Catharine Trotter Cockburn's *Defence* of Locke

Jessica Gordon-Roth*

**ABSTRACT**

Catharine Trotter Cockburn is best known for her *Defence of Mr. Locke's Essay of Human Understanding* (1702). However, very little has been said about Trotter's treatment of Locke's metaphysical commitments therein. In this paper, I give a brief description of the history of Trotter's *Defence*. Thereafter, I focus on two (of the many) objections to which Trotter responds on Locke's behalf: 1) the objection that Locke has not proved the soul immortal, and 2) the objection that Locke's view leads to the absurd consequence that our souls are in constant flux. I argue that Trotter offers a compelling response to both of these charges. This is not only because of what Trotter explicitly claims in the *Defence*, but also because the *Defence* invites and encourages the reader to return to Locke's text. I then argue that in Trotter we find additional insights and clarifications once we move past the two objections I just mentioned, and on to the related topic of personal identity. In this short paper, I am not able to offer a full explication or evaluation of Trotter's treatment of Locke's metaphysical commitments. I am, however, able to show that this aspect of Trotter's *Defence* warrants careful consideration and further study.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Catharine Trotter Cockburn is best known for her *Defence of Mr. Locke's Essay of Human Understanding* (1702). However, very little has been said about Trotter's treatment of Locke's metaphysical commitments therein. In what follows, I will give a brief description of the history of Trotter's *Defence*. Thereafter, I will focus on two (of the many) objections to which Trotter responds on Locke's behalf: 1) the objection that Locke has not proved the soul immortal, and 2) the objection that Locke's view leads to the absurd consequence that our souls are in constant flux. I will argue that Trotter offers a compelling response to both of these charges. This is not only because of what Trotter explicitly claims in the *Defence*, but also because the *Defence* invites and encourages the reader to return to Locke's text. I will then argue that in Trotter we find additional insights and clarifications once we move past the two objections I just mentioned, and on to the related topic of personal identity. In this short paper, I will not be able to offer a full explication or evaluation of Trotter's

* City University of New York, Lehman College.

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treatment of Locke's metaphysical commitments. I will, however, be able to show that this aspect of Trotter's Defence warrants careful consideration and further study. To get to this point I will begin with a bit of background on the reception of Locke's Essay and what prompted Trotter to write the Defence in the first place.

2. BACKGROUND

Peter Nidditch rightly claims that Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding is "one of the great works of English literature of the seventeenth century... [it is] one of the epoch-making works in the history of philosophy" (vii, Foreword). He goes on to assert that the Essay "has been one of the most repeatedly reprinted, widely disseminated... read, and profoundly influential books of the past three centuries..." (vii, Foreword). It is important to remember, however, that the reception of the Essay was not uniformly warm. Many objected to the claims that Locke makes therein. Many went even further and argued that the book ought not be read because it poses a threat to Christianity.

On the list of those who condemned Locke's Essay was Thomas Burnet. Between 1697 and 1699, Burnet published three pamphlets aimed at Locke's Essay. Burnet did so anonymously. Trotter published the Defence in response to Burnet's pamphlets in 1702—also anonymously. In a letter to Locke, Trotter explains why she wrote the Defence. She says:

I do not presume to address these papers to you as a champion in your cause; but as an offender, to make the best apology I can for a bold unlicensed undertaking. That excellence of the Essay of Human Understanding, which gave me courage in encountering a caviller against it, strikes me with shame and awe, when I think of coming before you; like a rash lover, that fights in defence of a lady's honour, the juster his cause is, the more reason he has to fear her resentment, for not leaving it to assert itself by its own evidence; and the more it secures him of success against his adversary, the less pretence he has to her forgiveness. But, Sir, The Essay of Human Understanding is a public concern, which every one has a right and interest to defend. It came too late into the world to be received without opposition, as it might have been in the first ages of philosophy, before men's heads were prepossessed with imaginary science....

