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THE CARTESIANISM AND ANTI-CARTESIANISM OF LOCKE'S CONCEPT OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

The shift towards subjectivity initiated by René Descartes also represented the starting point for British empiricism: ever since John Locke and his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* successive philosophers invariably began with an analysis of the subjective content of thinking. On the other hand, however, the gap between the metaphysics of the Cartesian *ego cogito* and the empirical analysis of subjectivity and personal identity presented by Locke seems to be so significant that one could speak of a break with the earlier tradition, while seeing Locke's empiricism as the overcoming of 17th century rationalism and substantialism.

In the present text, I analyse Locke's understanding of subjectivity and the concept of personal identity, with the main aim being to indicate the extent to which it is actually possible to speak in this case of a continuation of the position presented by Descartes in his *Meditations*. It is my attempt to prove that the concept presented by Locke cannot be treated as the opposite of this solution, but rather as its correction and complement. What is more, an unconsidered acceptance of the opposition of Lockean genetic empiricism to Cartesian rationalism prevents one from seeing the importance of metaphysics in Locke's philosophy. The completion of Cartesian rationalism presented by him concerns psychological analyses that link particular functions of thinking, such as memory and imagination, whose share is generally overlooked by Descartes. His correction of the Cartesian stance, however, does not consist in removing metaphysical concepts from the description

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of personal identity, but in demarcating the boundary between the three levels of cognition: psychology, philosophical speculation, and metaphysics that complete the concept of personal identity. According to the author of the *Essay*, Descartes unnecessarily and misleadingly blends them. On the other hand, as we will see, a proper drawing of conclusions by Locke from the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* principle would allow us to see the limitations inherent in empiricism.

There are, of course, many places in Locke's *Essay* which question the validity of rationalistic metaphysics, for which the basic term is "substance" understood as "a thing capable of existing independently,"¹ that is, in a Cartesian manner. It is impossible to accept the existence of such a substance because if it is understood as an unknown and only postulated basis of any experience, it remains completely beyond the possibility of any determination, but also because the attempt to define it merely constitutes a speculation of reason, susceptible to falsification by experience. In turn, to deprive experience of all significance, to make the substance something truly independent from it, would give reason the possibility of creating conceptual constructs whose only value is their internal coherence.² That is why in a well-known passage Locke writes ironically:

Had the poor Indian philosopher (who imagined that the earth also wanted something to bear it up) but thought of this word substance, he needed not to have been at the trouble to find an elephant to support it, and a tortoise to support his elephant: the word substance would have done it effectually. And he that inquired, might have taken it for as good an answer from an Indian philosopher, that substance, without knowing what it is, is that which supports the earth; as we take it for a sufficient answer, and good doctrine, from our European philosophers, that substance, without knowing what it is, is that which supports accidents. So that of substance, we have no idea of what it is, but only a confused obscure one of what it does.³

¹ See René Descartes's Third Meditation in AT 7:44, CSM 2:30.

² The Cartesian philosophy of nature provides many examples of such independence of pure notions of reason from experience—distinguishing between two types of movement, apparent and real, or basing the description of mechanical interaction of bodies on the principles of statics (the third law of nature), which led to paradoxes that were contradicted by everyday experience. On that, see René DESCARTES, *Principles of Philosophy*, 1:40; AT 8A:65, CSM 1:242; the paradoxical character of the law is stressed in Peter MCLAUGHLIN, "Force, Determination, and Impact," in *Descartes' Natural Philosophy*, ed. Stephen Gaukroger, John Schuster, and John Sutton (London–New York: Routledge, 2000), 97ff.

³ John LOCKE, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), II, 13, 19, 175. While referring to this edition, I provide the book number, part, paragraph, and page.

The notion of substance does not refer to any specific idea, whether in relation to spiritual or bodily substance, but becomes a symbol for the operations of human understanding, establishing what can be understood by this notion—on the basis of natural history and the philosophy of nature (in relation to bodies) or psychology and moral philosophy (in relation to persons). The traditional notion of substance understood as a basis for qualities seems superfluous, and thus it does not matter what substance we consider as a basis for thinking “whether spiritual or material, simple or compounded, it matters not.”⁴ However, as we will see, Locke's concept of personal identity only to some extent replaces the metaphysical *ego cogito* concept with an empirical one; it would be more appropriate to state that it revises and complements it.

TWO CONCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

The Cartesian understanding of substance as “a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence”⁵ causes the soul to be substantially separate and independent of the body. This independence means, *inter alia*, that although with the death of an organism the body is destroyed, the *res extensa* remains indestructible, but also that the destruction of the body has no effect on the soul for it is indivisible,⁶ hence not subject to destruction. For now, let us leave out the question of the possibility of proving the immortality of the soul, which Descartes ultimately abandons.⁷ But unlike the body, which always remains part of a general *res extensa*, the soul contains the principle of individuation. The thinking substance is not the thinking itself (*cogitatio*), but an individual *ego cogito*.

