call *Substance*” (2.23.1).

ideas of modes. For instance, after making the above-cited claims, Locke asserts that there are indeed times that we aim to represent entities in the world when we make ideas of modes.⁹ We thus need to learn more about Locke's conception of "person" and how it squares with the further claims he makes about substance, power and agency before we come to any conclusions regarding the ontological status of persons. Once we do, we will see that we have evidence that Lockean persons are substances. We will start with Locke's assertion that "person" is a forensic term.

In 2.27.26, Locke claims that "person" "...is a Forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit; and so belongs only to intelligent Agents capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery." Persons are thus the kinds of entities that act, and are held accountable for their actions. In other words, persons are agents. This is important because in 2.21.16 Locke claims that *only* substances can be agents:

Tis plain then, That the *Will* is nothing but one Power or Ability, and *Freedom* another Power or Ability: So that to ask, whether the *Will has Freedom*, is to ask whether one Power has another Power, one Ability another Ability; a Question at first sight too grossly absurd to make a Dispute, or need an Answer. For who is it that sees not, that *Powers* belong only to *Agents*, and *are Attributes only of Substances*...So that this way of putting the Question, *viz.* whether the *Will be free*, is in effect to ask, whether the *Will* be a Substance, an Agent, or at least to suppose it, since Freedom can properly be attributed to nothing else (2.21.16).

If persons are agents and only substances can be agents, then persons have to be substances. This is the first argument for persons being substances.

A second argument for persons being substances can be extracted from what Locke says about substance and power. As we know, Locke claims "*Person* stands for...a thinking

⁹ See 2.22.9. Moreover, sometimes it seems as if Locke thinks that the ideas we put together when we make ideas of modes are not as "scattered" or "independent" as 2.31.14 and other passages would cause one to believe. See 2.30-31 and 4.4.

intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places...” (2.27.9). This means that the referent of the idea we call “person” is the kind of thing that can think, can reason, and can reflect. Finally, the referent of the idea we call “person” persists over time, and is aware of said persistence. If a thing has the ability to think, to reason and to reflect, that thing has powers. We know this because of Locke’s treatment of powers, in general. Locke also explicitly claims that thinking is a power (and reasoning, reflecting and the like are all just kinds of thinking) (2.21.6). Moreover, Locke explicitly claims that persons have powers (2.21.10).¹⁰ Finally, Locke claims that only substances have powers. He says, “For who is it that sees not, that *Powers...are Attributes only of Substances...*” (2.21.16). We can thus say that persons have powers and only substances have powers. So persons have to be substances.¹¹ Although many of Locke’s initial claims about the

¹⁰ “So that *Liberty is not an Idea belonging to Volition*, or preferring; but to the Person having the Power of doing, or forbearing to do...” (2.21.10). Samuel Rickless (via email correspondence) has objected that when Locke uses the term “person” here he is invoking the ordinary usage of the term and means to say “man.” As Rickless himself points out, however, Locke begins to elucidate the distinction he makes between “man” and “person” in 2.1.11-12, 19 and Locke works on 2.21, after adding 2.27 to the *Essay*. This causes Rickless to claim that when Locke uses the term “man” in 2.21, we should think he means “man.” If we are going to take Locke at his word and think that by “man” Locke means “man” I think we should do the same when it comes to “person.” My point is not that every claim Locke makes in 2.21 is a claim about the powers of persons, but we should take Locke at his word when he claims that persons have powers. We should also note that we know persons have powers because they can think, reason, reflect, etc. The argument that I give here would thus stand regardless.

¹¹ Vere Chappell also argues that Locke’s claims about substance and power commit him to the view that persons are substances (1990, pp. 19-32). Chappell does not make the point that Locke explicitly claims persons have powers, or the point that powers cannot be reified, however (and these are two very important bits of evidence in favor of a substance reading). Additionally, Chappell does not respond to the worry that relations have powers. It should also be noted that Chappell takes Locke to think that persons are compounded substances. I argue elsewhere that Locke is agnostic when it comes to this issue. Thus what I am arguing here is compatible with the basic contours of Chappell’s view, our positive readings end up looking quite different. LoLordo has recently asserted that, just like Chappell, I read Locke’s claims about substance and power in 2.21 too strongly. In response I will say that I agree that what Locke is discussing in 2.21 mostly pertains to the will, reification of the will, etc. Nevertheless, I contend that what Locke says in 2.21 when discussing the will can be extended to be claims about substances and powers more generally, given all that he says later about substances having powers and powers making up a great part of our ideas of substances, etc. See: 2.22.11, 2.23.7, 2.23.8, 2.23.10, 2.23.37, 3.9.1, 3.9.17, 3.11.21, 4.3.7, 4.3.9, and 4.7.15.

distinction between substances and modes do not give us conclusive evidence about the ontological status of Lockean persons, what he says about substance, power and agency gives us good reason to conclude that persons are substances.

Nevertheless, one who thinks that Lockean persons are modes might claim that modes always depend on substances for their existence and so inherit some of their properties from substances. These properties would include powers. Thus, persons can have powers and still be modes.¹² In response I will start by saying that it is true that Locke claims modes depend on particular substances for their subsistence. We saw this in the initial definition of “mode,” as quoted earlier (2.12.4). Nevertheless Locke is hopelessly unclear about what modes are or what he means when he asserts that modes depend upon substances. Some commentators take modes to be qualities or properties. But, this is not the only way to read Locke. I contend that when Locke claims that modes depend upon substances he means that mode *X* exists only if a substance is engaged in activity *X*, or is in state *X*. Thus there is no gratitude without a substance doing the thanking, and there is no murder without a substance doing the killing. Likewise there is no war without substances engaged in combat.

It is not clear that Locke thinks modes depend upon substances for their subsistence in the same way that qualities do, or that modes are properties—though this is something that a number of commentators assume. It is important to note this. It is also important to note that Locke does not claim that modes inherit some of their properties from the substances on which they depend. Nor does he claim that this sharing can include powers. What he does claim is the following: Substances have powers. We get our ideas of active and passive powers from substances (2.21.2)

¹² This objection comes from William Uzgalis (in conversation).

and, thus, powers make up a great part of our ideas of substances (2.21.2).¹³ In addition, as we have seen, Locke claims that powers belong only to substances (2.21.16). If modes had powers, then Locke could not claim that powers are attributes *only of* substances. We thus do not have good reason to think that modes inherit powers from the substances upon which they depend.

We should additionally note that many who give mode readings of Locke on persons think persons *just are consciousnesses*.¹⁴ Locke does not do much to define “consciousness,” but it is not far-fetched to think that what he means is self-conscious thinking.¹⁵ We know Locke claims that thinking is a power, and it thus seems safe to conclude that consciousness is a power. This brings us to an important but often overlooked aspect of Locke’s view: In 2.21 Locke claims that no power can have a power. He says, “...*Liberty*, which is but a power...cannot be an attribute or modification of the *Will*, which is also but a power.” (§14). So, if persons *just are consciousnesses*, and consciousness is a power, then persons cannot have powers. We know that persons have powers, however. Persons have the power to plan, to will, to act, to forbear acting... etc. Those who think that persons are moral agents—as Locke does—most certainly believe that persons have these powers. If they did not, we would not, or should not, hold persons morally responsible for their actions. Given this, we should thus conclude that persons are not mere consciousnesses—*but things with consciousnesses*—or substances.

