 Locke’s Person is a Relation

MARKO SIMENDIĆ (UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE)

Recommended citation:
https://doi.org/10.5206/ls.2015.681

For more information about this article:

Locke Studies is published by The John Locke Society.
This is an open access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and shared under the original license.
John Locke added a chapter called ‘Of Identity and Diversity’ to the second edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1694) [hereafter *E* or *Essay*] in which he presented a revolutionary account of persons and personal identity. Chapter II.xxvii proved to be an immensely important contribution to the philosophical scholarship of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and remains the focus of a substantial and growing body of commentary. Within the abundant literature on Locke’s views on personhood, a number of contemporary accounts endeavour to answer a seemingly simple question—what *is* Locke’s person? Locke gives no explicit answer but offers three possibilities. ‘Complex ideas’, Locke writes, ‘may be all reduced under these three Heads’ (*E*, II.xxi.3) and these three are: modes, substances and relations.

The answer that dominates recent discussions of the place of Locke’s persons in his classification of ideas is based on Edmund Law’s 1769 ‘Defence’ of Locke. Authors such as Antonia LoLordo (2012) and Udo Thiel (2011) follow Law in emphasising the forensic nature of personhood and argue that Locke’s persons are modes. Another group of authors, including Kenneth Winkler (1991) and, more recently, Jessica Gordon-Roth (2015) rely on Locke’s claims about powers and agency and point out that persons are substances. In this paper I aim to present an

---


2 See Edmund Law (1769).

3 Other authors who argue that Locke’s person is a mode include Ruth Mattern (1980) and William Uzgalis (1990).

4 William Alston and Jonathan Bennett (1988), as well as Vere Chappell (1990) also view Locke’s person as a substance.
alternative reading that focuses on Locke’s definition of a person, and suggest that the person is best understood, in Locke’s terms, as a relation. ‘Person’ is, foremost, a term employed in a philosophical treatise in which the author insists on a ‘philosophical’ and not everyday use of words, in order to ‘convey the precise Notions of Things’ (E, III.ix.3; Stanton, 2011: 325–27) My argument will thus focus on Locke’s definition of a person. Person is what Locke calls a ‘complex idea’ and its definition is, as I will argue, comprised of two principal elements—substance and personal identity. The latter I view as the relation between multiple diachronic iterations of the same consciousness that gives the person its temporal extension.

Locke distinguishes between simple and complex ideas. Simple ideas are ‘unmixed’ qualities, such as ‘the Smell and Whiteness of a Lily’, (E, II.i.1) while complex ideas are composed of a multitude of simple or complex ideas. Depending on how their constitutive ideas are combined, complex ideas can be substances, modes or relations. One of the most common oversights scholars on Locke make is that they do not devote sufficient attention to the fact that person is a complex idea. This leads them to substitute a certain part of personhood or one of its aspects for the idea of a person. For example, Winkler (1991), who argues that persons are substances, thinks of persons only as ‘intelligent Beings’—and that is only one part of Locke’s definition. On the other hand, LoLordo (2012, 101) considers Locke’s person a mode, and in her view ‘persons are not substances at all’. A person is here reduced to ‘the idea of a continuing consciousness’ (ibid.). And this, as I will argue, amounts to personal identity, which is only one part of a person. Here I will put forward a reading of Lockean person as a compound—a complex relational idea consisting of substance and personal identity.

§1. Locke’s Definitions
In the Essay Locke offers the following definition of a person:
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 it self as it self, 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: It being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive (E, II.xxvii.9).

A synonym for ‘person’ is ‘self’ and, ‘[w]here-ever a Man finds, what he calls himself, there I think another may say is the same Person’ (E, II.xxvii.26). Self, the first-person aspect of personhood, is defined as

that conscious thinking thing, (whatever Substance, made up of whether Spiritual, or Material, Simple, or Compounded, it matters not) which is sensible, or conscious of Pleasure and Pain, capable of Happiness or Misery, and so is concern’d for it self, as far as that consciousness extends (E, II.xxvii.17).