There is a lot to say about this excerpt of Trotter's letter to Locke. At the very least we should note that Trotter feels compelled to defend the Essay, as a matter of public concern. We should additionally note that although Trotter feels so compelled, she also feels ill equipped to undertake the task. Above Trotter refers to the Defence as a "bold unlicensed undertaking." Later Trotter describes the vast discrepancy between her abilities and those of Locke. She also references the weakness of her defense. She says, "[P]erhaps the weakness of this defence may show you, that those, who mean well to religion, have no little need of your instruction. In hopes of which, I have ventured to publish these papers, not without much apprehension..." (35–36). This kind of humility or tone is not
uncommon amongst early modern women philosophers. Consider Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. In her first letter to Descartes, Elisabeth thanks Descartes for “consenting to communicate with an ignorant and indocile person.”

Elisabeth then goes on to raise some of the most devastating objections to the *Meditations* that Descartes receives. In what follows we will see that, like Elisabeth, Trotter grossly underestimates herself.

### 3. THE DEFENSE

As I mentioned earlier, Burnet objects that Locke has not proved the soul immortal (S3). Trotter responds to this charge by first asserting that Locke never set out to prove the soul immortal (S3). It is thus not as if Locke attempts to prove the soul immortal and then fails to do so. However this alone will not put Burnet at ease, for Burnet’s real worry is not that Locke does not prove the soul immortal, but that some of Locke’s commitments make it so that the soul *cannot be immortal*. Here are the two that most concern Burnet: 1) Locke asserts that souls are not always thinking and 2) Locke asserts that we cannot know whether souls are immaterial (in the substance dualist sense). Burnet contends that both of these assertions pose a serious threat to the immortality of the soul—or rather, any proof of it. Through Trotter’s response to Burnet, we will be able to see what Locke is really up to when he makes these assertions, and why neither assertion poses the threat that Burnet describes.

To put Burnet’s worry about the first assertion into context, we should remember that for someone like Descartes, thinking is the principal attribute of the soul. Thus if the soul were to stop thinking, it would cease to exist. It is likely that Burnet has something like this in mind. Locke does not view substances in terms of their principal attributes, however. Moreover, Locke denies that the soul always thinks, since we have dreamless sleeps and the like. But in doing so, he does not threaten proofs of the immortality of the soul, for few—if any—rest on the supposition that the soul always thinks. As Trotter herself puts it: “I confess I do not see of what consequence it is at all to the proofs of the immortality of the soul. Do they depend upon the contrary supposition, that the soul *always thinks*?” (S3). Certainly Descartes’ own proof does not. Moreover, Trotter points out that any proof that rested on this supposition would “have a very unsure foundation” (S3). Here is why: Even if we take it for granted that the soul must think to exist now, this is no proof that the soul will always exist. This is because souls are contingent beings, and a contingent being can be extinguished by God, regardless of whether it is thinking. Of this Trotter says:

> But let it be granted, that it is ever so clearly proved, that thinking is necessary to the soul’s existence, that can no more prove, that it shall always exist, than it proves, that it has always existed; it being as possible for that omnipotence, which from nothing gave the soul a *being*, to deprive it of that *being* in the midst of its most vigorous reflections, as in an utter suspension of all thought. If then this proposition, that the soul *always thinks*, does not prove, that it is immortal, the contrary supposition takes not away any proof of it; for it is no less easy to conceive, that a *being*, which has the power of thinking with some
intervals of cessation from thought, that has existed here for some time in a capacity of happiness or misery, may be continued in, or restored to the same state, in a future life, than that a Being which always thinks, may be continued in the same state. (53)

According to Locke we are aware of every idea or thought we have. Thus, to have an idea and not know about it is like being in pain and not knowing about it: impossible! Although this might strike post-Freudian readers as strange, Trotter is right to point out that this facet of Locke’s view, and the accompanying assertion that we are not always thinking, poses no threat to the immortality of the soul. Trotter astutely notes that if the soul’s always thinking is not used as evidence for the soul’s immortality, Locke’s claim to the contrary cannot be considered evidence against it. Moreover, any proof of the immortality of the soul that rests on the notion that the soul continuously thinks is a pretty poor proof indeed.

