



Modern Philosophy

## **Paideia and Identity: Meditations on Hobbes and Locke**

Bill Uzgalis  
Oregon State University  
[wuzgalis@orst.edu](mailto:wuzgalis@orst.edu)

**ABSTRACT:** Thomas Hobbes, like Francis Bacon before him, disliked Aristotle and scholasticism. They were both quite familiar with the objects of their dislike, having encountered Aristotle and scholasticism first hand at Oxford University. Bacon later described his tutors as "men of sharp wits, shut up in their cells of a few authors, chiefly Aristotle, their Dictator." Bacon clearly saw the extent of new possibilities in thought. He held that Europeans of his time needed to sail beyond the Pillars of Hercules (the limits of ancient learning) into an ocean of new learning. Hobbes, for similar reasons described the universities as places for the production of insignificant speech. Locke also echoed this rejection of scholasticism and contempt for the universities. The purpose of this paper is to talk about this rejection and the ways in which the continuing revolt against university education by Hobbes and Locke has contributed to a new view of the self.

Hobbes rejects the teleology of Aristotelian science. His view of man is shaped by Galileo's new insights about motion. His translation of the revolutionary doctrines of physics into claims about man and politics is a most remarkable piece of creative thinking. Life is not aimed at the attainment of the mature state of the species as Aristotle claimed. Man, like other physical objects, keeps moving until something (death, in the case of man) stops him. Yet the reaction to Aristotle and scholasticism was not a matter of simply rejecting the philosophy of Aristotle wholesale. The relation which philosophers had to Aristotelian ideas is much more complex. Philosophers quite typically would reject one piece of Aristotelianism but keep another. Part of the reason for this is that it is not easy to reject one's education, even when, as in the case of these three philosophers, one is consciously attempting to do so. Hobbes, for example, while objecting to Aristotelianism and Scholasticism in quite significant ways, yet discusses problems of identity using Aristotelian terms.

It seems likely that Hobbes' chapter "Of Identity and Diversity" in *De Corpore* published as early as 1642 in Latin and then in English in 1675 under the title *De Corpore Politico* is a partial model for Locke's discussion of identity in Chapter XXVII of Book II of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. For this reason alone it deserves some attention. Hobbes' account of persons in the *Leviathan* tells us that like Locke, Hobbes distinguishes between man and person, though not in the same way. Hobbes' materialism was not part of mainstream 17th century thinking. For this reason Hobbes was much reviled. In this sense Hobbes may seem more radical than Locke, who does not maintain as Hobbes does, that

immaterial substance is an oxymoron! Still, it turns out that in his account of man Hobbes is closer to his Aristotelian and Scholastic roots than Locke.

At the beginning of his discussion of identity Hobbes enunciates a version of the principle that later came to be called the Indiscernability of Identicals, or Leibniz' Law. "Now, two bodies are said to differ from one another, when something may be said of one of them, which cannot be said of the other at the same time." It is true that this is a negative version of the principle and a version cast in the semantic mode, but its essential connection with the principle of the Indiscernability of Identicals seems undeniable. (1) Hobbes goes on to enunciate another principle, which with some modification is fundamental to Locke's chapter on identity. "...first of all, it is manifest that no two bodies are the same; for seeing they are two, they are in two places at the same time; as that, which is the same, is at the same time in one and the same place." Locke has more categories than bodies, so he adds the condition that two things *of the same kind* cannot be in the same place at the same time. Hobbes goes on to connect this principle with difference in number, suggesting that he sees this principle as related to the unity and diversity of substances and that these relations in turn determine the relations of sameness and difference. This reflects the fundamental insight of the Aristotelian tradition about identity -- that one must first determine what something is, what makes it one thing, and that in turn determines identity.

