

30. Locke's Nominal Substances

30.1. *Locke the Nominalist*

And so we arrive, in the end, at John Locke, who added an account of identity and diversity to the second edition (1694) of his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. There is perhaps no area of seventeenth-century thought that has been subjected to so much, and so sophisticated a body of commentary, and I will not pretend to do justice to the entirety of the topic. Still, when viewed in the proper historical light, many features of Locke's account become newly perspicuous. The project becomes at once less striking and original, but also more plausible and defensible.

The context I have in mind is that of scholastic nominalism, as described in the previous chapter. Although it is hazardous to speak of nominalism as a well-defined philosophical movement (§4.3), there is clearly a well-defined cluster of views on the subject of diachronic identity, coinciding with the group of authors traditionally associated with nominalism. For these authors, beginning in William Ockham and then, in canonical form, in John Buridan, identity is always understood strictly. Two things are numerically the same only if they are entirely the same. Since the nominalists think that a whole just is its parts, they hold that a composite substance cannot maintain its identity over time unless it continues to have all and only the same parts. What is not entirely the same may be partly the same, in virtue of sharing parts that satisfy the strict criterion of numerical sameness. If those enduring parts are prominent enough, or if there is enough continuity in their replacement, then we might loosely say that the two not wholly identical things are the same thing. Strictly speaking, however, we would be talking about two things and not one. Accordingly, composite substances are rarely the same over time. The growth and decay of

living things, or even the erosion of stones, leads to a constant succession of distinct wholes, each member of the sequence being partly the same as the last one, but partly distinct. So in the case of rivers, oceans, a horse, or the human body, we can speak of the same thing existing through time, diachronically, only in a loose sense, inasmuch as “one thing is said to be numerically the same as another according to the continuity of distinct parts, one in succession after another” (Buridan, *In Phys.* I.10; see §29.3). I do not know whether the nominalists influenced Locke directly, or whether perhaps he arrived at similar ideas independently, from common premises. Setting aside, as usual, such questions of provenance, I claim only that Locke's theory can plausibly be read as growing out of the same set of principles as scholastic nominalism.

The affinities with nominalism are clear enough, as we will see, but even so one might think that a more likely antecedent is Thomas Hobbes. Like Hobbes (see §29.5), Locke insists that questions of diachronic identity are always relative to the names we use, and the ideas that lie behind those names. If we are talking about bodies, Locke contends that we should be mereological essentialists, but should tolerate qualitative change (*Essay* II.27.3). If it is living organisms that are in question, then identity can be preserved through change provided that it is continuous in the right way (II.27.6, 8). To this Locke famously adds an account of personal identity in terms of continuity of consciousness, understood at least mainly in terms of memory (II.27.9). Setting aside for now the last criterion, the first two aspects of the theory fit neatly with Hobbes's account, since he too contends that bodily sameness should be subject to mereological essentialism, and that the sameness of an organism should be understood more loosely, in terms of some sort of continuity. Yet despite these similarities, it is quite clear that Locke is not taking the radical approach that Hobbes took. What really exists, for Hobbes, are permanent bodies, which are never

naturally generated or corrupted. The composite entities we recognize in our conceptual scheme are merely the product of the names we impose in response to the constantly changing appearances. In strict metaphysical fact, those appearances disguise a world of things that are wholly permanent, whose diachronic identity is unproblematic. Locke, in contrast, nowhere suggests any sympathy for this sort of radical perspective. On the contrary, he frequently embraces the conventional picture of substances coming into and going out of existence (see §27.7). Nor, accordingly, is Locke an anti-essentialist of Hobbes's stripe. Although Locke denies that our nominal essences capture the variation in real essences among things, he is quite clear in admitting that material substances have real essences. To be sure, Locke is resolutely skeptical about our grasp of real essences, but even so he seems to think of substances along generally commonsensical lines, so that the things that are substances, each with its own real essence, are the same ordinary objects that Aristotelianism takes for granted, and that we continue to take for granted today: horses, human beings, oak trees, and non-living stuff such as gold.

Locke's commitment to this much of our commonsense ontology points back to the tradition that Hobbes's own works grows out of, that of the nominalists. They too endorse mereological essentialism, and endorse biological continuity as the criterion for the sameness of living organisms. Modern scholars have been almost wholly unaware of this earlier tradition regarding diachronic identity, and so have not considered Locke's views in that context. Yet as soon as one does consider this tradition, certain lines of interpretation that have been largely neglected by recent scholarship become much more plausible. In particular, it becomes quite plausible to think that Locke's three different criteria for individuation are not all aimed at establishing the strict numerical sameness of a single persisting substance. Instead, it becomes natural to suppose that it was obvious to Locke

that only the first criterion – exact sameness of parts – yields genuine numerical identity, and that the other two criteria yield some sort of looser notion of sameness, not grounded in any one thing that endures, but only in a sequence of distinct things.

It is, to be sure, not obvious from the text alone that this is what Locke is doing. Rather than expressly maintaining that living things and artifacts are the same over time only in a weaker, less strict sense, Locke, like Hobbes, couches his analysis in terms of a difference in how we conceive of the thing in question. My contention, however, is that this is just a different way of making the same point that the nominalists were making. The clearest indication of this is Locke's resolute insistence that sameness of substance requires exact mereological sameness. This first becomes clear in sec. 3, which turns from the relatively straightforward case of simple substances (God, finite intelligences [angels and souls], and single particles of matter) to the case of "compound" substances. These cases, he tells us, are no more difficult to grasp than the simple cases, "if care be taken to what it is applied" – that is, to what we are ascribing identity and diversity. The first case he then considers is that of a compound mass of atoms, which for short he calls a body:

If two or more atoms be joined together into the same mass, ... whilst they exist united together, the mass, consisting of the same atoms, must be the same mass or the same body, let the parts be ever so differently jumbled. But if one of these atoms be taken away, or one new one added, it is no longer the same mass or the same body.

Locke does not bother to explain why exact mereological sameness is the right criterion for bodily sameness, and on its face the suggestion seems puzzling. If the Lockean project is to understand identity in terms of the different ideas we have in different cases, then it is hard to see how mereological essentialism should get into the discussion at all. For it fits no one's pre-theoretical idea of sameness to suppose that a thing loses its identity when it gains or loses a single part, however small. Viewed in the proper historical context, however, an

obvious hypothesis emerges to explain what Locke is doing: he is supposing that identity must always be understood strictly, and supposing that a compound body just is its parts. Hence the criterion for bodily sameness is not motivated by reflecting on our *idea* of body, but by the logic of identity.