It seems as if Burnet should be moved by this. But even if Burnet were to accept Trotter’s points as just outlined, he would be hard pressed to accept that Locke’s second assertion poses no threat to the immortality of the soul. This is because while most arguments for the immortality of the soul do not rest on souls always thinking, they do rest on souls being immaterial. Thus when Locke calls the immateriality of the soul into question, it seems as if he calls the conclusions of those proofs into question. In what follows I will say a bit more about Locke’s agnosticism regarding substance dualism and these arguments. Then we will turn to Trotter’s responses.

To start, it is important to realize that Locke’s agnosticism regarding substance dualism extends only to finite substances. (Locke is committed to the supposition that God is an immaterial substance.) That being said, Locke thinks that there is nothing about the concepts “thought” and “matter” which exclude one another. Moreover, Locke claims that because God is omnipotent, he could have superadded the ability to think to formerly inert systems of matter. Finally, while we know that every finite substance’s qualities are supported by what Locke calls “substratum,” we cannot know anything more about substratum than that. We simply cannot penetrate substratum. Thus, we cannot know whether the kind of substratum that can support thinking and willing is distinct from the kind of substratum that can support being solid and white. We cannot know whether finite entities that can think are substantially different from those that do not. So it could be the case that matter can think, but about this we cannot be certain.

As I mentioned, a number of arguments for the immortality of the soul rest on the supposition that the soul is immaterial. Take for instance those of Plato and Descartes. The idea is that something which is nonextended and indivisible, the immaterial, cannot break down. On the other hand, that which is extended, or material, can and does. It is therefore only if the soul is immaterial that the soul can survive the death of the (material) body. Thus when Locke leaves open that the soul could be material, he leaves open that the soul could in fact perish after death, just like the body. There is much that can and should be said about Locke’s stance on substance dualism, superaddition, the arguments that rest on the immateriality of the soul, and what it means for a substance to be ‘immaterial’ according to different
philosophers. But with this background in mind we should now turn to Trotter’s response.

The first thing Trotter reminds Burnet is that Locke’s agnosticism regarding substance dualism is just that: agnosticism. Locke is not committed to substance dualism. But Locke is not committed to materialism either. Moreover, there is some indication that Locke leans more toward the soul being immaterial than not. Of this Trotter says,

Mr. Locke allows it to be highly probable that the soul is immaterial, but where he is speaking of demonstration, only says, that it is not impossible, for anything we know, that God may give, or have given, to some systems of matter, disposed as he sees fit, a power to perceive and think. (66)

Trotter then goes on to show that even if Locke leans toward the soul being immaterial, this is not as important as it at first seems. This is because the immortality of the soul does not rest on its immateriality: If God can superadd the ability to think to systems of matter, then surely it is also within God’s power to make such entities immortal. God is omnipotent, and that is what allowed Locke to suppose that God could make matter think in the first place. Trotter quotes the following passage from Locke to make this point:

[A]ll the great ends of morality and religion are well enough secured, without philosophical proof of the soul’s immateriality; since it is evident, that he, who made us at first begin to subsist here, sensible, intelligent beings, and for several years continued us in such a state, can and will restore us to the like state in another world, and make us capable there to receive the retribution he has designed to men, according to their doings in this life; and therefore it is not of such mighty necessity to determine one way or the other, as some over-zealous for or against the immateriality of the soul have been forward to make the world believe. (67)

When Trotter quotes this passage (4.3.6) she shows how the soul can be immortal even if it turns out to be material. She also shows that Locke is deeply committed to the belief that we will survive the deaths of our bodies and receive Divine punishment and reward. And this is the case despite Locke’s agnosticism regarding substance dualism. Moreover, Trotter goes on to assert that those who base their proofs for the immortality of the soul on the immateriality of the soul face some potential problems. Of this she says:

But could the immateriality of the soul be proved to be as certain, as it is highly probable, it can never be of good consequence, and may be dangerous, to make that the main proof of its immortality; for this is an argument of no use to the generality of mankind, who want either leisure, or capacity, for such nice speculations; and if they are convinced on other grounds, that the soul is immortal, it is no great matter, whether they think it immaterial, or no.
But if they are persuaded, that it cannot be immortal, if it is not immaterial, ‘tis easy to see of how ill consequence that must be, if the proofs of the soul’s immateriality should not happen to convince them; as it often falls out by the different cast of men’s heads, that the same arguments, that are very strong and persuasive to one man, have no force at all with another . . . (64)

Trotter’s point seems to be that if you rest the proof of the immortality of the soul on the immateriality of the soul, and there are those who are unconvinced by proofs for the immateriality of the soul, they will start to believe that the soul is mortal as a result. Trotter thus not only shows that Locke’s agnosticism regarding substance dualism ought not have any effect on the immortality of the soul, or proofs of it. She also shows that the proofs Burnet is so quick to defend might lead laymen to believe that the soul is mortal, rather than not.20

In sum we can say that although Burnet is worried that some of Locke’s commitments threaten the immortality of the soul, Trotter successfully shows that Locke is not in the trouble that Burnet describes. He can think that the soul is immortal, despite the fact that he simultaneously thinks we cannot be certain about whether it is immaterial. Locke can also take the soul to be immortal even though he contends that the soul is not always thinking.21

At this point Burnet might agree that if God can superadd thought to systems of matter, then God can make a material soul immortal—whether souls are always thinking or not. It seems Burnet would have to, if he deems God omnipotent.22 Nevertheless, Burnet would still likely assert that some weird consequences remain if we assume that souls do not always think. This brings us to Burnet’s second objection. Burnet claims that “upon this supposition . . . that all our thoughts perish in sound sleep, we seem to have a new soul every morning” (Second Remarks, 17 [also, 57 in Sheridan, ed.]). To explain why he thinks Locke’s view leads to this absurd consequence, Burnet says “if a body cease to move, and come to perfect rest, the motion it had cannot be restored, but a new motion may be produced. If all cogitation be extinct, all our ideas are extinct, so far as they are cogitations, and seated in the soul: so we must have them new impressed, we are, as it were, new born, and begin the world again” (Second Remarks, 17 [also, 58 in Sheridan, ed.]). Burnet is drawing a comparison between motion in bodies and thought in souls.23 But as Trotter goes on to point out, this comparison only yields the conclusion that we awake with new souls each morning after a dreamless sleep if a body that was in motion ceases to exist when it stops moving, only to be replaced with a new one when a new motion is produced. In response to this objection Trotter says:

That is a pretty conceit indeed, but how does this seem? . . . The force of . . . [this] . . . argument lies thus: cogitation in the soul answering to motion in the body; as the same motion cannot be restored, but a new motion may be produced; so the same cogitations cannot be restored, but new cogitations must be produced. Ergo, we seem to have a new soul every morning. This may be a good consequence, when the Remarker has proved, that every new motion makes, or seems to make a new body . . . (57–58)
Based upon what Burnet says in his pamphlets it is difficult to see if he is of the mind that a body ceases to be as soon as it stops moving, or whether he has just made a misstep in his analogy. Surely there are philosophers who seem to think something along these lines. But just as surely Locke does not. Locke does not think that a body ceases to exist when it stops moving, nor does he think a soul ceases to exist when it stops thinking. About this Trotter is quite right and quite clear. Trotter does not offer a knock-down defeat of Burnet’s objection, but she does make plain that it is not as strong as it might at first seem. Moreover, Trotter highlights a potential basic difference between Locke’s view of substance and others’ and in so doing she places the burden of proof on Burnet. Burnet has to show why his view on substance, which would yield the result that we have new souls each morning after a dreamless sleep, is preferable to one that does not. Or he has to show that we are never without thought—which, according to Trotter, he cannot.

