

Locke in Göttingen

Udo Thiel

Abstract: This paper focuses on Locke's place in positions developed by three of the most important Göttingen philosophers of the 1770s and 1780s - Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, Christoph Meiners, and Michael Hißmann. The first section after the introduction looks at their endorsement of what Meiners calls "Locke's method" and comments in general terms on their relation to Locke. Section 3 argues that their accounts of some central aspects of Locke's philosophy are problematic. In order to account for the complexity of the Göttingen philosophers' relation to Locke, sections 4 to 6 examine in more detail their views and arguments on two central issues in the philosophy of mind, the nature of the human soul and personal identity.

Keywords: Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, Christoph Meiners, Michael Hißmann, Soul, Personal Identity.

1. Introduction

The University of Göttingen, founded in 1734 and officially inaugurated in 1737, was named after the Elector George Augustus of Hanover who was also King of Great Britain. The King's local minister, Gerlach Adolph von Münchhausen, was responsible for establishing a modern university, based on the model of Halle¹. In the decades that followed, the *Georgia Augusta* developed into Germany's most advanced university, became one of the centres of the

¹ For details on the early history of the University of Göttingen and its status as a modern place of learning, see H.-G. Schlotter (ed.), *Die Geschichte der Verfassung und der Fachbereiche der Universität Göttingen*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1994; J. v. Stackelberg (ed.), *Zur geistigen Situation der Zeit der Göttinger Universitätsgründung 1737*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Göttingen, 1988; L. Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae. Göttingen 1770-1820*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1995. See also the succinct account in F. Wunderlich, "Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta – Radikalaufklärung im Hörsaal?", in *Aufklärung* 24 (2012), pp. 65-90, at pp. 79-84.

Enlightenment in Germany, highly respected internationally, and a home to leading scholars in a variety of disciplines. These included, to name just a few, the physiologist Albrecht von Haller, the historian August von Schlözer and the physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg. Leading Enlightenment thinkers from other parts of Germany, such as Christian Garve, made a point of paying visits to Göttingen. By the early 1780s contemporaries referred to the University of Göttingen as “one of the most famous ... [universities] in Europe” where “the most select men” had been appointed².

Possibly due to the affiliation with Britain there was, as visitors noted, a certain “bias in favour of the English” among the professors in Göttingen³. It is not clear, however, that the political link with Britain had much to do with the role that Locke played in the philosophical thought developed in Göttingen, as British philosophy and Locke in particular were also very much present elsewhere in Germany⁴. In any case, this paper is not concerned with the way in which British thought was transmitted or with Locke’s presence in the Göttingen Enlightenment in general. Rather, the paper focuses on Locke’s place in positions developed by three of the most important Göttingen philosophers of the 1770s and 1780s - Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, Christoph Meiners, and Michael Hifßmann. Of the three Feder is not only the most senior but also the most influential philosopher. Coming from a position at a gymnasium in Coburg, Feder arrived in Göttingen in 1768 where he stayed for thirty years and became a famous, highly respected and very productive scholar⁵. In 1769 he published an extremely influential textbook, *Logik und Metaphysik*,

² J.K. Riesbeck, *Briefe eines reisenden Franzosen ueber Deutschland*, 2 vols., [n.p., no publisher, printer] 1784², vol. 2, pp. 249, 246. For more context, see H.-P. Nowitzky, U. Roth, G. Stiening and F. Wunderlich, “Zur Einführung” in their edition of Michael Hifßmann, *Briefwechsel*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2016, pp. 1-2.

³ Riesbeck, *Briefe*, cit., vol. 2, p. 243 (“Partheylichkeit für die Engländer”).

⁴ For an overview of the presence of British philosophers in eighteenth-century German philosophy, see G. Zart, *Einfluss der englischen Philosophen seit Bacon auf die deutsche Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Dümmler, Berlin 1881. For an account that focuses on Locke, see K. Pollok, “Die Locke-Rezeption in der deutschen Aufklärung: frühe lateinische und deutsche Übersetzungen von Lockes Werken (1701-61)”, in *Id.* (ed.), *Locke in Germany. Early German Translations of John Locke, 1709-61*, Thoemmes Continuum, Bristol 2004, vol. 1, pp. v-xxxiii. See also P. Rumore, “Locke in Halle: A Chapter of the 18th-Century German Reception of John Locke”, in *Studi Lockiani* 2020, pp. 163-94.

⁵ For general information on Feder, see U. Thiel, “Johann Georg Heinrich Feder”, in H.F. Klemme and M. Kuehn (eds.), *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*, vol. 1, Continuum, London-New York 2010, pp. 308-15. For a brief account of the circumstances of Feder’s appointment at Göttingen, see Wunderlich “Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta”, cit., pp. 82-83.

of which a seventh edition was published in 1790. Meiners was a student of Feder's and later a close personal friend. He became an extraordinary professor of philosophy in Göttingen in 1772, a full professor in 1775⁶. Hißmann studied philosophy with both Feder and Meiners⁷. He began teaching philosophy in 1776 and became an extraordinary professor at Göttingen in 1782. All three were strongly influenced by the philosophy of John Locke. Feder has even been dubbed a "Lockean Ringleader"⁸. It is obvious, however, as we shall see in our overview in section 2, regarding "Locke's method", that the three are not straightforward 'Lockeans'. In section 3 we shall see that, in some cases at least, their accounts even of Lockean views they approve of are problematic. The Göttingen philosophers' relation to Locke's thought is complex, and to better understand this complexity, an analysis of the way in which they deal with specific topics is required. Therefore, in sections 4 to 6, we shall look in more detail at their views and arguments on two central issues in the philosophy of mind, the nature of the human soul and personal identity.

2. Feder-Meiners-Hißmann – and "Locke's Method"

Even the first professor of philosophy at Göttingen, Samuel Christian Hollmann, although educated in the then dominant philosophy of Christian Wolff, knew his Locke and adopted aspects of his thought⁹. Feder, too, was

⁶ For general information on Meiners, see F. Wunderlich, "Christoph Meiners", in H.F. Klemme and M. Kuehn (eds.), *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*, vol. 2, Continuum, London-New York 2010, pp. 773-81.

⁷ For general information on Hißmann, see F. Wunderlich, "Michael Hißmann", in H.F. Klemme and M. Kuehn (eds.), *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*, vol. 1, Continuum, London-New York 2010, pp. 515-22. For an account of Hißmann's conception of philosophy, see P. Rumore, "Im Kampf gegen die Metaphysik. Michael Hißmanns Verständnis der Philosophie", in H.F. Klemme, G. Stiening and F. Wunderlich (eds.), *Michael Hißmann (1752-1784). Ein materialistischer Philosoph der deutschen Aufklärung*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2013, pp. 43-62.

⁸ F.C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason. German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., London 1987, p. 180. The importance of Locke to the Göttingen philosophers is not universally acknowledged, however. W. Ch. Zimmerli, for example, manages to write on the philosophy of Feder and Meiners without even mentioning Locke. See W. Ch. Zimmerli, "'Schwere Rüstung' des Dogmatismus und 'anwendbare Eklektik': J. G. H. Feder und die Göttinger Philosophie des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts", in *Studia Leibnitiana* 15 (1983), pp. 58-71.

⁹ For Hollmann's general philosophical outlook, see K. Cramer, "Die Stunde der Philosophie. Über Göttingens ersten Philosophen und die philosophische Theorie der Gründerzeit", in J. v. Stackelberg (ed.) *Zur geistigen Situation der Zeit der Göttinger Universitätsgründung 1737*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1988, pp. 101-143. See also U. Thiel, "Samuel Christian Hollmann", in

educated in the Wolffian tradition, but in Feder Lockean thought takes on a more central role than in Hollmann. He refers and appeals to Locke in several of his writings and on a wide range of topics¹⁰, but central to his own outlook is his endorsement of what he takes to be the essential points in Books I and II of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Feder also appeals to Locke's distinction between real and nominal essences, sharing on the whole Locke's moderate skepticism relating to knowledge-claims about the real essence of substances¹¹.

