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K. Joanna S. Forstrom: *Locke and Personal Identity*. London and New York: Continuum, 2010, 154pp. ISBN 978-1-8470-6145-4.

A quick perusal of the contents of this book reveals that the title *John Locke and Personal Identity* is slightly misleading. There are six chapters in total, and Locke's theory of personal identity is the subject of only two of them, chapters 1 and 6. Each of the four chapters in between is devoted to one of Locke's contemporaries – Descartes, Hobbes, More and Boyle – or more particularly, to their views on the immortality of the soul and/or bodily resurrection. Forstrom argues that not only do these views form the context for Locke's development of his theory of personal identity, but also (and more importantly) that when this theory is appropriately contextualised it is revealed to have resources sufficient to overcome a number of long-established objections raised against it, specifically those by Thomas Reid and Joseph Butler. This latter claim is intended to be the book's central thesis.

The first chapter details some of the background to Locke's decision to include a chapter on personal identity in the second edition of his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1694). The key trigger, according to Forstrom, was Molyneux's suggestion to Locke that he expand his *Essay* by treating the traditional metaphysical problem of the principle of individuation, namely the problem of 'what individuates, or makes distinct, an individual from others of the same kind' (7). Forstrom suggests that interest in this problem was fuelled by what she sees as tension between two traditional theological commitments, the first to personal immortality, the second to a future bodily resurrection. Both commitments are tied to the Christian belief that on the Day of Judgement we shall be judged by God for our deeds, and then subjected either to punishment or reward in the afterlife. The Christian eschatological vision was widely considered to form the cornerstone of public morality (for as one's future fate was held to be determined by how one acted in this life individuals had a clear incentive to act morally in it), but it was also widely recognised that it could only do so if there were grounds to suppose that the person judged on the Last Day, and then subjected to reward or punishment, will be the same person as the one whose earthly actions she is being judged for. After all, the afterlife can only be of concern to a person if she is confident that it will be the same person, i.e. *her*, that gets to experience it. Also at stake is God's justice, since God can only be just if he holds to account the very same person who committed a particular praiseworthy or blameworthy action. The theological need to identify criteria for the diachronic identity of persons is thus clear. And according to Forstrom, it was Locke's chief motivation in developing his theory of personal identity.

Having sketched the background, Forstrom proceeds to offer 'a brief overview' of Locke's theory (22). She summarises Locke as claiming that 'the existence of a person is the existence of a consciousness, and the continued existence of that person is the continued existence of that consciousness' (24) and that individuals are morally accountable for those actions that can be appropriated 'by the extension of consciousness' back to past actions (25). In the process of her brief exposition Forstrom cites various passages (such as *Essay* II.27.22 and II.27.26) to show Locke's concern 'with explaining how an individual will be responsible for his or her actions here on earth after death' (28). This seems, to my mind, a perfectly defensible suggestion, and Forstrom seems on solid ground when she makes it. But while this aspect of Forstrom's overview is instructive, in general the presentation of Locke's theory that she offers in chapter 1 is basic and somewhat un-nuanced. For example, nothing is said about whether Locke offers a straightforward memory criterion of personal identity, as has traditionally been believed, or a 'memory continuity' criterion, as some scholars have argued. In fact there is no mention at all

here of the scholarly debates about the details of Locke's theory, and a reader unfamiliar with the literature is liable to come away from this book with the impression that the account sketched by Forstrom is straightforward and uncontentious. Anyone seeking a detailed philosophical analysis of Lockean personal identity will therefore need to look elsewhere.

Forstrom then moves to consider Locke's theory of personal identity in relation to the accounts of personal immortality and/or bodily resurrection defended by four of his contemporaries, namely Descartes (chapter 2), Hobbes (chapter 3), More (chapter 4) and Boyle (chapter 5). As is noted early in the book, a number of historians of philosophy have already sought to contextualise both Locke and his theory of personal identity, but Forstrom claims to offer 'an extension and deepening' of the trend to contextualise historical thinkers, as in her book 'the context not only of Locke is discussed, but also that of those to whom he is responding' (2). In other words, Forstrom seeks not just to contextualise Locke, but to contextualise his context, so to speak. A good example of what this involves can be found in chapter 2, which focuses primarily on expounding Descartes' arguments for the real distinction between soul and body, and for the immortality of the soul. Forstrom explains not only how Descartes' work forms a major part of the intellectual background leading up to Locke's development of his theory of personal identity, but also how Descartes' own efforts were driven by his desire to satisfy the demand that was made of Christian philosophers by the fifth Lateran Council to develop arguments for the immortality of the soul (33-38). In subsequent chapters, Forstrom intimates that the main context for Hobbes is Descartes' work, for More it is Descartes' and Hobbes' work, and for Boyle it is Hobbes' and More's work, and her discussion of the various thinkers interweaves and overlaps accordingly. Over the course of chapters 2 – 5 Forstrom thus presents an account of some key 17th century philosophical debates on immortality and resurrection, and traces some of the ways the protagonists engaged with and responded to each other. It is in its capturing some of the richness of these debates that this book derives the bulk of its value.

