

Locke and Hume on Personal Identity



Dr Ruth Boeker

Interview with Locke and Hume

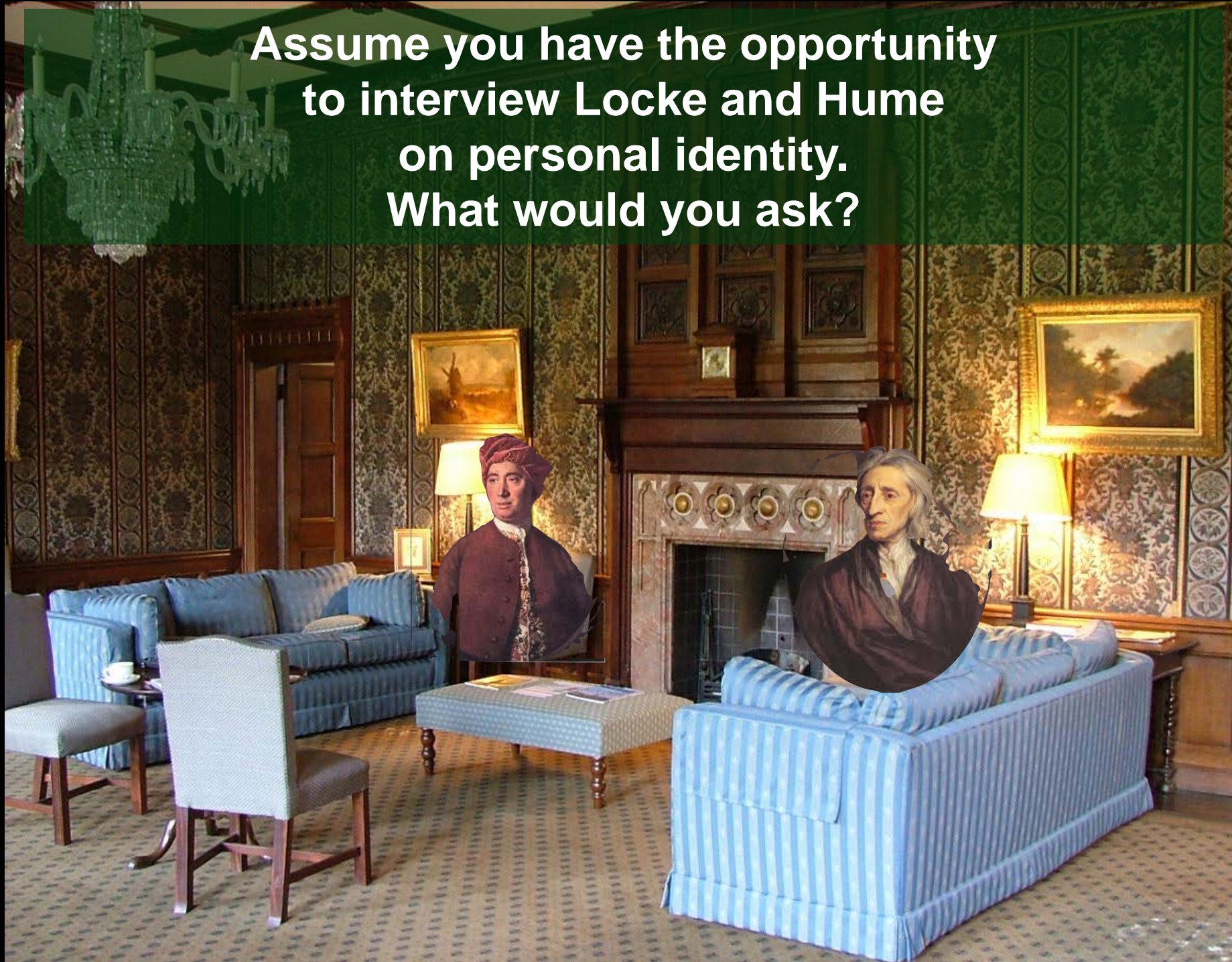


Interview with Locke and Hume



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Assume you have the opportunity to interview Locke and Hume on personal identity. What would you ask?

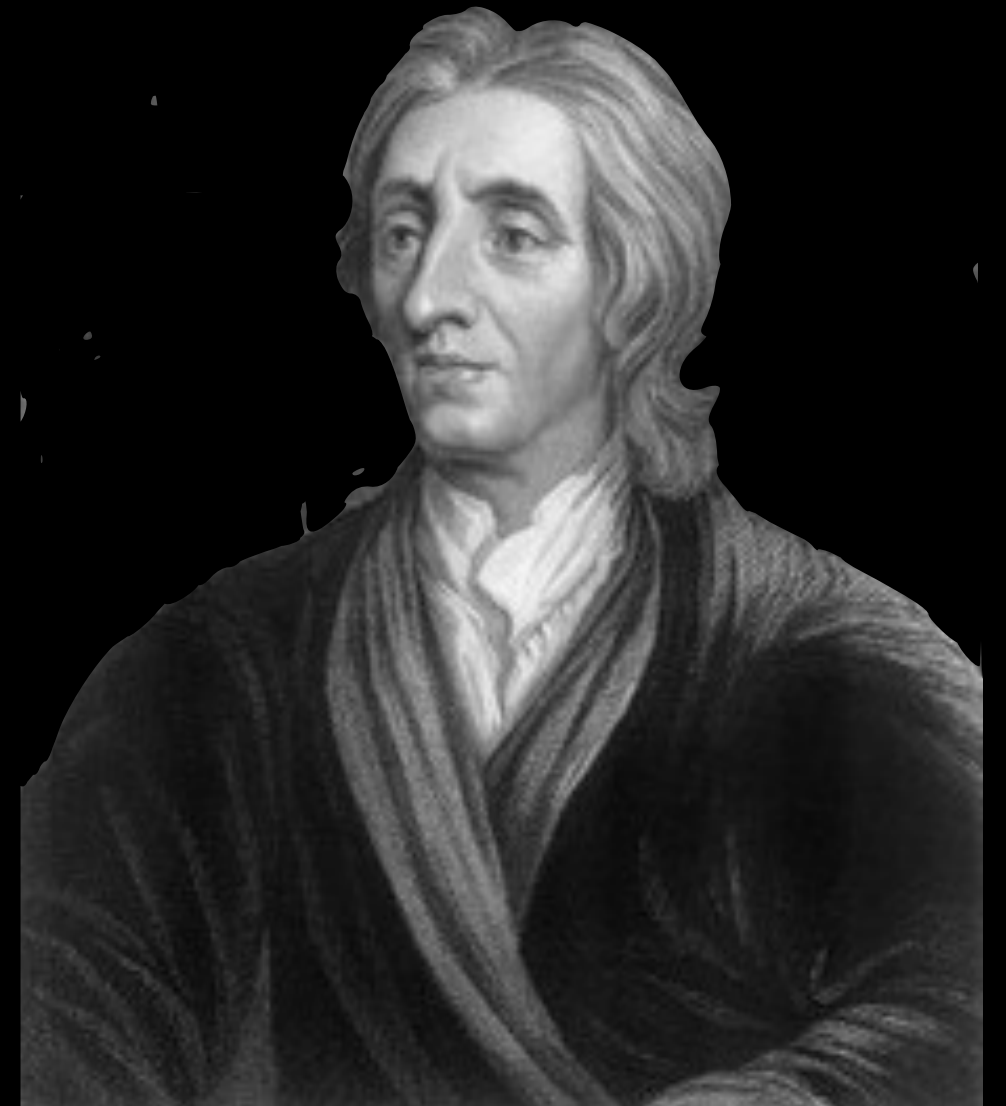


Interview with Locke and Hume

- ✦ **Today's topics:**
- ✦ **The distinction between persons and human beings**
- ✦ **How far does personal identity extend?**