I have argued that Trotter shows that Locke is not committed to the odd conclusion that we awake with new souls each morning. But at this point some might object that Locke’s theory of persons and personal identity is one in which souls and the like are in constant flux. So why be worried about Burnet’s objection at all? It is to this question that we will turn our attention next.

It is worth noting that Locke’s chapter on identity can read like a seventeenth-century anticipation of the films Freaky Friday or Total Recall. This chapter is filled with passages that involve souls and persons switching bodies, and the like. Take the prince and the cobbler passage (2.27.15). Here Locke describes the soul of a prince entering and informing the body of a cobbler as soon as the cobbler’s soul leaves his body. There are many things we might be intended to get out of this passage, but at the very least Locke thinks we will conclude that the human being we have railing ‘cobbler’ will wake up wondering where his royal attendants are, and why he is in such shabby clothing. In other words, the person we are calling ‘prince’ persists in the body of the cobbler. Moreover, this is because the prince’s consciousness was carried with his soul and into the body of the cobbler. In another passage, Locke describes a man who operates with a different consciousness by day than he does by night (2.27.19). And in yet other passages Locke pushes against the commonly held belief that wherever you have the same person, you have the same soul. Of this Locke says, “But yet to return to the Question before us, it must be allowed, That if the same consciousness... can be transferr’d from one thinking Substance to another, it will be possible, that two thinking Substances may make but one Person” (2.27.13). In this particular thought experiment, it is supposed that if my consciousness could be transferred seamlessly to another soul, then I (the person) could persist through said change.

Nevertheless, Locke does not think our souls are in constant flux. Nor does he think that persons switch in and out of human bodies on a regular basis. Locke is using these thought experiments to show us that the terms ‘man’, ‘soul’, and ‘person’ are different ideas that pick out different entities in the world. The point of these passages is to show us that although we usually use these terms interchangeably, we ought not. Just because the man who stands before you is the same as the one you met last week does not necessarily mean that said man houses the
same person as the one you met last week. But that we get this kind of disconnect is rare, according to Locke—as rare as fugue states, and cases of dissociative identity disorder. Trotter is thus right to take seriously Burnet's objection that Locke's view leads to the strange consequence that our souls are in constant flux. Trotter realizes that Locke's view is not one in which persons switch bodies and souls on a regular basis, despite the many thought experiments included therein. Trotter's explication of Locke on persons and identity makes this important point very clear. That said, we might now wonder what Lockean persons are, if they are distinct from men and souls. It is to this question that I will turn before concluding.

According to Trotter, persons are self-consciousnesses. She says, "[b]ut understanding by person, as he does, self consciousness, and by man the soul and body united..." (55). So while a Lockean man is soul and body united, a person is consciousness (or self-consciousness). This is important because commentators agree that for Locke consciousness is a mode, and not a substance. Thus when Trotter identifies persons with consciousnesses it appears that she identifies persons with modes, or attributes of substances, rather than substances in themselves. In other words, it seems that Trotter thinks that persons are entities that depend upon substances, rather than being the self-subsistent things upon which modes depend.

Whether Lockean persons are substances or modes has long been a subject of great debate. This is because while Locke discusses the ontological status of other entities he makes no explicit proclamations about the ontological status of persons. Moreover, Locke's definition of 'person' (which is that of a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and considers itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places [2.27.9]) sounds like it is the definition of a self-subsistent thing, or substance. But Locke also asserts that the identity of substance is not what determines the identity of any person over time (2.27.10 and 23). Finally most of Locke's predecessors claim that persons are substances, while many of Locke's successors deny this fact. This makes it seem as if Locke's stance on persons marks a pivotal point in the debate over personal identity—though it might not be clear on which side Locke lies.