... we need to recognize that body, taken in the general sense, is a substance, so that it too never perishes. But the human body, in so far as it differs from other bodies, is simply made up of a certain configuration of limbs and other accidents of this sort; whereas the human mind is not made up of any accidents in this way, but is a pure substance. For even if all the accidents of the mind change, so that it has different objects of the understanding and different desires and sensations, it does not on that

⁴ LOCKE, *Essay*, II, 27, 17, 341.

⁵ DESCARTES, *Principles*, 1:51, AT 8A:24, CSM 1:210.

⁶ DESCARTES, *Sixth Meditation*, AT 7:78, CSM 2:54.

⁷ Jerzy KOPANIA, “Descartes i problem nieśmiertelności duszy ludzkiej,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 57, no. 4 (2014): 9–32; Marleen ROZEMOND, “Descartes and the Immortality of the Soul,” in *Mind, Method, and Morality. Essays in Honour of Anthony Kenny*, ed. John Cottingham and Peter Hacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 252–73.

account become a different mind; whereas a human body loses its identity merely as a result of a change in the shape of some of its parts. And it follows from this that while the body can very easily perish, the mind is immortal by its very nature.⁸

Thinking? At last I have discovered it — thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist — that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. ... I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason — words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now. But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of thing? As I have just said — a thinking thing.⁹

Pointing to the *ego* as the basis of the thinking process, acknowledging that it is a thinking thing, raises two fundamental doubts. The first concerns the directness and simplicity of the experience of the self in the act of introspection, the second concerns the personal identity, i.e., the permanence and invariability of the *ego* in the entirety of the experience given in the time order. In part, these doubts can be removed by pointing to the specificity of the lecture on the contents of *Meditations*, which are written in the order of discovery, not justification. This makes certain decisions clear and justified only in the further parts of the text—for example, the granting of the substantial character of the *ego cogito* becomes understandable only when in the Third Meditation Descartes inquires “whether I myself, who have this idea, could exist if no such being [God] existed”¹⁰ and “whether I possess some power enabling me to bring it about that I who now exist will still exist a little while from now”;¹¹ because preserving myself in existence is not within my power, which as a thinking thing I would know, “this very fact makes me recognize most clearly that I depend on some being distinct from myself.”¹² The being is God.

Seemingly, Locke’s position on the issue of personal identity is completely opposite to Descartes’. The reasons are obvious: Locke makes the analysis of personal identity independent of substantialist metaphysics in its traditional, rationalistic version, and should there still be any reasons suggesting that one should refer to metaphysics, the solution he presents is closer to materialism than to dualism of thinking and extension.¹³ A lot speaks for, however, that it is more of a reformula-

⁸ DESCARTES, *Meditations, Synopsis*, AT 7:14, CSM 1:10.

⁹ DESCARTES, *Second Meditation*, AT 7:27, CSM 1:18.

¹⁰ DESCARTES, *Third Meditation*, AT 7:48, CSM 1:33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, AT 7:49, CSM 1:33.

¹² *Ibid.*, AT 7:49, CSM 1:34.

¹³ The ambiguity of Locke’s position results both from the impossibility of resolving the dualism–materialism opposition, and openness to natural history and the phenomena described in it, which are yet to be explained. On the one hand, therefore, Locke presents an interpretation that there is no need to postulate the existence of a spiritual substance, because thinking can be understood

tion and supplementation of Descartes's concepts; moreover, on some points, these concepts are mutually compatible. In order to draw a precise demarcation line that separates those elements of the two concepts that are analogous and those in which they are fundamentally different, it should be noted that the analysis of the concept of personal identity—which is otherwise multi-faceted—fits into a broader context. On the one hand, it is a question of a psychological analysis of the formation of human subjectivity, and on the other, of its metaphysical completion. And although Locke states that we do not possess the idea of substance, but only “a confused obscure one of what it does,” he is ultimately forced to refer to the metaphysical, that is, substantial concept of personal identity.

The problem of the subjective, individual aspect of experience covers two planes in Locke's philosophy: the psychological description of the development and differentiation of experience, as well as the issue of personal identity, in the explanation of which Locke endeavours to avoid reference to the metaphysics of substance. This is a multi-stage supplementation of the transition that seems to take place in the quoted passage of *Meditations* between the realization of one's own thinking and the statement “I am a thing which is real and which truly exists.”

