

LOCKE'S THEORY OF SUBSTANCE

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Introduction

No theory in the *Essay*¹ has been more criticized than Locke's theory of substance and his use of the term "substance". Locke uses "substance" in two different senses. Sometimes it is used to refer, more strictly, to that which is the bearer of qualities, the underlying *substratum* in which different qualities can inhere or have their being. The idea of substance, in this sense, according to Locke, is neither clear nor distinct. Now if it is an idea at all it seems difficult to understand, on Locke's empiricist premises, how it arises. At other times, he means "substance" to refer to a particular sort of substance, to any common sense object around : table, chair, house, tree and so on. In this latter sense, Locke's notion of substance seems to be that, for the ordinary man a substance is thought of as being made up of certain qualities which experience teaches us to associate together. But Locke cannot end his notion of particular substance here, because when we speak of qualities we speak of them as existing in something, and we do so "because we cannot conceive, how they should subsist alone, nor one in another" and have to suppose them "supported by some common subject" (II, XXIII 4, p. 297). So Locke has to retain much of his conception of substratum in his treatment of particular substance.

If Locke is interpreted as an empiricist philosopher (as often interpreted), as one who argues that our claim to knowledge, in any discipline, is a matter of testable hypothesis, then he should have been moving toward the conclusion that talk about substance is essentially meaningless. This precisely what he *avoids* doing. This avoidance, to some extent, is understandable. This is due to the fact that at the bottom, he holds the rationalist view that if there are qualities, then there must be something to have these qualities and this is the substratum about

which he talks. And at the same time Locke is quite aware that it is not possible to form the notion of substratum independently of the qualities which characterise it. However, in this paper, I argue that Locke's rationalist cast of mind with regard to his notion of substance can be located (1) in his conviction that the qualities we associate together, in fact, belong together, (2) in the inconceivability of their subsisting *in* and *by* themselves and; (3) in the philosophical tradition according to which qualities are accidents.

II

Locke's Epistemological Position

Before considering Locke's notion of substance, it is necessary to approach the main epistemological position of his *Essay*². In "The Epistle to the Reader" Locke mentions that his intention in writing the *Essay* is "to examine our own abilities, and see, what objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with" (p.7), or "to take a Survey of our Understanding, examine our own Powers, and see to what things they are adapted" (Int. p. 47). In other words, he wants to restrict the "boundary and horizon" of our inquiry, or to set a limit to the things which are proper considerations for the human understanding. This Locke wants to do by applying his three-fold method:

First, I shall enquire into the *Original* of those *Ideas*, Notions, or whatever else you please to call them, which a Man observes, and is conscious to himself he has in his Mind; and the ways whereby the Understanding comes to be furnished with them.

Secondly, I shall endeavor to show, what *Knowledge* the Understanding hath by those *Ideas*; and the Certainty, Evidence, and Extent of it.

Thirdly, I shall make some Enquiry into the Nature and grounds of *Faith*, or *Opinion*: whereby I mean that Assent, which we give to any Proposition as true, of those Truth yet we have no certain knowledge: And here we shall have Occasion to examine the Reasons and Degrees of *Assent* (Int. p. 44).

Origin of Ideas : The key term of the *Essay* is "idea" which has been much criticized and discussed by Locke's commentators. But what is an idea? One would expect a clear definition of the term since it is used in the *Essay* very

frequently. Unfortunately, rather than providing clarity, Locke simply apologizes for his frequent use of the term. "I must here in the Entrance beg pardon of my reader, for the frequent use of the Word 'Idea'" "(Int. p. 47). He points out that it is a term which serves best to stand for "whatever is meant by *Phantasm*, *Notion*, *Species*, or whatever it is, which the Mind can be employed about in thinking" (p.47). Elsewhere Locke says that "Whatever the Mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of Perception... that I call *Idea*" (II, VIII, 8, p. 134)³.

After defining the term "idea" Locke now turns to the question "how they come into the Mind" (Int. p. 48). In Book I of the *Essay* Locke attacks the theory that certain sort of ideas are innate. This attack is primarily based on his empiricism, that all the materials of knowledge are derived from experience, and that though, at birth, we all have certain powers of acquiring knowledge, our minds are then like "white Paper, void of all Characters, without any 'Ideas'". Now if we do not have any innate ideas, then how do we come by them⁴. Locke's obvious answer is from experience (II, I, 4, p. 104). He further observes that experience, which is the source of the materials of our knowledge, is of two kinds: "SENSATION" and "REFLECTION". These two are the Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the *Ideas* we have, or can naturally have, do spring" (II, I, 2, p. 104).