Feder's account of logic in *Logik und Metaphysik* covers traditional parts such as the syllogism, but is based on, if not entirely reduced to an empirical or cognitive psychology, and this corresponds to his reading of Locke's *Essay*. Regarding Book I, Feder focuses on innate ideas and emphasizes that there are indeed no good reasons to believe that any of our ideas, including abstract ideas, are innate and have any other source than sensations¹². In more general terms, and referring mostly to Book II, he sums up Locke's achievement by saying that his *Essay* "constituted without doubt the most remarkable epoch in the history of logic since Aristotle". By explaining the genesis of the most important of our general concepts, Locke had brought "new light" into logic. "The theory of the origin of our general concepts, and of the laws of their connection", the accounts of "the sources of error" and of "the limits of human knowledge and the grounds of its reliability became more complete and correct thereby"¹³. Feder does not mention Locke in his sketch of the history of metaphysics, but he argues that metaphysics is useful only if it "discovers the origin of our general concepts in sensation, and the origin of scientific concepts in common knowledge", and if it "examines the grounds of our opinions in relation to important

H.F. Klemme and M. Kuehn (eds.), *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*, vol. 2, Continuum, London-New York 2010, pp. 542-44.

¹⁰ G. Zart provides a summary of such references, with some commentary, in Zart, *Einfluss der englischen Philosophen*, cit., pp. 130-39, 145-46.

¹¹ For Feder's distinction between the "Nominal-Wesen der Dinge" and the "absolute Grundwesen eines Dinges", see J.G.H. Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik*, Dieterich, Göttingen 1790, p. 245.

¹² See, for example, Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., pp. 48-49.

¹³ Here is the relevant passage in full: Locke's "*Versuch über den menschlichen Verstand* machte in der Geschichte der Logik ohne Zweifel die merkwürdigste Epoche, die seit dem Aristoteles gemacht worden war. Durch die Entwicklung der vornehmsten von unsern allgemeinen Begriffen zündete er ein neues Licht auch in der Logik an. Die Theorie von dem Ursprunge der Begriffe, und von dem Gesetze ihres Zusammenhanges, von der symbolischen Erkenntnis, und den darinne gegründeten Quellen der Irrthümer, von den Grenzen der menschlichen Erkenntniß, und den Gründen ihrer Zuverlässigkeit, wurde dadurch vollständiger und richtiger" (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., pp. 220-21).

matters and in doing so recognizes the limits of our knowledge”¹⁴. Clearly, Feder’s description of a useful metaphysics coincides at least in part with what he says Locke has done in the area of logic. It seems that for Feder, both logic and metaphysics ought to concern themselves with the origin of ideas in experience and the related epistemological issue of determining the limits of human knowledge, which is a central concern also of Locke’s *Essay*.

And yet, as Feder himself remarks, he is not a Lockean. He emphasizes that he does not belong to any one school of philosophy, that he is just as little a Lockean as a he is Wolffian or a Kantian¹⁵. Rather, he attempts to develop his own philosophy by way of critically examining other systems and retaining what is valuable from each. Obviously, such eclecticism precludes any unmitigated allegiance to Locke. Locke played only one if a very important part in the development of his philosophy. Indeed, while critical of Wolff in many respects, several ideas including the very structure of Feder’s philosophy, even the basic distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy, are retained from Wolffian thought. Moreover, even considering only British philosophy there is more than just Locke in Feder. As Manfred Kuehn has shown, Scottish Common Sense philosophy, with thinkers such as Thomas Reid and James Beattie, was particularly influential in both Feder and Meiners¹⁶. We shall see below in sections 4 and 5 that the Scots are relevant to Feder’s philosophy of mind.

Christoph Meiners even edited a German translation of Beattie’s *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*¹⁷, and his own *Grundriß der Seelenlehre* of 1786 was apparently influenced by Beattie¹⁸. By 1786 Meiners had abandoned his earlier, materialist view of the mind. In 1772 he had published a programme for developing a new kind of philosophy, titled *Revision der Phi-*

¹⁴ “[...] wenn dabey der Ursprung unserer allgemeinen Begriffe aus der Empfindung, und der Ursprung der wissenschaftlichen Begriffe aus der gemeinen Erkenntniß, fleißig entdeckt; wenn endlich die Gründe unserer Meynungen in Ansehung der wichtigen Gegenstände geprüft, und die Grenzen unserer Erkenntniß dabey bemerkt werden” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., p. 227).

¹⁵ K.A.L. Feder (ed.), *J.G.H Feder’s Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, Schwickert, Leipzig - Hahn, Hannover - Leske, Darmstadt 1825, p. 88.

¹⁶ M. Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768-1800. A Contribution to the History of Critical Philosophy*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Kingston and Montreal 1987, pp. 70-85. For Feder and Reid on psychology, see P. Rumore, “Feder und die Psychologie seiner Zeit”, in H.-P. Nowitzki, U. Roth and G. Stiening (eds.), *Johann Georg Heinrich Feder (1740-1821). Empirismus und Popularphilosophie zwischen Wolff und Kant*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2018, pp. 39-54, at pp. 49-50. See also U. Thiel “Feder und der Innere Sinn”, *ibid.*, pp. 55-86, at pp. 76-77.

¹⁷ J. Beattie, *Neue Philosophische Versuche*, 2 vols., Weygand, Leipzig 1779-80.

¹⁸ Ch. Meiners, *Grundriß der Seelenlehre*, Meyer, Lemgo [1786]. Compare Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany*, cit., p. 71.

*losophie*¹⁹. Philosophy as a whole, Meiners argues there, should be ‘revised’ in the sense that it be based on empirical psychology, rather than on arbitrary concepts and principles²⁰. As will be discussed below in section 6, their materialist outlook clearly distinguishes both Meiners and Hißmann from Locke. Yet more so than Feder, they see themselves as working within the Lockean tradition, and *Revision* is obviously inspired by Locke. Meiners makes a point of expressing thanks to the “wise Locke” for enabling him to rise above the “chaos” of scholastic quibbling into the “bright region of distinct concepts”²¹, emphasizing that he “always likes Locke’s method better than Wolffian constraint”²². He even divides the proposed empirical psychology into four parts that correspond, roughly, to the four books of Locke’s *Essay*: 1) Of ideas 2) Of the forces or faculties of the mind 3) Of language 4) Of truth and the limits of human knowledge²³.

Like Feder, Meiners emphasizes the importance of Books I and II of the *Essay*, appealing to Book II when he speaks of “Locke’s method” and arguing that metaphysical issues should be dealt with by examining the origin and genesis of our general ideas or concepts. Locke, Meiners says, does not

begin with arbitrary principles and definitions, he never says what something is, but explains by which impressions and intermediate concepts we come to have this or that general idea. For him metaphysics does not consist of a collection of demonstrations of real things, but of conjectures about the way in which our concepts have developed from certain appearances. He does not say that the world is what metaphysics teaches, but points to the various ways in which we come to have representations of its parts²⁴.

¹⁹ [Ch. Meiners], *Revision der Philosophie*, Dieterich, Göttingen-Gotha 1772.

²⁰ For a brief account of the work, see F. Wunderlich, “Christoph Meiners’s Empiricist ‘Revision’ of Philosophy and Michael Hißmann’s Anti-Speculative Materialism”, in K. de Boer and T. Pruncea-Bretonnet (eds.), *The Experiential Turn in Eighteenth-Century German Philosophy*, Routledge, New York-London 2021, pp. 119-37, at pp. 120-21.

²¹ Meiners, *Revision*, cit., p. 161. (“Dir, weiser *Locke*, habe ich es zu danken, daß ich mich aus dem wüsten Chaos scholastischer Zeichendeutereien in die helle Region der deutlichen Begriffe emporgehoben habe”).