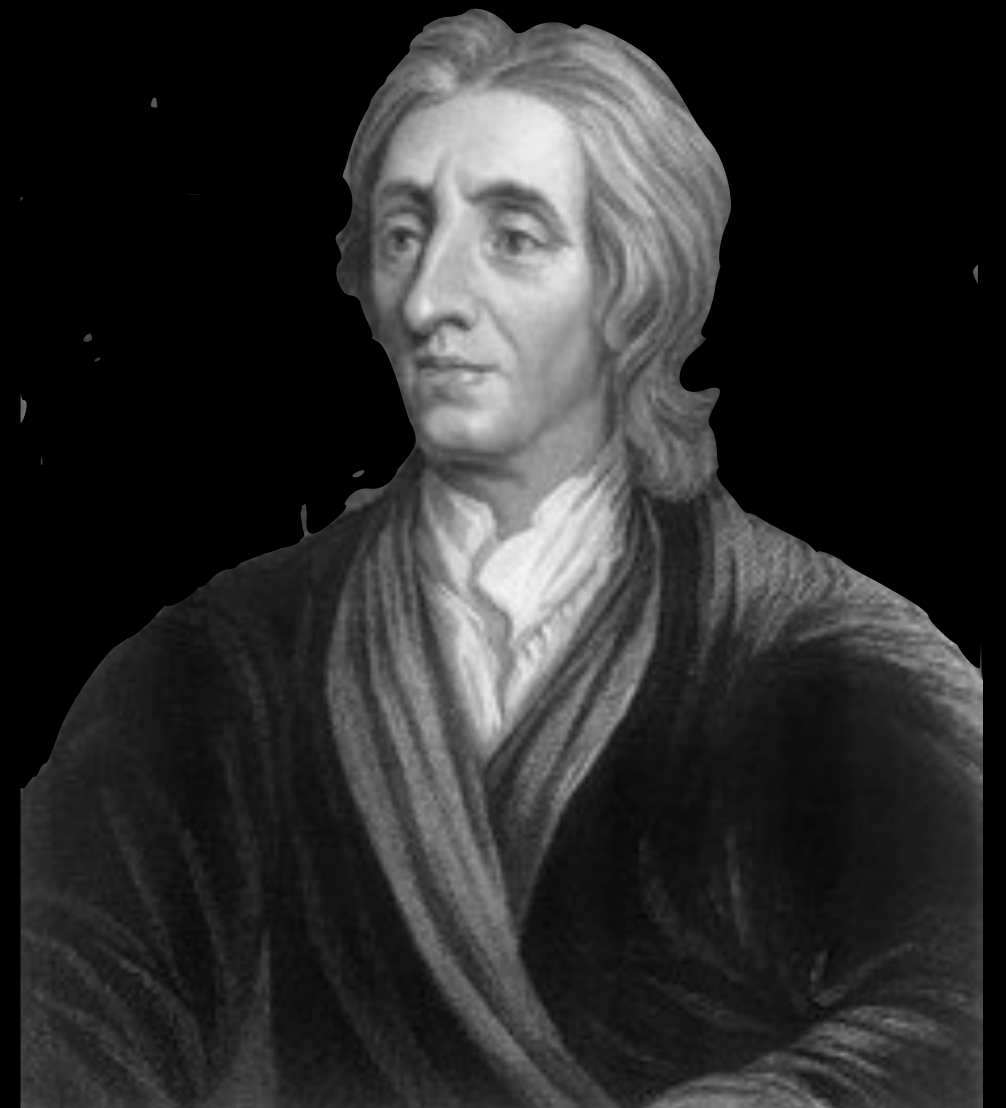
Distinction between human beings and persons

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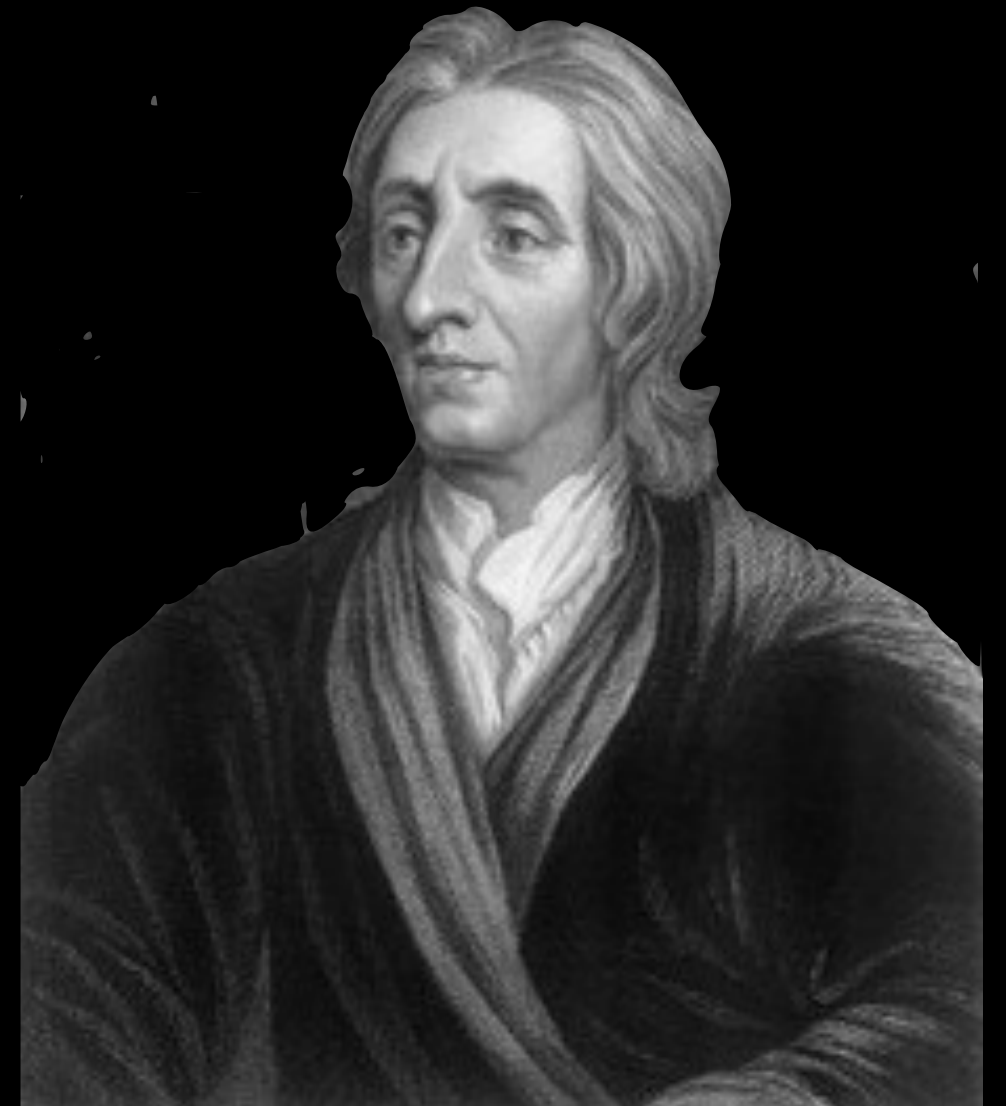
Distinction between human beings and persons

Locke, why do you put so much emphasis on the distinction between persons and human beings?