Both versions of the definition are laid out in a way that is common in Locke’s argument. According to Locke (E, III.iii.10), the best way to define something is ‘by enumerating those simple Ideas that are combined in the signification of the term Defined’.

And when Locke defines a person, he enumerates a set of its properties: it being a ‘thinking intelligent Being’, having ‘reason and reflection’, and being able to ‘consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places’. It would therefore be a mistake to argue that one part of Locke’s definition somehow better defines the person than the others. Person is no less a ‘thinking intelligent Being’ than a being that has consciousness, or a being that extends itself in time. Even if we think of a person only in terms of what it consists of—intelligent being (a substance) and consciousness—and exclude what it does, it would still be wrong to argue that one of these two elements takes precedence over the other.

In both versions of the definition, a person is comprised of three basic elements: 1) a rational intelligent being or a ‘thinking
thing’; 2) consciousness;⁵ and 3) temporal extension, a person being ‘the same thinking thing in different times and places’. The three elements are interconnected, one being a feature of another or its result: thinking is an action of an intelligent being and consciousness is a feature of thinking. In turn, temporal extension is a feature of consciousness and a consequence of the identity (sameness) of its multiple diachronic iterations. The first part of my paper deals with the ‘intelligent Being’ and consciousness while the second addresses temporal extension as a defining feature of Locke’s person—subsumed under, as I will argue, the idea of personal identity.

§2. ‘Intelligent Being’ and consciousness
As Winkler (1991: 215) correctly observes, ‘Locke defines a person as a kind of intelligence’ and ‘finite intelligences’ appear second in Locke’s list of the three kinds of substance of which we have conceptions’. Indeed, Locke (E, II.xxvii.2) is explicit that ‘[w]e have the Ideas but of three sorts of Substances; 1. God. 2. Finite Intelligences. 3. Bodies’. But the problem with Winkler’s account is that a person is, by definition, more than just an ‘intelligent Being’—it is an intelligent being that has consciousness and temporal extension. It is ‘a [specific] kind of intelligence’ (my emphasis) and it cannot be simply identified with just one of its constitutive elements.

The distinction between God and finite intelligences parallels Locke’s remarks about intelligent beings. To a different degree of perfection and with differing propensities for happiness, (E, II.xxi.50) both God and men are intelligent beings (E, II.xxviii.6; II.xxi.48).⁶ But, even if ‘finite intelligences’ are not to be subsumed under ‘intelligent beings’, Locke is explicit about men being substances. When he argues that personal identity does not

⁵ Noonan (2003, 42–43) briefly discusses the meaning of the word ‘consciousness’ in Locke. He refers to E, II.xxvii.9 and rightly points out that consciousness means ‘the perception of what passes in a man’s mind’.
⁶ To this category also belong those beings that are of a higher order than people, but lower than God. (E, IV.xvi.12)
consist ‘in the Identity of Substance’, the substance Locke \((E, \text{II.xxvii.19})\) refers to is a man. More specifically, in his example Locke understands Socrates (a man) as a substance that hosts two separate consciousnesses and, thus, persons—one belonging to ‘Socrates waking’ and the other to the ‘sleeping Socrates’ (ibid.).

All men are substances, but not all men can be thought of as thinking intelligent beings. A ‘dull irrational \textit{Man}’ is always a man, since ‘’tis not the Idea of a thinking or rational Being alone, that makes the Idea of a Man in most Peoples Sense; but of a Body so and so shaped joined to it’ \((E, \text{II.xxvii.8})\). An irrational man, however, cannot be a person, as he lacks the ability to think and self-reflect. At least in the \textit{Essay}, Locke’s ‘man’ is a name for a living human organism and therefore a moral equivalent of a plant or an animal. Man’s ability to be a moral agent, capable of enjoying rewards and suffering punishments for his actions (both in his lifetime and in a life to come), depends on him having consciousness, which is commonly ‘united’ to a ‘Spiritual Substance’ \((E, \text{II.xxvii.25})\). This is, Locke argues, an immaterial ‘thinking Substance’ to which consciousness is ‘annexed’ \((E, \text{II.xxvii.23})\). Although Locke is uncertain about the exact nature of the thinking substance, he understands consciousness as one result of this substance exercising its power—consciousness is its ‘Affection’.\footnote{Thinking substance, the same as any other substance, is not identical with a person. As Noonan (2003, 45) argues, ‘[w]hen a person thinks, then, it really is the case, in Locke’s view, that it does so only because something else—some thinking substance which is strictly non-identical with it—does so’. For possible implications of this view, defending Locke from Joseph Butler’s circularity objection, see Noonan 2003, 55–57.}