Ideas of sensation, such as, yellow, cold, soft, hard, sweet etc., come into the mind through the senses; that is, the senses, "conversant about particular sensible Objects, do convey into the Mind, several distinct Perceptions of things, according to these various ways, wherein those objects do affect them : And thus we come by those *Ideas*... which we call sensible qualities" (II, I, 3, p. 105). In other words, external objects affect our sense organs in various ways and our senses thereupon "convey into the Mind" what produces perceptions there. All our ideas of sensible qualities come about in the same way, so that we cannot have *any idea* of sensible qualities which have not come through our senses. In this sense a man born blind would have no idea of any colour⁵.

The other source of our ideas from which the "empty cabinet" of knowledge is furnished is reflection. Locke defines reflection as "the *Perception of the Operation of our Mind* within us, as it is employ'd about the *Ideas* it has

got” or “that notice which the Mind takes of its own Operations, and the manner of them” (II, I, 4, p. 105). Examples of the ideas furnished by reflection are perceiving, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing and all the different activities of our own minds. It should be noted here that reflection is dependent upon sensation and occurs only in connection with it. If there were no sensory input reflection would never occur. Hence, though reflection is one of the sources of ideas, (1) it is not directly stimulated by objects external to us and; (2) it is a secondary or subordinate source of ideas.

Simple and Complex Ideas : Having observed that ideas are the objects of the understanding whenever a man thinks, and that none of them are innate, but all come either from sensation or from reflection, Locke turns his attention to specify their character that “some of them are simple, and some complex” (II, II, 1, p. 119). A simple idea is one which is uncompounded and “contains in it nothing but one uniform Appearance, or Conception in the mind, and is not distinguishable into different Ideas” (II, II, 1, p. 119). All simple ideas are “suggested and furnished to the mind, only by... Sensation and Reflection” (II, II, 2, p. 119).

Complex ideas, on the other hand, are those that are compounded out of simple ideas and are divided into three types : modes, substances and relations. by modes Locke means such “complex *Ideas*, which however compounded, contain not in them the supposition of subsisting by themselves, but are considered as Dependencies on or Affections of Substances; such are the *Ideas*, signified by the Words *Triangle*, *Gratitude*, *Murther*, etc.” (II, XII, 4, p. 165). The ideas of substances do carry with them the supposition of independent existence or self- subsistence, being “such combinations of simple *Ideas*, as are taken to represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves” (II, XII, 6, p. 165). Finally, the complex ideas of relations “consist in the consideration and comparing one *Idea* with another” (II, XII, 7, p. 166).

However, Locke’s division of ideas into simple and complex is based upon two major differences :

- 1) First, a simple idea is defined as one that contains nothing but one uniform appearance in the mind; consequently, simple ideas are unanalyzable or indistinguishable i.e.. they cannot be broken into constituent parts. On the other hand, complex ideas are derived from simple ideas by the mind’s

activity of comparing, abstracting and separating these elementary data of experience.

- 2) Secondly, the role of the human mind with regard to simple ideas is described as passive. Simple ideas are received by the senses and can be neither created nor destroyed by the mind. As Locke writes : "These simple *Ideas*, when offer to the mind, the understanding can no more refuse to have, nor alter, when they are imprinted, nor bolt them out, and make new ones in it self, than a mirror can refuse, alter or obliterate the Images or *Ideas*, which, the Objects set before it, do therein produce" (II, I, 25, p. 118). But the role of mind with regard to complex ideas is extremely active. Complex ideas are both analyzable and constructed by the mind.

Primary and Secondary Qualities : Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities arises from his distinction between ideas and qualities. He mentions that in order to "discover the nature of our *Ideas* the better, and to discourse of them intelligibly, it will be convenient to distinguish them, as they are *Ideas* or Perceptions in our Minds; and as they are modifications of matter in the Bodies that cause such Perceptions in us" (II, VIII, 7, p. 134). By the former he means ideas per se, and by the latter i.e. "the Power to produce any *Idea* in our mind", he means quality. It is important to notice here that what Locke intends to mean is that ideas are in the mind, whereas qualities are in objects.