Distinction between human beings and persons

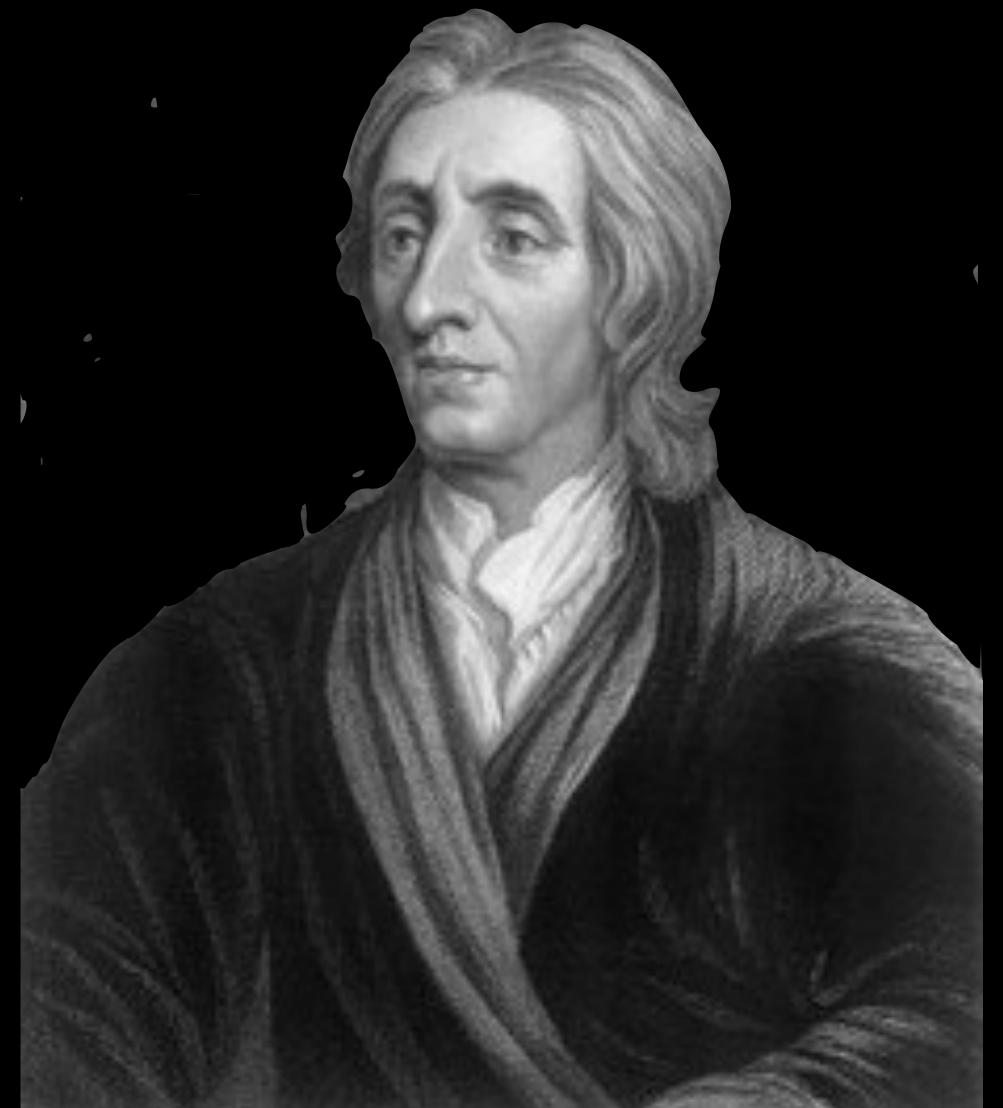
- ✦ We need to clarify what we mean by the term “person”.



Distinction between human beings and persons

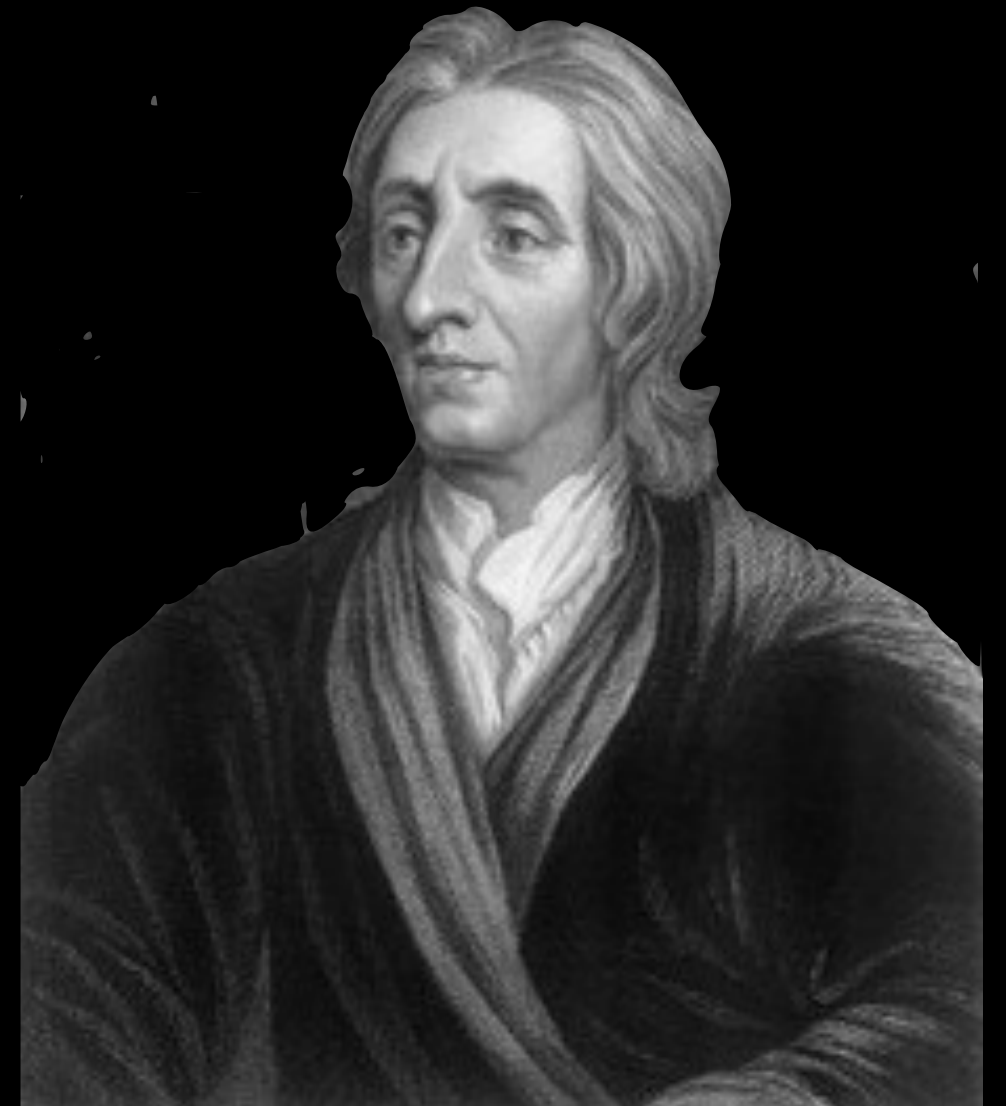
- ✦ We need to clarify what we mean by the term “person”.

“*Person* [...] is a Forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit; and so belongs only to intelligent Agents capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery. This personality extends it *self* beyond present Existence to what is past, only by consciousness, whereby it becomes concerned and accountable, owns and imputes to it *self* past Actions, just upon the same ground, and for the same reason, that it does the present.” (*Essay II.xxvii.26*)



Distinction between human beings and persons

- ✦ We cannot assume that a person's continued existence coincides with that of a human being or that of a substance.