After going on to describe the way in which biological continuity can account for the identity of various sorts of living things, Locke makes this crucial remark

It is not therefore unity of substance that comprehends all sorts of identity, or will determine it in every case. But to conceive and judge of it aright, we must consider what idea the word it is applied to stands for: it being one thing to be the same *substance*, another the same *man*, and a third the same *person*, if *Person*, *Man*, and *Substance* are three names standing for three different ideas; for such as is the idea belonging to that name, such must be the identity. (II.27.7)

By treating the strict mereological criterion as the only criterion that yields sameness of substance (lines 1, 3), Locke is implying that the other criteria do not yield genuine identity. They cannot, because in his ontology everything is either a substance or else depends on a substance (see the following section for further discussion). Genuine identity requires sameness of parts, and where that is lacking the notion of identity is merely a *façon de parler*. This is by no means to say that we should not talk about the same man, or the same person existing through time. Such talk is perfectly meaningful, and it is indeed the primary burden of II.27 to explain just what that meaning is. But we should not suppose that such claims entail the ongoing existence of any one thing. The remainder of the chapter repeats this over and over with respect to personal identity: e.g., “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” (II.27.10). Throughout the chapter, material substances are always bodies, and are always individuated strictly. Locke continues this usage in his later correspondence with Stillingfleet, remarking for instance that “no body, upon

removal or change of some of the particles that at any time make it up, is the same material substance or the same body” (*Works* IV:308-9). Hence although Locke wants it to come out true that an oak tree and Socrates persist through the course of their lives, this is not true in virtue of any substance's persisting. In broad outlines, and setting aside for now his bold new conception of personal identity, Locke is simply repackaging the old nominalist theory.

The previous chapter offered various examples of strict mereological identity being imposed on material substances, up to the late sixteenth century. For seventeenth-century examples, see Arnauld and Nicole's *Port-Royal Logic* II.12, drawing on earlier work of Arnauld's. Citing the cases of rivers, animal bodies, and cities, they conclude that words that purport to refer to one enduring thing in fact often refer to “plusieurs sujets distincts sous une même idée.” If Locke is supposed to be doing something very different from this, it is only because he did not write clearly enough to make himself understood.

See too Robert Boyle: “It is no such easy way, as at first it seems, to determine what is absolutely necessary and but sufficient to make a portion of matter, considered at different times or places, to be fit to be reputed the *same* body. That the generality of men do in vulgar speech allow themselves a great latitude about this affair, will be easily granted by him that observes the received forms of speaking. Thus Rome is said to be the *same* city, though it has been so often taken and ruined by the barbarians and others, that perhaps scarce any of the first houses have been left standing. . . .” (*Possibility of the Resurrection*, *Works* VIII:300). The passage goes on to discuss a wide range of cases that violate mereological sameness (universities, rivers, flames, ships), and where yet we ordinarily speak of the thing remaining the same over time. Boyle does not offer a theory of diachronic identity here, and so it is not clear whether he is inclined to think these are not cases of true identity, or whether he thinks one needs a looser criterion. But what motivates the whole discussion is the temptation to treat sameness as strict, mereological identity. Boyle moreover treats this as a commonplace notion, which suggests that further research might reveal many seventeenth-century precedents for this line of thought.

Another precedent worth mentioning is Thomas White, *Peripateticall Institutions* IV.7, who divides the problem of diachronic identity into distinct cases as Locke does, but comes to different conclusions about the proper criteria in each case.

I have not found Locke explaining why bodily identity requires mereological sameness. In particular, it is simply my conjecture that he embraces the part-whole identity thesis. Although *Essay* Bk. IV does repeatedly invoke the maxim that “the whole is equal to all its parts,” he treats this as a tautology, true simply by virtue of the meaning of the terms (IV.7.11). So understood, it can hardly bear the sort of metaphysical weight described in §28.5.

Locke distinguishes personal identity from substantial identity in nearly every section of his long discussion: secs. 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26. Indeed, this claim might plausibly be regarded as the principal thesis of the chapter.

Modern commentators have been so perplexed by Locke's insistence that only the strict bodily criterion yields sameness of substance that they have often been driven to suggest that ‘substance’ has some special meaning in this chapter. See, e.g., Alston and Bennett, “Locke on People and Substances” p. 39; Uzgalis, “Relative Identity” p. 294: “In the Chapter on Identity, Locke adopts a new conception of substances which he does not use elsewhere in the *Essay*.” In light of the historical context of Locke's account, such a suggestion looks quite unnecessary.

There is overwhelming textual evidence that ‘body’ for Locke is equivalent to ‘material substance,’ and that such a substance is subject to mereological essentialism. *Essay* II.27.2 tells us that “we have the ideas but of three sorts of substances: 1. God. 2. Finite Intelligences. 3. Bodies.” *Essay* II.27.10 treats the two terms as interchangeable: “Different *substances*, by the same consciousness, . . . being united into one person, as well as different *bodies* 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” (emphasis added). The same pattern continues throughout Locke's later correspondence with Stillingfleet. As Kaufman remarks of one such passage, “Here, as in every other passage in the 1699 letter dealing with sameness of body, Locke equates *body* with *mass of matter* and *material*

substance, and as such bodies and material substances are to be treated as having the persistence conditions of masses, i.e., mereological essentialism is true of them" ("Resurrection," p. 205). As Kaufman stresses, Locke gains no advantage from some special use of 'substance' here. On the contrary, by treating bodies, individuated strictly, as the only substances, he makes his position against Stillingfleet all the harder to defend.

30.2. Persistence Candidates

When Locke's theory is understood in light of the nominalist tradition, it becomes hard to resist concluding that the criteria Locke applies to living things and persons do not yield strict identity, and that an oak tree and Socrates may instead be simply a sequence of distinct substances. This interpretation not only makes better historical sense, but also resolves many of the puzzles that surround the usual modern construals of his account. One such puzzle concerns what oak trees and persons are. The text could hardly be clearer in insisting that there is no enduring substance that is an oak tree. So what then is an oak tree? What is a person? For those who want to find some enduring thing to serve as the referent of these ideas, there are only a few other possibilities, and they are all ruled out by Locke's text. First, a living thing or a person might be a mode. Although a number of commentators have made this argument, it seems both bizarre on its face and excluded by the text. Bizarre, because a mode must be a mode of something, and it is hard to see what an oak tree, say, could be a mode of, unless perhaps it is a mode of a body. But this seems to be obviously the wrong result: an oak tree is not a mode of a body, but rather it *is* a body. The proposal also seems excluded by the text, because Locke – like everyone else during our period – holds that modes are individuated by the substance they inhere in: "All other things being but modes or relations ultimately terminated in substances, the identity and diversity of each particular existence of them too will be by the same way determined" (II.27.2). So if an oak tree were a mode of a body, it would cease to exist whenever the body ceases to exist. Modes

cannot leap from substance to substance. More generally, for a living thing or a person to be a mode, there would have to be some substance that endures for at least as long as the mode in question endures, and so Locke would need some further account of the diachronic identity of that substance in which the mode *man* or *person* inheres. Of course he offers no such further story.