Locke divides qualities into two classes : primary and secondary. The primary qualities of objects are those which are "utterly inseparable from the Body, in what estate soever it be;" (II, VIII, 9, p. 134). He demonstrates what he means by these qualities by using "a grain of Wheat." If we divide the grain of wheat into two parts, or even numerous parts until the parts are no longer sensible, "each part has still *Solidity, Extension, Figure and Mobility*". Thus Locke writes : "These I call original or primary qualities of Body,⁶ which I think we may observe to produce simple *Ideas* in us, viz. Solidity, Extension, Figure, Motion, or Rest, and Number" (II, VIII, 9, p. 135). In short, he wants to maintain that (a) no mechanical deformation or sub-division of a body can deprive it of these qualities, and; (b) the ideas we have of these qualities do really resemble them.

By secondary qualities Locks does not mean anything “in the Objects themselves, but Powers to produce various Sensations in us by their primary qualities”, (II, VIII, 10, p. 135). Ideas of Secondary qualities include colours, sounds, tastes, smells, tactile sensations etc. Locke further adds that the ideas of secondary qualities are produced in us “*by the operation of insensible particles on our senses*” (II, VIII, 13, p. 136, emphasis Locke’s), or we may now say, through the operation of light rays on our eyes, sound waves on our ears, chemical effluences on our nose, and so on.⁷ The secondary qualities differ from the primary in that they are in bodies only as powers to produce certain ideas in us, and the ideas which we have of them in no way resemble them. As Locke mentions, the primary qualities “may also be called *real qualities* because they really exist in ... Bodies” (II, VIII, 17, p. 137-38), and that our ideas of these qualities are resemblance of them, but that there “is nothing like our *Ideas* [of secondary qualities], existing in the Bodies themselves” (II, VIII, 15, p. 137).

To primary and secondary qualities Locke adds a third sort, which are allowed to be barely powers of bodies by the operation of their primary qualities “to make such a change in the *Bulk, Figure, Texture, and Motion of another body*, as to make it operate on our senses, differently from what it did before. Thus the Sun has Power to make Wax white, and Fire to make Lead fluid” (II, VIII, 23, p. 140-41).

III

Idea of General Substance

From our discussion of Locke’s treatment of ideas and qualities of objects we get some helpful clues as to what his conception of substance is going to be. Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities is a distinction between qualities of objects, as opposed to a distinction between objects in themselves. An object has primary qualities like size, shape, solidity, motion or rest; and in turn there are the appearances of secondary qualities brought about by these primary ones -- colour, sound, smell, and so on. But Locke seems to think that this picture of the world is necessarily incomplete, since we can ask “what is it that has such and such qualities”? In other words, we should surely think of qualities as qualities *of* something. So his account of qualities

presupposes that *something*, the notion of substance. They cannot exist *in* and *of* themselves, rather qualities are qualities *of* and therefore dependent *upon* something. So Locke is tempted to think that there must be some kind of substance or what he calls "substratum" capable of holding these qualities together, something in which qualities can exist.

With respect to Locke's notion of substance⁸ the most important question that arises is: "How is the idea of substance derived"? This question may be divided into two: (1) "How do we come to have the general idea of substance"? and; (2) "From what source or sources do we obtain the idea of a particular sort of substance"? Locke maintains that our idea of substance (which is a complex idea) arises from the rapid flow of various simple ideas via senses. He points out that we find in nature.

.... that a certain number of these simple *Ideas* go constantly together; which being presumed to belong to one thing, are called so united in one subject, by one name; which by inadvertency we are apt afterward to talk of and consider as one simple idea (thing) Because not imagining how these simple *Ideas* can subsist by themselves, we accustom our selves, to suppose some Substratum, wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call Substance (II, XXIII, 1, p. 295).

In the above passage Locke uses the term "idea" very ambiguously. The immediate problem which arises is that when he says "a certain number of these simple *Ideas* go constantly", whether he means (a) it is to these ideas, or (b) to the qualities which produce them, that the notion of substance as a support belongs?

However, textual evidences support that it is to the latter to which Locke refers in his notion of substance. In Section 2, Chapter XXIII, Book II he points out that "if any one will examine himself concerning his *Notion of pure Substance in general*, he will find he has no other *Idea* of it at all, be only a Supposition of the knows not what support of such Qualities, which are capable producing simple *Idea* in us" (emphasis Locke's except for "Qualities"). And again he says in the same section that the "*Idea* to which we give the general name Substance, being nothing, but the supposed, but unknown support of those *Qualities*, we find existing (p. 296). The idea of substance is engendered from

the “*Collection of those several simple Ideas of sensible Qualities*” (II, XXII, 4, p. 297, emphasis added).