¹³ For further evidence for these two claims see: 2.21.3, 2.21.16, 2.21.72, 2.22.11, 2.23.7, 2.23.8, 2.23.10, 2.23.37, 3.9.1, 3.9.17, 3.11.21, 4.3.7, 4.3.9, and 4.7.15.

¹⁴ See LoLordo: 2010, pg. 651-652. Also, 2012, pg. 123: “Only some consciousnesses are persons, then because only some consciousnesses have the idea of the self required to think of themselves as beings who exist through time and thus as beings whose future pleasure and pain matter in exactly the same way their present pleasure and pain do.” I take it that this means that some consciousnesses are persons—in the identity sense of “are.” Persons are consciousnesses (of a certain stripe). Uzgalis also implies that persons are consciousnesses.

¹⁵ Shelley Weinberg (2012) argues that what Locke says in 2.27.25 implies that there can be a metaphysical fact of consciousness that is detachable from the man (human being) and not identifiable either with a mode or a substance. For more information about the nature of consciousness and its relation to other mental states see: Shelley Weinberg (2008), Mark Kulstad (1984), Coventry, A. and Kriegel, U., (2008) and Antonia LoLordo,

Even with this in mind, those who hold a mode view might now claim that because Locke is not explicit about the ontological status of consciousness, it could well be that consciousness is a mode. They may even press the point by saying that persons are modes who get their powers through the substances upon which they depend. I think I have given ample evidence against this view but here is one further thing to consider: If persons are modes who get their powers through the substances upon which they depend, we would have to think that if a person has a power, so does that substance. Yet, we think persons have powers that men do not. The same goes for souls.¹⁶ Moreover, we think that the powers of persons and the substances to which they are intimately related can come apart. Locke does too. This is why we do not (always) hold the human being responsible for something she did while in the midst of a fugue state, for example. This is also why, for Locke, it is the person, and not the soul (alone) that is judged on Judgment Day.¹⁷ Thus it looks as if persons cannot be modes who get their powers through the substances upon which they depend. Persons must be substances instead.

In response to the line of argumentation I have provided here some mode interpreters have asserted that fathers, constables and dictators have powers, even though they are not substances.¹⁸ The same goes for husbands and citizens. This is supposed to be evidential for non-substances having powers, and open the door to a mode interpretation of Locke on persons. Nevertheless it is important to remember that the ideas we call “father,” “constable” and “dictator” are not ideas of modes, but ideas of relations. So too are the ideas we call “husband”

¹⁶ As a kind, persons seem to have powers that souls do not. Perhaps souls can think, but only persons can think of themselves as the same things over time, etc. Perhaps it is this ability that makes the person and not (merely) the soul the recipient of punishment and reward on Judgment Day.

¹⁷ This is also implicit in the thought experiments Locke provides throughout 2.27, where we see persons persisting despite a change in man, soul, etc.

¹⁸ LoLordo recently replied with this assertion. This kind of assertion is also implicit in an anonymous referee’s comments.

and “citizen.” Moreover, Locke distinguishes between modes and relations. Thus what Locke says about our ideas of relations cannot be attributed to modes any more than what Locke says about our ideas of modes can be attributed to substances, or vice versa. It is also important to note that not all relations have powers. The relation we call “taller” does not seem to have any power. Nor does the relation we call “shorter.”¹⁹ Thus having powers is not a defining feature of relations. Having powers *is* a primary or defining feature of substances, however. As we have seen, Locke makes this point straightforwardly in 2.21 and throughout the rest of the *Essay*.²⁰ Given that only substances have powers, it thus must be the case that if any relation has a power it is because at least one of the entities in the relation is a substance. In other words, any powers a constable has, he has because he is a substance that stands in a particular relation R to something else.

Furthermore, in 2.25 and 2.28 we get evidence that some of the relations that have powers are relations that involve persons. For instance, in 2.25.1, Locke makes clear that “husband” is a relation between persons: “...[W]hen I give *Cajus* the name *Husband*, I intimate some other Person.” Given that a relation can have powers only if at least one of the relata is a substance, that husbands have powers,²¹ and that “husband” is a relation between persons, this suggests that persons are substances. In 2.28, we get further evidence that this is the case. Here Locke claims:

A *Citizen*, or a *Burgher*, is one who has a Right to certain Privileges in this or that place. All this sort depending upon Men’s Wills, or Agreement in Society, I call *Instituted* or *Voluntary*; and may be distinguished from the natural, in that they are most, if not all of them, some way or other alterable, and separable from the Persons, to whom they have

¹⁹ The examples Locke uses are “bigger” and “less” (2.25.7).

²⁰ 2.21.3, 2.21.16, 2.21.72, 2.22.11, 2.23.7, 2.23.8, 2.23.10, 2.23.37, 3.9.1, 3.9.17, 3.11.21, 4.3.7, 4.3.9, and 4.7.15.

²¹ Locke does not explicitly say that husbands have powers, but few would deny this!

sometimes belonged, though neither of the Substances, so related, be destroy'd (2.28.3). In this section of the text, Locke is asserting that although natural relations are destroyed any time there is a change or loss in one of the relata,²² the relation “citizen” can be altered or destroyed despite no such change. More importantly, Locke is asserting that “citizen” is a relation that involves persons, and that persons are substances. This is what he means when he says that a relation is “separable from the Persons, to whom they have belonged, though neither of the Substances, so related, be destroy'd” (2.28.3). Thus an examination of what Locke says about relations does not suggest that persons are modes, but rather offers further evidence that persons are substances.

Importantly, I am not claiming that what Locke says about relations in 2.25, 2.26 and 2.28 alone provides evidence for the conclusion that persons are substances. Instead I am arguing that what Locke says about substance, power and agency *prior to*²³ his discussion of relations and personal identity commits him to the claim that only substances can have powers or be agents—and this commits him to the claim that persons are substances.²⁴ If we read Locke’s claims about relations in the context of these preceding discussions, we can see that even if bachelors, husbands, citizens and the like have powers this is not evidence against persons being substances. Moreover, a careful reading of Locke’s discussion of relations in 2.25.1 and especially 2.28.3 gives us additional reason to conclude that Lockean persons are substances.

²² “The *nature* therefore of *Relation*, consists in the referring, or comparing two things, one to another; from which comparison, one or both comes to be denominated. And if either of those things be removed, or cease to be, the Relation ceases, and the Denomination consequent to it...” (2.25.5).

²³ See 3.9.1, 3.9.17, 3.11.21, 4.3.7, 4.3.9, and 4.7.15 as well.

²⁴ 2.27 is sandwiched between Locke’s discussions of relations in 2.25, 2.26 and 2.28. However that is because the ideas we call “identity” and “diversity” are ideas of relations, not because persons are relations.