Locke's description of subjectivity employs two concepts: consciousness and reflection. The first stands for the knowledge of what can be indirectly grasped (*perceived*, from Latin *per-capio*, *-ere*) from what is happening in thinking and what usually, in the absence of a better term, is called thoughts. Therefore, consciousness means both the changeability of various contents of thinking, but also the possibility of distinguishing them: “as the mind by the senses comes more and more to be furnished with ideas, it comes to be more and more awake,” writes Locke and adds, “the more it has matter to think on.”¹⁴ This “awakening of the mind” means not only the appearance of content, but also the possibility of objectifying it—it is an object-oriented perception.

This indicates the twofold nature of experience: “awakening of the mind” means the differentiation of experience into an objective and subjective layer. However, said differentiation occurs in two stages—the first is the awareness of particular objects of thought. Locke notes not only that consciousness is the consciousness of something, but it is also the consciousness of someone—even if the sense of

as the capacity of a material being, but on the other hand, he did not prejudge about the nature of “angels of all sorts” or “intelligences whose orders are more numerous than corporeal substances ... whereof our faculties give us no certain knowledge at all” (*Essay*, IV, 3, 6, 540). As a side note, let us add that this openness, intrinsically inscribed in the propaedeutic idea of the *Essay*, made it possible to come across the work not only angels, but also jumaras, aquariuses, and even a cross between a cat and a rat.

¹⁴ LOCKE, *Essay*, II, 1, 22, 117.

oneself is still vague: “Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man’s own mind. Can another man perceive that I am conscious of any thing, when I perceive it not myself?”¹⁵

The second stage of experience differentiation is the ability to objectify (i.e., make an idea of) the mental processes themselves by reflexively turning towards them. In this way, the thinking which was supposed to define the essence of the soul turns out to be for it a collection of subsequent objects, which Locke associates with the process of gaining awareness of the individuality of the self in relation to all conscious contents—they are private, someone’s “own” states. Thus, turning towards the operations of reason itself allows us not only to say “I know that I perceive objects,” which corresponds to Locke’s concept of consciousness, but also to “know what it means to know”—which is tantamount to his understanding of reflectiveness. “The other fountain, says Locke, from which experience furnisheth 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 got; 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.”¹⁶ The effect of capturing (realizing) the variability of individual states of thought (what is happening, changing, occurring) are ideas, and such capturing (realizing) Locke calls perception. Thanks to reflection, perception itself becomes an idea—the first reflective idea upon which all other acts of thinking are built.

The formation of subjectivity in acts of consciousness and reflection is a prerequisite for the constitution of personal identity. The latter concept belongs to the most commented on (and criticized) parts of Locke’s philosophy. According to the traditional reading, reinforced by critical comments from successive philosophers—George Berkeley, Joseph Butler, David Hume, or Thomas Reid¹⁷—basing personal identity on memory and the availability of previous contents of thinking in each act of recollection does not take into account the selectivity of memory and the continuous reinterpretation of its content, nor does it make it possible to justify the identity of the subject of cognition. It should therefore be recognized that if we are not to return to founding personal identity on the notion of a thinking,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 1, 19, 116.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 1, 4, 105.

¹⁷ Joseph BUTLER, *The Analogy of Religion* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1873), 317–23 (Dissertation I: *Of Personal Identity*); George BERKELEY, *Alciphron*, in *The Works of George Berkeley*, ed. Arthur A. Luce and Thomas E. Jessop (London: Nelson: 1948–1957), 3:296–99 (dial. 7, par. 9); David HUME, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin, 1985), 299–311, bk. 1, part 4, sect. 6 *Of Personal Identity*; Thomas REID, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Edinburgh: J. Bell, 1785), 333, essay III, chap. 6.

substantial *ego*, as is done, for example, by Butler,¹⁸ Locke's new way of ideas, imperceptibly for him, leads to a sceptical solution known from the fourth part of the first book of Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*.¹⁹ Even today, commentators often emphasize that the solution proposed by Locke is not one that could replace Descartes' concept postulating the substantial character of *ego cogito*.²⁰

It seems, however, that the criticism voiced most frequently concerns only the selectively treated certain thread of this concept, in which Locke bases personal identity on the functioning of memory. A person, Locke writes, "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. ... For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that, that makes everyone to be what he

¹⁸ "Though the successive consciousnesses, which we have of our own existence, are not the same, yet are they consciousnesses of one and the same thing or object; of the same person, self, or living agent. The person, of whose existence the consciousness is felt now, and was felt an hour or a year ago, is discerned to be; not two persons, but one and the same person; and therefore is one and the same" (BUTLER, *The Analogy*, 319–20).

