Locke on Personal Identity

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Although the first ten articles of Book II, Chapter XXVII of John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* are not concerned specifically with the problem of personal identity, they must be understood if Locke's doctrine on that subject is to be fully grasped.[1] In these articles are to be found Locke's views on identity in general; these views include at least one insight which, I think, has been ignored by some later philosophers. Therefore, at the risk of seeming (which is to say, being) a little tedious, I will open my discussion with a consideration of these articles.

"That," Locke says in Article 1 of Chapter XXVII, "that had one beginning, is the same thing; and that which had a different beginning in time and place from that, is not the same, but diverse." To paraphrase this point: Objects *X* and *Y* (where they are of the same kind, e.g., material bodies) are the same object if they originated at the same time and in the same place; otherwise they are different objects. If this is a correct reading of the quotation, Locke clearly intends us to accept common time and place of origin as a necessary and sufficient condition of *X* and *Y* being the same object, provided *X* and *Y* are the same kind of object and have origins. The reasons for the qualifications are as follows. (a) According to Locke, we can conceive God, and a finite intelligence, and a material body, i.e., one substance of each of the three kinds of which, he says, we have ideas, all existing in the same place at the same time. (b) According to Locke, God has no origin, yet is identical with himself. We know that God is identical with himself in the same way in which we know that a body which we see in a certain place at a certain time is identical with itself at that time. Finite intelligences and material bodies *do* have times and places of origin; this establishes a connection between the present

topic and later discussion. See Locke's Article 2.

In Article 1, Locke gives an argument for the contention attributed to him in the last paragraph, one which it would be well to examine. It is impossible, he says, for two things of the same kind to exist in the same place at the same time, or for one thing to exist in different places at one time. If it be asked how we know the first of these things to be impossible, Locke's only answer in Article 1 is that we never find or conceive it possible. Likewise, if it be asked how we know that one thing cannot exist in different places at one time, Locke's answer is that when we see something at a certain time in a certain place, "we are sure" that it is not the same thing as that which we see at the same time in another place.

To spell out Locke's argument a little more fully: If it is impossible for two things of the same kind to exist in the same place at the same time, then object *X*, at the moment of its origin, could not have shared the place it occupied with object *Y* (of the same kind as *X*), unless *X* and *Y* were the same object. Hence, that *X* and *Y* have the same time and place of origin is a sufficient condition of their being the same object. Moreover, if one thing cannot exist in two places at one time, object *X* could not have been in two places at its moment of origin. Hence, that *X* and *Y* originated at the same moment in two different places is a sufficient condition of their diversity, and hence is a sufficient condition of their lack of identity.

Now let us assume that one thing cannot have two different times of origin. Then *X* and *Y* cannot be the same object if they originated at different times. But then, that *X* and *Y* originated at different times is a sufficient condition of their diversity, and hence is a sufficient condition of their lack of identity. The following four possibilities are, however, exhaustive: *X* and *Y* originated either (1) in the same place at the same time, or (2) in the same place at different times, or (3) in different places at the same time, or (4) in different places at different times. But it follows from what has been said that in cases (2)–(4), *X* and *Y* are not identical. Hence (a), where *X* and *Y* are of the same kind and have origins, that they originated in the same place at the same time is a *necessary* condition of their being identical. But (b), it has already been shown that this is a

sufficient condition of their being identical. Conclusion (a) cannot, I believe, be established on Locke's premisses without the assumption that I make at the head of this paragraph. This concludes my exposition of Locke's argument for conclusions (a) and (b).

I think that Locke could easily give a defense of the claim that one thing cannot originate at two different times, which would work just like his defense of the claims that two things cannot exist in the same place at the same time, nor one thing exist in two places at one time. That is, he could say that we cannot conceive one thing originating at two different times. This suggests to me a test like the following (though I will not claim that this type of test is *demanded* by the text). Picture to yourself an object X beginning to be, and an object Y beginning to be a little later. You must admit that you have pictured to yourself two different objects. So you cannot conceive an object originating at two different times. So no object can in fact originate at two different times.—This might make it a little clearer how Locke arrived at the premisses of his argument. The conceivability test of possibility has been used by a great many philosophers, e.g., by David Hume.