²² “Mir gefällt die Lockische Methode immer besser, als der Wolfische Zwang” (Meiners, *Revision*, cit. p. 54).

²³ Meiners, *Revision*, cit., pp. 54, 162-163.

²⁴ “Er [*Locke*] fängt nirgends mit willkürlichen Grundsätzen und Definitionen an, sagt niemals, was eine Sache sey, sondern durch was für Eindrücke und Zwischen-Begriffe wir endlich zu dieser oder jener allgemeinen Idee gelangen. Bei ihm ist die Metaphysik nicht eine Sammlung von Demonstrationen wirklicher Dinge, sondern Vermuthungen über die Entstehungsart unserer Begriffe von gewissen Erscheinungen. Er sagt nicht, daß die Welt das sey, was die Metaphysik lehrt: sondern zeigt

For Locke, Meiners believes, the analysis of how our ideas develop is the basis for determining the limits of human knowledge²⁵.

Like Meiners, Michael Hißmann notes the significance of Locke's philosophy to his own work. In his *Psychologische Versuche* Hißmann writes that in all areas of logic, "or which is the same thing, in all areas of psychology, Locke has enlightened me more than any other writer"²⁶. And Hißmann, too, highlights the centrality of Locke's rejection of innatism and his account of the origin of our ideas. "Since the age of Locke", he remarks, "the doctrine of ideas and their origin has become a main area of investigation for philosophers"²⁷. He argues, as does Meiners, that most of the themes that traditional metaphysics deals with should be moved to other disciplines. For example, natural theology should be moved to ethics and cosmology to physics²⁸. Any topics that remain in metaphysics should be dealt with in the way Locke did, namely by searching for the origin of our general ideas in experience.

But if one wants to have a science called *metaphysics*, one should deal with it according to *Locke's* example. One should turn it into a compendium of important general ideas and the first judgements that are derived from the exploration of the way in which they have developed²⁹.

3. "Lacking Precise Knowledge of Locke's Essay"

All three Göttingen philosophers bemoan the (alleged) fact that Locke's writings, and his *Essay* in particular, have not been read carefully enough and have been misread and misunderstood. Feder maintains that both "dogmatists" and skeptics seem to be positively disposed towards Locke's thought, adding,

die verschiedenen Wege an, wodurch wir zu Vorstellungen von ihren Theilen gelangen" (Meiners, *Revision*, cit., p. 208).

²⁵ Meiners, *Revision*, cit., p. 208.

²⁶ "Mir hat Locke [...] in der ganzen Logik, oder welches einerley ist, in der ganzen Psychologie, mehr Licht gegeben, als irgendein Schriftsteller" (M. Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche, ein Beytrag zur esoterischen Logik*, [no publisher, printer], Frankfurt-Leipzig 1777, p. 96 fn.).

²⁷ "Seit Locke's Zeitalter ist die Lehre von den Ideen und ihrem Ursprung eine Hauptuntersuchung der Philosophen geworden" (M. Hißmann, *Anleitung zur Kenntniß der auserlesenen Literatur in allen Theilen der Philosophie*, Meyer, Göttingen-Lemgo 1790². (First edition 1778). p. 164.

²⁸ Hißmann, *Anleitung*, cit., pp. 19-20.

²⁹ "Will man aber [...] eine Wissenschaft haben, die *Metaphysik* heißen soll; so bearbeite man sie nach *Locke's* Beyspiel. Man mache sie zu einem Magazin wichtiger allgemeiner Ideen, und der nächsten Sätze, die aus der Aufsuchung ihrer Entstehungsart fließen" (Hißmann, *Anleitung*, cit., p. 19).

however, that many of the former praise Locke without knowing what actually can be inferred from his statements, while the latter infer more from his statements than what Locke himself would condone³⁰. Meiners states that, unfortunately, only little use has been made of “this excellent man’s” teachings. Locke is cited often enough, he complains, but one knows his work mainly from the index or the titles of chapters in his *Essay*. He points out that this lack of attention to Lockean method has inspired him to write *Revision der Philosophie*³¹. And Hißmann claims that a “lack of precise knowledge of Locke’s *Essay*” is probably responsible for the fact that one cannot find a plausible account of inner sensations and inner feelings in the current textbooks on logic³². Feder, Meiners and Hißmann clearly think that they understand Locke’s philosophy better than most of their philosophical contemporaries. One does not have to dig deep, however, to see that their own accounts of Locke raise questions.

As we saw, the three Göttingen philosophers focus, for the most part, on Locke’s critique of the theory of innate ideas in Book I and his account of ideas as originating in sensation and reflection in Book II. Hißmann even believed that Locke built his philosophy “wholly” on his critique of innate ideas³³. It is obvious even from a cursory reading of Book I, however, that for Locke the main target of his critique does not concern innate ideas, but the view that certain theoretical and practical *principles* are innate. Innate ideas are relevant indirectly, as ideas feature in principles and would have to be innate, Locke argues, if principles were innate³⁴. This is not a minor point of detail but affects the Göttingen philosophers’ understanding of Locke’s *Essay* as a whole. They

³⁰ “Er [Locke] hat das Glück den Dogmatikern zu gefallen, und er ist der Liebling der Skeptiker. Aber es ist zu vermuthen, daß viele von jenen nachloben, ohne zu wissen, was man aus Lockens Sätzen folgern kann; so wie gewiß ist, daß diese mehr daraus folgern, als er selbst billigen würde” (J.G.H. Feder, *Grundriß der Philosophischen Wissenschaften*, Findeisen, Coburg 1767, pp. 78-79).

³¹ Meiners, *Revision*, cit., pp. 153-54.

³² “Ohne Locken gelesen zu haben, wird man sich daher den bestimmten Begriff vom inneren Sinn, den inneren Gefühlen und Empfindungen, nicht machen, den man sich zu machen hat. Und diesem Mangel genauer Bekanntschaft mit dem Lockischen Versuch ist es wohl zuzuschreiben, daß man in den mehresten Logischen Schriften die Veranlassung zu dieser Entdeckung und ihren wahren Gehalt vergeblich sucht” (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 95).

³³ “Darinnen hatte Locke immer den großen Vorzug vor Leibniz, daß er seinem System getreu blieb, das er eigentlich ganz auf seinen sinreichen Angriff der angebohrnen Begriffe bauete” (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 172).

³⁴ J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, Liv.1, pp. 84-85. Hißmann mentions innate principles at one point, but says merely that some philosophers at Locke’s time claimed that not only ideas but also principles are innate (Hißmann, *Anleitung*, cit., p. 164).

seem to neglect or reject crucial views and arguments in other parts of the *Essay*, such as Locke's view, central to his moral philosophy, that principles of morality, while not innate, are, like mathematics, "capable of Demonstration"³⁵. Take, for example, Feder's four-volume *Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Willen*³⁶, valued highly by himself as one of his most important works. In his autobiography he suggests that the work is modelled on Locke's *Essay*. Feder writes:

The first idea of this undertaking developed, apart from my preference for Practical Philosophy, from my respect for *Locke's* work on the human understanding. A similar work on the will seemed to me to be lacking, and I had courage enough to devote myself to it³⁷.

Feder notes the "empirical" nature of this work³⁸, and he summarizes its content as follows.

The principles of virtue and happiness established therein are those according to which I have lived, so far as human weakness permitted. I have tested their truth and usability on myself and others³⁹.

It is doubtful that a work of this kind can be said to be modelled on Locke or to be "similar" to what Locke argues about the understanding in the *Essay*. At the very least one would have to reduce Locke's *Essay* to a project in some way reminiscent of Book II in order to claim any kind of similarity. Regarding principles of morality and virtue at least, Locke argues that they are precisely not to be based on experience and "tested" against practice to determine their truth. Rather, he holds that principles of morality can be shown to be valid and universally binding on the basis of reason alone, independently of whether anyone actually lives by them. "The Truth and Certainty of *moral Discourses*", Locke says, "abstracts from the Lives of Men, and the Existence of those Ver-

³⁵ Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.xii.8, p.643.