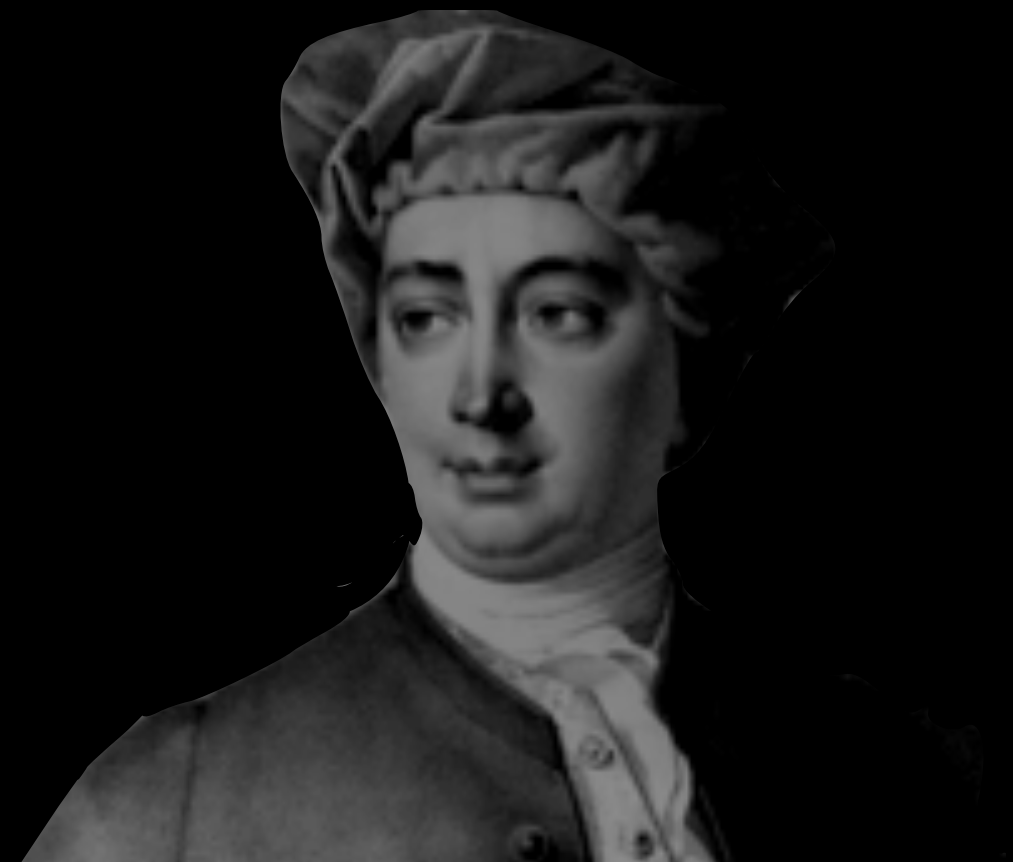


Distinction between human beings and persons



Distinction between human beings and persons

Hume, why do you never mention Locke's distinction between human beings and persons?



Distinction between human beings and persons

- ◆ First-personal introspective approach
- ◆ Focus on self or person



Distinction between human beings and persons

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Distinction between human beings and persons

- ◆ First-personal introspective approach
- ◆ Focus on self or person
- ◆ In principle the theory has scope for a distinction between human beings and persons
- ◆ To explain this we have to turn to the identity of plants and animals.



Distinction between human beings and persons

OK, let's focus on an example.
How do you explain that we believe that a penguin is identical over time?

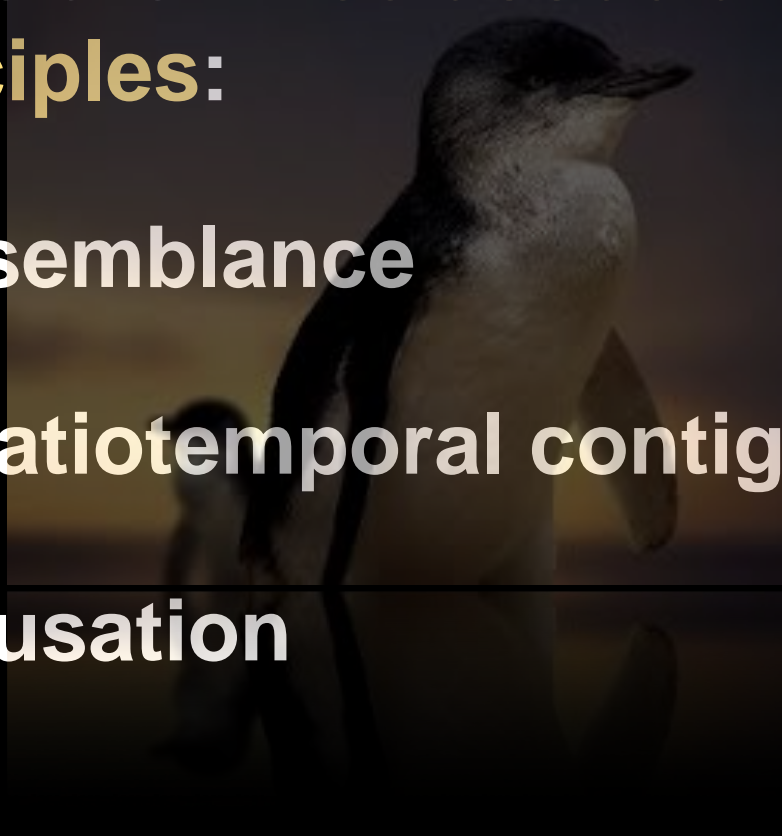


Distinction between human beings and persons

OK, let's focus on an example.
How do you explain that we believe that a penguin is identical over time?

There are **three associative principles**:

- resemblance
- spatiotemporal contiguity
- causation



Distinction between human beings and persons

◆ Personal identity

- resemblance
- causation



Distinction between human beings and persons

◆ Personal identity

- resemblance
- causation

◆ Identity of human beings

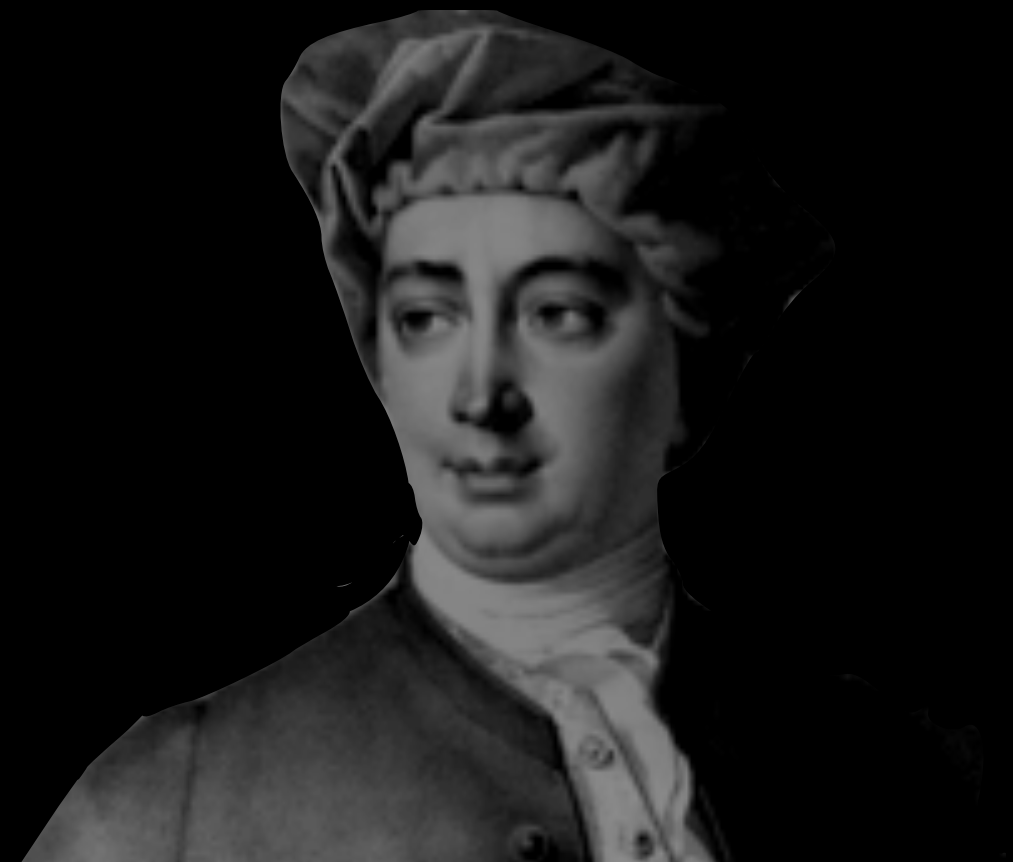
- resemblance
- spatiotemporal contiguity
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**How far does personal identity
extend?**