This, I believe, covers Locke's Articles 1 and 2. In Article 3, he states that no action of a finite being, for example, a human thought, "considered as at different times, can be the same, each part thereof having a different beginning of existence." Joseph Butler and Thomas Reid evidently share this opinion. For they use it as a basis upon which to criticize Locke's theory of personal identity, Reid saying, for example, that it is strange that Locke should make the continued existence of a person through time depend upon consciousness, which does not have such an existence. But this is jumping ahead.

An object need but exist, Locke appears to be saying in Article 4, in order to exist in certain (presumably identical or contiguous) places at certain (presumably successive) moments, one place to one moment, and so to exclude all other objects of the same kind from those places at those moments, and so, according to what has already been said, to be identical with itself as long as it exists. For this reason, he calls existence the

principle of individuation. I will not elaborate upon this argument; it involves, I think, the same types of considerations as does the argument which I have considered in detail.

When an object exists, then, according to Locke, and for as long as it exists, it is itself and not another object. But we must be careful, he warns us, to what we apply this principle of individuation. That is, we must be careful what it is the existence of which is in question when we try to decide whether something observed (or considered as) at one time and place is the same thing as something observed (or considered as) at another time (and perhaps another place).

But this calls for elaboration. Consider an object the qualities of which are changing (and the location of which is perhaps changing, too). Does this object maintain its identity? The answer would seem to be that in some cases it does, and in some cases it does not. A tree can grow and still remain the same individual tree. But it cannot be chopped into pieces and still be the same tree, although it might still be considered the same mass of wood as that of which the tree was made just before it was chopped up. Locke explains this in this way. The same tree exists as long as the same functional organization, which he identifies with the life of the tree, exists (see Locke's Article 5). The same mass of wood exists as long as the same particles of matter remain contiguous, however arranged. As the tree grows, the same organization persists; but it ends when the tree is destroyed, although the same mass of matter may still persist. So a tree can continue to exist even though it changes in certain respects, e.g., size; and a mass of matter can continue to exist even though it changes in certain respects, e.g., the relative positions of its parts. In the former case, it is a functional organization obtaining among particles of matter, themselves more or less continuously being replaced by other particles of matter, the existence of which is in question. In the latter case, it is the existence of certain particles of matter in relations of contiguity to one another which is in question.

It might be asked under what conditions the functional organization of a particular tree continues to be *the same* functional organization.

Locke's answer, clearly, is: as long as it exists. But under what conditions are we to say that such a functional organization continues to exist? These conditions, I would think (filling in for Locke), would be of this sort: (1) The particles of matter among which the organization obtains succeed one another continuously and gradually. (2) The organized mass does not disappear one instant and reappear the next instant somewhere else. (It must be the same mass to be the same organization at a given time. See Locke's Article 5.) (3) The organization, if it takes on new aspects in different periods of the tree's life, does so gradually, and takes on *such* aspects as are characteristic of trees in those periods of their lives.

Locke gives no positive indication, as far as I can see, that he would accept condition (3), i.e., that he would allow that the identity of a thing (e.g., a tree) can be preserved through changes in that (the functional organization of the tree) the continued existence of which constitutes the continued existence of the thing in question. But I do not think that anything he says definitely rules out his taking the view that such changes are allowable, i.e., that identity can be preserved through them. His phrase, "in a like continued organization conformable to that sort of plants" (Article 5), describing the way in which new particles of matter are united to a given living plant, seems favorable to my interpretation; for surely, a *continued* organization *conformable* to a certain sort of plants can take on new aspects as the plant grows older, especially when those new aspects are characteristic of the functional organization of older plants of that sort, and still remain the same functional organization. Moreover, the thrust of Locke's doctrine is that a thing need not remain absolutely unchanging in order to continue to exist, and therefore, in order to remain the same thing. So, it would seem, it would be (at least) unreasonable of Locke, it would constitute a denial of his basic insight, for him to insist that the identity of a thing cannot be preserved through changes in that (in the example used above, the functional organization of the tree) the continued existence of which constitutes the continued existence of the thing in question.