Commentators continue to argue about whether Lockean persons are substances or modes. It is worth noting, however, that the mode reading has become increasingly popular of late. This reading is presently held by Ruth Mattern, Udo Thiel, William Uzgalis, Antonia LoLordo, and a number of others. Usually this interpretation is traced back to Edmund Law. Nevertheless, it is arguable that when Trotter asserts that persons are self-consciousnesses, this implies that persons are modes. If so, this would be significant because Trotter published her Defence sixty-seven years before Law published his, and Trotter and Law were in correspondence between 1746 and 1748.

In highlighting this I do not mean to imply that Trotter might be due the credit that Law has been given. It is quite clear that while Law gives an explicit mode reading, Trotter does not. It is worth noting, however, that there were many developments in Locke scholarship between Trotter's Defence and Law's. Some of the objections found therein highlight just how important it is to determine
the ontological status of Lockean persons. We can see this if we consider an objection raised by Joseph Butler in 1736—more than 30 years after Trotter published her *Defence*.

Butler argues that based upon the way Locke defines ‘person,’ Locke cannot give the persistence conditions he gives for persons. When Butler raises this objection it marks the first time that it becomes clear that if Lockean persons are substances, it seems as if Locke runs into a problem when he asserts that the identity of substance is neither required nor enough for the persistence of any person. It is likely that this is what led Law to say so much about the ontological status of Lockean persons, and explicitly assert that despite the way in which Locke defines ‘person,’ Lockean persons are modes. But, there was no such push in the air when Trotter was writing her *Defence*. This could be why we see an explicit mode reading in Law, though no such explicit reading in Trotter.

At this point some might object that since there was no demand that one include an ontological stance in one’s interpretation of Locke, when Trotter was crafting hers, she might not have meant to imply that persons are modes when she equated them with self-consciousnesses. In response, I will say that this may indeed be the case, though it is worth noting that one of the other issues to which Trotter is responding on Locke’s behalf is whether the soul is a (permanent) substance. Burnet accuses Locke of denying this and Trotter is quick to save Locke from this accusation. Trotter thus has the issue of substances versus modes (or powers) in mind when she asserts that Lockean persons are self-consciousnesses. So it could just as easily be the case that Trotter has a mode interpretation in mind, and does not explicitly express it because the controversy that began with Butler and continues today had not yet come to light.

Still, some might claim that even if Trotter had the distinction between substances and modes at the front of her mind, she need not have meant to assert that Lockean persons are modes when she called them self-consciousnesses. Moreover, this can be the case even if Trotter would agree that consciousness itself is a mode. This is because while one could take Trotter to mean that “person is consciousness (or self consciousness)” when she says, “[b]ut understanding by person, as he does, self consciousness . . .” (55), one could also take Trotter to mean that a person is a consciousness. In other words, one could perhaps just as easily take Trotter to mean that a person is a *substance* with consciousness (or self-consciousness) in this passage. If this is the case—if Trotter thinks Lockean persons are substances—then we might think that Trotter would have to show why there is no tension between this assertion and Locke’s claim that the identity of substance is neither necessary nor sufficient for the persistence of any person. But said objection was not in the mix when Trotter was drafting her *Defence*. Moreover, this objection has been handled by those who think that Lockean persons are substances, and I tend to think there are clues that Trotter might have a viable resolution at her disposal. Either way (whether Trotter thinks Lockean persons are substances or modes) it is clear that there is much to be learned about the debates over Locke on persons and souls through Trotter’s treatments of them.
4. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have aimed to shed some light on Catharine Trotter Cockburn's *Defence* and her treatment of Locke's metaphysical commitments therein. I have argued that Trotter saves Locke from the objections raised by Burnet. I have also shown that through Trotter we get some important insights on Locke on persons. While I could not explore or evaluate every aspect of Trotter's text, I hope I have shown that it is worth far more attention and consideration than it usually gets.42

NOTES

1. I refer to Catharine Trotter Cockburn as "Trotter" in the rest of the paper since she wrote the *Defence* prior to getting married (and Cockburn is her married name).


3. The *Essay* was first published in 1689. All references to Locke's *Essay* come from John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) and are in the following format: (book, chapter, section).