A man is an intelligent being because he has a ‘thinking substance’ and this substance is his soul. Locke writes about the soul reflecting or thinking, \((E, \text{II.i.4, II.i.9})\) even though he emphasises that the soul does not always think: ‘the perception of \textit{Ideas} being (as I conceive) to the Soul, what motion is to the Body, not its Essence, but one of its Operations’ \((E, \text{II.i.10})\). A ‘dull irrational \textit{Man}’ thus has a similarly ‘dull’ (ibid.) soul, a thinking substance that is unable to think. Such a man is devoid
of consciousness and, ultimately, personhood. In contrast, an intelligent being that has consciousness comprises two substances—a living human body and a thinking soul. Both substances are required for moral agency, as they exercise what Locke calls ‘powers’. By powers Locke understands both the ability to inflict change and the disposition to be changed, so ‘Fire has a power to melt Gold’ and ‘Gold has a power to be melted’ (E, II.xxi.1). Body and soul each have two main powers. The power of thinking (along with consciousness that always accompanies it) and the power of volition are ‘[t]he two great and principal Actions of the Mind’ (E, II.vi.2). These two powers are complemented by the two primary bodily powers: the power of moving and the power of perception (E, II.xxi.73). One’s deliberate actions, the willful movement of one’s body, depend on body and soul exercising ‘the power of communication of Motion by impulse’ and ‘the power of exciting of Motion by Thought’ respectively. Motion and thought are powers that rely on being exercised by a substance (E, II.xxi.3, II.xxi.4). This makes substances that make up an intelligent being vital for personhood, as the exercise of their respective powers makes it possible for one to think, willingly act and perceive these thoughts and actions as one’s own.

Although substance (body and soul together, or soul alone) is a requirement for personhood, the substance needs to be neither identical nor material. Locke (E, II.xxvii.17) leaves room for personhood to be associated with ‘whatever Substance, made up of whether Spiritual, or Material, Simple, or Compounded, it matters not’. The substance to which personhood is attached is the soul, the ‘thinking substance’ either with or without the body. Either way, Locke does not identify a person with its underlying substance. In fact, his examples and thought-experiments are aimed at showing something very different—they demonstrate how personhood follows consciousness, regardless of the substance this consciousness occupies. So, if one would separate a little finger from the body and if the consciousness also left the body and continued to exist in that finger, Locke (E, II.xxvii.17)
argues that ‘tis evident the little Finger would be the Person, the same Person; and self then would have nothing to do with the rest of the Body’. Although its substance has been radically altered, the person remains the same. Another of Locke’s (E, II.xxvii.15) examples shows how personhood is independent of a human body it inhabits. Locke suggests that if a soul of a prince, containing his consciousness and his memories, left the prince’s body and entered the soulless body of a cobbler, ‘he would be the same Person with the Prince’. He would not, however, be the same man. Similarly, if two men shared a single consciousness, they would be one and the same person (E, II.xxvii.23). Finally, Locke (E, II.xxvii.19) even considers a possibility of multiple persons residing in the same man, provided that they do not share the same consciousness: ‘[i]f the same Socrates waking and sleeping do not partake of the same consciousness, Socrates waking and sleeping is not the same Person’.

The first part of Locke’s definition of a person, ‘a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection’ points to an idea of a substance. Even though Locke leaves room for other intelligent beings that could fill the role, this is most commonly a man with a functioning ‘thinking Substance’, a rational soul that makes him capable of thought and self-reflection. And, unlike a ‘Mass of the same Particles’ which constitutes an identical (unchanging) substance, the important feature of living (human) bodies is that they change over time. The same as with any other living organism, a man’s identity is established ‘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’ (E, II.xxvii.6).