¹⁹ It is worth taking this opportunity to note that the famous comparison of the mind to theatre (*Treatise of Human Nature*, I, 4, 6, 301) is, above all, sceptical and does not offer a conclusive solution to the question of personal identity, since it is overcome in the second and third book of the *Treatise* by complementary terms on the inter-personal level (by being founded on sympathy and indirect passions) as well as on the moral level. In a sense, this "multilayered" definition of identity resembles Locke's proposal, but the biologism of the author of the *Essay* is replaced in Hume's case by emotivism. On the emotional aspect of personal identity in Hume's case, see e.g. Amélié Oxenberg RORTY, "'Pride Produces the Idea of Self': Hume on Moral Agency," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 3 (1990); Wade L. ROBINSON, "Hume on Personal Identity," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1962).

²⁰ For example, Henry Alison considers Locke's concept untenable and sees its only positive aspect in the historical context as an attempt to overcome earlier concepts (Henry ALISON, "Locke's Theory of Personal Identity. A Re-examination," in *John Locke. Critical Assessments*, ed. Richard Ashcraft (London: Routledge, 1991), 4:527–44; an attempt to rehabilitate the concept was presented by M. W. Hughes, who pointed out its practical aspect in which the theory of "full, i.e., substantialist, identity" was replaced by a "full responsibility" theory ("Personal Identity: A Defence of Locke," *ibid.*, 545–63). Another interpretation is found in Lex Newman: the change in Locke's understanding of personal identity is not antimetaphysical, but epistemic and pragmatic: the issue of personal identity is part of Locke's general philosophical programme, in which "experience can induce practical judgements about matters for which metaphysical truth is beyond our cognitive grasp" (Lex NEWMAN, "Locke on Substance, Consciousness, and Personal Identity," in *Locke and Leibniz on Substance*, ed. Paul Lodge and Tom Stoneham (London–New York: Routledge, 2015), 107). Newman is obviously right, but he omits the religious aspect of the problem, where empirical judgements are also "beyond our grasp." Even if the critics point out the eschatological thread, they again point out the functioning of memory, consciousness and the practical, moral aspect of the concept, learning about its multifacetedness and the reference to natural philosophy when interpreting the resurrection (David P. BEHAN, "Locke on Persons and Personal Identity," in ASHCRAFT, *John Locke. Critical Assessments*, 582).

calls self... in this alone consist 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.”²¹ Self-consciousness given at different moments and in each of them extending into the past is likened by Locke to the identity of the subject in each of these moments.

In Locke’s criticism of the concept of identity it is pointed out that such a leap from consciousness of one’s own self in each of the moments to the identity of the self that is the subject of all of them is not legitimate. It is worth noting, however, that a) Locke’s statement is primarily of a critical character, b) this first-person, autobiographical identity is complemented by other aspects of identity. The acknowledgement that awareness of the past is sufficient to recognize personal identity is the result of separation of conscious thinking and substance. This criticism of Descartes is strongly expressed in subsequent paragraphs of the *Essay* (II, 27, 12–17), where the question “whether if the same substance, which thinks, be changed, it can be the same person, or remaining the same, it can be different persons” receives the response: “self is that thinking thing (whatever substance it is made up of whether spiritual, or material, simple or compounded, it matters not) which is sensible ... and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends.”²² The first-person identity based on consciousness and memory is complemented by two other aspects of identity: the identity of man and the identity of a person in a legal sense. The identity of man by which Locke understands the identity of the living organism being “the same continued life communicated to different particles of matter,”²³ takes into account the transformation of an organism; it is also an identity which, unlike the first-person identity, can be confirmed from the third-person perspective. With the exception of the two cases described in the Scriptures (Jesus and Lazarus) which are supernatural such an identity is continuous in character: it lasts even in spite of memory deficits and loss of consciousness, and it is only with the end of life that the final end of man occurs.

A person is also “a forensic term appropriating actions and their merit ... to intelligent agents capable of a law, and happiness and misery.”²⁴ The identity of the thus understood person is attributed from the outside owing to the fact of being subject to the law. This identity is not only continuous (as well as is the identity of a human being), but it is also always individual and independent of both the changeability of the particles of the body which is the basis of thinking and the

²¹ LOCKE, *Essay*, I, 27, 9, 335.

²² *Ibid.*, II, 27, 17, 341.

²³ *Ibid.*, II, 27, 8, 332–33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 27, 26, 346.

changeability and transience of memory. It is, however, an identity devoid of content and only formal, which can be attributed to every rational being. The combination of all three aspects of identity is therefore a correlate of substantial identity, preserving such of its determinants as numeric unity, continuity, and invariability.