This last passage usefully tells us that substances, modes, and relations exhaust Locke's ontology. Or almost. For he immediately goes on to consider one further special case, that of successive entities, such as motions. As we saw in §29.3, this is certainly a case worth considering, inasmuch as the variability of composite material substances makes them at least analogous to successive entities. Might they just be successive entities? Some modern commentators have urged just this, arguing that living things and persons should be understood as – in modern parlance – four-dimensional perduring entities or, in scholastic terms, as *entia successiva*. This suggestion has been commonly dismissed as anachronistic, but that is quite wrong. Locke in fact expressly considers this possibility and rejects it:

3 Only as to things whose existence is in succession, such as are the actions of finite beings, v.g. motion
 and thought, both which consist in a continued train of succession, concerning their diversity there
 can be no question: because each perishing the moment it begins, they cannot exist in different times,
 or in different places, as permanent beings can at different times exist in distant places; and therefore
 no motion or thought, considered as at different times, can be the same, each part thereof having a
 6 different beginning of existence. (II.27.2)

Locke does not deny the reality of successive beings; on the contrary, he seems to recognize them, at least in the cases of motion and thought. (As noted in §18.1, seventeenth-century authors commonly do embrace this aspect of scholastic ontology, perhaps because their theories depend too much on motion to cast it aside as unreal.) In the context of a discussion of identity, however, Locke regards successive entities as quite irrelevant. By

nature, they do not *endure* through time at all, because each of their “parts” exists at a different instant, without any overlap (lines 5-6). This is a way of existing through time, but it is not a way of being the same thing over time, as “permanent beings” are (line 4). So successive entities are irrelevant to the discussion. (We saw Oresme exclude successive entities from his discussion of diachronic identity for just the same reason [§29.3].)

Although Locke dismisses successive entities in just a sentence, his ultimate account of composite substances is in some ways not so different. Like motion or, in general, an event, what we think of as a persisting oak tree is really just a series of distinct bodies, each existing for a brief period of time, connected by the sorts of causal relationships that Locke tries to capture with his talk of “partaking of one common life” (II.27.4). To be sure, such a sequence of bodies is not a successive entity. For one thing, Locke accepts the common scholastic characterization of a successive entity as having parts that endure for only an instant – “each perishing the moment it begins” (line 3 above; see §18.?). The “parts” of a persisting oak tree, in contrast, are bodies, each of which endures for as long as it satisfies Locke’s strict mereological constraint, and with considerable overlap among the parts of these parts. Moreover, motions and events exist *only* over time, as a sequence. No one part of a motion is itself a motion, inasmuch as motion cannot exist at an instant. In contrast, an oak tree is at every instant fully an oak tree. Indeed, this is what generates the puzzle of diachronic identity: we want to know in what sense this oak tree right here and now is the same as the oak tree on this same spot a year ago. Finally, a successive entity is indeed an entity, a thing with a distinct manner of persisting through time. Locke, in contrast, gives every sign of eschewing the idea that the series of oak-tree bodies is itself a persisting thing. It is not a substance, as he makes clear. It is also not a successive entity or a mode. What then is it? Simply a series of different bodies, causally linked together so as to yield what we

take to be a “common life.”

Part of the reason it is hard to see that this Locke's view is that English lacks a term for the idea of a substance-sequence. The notion itself, however, is familiar enough: our idea of wood, for instance, is the idea of something that exists first in an tree, then in a lumber yard, and finally as part of a chair. We think of the wood persisting through time, first as part of one substance, and then as part of another. Perhaps there is a single substance, the wood, that endures through all these changes, but one needn't suppose so to find the notion of wood perfectly intelligible. In a Lockean spirit, I suggest we call this sort of sequence of non-identical substances a *nominal substance*. These are cases where there is no single enduring substance, but where we treat the sequence as if it were the same thing over time in the literal, numerical sense. One might in principle recognize the existence of all sorts of far-fetched, arbitrarily yoked together nominal substances. The ones that Locke recognizes, however, are tied together by robust interconnections that resonate with our conceptual schemes.

In referring to these as nominal substances, I of course mean to draw attention to their affinities with nominal essences (and nominal powers; see Ch. 23). Just as a nominal essence is something we construct, as a rough approximation to real essences, in an effort to organize the world around us, so a nominal substance is a construction out of the real, strictly individuated substances that are the metaphysical bedrock of the material realm. Locke's interest in the identity conditions for oak trees, men, and persons is of a piece with his broader interest in reaching a clearer understanding of our language, so that it is fit not just for our relatively undemanding “civil use” in ordinary life, but for our more exacting “philosophical use” (III.9.3). The reason Locke spends so much time on the case of persons is surely that it is an idea with implications not just for philosophy, but also theology and

law, a “forensic term” (II.27.26), as he famously calls it. A less pessimistically skeptical author might aim at showing his readers the true nature of the substance that is the self. Locke thinks in general that our ideas of substance are “unavoidably ... various and ... very uncertain” (III.9.13). This is true, surely, not just with respect of our efforts at assigning things to their kinds, but also with respects to our individuating things over time. The best we can hope to do is to articulate clearly the principles from which we construct nominal substances. The strictly individuated real substances that underlie them are inevitably hidden from our view.

A modal interpretation of Locke is defended in Uzgalis, “Relative Identity,” and in Lowe, *Locke on Human Understanding*, although Lowe – rather puzzlingly – both admits that there is essentially no evidence for this interpretation of Locke, and subjects the interpretation to the same sort of criticism I advance in the main text. It is a striking feature of the literature in this domain that so many commentators regard their accounts as merely the least bad of the available options.