In section 7 Hobbes raises the problem of identity over time, and considers three possible solutions. He writes:

But the same body may at different times be compared with itself. And from hence springs a great controversy among philosophers about the beginning of individuation, namely, in what sense it may be conceived that a body is at one time the same, at another time not the same it was formerly. For example, whether a man grown old be the same man he was whilst he was young, or another man; or whether a city be in different ages the same, or another city. Some place individuality in the unity of matter; others in the unity of form; and one says it consists in the unity of the aggregate of all the accidents together. For matter, it is pleaded that a lump of wax, whether it be spherical or cubical, is the same wax, because the same matter. For form, that when a man is grown from an infant to an old man, though his matter be changed, yet he is still the same numerical man; for that identity, which cannot be attributed to the matter, ought probably be ascribed to the form. For the aggregates of accidents, no instance can be made; but because when any new accident is generated, a new name is commonly imposed on the thing, therefore he, that assigned this cause of individuality, thought the thing itself also was become another thing. (2)

In this passage, Hobbes not only makes the distinction between identity at a time and identity over time and talks about the problem of identity over time as the comparison of the thing at different times, all of which have their echo in Locke, he also considers various solutions to the problem which also have their echo in Locke's discussion of identity over time. Locke explicitly considers the 'same matter' solution and incorporates it in part of his discussion. Locke goes on to consider the problem; Hobbes raises when he discusses the case of the man grown from an infant to an old man who retains his identity "though his matter be changed." Hobbes uses the Aristotelian or scholastic term "form" in discussing this case. Locke notably does not.

In his exposition Hobbes is treating these hypotheses as though they are competing and exclusive solutions to the problem of identity over time. It is plain that while he thinks there may be something to each of them, to treat them as exclusive solutions to the problem is a mistake. This becomes clear from the counter-examples to the three proposed solutions to the problem which Hobbes raises. This way of reasoning, of raising competing

hypotheses and generating counter-examples to find the best solution is also typical of the reasoning in Locke's chapter on identity. Hobbes remarks that on the unity of matter hypothesis "...he that sins, and he that is punished, should not be the same man, by reason of the perpetual flux and change of man's body..." (3) Thus, the case which supports the second solution is a counterexample to the first hypothesis. Hobbes objection to the second hypothesis, i.e. that it is the *form* and not the *matter* which determines identity is:

...two bodies existing both at once, would be one and the same numerical body. For if, for example, that ship of Theseus, concerning the difference whereof made by continual reparation in taking out the old planks and putting in the new, the sophisters of Athens were wont to dispute, were, after all the planks were changed, the same numerical ship it were at the beginning; and if some man had kept the old planks as they were taken out, and by afterwards putting them together in the same order, had again made a ship of them, this without doubt, had also been the same numerical ship with that which was in the beginning; and so there would have been two ships numerically the same, which is absurd. (4)

Thus Hobbes raises the problem of the ship of Theseus, now famous in the literature on identity and personal identity, as a counter example to the claim that it is form alone which determines identity. Presumably both the ship that had the planks replaced and the ship made of the old planks have the same form. But *ex hypothesi*, since they have the same form they would be numerically the same, this, as Hobbes concludes, is absurd. Finally, the third hypothesis is inadequate because "...nothing would be the same it was; so that a man standing would not be the same he was sitting; nor the water, which is in the vessel, the same with that which is poured out of it." (5) Having considered and criticized these three solutions, Hobbes draws the moral and proposes his own solution to the problem.

But we must consider by what name anything is called, when we inquire concerning the identity of it. For it is one thing to ask concerning Socrates, whether he be the same man, and another to ask whether he be the same body; for his body, when he is old, cannot be the same it was when he was an infant, by reason of the difference in magnitude; yet nevertheless he may be the same man.

Hobbes is distinguishing between a man and the body of the man. These are different questions and will get different answers. Socrates is the same man from infant to old age, but his body is not the same "by reason of the difference in magnitude." The continuation makes it clear that Hobbes is identifying the body with the matter which composes it.