³⁶ J.G.H. Feder, *Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Willen*, 4 vols., Meyer, Göttingen-Lemgo 1779-93.

³⁷ "Der erste Gedanke zu diesem Unternehmen entstand, außer meiner Vorliebe für die Practische Philosophie, durch meine Achtung für *Locke's* Werk über den menschlichen Verstand. Ein ähnliches über den Willen schien mir zu fehlen; und ich hatte Muth genug, mich ihm zu widmen" (Feder, *J.G.H Feder's Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, cit., p. 94).

³⁸ Feder, *J.G.H Feder's Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, cit., p. 95.

³⁹ "Die darin aufgestellten Grundsätze von Tugend und Glückseligkeit sind diejenigen, nach welchen ich, so weit es die menschliche Schwachheit vermochte, gelebt habe. Ihre Wahrheit und Brauchbarkeit habe ich an mir und andern erprobt" (Feder, *J.G.H Feder's Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, p. 94).

tues in the World, whereof they treat"⁴⁰. Thus, although Feder occasionally cites Locke, for example on his view that feelings of uneasiness drive the will⁴¹, and contrary to Feder's comments on his own work, the general idea behind *Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Willen* is distinctly un-Lockean.

Another example of a problematic appeal to Locke concerns Hißmann's comments on Locke's notion of inner sense. Hißmann claims that it is Locke's account of inner sense in particular that constitutes his response to the theory of innate ideas⁴². According to Hißmann, the doctrine of innate ideas was meant to explain the origin of "those concepts that could not be derived from sensuous impressions of the outer senses"⁴³. Locke has shown, however, Hißmann writes, that there is no reason to resort to innatism and that instead "one has to assume a second source of our ideas, an inner sense", or, in Locke's terminology, "reflection"⁴⁴. Hißmann criticizes Leibniz in this context but he does not mention the latter's quite different evaluation of Lockean reflection. In stark contrast to Hißmann, Leibniz argues that, as "reflection is nothing but attention to what is within us", Locke's theory of reflection actually amounts to a *concession* to innatism⁴⁵. Instead of considering this reading of Lockean reflection, Hißmann argues it follows from the principles which "after Locke have been universally adopted in psychology" that there must be a physical base for inner sense, *i. e.* that there must be "in the most inner parts of our brain certain organs to the vibrations of which one must ascribe those modifications of the soul that are not caused by the impact of external objects on the outer organs"⁴⁶. This as-

⁴⁰ Ibid., IV.iv.8, p. 566.

⁴¹ Feder, *Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Willen*, cit., vol. 1, p.67.

⁴² Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., pp.93-97, 171-74.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 94.

⁴⁴ "Der englische Weltweise aber bewies aus Gründen, die fast allen Philosophen des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts ueberzeugend waren, daß man gar nicht Ursache habe, um der Seelenveränderungen Willen, die man nicht ohne Mühe aus den Eindrücken auf die äußeren Sinnen erklären könne, zur Gottheit seine Zuflucht zu nehmen. Für diese [...] Seelenmodifikationen, müsse man eine zwote Quelle unsrer Ideen, einen inneren Sinn annehmen" (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 94). See Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.i.4, p. 105.

⁴⁵ G.W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, trans. and ed. by P. Remnant and J. Bennett, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981, p. 51.

⁴⁶ "Nothwendig müssen daher, nach der Sprache und den Grundsätzen, die nach Locke allgemein in der Psychologie aufgenommen worden sind, in dem Innersten unsers Gehirns gewisse Organen vorhanden seyn, deren Erschütterung man die verschiedenen Modifikationen der Seele zuschreiben muß, die nicht durch die Einwirkung äußerer Gegenstände auf die äußern Organe verursacht werden. Diese innern Organen des Gehirns, die der Grund und die Werkstätte von den *ideas of reflexion* sind, heißen der innere Sin, und die verschiedenen Veränderungen dieser innern Organen heißen innere Gefühle und innere Empfindungen" (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., pp. 97-98).

assessment of Locke's role in subsequent thought seems to be based on Hißmann's essentially materialist reading of Locke (see below section 6). He simply ignores Locke's comment that he does not wish "to meddle with the Physical Consideration of the Mind", as this would involve "Speculations" that may be "curious and entertaining", but are to be declined as "lying out of my Way, in the Design I am now upon"⁴⁷.

Apart from misguided appeals to Locke, the three Göttingen 'Lockeans' are explicitly critical of some of Locke's positions that are central to his philosophy. We shall now turn in more detail to two central issues in the philosophy of mind in order to evaluate their assessments of Locke's account.

4. Feder and Locke on the Nature of the Soul

The importance the Göttingen philosophers ascribe to inner sense and to Locke's account thereof relates to their views on the nature of the human mind and personal identity. Feder argues that inner sense, providing us with the consciousness of our inner states, is the reason why we are able to ascribe a soul or mind to ourselves.

A large part of our concepts is derived from sensations that we have due to inner sense. That is how the soul has the concept of itself, and of its properties. And through this basic mental representation we form other concepts of mental natures and properties⁴⁸.

Thus, inner sense is the basis, according to Feder, on which we can build a general theory of the mind⁴⁹. What is the soul or mind, according to Feder? He considers a variety of views, including the Humean view that we know no more of the soul than its various states or perceptions and that, to us, the soul is nothing but a bundle or collection of those perceptions. Feder writes: "At least

⁴⁷ Locke, *Essay*, cit. I.i.2, p. 43.

⁴⁸ „Ein grosser Theil unserer Begriffe rühret aus den Empfindungen her, die wir vermöge des innern Sinnes haben. Daher hat die Seele den Begriff von ihr selbst, und von ihren Eigenschaften. Und vermittelst dieser geistlichen Grundvorstellung bilden wir uns unsere übrigen Begriffe von geistlichen Naturen und Eigenschaften“ (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., p. 50).

⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis of Feder's account of inner sense, see U. Thiel, "Feder und der Innere Sinn", cit. See also the relevant sections in U. Thiel, "Experience and Inner Sense: Feder – Lossius – Kant", in K. de Boer and T. Prunera-Bretonnet (eds.), *The Experiential Turn in Eighteenth-Century German Philosophy*, Routledge, New York-London 2021, pp. 98-118.

what we know of our soul is nothing but a collection of modifications of its power and capacity, as they express themselves in their effects and sensations⁵⁰.

Elsewhere Feder questions that inner sense can provide us with knowledge of “the absolute essence soul”, suggesting that through inner sense we perceive “merely our present state, this current thinking, willing, feeling”⁵¹. It is plain, however, that Feder does not endorse a bundle view of the mind or soul. His reference to the soul’s “power and capacity” suggests an entity beyond mere perceptions. Indeed, he holds that inner sense does not only provide us with a consciousness of inner states but also with that of the soul as a “subject of our consciousness”⁵², or that part of us “in which we are conscious of the present and the past, of pleasure and pain”⁵³. What is the nature, however, of this subject called ‘the soul’? In several places Feder emphasizes that inner sense and consciousness of self are likely to have a physical base. For example, he says it is “very probable that our self-consciousness” has some organic base. He appeals to the fact that physical illness can weaken self-consciousness and lead us to think we are a person that we are not and never have been⁵⁴. Unlike his pupil Hißmann, however, Feder does not think that such phenomena should lead us to a materialist view of the mind.

While Feder holds we cannot know with absolute certainty what the nature of the mind or soul is, he argues it is highly probable that the subject of consciousness, or the soul, is (1) a substance and (2) an immaterial substance. Although these beliefs are not the content of inner sensations, Feder claims that they originate in the latter. As regards (1), Feder claims that the understanding forces us to go beyond the “concepts of properties, states and relations” and to add the concept of substance⁵⁵. He makes use of an old argument, also present

⁵⁰ “Wenigstens ist das, was wir von unserer Seele wissen, nichts als eine Sammlung von Modificationen ihrer Kraft und Fähigkeit, wie diese sich in ihren Wirkungen und Empfindungen äussern” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik*, Dieterich, Göttingen-Gotha 1769, p. 109).