From this perspective, Locke's position could be considered critical and alternative in relation to the Cartesian solution. The term "a thinking thing" is merely a verbal reference to Descartes, since the deficiencies of the psychological foundation of identity are overcome not by reference to the founding role of the substance (thinking or material), but to two other aspects of identity, the biological and the legal. The reference to the concept of substance is no longer relevant. It is enough to recall at this point the ironic comment made by the English philosopher: "I confess myself to have one of those dull souls, that doth not perceive itself always to contemplate ideas; nor can conceive it any more necessary for the soul always to think, than for the body always to move."²⁵—In his opinion, Descartes mixes both planes: of thought and of substance. This is the reason for Locke's objection, which postulates that thinking should be attributed not to the substance of the soul, the Cartesian *res cogitans*, but to man, who is an empirically given living organism. This solution is an expression of a propensity for materialism and a reason for sharp polemics with Edward Stillingfleet. It also allows Locke to use his cognitive pessimism about the real essence of bodies on the last, fourth, plane on which he considers personal identity—that is, the religious plane. Its reconstruction allows us to see not an alternative, but a complementary to the Cartesian character of Locke's concept.

LOCKEAN DESCARTES AND CARTESIAN LOCKE

Meanwhile, let us recapitulate the analyses made thus far. The Cartesian definition of the subject as an *ego cogito* indicates the fact that every act of thinking is already internally dualized, contains an intentional reference to an object, and at the same time is a subjective act. This is in line with Locke's intuitions, with the provision, however, that the possibility of regressing in the historical reconstruction of experience to a direct experience, occurring earlier in relation to the division into the subjective and the objective sphere, is invalidated. William James will later describe such an experience radicalizing the achievements of modern empiricism as pure experience—according to Locke it remains only the postulated end of the

²⁵ Ibid., II, 1, 10, 108.

historical reconstruction of experience, but not an object of consciousness.²⁶ On the other hand, Locke describes more accurately than Descartes the formation of subjectivity in consciousness and acts of reflection. In Descartes's *Second Meditation*, the definition of self-consciousness is accomplished by means of analysis and subtraction. What goes beyond the operations of the intellect does not define the *ego*, being only an accessory belonging to the common consciousness.²⁷ From the very beginning, the existence of the *ego* has been metaphysically founded: it is created by God, and only Descartes's method of demonstration gradually reveals this truth and shows the necessity of reference to metaphysics. Meanwhile, Locke's method of defining subjectivity is carried out in a reversed way, through the accumulation of determinations: from a direct feeling of the independence of sense perception,²⁸ through the autobiographical, first-person identity based on memory, the identity of man as a living organism, all the way to the identity of the person in a legal sense. However, all these terms refer only to the natural plane, which is complemented on the supernatural one, where Locke presents an interpretation of the resurrection of the body and eternal life. It allows us to demonstrate that the criticism of Cartesian position made by the author of the *Essay* does not boil down to a rejection of the metaphysical foundation of human subjectivity, but to an indication of a separate place for such foundation in the entire construction of human identity.

The shift from substantialist to functionalist thinking²⁹ plays an important role in the new programme of empirical knowledge: the notion of 'matter' is replaced by empirical cognition of a historical nature, while the rational philosophy of

²⁶ Cf. William JAMES, *The world of pure experience*, in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1912), 39–44. In Locke's concept, the historical reconstruction of the differentiation of experience is of a logical nature (as a dissection of thinking into simple elements (sensual and reflective)), and is based on an analogy to the development of cognitive functions of humans and animals (cf. *Essay*, II, 1, 21–22, 116–117).

²⁷ Cf. DESCARTES, *Second Meditation*, AT 7:24–26, CSM 2:16–18.

²⁸ It should be noted that Locke uses the Cartesian term "assurance" (see footnote 33 below) while referring to sense perception; he writes for example: "the notice we have by our senses, of the existence of things without us ... is an assurance that deserves the name of knowledge (*Essay*, IV, II, 3, 631). What is crucial here is the fact that the assurance and confidence given by our senses is no more than the knowledge of the existence of bodies, but not of their nature and their nominal or real essence, is to be deduced. This distinction can be expressed also by the relation between the "real existence" of things and the "fleeting existence" of ideas; more detailed analysis of Lockean ontology in relation to the Cartesian one be found in Matthieu Haumesser ("Virtual Existence of Ideas and Real Existence: Locke's Anti-Cartesian Ontology," in *Locke and Cartesian Philosophy*, ed. Hamou Philippe and Martine Pecharman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 106ff.