If my interpretation of Locke on this point is correct, then his insight,

I think, boils down to this. A thing may undergo change, and yet remain the same individual thing, provided that the changes it undergoes are allowed for, so to speak, in the concept of that kind of thing (as, for example, increase in size is allowed for in the concept of a tree). This doctrine constitutes an answer to the problem of unity through change in qualities: the problem how a thing can undergo change in qualities and still remain the same thing. I refer to this doctrine as an insight. That I think it is, a striking and important insight, one which, I think, has been ignored, or else not understood, by many philosophers who have come after Locke. (I would put Butler, Reid, and Hume in this company.) The doctrine is a testimony to Locke's concern for the utility of concepts, a concern which shows itself in at least one other matter to be discussed. But that is all the evaluation of Locke I will do for the moment. (During this discussion, the problem of unity through change of place has been mentioned, but not attacked. Its solution would come, it appears to me, through the explication of Locke's argument at the bottom of page 3 above, which I declined to explicate.)

Before moving on to Locke's discussion of personal identity, I want to examine his concept of a man, for his contrast between a man and a person (which, he admits, is not reflected in everyday speech) forms an important part of his discussion of persons. Important references to the idea of a man are made in Articles 7, 9, 10, 15, 21, and 29. I will take these references in reverse order. In Articles 29 and 21, Locke's moderation has the upper hand; here he says that one's idea of a man may be of (a) a rational spirit, (b) a rational spirit united to a body that shows a certain organization of parts, or (c) a body that shows a certain organization of parts. In Article 21, he states that there is perhaps little agreement as to which of these is a man; his concern here is with the consequences of adopting each definition. In Article 15, he states that the same body, as well as the same soul, goes into the making of the same man, though the body, he says, is probably the overriding consideration for everyone but the man in question. In Articles 7 and 9, he appears to view a man as a functionally organized, living body of a certain shape and constitution, on

the grounds that when we see such a body, we say "there is a man," whether or not there are signs of a reasoning power connected with that body, whereas, if we saw a body unlike a man's, and signs of a reasoning power connected with that body, we would not say "there is a man." In support of this latter contention, Locke goes beyond most modern ordinary language philosophers in their own game, producing not just imaginary cases, but an actual case in which an author refers to a creature of which he has been told as a rational parrot, and not as a man in a parrot's body. Having made this appeal, Locke concludes (Article 10), "I presume it is not the idea of a thinking or rational being alone that makes the *idea of a man* in most people's sense: but of a body, so and so shaped, joined to it."

This does not, I think, make an entirely coherent picture. Nevertheless, I think that Locke's view can be summarized as follows: (1) One's idea of a man may be any one of (a)–(c) above. (2) According to everyone but the man concerned, it is the existence of the living body that constitutes the existence of the man. Therefore (I think it is suggested), it would perhaps be best for everyone to adopt this criterion.

This brings us to Article 11a (as I shall designate the first of two articles marked '11' in my edition) and Locke's definition of 'person.' He gives his definition of 'person,' he says, because, to find wherein personal identity consists, we must know what a person is. We can see why he says this. When we know the definition of a person, we will know, presumably, what it is that must persist over a given period for any person to be identical with himself over that period.

A person, Locke says in Article 11a, "is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it." What does the first clause of this statement mean? If we agree not to talk metaphysics, it is quite clear what it means. We are all familiar with beings of the type described; for such are most of the human beings we are acquainted with or have heard of. So, leaving metaphysics aside, we could interpret Locke to be saying that persons are

human beings of a certain type (excluding, e.g., infants, idiots, and certain of the insane), or creatures which we have never encountered, but which are like those human beings who are persons and unlike the rest of humankind in being rational and in being aware of having been in certain places at certain times, of having seen and done certain things in those places at those times, etc.

But in interpreting Locke's definition, we are not, of course, free to leave metaphysics aside. We must ask what that "thinking intelligent being" is, which, he says, is conscious of itself as itself in different times and places, and constitutes the self or person. In Article 27, he states clearly that we are ignorant of the nature of this thinking thing. In Article 25, he says that the more probable opinion is that the consciousness referred to in the definition "is annexed to, and the affection of, one individual immaterial substance." This, then, gives us a significant part of our answer. According to Locke, the thinking being which is the self or person is probably an immaterial substance. But what else might it be? In Article 17, he clearly implies that it might be made up of spiritual or material substance, either simple or compounded. Also in that article, he refers to the being in question in very broad terms as "that with which" the consciousness of the being which is presently the self can join itself. There are other clues as to what Locke means by "thinking intelligent being" in his definition of a person, clues which may be found in Articles 10b, 12, 15, and 16. But as far as I can tell, the possibilities always boil down to two. The being in question, the self or person, is either a material or a spiritual substance. (Thus I agree, though with a little hesitation, to Butler's statement that 'being' in Locke's definition means 'substance.')[2]

