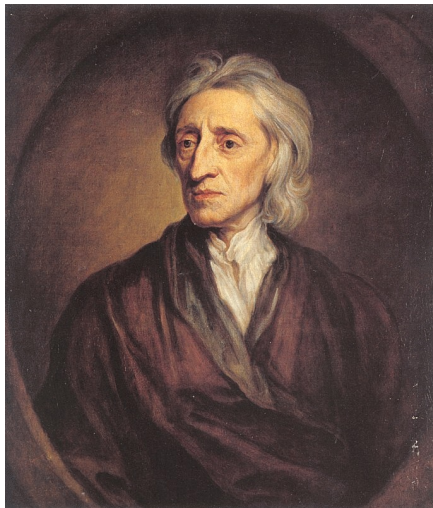


Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Hamilton College
Spring 2010



Class 14 - Locke
Empiricism,
The Primary/Secondary Distinction,
and Personal Identity

Four Central Topics in Locke's Work

1. Arguments against innate ideas
2. The primary/secondary distinction
3. An account of personal identity, including Locke's approach to the mind/body problem
4. Locke's philosophy of language, including the doctrine of abstract ideas

Two Lines of Attack

against the rationalists

1. Give up some of the general principles supposedly known innately.
2. Attempt to reclaim some of the knowledge that was formerly thought to rely on innate ideas.

Locke and Ock(ham)

- Locke rejects a contentious form of the doctrine of innate ideas.
 - UA
 - Straw person?
- Locke's positive claim is independent of his criticisms of innate ideas.
 - If he can show how to justify our beliefs while avoiding any appeal to innate ideas, we might prefer his empiricist account.
 - Ockhamist principles of simplicity



The *Tabula Rasa*

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any *ideas*. How does it come to be furnished? From where does it come by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? From where does it have all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from *experience*; our knowledge is founded in all that, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either about *external sensible objects* or about *the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking*. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from which all the *ideas* we have, or can naturally have, do spring (II.I.2, AW 323a).



Sensation and Reflection

- Simple ideas of sensation come from individual sense experiences of particular objects.
 - ▶ We can hold those ideas in memory, and recall them.
 - ▶ Language primarily consists of names of our simple ideas.
- Using our naturally developing ability to reflect, we can go beyond the limits of particular sense experience, and memory of such experience.
 - ▶ “The other fountain from which experience furnishes the understanding with ideas is the *perception of the operations of our own mind* within us, as it is employed about the *ideas* it has gotten - which operations, when the soul comes to reflect on and consider, do furnish the understanding with another set of *ideas*, which could not be had from things without. And such are *perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing*, and all the different actings of our own minds, which we, being conscious of and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our understandings as distinct *ideas* as we do from bodies affecting our senses... I call this REFLECTION” (II.I.4, AW 323b).

Plan

See next Tuesday's slides for discussion of the primary/secondary distinction, and Locke's take on the mind/body problem.

The rest of this document contains slides concerning personal identity.

The Ship of Theseus

- We can replace every plank on the ship, one at a time.
- It changes its material composition completely, but remains the same ship.
- We can make a new ship with the old wood, and find ourselves completely confused about what to say.
- Is the ship that Theseus uses, with all new materials, his ship?
- Or, is the new ship made of the old wood his ship?



The Self as a Moral (Forensic) Concept

- Not the soul (to which Descartes identified the self)
- Not the matter of our bodies (to which materialists like Hobbes identified the self)
 - An animal is not merely its matter.
 - The matter remains after death while the animal does not.
- Used for practical purposes of ascribing responsibility.

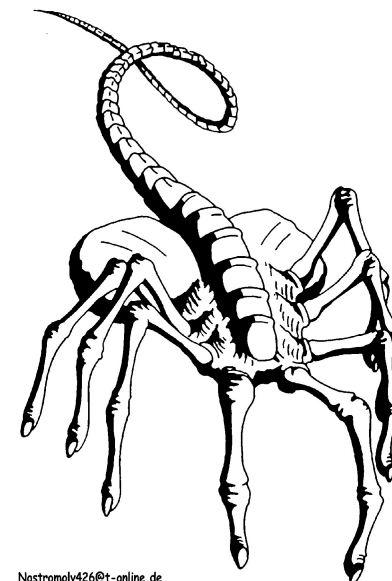
Relative Identity

- Identity is relative to a sortal, to a kind of thing
- A lump of plasticine can be the same lump, but a different statue.
- We can not know how to identify something unless we know what kind of thing it is.
- So, we can not know what our identity is until we know what kind of thing we are.



Against Biological Criteria

- Locke takes 'man', or 'human being', to be a type of animal, whose identity (qua human being) is determined functionally.
 - ▶ “The identity of the same *man* consists...in nothing but a participation of the same continued life, by constantly fleeting particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized body” (II.XXVII.6, AW 369a).
 - ▶ This sort, human being, can not serve as the sort of our selves.
- A human is identified by the functional organization of the body; it is a biological thing.
- But, a person is not a biological thing.
- “[A person] 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...” (II.XXVII.9, AW 370a).
- Aliens, and sentient machines



Against Identifying with the Soul

- “Souls [are], as far as we know anything of them, in their nature, indifferent to any parcel of matter...” (§II.XXVII.14, AW 372a).
- Imagine that a soul had two successive incarnations.
- We wouldn’t say that there were only one person.
- “Suppose it to be the same soul that was in *Nestor* or *Thersites* at the siege of *Troy*...which it may have been, as well as it is now the soul of any other man. But he now having no consciousness of any of the actions of either of *Nestor* or *Thersites*, does or can he conceive himself the same person with either of them? Can he be concerned in either of their actions, attribute them to himself, or think them his own more than the actions of any other men that ever existed? Thus, this consciousness not reaching to any of the actions of either of those men, he is no more one self with either of them than if the soul or immaterial spirit that now informs him had been created and began to exist, when it began to inform his present body...” (II.XXVII.14, AW 372a).

Consciousness

- Locke identifies the self with the thinking thing.
- If the same consciousness...can be transferred from one thinking substance to another, it will be possible that two thinking substances may make but one person. For the same consciousness being preserved, whether in the same or different substances, the personal identity is preserved (II.XXVII.13, AW 371b).
- For Locke, what makes the same person over time, is consciousness, and, especially, connection through memory, which Locke calls consciousness extending backwards.
- Thus, the day and night man, who has divided consciousness, is two different persons in one body.