2. Arguments Against a Mode Interpretation

I have argued that there is compelling evidence that Lockean persons are substances. Now I will consider the passages and arguments that present the biggest challenge for a substance interpretation: those presented by Ruth Mattern and Antonia LoLordo.²⁵ Contrary to what I have said here, both Mattern and LoLordo argue that when Locke claims that “person” is a “forensic term,” we get evidence that Lockean persons are modes. To see why, I will have to say a bit more about Locke’s substance/mode distinction and the evaluative measures used for each.

As we saw above, we put ideas together as we see fit when we make ideas of modes. This means that when we want to determine whether our idea of a mode is correct we turn not to the world, but to other language users to find out:

Nor does the Mind, in these of mixed Modes, as in the complex *Ideas* of Substances, examine them by the real Existence of Things; or verifie them by Patterns, containing such peculiar Compositions in Nature. To know whether his *Idea* of *Adultery*, or *Incest*, be right, will a Man seek it any where amongst Things existing?...No (3.5.3).²⁶

On the other hand, since what we aim to do when we make ideas of substances is to represent what is in the world,²⁷ we adjust our ideas of substances according to what we find in nature.²⁸

As we will see, the direction of fit has an impact on how we evaluate our ideas, and proves to be important when it comes to determining whether the idea we call “person” is an idea of a substance or mode.

²⁵ Since this paper is not intended to be a comprehensive response to Mattern and LoLordo, I will only take up those passages and arguments appearing most troubling for a substance interpretation.

²⁶ See also 3.9.7 and 3.6.44-45.

²⁷ 4.4.12.

²⁸ See 3.5.3 and especially 3.6.46-47—where Locke discusses how Adam would alter the idea he calls “gold” after observing different changes in it through experimentation. See also 2.31.3 and 13 in addition to 3.4.2, 3.5.3, 3.6.28, 3.6.44-51 and 3.9.9. Also contrast what Locke says in 3.6.46-47, where he discusses the way Adam makes, names and fine-tunes his ideas of substances with 3.6.44-45, where he discusses the way Adam makes and names his ideas of modes.

There are a number of different evaluative measures that Locke discusses for our ideas, but the one that matters most for our purposes is adequacy. Locke calls only those ideas which represent their archetypes perfectly “adequate.” Importantly, not one of our ideas of substances is adequate. This is for a number of different reasons, but I will focus on just one. Locke claims that our ideas of substances will always fail to be adequate because we can never capture all of the qualities or powers any particular substance has (2.31.8). Part of the reason for this failure is that we cannot possibly witness all of the changes any particular substance might undergo. The other problem is that while we assume there is a cause of all of the qualities and powers we observe in any particular subsistent thing, Locke thinks this cause or “real essence” is not something we have access to. The internal constitution or real essence of any particular substance lies beyond the scope of human understanding.²⁹ This is why if we assume we are trying to represent a real essence when we make an idea of any particular substance, we create an idea that is inadequate. This is also why Locke thinks those who claim we sort the world into substance kinds based upon real essences are mistaken.

For Locke, the nominal essence of any sort or kind is a general idea that includes the collection of simple ideas or features we take any member of that kind to have. Locke thinks that whatever simple ideas we choose to include when we make the nominal essence of any substance kind is going to be partly determined by real essences. This is because the real essence of any particular substance is the cause of the qualities or powers we observe (and said qualities or powers are the cause of the simple ideas we have). Since we cannot know anything more about real essence than this, however, it cannot be the case that we use the real essences of substances to carve up the world. That is, it cannot be that we use any information about the real

²⁹ See 3.6.6, for instance.

essences of substances to create the nominal essences of substance kinds.³⁰ Locke thus distinguishes between the real and nominal essence of substances or substance kinds. While we know the latter, we cannot possibly know the former. While any member of a substance kind will share the latter, we cannot say the same about the former.

Since our ideas of modes do not intend to represent any archetypes, there is no sense in which they can fail to do so perfectly (2.31.3).³¹ In addition there is no distinction between the real and nominal essence of any mode kind.³² And since we know the nominal essence of every mode kind, this means we know the real essence of every mode kind. This means that every mode idea will be an adequate idea. Therefore, while there are very few things we can know about substances,³³ we face little to no limitations when it comes to our ideas of modes. This is what leads Locke to claim that while the best we can achieve is probable opinion within natural philosophy—where our focus is on substances³⁴—we can attain demonstrative knowledge in mathematics and ethics³⁵—where our focus is on modes: “Upon this ground it is, that I am bold to think, that Morality is capable of Demonstration, as well as Mathematicks: Since the precise real Essence of the Things moral Words stand for, may be perfectly known; and so the Congruity, or Incongruity of the Things themselves, be certainly discovered, in which consists perfect Knowledge...” (3.11.16).

Given what we have learned thus far, it should be clear that Locke thinks we can only get

³⁰ See 3.3.6.

³¹ Locke claims, “The ideas, therefore, of modes... cannot but be adequate” (2.21.14). However Locke later asserts that our ideas of modes can fail to be adequate if we take another man’s idea as the archetype for our own, and fail to copy or represent it perfectly. Our ideas of modes are adequate otherwise (2.31.3-4).

³² See 3.3.17 and 18. Also see 3.10.19.

³³ 2.23.29, 4.3.10-15.

³⁴ 4.3.26, 4.12.9-10.

³⁵ In addition to 3.11.16, see 4.3.18-19, 4.4.6-8, 4.12.8 and 4.12.11.

demonstrative knowledge when we have adequate ideas, and we can only have adequate ideas when we know real essences. Moreover we know the real essences of modes, though the real essence of any particular substance is not something we finite beings can penetrate. This makes it seem as if the terms of the demonstrative science of mathematics must stand for ideas of modes, and the same goes for ethics given that Locke says we can have demonstrative knowledge of not only the former, but also the latter. This is important to keep in mind when trying to determine the ontological status of Lockean persons, because when Locke calls “person” a “forensic term,” this suggests that persons have something to do with morality. We thus might think that what Locke says about the possibility of a demonstrative science of ethics points to persons being modes as a result. If we return to the section of the text I just quoted above (3.11.16) with this in mind, it is easy to see how one could come to this conclusion. This passage continues,

...[W]hen we say that *Man is subject to Law*: We mean nothing by *Man*, but a corporeal rational Creature: What the real Essence or other Qualities of that Creature are in this Case, is no way considered. And therefore, whether a Child or Changeling be a *Man* in a physical Sense, may amongst the Naturalists be as disputable as it will, it concerns not at all the *moral Man*, as I may call him, which is this immoveable unchangeable *Idea, a corporeal rational Being*. For were there a Monkey, or any other Creature to be found, that had the use of Reason, to such a degree, as to be able to understand general Signs, and to deduce Consequences about general *Ideas*, he would no doubt be subject to Law, and, in that Sense, be a *Man*, how much soever he differ'd in Shape from others of that Name.

Since it is usually the case that our ideas of particular substances are affected by what the naturalists discover in the world, though our ideas of modes are not, it is easy to take Locke to imply that the idea we call “moral man” is an idea of a mode when he claims that the “moral man” is an immoveable, unchangeable idea, that is unaffected by what the naturalists uncover or claim. This is precisely what Mattern and LoLordo argue.