⁵¹ “Giebt sich etwa dem Selbstgefühl das absolute Wesen der Seele zu erkennen? Ist es nicht vielmehr immer nur unser gegenwärtiger Zustand, dieses gegenwärtige Denken, Wollen, Fühlen, was wir mittels des innern Sinnes wahrnehmen?” (J.G.H. Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, in *Philosophische Bibliothek* 2 (1789), pp. 1–40, at pp. 24–25).

⁵² “Subject unsers Bewußtseyns” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1769, cit., p. 108).

⁵³ “[...] in welchem wir uns des Gegenwärtigen und Vergangenen, der Lust und der Unlust bewußt sind” (J.G.H. Feder, *Grundsätze der Logik und Metaphysik*, Dieterich, Göttingen 1794, p. 21).

⁵⁴ “So halte ich es doch für sehr wahrscheinlich, daß auch unser Selbstbewußtseyn [...] mit auf organischen Gründen beruhe. Denn man hat Beyspiele, daß in Krankheiten auch dieß Selbstbewußtseyn geschwächt und in unnatürliche Zerrüttung gebracht werden kann” (Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., p. 38 fn.).

⁵⁵ Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., p. 25.

in Locke, according to which ideas of qualities and states bring along the notion of a something to which these qualities and states belong⁵⁶. Feder's version of the argument says that there is a sense in which the concept of a substance is even "contained" in the "concepts of properties, states and relations" themselves or "essentially connected" with the latter⁵⁷. In short, when we have ideas of "properties, states and relations" we also have the notion of a substance on which they depend. It follows, Feder believes, that by making us aware of our states and properties, inner sense makes us aware of ourselves as substantial beings. Even the most extreme skeptic, Feder maintains, cannot avoid assuming a substance, as the concept of states demands that of a substance.

As regards (2), Feder claims that although we may not be able to know with absolute certainty what the inner nature of the soul is, inner sense or "the feeling of self and reflection on the latter [...] acquaints us with something about the nature of our soul"⁵⁸. Feder proceeds to argue that inner sense points to the soul's most fundamental features, namely, its simplicity and immateriality. He holds that while our inner sense does not prove that the soul has these features, it certainly *suggests* that the soul is simple and immaterial.

In particular with regard to our soul, the feeling of self certainly supports the simplicity of the thinking substance rather than the contrary. At least, it seems to me that one can sufficiently distinguish – by means of the same – the soul from the entire mass of organized matter of which its body is constituted⁵⁹.

Feder was not the first to argue in this way. Of particular importance is Thomas Reid, the leading philosopher of the Scottish School of Common Sense to whose *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* of 1764 Feder refers several times in the early editions of *Logik und Metaphysik*⁶⁰. Reid argues that "our sensations suggest to us a sentient being or mind to which they belong: a being which hath a per-

⁵⁶ Compare Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xxiii.1-2, pp. 295-96.

⁵⁷ Feder, "Ueber den Begriff von Substanz", cit., p. 26.

⁵⁸ "durch das Selbstgefühl und die Reflexion über dasselbe ... [ist uns] einiges von der Natur unserer Seele bekannt" (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1769, cit., p. 400).

⁵⁹ "Insbesondere in Ansehung unserer Seele ist das Selbstgefühl gewiß mehr für die Einfachheit der denkenden Substanz als wider dieselbe. Wenigstens, dünket mich, unterscheidet sich, vermöge desselben, die Seele genugsam von der ganzen Masse organisirter Materie, die ihren Körper ausmacht" (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1769, cit., p. 403).

⁶⁰ See, for example, Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik*, Dieterich, Göttingen-Gotha 1771, p. 171, where Feder recommends Reid's *Inquiry*.

manent existence, although the sensations are transient and of short duration”⁶¹. Our belief in the permanent existence of a thinking substance or mind, Reid thinks, is not based on inferences of reason but on judgements that derive immediately from our sensations⁶². Feder, however, also appeals to reason in his case for the simplicity of the soul, making use of standard anti-materialist arguments. He states, for example, that we can infer the simplicity and indivisibility of the thinking subject from the obvious unity or rather simplicity of consciousness. Because consciousness is something quite simple and indivisible, it “can exist only in a subject which is itself indivisible, exactly one, simple”⁶³. According to Feder, the “concept of One sensing, thinking, willing subject precludes the idea of that multiplicity which is assumed in the concept of matter”⁶⁴. There is no reason, he holds, why we should assume a multiplicity in what functions as a basis for consciousness, as the latter appears to us as an “indivisible unity”⁶⁵.

Feder continues to maintain that the “absolute essence of things” cannot be known, and yet in spite of this and all remaining doubts⁶⁶, he argues that the notion of the soul as developed from inner sense, is the notion of a subject that is simple and immaterial. He emphasizes that “Locke’s well-known skepticism on this matter really goes too far”⁶⁷. Is the reading of Locke assumed here an adequate gloss of Locke’s position? It might be argued that Feder’s position is not as different from Locke’s as he suggests. Like Feder, Locke holds that we cannot know the real essence of the soul but that it is the “more probable Opin-

⁶¹ Th. Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, ed. by D.R. Brookes, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1997, Chapt. 5, Sect. iii, p. 60. Re “natural suggestion”, see *ibid.* Chapt. 2, Sect. vii, p. 38.

⁶² “This sensation suggests to us both a faculty and a mind; and not only suggests the notion of them, but creates a belief of their existence; although it is impossible to discover, by reason, any tie or connection between one and the other [...] they are judgments of nature, judgments not got by comparing ideas, and perceiving agreements and disagreements, but immediately inspired by our constitution” (Reid, *Inquiry*, cit., Chapt 2, Sect. vii, p. 37).

⁶³ “Denn, können wir uns die Gewahrnehmung oder das *Bewußtseyn* wohl gedenken, als etwas, welches, wo es nur einmal vorhanden, dennoch vertheilt und ausgebreitet wäre? Ist es nicht vielmehr etwas ganz einfaches und untheilbares? Also kann es ja auch nicht anders vorhanden seyn, als in einem Subjecte welches selbst untheilbar, genau eins, einfach ist” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., p. 325).

⁶⁴ Feder, *Grundsätze*, cit., p. 240.

⁶⁵ “Warum sollten wir Vielheit voraussetzen im Grunde dessen, was sich uns als untheilbare Einheit zu erkennen giebt; und wo die Voraussetzung der Vielheit die Erscheinungen unbegreiflich macht?” (Feder, *Grundsätze*, cit., pp. 242-43).

⁶⁶ “diese Eigenschaft der denkenden Substanz ... [kann] nicht mit völliger Evidenz dargethan werden” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., pp. 325-26).

⁶⁷ “Locke’s bekannter Skepticismus in dieser Sache geht doch wirklich zu weit” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., pp. 326-27). See also Feder *Logik und Metaphysik* 1769, cit., p. 404.

ion” that the soul is an immaterial substance⁶⁸. However, unlike Feder, Locke thinks that the notion of thinking matter does not involve a contradiction and that it is at least possible God may “superadd” the power of thought to suitable systems of matter⁶⁹. And as Locke does not elaborate on why he nevertheless thinks “the more probable Opinion” is that the soul is an immaterial substance, it appears that his “skepticism” or agnosticism regarding the nature of the soul is indeed different from Feder’s version. In the last analysis, then, Feder’s assessment of the difference between himself and Locke seems correct. Moreover, Locke’s suggestion about ‘superaddition’ seemed to many to open the door to materialism, a door that Feder wanted to keep firmly shut, siding more with philosophers such as Reid than with Locke on this matter.