²⁹ Han-Kyul KIM, "The Supposed but Unknown: A Functionalist Account of Locke's Substratum," in LODGE and STONEHAM, *Locke and Leibniz on Substance*, 28–44.

nature reveals its speculative and falsifiable character.³⁰ In short: the notion of matter changes its sense, ceasing to be an unknown substrate of phenomena, and begins to be understood as a notion concealing a series of cognitive operations that enable us to determine what should be regarded as objectively existing bodies. However, while the changes in the definition of material substance were driven by the accumulation of natural histories and discoveries which falsified previous philosophical concepts, in the case of the substance on which human subjectivity was to be founded, such a historical extension, demolition and re-erection of the edifice of knowledge was not necessary.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the study of nature and the description of human subjectivity is revealed in Locke's objection to the Cartesian isolation of intellectual operations themselves as building human identity. When Descartes states that although "the first thought to come to mind was that I had a face, hands, arms, and the whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse, and which I called the body,"³¹ he instantly adds that such an experience may be the result of an interaction with "some supremely powerful and ... malicious deceiver."³² Thus, two orders are distinguished: *assurance morale* and *certitude metaphysique*: the first is natural and instinctive, the second belongs to the intellect and is unquestionable.³³ Locke does not reject *assurance morale*: the

³⁰ In one of her papers, Martha Brandt Bolton analyses Locke's adherence to the corpuscular hypothesis, suggesting its provisional character; though this interpretation seems very convincing, I tend to understand Locke's positing in an even more "historical" light. Whereas substance understood as bare substratum remains unknown, any positive judgement concerning substances must refer either to some results of historical accumulation of observations and experiments (one's individual experiences and natural histories) or speculations concerning natural essences. Without deciding here whether Locke's position closer to realism or instrumentalism treating speculative hypotheses as convenient tools to expand knowledge about phenomena, let us note that Locke saw a historical march of these kinds of speculations. In the *Essay* itself we find references to Aristotle's substantial forms, Cartesian vortices, Boyle's corpuscularianism, and—in subsequent editions of the work—Newton's physics (Martha Brandt BOLTON, "Locke's Account of Substance in Light of His General Theory of Identity," in LODGE and STONEHAM, *Locke and Leibniz on Substance*, 64).

³¹ DESCARTES, *Second Meditation*, AT 7:26, CSM 1:17.

³² DESCARTES, *Second Meditation*, AT 7:26, CSM 1:18.

³³ We find this distinction in *Discourse on Method*, IV: "For although one might have a moral certainty [*assurance morale*] about these things, so that it seems we cannot doubt them without being extravagant, nevertheless when it is a question metaphysical certainty [*certitude metaphysique*], we cannot reasonably deny that there are adequate grounds for not being entirely sure about them. We need only observe that in sleep we may imagine in the same way that we have a different body and see different stars and a different earth, without there being any of these things (AT 6:37–38, CSM 1:130). In the *Principles* "moral certainty" is defined as "certainty sufficient for application to ordinary life, even though they [morally certain things] may be uncertain in relation to the absolute power of God" (AT VI:327, CSM 1:289–90).

natural conviction that my “self” is different from the world not only represents a starting point for an ever more accurate, multi-layered description of personal identity, but also reveals a metaphysical assumption: man is first and foremost a body, even though it is endowed with a specific ability to think. In this respect, the interpretation presented here agrees with the reading presented by Philippe Hamou, who emphasizes the fact that the object of Locke’s criticism is not Cartesian substantialism, but the “disembodiment” of the self.³⁴ It might be added that Locke’s objection results both from his interests in natural history and the effort to rationalize religion and attempt to develop an interpretation of its dogmas that would be in line with natural philosophy.

While this overcomes substantial dualism, what determines the similarity of the two theories (and at the same time allows us to point out the differences between them) is the way in which both philosophers consolidate human identity in the concept of an almighty and infallible good Creator. Whereas for Descartes the order of discovery of the concept of *ego* is prior to the concept of God, in practice, the real existence of *ego* entirely depends on the Creator.³⁵ We find the same reasoning in Locke when he writes, e.g. that “we have the knowledge of our own existence by intuition; of the existence of God by demonstration; and of the other things by sensation.”³⁶ The existence of God is deduced in the following manner: “if ... we know there is some real being, and that non-entity cannot produce any real being, it is an evident demonstration, that from eternity there has been something; since what was not from eternity, had a beginning; and what had a beginning, must be produced by something else.”³⁷ What originates and what requires foundation of existence in God is neither the totality of bodies in general (for it would be possible to assume their eternal existence), nor individual bodies, since the explanation of the origin of each body does not require reference

³⁴ Philippe HAMOU, “Locke and Descartes on Selves and Thinking Substances,” in *Locke and Cartesian Philosophy*, 135ff. It should be added that Locke’s argument against the “disembodiment” is in line with his opposition to the beast-machines conception, one of his earliest interests in Descartes’s philosophy.

³⁵ The inalienable role of God in Descartes’s philosophy is highlighted by John Cottingham in his *Cartesian Reflections. Essays on Descartes’s Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 253ff. As he points out, the difference between the order of discovery and the order of justification is amplified by Descartes himself in his *Regulae or Rules for the Direction of our Native Intelligence*, being the difference between “considering things in accordance with the way that corresponds to our knowledge of them,” and “considering things in accordance with how they exist in reality” (ibid., 259).