Nevertheless this passage can support the thesis that persons are modes only if we take “moral man” to mean “person.” It is not clear that these terms are co-referential, and there might be reason to think they are not.³⁶ Moreover, even if we assume that they are, I contend that if we read on, we will see that there is no evidence for the claim that Lockean persons are modes in

3.11.16. In a more complete version of this passage we see that Locke claims:

...Nor let any one object, that the names of Substances are often to be made use of in Morality, as well as those of Modes, from which will arise Obscurity. For as to Substances, when concerned in moral Discourses, their divers Natures are not so much enquir'd into, as supposed; v.g. when we say that *Man is subject to Law*: We mean nothing by *Man*, but a corporeal rational Creature: What the real Essence or other Qualities of that Creature are in this Case, is no way considered. And therefore, whether a Child or Changeling be a *Man* in a physical Sense, may amongst the Naturalists be as disputable as it will, it concerns not at all the *moral Man*, as I may call him, which is this immoveable unchangeable *Idea, a corporeal rational Being*. For were there a Monkey, or any other Creature to be found, that had the use of Reason, to such a degree, as to be able to understand general Signs, and to deduce Consequences about general *Ideas*, he would no doubt be subject to Law, and, in that Sense, be a *Man*, how much soever he differ'd in Shape from others of that Name. The Names of Substances, if they be used in them, as they should, can no more disturb Moral, than they do Mathematical Discourses: Where, if the Mathematicians speak of a *Cube* or *Globe* of *Gold*, or any other Body, he has his clear settled *Idea*, which varies not, though it may, by mistake, be applied to a particular Body, to which it belongs not (3.11.16).

A careful reading of 3.11.16 shows that what Locke is really claiming is that every term in a demonstrative science of ethics *need not* mark an idea of a mode, just as every term in a demonstrative science of mathematics *need not* mark an idea of a mode. Moral laws can contain names of substances, just like mathematical ones can, and even though this is the case, it does not mean that demonstration is rendered impossible. This is because when we use the name of

³⁶ Margaret Atherton has expressed this worry (in conversation). This is both because of Locke's claim that the moral man is “corporeal” and because she asserts that there is more to being a person than being a moral man. I share both of these concerns—though I am particularly moved by the latter: Although Locke identifies persons as moral agents when he calls “person” a forensic term, I do not think that persons are merely moral agents. Persons are also artists, friends, etc. Thus, being a moral agent is just one aspect of being a person (albeit a very important one).

any substance in what is supposed to be a demonstrative science, we do not focus on the fact that we do not know the real essence of the thing to which that named idea refers, or even a good number of its qualities. This is because the thing to which that named idea refers is not the focus of our science.

In other words, we are not concerned with ideas of particular substances or particular substances themselves, and what we do and do not know about them in any demonstrative science—whether it be ethics or mathematics. This is what Locke means when he says, “The Names of Substances, if they be used in them, as they should, can no more disturb Moral, than they do Mathematical Discourses: Where, if the Mathematicians speak of a *Cube* or *Globe* of *Gold*, or any other Body, he has his clear settled *Idea*, which varies not, though it may, by mistake, be applied to a particular Body, to which it belongs not” (3.11.16). While gold is the substance to which Locke turns to make this point when it comes to mathematics, the moral man is the substance to which Locke turns to make the analogous point about ethics. So, while what qualities or details we include in our ideas of the moral man and gold would usually be affected by what the naturalists discover, given that they are ideas of particular substances, such a thing is not a concern when we create, utilize and discuss ethical or mathematical laws, where said ideas sometimes appear. This is because when we create, utilize and discuss ethical laws we are concerned not with ideas of substances like the ones we call “man” or “moral man,” but with ideas of modes, like the ideas we call “justice” or “murder.” Likewise, when we create, utilize, and discuss mathematical laws, we are concerned not with ideas of substances like the ones we call “gold” or “iron,” but with ideas of modes, like the ideas we call “triangle” or “cube.” Ideas of substances are thus placeholders in demonstrative sciences. We sometimes need them to express what we want to express, but their nature, or the nature of their referents is not the

subject of our enquiry.

This is why Locke claims that even though moral discourse includes names of substances, and therefore ideas of substances, the meaning of them is set. “Moral man” stands for an idea of a corporeal rational creature, for the purposes of moral discourse, just as “gold” stands for an idea of a shiny, yellow metal, for the purposes of mathematical discourse. The meaning of these terms is set despite what the latest discoveries might tell us, and the fact that our ideas of particular substances are usually informed by such discoveries. Moreover, this is all Locke means when he says: “What the real Essence or other Qualities of that Creature are in this Case, is no way considered” (Bk. III, Ch. XI, §16). Therefore, although this kind of claim at first looks as if it is evidential for moral men—and perhaps persons—being modes, when we read this claim in context, as we have just done, we see that this is not the case. What we get out of this passage then is direct evidence that Locke thinks the idea we call “moral man” marks an idea of a substance.³⁷ We also get indirect evidence that Locke thinks the idea we call “person” marks an

³⁷ Kenneth Winkler looks at this same passage—3.11.16—and claims that it shows that the moral man is a substance for Locke (Winkler, 1998, pg. 164). In response to this objection, LoLordo says that she grants that the name “moral man” is the name of a substance, but this does not mean that the idea which this name stands for is an idea of a substance, or that this idea’s referent is a particular substance in the world (2012, pg. 655). Given that we never see Locke employing names of substances to stand for anything other than ideas of substances, and particular substances in the world, it seems that once LoLordo accepts that the name “moral man” is the name of a substance, she has to also accept that this marks an idea of a substance, or that moral men are indeed substances. In addition, we should note that LoLordo herself claims, “...if the moral man is a substance so is a person” (2010, pg. 655). It thus looks as if we not only have good reason to think that Locke thinks the moral man is a substance. It also looks as if LoLordo has good reason to accept that persons are substances, in light of this fact. This same issue comes up in *Locke’s Moral Man*. See footnote 34 on page 84.

An anonymous referee has suggested that Locke uses the term “moral man” in much the same way as he uses the term “bachelor.” This is supposed to give way to a mode reading of Locke on persons. As I argue above, Locke draws a distinction between relational and modal terms. “Bachelor” is a relational, not a modal term. Thus even if the term “moral man” functioned like the term “bachelor” in 3.11.16 this would not give rise to a mode reading of Locke on persons. See the subsequent footnote for a more comprehensive treatment of this issue.

idea of a substance, if we take “moral man” and “person” to be co-referential.³⁸

In response Mattern and LoLordo will claim that there is a passage that provides *direct* evidence for persons being modes. They argue that in 4.3.18 we get evidence that the term “person” is at the center of a demonstrative science of ethics. They contend that this means persons are modes. Here Locke claims:

The *Idea* of a supreme Being, infinite in Power, Goodness, and Wisdom, whose Workmanship we are, and on whom we depend; and the *Idea* of our selves, as understanding, rational Beings, being such as are clear in us, would, I suppose, if duly considered, and pursued, afford such Foundations of our Duty and Rules of Action, as might place *Morality amongst the Sciences capable of Demonstration*: wherein I doubt not, but from self-evident Propositions, by necessary Consequences, as incontestable as those in Mathematicks, the measures of right and wrong be made out, to any one that will apply himself with the same Indifferency and Attention to the one, as he does to the other of these Sciences. The *Relation* of other Modes may be certainly perceived, as well as those of Number and Extension: and I cannot see, why they should not also be capable of Demonstration, if due Methods were thought on to examine, or pursue their Agreement or