It is important to notice that Locke is concerned with the *idea* of substance, but not with the *being* of substance.⁹ He seems to hold that since our idea of substance is not clear enough, nothing is signified by this term but a “confused *Idea of something* to which they belong, and in which they subsist”, and that this thing is substance which is “supposed always *something* besides the observable *Ideas*, though we know not what it is” (II, XXII, 3, p. 297). Now the question may be raised : whether from Locke’s statement that we have no clear or distinct idea of the thing we suppose to be a support of qualities, does it follow that such substances don’t exist? Aaron comments that Locke “did not deny the being of substance, and he did not deny the need of a support to qualities”, what he denies is that “we have knowledge of this substance”.¹⁰ And O’Connor points out that for Locke “it was the notion of substance as the substratum necessary for the existence of qualities which is the important sense of the world”.¹¹ Indeed Locke’s use of the term “idea” together with “support”, “inhere”, “subsist” etc. implies that he has a distinct notion of substance although he calls it something, he knows not what.

So the general idea of substance is a metaphysical entity, an unknown, but supposed existent, an underlying support for the qualities. The “unknown substratum” theory of substance ostensibly offers an answer of the question “what is it that supports qualities and unites them into stable individual things”?¹² Locke’s view that the qualities which produce our ideas, subsist in the supposed substratum and cannot subsist without it, implies that the qualities, being dependent upon the substratum do not compose the substance. Now if the qualities do not compose the substance, then it is something entirely different from any idea which we have. And, in this case, Locke must admit that if qualities subsist in substance, it must be something which underlies them. Thus it becomes clear that although in his First Letter to Stilling fleet (the Bishop of Worcester) Locke explains that his arguments concern with the idea alone, not with the being of substance, and to show that we have no clear idea of substance, is not to deny that substance exist.¹³

However, it becomes clear that Locke is expressing the belief that there is such a thing a substance, over and above the collection of ideas in which they

subsist, yet admitting that he cannot get nearer to it. But one question may be asked : whether theory of substance is his own theory or not. Mackie points out that the doctrine of substance is not something that Locke is himself constructing, using and relying upon, rather it is something he found already in use.¹⁴ And O'Connor brings out three points of the traditional theory of substance from which Locke, inspite of his criticism, never dissociates himself. These are as follows :

- (a) Substance was *ens per se stans* or that which had a capacity for independent existence and was the genuinely real feature of the universe.
- (b) Substance was also *quod substat accidentibus*, the substratum in which qualities inhere.
- (c) Substance was that which could be subject but not predicate of a proposition in logical form.¹⁵

Locke's adherence to the above three views is seen in the following passage :

And thus here, as in all other cases (in attempting to give an ultimate meaning of substance), where we use Words without having clear and distinct *Ideas*, we talk like Children; who, being questioned, what such a thing is, which they know not, readily give this unsatisfactory answer, This it is *something*; which in truth signifies no more, when so used, either by Children or Men, but that they know not what; and that the thing they pretend to know, and talk of, is what they have no distinct *Idea* of at all, and so are perfectly ignorant of it, and in the dark. The idea then we have, to which we give the general name Substance, being nothing, but the supposed, but unknown support of those Qualities, we find existing, which we imagin cannot subsist, *sine re substante*, without something to support them, we call that support *Substratum*; which, according to the true import of the Word, is in plain *English*, *standing under, or upholding* (II, XXIII, 2, p. 296).

In this passage Locke both admits the weakness of the traditional "substance view", as well as he adopts the view. The first part of the passage ending with "in the dark" is the criticism of the literal substratum view of which we are ignorant like children. This criticism followed from Locke's account of the way in which we come to have knowledge, that since we can know nothing about

what the word "substance" stands for, we are using the word without a meaningful referent.

In the remaining part of the passage Locke accepts the views of substance which O'Connor ascribes to the traditional rationalist philosophers. His acceptance springs from the fact that even though we do not know substance, but only suppose it, the supposition would be a substratum of "substantial" in which our various qualities "which we imagine cannot subsist *sine re substantive*" inhere. Now qualities cannot exist by themselves, and need a support, this support must necessarily be capable of independent existence, otherwise it would again be a quality of something. So substance is an "ens per se stans", which has a capacity for independent existence. On the other hand, if qualities are commonly called accidents (which Locke says that they are, p. 295), then substance is also "quod substat accidentibus", the substratum in which qualities must inhere. In this sense substance must be the *subject*, not the predicate of a logical proposition. And it follows from Locke's assertion that qualities are qualities of something. This something (subject) is the substance which has the qualities (predicates).