In contrast, personal identity is established through the sameness of consciousness and, as a part of Locke’s definition of a person, ‘thinking intelligent Being’ serves to denote a substance capable of sustaining consciousness. This substance is comprised of a body and a soul, a thinking substance where consciousness resides. Personhood, however, does not require the substance to remain identical—it can and it will change over time. Men will
reach adulthood, grow old, die and be resurrected before the Last Judgment. Their bodies change, and their souls might change, too. But in each of these stages personhood persists and Locke’s definition of a person demands that some sort of substance exists, regardless of its current temporal incarnation. Locke (E, II.xxvii.10) confirms this when he writes about consciousness being ‘annexed’ to multiple substances over time: ‘For it being the same consciousness that makes a Man be himself to himself, personal Identity depends on that only, whether it be annexed only to one individual Substance, or can be continued in a succession of several Substances’.

Let us now turn to consciousness, the second element of Locke’s definition of a person. In the Essay, consciousness is defined as ‘the perception of what passes in a Man’s own mind’ (E, II.i.19) or, within the definition of a person, one’s ‘perceiving, that he does perceive’. Consciousness is an ‘Action of the Mind’ that is an integral part of the thinking process and its being identical over time assures the identity of the person. In Locke’s view, thinking is always accompanied by one’s awareness of one’s thinking self and this awareness persists through time. Consciousness thus extends backwards in time, and one is equally conscious of both one’s present and one’s past thoughts and actions, united in this enduring self. (E, II.xxvii.25) Past and present experiences are united in the (present) consciousness, since for Locke there is no difference between experiencing present ideas and recalling them later. Locke compares memory to a repository, ‘the Store-house of our Ideas’, from which the mind ‘revive[s] Perceptions, which it has once had, with this additional Perception annexed to them, that it has had them before’ (E, II.x.2). To remember a past idea is to experience the very same idea again (E, II.xix.1)

For Locke and his contemporaries, as Harold Noonan (2003, 42) argues, ‘consciousness’ means ‘knowledge of oneself, knowledge of one’s own thoughts and actions’. This knowledge includes both past and present thoughts and actions. One’s personhood thus extends in time as far as one has the memory of
one’s past experiences. Locke (E, II.xxvii.26) argues that ‘personality…owns and imputes to it self past Actions, just upon the same ground, and for the same reason, that it does the present’ (my emphasis). Locke’s person does not simply remember actions, but ‘imputes’ them—remembers them as his own. In other words, a person owns or ‘appropriates’ the actions that constitute it.\(^8\) Consciousness thus ‘unites Existences, and Actions, very remote in time, into the same Person’ (E, II.xxvii.16). At the same time, we are conscious of both our present and past experiences—the former ideas we receive directly from our senses and the latter we ‘revive’ from our memory.

Consciousness is a mode (Chappell 1990: 30–31). In Locke’s classification of ideas (E, II.xii.4), modes are ‘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’. Consciousness is such an idea and Locke (E, II.xxvii.25) is explicit about it being ‘the Affection of one individual immaterial Substance’ (my emphasis). This ‘individual immaterial Substance’ is the soul, or ‘the thinking Substance in Man’ (E, II.xxvii.23). Finally, ‘consciousness’ is a mode of thinking, because it is a term that denotes a certain mental activity, namely of one having a perception of one’s thoughts. As such, it is comparable to ‘Reasoning, Judging, Volition, and Knowledge’ (E, II.xix.2).

Locke’s person is a complex idea that consists of two elements, intelligent being and consciousness. An intelligent being is a substance that is comprised of two substances, body and soul (thinking substance). The (immaterial) thinking substance provides a living human organism with its reasoning faculties and stores its consciousness and memories (and presumably continues to do so after death). Consciousness, on the other hand, is a product of the thinking substance and is, therefore, a mode of thinking. In connection to his discussion of personhood, Locke offers no thorough examination of body and soul as substances.