5. Feder and Locke on the “Favourite Topic of the English Metaphysicians”

If the thinking subject is a simple substance, as Feder assumes, it would not be subject to change, and hence there would be no problem accounting for its diachronic identity. This is what many (but certainly not all) eighteenth-century philosophers believed⁷⁰. Feder is aware, however, of the debates about individuation and identity from medieval times to his present, conceding that one can get confused about the matter “because of the incompleteness of our concepts of individuals and also of kinds”⁷¹. This is evidenced, he says, “by the disputes of the scholastics over the *principium individuationis* and the almost more pedantic disputes about personal identity which, since Locke’s time, seem to be a favourite topic (*Lieblingsmaterie*) of the English metaphysicians”⁷². Feder is confident, however, that the doubts that have been raised about diachronic identity can be removed⁷³. As we shall see, he is not critical of Locke here, but attempts to include Lockean ideas in his account.

⁶⁸ Locke, *Essay*, cit., II. xxvii.25, p. 345.

⁶⁹ “God can, if he pleases, superadd to Matter a Faculty of Thinking” (Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.iii.6, p. 541).

⁷⁰ For an analysis of the various accounts of personal identity by philosophers who adopt an immaterialist view of the human mind, see U. Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject. Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014², pp. 224-276.

⁷¹ Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1771, cit., p. 310; 1790 p. 287.

⁷² “[...] der Streit der Scholastiker über das *principium individuationis*, und der beynahe noch spitzfindigere Streit über die *personelle Identität*, der seit *Lockens* Zeit eine Lieblingmaterie der englischen Metaphysiker zu seyn scheint” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1771, cit., p. 310; 1790, p. 287).

⁷³ Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., p. 35.

Feder's comments on this "favourite topic of the English metaphysicians" are scattered over several of his writings. It may seem, moreover, that no consistent position emerges. Feder seems both (1) to appeal to a natural "feeling" of identity, following perhaps Scottish Common Sense philosophers, such as James Beattie and Henry Home, Lord Kames⁷⁴; and (2) to endorse a Lockean approach to the issue. Feder himself does not separate these two approaches. He seems to make use of both in his response to a view he ascribes to the skeptic. The skeptic may question our belief in our diachronic identity and suppose, Feder notes, that "several souls could follow one another" in one body, without the man or human being noticing this⁷⁵.

In terms of (1) Feder concedes that one cannot prove "the impossibility of such unnoticeable changes of souls"⁷⁶. He holds, however, that an "inner feeling" tells me that I "always am and remain the same feeling and thinking subject, in spite of all the changes in my body and my relations, of my representations and feelings. Nature drives me constantly, and as far as I can tell every other healthy human being, to believe in this persistence and unity of our souls"⁷⁷. It is not clear, he claims, that I could even have this feeling of identity "if several thinking subjects followed one another in my human body"⁷⁸. In any case, Feder argues the fact that the skeptic's scenario is not disprovable should not lead us to give up our natural belief in our personal identity⁷⁹. The skeptic's scenario may in principle be possible, but so is the scenario that our souls remain numerically the same through time⁸⁰. And since our natural feeling suggests the latter, it is most reasonable to adopt this belief.

Regarding (2) Feder recognizes that the issue of diachronic identity is rel-

⁷⁴ According to Kames, my personal identity is known to me by a "feeling of identity, which accompanies me through all my changes" (H. Home, Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, ed. by M.C. Moran, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 2005, pp. 233-34). Beattie speaks of personal identity as one of the "dictates of internal sensation natural to man and universally acknowledged" (J. Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth; in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism*, Kincaid & Bell, Edinburgh – Dilly, London 1771², p. 76).

⁷⁵ Feder, "Ueber den Begriff von Substanz", cit., pp. 37-38.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁷⁷ "Nach meinem innersten Gefühl [...] scheint es mir [...], daß ich immer dasselbe fühlende und denkende Subject bin und bleibe, bey allen Veränderungen meines Körpers und meiner Verhältnisse, allem Wechsel meiner Vorstellungen und Gefühle. Die Natur treibt mich anhaltend und dringend dazu an, und so viel ich bemerke, auch jeden andern gesunden Menschen, an diese Fortdauer und Einheit unserer Seelen zu glauben (Feder, "Ueber den Begriff von Substanz", cit., p. 39).

⁷⁸ Feder, "Ueber den Begriff von Substanz", cit., p. 40.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

evant to moral and legal issues, and in this context, he applies a broader notion of personhood that includes the body⁸¹. Here, instead of appealing to an “inner feeling” of identity, Feder proposes a distinction between a complete or absolute identity and a relative identity (*gewisse Identität*)⁸². The latter notion of identity is ‘relative’ in the sense that here the “relation to our concepts and intentions” is relevant to determining identity⁸³. This distinction applies to external objects and other persons as well as to one’s own self. If no parts of the newborn body are retained in the body of the old man, Feder argues, we do not have a complete or absolute identity, but we may still have a relative identity⁸⁴. For the latter it is sufficient that “it is the same man for us and our aims and purposes; to us in all respects the son, the brother, the father”⁸⁵. And so, Feder argues, even if we were to accept what the skeptic supposes, this would be irrelevant to relative identity which is what matters in the moral or practical sphere⁸⁶. Here it is sufficient that “our soul for us and for other human beings, and in general for all the purposes that it is made for, always is and remains the same”. Even “rewards and punishments in the other life”, Feder thinks, do not require an “absolute identity of the thinking subject”⁸⁷.

Feder’s account of absolute and relative identity corresponds to an old distinction between identity in a strict sense and in a loose or ‘popular’ sense⁸⁸, but he links it to Locke’s distinction between substantial identity and personal identity, according to which the latter is constituted by the “unity of consciousness”⁸⁹. Feder argues that “the concept of moral unity (moral per-

⁸¹ Feder, *Grundsätze*, cit., p. 9.

⁸² “zwischen einer völligen und einer gewissen Identität“ (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., p. 287.)

⁸³ “Beziehung auf unsere Begriffe und Absichten“ (Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., pp. 36, 39.)

⁸⁴ By translating Feder’s “gewisse Identität” as “relative identity” I do not mean to suggest that he is arguing for the idea of relative identity as discussed in present-day accounts of the topic. While Feder’s notion may be compatible with the present-day notion of relativity, he does not explicitly endorse or even spell out this idea.

⁸⁵ Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., p. 37.

⁸⁶ In a theological context, to do with an explanation of the trinity, Feder comments on the concept of a person in general and as applied to humans. He says that ‘person’ serves to distinguish the various relations into which one and the same “Grundsubjekt” can enter and that in the case of humans this involves rights and duties. Feder, *J.H.G. Feder’s Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, cit., p. 335.

⁸⁷ Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., pp. 38-39.

⁸⁸ See U. Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, cit., pp. 267-68.

⁸⁹ “Locke unterscheidet [...] *substantial* und *personal identity*; zu letzterer ist die Einheit des Bewußseyns genug” (Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., p. 39, fn.). See Locke, *Essay*, cit. II.xxvii.7, p. 332 and II.xxvii.15, p. 340.

sonality) relates to the moral predicates of right and duty” and that “a subject who has certain rights and duties is called a person”. This “personal unity”, he holds, consists in the “unity of consciousness”⁹⁰. However, Feder does not simply equate his ‘relative’ identity with a Lockean personal identity based on consciousness. Rather, as his example cited above indicates, he allows for several different respects in relation to which a human being can be the same or different across time. Nor does he say that a memory of the past is always required for just rewards or punishments. This is evident from the following passage.

If in some respects it can be said that a human being is no longer the same because his way of thinking has changed so much, because he seems to have forgotten everything that used to occupy him and what distinguished him: he can still in some respects be considered the same [...] and may count sufficiently as the same for a just judge to punish or reward him for his past⁹¹.

For Feder, then, the unity of consciousness or memory is only one possible respect that is relevant to relative identity.