IV

Idea of Particular Substance

When Locke passes from our idea of substance in general to our idea of "particular sorts of substances", we see a slightly different view of substance, a difference of emphasis. We may take an idea of a particular substance, say, the idea of this particular chair. The idea of the chair is a complex idea consisting of the simple ideas of brownness, hardness, smoothness and so on. But in addition to these there is an extra element in my idea of the chair, that its simple ideas are experienced by me as one group or family, belonging together. "The Mind being ... furnished with a great number of the simple *Ideas*, conveyed in by the *Senses*, as they are found in exterior things, or by *Reflection* on its own Operations, takes notice also, that a certain number of these simple *Ideas* go constantly together" (II, XXIII, 1, p. 295). And again, "We come to have the *Ideas of particular sorts of substances*, by collecting such Combinations of simple *Ideas*, as are by Experience and Observation of Men's Senses taken notice of to exist together, and are therefore supposed, to flow from the particular internal Constitution, or unknown Essence of that substance" (II, XXIII, 3, p. 296).

However, in speaking of particular sorts of substances, Locke is not *primarily* referring to a substratum view, but a shorthand way of describing various sets of qualities. Whenever an external object affects my senses, a certain number of ideas (ideas of qualities) come together, and suggest to me one thing, and I combine these ideas and give the combination a name, the name of a substance. So when we consider any particular substance, we consider it primarily as a combination of qualities.¹⁶ As Locke says :

Thus we come to have the *Idea* of a Man, Horse, Gold, Water, etc. of which substances, whether any one has any other clear *Idea*, further than of certain simple *Idea* coexisting together, I appeal to every one's own Experience, 'This the ordinary Qualities, observable in Iron, or a Diamond, put together, that make the true complex *Idea* of those Substances, which a Smith, or a Jeweller, commonly knows better than a Philosopher; who whatever ... he may talk of has no other *Idea* of those Substances, than what is framed by a collection of those simple *Ideas* which are to be found in them' (II, XXIII, 3, p. 296-97).

Here in speaking of particular sorts of substances, like man, horse, gold etc. Locke means certain sets of qualities, not the underlying supports of those qualities. He seems to suggest that for the ordinary man a substance of a particular sort is thought of a being made up of certain qualities which experience teaches us to go together. The "ordinary Qualities", in the passage, seems to be those a man takes to be attributable to a substance of a particular sort, so that for the layman the yellowness of gold as perceived will form part of the complex idea of gold, though the scientists and philosophers know that in the object, the yellowness is but a power.

When Locke speaks of particular substance in terms of the observable qualities and that may be the empirical basis for the particular idea of substance¹⁷. But the story of "particular sorts of substances" cannot end here, since this does not, in any way, give us knowledge of the underlying support of those qualities. This view is reflected, as Locke supposes, in our conviction that the qualities we associate together, in fact, belong together, in the inconceivability of their subsisting by themselves, and in the philosophical tradition according to which qualities are accidents. So logically, Locke always retains the conception of the substratum which supports qualities of ordinary objects. And this conception of substance in general figures our idea of a

particular sort of substance as a “*confused Idea of something*” (II, XXIII, 3, p. 297), which supports the various qualities, which produces certain combinations of ideas in us. So when Locke uses “substance” in the sense of particular substance, it is also necessarily substance in the sense of substratum, and this is because, as Odegard mentions, of Locke’s belief that substance in the former sense is necessarily a substratum and vice versa.¹⁸

We see that Locke incorporates much of his conception of substratum in his treatment of particular sorts of substances. Without the assertion of a substratum, the idea of particular substance, as a group of ideas or the qualities which produce them, is meaningless. As Locke writes :

.... when we speak of any sort of Substance, we say it is a *thing* having such or such Qualities, as Body is a *thing* that is extended, figured, and capable of Motion; a Spirit a *thing* capable of thinking; and so Hardness, Friability, and Power to draw Iron, we say, are Qualities to be found in a Loadstone. *These and the like fashions of speaking intimate, that the Substance is supposed always something besides the Extension, Figure, Solidity, Motion, thinking, or other observable Ideas, though we know not what it is* (II, XXIII, 3, p. 297, emphasis added.)