On modes as individuated by their subject, see also *Essay* II.12.4, which offers Locke's canonical definition of ‘mode’: “First, *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.” Admittedly, there is perhaps just barely room in this passage for allowing that a mode, while always dependent on a substance, need not always depend on the *same* substance. There is also room for an alternative reading of II.27.2, as quoted in the main text. Thiel, for instance, reads it as maintaining not that modes are individuated by substances, but that they are individuated by their existence, just as substances are (“Individuation,” p. 235). This, however, strikes me as both as unlikely in the context of Locke's time, and as a strained reading of the text, since it would seem to make it into a *non sequitur*. How could the fact that modes are “ultimately terminated in substances” yield the result that modes are individuated separately from substances, in terms of their own proper existence? Moreover, as Thiel himself notes, when the passage is read that way one has to conclude that Locke has nothing to say about the individuation of modes, which is odd because the passage seems in context to be intended to settle the question of the individuation of modes and relations.

Another text that insists on modes as individuated by their subject is II.27.13, where Locke considers “whether the consciousness of past actions can be transferred from one thinking substance to another.” He first concedes that, “were the same consciousness the same individual action, it could not.” Then he goes on to say that since it is “but a present representation of a past action” it might be transferred. Although he does not say so here, it is clear from II.19.1-2 that these acts of consciousness are modes. His point, then, is that modes cannot be transferred, and so “the same consciousness” could not be in one thinking substance and then another. But there is no obstacle in principle to one substance's having a “representation” – a memory – of a distinct conscious event had by a distinct thinking substance.

For Locke as a proponent of four-dimensionalism, see Conn, *Locke on Essence and Identity*. For worries about anachronism, see Kaufman's review. Kaufman (pp. 401-2) also notes the trouble for Conn's view posed by Locke's dismissal of successive entities in II.27.2. From a certain perspective, the view that Conn defends is similar to my own proposal, given that he holds that “a Lockean organism is thus the temporally extended aggregate of its successively existing constituent masses of matter” (p. 134). But there are crucial differences: most prominently, Conn thinks there is an entity that is the temporally extended aggregate, whereas I take Locke to be not advocating a new ontology of four-dimensional objects, but showing that our conventional ontology of enduring organisms and persons corresponds to no thing whatsoever (but only to a series of things).

An account much like the one I propose here has been offered by various other commentators. See, in particular, Winkler, “Locke on Personal Identity,” where persons and animals are characterized as “a series of

substance-stages" (p. 164). Winkler does not, however, think the view can be found in Locke's text. More recently, McCann, "Identity, Essentialism," has contended that only bodily identity "is an entirely natural or physical relation," whereas the identity of an organism "is in part a creature of our ideas or nominal essences" and is subject to "conventionalism (more or less)" (p. 189). This points in the same direction as my own view, but McCann does not supply any details.

Conn, *Locke on Essence and Identity*, pp. 108-11, discusses still other authors who take similar lines, although without working the view out in detail.

30.3. *The Ambiguity of 'Socrates'*

A nominalist reading of Locke competes primarily against two very different sorts of views: a relative identity interpretation, and a coincidence interpretation. According to the first, questions of identity are always relative to the idea under which the thing is conceived. Hence there is no absolute answer to the question of whether this composite substance is numerically identical to that one, at a different time. Whether they are identical depends on whether they are conceived of as, for example, a body, a man, or a person. There is a large literature on this interpretation of Locke. Rather than attempt to add to or even summarize it, I will simply let my own interpretation stand in counterpoint. On the reading proposed here Locke has quite a strict and absolute conception of identity, according to which a substance can be numerically the same over time only if, among other things, it has all and only the same parts. The criteria for living things and persons do not stand on an equal footing with this strict criteria, but are merely ways of making sense of our conceptual scheme in the absence of genuine identity.

The other principal rival to my own view – and perhaps the standard modern interpretation – reads Locke as endorsing multiple, coinciding, material substances. In the human case, for instance, there would be a body, a man, and a person, each a distinct thing with its own criteria for individuation. The first thing to say about this sort of view is that it is wildly anachronistic – far more so than the four-dimensionalist interpretation considered

in the previous section. There is, so far as I can find, absolutely no historical precedent for the idea that an ordinary substance like a tree is in fact two coincident substances: a body and a living thing. If this is what Locke is doing, then it is the most radical metaphysical innovation of the seventeenth century. This is not to say that authors from our four centuries had no interest in drawing some sort of distinction between the body of a living thing and the living thing itself. On the contrary, as we have seen, scholastic authors attempted to do just this in quite a few different ways – their theories of prime matter (chs. 2-3), accidental quantity (chs. 14-15), and pluralism regarding substantial forms (§25.?) were all, in part, inspired by the desire to explain how a thing's body can possess properties that the whole substance does not, or might not. One might therefore contend that since Locke can avail himself of none of these strategies, he needs some device like coincident objects to account for, say, the instability of the persistence conditions of a body, versus the robustness of the persistence conditions of a living thing. Perhaps. But it is – or ought to be – very hard to take this suggestion seriously, given how clearly Locke seems to rule it out when he stresses over and over again that the identity of a living thing or a person over time does not consist in there being a single enduring substance.

Moreover, beyond what Locke repeatedly and explicitly says, there are broader systematic reasons, stemming from his discussion of real essences, for why Locke could not defend the coincidence view. Given his skepticism regarding our knowledge of real essences, it would seem that the idea of *person* described in II.27 cannot stand for an enduring substance, just because Locke has too good an idea of what a person is, and what its identity conditions are. He famously remarks:

to find wherein personal identity consists, we must consider what person stands for; which, I think, 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 (II.27.9)

If this is what a person is, and if persons are enduring substances, then Locke would have gone a long way toward describing a real essence. In particular, he would have just sketched the necessary and sufficient conditions for the endurance of a person. But as we saw in §27.7, Locke is adamant that we cannot do this, not even in principle, unless we illicitly take for granted that our nominal essences track real essences. Without our ideas of nominal essences to guide us, the best we can do is take a given individual and ask what is essential to it. The result, as we have seen, is that “particular beings, considered barely in themselves, will be found to have all their qualities equally essential, and everything, in each individual, will be essential to it, or, which is more true, nothing at all” (III.6.5). This fits quite nicely with the doctrine of mereological essentialism (see the following section), but precludes Locke's idea of person from defining a substance. The idea of a person must therefore be merely nominal, and the persisting entity we construct on the basis of that idea must be merely a nominal substance.

Implausible as the coincidence interpretation is, it has a powerful textual impetus behind it, in that Locke repeatedly takes human beings and other living things as his paradigmatic examples of substances. In his discussion of substance, for instance, man and horse are two of the principal examples of ordinary, familiar substances, alongside gold, water, and stone (see, e.g., II.23.3, 4, 6). This looks on its face to be extremely strong – even decisive – evidence against the nominalist interpretation I am offering. For if horses and human beings are merely nominal substances, then it would seem to be seriously misleading for Locke to treat them on a par with gold and other nonliving things. Strictly speaking, a horse should not count as a substance at all.