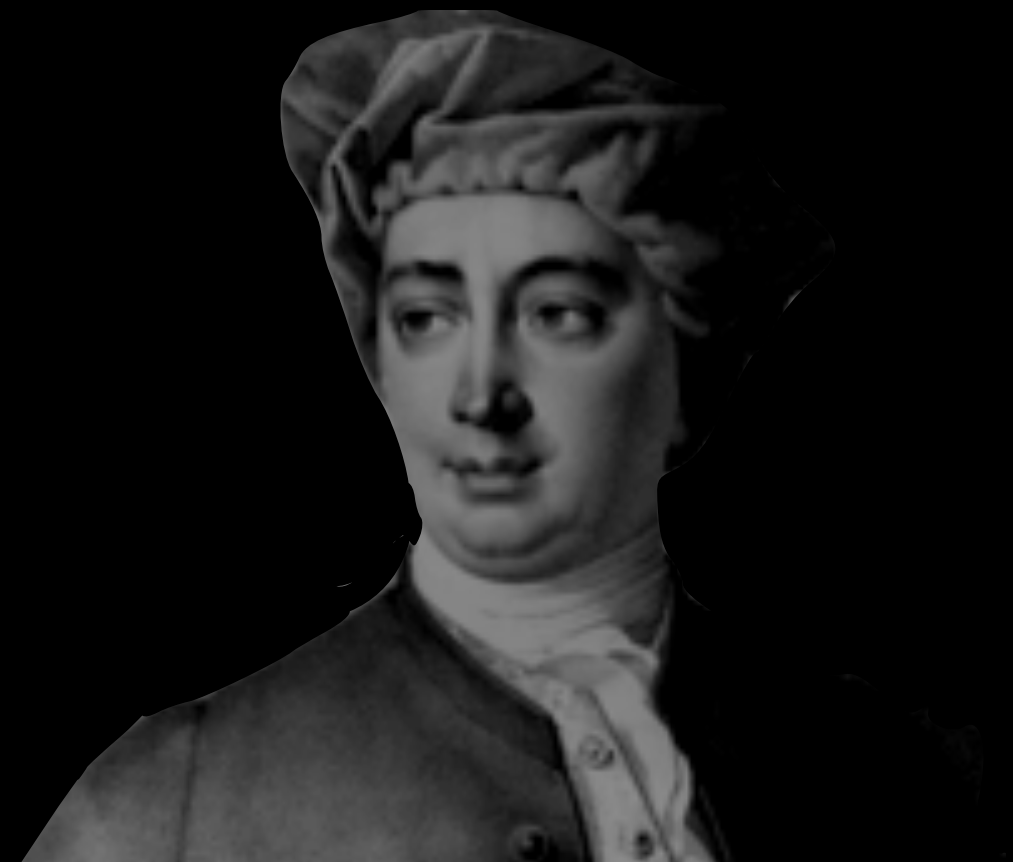
How far does personal identity extend?

Hume, how far into the past does our personal identity extend?



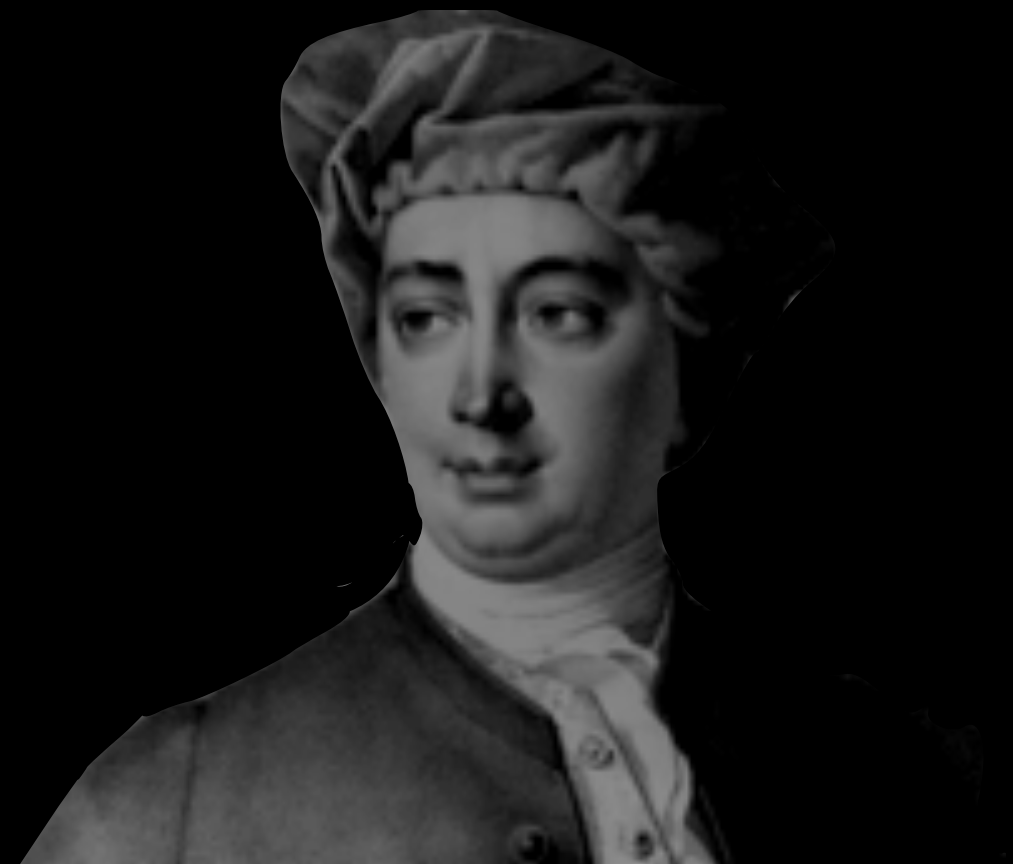
How far does personal identity extend?

- ◆ We need memory to discover personal identity.
- ◆ Personal identity can extend beyond memory by causation.
- ◆ Events that we have entirely forgotten can be part of a person's continued life over time.



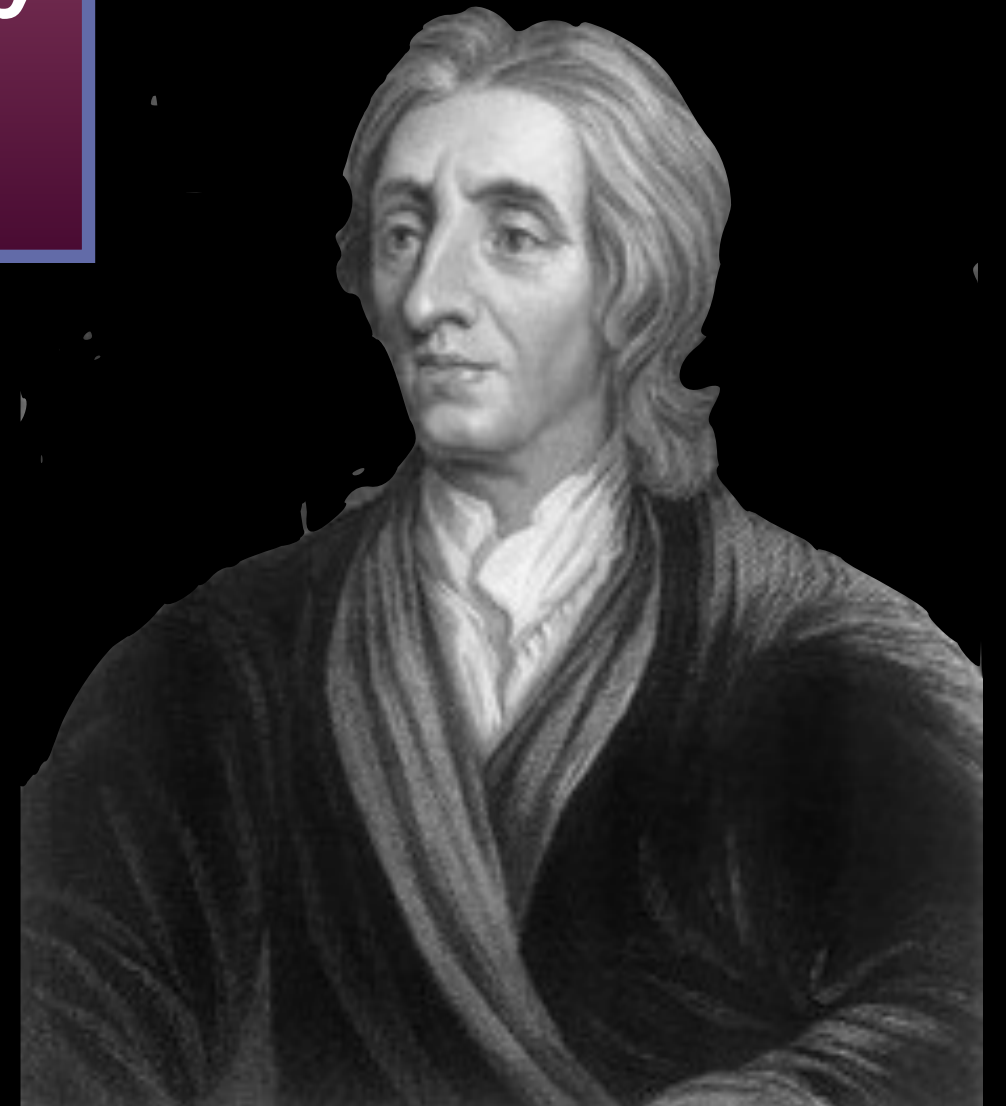
How far does personal identity extend?