Nevertheless, Forstrom's treatment of these debates suffers from a number of serious weaknesses, of which I shall mention two. First, the attempt to contextualise Locke's theory is marred by a puzzling omission, which is an extended treatment of the traditional scholastic account of individuation and personal identity, as found defended (for example) in the work of Kenelm Digby. Forstrom notes time and again that Locke, Descartes, Hobbes, More, and Boyle were reacting to the scholasticism that was entrenched in the universities for much of the 17th century, and given her stated aim to contextualise both Locke and his context, it is surprising that she provides little detail about the scholastic theories that all of these thinkers were reacting to.

The second weakness is that over the course of chapters 3 – 5 Forstrom tries to argue that Locke's theory of personal identity was directly influenced by the work of Hobbes, More, and Boyle, and in each case the claim of influence is highly problematic. To give just one example, in chapter 4 Forstrom bases her claim that Locke was influenced by Henry More on the fact that he 'seems to accept one move of More's ... [namely] that of allowing conscience to play a significant role in the afterlife' (100). Forstrom identifies a passage from II.27.22 of Locke's *Essay* as evidence of this: 'but in 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.' Yet this passage is clearly informed not by More's philosophy but by *scripture*, specifically I Corinthians 14.25 and Romans 2.15.

In spite of the aforementioned faults, both students and scholars can draw profit from Forstrom's historical survey of various 17th century views on immortality and resurrection,

which is often well-crafted and insightful. As already noted, this historical survey is intended to support Forstrom's contention that Locke's theory of personal identity was developed in response to certain theological concerns about personal immortality and God's justice, and that when viewed this way it can be seen to have the resources to withstand three longstanding objections to it, one by Thomas Reid, the other two by Joseph Butler. Forstrom seeks to make good on this claim in chapter 6 by reconsidering the three objections in light of her reappraisal of Locke's motives for developing his theory in the first place. In what follows I shall consider Forstrom's discussion of just one of these objections, Reid's so-called 'brave officer objection'.

Reid's objection is well known, but is worth briefly restating here (I give Forstrom's slightly modified version): a brave officer steals an apple when still a boy at school; he is conscious of the theft some years later, when he is an officer, but has lost consciousness of it later in life, when he is a general, though at this point he is conscious of actions he committed as an officer. According to Reid, Locke's theory of personal identity is committed to holding that the officer is the same person as the boy (on account of the former being conscious of the theft committed by the latter), that the general is the same person as the officer (on account of the former being conscious of actions committed by the latter), and yet that the general is not the same person as the boy (the failure in transitivity due to the fact that the general is not conscious of the boyhood theft). Forstrom notes, quite rightly, that Reid's objection is generally taken to expose a serious problem with Locke's theory of personal identity. According to Forstrom, however, this is a mistake. She appears to accept that Locke is committed to saying that the general is not the same person as the boy, and so should not be held accountable for the boy's theft, but claims that this does not undermine Locke's theory because 'The question Locke is concerned with is: Will the general be held responsible for stealing the apple when he is resurrected and judged by his conscience on the Day of Judgment?' (123) And the answer to this question, according to Forstrom, is Yes, because on the Day of Judgement the 'secrets of the heart' will be restored to him, and he will thus regain the consciousness of the boyhood theft that he had previously lost, and so will be morally accountable for it once again. Forstrom's suggestion is intriguing and deserves more attention than I can give it here. It is worth noting, however, that it has all the hallmarks of a 'Deus ex machina', not to mention all the problems associated with that. For example, Forstrom thinks that Locke will look to God to restore 'lost' memories at the time of the Last Judgement, but she is silent about the criterion that God will use to do this. And this is no small matter. Lockean personal identity is determined entirely by consciousness. But in the case of Reid's example, the general has no consciousness of the boyhood theft. So if God restores consciousness of that event to the general at the Last Judgement, and is correct in doing so, as Forstrom assumes He is, He must be utilising in the general's case some criterion of personal identity other than the general's own consciousness of actions he has performed (which of course is precisely what the general lacks in the case of the boyhood theft). But if there is some criterion by which lost memories can be correctly restored to individuals like the general, and which does not involve consciousness, then personal identity cannot be determined entirely by consciousness after all! It is thus doubtful that Forstrom's recontextualising of Locke's theory of personal identity is sufficient to bolster it against Reid's objection.