The key to understanding Locke's position here is to recognize a fundamental

equivocation in the denotation of substance terms. As soon as one distinguishes between real and nominal substances, and treats the latter as a sequence composed of the former, one introduces an ambiguity into a term like 'Socrates.' One can use that term to refer to the substance that exists here and now, or one can use it to refer to the sequence of substances that makes up the persisting nominal substance. To mark this ambiguity, I will distinguish between *synchronic* and *diachronic* denotation. In cases where a substance endures numerically the same over time, these two denotations do not come apart. A term picks out the very same thing, regardless of whether it refers synchronically to the thing that exists right now or refers diachronically to the persisting thing. There is no room for ambiguity here, because the persisting thing, at every moment of its existence, just is the very same thing that exists right now. The notion that the diachronically denoted persistent thing is in fact a sequence of things simply has no place. For theories in the nominalist tradition, in contrast, the thing at a time is typically not numerically the same as the thing at another time, and so *a fortiori* not the same as the 'thing' that persists through time. Hence substance terms are ambiguous.

Fourteenth-century advocates of the nominalist approach to identity were aware of the problems here. A term like 'Socrates' is supposed to be a paradigmatic example of an absolute term, picking out a thing directly, without relating it to anything else. But if 'Socrates' refers to a sequence of things, it no longer seems to function straightforwardly as an absolute term. Nicole Oresme contended that in fact it is not, and that the proper analysis of diachronic identity reveals such terms to work quite differently from how scholastic logicians had always supposed. Although Locke does not seem to have explicitly recognized the semantic issues that surround his conception of identity – or even that there is an ambiguity here – it is clear on inspection that his use of substance terms is ambiguous in just this way. Most often in the *Essay* these terms denote synchronically. This is true even in

II.27, where the very topic of discussion gets initially framed in terms of synchronic denotation: “when considering any thing as existing at any determined time and place, we compare it with itself existing at another time, and thereon form the ideas of *identity* and *diversity*” (II.27.1). Here ‘thing’ is explicitly said to pick out a thing at a time and a place, and the problem of identity is the problem of whether that thing is the same as a thing at another time. The denotation here must be synchronic for this problem even to make sense. In some places, though, Locke switches to the diachronic sense, as when he describes the person or the self as a temporally extended whole composed of parts: “Any thing united to it by a consciousness of former actions makes also a part of the same self, which is the same both then and now” (II.27.25). Here ‘self’ must denote diachronically, for the notion of a temporal ‘part’ to make any sense. There are, however, not such many passages. His usual usage is synchronic, and so the problem of identity is not usually that of unifying distinct parts of a diachronic whole, but of accounting for the supposed identity between distinct synchronic individuals. Even in the passage just quoted Locke needs that synchronic usage: although ‘part’ denotes diachronically, for the temporally extended whole, ‘thing’ must denote synchronically, for a conscious thinking thing at a time. His preference for the synchronic usage is just what one would expect, if persons and living things are mere nominal substances, not genuine things. And that usage explains, too, why ‘horse’ and ‘man’ serve throughout the *Essay* as paradigmatic substance terms. They do so, because they denote synchronically, for the body or compound substance that, at a given time, is a horse or a man.

When Locke’s theory is so understood, it takes on the sort of parsimonious, metaphysically austere character that one might expect. The things that exist in the material realm are simple and compound substances, with their dependent modes. A compound

substance is always a thing, and always a body. Some such things are living, and some such living things are human beings (“men”). If such beings are conscious, they are persons. It may be that consciousness is possible only in bodies that are joined to an immaterial substance so as to form a larger composite whole – indeed, Locke says that this is “the more probable opinion” (II.27.25). But in any case there is, at a time, only one complete substance here: the thing that is the body that is the living thing that is the person. This is, moreover, the outcome that Locke needs elsewhere for his theory of general terms to come out right. General terms, according to Locke, refer to “abstract and partial ideas of more complex ones, taken at first from particular existences” (III.3.9). He gives the example of going from ‘Peter’ to ‘man’ to ‘animal’ to ‘living thing’ to ‘body’ to ‘substance’ and finally to ‘being’ and ‘thing.’ Every step of the way, it is the same individual thing that gets picked out, while “leaving out something that is peculiar to each individual” and so embracing a wider range of individuals. For instance, “making a new distinct complex idea, and giving the name *animal* to it, one has a more general term that comprehends, with man, several other creatures.... By the same way the mind proceeds to *body*, *substance*, and at last to *being*, *thing*...” (ibid.). This is what one would expect Locke to say, given that the substance just is the body, which just is the animal, which just is Peter. If the person were distinct from the man, and the man distinct from the body, then this account of general terms would make no sense. Terms of greater generality would not just pick out a wider range of things, but would in fact pick out entirely different things.

For the relative identity interpretation of Locke, see, e.g., Noonan, “Locke on Personal Identity”; Thiel, “Individuation.” Among the many arguments against this sort of interpretation, one might consult Yaffe, “Locke on Ideas of Identity” pp. 198-201 and Chappell, “Locke and Relative Identity.”

Chappell provides a good example of the coincidence interpretation, as does Kaufman, “Locke on Individuation,” although Kaufman thinks the view is inconsistent with other aspects of Locke’s account. Against the coincidence interpretation, see McCann, “Identity, Essentialism.”

Scholastic worries about the semantics of substance terms seem to appear first in Nicole Oresme, who makes this extremely interesting, if brief, remark: “et si arguatur ulterius: igitur ‘Sortes’ est nomen

connotativum, responditur quod non est simpliciter absolutum sicut alii termini de praedicamento substantiae, non est etiam nomen connotativum sicut nomina accidentium quae praedicantur in quid" (*In Gen. et cor.* I.13, pp. 113-14). This idea gets picked up in Albert of Saxony who repeats this remark almost verbatim, adding that 'Sortes' "est unum nomen medio modo se habens" (*In Phys* I.8 p. 128; see *In Gen. et cor.* I.10). The idea is that the failure of complete identity requires a rethinking of the way absolute terms work, and allowing for some third kind of term in between absolute and connotative. This is as much as either author says, however, and I have not found these suggestions developed in any detail elsewhere.