“But having once acquir’d this notion of causation from the memory, we can extend the same chain of causes, and consequently the identity of our persons beyond our memory, and can comprehend times, and circumstances, and actions, which we have entirely forgot, but suppose in general to have existed.” (T 1.4.6.20)



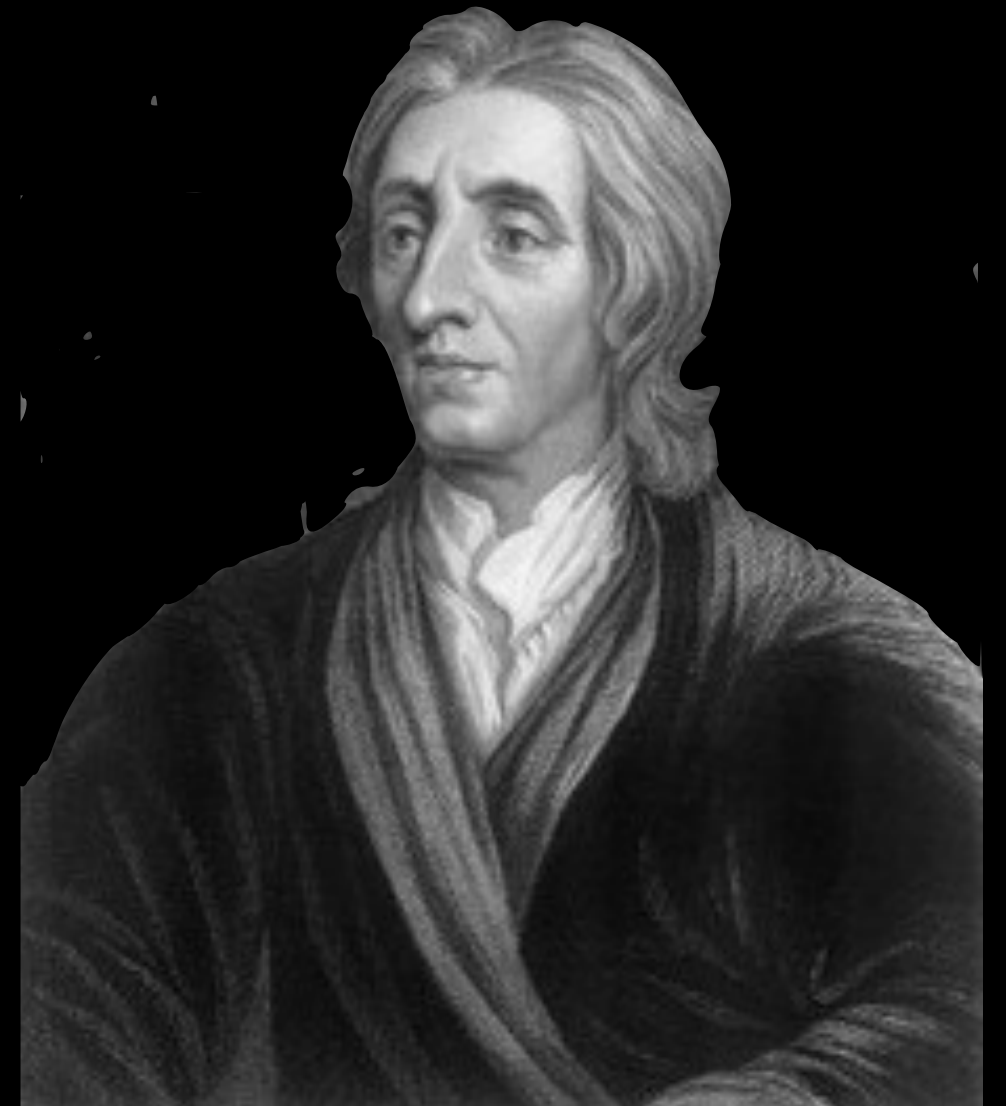
How far does personal identity extend?

Locke, what do you think about Hume's claim that personal identity can extend beyond memory by causation?



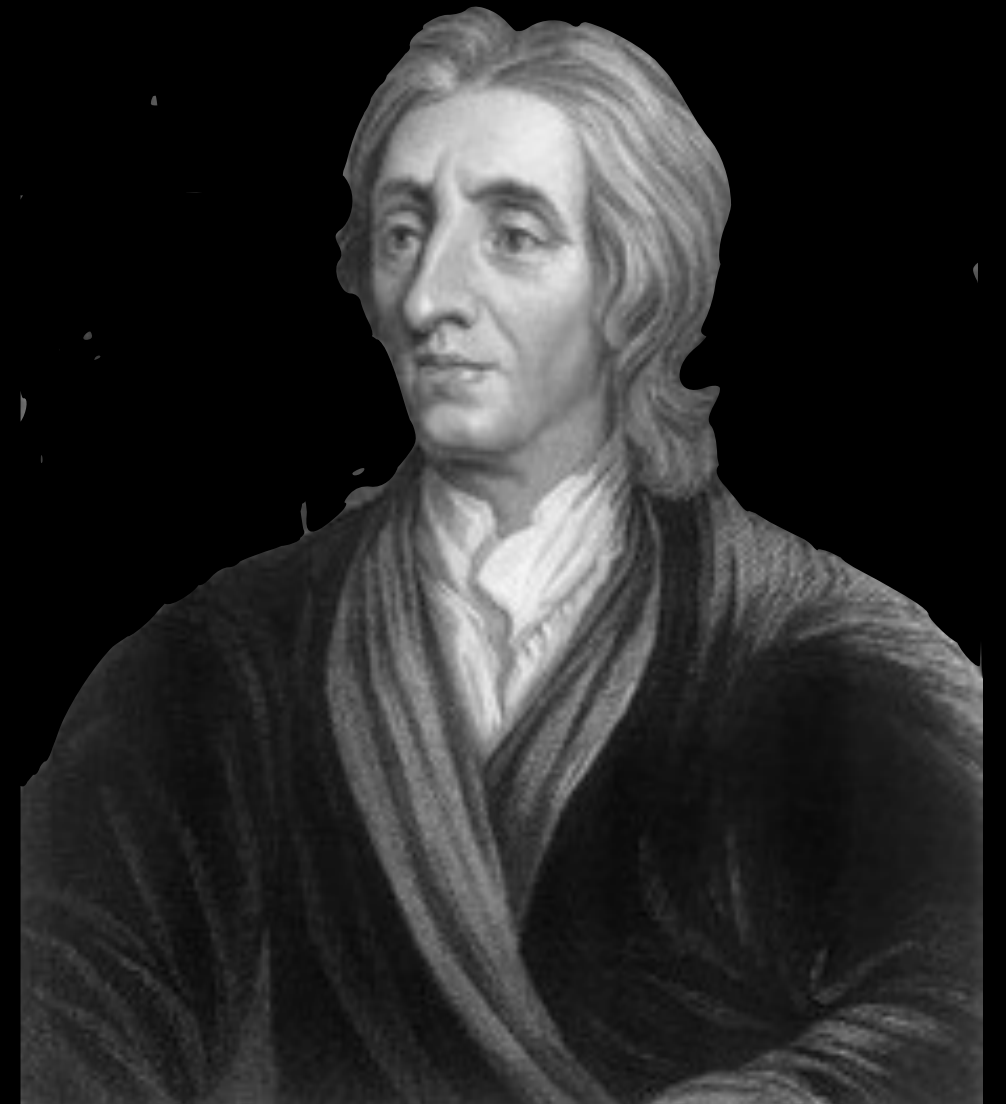
How far does personal identity extend?