And therefore, whensoever the name, by which it is asked whether the thing be the same as it was, is given it for the matter only, then, if the matter be the same, the thing also is individually the same; as the water, which was in the sea, is the same which was afterwards in the cloud; and any body is the same, whether the parts of it be put together or dispersed; or whether it be congealed or dissolved.

Man, on the other hand, is identified in terms not of the matter but of form:

Also, if the name be given for such form as is the beginning of motion, then as long as that motion remains, it will be the same individual thing; as that man will always be the same, whose actions and thoughts all proceed from the same beginning of motion, namely that which was in his generation; and that will be the same river which flows from one and the same fountain, whether the same water, or other water, or something else than water, flow from thence; and that

the same city, whose acts proceed continually from the same institution, whether the men be the same or no. (6)

Hobbes embraces the Aristotelian definition of man. He says in Chapter IV "Of Speech" in the *Leviathan* that: "As for example, the name *body* is of larger signification than the word *man*, and comprehendeth it; and the names *man* and *rational* are of equal extent, comprehending mutually one another." (7) This Aristotelian definition of man is one which Locke will reject along with the notion that rationality is confined to the human species and so of equal extent with the term *man*, though rationality will find its proper place in Locke's definition of *person*.

Hobbes' solution to the problem of identity is that the alternatives he posed at the beginning should not be viewed as exclusive competitors, one or the other of which is right. Rather, each is a partial answer, correct if confined to its own proper domain, but inadequate when generalized. One might take this as a version of the Aristotelian insight that what something is will determine its identity. Locke learned his lesson from Hobbes well. This is one of the foundation principles of the Chapter "Of Identity and Diversity." Locke enunciates it explicitly in section 8 of that chapter.

While there are, as I have just noted, a number of remarkable similarities between Hobbes' chapter on identity and Locke's there are also some very significant differences. Locke says nothing about the ship of Theseus or the identity of cities. (8) While Hobbes uses the term *person* and distinguishes it from man he does not discuss personal identity. This is largely because, as we shall see shortly, for Hobbes the identity of person depends completely on the identity of man.

There is also a difference in philosophical machinery. Hobbes conducts his discussion of individuation largely in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between form and matter. (9) Hobbes thinks the identity of an entity may be determined by its form or by its matter. For Locke, if a mass of matter loses or gains but a single atom it ceases to be that mass, and for things which are individuated by their organization rather than their matter, the change of matter will not change their identity. Locke is working in terms of the substance, mode, relation language which comes to him from Francisco Suarez, via Descartes and other seventeenth century philosophers. There was an argument about the Aristotelian terminology as to whether form or matter or some combination of them constitutes substance. Hobbes seems to be allowing that different kinds of substances may be individuated by their form or their matter or by their accidents. Locke's distinction between substance and modes does not allow for this same kind of freewheeling use of substance.

In this chapter about identity, Hobbes chooses to discuss the identity of man, by which he means a living human body, very likely with a variety of interesting capacities. But what about person? Locke, as we shall see, distinguishes between man and person. Here is what Hobbes has to say about the term *person* in the *Leviathan*, Part I Chapter XVI: "Of Persons, Authors, And Things Personated":

A PERSON is he whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether truly or by fiction. When they are considered as his own, then is he called a natural person: and when they are considered as representing the words and actions of another, then is he a feigned or artificial person.

Hobbes goes on to connect the notion of person with the face. This is worth noting because the face (unlike the skull or the brain) is of crucial importance to us in our usual way of recognizing people. The idea of a mask suggests a disguise, but Hobbes completely ignores

this aspect of the analogy, in favor of the notion that the person is a (likely accurate) representation of the self in words or actions. What exactly is a natural person? A natural person is one whose words or actions are considered his own. This outward representation of the man in speech and action has been translated from the stage to any representation in speech and action "as well in the tribunals as theatres." This implies a connection between persons and legal responsibility. Already here we have the beginning of what Locke was to call the forensic character of personal identity.

