Locke: Power, Identity, and Knowledge

1. The Idea of Power: One of the ideas we get from both sensation and reflection (listed as such at 2,7,8,p.12). But our clearest idea of active power (distinguished from passive power at 2,21,2,p.19) comes from reflection, not sensation: 2,21,4,pp.19-20. Note Locke’s reason for this. We will pick this up later in our discussion of the empiricists, as Berkeley will argue we get our idea of active power only from reflection, and not at all from sensation, and then Hume will argue that we don’t get it from reflection, either, and so we in a way don’t have any idea of active power.

2. Identity Over Time
- 2,27,7,p27: over-arching idea: idea of identity suited to the idea it is applied to.
- 2,27,3,p25: very strict about the identity of bodies (masses, physical objects) in terms of the atoms that compose them: “But if one of those atoms is taken away, or one new one added, it is no longer the same mass or the same body.” But extremely liberal on the atoms’ arrangement: “let the parts be ever so differently jumbled.”
- 2,27,4-5,p26: Plants and animals are more than collections of particles; their particles work together to sustain one life. Thus, identity over time doesn’t depend on (nor is it guaranteed by) having all the same atoms joined. Iff the same life is being sustained, you have the same plant or animal.
- 2,27,6,pp26-7: identity of a man (human being?): same treatment as other animals, because a man is just an animal of a certain form.
- 2,27,9-10,pp.28-9.: but since consciousness is what’s important to the idea of a person, “Consciousness makes personal identity.” Locke gives an account based on personal memory: “For as far as any intelligent being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness it had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present action, so far it is the same personal self.”
- Transitivity problems for Locke’s and other psychological accounts; possible modification.
- 2,27,18-19,p.30: consequences for punishment… & 2,27,20pp.30-31: potential problems for Locke’s account (even if modified†)?
- 2,27,15p.29: Prince/cobbler case, and relative identity
Is it possible that for some x existing at one time and some y existing at another, and two categories F and G….
   x is F, and y is F, and x is G, and y is G, and
   x is the same F as y, but
   x is not the same G as y ?
Let’s call the claim that this can happen the relative identity thesis. In Locke’s prince/cobbler case, let x be the guy (person/man) who goes to sleep in the castle in
the evening (with the princely soul and the princely body), and let y be the guy (person/man) who wakes up in the cobbler shop the next morning (with a princely soul but a cobblerly body). If Locke holds here (as it seems he does) that x is the same person as y, but x is not the same man as y, then Locke is embracing relative identity, as we’re here using the term.

3. Knowledge, especially of “Real Existence”
-at 4,1,1-2,p.31: one’s knowledge is only “conversant” about one’s ideas
-yet at 4,1,3,p.31, Locke allows that we have some knowledge of “Real existence”
-4,10,1-3,pp.31-2: Knowledge of God seems to come via a causal inference from one’s own existence
-Knowledge of anything else “is to be had only by actual sensation” (4,11,1,p.32). Seems to just squeak in as knowledge, through some generosity: “not so certain as demonstration, yet may be called knowledge” (4,11,3,p.33).
-But (in terms Hume will pick up), “this knowledge extends as far as the present testimony of our senses” (4,11,9,p.35.6) and (added at 4,11,11,p.36) our memory of what our senses testified to in the past.
-No such generosity is extended to the present existence of things not now sensed (4,11,9,p.35.7), or of the existence of “other finite spirits” (4,11,12,p.36)!