³⁸ Although I have admitted (at the 2012 Central APA) that I could see how one could come to think that the moral man is just a way of considering the species we call “man,” (the term picks out an aspect of the kind we call ‘man’) I now think the analogy Locke is trying to draw between the use of substance terms in ethics and mathematics breaks down if this is what is going on in 3.11.16. Here is why: Mode interpreters think that what Locke is saying is that when the term “man” is featured in a law of ethics it is not problematic that this substance term is included therein because really it means “moral man” or “person” and these names pick out ideas of modes. But if this is the case then when the mathematician uses the term “gold” he must mean to pick out an aspect of the gold, rather than the gold itself. That is, the term “gold” must be being used to pick out the cube or sphere that is gold. The thing is, the phrase Locke uses in 3.11.16 is “cube or globe of gold.” If the term “gold” were supposed to just mean “cube” or “globe” then such phrases would be rather meaningless. I contend that it is not an equivocation that makes the term “gold,” fixed, but rather a decision to settle on the nominal essence of the term “gold” for the purposes of demonstration. Settling on this nominal essence is what one has to do because one does not know the inner constitution of gold, etc. But this need not matter for the mathematician for she is not concerned with gold or any other substance. Rather she is concerned with cubes and globes and other mathematical concepts. The same goes for the terms we call “man” and “moral man.” Whatever we do not know about either men or moral men does not affect the demonstration of the ethicist, for the ethicist has decided to settle on a nominal essence and go from there. Moreover, this does not much matter because she is concerned to show the kinds of things men or moral men ought and ought not do. She is not concerned to show what makes an entity a man or moral man, any more than the mathematician is concerned to show what makes an entity gold or lead. The ethicist is providing a demonstration of the rules that those who can understand general signs and can deduce consequences ought to follow—though getting clear on what equips any entity with these capabilities lies beyond the scope of the ethicist’s project. Now there may be some who think that the ethicist’s job *is* to determine whether monkeys or changelings are moral men or persons. Thus there will be some who think Locke has a problematic view of ethics and ethicists. But this certainly seems to be Locke’s view.

Disagreement. *Where there is no Property, there is no Injustice*, is a Proposition as certain as any Demonstration in *Euclid*: For the *Idea* of *Property*, being a right to any thing; and the *Idea* to which the name *Injustice* is given, being the invasion or Violation of that right; it is evident, that these *Ideas* being thus established, and these Names annexed to them, I can as certainly know this Proposition to be true, as that a Triangle has three Angles equal to two right ones. Again, *No Government allows absolute Liberty*: The *Idea* of Government being the establishment of Society upon certain Rules or Laws, which require Conformity to them and the *Idea* of absolute Liberty being for any one to do whatever he pleases; I am as capable of being certain of the Truth of this Proposition, as of any in Mathematicks.

After quoting this passage LoLordo claims, “The idea of ourselves ‘as understanding, rational creatures’: this is the idea of a *person*...” (2012, 84). LoLordo is exactly right about that. Locke is talking about persons, and the idea that each person has of her self. It is also the case that Locke is once again talking about the possibility of a demonstrative science of ethics here. Locke clearly thinks we can be as certain of the relation between any two ideas of modes in ethics, as we can of the relation between any two ideas of modes in mathematics. But the thing LoLordo takes this passage to also express is that “person” is a moral term that is “central to the demonstrative science of morality.”³⁹

It is not clear what makes a term a moral term for Locke, or what would make some moral terms “central to the demonstrative science of morality” and others not. Locke never uses this kind of language. It is clear, however, that while some terms in any given moral law are the terms the law aims to clarify or say something substantive about, others are not. Moreover, I would think that for a term to be “central” to a science, it need not only be featured in a good number of the laws of that science; it should also be the case that said term is one of the key points of investigation or inquiry of that science. I would therefore think that if the term “person” is “central” to a demonstrative science of ethics, it would not only be the case that the term “person” is featured in a good number of moral laws; it would also be the case that part of what

³⁹ LoLordo makes this claim on numerous occasions (2012 and 2010).

the demonstrative science of ethics attempts to do is get clear on what the term “person” means and where the boundaries of the species we call “person” lies. Importantly, none of the moral rules that Locke discusses above includes the idea we call “person.”⁴⁰ In addition, it is not in his discussion of ethics, morality or politics, but in his discussion of epistemology and metaphysics, that Locke gets clear on what persons are and where the boundary of the species we call “person” lies, and this is significant.⁴¹ It is thus hard to see how what Locke says here commits him to the claim that the term “person” is central to the demonstrative science of morality.

It also looks as if LoLordo is claiming that because Locke calls the idea we have of ourselves “clear,” the idea we call “person” must be an idea of mode.⁴² But our ideas of particular substances can be clear insofar as the simple ideas that compose them are clear.⁴³ In addition Locke makes plain that some mode ideas fail to be clear.⁴⁴ Moreover, if it is the case that the idea we call “person” is an idea of a mode because it is clear, then it appears “God” has to be an idea of a mode for the same reason.⁴⁵ But Locke claims that “God” is an idea of a

⁴⁰ Although laws such as “where there is no property there is no injustice” implicitly include the idea we call “person” this need not suggest that the idea we call “person” is a mode. This is because it only seems that demonstration *could be* rendered impossible when an idea of a substance is included in the law one is trying to demonstrate. In laws where there is no explicit use of the term, whether that term picks out an idea of substance or mode just does not matter. Moreover, as we have seen, even when substance terms are used in a science such as ethics or mathematics, this does not mean said sciences cannot be demonstrative (See 3.11.16).

⁴¹ LoLordo and others seem to think that ethics or morality is a science of persons for Locke, but I deny this.

⁴² Both Mattern and LoLordo assert that by “clear” Locke means “adequate”—but they give no argument for this assertion. Locke distinguishes between clarity and adequacy: An idea is clear if it is vivid or exact, and we can easily reignite it via the memory. It is obscure if not (2.29.2). On the other hand, it’s only if a real idea represents its archetype perfectly that it is adequate; it is inadequate if not (2.31.1). Mattern and LoLordo have given no compelling reasons for us to think that suddenly Locke takes “clear” and “adequate” to mean the same thing, and thus we ought to assume they do not.

⁴³ That said, the idea of substratum always fails to be clear, on Locke’s view.

⁴⁴ The mode ideas we call “infinity” and “eternity” fail to be clear (2.29.15 and 16).