But what, to wrap up this immediate topic for the moment, is a spiritual or a material substance, according to Locke? A spiritual substance, he says in Book II, Chapter XXIII, Article 5, is that in which we suppose the operations of the mind to subsist, not being able to conceive how they could subsist alone, or in one another. A material substance is likewise a substratum which, as we suppose, supports such a collection of simple sensible ideas as we call, for example, a horse. In other words, we use the

notion of substances to explain how the different operations of a mind, or qualities of an object, cohere. Perhaps this explanation is also supposed to cover the fact that such operations and qualities show a common ownership through time. Locke has been criticized for retaining the notion of spiritual substance when, so the objection goes, he no longer needed it, having solved the problem of unity through change in qualities, mentioned above. But more of this later.

I shall now make an effort to discover what Locke means when he says, as quoted above, that a person considers himself as himself in different times and places *by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking and essential to it.* I will do this by giving a series of quotations and explications.

Locke says that no one can perceive without being aware that he is perceiving, where perceiving includes such things as seeing, hearing, etc., meditating, and exerting the will. (This opinion has had many adherents.) "Thus it is always," he continues in Article 11a, "as to our present sensations and perceptions: and by this everyone is to himself that which he calls *self*." That is to say, at any moment, it is in virtue of being conscious that one is perceiving, that one is the person one is, and not another. Moreover, it is in virtue of being thus conscious, that one *knows* that one is the person one is (for this explains the occurrence of the words "to himself" in the quotation).

Locke further develops his position in these words: "In this [consciousness that one is perceiving] alone consists personal identity," and thus "as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person." (See Article 11a.) That is, since the consciousness one has of one's perceptions at any given moment is that in virtue of which one is at that moment a person, and hence (since existence is the principle of individuation) is that in virtue of which one is the person one is at that moment, the extension of this consciousness through time, so to speak, is that in virtue of which one is a person extending through time, and hence is that in virtue of which one is the same person at two different times.

But now, it seems, we have to figure out what is meant by the phrase, "the extension of this consciousness through time." Locke says things in two different places which can help us. First (Article 10b): "As far as any intelligent being *can* repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness it had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present action; so far it is the same personal self." Now in Article 13, he says that this "same consciousness" of which he speaks is not "the same individual action" but rather "a present representation of a past action." This suggests that he is thinking in the following terms. At a certain time, a rational being perceives something (e.g., wills something, or sees something), and this occurrence is (necessarily) accompanied by the consciousness that it is taking place. Later, that rational being represents to itself that past occurrence. But this it does by *repeating* the past perception in question (see Locke on memory, Book II, Chapter X, Article 2). But then a part of the representation in question is (necessarily, I think) the representation of the consciousness that accompanied it. If this is so, then, it would seem, to say that the consciousness one has of one's perceptual (or mental) activity (including willing)—to say that this extends through time is to say that one *can* represent to oneself, by repeating it, that consciousness which one had at one time of one's mental activity at that time. It should be noted that only the possibility of representing one's past consciousness is in question; see the statement from Article 10b quoted at the head of this paragraph.

How, then, to return to the question with which I started, does that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking enable a person to consider himself as himself in different times and places? If what I have just said is correct, then the answer is, clearly: by giving that person the memory of having done and experienced such and such. By that self-consciousness which is essential to thinking, a person is aware that he is having the perceptions he is having at a given moment. But if a person is aware, at a given moment, that he is having the perceptions which he is having at that moment, then he will be able (at least in some cases) to remember that he was having those perceptions, by reproducing his

original awareness of having those perceptions, with the additional perception, that this is a past awareness. But if the present awareness of having certain perceptions is to count as considering oneself as oneself now, this reproduced awareness must count as considering oneself as oneself in a different time and place. At least, it appears to make sense to read Locke in this way.

Let us note parenthetically that Locke, as in the passages just considered, calls the actions and experiences of a person perceptions, and defines a person as a thinking, as opposed to a thinking and self-moving being, or something of this sort. This would appear to indicate that deep-down, he thinks of a person as a spiritual substance.