4. This is not meant to imply that Nidditch does not note this. He does.


6. Remarks upon an Essay concerning Humane Understanding (1697), Second Remarks upon an Essay concerning Humane Understanding (1697), and Third Remarks upon an Essay concerning Humane Understanding (1699).

7. 35. All of the quotations from Trotter's *Defence* come from Patricia Sheridan, ed., *Catharine Trotter Cockburn: Philosophical Writings* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2006).

8. "It is confessed, the vast disproportion between one of so mean abilities as the author of this defence, and the incomparable Mr. Locke, might with reason have deterred from the attempt..." (35-36).


10. Elisabeth presses Descartes to explain how the soul (which, according to Descartes, is immaterial) can move the body (which is material). See Shapiro, *The Correspondence*.

11. It is arguable that Locke thinks such a thing cannot be demonstrated. Trotter hints at this (53) and this is something Locke suggests in his correspondence with Stillingfleet. See *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1823. Reprint Darmstadt, Germany: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1963).

12. While the force of this objection might not be immediately apparent to today's reader, it is important to remember that, during Locke's time, one could be charged with heresy for authoring or professing anything that could be interpreted as inconsistent with scripture. (Consider how well that worked out for Galileo!)


14. Locke does not think we can identify a substance's principal attribute.

15. Locke thinks that every idea or thought is transparent and reflexive. We thus cannot entertain ideas or have thoughts and not know about them.

16. Samuel Rickless has pointed out (in email correspondence) that Descartes only sets out to prove that the soul might be immortal (because it is immaterial) (September 9, 2014). However, I take it that the point I am making here still stands. The reason that Descartes has for asserting that the soul could be immortal is that it is immaterial, not that it is always thinking.
17. Of course 'pain' is an idea for Locke. My point is that while many would agree that one cannot be in pain and not know about it, Locke believes this to be true of every idea: we cannot have an idea and not know about it.


19. There are many different conceptions of immaterial substance at work in the early modern period. I do not have room to explore this in this short paper, but it is worth noting that for someone like Samuel Clarke, the soul is immaterial and immortal, but that the immaterial is extended. I am sticking to Plato and Descartes for simplicity's sake, but I do not mean to imply that they have identical conceptions of substance either.

20. Trotter also points out that there are philosophers who have thought the soul is both material and immortal.

21. There is some indication that Locke thinks the souls of the wicked are extinguished after they receive Divine punishment and only the souls of the good go on to receive eternal reward. But, this is not inconsistent with what I have claimed here.

22. Perhaps if Burnet could show that 'thinking matter' is a contradiction he might not have to admit this, but I need not pursue this further here.

23. Burnet is picking up on the comparison that Locke himself draws between motion in bodies and thought in souls, though of course Locke does not end up using this comparison in the same way.

24. There are some interpretations of Descartes that sound friendly to what Trotter takes Burnet to be describing here. About this Lisa Downing has said (in electronic correspondence, May 2, 2014): “On some interpretations of Descartes, bodies cease to exist as individual bodies when they stop moving, because motion is what individuates particular bodies. If they were to cease moving, they would just merge with their neighborhoods. (Though of course their extension would not cease to exist.)” Additionally Antonia LoLordo has pointed out (in electronic correspondence, May 3, 2014) that although bodies can cease moving for Gassendi, atoms cannot stop moving even when the bodies they compose are at rest.