⁴⁵ Locke claims not only that our idea of ourselves is clear, but also that the idea we have of God is clear in 4.3.18.

substance on a number of occasions.⁴⁶ Thus if we follow LoLordo in the assumption that all clear ideas are mode ideas, we would be contradicting Locke's repeated assertion that God is a substance.⁴⁷

What Locke is really saying in 4.3.18 is that given that we know we (persons) are the kinds of things to which moral rules apply, and we know there is a God, who will dole out eternal punishment and reward on Judgment Day, we have good reason to develop a theory of morality. It also looks as if Locke thinks that we can come just as far with morality as we can with something like mathematics, and this is because the thing that makes mathematics capable of demonstration is a feature of moral rules as well: they are couched mostly in mode terms. What we get here, then, is one more push for the possibility of a demonstrative science of ethics, in addition to a story about how or why we developed such a theory in the first place. What we do not get, however, is evidence for the claim that "person" is a term that is central to a demonstrative science of ethics. This means that we do not get evidence for persons being modes, either.

⁴⁶ For evidence that Locke claims God is a substance see 2.21.2, 2.23.35 and 2.27.2.

⁴⁷ In response to this LoLordo would claim that she agrees Locke thinks God is a substance, but this does not disturb the demonstrative science of ethics because we know the real essence of God. LoLordo uses 4.10.12 as evidence: "Locke tells us that God's omniscience, power, and providence will be established, and all his other attributes follow' from 'the necessary existence of an eternal mind'" (2012, fn 33, p. 83 and 2010, fn 35, p. 663). She says, "I do not claim to understand how one derives providence from necessary existence. Thus, although Locke does not put it in these words, we have at least partial knowledge of the real essence of God. This explains why the idea of God can enter into demonstrative science while our ideas of created substances cannot" (ibid). It is important to note that Locke does not "put it in these words." He does not claim that we have even partial knowledge of the real essence of God, and all it seems he says in the section of the text LoLordo quotes is that all of God's attributes flow from his real essence (just like with any other substance). Moreover, Locke is clear that we cannot know the real essence of God: "For it is Infinity, which joined to our *Ideas* of Existence, Power, Knowledge, *etc.* makes that complex *Idea*, whereby we represent to our selves the best we can, the supreme Being...[H]is own Essence (which certainly we do not know, not knowing the real Essence of a Pebble, or a Fly, or our own selves,...)" (2.23.35). There is implicit reference to a similar point here: "I do not pretend to say how these Attributes are in GOD, who is infinitely beyond the reach of our narrow capacities" (2.17.1).

At this point, one could argue that because Locke claims the idea we have of ourselves (as persons) and the idea we have of God provide the foundation for a demonstrative science of ethics as I just described, then the idea we call “person” has to be a central moral term. But it seems as if there is a difference between a term or idea being foundational and a term or idea being central. Moreover, if this is the case for persons, then we have to accept that the term “God” is a central moral term as well. This would mean that the name “God” would have to mark the idea of a mode, for Locke. This would indeed be troubling, given that Locke tells us God is a substance throughout the *Essay* and his correspondence with Stillingfleet. Thus, what Locke says in 4.3.18 does not give us evidence that the term “person” is central to a demonstrative science of ethics.⁴⁸

Still, some might claim that even if “person” is not a central moral term, this does not matter. This is because in 3.11.16 Locke claims that we know “the precise Essence of the Things moral Words stand for...” and this means that any moral term, whether central or not, must mark an idea of a mode. Moreover, “person” is a moral term for Locke. I will respond by saying that if we want to claim that “person” is a moral term for Locke because persons are the entities that we hold responsible for action, and punish and reward accordingly—or, in other words, persons are the entities to which moral laws apply—that is just fine. When Locke calls “person” a “forensic term,” I take him to mean just that. But when we say that we have to know the real essences of moral terms for a demonstrative science of ethics to be possible, what we mean is

⁴⁸ In response to this argument, an anonymous referee has asked why it is “not sufficient for centrality that the only beings that morality applies to are those capable of a law, namely persons...” I am not entirely sure that morality only applies to persons. It seems that morality applies to angels and perhaps other entities. Otherwise, how do we account for fallen angels and the like? The other thing is, it is not just the idea we have of ourselves, but the idea we have of ourselves *and the idea we have of God*, that when carefully considered provide the foundations of our duty and rules of action. This is clear in 4.3.18. I contend that this takes us back to the point that if this makes “person” a mode term, it would make “God” a mode term as well, and we have ample evidence that “God” is a substance term for Locke.

that we need to know the precise nature and bounds of the species of the terms that comprise the substantive parts of the laws of ethics (like “justice,” “murder,” “property,” etc.) in order to get demonstrative knowledge, not the real essence of the entities to which said laws apply. This is, at least in part, what Locke is saying in 3.11.16.⁴⁹ Thus just because Locke calls “person” a “forensic term,” this does not entail that “person” is a “moral term,” unless all we mean by this is that persons are the objects to which moral laws apply. And, if this is all we mean when we claim that “person” is a “moral term,” we do not have to think that persons are modes. Therefore, while it is important to consider what Locke says about our conceptions of “substance” and “mode,” and Locke’s claims about the possibility of a demonstrative science of ethics, what we learn as result of this examination does not point us in the direction of a mode reading of Locke on persons. Moreover, what Locke says about substance, power and agency in other parts of the *Essay* provides compelling evidence that Lockean persons are particular substances.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Moreover, just because an entity is a thing to which laws or a theory applies, this does not have to mean that the term that picks out that entity is a term of that theory or science. For instance, we apply aesthetic norms to all sorts of objects—landscapes, sunsets, architecture, etc.—but when pressed, we would not likely say that “landscape” and “sunset” are aesthetic terms. In the same vein, we often apply the laws of physics to help explain the world around us. This is how we explain why a piece of chalk will necessarily fall to the earth when released from a hand—but when pressed, we would not likely say that “chalk” or “earth” are terms of physics (or at least in the way that, say, “gravity” is). Edwin McCann (in conversation) has suggested that “force” only appears once in Newton’s laws, though it is indeed a term that is central to his theory, and so the number of times “person” appears in the laws of ethics might not determine whether “person” is a moral term, or a central moral term. I take it that McCann is right about this, but it seems that while Newton was trying to get clear on forces and their effects, the laws of ethics do not try to do the same when it comes to persons, so the point remains. On a slightly different note, Ruth Boeker (in conversation) has argued that persons are not just the objects of the laws of morality, but the *subjects*, insofar as they can reason and reflect, etc. But given that Locke says that only substances have powers (such as reasoning and reflecting), I take this as further evidence for a substance reading of Lockean persons. Also, if the point is that what is required for demonstration of morality is that we (persons) are the kinds of entities that can complete the demonstration, insofar as we have reason, etc. this is not something specific to the science of morality. The demonstrative science of mathematics requires this too, yet we would not say that “person” is a term that is central to that science.

⁵⁰ In response to the arguments I have given here, Ruth Mattern (in conversation) claims that I have conflated Locke’s two distinctions between substance and mode. There is the first: substances are things and modes are dependences on such things. But there is also a second, which Woolhouse, (1971) points

3. Objections and Replies

I have argued that Lockean persons are substances and shown why the passages Mattern and LoLordo cite ought not convince us otherwise. Now I will consider two objections that any one who thinks Lockean persons are substances faces. The first concerns Locke's claims about the persistence of persons and the identity of substance. The second regards Locke's place-time-kind principle. I will do a bit of work to spell out these objections and then reply to them below.