In this passage Locke retains the substance-qualities (subject- predicate) form of the “substratum” view. Although he says that we do not have any clear idea of particular sorts of substance other than that of “certain simple *Ideas* coexisting together” and that “Tis the ordinary Qualities, observable In Iron, or Diamond, put together that makes the true complex *Ideas* of those substances”, he should admit that the observable qualities do carry with them the idea of a support.

Thus Locke needs to assert a substratum to account for the fact that the qualities can exist together. And this is a direct consequence of his Loadstone example. What we mean by Loadstone are those qualities which he enumerates, but we speak of them as qualities *of* or *in* something, a presupposition of some substratum. This presupposition is made necessary by the fact that whenever we speak of qualities, we, in fact, speak of them as qualities of something and this leads to the conclusion that substance is something besides the qualities, in which they subsist. So substance cannot be discarded because all “simple ideas, all sensible qualities, carry with them a supposition of a substratum to exist in, and

of a substance wherein they inhere".¹⁹

Locke further adds that ideas of powers are a part of our ideas of particular sorts of substances, that they "make a great part of our complex Ideas of Substances" (II, XXIII, 8, p. 300, see also Sec. 10, emphasis Locke's). Among the groupings of simple ideas which make up our ideas of particular substances are included "active powers, and passive Capacities; which though not simple *Ideas*, yet, in this respect, for brevity's sake, may conveniently enough be reckoned among them" (II, XXIII, 7, p. 299). In other words, active powers and passive capacities are considered in one thing, the possibility of having any of its simple ideas changed, and the possibility of making that change. Thus we say that fire has power "to change the colour and consistency of Wood" (II, XXIII, 7, p. 299). However, ideas of powers in the sense of active powers and passive capacities constitute a large part of our idea of particular sort of substance.²⁰ And the ideas of powers presuppose, like those of qualities, the existence of material substance.

V

Concluding Remarks

In our discussion we have seen that although Locke does deny that we have knowledge of substance, he is inclined to admit that there must be some kind of entity or "substratum", capable of holding qualities together, in which qualities can subsist. This seems sound enough. But this view immediately leads to a problem -- the problem of locating or identifying this underlying substratum called substance. What is it? How do we come to detect it? What are the criteria for making the assertion that it is there?

Now taking Locke's assertion that he is concerned with the *idea* of substance alone, not with the *being* of substance, let us see how can he find this idea in his empiricist vocabulary. It is to be noted here that the essence of the empiricist thesis formulated in Book II of the *Essay* is that all the materials of knowledge (ideas) come from experience by way of the senses, that sensation and reflection are the two sources from which all our ideas stem. He seems to suggest that if we are to learn anything about the nature of things, then we must investigate and turn our attention to their observable qualities, those qualities

known by sensation and reflection. Now if all the ideas that we have or can have, must have been experienced in one or the other of these two ways, then what about the idea of substance? Is it given or capable of being given in either sensation or reflection? Locke's answer is that it is not, In his refutation of innate principles Locke writes :

... *the Idea of Substance*, ... we neither have, nor can have, by *Sensation* or *Reflection* ... [B]y these ways, whereby other *Ideas* are brought into our Minds, this is not, We have no such *clear Idea* at all, and therefore signifying nothing by the word "Substance", but only an uncertain supposition of we know not what; (i.e., of something whereof we have no particular distinct positive) *Idea*, which we take to be the *substratum*, or support, of those *Ideas* we do know (I, IV, 18, p. 95).

The idea of substance we do have, then, is not a sensible idea, nor it is a simple idea of reflection. Therefore, it must be an idea which the mind constructs. Locke clearly points out that the idea of substance is a complex idea. How does the mind construct such an idea? We do experience various simple ideas such as colours, smells, tastes, sounds, shapes, sizes etc. but the idea of substance does not arise from combining these ideas so. Aaron is a little more favourable to Locke on this issue.²¹ He thinks that though Locke does not provide a clear notion of how we come to have the idea of substance (since we do not experience it through senses), nevertheless there is an implicit answer to be found in the *Essay*. The answer, basically, is that in addition to experiencing the particular qualities that characterize an object, we also experience them as going together. The mind has not ideas of isolated qualities, but of qualities together in one unity. Now here, surely, is the empirical basis of the idea of substance. The "togetherness of these ideas is as real a part of the experience as are the ideas themselves."²²