Feder does not elaborate on this, however. Moreover, the question remains if his (1) account of diachronic identity in terms of an “inner feeling” is even compatible with his (2) Lockean analysis, appealing to a distinction between absolute and relative identity. Of course, both (1) and (2) share the view that no proof or argument for absolute identity is required. And so, if one is skeptical about the possibility of such a proof, this does not really matter, according to Feder. Further, the two accounts can be said to be compatible in the sense that (1) relates to the metaphysics of the soul and (2) to the embodied self and practical matters in moral and legal contexts. There is, then, no inconsistency between (1) and (2) in Feder. Locke, however, would have rejected (1) and the very notion of a feeling of ourselves as persisting thinking substances, partly on the grounds that there seems to be no experiential evidence for such a feeling and partly because, unlike Feder, he is agnostic about the nature of the human soul.

⁹⁰ Feder, *Grundsätze*, cit., p. 68.

⁹¹ “Wenn immerhin in gewisser Rücksicht gesagt werden kann, daß ein Mensch nicht mehr derselbe sey, weil sich seine Denkart so sehr geändert, weil er alles scheint vergeßen zu haben, was ihn sonst beschäftigte, was ihn auszeichnete: so kann er doch in mancher Absicht als derselbe angesehen werden, und [...] noch genugsam derselbe seyn, um von einem gerechten Richter fürs Vergangene gestraft oder belohnt zu werden“ (J.G.H. Feder, “Ob zum Begriffe der Unsterblichkeit die Erinnerung an dieses Leben erforderlich; und aus was für Gründen dieselbe geschlossen werden könne?”, in *Hannoversches Magazin* 11 (1773), pp. 641-54, at pp. 645-46).

6. Meiners, Hißmann and Locke on the Mind and Personal Identity

As indicated, Locke's suggestion cited above that "God can, if he pleases, superadd to Matter a Faculty of Thinking" inspired eighteenth-century materialists in both Britain and Germany⁹². In Göttingen, Hißmann is the most radical in this regard. Meiners shared Hißmann's materialism, but his formulations are more moderate, and, as noted above, he later abandoned this view about the nature of the mind⁹³. Hißmann follows to a large extent, if not in all details, Joseph Priestley's version of materialism⁹⁴. Like Priestley, Hißmann does not attempt to prove the truth of the materialist thesis about the human mind, arguing merely for its high probability⁹⁵. For example, both the early Meiners and Hißmann argue against the traditional view, present in Feder, that the notion of a simple substance which holds our various perceptions together can be derived from a feeling of unity. They concede that we feel that our various perceptions occur not in several substances, but in one unitary substance. However, simplicity, they argue, cannot be inferred from unity. Indeed, like Priestley, they hold that it is more plausible to assume that this substance is complex (*i. e.* material), rather than simple, indivisible and immaterial. A simple being, they argue, could have only one perception at a time, but experience shows that we have several ideas simultaneously⁹⁶. Further, like Priestley, Hißmann believes

⁹² See J.W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter. Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Blackwell, Oxford 1982; P. Rumore, *Materia cogitans. L'Aufklärung di fronte al materialismo*, Olms, Hildesheim 2013.

⁹³ Meiners's change of mind, abandoning materialism, is evident in his *Grundriß der Seelenlehre* of 1786, cit. pp. 25, 65. See the account in Wunderlich, "Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta", cit., p. 74. Note that 'materialism' in this context refers to a thesis about the nature of the human mind. It leaves open the question of whether there are other beings (*e. g.* God) that are immaterial.

⁹⁴ For details on Hißmann's version of materialism and its relation to Priestley, see U. Thiel, "Hißmann und der Materialismus", in H. F. Klemme, G. Stiening and F. Wunderlich (eds.), *Michael Hißmann (1752-1784). Ein materialistischer Philosoph der deutschen Aufklärung*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2013, pp. 25-41. See also F. Wunderlich, "Christoph Meiners's Empiricist 'Revision' of Philosophy and Michael Hißmann's Anti-Speculative Materialism", cit., and F. Wunderlich, "Materialism at the University of Göttingen: between Moderate and Radical Enlightenment", in S. Ducheyne (ed.), *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment*, Routledge, New York-London 2017, pp. 223-39. For Priestley's materialism, see U. Thiel, "Priestley and Kant on Materialism", in *Intellectual History Review* 30 (2020), pp. 129-43.

⁹⁵ Hißmann *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 252.

⁹⁶ Ch. Meiners, "Psychologisches Fragment über die Verschiedenheiten des innern Bewußtseyns", in Ch. Meiners, *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften*, vol. 2, Weygand, Leipzig 1776, pp. 3-44, at pp. 24-27; Hißmann *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 259. Compare J. Priestley, *A Free Discussion of the Doctrine of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity, in a Correspondence between Dr. Price and Dr.*

that materialism about the mind is compatible with the Christian religion, including the belief in immortality and an afterlife⁹⁷. This was obviously considered compatible with Locke's well-known statement that "all the great Ends of Morality and Religion, are well enough secured, without philosophical Proofs of the Soul's Immateriality"⁹⁸.

Hißmann appeals several times to Locke's suggestion about 'superaddition'. He states that he believes that matter can think if it is organized in a certain way, adding that "Locke saw this clearly"⁹⁹. Hißmann's formulation seems to suggest, however, that he thinks Locke positively affirmed that matter has the faculty of thought - which is of course not the case. In short, Hißmann appears to misread Locke's suggestion as an endorsement of materialism¹⁰⁰. This is somewhat surprising, as Priestley, on whose account Hißmann models his materialism, remarked correctly that Locke did not endorse materialism, adding of course that he should have done so. "It is still more unaccountable in Mr. Locke, to suppose, as he did, and as he largely contends, that, for any thing that we know to the contrary, the faculty of thinking may be a property of the body, and yet to think it more probable that this faculty inhered in a different substance, viz. an immaterial soul"¹⁰¹.

Meiners's and Hißmann's materialist view of the mind informs their position on the related issue of personal identity which is part of their account of inner sense and of a variety of inner "feelings"¹⁰². Here, they emphasize the importance of a "feeling of personality", noting its direct practical importance¹⁰³. They occasionally use the term "self-consciousness" for this feeling, but argue

Priestley, J. Johnson and Cadell, London 1778, p. 283; and *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit*, J. Johnson, London 1777, pp. 86-87.

⁹⁷ They differ, however, in the way in which they account for the afterlife. See P. Rumore, "Priestley in Germany", in *Intellectual History Review* 30 (2020), pp. 145-166, at p. 152.

⁹⁸ Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.iii.6, p. 542.

⁹⁹ "Ich glaube, die Materie könne, den strengsten Raisonnements zufolge, allerdings denken, wenn sie auf eine gewisse Weise organisiert ist, die ich näher nicht bestimmen will, weil ich das Gehirn nur sehr unvollständig kenne. Locke sahe dieses deutlich ein, und unstreitig hat er hier, wie in andern Stücken, besser gesehen, als diejenigen, die ihn dieser Behauptung wegen für schwach gehalten haben" (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 270). See also Hißmann, *Anleitung*, cit., p. 253.

¹⁰⁰ Falk Wunderlich, too, points this out, in Wunderlich, "Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta", cit., p. 88.

¹⁰¹ Priestley, *Disquisitions*, cit., p. 31. See also pp. 32, 218-219.

¹⁰² For a detailed analysis, see U. Thiel, "Varieties of Inner Sense. Two Pre-Kantian Theories", in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 79 (1997), pp. 58-79.