Most who think Lockean persons are modes are happy to point out that Locke claims that sameness of substance is not necessary for the persistence of any person:

The Question being what makes the same *Person*, and not whether it be the same Identical Substance, which always thinks in the same *Person*, which in this case matters not at all...For it being the same consciousness that makes a Man be himself to himself, *personal Identity* depends on that only, whether it be annexed only to one individual Substance, or can be continued in a succession of several Substances...(2.27.10).

In addition Locke claims that sameness of substance is not sufficient for the persistence of any person: "Nothing but consciousness can unite remote Existences into the same Person, the Identity of Substance will not do it" (2.27.23). This seems to imply *inter alia* that an entity can persist as the same person despite not being the same particular substance over time, or fail to persist even if she is the same particular substance over time. If persons are substances, as I have

out: All that has a real essence is a substance and all that lacks a real essence (in any real sense) is a mode. Under this kind of interpretation we know the real essences of modes because they do not have any. I am on board with the claim that whatever conforms to our ideas of modes will not have a real essence in itself, but I am not sure I am on board with the claim that whatever lacks a real essence is a mode. In addition, it seems to me that we must have evidence that we know the real essence of persons to conclude that persons lack real essences and to further conclude that persons are modes. But then we are back to the arguments I have offered in this paper: there is no evidence that we know the real essence of persons and additional evidence to the contrary. Thus, accepting Woolhouse's two distinctions does not affect the force of the arguments I have given in support of a substance interpretation of persons.

argued, then there seems to be a problem. This tension was first highlighted by Joseph Butler⁵¹ and Thomas Reid.⁵²

In response I will say that while it appears that there is a tension between Lockean persons being particular substances and Locke's claims about the identity of persons, this is only the case if we restrict our attention to what Locke says in sections 2.27.10 and 2.27.23 (as quoted above). Locke goes on to tell us what he means when he claims that the identity of substance does not determine the identity of persons, which is that the substances to which any person is related need not be the same for her to persist, and even if they are, she could fail to persist. If we follow Locke through the twists and turns of 2.27, we will see that what Locke means when he claims that sameness of substance is neither necessary nor sufficient for sameness of person is the following: There can be a change in the substance we call "body," and yet no change in person (§11). There can be a change in the substance we call "man,"⁵³ and yet no change in person (§15). There can be a change in the substance we call "soul," and yet no change in person (§13). Moreover, having the same body is no guarantee that a person will persist (§17, 18). In addition, a person could fail to persist, despite there being no change in man (§19, 20). And, a person could fail to persist, despite there being no change in soul (§14). Importantly, Locke does not claim that a person can persist despite not being the same particular substance, or fail to persist despite being the same particular substance—as Butler, Reid and others have erroneously suggested—and this means Locke does not deny that persons are substances. That is, there is no tension between Lockean persons being substances and the claim that sameness of substance is

⁵¹ Butler, *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed* (1736).

⁵² Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785). Note: I am taking this objection to be distinct from, though closely related to, the objection that Butler and Reid (and Berkeley!) are better known for: the circularity/failure of transitivity objection.

⁵³ Human beings and persons are distinct for Locke.

neither necessary nor sufficient for sameness of person. Moreover, Locke makes similar claims about the persistence conditions of other entities, which he takes to be substances.

This becomes clear if we turn to Locke's discussion of men. Earlier in the "Identity and Diversity" chapter Locke claims that a man can persist despite a change in body. He says, "This also shews wherein the Identity of the same Man consists; viz. 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" (2.27.6). Presumably, the contrary is true as well. A man could fail to persist despite no such change. This makes it seem as if the persistence of the animal we call "man" is not dependent upon the identity of the substances to which it is related. This also sounds a lot like what Locke says about persons. Locke goes on to assert that both of these assumptions or observations are true: He says, "Different Substances, by the same consciousness (where they do partake in it) being united into one Person; as well as different Bodies, united by the same Life are united into one Animal, whose Identity is preserved, in that change of Substances, by the unity of one continued Life" (2.27.10). We can thus say that like persons, animals—including men—can persist through a change in the substances to which they are related. But this does not mean that men are not substances. "Man" is an archetypal substance kind for Locke. Locke claims "man" is a substance kind throughout the *Essay*. Moreover, Locke maintains that men are particular substances after making the above claims about the persistence of men. We see this in Locke's correspondence with Stillingfleet⁵⁴ and in

⁵⁴ The correspondence between Locke and Stillingfleet takes place between 1697 and 1699 (after the "Identity and Diversity" Chapter was first added to the *Essay* (1694)). Referring to what he wrote in the *Essay*, but not quoting it, Locke says, "...[S]peaking in that place of the ideas of distinct substances, such as a **man**, horse, gold, &c. I say they are made up of certain combinations of simple ideas; which combinations are looked upon, each of them, as one simple idea, though they are many; and we call it by one name of substance... from the custom of supposing a substratum, wherein that combination does subsist..." (Letter 1, 17-18, emphasis my own).

his discussion of the persistence of persons. Part of what Locke means, after all, when he claims that sameness of substance is neither necessary nor sufficient for sameness of person is that sameness of man is neither necessary nor sufficient for sameness of person (2.27.15, 19, 20). We thus have evidence that there are some particular substances that can persist through a change in the substances to which they are intimately related, and this is part of the larger point Locke is trying to make in his discussion of identity.⁵⁵ This includes not only men (as well as other animals and plants) but also persons!

Since persons are substances, a person has to persist as the same particular substance to persist at all. (This is a rather trivial fact about the persistence of any particular substance.) That being said, the body, man, and soul any person is related to need not be the same for her to persist, and even if they are, she may fail to persist. This is all Locke means when he claims that sameness of substance is neither required nor enough for the identity of any person over time. The claim that the identity of substance does not determine the identity of persons thus does not pose a problem for a substance reading of Locke on persons. It does not entail that a person can persist despite not being the same particular substance. Moreover, we have evidence that this kind of claim is in keeping with Locke's treatment of other kinds of substances.⁵⁶

With this in mind we should turn our attention to the second objection. Locke claims that no two things of the same kind can be in the same place at the same time. If persons are

⁵⁵ I take this (at least in part) to be what Locke means when he says, "Tis not therefore Unity of Substance that comprehends all sorts of *Identity*, or will determine it in every Case..." (2.27.7).