- ◆ Personal identity consists in sameness of consciousness.



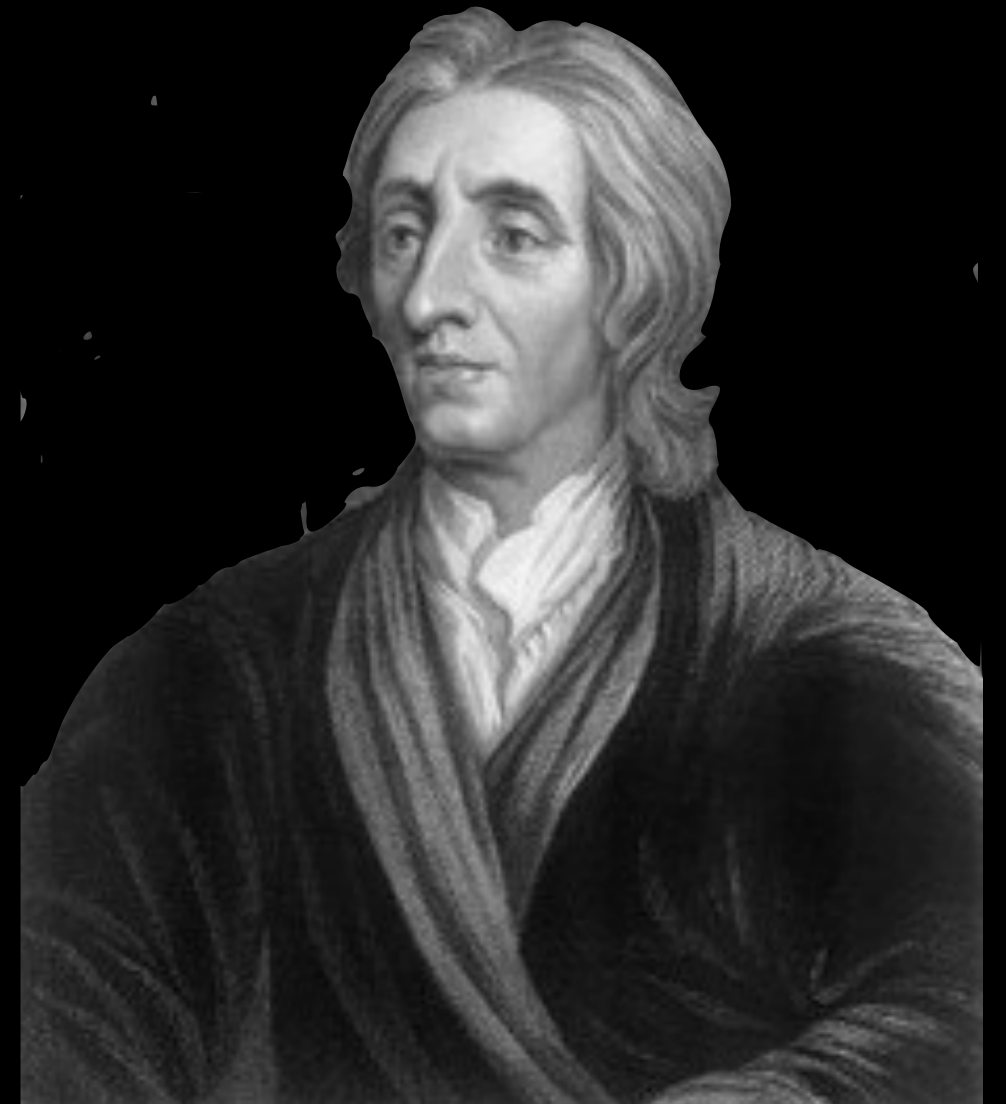
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- ◆ Person is a forensic term.



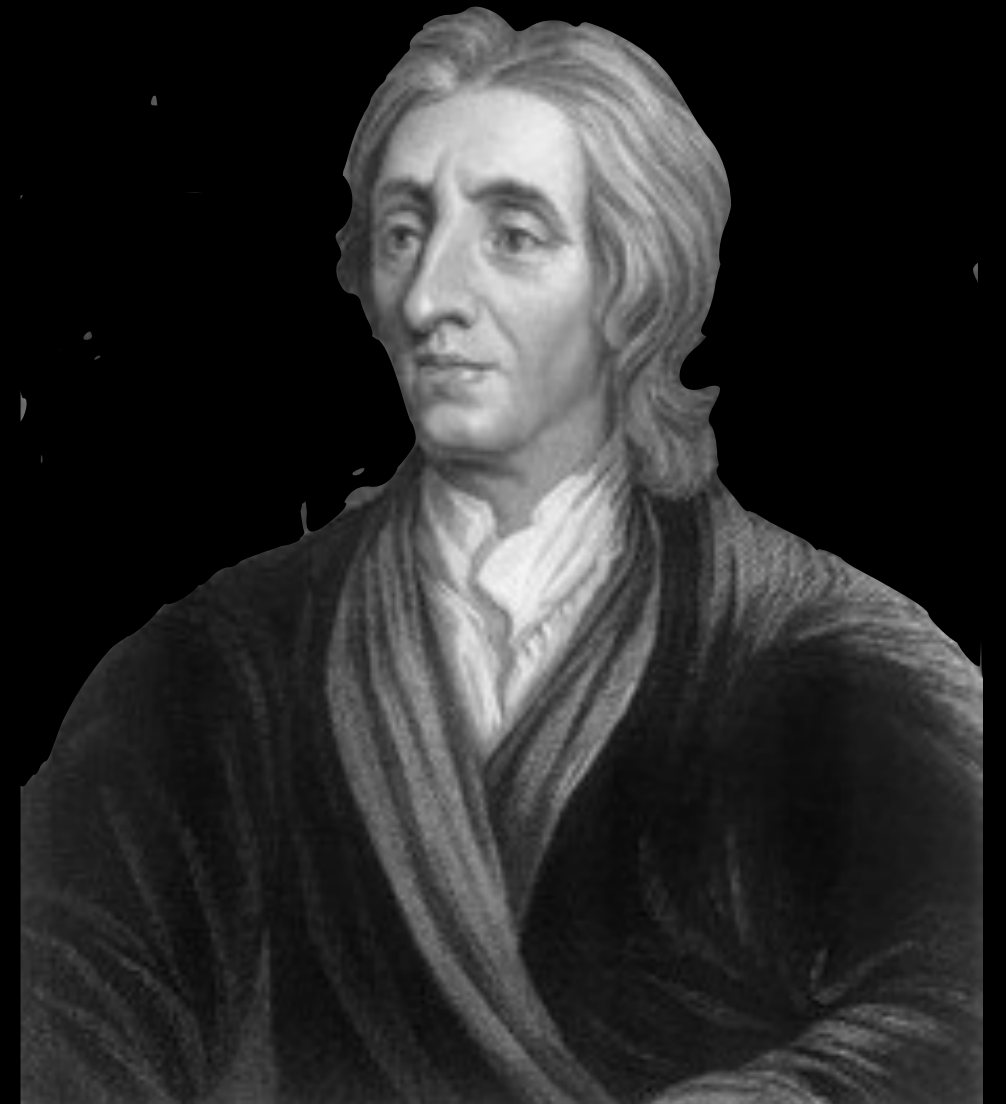
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- ✦ Personal identity consists in sameness of consciousness.
- ✦ Person is a forensic term.
- ✦ It's unjust to hold someone responsible for actions that they are not in a position to remember.