\(^8\) In this I agree with LoLordo’s (2012, 70–75) ‘appropriation’ interpretation.
Although Locke’s account of personhood demands the existence of an underlying substance, it remains detached from any discussions about the nature of such substance(s). The exact characteristics of a ‘thinking Substance’ and the properties of a living human organism in which it resides are irrelevant for Locke’s definition of a person; it remains sound, ‘whatever Substance…it matters not’ (E, II.xxvii.17). This is not to say that Locke gives no account of a man or of a thinking substance. It is rather that his definition of a person is framed in a way that makes its validity independent of any such considerations. And as long as the consciousness remains intact, a Lockean person persists through life, death and resurrection of its substance. In effect, the substance can change dramatically over time, but the person on the Judgment Day remains the same person he was when he committed the actions that are under divine scrutiny.

There are also epistemic reasons behind Locke’s reluctance to make stronger claims about substances (LoLordo 2012, 95–98). Locke argues that our ideas of substances are ‘deficient, and inadequate’, since we can never know all their properties (E, II.xxxi.9) and ‘such a complex Idea cannot be the real Essence of any Substance’ (E, II.xxxi.6). Modes and relations, on the other hand, ‘being Archetypes without Patterns, and so having nothing to represent but themselves, cannot but be adequate, every thing being so to it self’ (E, II.xxxi.3). Consciousness is a mode and a person is, as I argue, a relation, and these two notions are epistemologically privileged over substances. Knowledge about them is derived from reason and revelation, sources that take precedence over our senses. Ideas of consciousness and memory are products of our reflection, an inevitable consequence of rational thinking and they are inseparable from it. While someone is reflecting on her past, she can only be certain about what ‘is open to [her] introspection’ and that is her consciousness. (Noonan 2003, 36) On the other hand, the idea of a person is a forensic term that Locke uses to denominate the object of God’s

---

9 On Locke’s real and nominal essences see Uzgalis 1988.
reward or retribution, in accordance with the evidence revealed in the Scripture (*E*, II.xxvii.26).

§3. Relations and personal identity

Locke’s person is best understood as extended in time. This is something on which Locke insists in both of his definitions of a person. The person is somebody who ‘can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places’ and ‘concern’d for it self, as far as [its] consciousness extends’ (*E*, II.xxvii.9, II.xxvii.17). The (temporal) extension of a person stems from the extension of his consciousness, by which ‘he finds himself to be the same self which did such or such an Action some Years since, by which he comes to be happy or miserable now’ (*E*, II.xxvii.25). This passage is revealing because it points to another reason why temporal extension is an inseparable part of Lockean personhood. Locke (*E*, II.xxvii.26) famously claims that ‘person’ is ‘Forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit; and so belongs only to intelligent Agents capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery’. He then continues in familiar terms: ‘This personality extends it self beyound present Existence to what is past, only by consciousness, whereby it becomes concerned and accountable, owns and imputes to it self past Actions, just upon the same ground, and for the same reason, that it does the present’ (ibid.). The very purpose of ‘person’ as a forensic term is therefore conditional upon its being extended diachronically. In the civil and in the divine court alike, the accused’s innocence or guilt is built upon establishing his responsibility for some *past* actions. The person who stands in court is facing reward or punishment, happiness or misery, depending on the court establishing that it was this particular person who committed a certain wrongdoing. And since the judicial process always ensues *after* the action in question was committed, a person set only at one point in time would be forensically irrelevant. This is why, particularly if ‘person’ is truly a forensic term, one of its defining elements is its temporal continuity and this continuity is premised on personal identity.
Locke’s discussion of personhood is a part of the chapter ‘Of Identity and Diversity’. The position of this added chapter is indicative, as it is both preceded with and followed by chapters on relations. Such a placement is not unexpected, as identity and diversity are relations and Locke is explicit about that. Locke (E, II.xxvii.2) writes: ‘Identity and Diversity are relations and ways of comparing well founded, and of use to the Understanding’ and, in his view, a relation is ‘a way of comparing, or considering two things together; and giving one, or both of them, some appellation from that Comparison, and sometimes giving even the Relation it self a Name’ (E, II.xxv.7). An example of a Lockean relation is the idea of a father. This idea has ‘a reciprocal intimation’ — the idea of a child. When the father’s (only) child dies, the relation on which the idea of a father depends gets broken, the ‘notion superinduced to the Substance, or Man’ ceases to exist, and this man stops being a father (E, II.xxv.4–5) The same applies to a great number of ideas that depend on a certain comparison: ‘Husband, Friend, Enemy, Subject, General, Judge,…Islander, Servant, Master, Possessor, Captain, Superior, Inferior, …Contemporary, Like, Unlike, etc. to an almost infinite number’ (E, II.xxv.7). These are important examples, as they show that a large group of what Locke calls relations are, in fact, things that are defined by some kind of relation. Locke’s idea of a person is one of these ideas. When Locke (E, II.xxviii.18) breaks down the idea of father into its constitutive elements, he distinguishes between the species or substance (man), the correlative idea (child) and the actions that explain the relation between the two ideas (begetting). ‘Father’ is ‘a notion superinduced to the Substance’ that denotes the relationship between the two correlative ideas (ibid.). Comparably, ‘person’ is a term that designates the substance to which is ‘superinduced’ the relationship of (personal) identity between one’s (present) consciousness and its various iterations ‘in different times and places’ (E, II.xxvii.9).