⁵⁶ One might wonder whether my view commits me to any particular relationship between the person, body, soul, and man and whether that commitment is troublesome for Locke's theory of personal identity. Locke never tells us what the relationship is between the person, man, soul, and body, but I suspect it is a very close one. At times, I lean toward the view that the relationship is one of coexistence. If one is wondering how coexistence is not ruled out by the place-time-kind principle, please see below. If one is hoping I will give a story about what allows God to restore memories to persons in order to punish and reward them on Judgment Day, that is not something I will offer here (at least in part because doing so would take me too far from the central point of this paper: showing that persons are substances).

substances, as I have argued, this might seem to be a problem. This is because souls are substances for Locke. Moreover, persons and souls are both thinking substances. Persons and souls are thus of the same kind, and it appears we get a violation of Locke's place-time-kind principle as a result.⁵⁷

It is worth noting that it is difficult to discern what Locke means when he posits the place-time-kind principle. Those who hold mode interpretations take Locke to mean that no two *substances* of the same kind can be in the same place at the same time. But part of what makes Locke's claims about persons ambiguous is that Locke calls both substances and modes "things," as I noted earlier. When Locke gives us the place-time-kind principle he claims that no two *things* of the same kind can be in the same place at the same time. Specifically he says: "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 any where at any time, excludes all of the same kind, and is there it self alone" (2.27.1). This can be interpreted to leave open the question whether the place-time-kind principle applies only to substances or to modes as well.⁵⁸

I will assume, for argument's sake, that when Locke claims no two things of the same kind can be in the same place at the same time, he is talking about substances. Even so, it remains difficult to determine what Locke means when he makes this claim. This is, at least in part, because Locke is agnostic when it comes to substance dualism.⁵⁹ I contend that when Locke posits the place-time-kind principle he uses "kind" as he does elsewhere—to stand for species. Locke means that we are certain no two horses can be in the same place at the same

⁵⁷ This objection comes from William Uzgalis.

⁵⁸ This is something I have been thinking about for a while, but which has become clearer to me through conversation with Kenneth Winkler.

⁵⁹ Locke is agnostic about substance dualism for finite substances.

time; no two persons can be in the same place at the same time; and likewise no two souls can be in the same place at the same time.⁶⁰ In other words, we are certain that no two entities that are picked out by the same nominal essence can be in the same place at the same time. One way of interpreting the place-time-kind principle, therefore, is to see it as an epistemological point about species.⁶¹

We get evidence for the plausibility of this interpretation if we examine the way in which Locke introduces the place-time-kind principle. He says, “When we see any thing to be in any place in any instant of time, we are sure, (be it what it will) that it is that very thing, and not another, which at the same time exists in another place, how like and undistinguishable soever it may be in all other respects” (2.27.1). Here Locke is talking about what we can be sure of, or know, when it comes to the identity and diversity of entities. The thing we can be sure of is that one thing cannot be in two different places at the same time. This suggests that Locke is making an epistemological point when he posits the place-time-kind principle in 2.27.1. But this also suggests that Locke is using the term “kind” as I contend: to stand for “species.” It is difficult to see how we could be even remotely worried that an entity could be in two different places at the

⁶⁰ Some think that in 2.27.2 Locke is asserting that there are just three kinds of substances—full stop. Thus they think Locke is not talking about all of the kinds (horses, persons, etc) that I describe here. I do not have the space to fully address this issue in this paper, but want to point out that when Locke claims, “We have the *Ideas* but of three sorts of Substances; 1. God. 2. Finite Intelligences. 3. *Bodies*...” it is consistent with Locke’s discussion of myriad kinds of substances throughout the *Essay* and Correspondence to think that he means we have ideas of 1. An eternal infinite immaterial substance, 2. Finite immaterial substances and 3. Finite material substances. While there is just one kind in Group 1 (God), Group 2 contains not only souls and persons, but also angels and many other kinds of which we have no knowledge. Group 3 contains not only individual atoms, but also plants, animals and the like.

⁶¹ We should remember that Locke claims that no two bodies can be in the same place at the same time due to solidity at different points in the *Essay* (2.4.4 and 4.7.5). I take it that what Locke says in 2.27.1 is distinct from, though compatible with, Locke’s claims in 2.4.4 and 4.7.5.

same time otherwise.⁶² Moreover, Locke appears to be claiming that if we could not be certain that no two things of the same kind can be in the same place at the same time and that no thing can be in more than one place at a time, the ideas we call “identity” and “diversity” would be rendered meaningless.

Thus I know the horse before me now is not the same as the horse in the distant pasture despite how similar the two seem because an entity cannot be in more than one place at the same time. Moreover I know that the horse before me now is there alone. There are no other horses in that very same spot at that very same moment. This I know to be true, despite how difficult it might be to track horses over time. Likewise, a person cannot be in more than one place at a time, and no two persons could be in the same place at the same time. So when there is a person before me now, I know that this person is not the same as the person in the next room despite how similar they might seem, for one thing cannot be in two different places at the same time. I also know the man in front of me now houses just one person and not two, for no two things of the same kind can be in the same place at the same time. This I know to be true, no matter how hard it is to track persons over time. In all of the thought experiments Locke uses, we never find him claiming that the same person could be in two different places at the same time, or that there are two persons in the same place at the same time. But this leaves open that a person and a soul could be in the same place at the same time. Claiming that persons are substances therefore need not leave Locke vulnerable when it comes to his place-time-kind principle.⁶³

⁶² If Locke meant something really general like “thinking thing” or “material thing” by “kind” it is difficult to see how this worry would arise in the first place. Why would I wonder whether this material thing is the same as the material thing in the other room? What would that worry even look like?

⁶³ Some think that we can treat both horses and persons as modes in 2.27 and resolve any potential problem with the place-time-kind principle. But if we can just treat horses and persons as modes whenever we wish, then why be troubled by the place-time-kind principle or any other tension in Locke’s text to begin with? Moreover, if we do so (treat horses, men, etc. as modes) we resolve a local problem at

Although Locke's assertion that no two things of the same kind can be in the same place at the same time at first seems troubling for a substance reading, it becomes clear upon a closer examination of the text that at least one interpretation of the place-time-kind principle leaves Locke unscathed, even if persons are substances. The same goes for Locke's assertion that the identity of substance is neither required nor enough for the persistence of any person. In other words, the two toughest objections mode interpreters can raise against any substance reading can be answered. Considering this in addition to the positive evidence we have from Locke's discussion of substance, power and agency, we have good reason to conclude that a substance reading of Locke on persons is both sympathetic and viable.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that although Locke does not make explicit claims about the ontological status of persons, we get compelling evidence that Lockean persons are substances, once we examine what Locke says about substance, power and agency. I have also shown that the passages Mattern, LoLordo and other mode interpreters cite do not imply otherwise. Moreover, I have shown that a substance reading can withstand the toughest objections mode interpreters can raise against it. We thus have good reason to conclude that Lockean persons are substances, and that a substance reading of Locke on persons can provide us with the sympathetic interpretation we seek. With a clearer understanding of the ontological status of Lockean persons in hand we can begin to gain a firmer grasp of what Locke's picture of persons

the expense of creating a vast chasm between 2.27 and the rest of the *Essay*, where Locke insists that horses and the like are substances.

looks like. We are also better equipped to pave the way toward a more nuanced description of the early modern debate over personal identity.⁶⁴

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⁶⁴ I am grateful to John Whipple, Margaret Atherton, Shelley Weinberg, William Uzgalis, Samuel Rickless, Kenneth Winkler, Antonia LoLordo, Ruth Mattern, Martha Brandt Bolton, Edwin McCann, Benjamin Hill, Ruth Boeker and the anonymous referees at *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* for help, feedback, and insights on this paper. I am also grateful for the feedback I received on earlier versions of this paper at the Locke Workshop at St. Andrews (2012), the Margaret Wilson Conference at Dartmouth (2012) the Central Meeting of the APA (2012) and the Northeastern Illinois Faculty Research Symposium (2011).

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