¹⁰³ Meiners, *Psychologisches Fragment*, cit., pp. 22-4; 27-37; Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., pp. 144-48.

that it must be distinguished from self-consciousness understood as the feeling of one's own existence¹⁰⁴. Like Locke, they link personality to issues such as responsibility and rewards and punishments, and this connection to moral and legal issues indicates that the feeling of personality involves a relating to one's own past and thus includes memory¹⁰⁵. The feeling of existence, by contrast, does not necessarily involve a relating to the past, according to Meiners and Hißmann. Hißmann states that we have the feeling of personality "when we feel not only that we exist now, but also that we existed previously at earlier times of our life"¹⁰⁶. Therefore, he also describes the feeling of personality as the feeling of the unity of the self: "We always feel the unity [...] of our person when, during a certain period in our lives, we are conscious of certain sensations, representations and actions, and are conscious at the same time that we perceived those impressions, had those representations and performed those actions"¹⁰⁷. In other words, the feeling of personality is the feeling of the diachronic *unity* of the self.

Meiners insists that "this unity of the person must not be confused with sameness or unchangeability: the former occurs in a substance that constantly changes and whose successive modifications combine with one another and so form a connected chain"¹⁰⁸. Similarly, Hißmann says that unity, but not identity, is compatible with changeability¹⁰⁹. It is for this reason that both Hißmann and Meiners reject the idea that we have a feeling of our own identity or a "consciousness that we who exist now are still the very same persons who existed formerly"¹¹⁰. They ascribe the view that we do have such a feeling of diachronic

¹⁰⁴ Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 148.

¹⁰⁵ "Das Gefühl der Person hängt gänzlich vom Gedächtnisse ab, hat mit ihm einerley Gränzen, Schicksale und Veränderungen" (Meiners, *Psychologisches Fragment*, cit., p. 39. See also pp. 27-28). For Hißmann, see *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., pp. 145-6.

¹⁰⁶ "[...] wenn wir nicht blos fühlen, daß wir jetzt sind, sondern auch, daß wir ehemals in den vorigen Zeitpunkten unsers Lebens existirten" (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 145).

¹⁰⁷ "Wir fühlen die Einheit [...] unsrer Person immer, wenn wir während eines gewissen Zeitraums unsers Lebens uns gewisser Empfindungen, Vorstellungen und Handlungen bewusst sind, und dabey uns bewusst sind, daß wir die Eindrücke empfunden, die Vorstellungen gehabt, und die Handlungen ausgeübt haben" (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 151).

¹⁰⁸ "Diese Einheit der Person muß man nicht mit Einerleyheit, oder Unveränderlichkeit verwechseln: jene findet in einer sich stets verändernden Substanz statt, deren auf einander folgende Veränderungen aber sich mit einander verbinden, und eine zusammenhängende Kette ausmachen" (Meiners, *Psychologisches Fragment*, cit., p. 40).

¹⁰⁹ Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 151.

¹¹⁰ Meiners, *Psychologisches Fragment*, cit., p. 38.

identity to Locke and some eighteenth-century philosophers¹¹¹. In fact, as we saw above, it is a view that their teacher Feder holds.

Their argument against this view is that a feeling of personal identity is simply “physically impossible”. According to Hißmann,

We cannot at all feel that we who exist now are still the same persons who existed formerly. Such a feeling is physically impossible and whoever believes he has it is deceived. The feeling of sameness is impossible mainly because our soul is not the unchanging being that it is held to be in today’s common psychological systems. As soon as experience destroys this presupposition, however, the soul simply cannot have a feeling of identity¹¹².

Experience shows that the being we call the soul is subject to constant change; it follows (or so Meiners and Hißmann suggest) that we cannot have a feeling of the diachronic identity of our soul. There is no identity on the physical side, and “thus the feeling of identity must necessarily vanish with the flux of these organs”¹¹³.

This account calls for several comments. First, the ascription of the criticized view to Locke is highly implausible, to say the least. For Locke does not say that we have a feeling or consciousness of diachronic personal identity; rather, he argues that we have a consciousness of past actions and thoughts, and that these past actions and thoughts belong to the same person that exists now precisely because of the consciousness we have of them at present¹¹⁴. This account is closer to (if not identical with) Meiners’ and Hißmann’s notion of a diachronic *unity* of the self than to the view they ascribe to Locke.

Second, their distinction between diachronic unity and identity seems to relate to Feder’s distinction between absolute identity and relative identity. Like

¹¹¹ Ibid.; Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 150.

¹¹² “Wir können gar nicht fühlen, daß wir, die wir jezt sind, noch gerade dieselbige Personen seyn, die wir ehemals waren. Ein solches Gefühl ist physisch unmöglich, und wer es zu haben glaubt, wird getäuscht. Gefühl der Einerleyheit ist hauptsächlich aus dem Grunde unmöglich, weil unsre Seele das unwandelbare und unveränderliche Wesen nicht ist, wofür man es in den heutigen gangbaren psychologischen Systemen zu halten pflegt. So bald aber die Voraussetzung durch die Erfahrung umgestoßen ist: so kan die Seele schlechterdings kein Gefühl der Identität haben” (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., pp. 148–49).

¹¹³ “[...] so muß nothwendig mit dem Fluß dieser Organen das Gefühl der Einerleyheit schwinden” (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 150).

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xxvii.16, p. 340: “Whatever has the consciousness of present and past Actions, is the same Person to whom they both belong”; and II.xxvii.17, p. 341: “That with which the *consciousness* of this present thinking thing can join it self, makes the same *Person*”.

Meiners's and Hißmann's diachronic unity, the latter allows for partial change, but their 'identity' and Feder's absolute identity exclude change. Meiners's expression in the quote above, "sameness, or unchangeability", is telling: to him, identity is the same as unchangeability. It is, however, problematic to define diachronic identity in terms of excluding change. The question of diachronic identity, as discussed by Locke and others, concerns the requirements for there to be identity through partial change. If we define identity in such a way as to exclude any change whatsoever then of course we have made it impossible to deal with the issue. On the Meiners/Hißmann account of identity, objects and embodied selves cannot be identical through time, as they are subject to change. Philosophers who believed in an immaterial mind or soul thought that strict identity, without change, does indeed exist in immaterial substances such as human souls. Meiners and Hißmann, who reject the notion of an immaterial soul but take over the account of identity as excluding change have no option but to deny the existence of diachronic personal identity altogether.

7. Conclusion: Locke between Feder and Meiners/Hißmann

It is plain that more needs to be said about 'Locke in Göttingen'. Only some aspects of this part of Enlightenment philosophy in Göttingen could be dealt with here. It has become clear, however, that the Göttingen philosophers' relationship to Locke is more complex than is sometimes assumed. Obviously, the simple label 'Lockean' is inadequate. While all three philosophers we have considered approve of what they take to be Locke's critique of innatism, his account of the origin of ideas in sensation and reflection and his skepticism about our ability to obtain knowledge of the real nature of substances, they hold several decidedly un-Lockean views on central philosophical issues. Regarding some topics they are explicitly critical of Locke's views and arguments. Moreover, some of their readings of aspects of his philosophy they approve of are problematic (*e. g.* innatism).

In terms of locating Locke in the Göttingen context, we saw that, while Feder is more conservative than Locke, committing himself to an immaterialist view of the mind, Hißmann and the early Meiners are more radical than Locke, committing themselves to psychological materialism. Locke, by contrast, is genuinely neutral about the nature of the mind. His statement that the "more probable Opinion" is that the mind is an immaterial substance is not argued

for in any detail and does not amount to a commitment to this position. For both the conservative and the radical strands of Göttingen philosophy Locke's appeal to experience is only a starting-point. Both go beyond Locke in their own different, even opposite ways. While Feder has links to Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, adopting the notion of natural "inner feelings" and substance-dualism, Hißmann takes up positions present in the English materialist Joseph Priestley. After Feder, Meiners and Hißmann had left Göttingen or died, British philosophy continued to be an important player in Göttingen. In 1810, Gottlob Ernst Schulze, Feder's son in law, was appointed to a professorship in Göttingen. Coming from Helmstedt, Schulze was not so much impressed by Locke, however, as by Hume, attempting, if unsuccessfully, to take philosophy back to a Hume-inspired skepticism.

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Udo Thiel
 Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz
 udo.thiel@uni-graz.at