Identity is to a person as ‘Generation of one of his own kind’ is to father and child. If Locke views father as a relation, then
person should also be considered as one. Both rely on comparisons and both are void if one of the correlatives ceases to exist—we cannot consider somebody a father if he has no children and there can be no person without its temporal continuity. Personhood is founded on personal identity and personal identity is identity over time. Locke’s person is ‘the same thinking thing in different times and places’ and, as such, it is always considered at at least two points in time (E, II.xxvii.9). Such temporal relations or comparisons are at the core of Locke’s notions of identity and diversity: ‘when considering any thing as existing at any determin’d time and place, we compare it with it self existing at another time, and thereon form the Ideas of Identity and Diversity’ (E, II.xxvii.1).

Identity, then, is a relation and a comparison, but what exactly is this personal relation and what is being compared by it? One of the requirements for Lockean relations is that the things that are being compared are not same, or, at least, that they are not indistinct. Locke argues that ‘there can be no Relation, but betwixt two Things, considered as two Things. There must always be in relation two Ideas, or Th[ings], either in themselves really separate, or considered as distinct, and then a ground or occasion for their comparison’ (E, II.xxv.6). Now, personal identity is the relation that yields the idea of the person as ‘the same thinking thing’ (my emphasis) by comparing diachronic iterations of its identical consciousness. This, however, does not make personal identity any less of a relation. Locke (E, II.xxvii.2) argues that ‘as to things whose Existence is in succession…concerning their Diversity there can be no question’. The example Locke (ibid.) here offers concerns the actions (motion and thought) of ‘finite Beings’ and he concludes that ‘no motion or thought considered as at different times can be the same, each part thereof having a different beginning of Existence’.

This is an instructive passage. Personal identity is the identity of things that are, or at least can be, considered mutually distinct. Similarly to a human organism, whose identity is established by its substance’s ‘participati[ng in] the same continued Life’ (E,
II.xxvii.6), personal identity depends on person’s diachronically distinguishable thoughts being identical in one aspect. This shared feature is person’s consciousness—one recognising (distinct) thoughts and actions as one’s own (Noonan 2003, 33). Consciousness thus serves as a marker, a standard of comparison that accompanies thought at all time. And if the same consciousness follows thought at two distinct moments in time, we can say that the thoughts in question belong to the same person. The aspect in which they are identical is that they have the same ‘owner’—the identical consciousness that appropriates them. In this case, as with the living body, identity is founded on the result of a comparison between two diachronically distinct things that share a certain feature. If that relevant feature is identical, the two things that are being compared can be considered identical—even though they occur at different times. A living body is considered identical at various times if it sustains the same life, whereas a person is identical if its thoughts and actions at various points in time are relatable by the identical consciousness that accompanies them.

