

# The Prince and the Cobbler

## John Locke

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# Personhood consists of continuous consciousness

- “since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity...and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person” (341).

- Locke may be making a metaphysical claim
- Important to distinguish between soul, body, man, and person
  - Personhood does not consist of soul, manhood, or body

- Manhood is not identical to personhood:
  - According to Locke, it is possible for one man to be multiple persons:
    - “If it be possible for the same man to have distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times, it is past doubt the same man would at different times make different persons” (342).

# Opposition to body theory:

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- The same consciousness occupying different bodies is the same person.
- A person's body may be altered without altering his personal identity (e.g., when a person loses a limb)

- Locke's theory also opposes soul theory held by Descartes and Plato:
  - Soul alone cannot constitute self because same soul can have multiple physical forms (e.g., through reincarnation) without the transference of personhood.
  - If consciousness altered but everything else remains the same, single soul tied to multiple persons.

# Example: The Prince and the Cobbler

- “For should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince’s past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon as deserted by his own soul, everyone sees he would be the same *person* with the prince, accountable only for the prince’s actions: but who would say it was the same *man*? The body too goes to making the man, and would, I guess, to everybody determine the man in this case, wherein the soul, with all its princely thoughts about it, would not make another man: but he would be the same cobbler to every one besides himself”(342).

- The cobbler now is the same *person* as the prince, but not the same *man* as the prince
  - “The immaterial substance or soul does not alone...make the same *man*” (324)
  - “Consciousness, as far as ever it can be extended- should it be to ages past- unites existences and actions very remote in time to the same *person*, as well as it does the existences and actions of the immediately preceding moment: so that whatever has the consciousness of present and past actions, is the same person to whom they both belong” (342).



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# Discussion questions

- Locke's discussion of the soul is vague. Although he claims that personhood is separate from the soul, he fails to clearly describe the connection between the soul and manhood, as well as the connection between the soul and consciousness. How may we interpret the role of the soul in these instances?
- Is Locke's idea of personal identity as separate from the physical form congruent with our own ideas of personal identity?

# Image sources

- <http://www.famouspeoplebiographyguide.com/royalty/Prince-harry/>
- <http://www.mi.sanu.ac.rs/vismath/reza/index.html>
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