³⁶ LOCKE, *Essay*, IV, 9, 2, 619.

³⁷ LOCKE, *Essay* IV, 10, 3, 620. See also the *Third Meditation*, where Descartes writes that “something can’t arise from nothing, and that what is more perfect—that is, contains in itself more reality—can’t arise from what is less perfect” (AT 7:40–41, CSM 2:28).

to a supernatural factor. The only being whose existence requires such foundation is the *self*. The certainty resulting from the reasoning in which acceptance of the existence of God is inevitable exceeds the natural conviction of the existence of bodies, just as in Descartes's concept metaphysical certitude exceeds moral assurance: "it is plain to me we have a more certain knowledge of the existence of a God, than of anything our senses have not immediately discovered to us. Nay, I presume I may say, that we more certainly know that there is a God, than that there is anything else without us."³⁸ Though Locke does not abandon moral assurance for the sake of metaphysical certainty as Descartes does, both uphold the metaphysical primacy of God over Creation.

DESCARTES, LOCKE AND THE METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATION OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

Before we indicate the role of this relationship in Locke's concept of personal identity, let us point to its other example originating from natural philosophy. It concerns the justification of the possibility of judging on the primary characteristics of bodies:

... the coherence and continuity of the parts of Matter; the production of Sensation in us of Colours and Sounds, etc. by impulse and motion; nay, the original Rules and Communication of Motion being such, wherein we can discover no natural connection with any *Ideas* we have, we cannot but ascribe them to the arbitrary Will and good Pleasure of the Wise Architect.³⁹

Although everyday speech (the "civil" use of language as distinguished from the "philosophical" one)⁴⁰ allows us to attribute qualitative characteristics to the body (e.g., colours and sounds), the ideas of these characteristics depend on our sensory system. A more adequate knowledge of bodies concerns their quantitative characteristics, which belong to the bodies themselves. Although both types of bodies correspond to two types of knowledge—sensual and common, and intellectual and accurate—the difference between two types of qualities of bodies, if expressed in terms of dualistic substantialism, is a reproduction of the Cartesian solution.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, 10, 6, 621.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 3, 29, 559–560.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 9, 3, 476: "such a communication of thoughts and ideas by words, as may serve for the upholding common conversation and commerce, about the ordinary affairs and conveniences of civil life, in the societies of men, one amongst another."

Sensory qualities are a kind of stimulation of the mental faculties (and thus, *de facto*, should be attributed to the mind), while primary qualities, the cognition of which may be accurate, should be attributed to *res extensa*—regardless of the details that differentiate the corpuscularianism accepted by Locke from the Cartesian vortex theory. The transition from mind to the world, however, cannot be made by the power of the mind itself, but only through the activity of God. We encounter such a solution both in Descartes's *Meditations* and, in a radicalized way, in post-Cartesian occasionalism. In Locke, whose epistemological programme comes to the fore even more clearly than in Descartes, the problem of the transition from mind to the world is being reformulated and concerns the adequacy of two types of knowledge, requiring however a reference to the activity of the *Wise Architect*.

At this point, we can return to the issue of the necessity of a metaphysical foundation of personal identity. In Descartes, man's dependence on God is emphasized by the equation of man's creation with his sustenance in existence, because "the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each particular moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence."⁴¹ Meanwhile, Locke separates the natural from the supernatural: personal identity, with its three distinct and complementary aspects, does not require direct reference to the Creator. Such a reference is only required for borderline moments of a person's existence—their creation and the Final Judgment awaiting them. The first is to bestow upon the material body the capacity to think, which is not possible in a natural way, even though the differentiation of experience and the development of thinking are subject to psychological (i.e., natural) description. In turn, the idea of the Last Judgment—with its religious and moral significance—constitutes the supernatural culmination of the description of human identity. For the natural ways of understanding identity remain incomplete. Autobiographical identity, based on memory, not only is available on the first-person basis, but it is also distorted owing to memory deficiencies. The identity of man as a living animal is given from the third-person perspective and is continuous, and thus fills in the gaps in memory, yet it is not a numerical identity, but only a continuity of changeability inherent in life. Although identity in the legal sense (of the person as a subject of law) retains all three: unity, continuity, and unchangeability, it has a formal character—it can be attributed to every rational being. It lacks the uniqueness inherent in the first-person experience. Only the first of these three aspects is given through internal experience. "In every act of sensation, reasoning, or thinking, we are conscious to ourselves of our own being," says Locke, and

⁴¹ DESCARTES, *Third Meditation*, AT 7:49, CSM 2:33.

although “in this matter, come not short of the highest degree of certainty,”⁴² still the linking of subsequent acts requires reference to something else, whereas the complementation of operations of memory with the identity of life and of a legal person is only a natural equivalent of substantial identity, guaranteed by being sustained in existence by God.