Personal identity is the relation between multiple diachronic iterations of consciousness. Locke (E, II.xxvii.21) suggests as much when he writes that ‘personal Identity can by us be placed in nothing but consciousness’ or that self is ‘determined…only by Identity of consciousness’ (E, II.xxvii.23). Person is, however, something more than consciousness, since, by definition, it also comprises substance. Locke argues that ‘[a]ny Substance vitally united to the present thinking Being, is a part of that very same self which now is: 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’ (E, II.xxvii.25). The identity of consciousness translates into the identity of the person, whereas a person extends into the past because it is comprised of at least two identical temporal iterations of consciousness (past and present) that are ‘united to’ the person’s present substance. Personal identity, the sameness of consciousness over time, is a feature of a person and a part of its definition. Identity, like
begetting is to a father, can be a property, and this is not only true for persons, but also for God. Identity is a property of God, ‘concerning [which] there can be no doubt’, as He is ‘without beginning, eternal, unalterable, and every where’ (E, II.xxvii.2).

When Locke writes about the sameness of a man or a person as founded on identity, he does not claim that men or persons are diachronically identical. Locke (E, II.xxvii.3) argues that ‘in these two cases of a Mass of Matter, and a living Body, Identity is not applied to the same thing’. Given that a person, and likewise also a man, is partly defined by its substance, he cannot be considered identical at various points in time because the substance that constitutes him is continuously changing. What remains diachronically identical, however, is life (in men and other living organisms) and consciousness (in persons). For Locke’s persons, ‘personal Identity consists, not in the Identity of Substance, but …in the Identity of consciousness’ (E, II.xxvii.19). And given that persons are defined both by their changeable substance and by their unchanging consciousness, personal identity is not the result of a diachronic comparison of a person, but a relation of its consciousness. Unlike ‘a Mass of Matter’ and unlike consciousness, a person rarely (if ever) remains identical to itself over time.

Person, comparable to father, is a relation in Locke’s classification because its idea depends on a relation of identity between two diachronic iterations of consciousness. As I have already argued, personal identity as identity of consciousness is comparable to the sameness of life that constitutes the identity of a man. Why is it, then, that person is a relation and man is not? The answer is found, again, in the definition of a person. Unlike man, person is defined by its temporal extension and this serves a specific forensic purpose. On the other hand, human identity is also a feature of a man as his living organism can persist in time, but this characteristic is not singled out by Locke as a man’s defining characteristic. Locke uses ‘person’ primarily as a forensic term that denotes an object of divine judicial scrutiny and for this meaning it is essential that person be understood as
extended in time. In contrast, in a significant, if not unlimited, number of contexts, temporal extension is not relevant for the meaning of the term ‘man’ and its use.

§4. Conclusion

Locke’s person is a being comprised of whichever substance, with consciousness that reaches back in time and accompanies its past thoughts and actions. It has consciousness encumbered with the experience of its past actions and is able to attribute these past actions to itself. This enables the person to fulfil its forensic purpose and be rightfully punished or rewarded at the Day of Judgment. Personal identity is the key feature of a person, as the identity between present and past consciousness makes it possible for the person, restored in flesh, to be associated with its past (mis)doings. The person is therefore an intelligent substance that is defined by a relation of identity and this makes it a relation in Locke’s classification.

There are a number of benefits to this interpretation. First, relations belong to the same moral vocabulary as modes. Relations include not only things, but also notions such as ‘Morally Good and Evil’ (E, II.xxviii.5), ‘Sins or Duties’, ‘Criminal or Innocent’, ‘Vertues or Vices’ (E, II.xxviii.7). Furthermore, relations can be founded on ‘some act, whereby any one comes by a Moral Right, Power, or Obligation to do something’ (E, II.xxviii.3). Some of Locke’s (ibid.) examples for this type of relations are ‘general’ (of an ‘army’) and “citizen” (as somebody who has rights within a specific territory). Furthermore, Locke (E, II.xxviii.2) writes that from some of the relations ‘also arise the Obligations of several Duties amongst Men’. The relation between God and persons, set in terms of the latter’s responsibility and obligation to obey God’s natural law, would suffice to classify persons as relations. But, as I endeavored to demonstrate, it is not only the purpose that makes person a relation, but also its structure.