Since Locke takes the position that the ability to remember is that which constitutes the extension of self-consciousness through time, it should be clear from what has been said that by his doctrine, where a person has the memory of having done or experienced something, he is the same person as the person who did or experienced that thing, and where he has no such memory, i.e., where he cannot remember having done or experienced that thing, he is not that person. Memory, then, by this doctrine, is the necessary and sufficient condition of personal identity with respect to different times.

I here note, but will not attempt to lay out in detail, Locke's discussion of the relations that might possibly obtain between thinking substances (material and immaterial) and that consciousness of one's perceptions which makes a being a person. This discussion takes up a large part of Chapter XXVII. Its outcome, as might be expected, is that whether or not this consciousness is or can be switched off, so to speak, from one thinking substance to another (if it can, several substances can correspond to one person), and whether or not one thinking substance can have, successively, two entirely different sets of memories (if it can, one substance can correspond to several persons)—whatever may be the case with regard to this, a person still extends through time to just the extent that his memories do. As to the possibility that a thinking substance may "remember" doing what in fact it didn't do, and thereupon be unjustly

rewarded or punished, Locke says (Article 13) that we must trust to the goodness of God that this never happens.

'Person,' Locke says in Article 26, is a forensic term. It plays a role in the allocation of praise and blame, punishment and reward. Thus, he says, it is applicable only to intelligent agents which are capable of happiness and misery, and of living in accordance with a law (a law, perhaps he means, obedience to which maximizes happiness). In this statement, we can find a motive for Locke's definition of 'person.' For only a being which can remember having done such and such, and can remember having suffered or been made happy thereupon, can fruitfully be praised or subjected to punishment, etc.

A number of other philosophers likewise think of 'person' as a forensic term, i.e., as a term "pertaining to, connected with, or used in courts of law or [more generally, in] public discussion and debate."[3] Thus Leibniz says that the person subsists after death, retaining its moral qualities by conserving the consciousness of what it is, and thereby is rendered susceptible to *chastisement* or *reward*.[4] Reid emphasizes the public aspect of personhood (if I may use that term) when he argues that were an amputated limb a part of a person, it would have a right to a part of that person's estate, would be liable for a part of his engagements, and would be entitled to a share of the praise and blame due him.[5] *Persona*, in Latin, appears to have referred sometimes to the mask worn by an actor in a dramatic performance, and sometimes to the man behind the mask. 'Person' itself has a similar range of meaning. It is sometimes used in treating of the man or woman, as when we use the expressions "in person" or "crimes against the person." But sometimes it is used in treating of the man's or woman's place or role in public life, as when we speak of legal persons, i.e., persons having legal rights and obligations (though a legal person need not be a man or woman). It seems fair to say, then, that those philosophers who, like Locke, speak or think of 'person' as a forensic term, have chosen to emphasize one major aspect, but not all major aspects, of the use of that term in nonphilosophical discourse.[6]

It is clear, from the two preceding paragraphs, that what may be

called considerations of morality have an influence on Locke's account of personal identity. He wants the idea of a person to be that of a morally responsible agent. So, in his definition of 'person,' he establishes requirements for being a person which are, he thinks, at least necessary conditions of being such an agent. Likewise, he appears to be influenced by what may be called considerations of immortality. For he points out (Article 15) that in accordance with his doctrine of personal identity, we can coherently conceive of the reidentification of persons at the resurrection, even if they have bodies different from their original ones, since the consciousness which makes a person is annexed to the soul, not to the body. Whatever else his bringing this up shows, he evidently is concerned that his account be conformable to Christian dogma.

Now I want to consider some criticisms of Locke's account of persons and personal identity. I will not present these criticisms in great detail, since my purpose is not to refute Locke, or to use him as a springboard to discussion of the problems he raises. I hope, rather, to indicate the directions in which a few of the more important criticisms of Locke have gone, or should, in my opinion, go; to bring out more clearly what Locke's doctrine is; and to point out, more or less in the manner of the preceding paragraph, several considerations that appear to have influenced Locke's account of personal identity.