To understand the Hobbesian account of person and its relation to man, we might also think about what use Hobbes was planning on putting the concept to when he defined it. Rather clearly, there is man and then there is the Leviathan, which is not a whale, but a giant artificial man. This artificial man is composed of men. And, just as those men have a natural person associated with them; the sovereign presumably personates the Leviathan. This suggests that conceptually persons are completely dependent for their existence on men. It is true that the definition allows one to personate others -- to speak in their name, as the sovereign speaks in the name of the Leviathan, or one of his deputies or officers speaks in his name. In this case the sovereign is an artificial person. The quotation from Cicero illustrates the fact that one can speak for a number of men. <sup>(10)</sup> Presumably there is only one natural person associated with a given man.

John Locke in his discussion of personal identity in Book II, Chapter xxvii of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* distinguishes between man and person but Locke rejects the Aristotelian definition of man. Locke begins arguing for his definition of man and thus the distinction, as soon as he gives his definition of man. Having defined oaks and horses in terms of organized bodies fit to maintain the same continued life Locke remarks:

He that shall place the Identity of Man in any thing else, but like that of other Animals in one fitly organized Body taken in any one instant, and from thence continued under one Organization of Life in several successively fleeting particles of Matter, united to it, will find it hard, to make an Embryo, one of Years, mad, and sober, the same man, by any Supposition, that will not make it possible for Seth, Ishmael, Socrates, Pilate, St. Austin, and Cesar Borgia to be the same Man. <sup>(11)</sup>

Having given his definition of man, Locke is at once concerned to show that competing definitions of man and their associated criteria of identity are inadequate. In this quotation he is considering the competing hypothesis that man should be defined simply as a finite intelligence or soul, and thus that the identity over time of any given man would be determined by sameness of soul. This hypothesis or supposition would unite an embryo and one of years, but it would also allow for the same man to undergo transmigration. If one finds this result unacceptable, then it shows that the same soul criterion is too broad, and the corresponding definition false.

The problem with this supposition and its associated definition, from Locke's point of view, is that it means that there is "nothing in the Nature of Matter" which relates to man's identity, and thus "all Body and Shape is excluded." <sup>(12)</sup> Locke goes on to argue that the hypothesis fares even worse if one has a view of transmigration which allows that the souls of men "may, for their Miscarriages, be detruded into the Bodies of Beasts, as fit Habitations with Organs suited to the satisfaction of their Brutal Inclinations." <sup>(13)</sup>

Locke goes on in section 7 to draw the moral that "'Tis not, therefore, Unity of Substance that comprehends all sorts of Identity, or will determine it in every Case." <sup>(14)</sup> This clearly has affinities with Hobbes' chief point about identity in his discussion in *De Corpore*, though the details are not the same.

Locke says that we must pay attention to what ideas words like *Substance*, *Man* and *Person* stand for, since different ideas will yield different identity conditions. It is clear from the preceeding discussion that the idea of man and the idea of substance are not the same. It is not the soul which comprehends the identity of man for reasons just considered. Similarly, however, it is not the identity of mass which determines the identity of man either. So, it is neither material or immaterial substance which determines the identity of man -- rather it is the organization of the particles. Locke also implies here that man and person stand for different ideas and so should be distinguished.

In section 8 Locke takes on another competing definition of man - that man is defined by certain characteristic powers or functions, in particular the powers of speech and rational discourse. This, rather clearly, is the Aristotelian entry in the competition to define man -- man is a rational animal. It is also Hobbes' entry in the competition. Locke offers the thought experiments of the talking parrot or cat which have such characteristic functioning as counter-examples to show that if we encountered such a creature we would not call it a man. On the other side, Locke shows us that we would go on calling a being that had our characteristic shape but was inarticulate a man. Taking the two sets of examples together, we get the strong result that having such and such a particular shape is a necessary and sufficient condition for being called a man.