Relations, like modes, ‘cannot but be adequate’ (E, II.xxxi.3) and this makes them equally pertinent to Locke’s ‘demonstrative
But, unlike modes, Locke’s examples of relations often include men—be they fathers, generals, or citizens. And although modes can be things, Locke gives no examples of men as modes while he offers ample examples of men as relations. Persons are thus more akin to fathers, constables and citizens than to rainbows, triangles and duels (cf. LoLordo 2012, 77–78). It seems strange that Law and the contemporary commentators who follow him in arguing that Locke’s persons are modes did not take much notice of relations as a possible category for persons. One reason for this inattention might be the tendency to understand ‘mode’ in its more common Cartesian sense, thereby obscuring some of the specifics of Locke’s usage. And, indeed, relations as ‘not contained in the real existence of Things, but something extraneous, and superinduced’ (E, II.xxv.8) are very similar to modes that are understood in their most basic sense, as ‘Dependencies on, or Affections of, Substances’ (E, II.xii.4). The fact that some relations (like ‘father’) do indeed point to a particular aspect or a property of a substance makes it even easier to downplay the difference between modes and relations in Locke. This may explain why LoLordo (2012, 77–78) uses Locke’s example of a relation to reinforce the claim that modes, like relations, can be things and not only properties.

Another advantage of understanding Locke’s persons as relations is to avoid entanglement in debates about the exact nature of the substance(s) involved. The idea of a person fulfils its forensic purpose, made of ‘whatever Substance…it matters not’. (E, II.xxvii.17) To reiterate, the idea of a father denotes a man who is defined primarily through his relation to his child, ‘let Man be what it will’ (E, II.xxv.4). Considering person as a relation points at the substance as an indispensable element that does not need to be fully intelligible in itself for the relation to have forensic value. Personal identity refers to consciousness rather than to substance, so it is irrelevant for us to know whether Locke was describing the same kind of substance at II.xxvii and elsewhere in the Essay. Emphasising the specifics of the
substances in II.xxvii is an interpretative step made by some scholars who view persons as substances,\(^\text{10}\) and this can be avoided if we consider persons as relations—without downplaying the importance of substances as elements of Locke’s persons. Finally, relations are ideas that are ‘superinduced’ on a substance and, although we do not need to know what this substance truly is, we know that it can act, i.e. exercise its powers of motion and thought (\(E\), II.xxi.3–4). Modes have no powers, but relations clearly have them if they comprise substances (Gordon-Roth 2015: 104). Therefore, one of the most important criteria that the proponents of substance interpretation make can be met by thinking of persons as relations.

Classifying persons as relations should fulfil the main criteria set by contemporary scholarship. Relations are, like modes, ‘adequate’ and clear ideas that are suitable for Locke’s demonstrative ethics. While being able to sustain the forensic aspect of personhood, persons as relations comprise substances and this enables them to have power and agency. Finally, if it is considered as a relation defined by personal identity, person becomes a member of the class of ideas that includes fathers, husbands, citizens and other people that we view with a specific relational property in mind. Presumably ‘without involving us in great Absurdities’, this categorisation acknowledges that persons are something more than substances, while at the same time allowing them to escape the strange and exotic company of triangles, rainbows and duels (\(E\), II.xxvii.21).

\textit{University of Belgrade}

\(^{10}\) For a reading that singles out some specifics of Locke’s substance in II.xxvii and contrasts them with the account of a substance presented elsewhere in the Essay see Alston and Bennett 1988: 39–41; Noonan 2003, 29–31, and Uzgalis 1990, 294.
REFERENCES

Law, Edmund. 1769. A defence of Mr. Locke’s opinion concerning personal identity; in answer to the first part of a late essay on that subject. Cambridge.