While such a reference is not necessary in temporal life, since personal identity can be fully described in psychological (continuity of memory), biological (continuity of life), and socio-legal categories (identity of the person in terms of legal responsibility), its completion entails the idea of the Final Judgment, “the great day, wherein the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, it may be reasonable to think, no one shall be made to answer for what he knows nothing of; but shall receive his doom, his conscience accusing or excusing him.”⁴³ For Locke, the essence of the substance of a thinking thing is generally irrelevant, but he tries to present an interpretation that is best reconciled with knowledge of nature. Since—let us repeat—“self is that conscious thinking thing which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extend,”⁴⁴ the complete identity is available by the Creator’s restoring to man a new body and once again giving this body the ability to think—but this time by re-establishing the memory of all previous acts. Thus, it is only in the supernatural order described at the religious level that all three aspects of human identity can be integrated: the autobiographical memory restored by the Creator becomes complete, the extent of human consciousness encompasses the whole of his life, and the new, indestructible body which man is endowed with will no longer be subject to natural transformations, constantly deteriorating and regenerating itself. This idea has a religious dimension—it is about eternal reward or punishment, but at the same time it is the result of Locke’s conviction about the finiteness of human reason and the shortcomings of memory, which require reference to a supernatural factor in order for human identity to be complete.⁴⁵

⁴² LOCKE, *Essay*, IV, 9, 3, 619.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, II, 27, 22, 344.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ As mentioned earlier, in his interpretation of the resurrection of bodies and, in the case of salvation—endowing people with an indestructible body, Locke makes use of cognitive pessimism. Although the functioning of such indestructible bodies exceeds the ability of our understanding (similarly to turning the bodies of the condemned into nothingness), in the end the natural body also hides its real essence from human reason. Cf. JOHN LOCKE, *Resurrectio et quae sequuntur*, in *Writings on Religion*, ed. Victor Nuovo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 232–37. The moral aspect of Locke’s doctrine of resurrection was highlighted by Joanna S. K. Forstrom in her monograph *John Locke and Personal Identity. Immortality and Bodily Resurrection in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (London–New York: Continuum, 2002).

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THE CARTESIANISM AND ANTI-CARTESIANISM OF LOCKE'S CONCEPT OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

S u m m a r y

This article focuses on the relationship between the conceptions of personal identity presented by Descartes and by Locke. Contrary to common readings, I claim that the difference between them cannot be reduced to a simple contrast between rational substantialism and genetic empiricism. Locke does not resign from the substantialist position but delimits the two spheres: natural cognition with its foundation in experience and philosophical speculations, in which he tries to present a rational interpretation of religious dogmas which is consistent with his epistemological programme. Locke's criticism is directed against the Cartesian notion of a thinking thing as a substance independent of the body and his description of the differentiation of experience and his depiction of human subjectivity is expanded in relation to Cartesian philosophy: personal identity gains explication at four complementary levels: psychological, biological, socio-legal, and religious.

Keywords: René Descartes; John Locke; personal identity; rationalism; empiricism.

**KARTEZJANIZM I ANTYKARTEZJANIZM LOCKE'OWSKIEJ KONCEPCJI
TOŻSAMOŚCI OSOBOWEJ****Streszczenie**

Niniejszy artykuł koncentruje się na zależnościach pomiędzy Locke'owskim i kartezjańskim pojmowaniem tożsamości osobowej. Wbrew częstym odczytaniom, różnica pomiędzy nimi nie daje się sprowadzić do prostego przeciwstawienia substancjalizmu i empiryzmu. Locke nie rezygnuje ze stanowiska substancjalistycznego, jednakże rozgranicza dwie sfery — naturalnego, bazującego na doświadczeniu poznania oraz filozoficznych spekulacji, w których stara się przedstawić racjonalną i zgodną ze swym programem epistemologicznym interpretację dogmatów religijnych. Krytyka Locke'a dotyczy możliwości istnienia rzeczy myślącej jako substancji istniejącej niezależnie od ciała, natomiast rozbudowaniu w stosunku do filozofii kartezjańskiej ulega opis różnicowania się doświadczenia i ludzkiej subiektywności, zaś pojęcie tożsamości osobowej zyskuje eksplikację na czterech uzupełniających się poziomach: psychologicznym, biologicznym, społeczno-prawnym i religijnym.

Słowa kluczowe: René Descartes; Kartezjusz; John Locke; tożsamość osobowa; racjonalizm; empiryzm.