How far does personal identity extend?

- ✦ Personal identity consists in sameness of consciousness.
- ✦ Person is a forensic term.
- ✦ It's unjust to hold someone responsible for actions that they are not in a position to remember.
- ✦ Example: drunkenness.

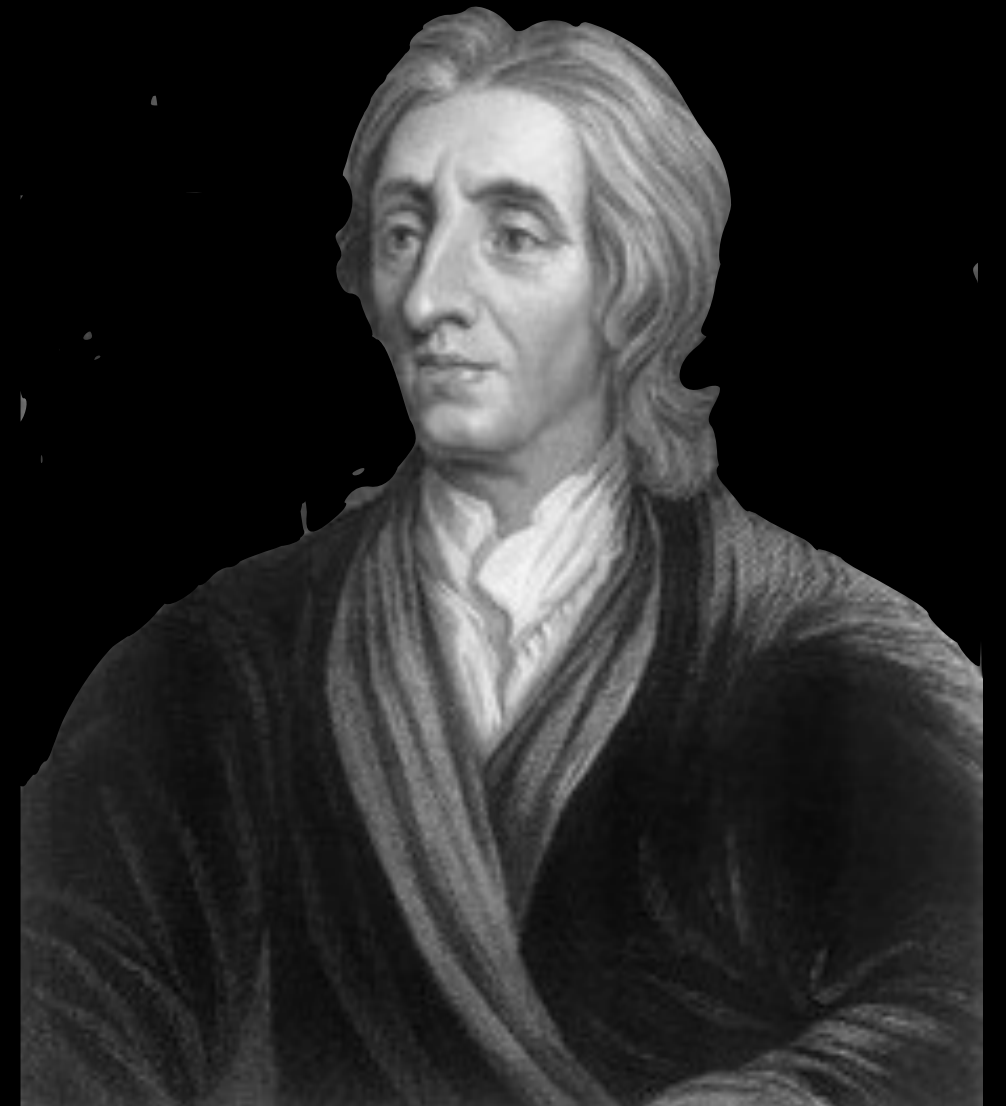


How far does personal identity extend?

◆ Molyneux to Locke:

“Drunkennes is it self a Crime, and therefore no one shall alledge it in excuse of an other Crime.”

(*Correspondence*, letter no. 1685, 4:767)



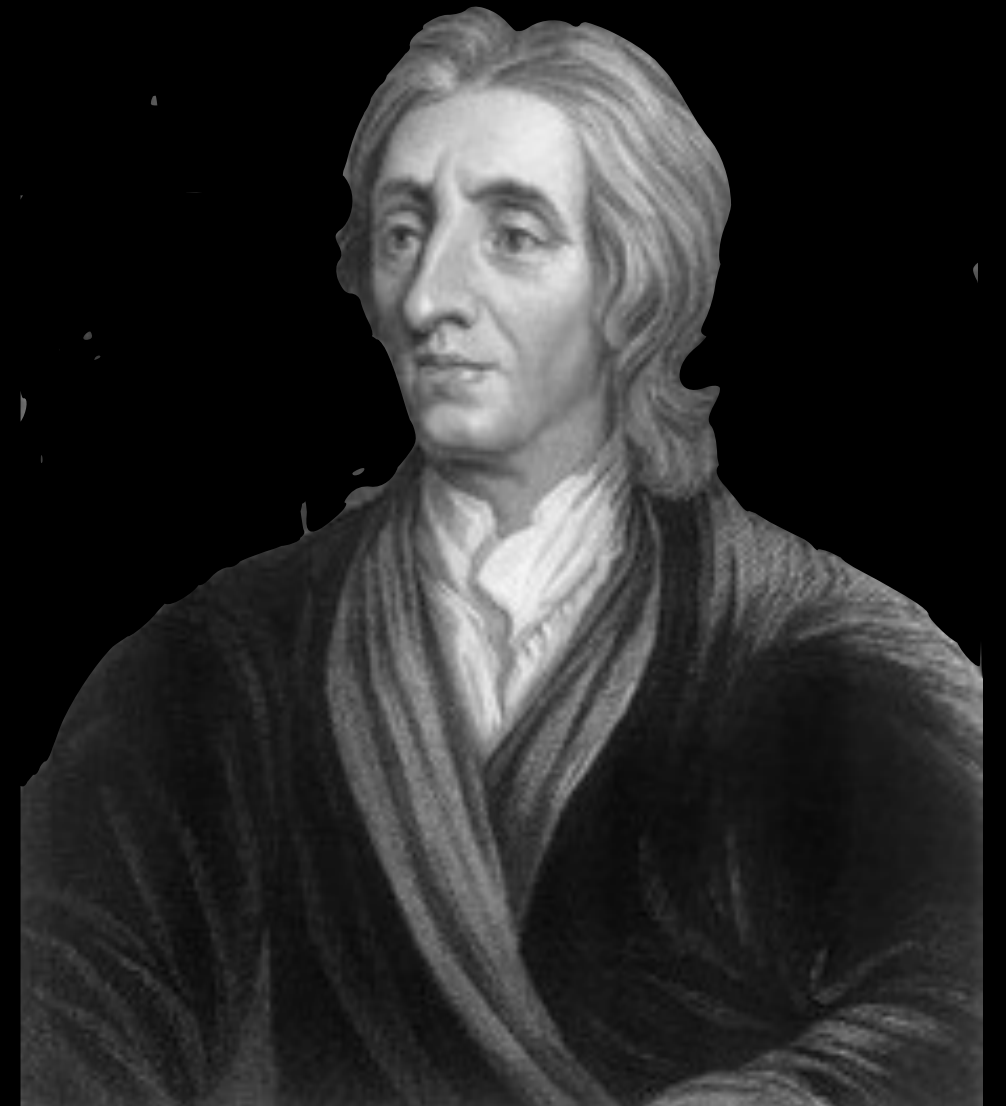
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- ◆ **Locke's response:** Assume the drunkard gets a fever. There is no principled way to distinguish drunkenness and illness.



How far does personal identity extend?

- ✦ **Hume: personal identity can extend beyond memory by causation.**
- ✦ **Locke: personal identity cannot extend to thoughts and actions that I'm unable to remember.**

Interview with Locke and Hume

Questions?