Locke's general account of identity entails that a thing must continue to exist through time in order to be the same thing at two different times (I think the discussion on pages 3–4 above makes this clear). Now we have seen (page 9 above) that according to Locke, a person continues to exist through time in the sense that his consciousness of his actions and experiences extends through time; and a person's consciousness of his actions and experiences extends through time, according to Locke, in the sense that he can, at a given time, reproduce the awareness he had at earlier times of actions and experiences which he performed or underwent at those earlier times (a conclusion reached on page 10 above). But there seems, at least *prima facie*, to be something wrong in this. For to be able to remember the actions and experiences which one performed or underwent

between a given past moment and the present, which, according to Locke's account, is to be able to reproduce one's awareness of these actions and experiences, is surely not *literally* to continue to exist from that past moment to the present. Furthermore, as we saw (page 11 above), according to Locke, that thinking thing which is at present a given person might not be the same thinking thing as that thinking thing which was that same person at an earlier time. So there appears to be an unfulfilled requirement *within* Locke's theory for something, the literal continuation of which through time constitutes the continuation of a person through time. Something whose experiences, and whose awareness of its experiences, could not be switched off to something else, might fulfill this requirement. Nor is the postulation of such a something as strange as it might sound. According to P. F. Strawson, the persons to whom we refer in everyday speech, in the course of referring to particular human actions, experiences, and states of consciousness, are just such beings.[7] But Locke appears too willing to allow that one thinking being might take over the memories of another to consider this possibility seriously. Moreover, the dualism of mind and body that Locke favors, which consists, basically, in the view that the mind of a human being is one entity and his or her body a numerically distinct, i.e., a second, entity, is inconsistent with the view that subjects of experience are Strawsonian persons, for the concept of a Strawsonian person is the concept of a *single* entity to which both predicates ascribing bodily attributes and predicates ascribing experiences are applicable.[8] It is perhaps worthwhile to point out that Locke's dualism may have stemmed from his study of Descartes.

Butler, Reid, and Hume all deny Locke's contention, touched upon on page 11 above, that no person did what he cannot remember doing.[9] That is, they deny that the ability to remember is a necessary condition of personal identity. It can also be questioned whether this is a sufficient condition of personal identity; for if it is, we are justified, presumably, in holding a man responsible for an action which he can remember doing, even though his body was not present at the scene of the action.[10] Behind the first of these two objections lies the idea that there

is some other sufficient condition of personal identity than memory (for if there is absolutely no other sufficient condition, the memory condition must be necessary, if personal identity is possible at all, and if there is some other sufficient condition, the memory condition cannot be necessary)—and perhaps also the idea that there is no necessary condition whatever of personal identity.

Now since Locke has disclaimed any intention of using the term 'person' as it is used in everyday speech, having put his account of personal identity only to the touchstone of utility, I do not see how the objection of Butler, Reid, and Hume, the objection that memory is not a necessary condition of personal identity, can be sustained, except by showing that Locke's position is in some way or other inconsistent with the utility of the concept of a person. I wish to pass over this whole matter for the moment. As for the second objection, that memory is not a sufficient condition of personal identity, the way it has been stated, it brings out sharply the need to discover what Locke means by 'can' and by 'remember' when he says that person *X* is person *Y* if *X* can remember doing what *Y* did.

There are two senses of 'remember,' one strong and one weak (if the latter strikes one as a lexicographical hoax, it can still be regarded as a somewhat useful invention). In the strong sense, if Bertrand Russell remembers writing *Language, Truth and Logic*, then he wrote *Language, Truth and Logic*. In the weak sense, if Russell remembers writing *Language, Truth and Logic*, he sincerely claims to remember (in the strong sense) having written *Language, Truth and Logic*, but he may or may not in fact have written that book.[11] Now when Locke says in Article 14 that if I remember performing any of the actions of Nestor (a figure in the Trojan War), then I am the same person as Nestor, he evidently is taking 'remember' in the strong sense; for sincerely claiming to remember (in the strong sense) having performed the actions of Nestor is not a sufficient condition of actually having performed them. But now there arises a problem. Taking memory as a *criterion* of personal identity, that is, roughly speaking, as a mark or index that we can use in deciding questions of personal identity, as opposed to a sufficient and/or necessary *condition*

of personal identity, how can a person decide, in a particular case, whether his memory is deceiving him? Likewise, how can others tell that his memory claims are accurate? These questions bring out, I think, the dependence, in at least some cases, of the memory criterion upon another criterion of personal identity: that of bodily presence at the scene purportedly remembered. I will leave this with the status of a suggestion. But if I were to argue in detail, I would argue that the bodily criterion is at least as important as the memory criterion.