25. Trotter says, “to conclude that my soul does not always think, 'tis sufficient to know, that there has some time past, in which I was not conscious, that I thought…” (54). Surely not even Burnet would claim that there was no time in the past that he was not conscious of thought. Thus Burnet would either have to submit to the assertion that the soul is not always thinking, or appeal to what would later be called the 'subconscious.' I am not sure that the latter was in Burnet’s arsenal. Patricia Sheridan has suggested (via email correspondence, May 12, 2014) that while Trotter takes Burnet to be claiming that a new body begins with a new motion, Burnet does not actually make this claim. Sheridan takes Burnet's point to be that while a new motion can start in the same body that is currently at rest, the same cannot be said for souls and thinking. In response to this I will say that if this is the case, I do not understand what the appeal to bodies and motion is doing for Burnet. In addition, Burnet would have to do a whole lot more work to show why the rules for bodies and the rules for souls are fundamentally different. Finally, Sheridan claims: "I… take him to be suggesting that while a gappy account of motion doesn’t necessarily pose a great problem for our concept of the continuous identity of bodies, a gappy account of consciousness does pose a problem for our concept of the continuous identity of souls." But I think that if this is Burnet's worry then what he is doing is identifying consciousness with the thoughts or ideas it produces, and it does not seem that Locke would be on board with this claim. After all, Locke says:

All other things being but Modes or Relations ultimately terminated in Substances, the Identity and Diversity of each particular Existence of them too will be by the same way determined: Only as to things whose Existence is in succession, such as are the Actions of finite Beings, v.g. Motion and Thought, both which consist in a continued train of Succession, concerning their Diversity there can be no question: Because each perishing the moment it begins, they cannot exist in different times, or in different places, as permanent Beings can at different times exist in distant places; and therefore no motion or thought considered as at different times can be the same, each part thereof having a different beginning of Existence (2.27.2).
Here it is clear that Locke thinks thoughts do not persist over time. Yet Locke certainly thinks that consciousness persists. (Otherwise he could not think the identity of consciousness is what constitutes the identity of any person over time.) Thus Locke does not identify consciousness with thoughts or ideas. And, I am therefore not sure how the gappy consciousness objection would work against Locke. (Just because I am not having a thought at moment y does not mean that I do not have the same consciousness as I did at moment x when I was having a thought.) This is all to say that I am not sure what Burnet intended when he turned to the comparison between motion in bodies and thought in souls. But either way it seems that this objection might rest on a fundamental difference in conceptions of 'substance,' and 'mode' and the relationship between the two.

26. As Locke puts it, "I agree the more probable Opinion, is that this consciousness is annexed to, and the Affection of one immaterial Substance" (2.27.25).

27. On this the vast majority of Locke scholars agree. Some tend to think that consciousness could be a power, rather than a mode, for Locke. I have suggested this. See Jessica Gordon-Roth, "Locke on the Ontology of Persons," The Southern Journal of Philosophy, forthcoming. But no commentator that I have encountered argues that consciousness is a substance for Locke. Indeed it is difficult to see how one could argue that consciousness, or self-reflective thinking, could be a self-subsistent thing, or substance.

28. Locke often claims that human beings, horses, and gold are examples of substances. Likewise Locke often claims that triangles, gratitude, and murder are examples of modes. But Locke makes no such claims about persons.


33. Strawson may also think that Lockean persons are modes. See Galen Strawson, Locke on Personal Identity: Consciousness and Concernment (Princeton University Press, 2011). It is difficult to tell. LoLordo (2012) suggests that E.J. Lowe also thinks Lockean persons are modes (fn 8, 66).


35. This is because even though it is not the case that all who hold mode interpretations assert that Lockean persons are mere consciousnesses, those who think that Lockean persons are consciousnesses must think that Lockean persons are modes, rather than substances. Importantly, LoLordo (2012) footnotes Trotter. See fn 9, 67.


37. This objection was raised (via email correspondence) by Samuel Rickless (September 9, 2014). This distinction rests on the difference between count nouns and mass nouns, as Rickless has helpfully pointed out.


40. In “Locke on the Identity of Persons and Substances” I argue that what Locke means when he asserts that the identity of substance is neither necessary nor sufficient for the persistence of any person is that the identity of body, soul, and man is neither necessary nor sufficient for the persistence of any person—and this is not inconsistent with Lockean persons being substances. It looks like this interpretive move is open to Trotter. (See Sheridan, 56).

41. Of course it is also possible that Trotter did not take a stance on this issue.

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