30.4. *Puzzles about Persons*

The nominalist reading of Locke helps solve the puzzle of what animals and persons are, if not enduring substances. The approach has the further advantage of dissolving quite a few of the standard objections to Locke's theory of persons. Consider the often-discussed problem of transitivity failure: the old man remembers his middle ages, and the middle-aged man remembered his youth, but the old man does not remember his youth. The result is that $a=b$, $b=c$, but $a \neq c$. This looks like trouble, because identity is a transitive property. On the present interpretation, the problem dissolves. The old man is not identical to the middle-aged man, when the terms denote synchronically, nor is the middle-aged man identical to the boy. The three distinct substances form a nominal substance, but are not strictly identical. Transitivity may and regularly will fail.

Consider too the gappy character of our memories, which seems to make it the case on Locke's view that I, as a person, encompass very little of my past. Locke seems willing, and even glad, to embrace that result, insisting on the distinction between sameness of person and sameness of man (see, e.g., II.27.20). But could the person that is I really cover so little of the life of the biological organism? Again, on the present view, there is nothing embarrassing about this. A person (denoting diachronically) is not a thing, but a sequence of things. Given our feeble memories, it just is true that the self we conceive of is quite a thin and tenuous construction. If you tell me about something I did, but which I no longer

remember, then I may be curious about whether it really happened. But even if I believe that it did happen, I cannot incorporate that into my conception of who I am. Perhaps later the memory will come back to me, and then my past action will come to be part of the person I am (denoting diachronically). Given that persons are mere nominal substances – constructs of distinct entities, tied together by memories – there seems nothing worrisome about these results.

What about false memories? If the person I construct is the sum of my current self and all the selves whose lives I remember, could that construct include conscious beings whose lives I merely take myself to remember, wrongly? It would seem not, because there might be another person who correctly remembers being that person, and then we would have $a=c$, $b=c$, but $a\neq b$ – another violation of the logic of identity. Yet, on the other hand, how can false memories be excluded, unless we already have an account of what it is to be the same person? Again, however, the nominalist reading of Locke points toward a reply: if the diachronic identity of persons is not strict numerical identity, then we need not worry about the laws of identity. More generally, the nominalist approach makes it clear that we ought not to worry about whether a memory is true or false. If I take myself to remember doing something, then that is part of the self I construct, right or wrong, for better or worse. Just as Locke's theory can tolerate forgetting, so it can tolerate misremembering. Our conception of ourselves does not include the whole of the living organism we are, and it might include actions performed by another organism. Indeed, the selves we construct might on close inspection turn out to be riddled with error and wildly incoherent in too many respects to count. Since such persons (denoting diachronically) are merely nominal, this makes no difference. Locke is analyzing our concepts, not the way the world is, and our concepts do not have to be coherent.

What then are we to make of Locke's remarks about how God would cope with false memories?

But that which we call the *same consciousness*, not being the same individual act, why one intellectual substance may not have represented to it, as done by itself, what it never did, and was perhaps done
 3 by some other agent, why I say such a representation may not possibly be without reality of matter of fact, as well as several representations in dreams are, which yet, whilst dreaming, we take for true, will be difficult to conclude from the nature of things. And yet that it never is so, will by us, till we have
 6 clearer views of the nature of thinking substances, be best resolved into the goodness of God, who as far as the happiness or misery of any of his sensible creatures is concerned in it, will not by a fatal error of theirs transfer from one to another, that consciousness, which draws reward or punishment
 9 with it. (II.27.13)

The first sentence of this complex passage raises the possibility that a person might take himself to have done something that he never did, and that in fact was “done by some other agent” (lines 2-3). The second sentence (lines 5-9) then considers whether this would yield the result that such a person might therefore be rewarded or punished for something that he did not in fact do. Given that Locke associates personhood with moral responsibility, it would seem that he has no choice but to treat the memory as determining reward or punishment. Yet, on the contrary, presumably thinking of the eternal rewards and punishments of the next life, Locke assures us that God would not let this “fatal error” (line 7) occur. This is a curious passage on any interpretation of Locke. For he seems unwilling here to let the memory criterion count as the final word regarding personal identity.

Memories can be wrong, if they represent the actions of some “other agent” (line 3), and in that case one ought not to be rewarded or punished for them. But to say this seemingly requires some other governing criterion for personal identity, a criterion that Locke seems tacitly to invoke when he speaks of distinct agents tied together falsely by consciousness.

As I understand this passage, Locke happily allows that the false memories combine

with true memories to construct a person. There are few constraints on the formation of nominal substances. Given that this is all a person is, however, it is no wonder that Locke finds intolerable the idea of someone's being damned for all eternity on the basis of a false conception of the self. The same point would presumably apply to someone who has (conveniently) forgotten her past life of crime, or to someone who has (sadly) forgotten her many years of virtuous self-sacrifice. God punishes according to what we deserve, not according to what we remember. But how can this be squared with the notion that "in this personal identity is founded all the right and justice of reward and punishment" (II.27.18), so that "to punish Socrates waking for what sleeping Socrates thought, and waking Socrates was never conscious of, would be no more right than to punish one twin for what his brother-twin did, whereof he knew nothing" (II.27.19)? I take Locke's view to be that the ties in consciousness that define personhood are merely a necessary condition for just reward and punishment. The presence of such ties is not sufficient to ensure responsibility, however, because one might have false memories of things for which one bears no responsibility. Similarly, the absence of such ties is not sufficient to annul responsibility, because one might forget things for which one deserves reward or punishment.

What then are the additional necessary criteria that determine moral responsibility? What leads Locke to think these punishment on the basis of these false memories would be a "fatal error" (line 7), and that indeed they *are* false memories? Clearly Locke's position is that he does not know, and thinks that on the available evidence we cannot know. Thus the very question of whether false memories are possible is "difficult to conclude from the nature of things" (line 5). As for what might come of such memories, here we can only invoke "the goodness of God" (line 6), at least "till we have clearer views of the nature of thinking substances" (lines 5-6). This is to say that *our* concept of persons is wholly

inadequate to settle such questions of moral responsibility. God, of course, will know what to do. Presumably, although Locke hardly spells this out, God's first task will be to restore all of one's memories, and expunge any false memories. Which ones are *ours*? This is a question we cannot answer, and must leave to God to sort out; the best we can do is stick to the memory criterion, and the nominal substance it yields. But we might speculate that if, say, we have immaterial, incorruptible souls, then God will restore a memory of all the conscious actions of that soul. If, instead, we are simply biological organisms, with no more continuity than that of an oak tree, then presumably the actions that are ours are those done by one of the temporary bodies that makes up the persisting nominal substance that is a human being.