When he comes to define person in section 9 of II. xxvii, Locke uses the Aristotelian criterion of rationality in the definition of persons: Person is a thinking intelligent being with reason and reflection that knows itself as itself the same thinking thing in different times and places. In addition to that old Aristotelian criterion now put in a new context, Locke adds a concept which had become much more philosophically prominent in the late seventeenth century -- consciousness. He writes:

For since consciousness always accompanies thinking and 'tis that, that makes every one to be, what he calls self; and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal Identity, i.e. the sameness of a Rational Being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that Person; it is the same self now it was then; and 'tis by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that Action was done. (15)

Persons for Locke, have more independence and moral weight than they do for Hobbes. For Hobbes, persons, while having a moral dimension because they appear in speech and action, ultimately represent men. For Locke, man really has very little moral importance. Persons have achieved a degree of independence from the living human body which Locke identifies as man. This is so because of consciousness. Consciousness is that crucial faculty which connects the present to the past and the future in terms of moral and legal responsibility and in terms of concern and care for the future state of the self. While Hobbes uses the term 'conscious' -- he does not consider the possibility (as Locke does) that consciousness could be transferred from one living body to another or indeed from one immaterial substance or soul to another. And while he notes that different persons can be associated with the same man, because person does not have the same independence from man and moral weight that it does for Locke, his assertion of this point is far less radical than it is when Locke makes a similar point.

Locke, like Bacon and Hobbes before him is in revolt against the Aristotelian and Scholastic *paidea* of his time. Bacon, Hobbes and Locke were all acutely aware of the new science of their time, and their insights about identity were shaped by these new insights. Thus we see a clear interconnection between science and the humanities. The movement of thought from Hobbes to Locke involves an increasingly revolutionary departure from ancient ways of thinking, and from the *paidea* presented to these philosophers at the

university. In all three we see the struggle to become free of old ways of explanation, and to draw out the consequences of new ways of thinking, and yet quite entangled in that *paidea* from which they so passionately wish to free themselves. Still, as time passes, while much is preserved which is good from the old ways of thinking, notably the basics of the Aristotelian account of identity, a new and revolutionary view of the self emerges which departs significantly from that of Aristotle.

## Notes

(1) There are, however, significant differences between the semantic version and ontological versions of the Indiscernability of Identicals. The former is open to counter-examples which do not apply to the latter, e.g. Andrew Jackson was called 'Old Hickory' because of his smell. He was not called 'Andrew Jackson' because of his smell.

(2) Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore*, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, Ed. Molesworth, Vol. 1. 1839. pg. 132

(3) *Ibid.* pg. 136

(4) *Ibid.*

(5) *Ibid.* pg. 137

(6) *Ibid.* pp. 137-8

(7) Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, ed. M. Oakeshott, Collier Books, New York, 1966. Pg. 35.

(8) This example is taken up by Hume as the model for the self.

(9) Hobbes has a third somewhat obscure option, which is that the identity of a thing is determined by its accidents. This, however, seems to reduce to a version of the matter criterion, since (I am guessing here) Hobbes holds that accidents cannot be transferred from one clump of matter to another, when the matter changes, so necessarily do the accidents which depend on it. Thus the ship of Theseus case Hobbes claims fits this model of individuation and not the first two.

(10) Thus, Hobbes also can give an account of the trinity in terms of these definitions, and it is worth noting that most of the occurrences of the term 'person' in the *Leviathan* are in the context of a discussion of the trinity. But, presumably Hobbes still regards God as a material body, and the three persons of the trinity as different representations in speech and action of that body.

(11) John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972. (II. xxvii. 6. 2-9) Pg. 332

(12) *Ibid.*

(13) *Ibid.* (18-20) Pg. 332

(14) *Ibid.* (II. xxvii. 7. 23-24) Pg. 332

(15) Locke, *op. cit.* (II. xxvii. 9 21-28) Pg. 335