Of course, Locke does not claim that I must actually remember doing something that Nestor did in order to be the same person as Nestor. All that is necessary is that I can or could remember doing what Nestor did. But what does this mean? That if I went through certain procedures, I *would* remember? (And how could it be shown that I really did remember, in the strong sense?) But there are no procedures which will enable one to remember any particular thing that he has experienced. Does it mean, then, that I am the one to whom it would be *appropriate* to apply memory-reviving procedures? But this seems just a way of saying that I did in fact do what I claim to remember doing. (And how can this be shown?) These questions, I think, again indicate, though they by no means prove, that the memory criterion of personal identity stands in need of supplementation.

Locke's apparent failure to see that the memory criterion most likely stands in need of supplementation, and his not distinguishing conditions from criteria of personal identity (an omission Reid blames him for),[12] might well be explained, I think, if it could be shown that he takes memory to be an infallible mark of personal identity for the person concerned. But this I think he does. When he says, for example, that if I remember doing the deeds of Nestor, I am the same person as Nestor, by 'remembering' (i.e., by 'being conscious of'), he means having certain experiences (see page 10 above). But judging by the certainty which he evidently places in these experiences, it seems that he takes them to be infallible guides to truth. This view of memory would appear to be an extension of the view of knowledge as an infallible type of experience, a

view which has found many adherents throughout the history of philosophy, from Plato to Peter Unger. (There is, however, in Chapter XXVII, one clear exception to the claim that Locke takes memory to be infallible. He allows, as stated above (pages 11–12), that a thinking substance might "remember" what in fact it never did. My claim, then, should perhaps be restated as follows. Ignoring Locke's whole discussion of the possibility that one thinking substance might acquire the memories of another, there are indications that in Chapter XXVII, he takes memory to be infallible, or nearly so, not the least of which indications is that this makes his reliance on memory as the sole criterion of personal identity more understandable.)

Another classical issue, which I think deserves mention, emerges from criticism of Locke's position that the ability to remember is the sole criterion of personal identity, viz., the problem how one obtains knowledge of himself, as compared with the way in which he obtains knowledge of others. Locke, as far as I can see, provides no way for another to learn about my personal identity, than through my telling him about my memories and present awareness of my perceptions. Reid, however, for example, says that we often judge of the identity of persons *X* and *Y*, seen at different times, on the basis of similarity of appearance.[13] In view of the apparent need for the bodily criterion of personal identity, this might well be a justified procedure. I am quite sure, however, that Locke would not accept it. As I suggested on page 7 above, it appears that he takes the position that identity of body is the criterion of identity for a man. But he distinguishes men quite sharply from persons, as can be gathered from what is said on pages 6–9 above. Now in his discussion of identity in general, it seems to me that his way of speaking suggests that there is only one criterion of identity for each kind of thing (e.g., for a living organism, this is maintenance of its functional organization). So if Locke views a person and a man as different kinds of things, and applies the bodily criterion to men, it seems unlikely that he would be willing to apply it to persons also. Moreover, if the subject of experiences is separable from the body, as Locke appears inclined to think, then the bodily criterion

of personal identity certainly cannot be sufficient in itself, even supposing it to have any use at all under these conditions.

The questions which emerge from Reid's comment are, I think, these. Is there any basic difference between the way in which I know that I am the same person as person *X*, and the way in which someone else knows it; and if there is, does his knowledge still somehow stem ultimately from the same source as mine? I think that a thorough discussion of these questions, which I shall not undertake, would bear importantly on the question of mind-body dualism, the nature of memory, and other topics central to the criticism of Locke's Chapter XXVII.

I undertook this brief discussion of the question of self-knowledge and knowledge of others under the heading of influences on Locke's account of personal identity. But perhaps I should say rather, I hope without unfairness to Locke, that the consideration of this question should have been more of an influence on his theory than it seems to have been. For I think that a more thorough consideration of this question than, by all appearances, he engaged in, might have led him to reflect more closely on the fallibility of memory, hence on the possible need for the bodily criterion of personal identity, and hence on his favored dualism (in the sense given this term on page 14 above), and on his apparent assumption that each kind of thing has only one criterion of identity. (And then again, maybe not.)