To be sure, Locke does not say that God's judgment will be so exacting as to restore all of our memories, and thereby make us responsible for everything we have ever consciously, voluntarily done. But given that memories are a necessary condition for moral responsibility, God can justly reward and punish us only for what we remember having done. To be punished or rewarded for what we cannot remember would leave us simply bewildered, at a loss, with no understanding of how the outcome was just. If Locke is right about this, then God will certainly have to restore some of the memories of some people, lest forgetting be a free get-out-of-hell card. And once God gets into the business of doing this at all, it is hard to see why he should stop halfway. What the view implies, then, is that the life to come will give us a supernaturally clear sense of the diachronic person we are, and that we will be judged on the merits of this full story. The philosophically interesting implication of this picture – setting aside the eschatological speculation – is that memory is not the ultimate, defining criterion of who we are. This single passage from sec. 13, describing God's correction of a "fatal error," shows that such ties in consciousness are simply the only tool we have available for articulating a conception of ourselves. It is not a

bad tool, inasmuch as psychological continuity is a necessary condition for any legitimate concept of the self. But to treat the memory criterion as if it carved out some sort of new metaphysical entity, above and beyond ordinary compound bodies, is to misread Locke in the most perverse of ways. The person we construct on the basis of memory is merely a construction, a nominal self that is the best we can do.

For a handy summary of the main puzzles surrounding Locke's theory of personal identity, see Yaffe, "Locke on Ideas of Identity," pp. 213-29. There is a vast literature on these topics, and my remarks here amount to nothing more than a sketch of how one might go, given the line of interpretation I am offering. There is in particular still a question of whether the so-called "simple memory theory" is the right way to interpret Locke's account, even given the approach I am sketching. My main point, however, is that these sorts of issues are far less worrisome on a nominalist reading of Locke's account, making it unnecessary to look for anything beyond a straightforward reading of what it means for "consciousness" to be "extended backwards" (II.27.9).

The goodness of God passage (II.27.13) has been read very differently by other commentators. Bolton, for instance, takes Locke to be contending that God will not allow false memories ("Locke on Identity," pp. 118-22). Although the text admits of this reading, I cannot believe it is what Locke means, since the phenomenon of false memories seems not just possible, but commonplace.

30.5. *Essence and Identity*

The interaction between Locke's theories of essences and diachronic identity is complex and, unfortunately, underdeveloped. The discussion of identity in II.27 does not even use the word 'essence,' and the treatment of essences elsewhere in the *Essay* was developed before II.27 was written. These two aspects of Locke's thought are so tightly linked that one can hardly offer a theory of the one without having in mind a theory of the other. Since each is subject to a wide range of competing interpretations, the whole terrain is extremely difficult to navigate. Here I will briefly map out my understanding of the territory.

In §27.7, I argued that Locke accepts the standard doctrine that an individual substance has a real essence that both defines it as what it is and explains its characteristic features. The textual evidence for this conclusion seems overwhelming. I further contended,

on the basis of strong although perhaps not overwhelming textual evidence, that this should be understood in its strong and traditional sense: as meaning that material substances are individuated by those essences, and so exist only when, and only for as long as their real essence continues to exist. There is perhaps room for a less conservative reading of Locke on this point. But the evidence tends to suggest he embraces this much of the traditional Aristotelian scheme.

This essentialist reading of Locke's theory seems to conflict with his explicitly stated anti-essentialism, according to which "there is nothing I have, is essential to me" (III.6.4). What I argued in §27.7, however, was that this notorious passage is shorthand for a more complex thought, according to which "particular beings, considered barely in themselves, will be found to have all their qualities equally essential, and everything, in each individual, will be essential to it, or, which is more true, nothing at all." (III.6.5). The idea, as I understand it, is that a real essence is the internal explanatory principle for all of a thing's intrinsic characteristics. Since there is no way – without relying on our fallible nominal essences – to discriminate between those characteristics that count as essential and those that do not, we completely lose a grip on what counts as an essential quality, and so everything counts as essential, which is in effect to say that nothing does.

I recapitulate this earlier argument because it is crucial to my reading of Locke here. If one accepts on its face the "nothing is essential" claim, it becomes impossible to ascribe to him any sort of absolute theory of diachronic identity. All identity would have to be relative to some conventional, nominal kind. On my reading of Locke as merely a qualified anti-essentialist, it is possible to defend an absolutist reading. Moreover, the details of his qualified anti-essentialism entail the strict sort of identity he offers in II.27, according to which a compound material substance maintains its identity only under very strictly specified

and rarely obtaining conditions. Although Locke never sets out how the theory of real essences fits with his theory of identity, the view I would like to ascribe to him takes a given compound body to have a certain real essence, which makes the body what it is, and gives rise to the superficial sensible qualities we use to demarcate our rough nominal kinds. Since these bodies are individuated strictly, they frequently go out of existence – much more frequently than our ordinary conceptual scheme recognizes. Accordingly, real essences frequently come into and go out of existence. Since they are essential to a given body, their individuation conditions must be the same as those for bodies. That is perhaps a surprising result, and it is not one that Locke mentions, but it seems unproblematic, since after all we ordinarily think of bodies in terms of their nominal essences, rather than their real essences, and accordingly we conceive of bodies as men and horses – as what I call nominal substances – and individuate them more loosely. The real explanatory story behind our conceptual scheme would have to be couched in terms of the ever-changing real essences of ever-changing bodies, but it is a familiar Lockean idea that there is a disconnect between our ideas of the world and how the world really (probably) is.

So far so good. Unfortunately, I cannot entirely fit these two aspects of Locke's theory together. According to the criterion for bodily identity of II.27.3, a collection of atoms remains numerically the same over time provided those atoms remain together, neither gaining nor losing a part. This is apparently both necessary and sufficient for identity. Its necessity is predicted by my reading of Locke's essentialism. But its sufficiency is extremely problematic for me. Locke says here that it "must be the same mass or the same body, let the parts be ever so differently jumbled" (see §1 for the full passage). In allowing unlimited jumbling, Locke is setting aside worries about accidental qualitative change, which for a corpuscularian like Locke is of course the product of variation in corpuscular structure.

This, as discussed in §29.5, is a characteristic move in the nominalist tradition on identity. But it does not seem to be a move that Locke can make, for at least two reasons. First, it seems to clash with his version of anti-essentialism. For if “particular beings . . . have all their qualities equally essential” (III.6.5), then it would seem that Locke’s strict criterion for substantial sameness is in fact not strict enough, and that he should further include a *no jumbling* clause into the account. Second, even if Locke can make room for some amount of jumbling, it would seem that *unlimited* jumbling is too much, because this would allow for a body’s real essence to be destroyed, and so permit identity even through change in real essence.

I see no easy solution to either of these problems. With respect to the second, the only option I see is to treat the *unlimited jumbling* clause as a mistake. The clause makes sense for some of Locke’s paradigm substances, such as water and gold, and perhaps it was with these sorts of cases in mind that Locke put the claim so strongly. But if it is to be extended to living things, as my interpretation requires, then I think the clause has to be rewritten so as to permit only limited jumbling – jumbling that does not alter the thing’s real essence. This suggestion will hardly work for the first of the above problems, however, since that difficulty could be blocked only by removing the clause entirely, and inserting in its place the contrary claim. Here the most promising way out would seem to be Locke’s distinction between the substance itself and its qualities. The main point of this distinction, as I have stressed elsewhere (§8.2., §13.6, §29.5), is to allow for substantial identity through accidental change. Inasmuch as Locke embraces a version of a substance–accident theory (see Ch. 9), one might expect this strategy to play a role in his thinking. So let us put on the substance side the matter (a collection of what II.27.3 calls “atoms”) and the real essence of that matter. The substance will endure as long as this stuff remains. Let us put on the accident

side the modes of the substance, including its various sensible qualities. Those, let us say, admit of unlimited jumbling, without change to the substance, provided the matter and the real essence remains intact. How will this interact with Locke's anti-essentialism? As I read that doctrine, it is consistent with the idea that a substance does indeed have a real essence that determines its identity conditions. The difficulty is in allowing the jumbling of qualities, in view of the *everything is essential* doctrine. This, however, is less problematic than it might seem, because Locke clearly cannot mean to deny the very possibility of change. His interest is in whether one can draw a distinction between the different features that flow from the essence of a thing: between those that define the kind and those that are merely accidental and non-defining. Is my hair color of the first sort or the second? What about my having ten fingers, or two legs, or one heart, or a brain? Barring external intervention, these are all necessary consequences of my real essence. The point of Locke's anti-essentialism is that there is no principled way to settle the question of which of these define my essence and which are merely accidental.

So much, perhaps, for what I have called the metaphysically austere character of Locke's metaphysics. In trying to pull together the different aspects of Locke's thought, I have found myself forced to ascribe to him an increasingly baroque, scholastic framework, complete with substances, matter, real essences, and a variety of accidents that flow from that real essence. These are interpretive choices I have been making along the way, of course, first ascribing the substance–accident distinction to Locke (Ch. 9) and then a traditional (albeit corpuscularian) scholastic theory of real essences (Ch. 27). Those interpretive choices lead to still more choices, with the result that, in the present domain, Locke comes out looking very much like the scholastic nominalists, shorn of their forms. This is the natural result of taking Locke to be committed to something like our

commonsense ontology of material substances. It is a result that exemplifies a finding we have seen over and over: that the scholastic metaphysical scheme, for all its obscure complexities, has as its ultimate goal to capture our ordinary conceptual framework for the world around us. When authors like David Gorlaeus and Thomas Hobbes reject that framework entirely, they pay the price – quite willingly – of abandoning commonsense, in exchange for a world that is nothing like how it appears to be. Perhaps this is the sort of view we should ultimately ascribe to Locke. Perhaps, for instance, his theory of identity is really just a way to soften the blow of a radically eliminativist metaphysics, like that of Hobbes (see §29.5). Or perhaps, to the contrary, Locke means to go to the other extreme, and embrace a proliferation of distinct but coinciding objects, each with its own persistence conditions. I myself prefer to read Locke as a more conservative and less original figure, embracing much of the standard metaphysical framework of his day, while imposing on that framework a novel linguistic and epistemic superstructure.

Above all, what Locke retains is the notion that the world ultimately consists of enduring substances and their dependent attributes. Where Locke departs from this picture is in his contention that when the world is viewed through the obscuring lens of our ideas, substances play no more than a subsidiary role. The ideas we have of the familiar, changeable things around us turn out, on close inspection, to pick out merely nominal substances. The real substances, subject to mereological essentialism, are not something we care very much about, and Locke pays them so little attention that it is easy to ignore them altogether. These are claims that many others had made before Locke, as we saw in the previous chapter. Locke's distinctive achievement is to extend this conclusion even to our ideas of ourselves. His notion of a person not only requires a strikingly new conception of psychological continuity, but also requires dismantling the prevailing conception of the self as grounded in

an enduring soul or mind. Even while earlier figures like Descartes had deconstructed the scholastic conception of material substance, they had retained the idea of the self as an enduring thing, an immaterial mind, and so left intact the centrality of substance in the case we care about most of all. Locke's signal achievement was to call into question even this limited role for the theory of substance. So while the scholastic framework endures in Locke's account, it does so just barely.

For the possibility that real essences might change even while the man or the person remains, see Kaufman, "Locke on Individuation," p. 523n.

The novelty of Locke's account of persons has various dimensions, each of which perhaps has some precedent, when taken alone, but not when taken as a whole. First, there is his insistence that sameness of soul does not capture our concept. This is an issue that is obviously of great importance in considering Locke's relationship to earlier scholastic thought, even if my discussion here largely takes it for granted. (For a good discussion, see Yaffe, "Locke on Ideas of Identity" pp. 207-13.) Second, there is the focus on psychological continuity and, specifically, on memory. One can, to be sure, find passing intimations of memory's relevance to diachronic identity in earlier authors. Sorabji, *Self* ch. 5, describes hints in Lucretius (*De natura rerum* 3.850) and Augustine (*Confessions* I.7.12). We have seen gestures toward it in Autrecourt (§29.4) and it can also be found, in inchoate form, in Gassendi (*Philosophiae Epicuri syntagma* II.1.18 p. 67 [tr. Stanley, *Hist. Phil.* p. 872]). Leibniz quite clearly and fully articulated the memory criterion in 1686 (*Discourse on Metaphysics* art. 34), but this work was published only in the mid-nineteenth century. Third, there is Locke's focus on the notion of a *person*, as something distinct from the notion of a *man*. This is quite a striking and unprecedented feature of his view. It seems likely that Locke was inspired by contemporary Trinitarian discussions, and specifically by William Sherlock's idea that what individuates one person from another is consciousness. Although in a sense this is much the same idea, Locke's distinctive contribution is to see that this idea could be applied to the notion of a human person, as something distinct from the living human organism, and that the idea could serve to articulate the idea of the same person over time, an idea that takes us into entirely new philosophical terrain. (Here I am drawing on Thiel, "Trinity," who makes clear both the similarities and the differences between Locke and Sherlock.)