Now I want to consider very briefly Penelhum's argument that Locke has no need of spiritual substance, and therefore should abandon that notion, since he has given the correct solution to the problem of the unity of a person through change, to which the doctrine of spiritual substance is an incorrect solution.[14] I have, in effect, agreed that Locke has given the correct solution, in outline, to the problem of the unity of a person through change. That solution is to point out that a person can undergo change and yet remain the same person, provided that the changes he undergoes are allowed for in the concept of a person, as increase in size is allowed for in the concept of a tree. Hence I have, in effect, agreed that it is unnecessary, that it is, in fact, the result of a confusion, to postulate

the existence of something in a person which does not change, in order to explain the continued identity of that person through change. Moreover, what I here say I have agreed to with respect to persons, I have agreed to with respect to everything else. I only wish to point out the following. (1) My agreement is predicated on the correctness of my interpretation of Locke on pages 4–6 above, for if Locke will not allow, for example, that a tree can retain its identity through changes in its functional organization, then he has not really introduced any new solution at all to the problem of unity through change (he has then, in effect, simply reintroduced the notion of substance). (2) Locke will still have other uses for the notion of substance, as long as he regards a mind as some sort of collection of ideas, and a physical object as some sort of collection of sensible qualities.

The question of the utility of Locke's concept of a person remains. For the sake of brevity, I here presuppose a great deal of the preceding discussion. My criticism of Locke in this respect proceeds, then, in outline, as follows. (1) Locke emphasizes only one of the major aspects of the use of the term 'person' in everyday speech, what might be called the legal or moral aspect. (2) This apparently leads him to give a certain purpose to the concept of a person: roughly, that of aiding in the allocation of praise and blame, etc. (3) This in turn apparently leads him to give the definition of 'person' that he gives (see page 7 above). (4) The purpose he gives to the concept of a person, or the definition he gives of 'person,' or his assumption that there is only one criterion of identity for each kind of thing, or all of these, apparently lead him to contrast 'man' and 'person' sharply. (5) This in turn appears to lead him to overemphasize the memory criterion of personal identity. (6) This overemphasis, I think, is more indicative of the inutility of Locke's concept of a person than any failure to require the necessary and/or sufficient conditions of moral and legal responsibility in a person is likely to be, because the memory criterion will not in fact bear the weight that he places on it (see pages 15–16 above); but to employ the bodily criterion, he would have to revise his concept of a person, for this criterion cannot be applied to immaterial substances, nor is it, as far as I can see, of great use if the soul can go from one body

to the next, carrying with it the consciousness which makes a person. (7) In view of the foregoing, Locke's solution might have been to emphasize also the other major role of the term 'person,' in which it means roughly the same as 'man.' While still retaining his interest in a person as a legally and morally responsible agent, he might have defined a person somewhat as is done on pages 7–8 above, and thus, perhaps, have avoided the difficulties mentioned under (6).

This concludes my section of critical comments on Locke's account of persons and personal identity. It is clear that these concepts have several important uses, and that their explication can be achieved only with the solution of a number of major philosophical problems.

NOTES

1. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Dover, 1959).
2. Joseph Butler, Dissertation I: "Of Personal Identity," Article 5.
3. *The Random House College Dictionary*, revised edition, under 'forensic.'
4. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy*, Part I, Section 89.
5. Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Essay III, Chapter IV.
6. I have found Arthur Danto's article "Persons," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edwards, ed., to be most useful in connection with these matters, and I borrow heavily from it in this paragraph.
7. See P. F. Strawson, *Individuals* (Anchor, 1963), pp. 92–93.
8. See Strawson, op. cit., pp. 100–101.
9. See Butler, op. cit., Article 3; Reid, op. cit., Chapter VI; and David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford, 1965, p. 262.
10. Terence Penelhum makes this point in his article "Personal Identity" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
11. In this and the following paragraph, I draw heavily upon Penelhum's excellent article, op. cit.

    In fact, of course, A. J. Ayer, and not Bertrand Russell, wrote *Language, Truth and Logic*. The latter quipped that he would like to have written it.
12. Reid, op. cit., Chapter VI.
13. Reid, op. cit., Chapter IV.
14. Penelhum, op. cit., p. 98.