Of course, Locke speaks of ideas going together, but this does not provide an answer to his problem. Such a case would only produce an idea of a combination of simple ideas, a combination in which the idea of substance would never arise.²³ To experience a number of qualities, which produce ideas, as going together is not in itself to experience what holds them together. Certainly, then, we have no sensory experience of substance. We perceive the qualities to which Locke has referred us, but we do not perceive the thing that bears them. Jenkins rightly comments that here is the tension for Locke, a tension that

represents the pull to empiricism, on the one hand and a pull to rationalism on the other.²⁴ Logic produces the dictum that if there are qualities there must be something to have them, thus representing the rationalist stand. Empiricism, on the other hand, seems to deny the findings of logic by failing to locate what should have been there. Now, as the logical dictum falls firmly within the bounds of rationalism, it has to be said that Locke has one foot in the rationalist camp.

So Locke's supposition of substance does not spring from an analysis of experience, but of his acceptance of the subject-predicate or substance-quality division, which he receives from the traditional philosophers. This acceptance makes it impossible for Locke to think how qualities should exist without a substratum which supports them. On the other hand, he well realizes that we cannot have any knowledge of substance, that it is in no way a dictum of experience. And though he does not intend to discard substance out of the reasonable part of the world, by emphasizing that there are no empirical grounds for substance, he as a matter of fact blew it away.

It is true that Locke's empiricism provides him with the key to break the substance-quality distinction, but he does not utilize this. Even he realizes the difficulties inherent in this distinction, for he remarks that "They who first ran into the Notion of Accidents, as a sort of real Beings, that needed something to inhere in, were forced to find out the word "substance", to support them" (II, XIII, 19, p. 175). And even Locke thinks that these notions are of little use "in deciding of Question in Philosophy" (II, XIII, 20, p. 175), nevertheless, he himself is unable to avoid falling into the same substance-quality mode of thought, since he speaks of qualities as being something which inhere *in* and subsist *by* substance.

In the light of the above discussion, Locke's consistency as an empiricist is at stake. A faithful commitment to the empiricist creed should have led him to deny the existence of substance, or at least remain sceptical about it. This is precisely what he avoids doing. And Locke's failure to remain faithful to his philosophical position reminds us of his successor Hume who is quite forth right about rejecting the idea of substance. He takes a look around the external world and comes to the honest conclusion that we have "no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities, nor have we any other meaning when we either talk of or reason concerning it".²⁵

NOTES

1. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975). We call this text *Essay*. All references to this edition are given in brackets immediately after passages cited with appropriate Book, Chapter, Section and page number.
2. I do not intend to deal with his epistemology at length, but only with those aspects (in brief and noncritically) which are relevant in relation to his notion of substance.
3. Locke uses the term "idea" in an ambiguous fashion. Aaron comments that "One criticism which has rightly been directed against Locke in this connexion is that he has included far too much within the connotation of this one term. Sense-data, memories, images, concepts, abstract ideas differ from each other greatly, and to call them all by the same name is to invite confusion. Locke wanted a comprehensive term to embrace all the immediate objects of the understanding, but his use of the word "idea" in this exceedingly wider manner does lead to ambiguity" *John Locke* (Oxford, 1971), p. 100.
4. Here Locke is asking how we acquire the ideas which are the materials of our knowledge.
5. One question remains open whether Locke would admit Hume's conclusion regarding the missing "shade of blue" that the man could supply the missing shade, for Locke says that "The Understanding seems to me, not to have the least glimmering of any *Ideas*, which it does not receive from" sensation or reflection (II, I, 5, p. 106). See Hume *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1978), p. 6.
6. Elsewhere Locke calls them "real qualities" (II, VIII, 17, p. 137). The main reason for listing these qualities as primary, i.e., as qualities really in and inseparable from bodies, seems to be that these qualities are more important to scientific investigation than other qualities.
7. cf. D. J. O'Connor, *John Locke*, (New York, 1967) p. 63.
8. The content of this paper is only about Locke's notion of "material" substance -- the underlying "stuffs" of physical objects. But he also talks of "spiritual" substance in which mental properties inhere. The principle of his reasoning about mental substance is exactly the same as that of material substance. Physical qualities require a substratum, so also mental qualities, such as, thinking, reasoning, willing etc. require a substratum, which he calls "spirit", to hold them. His contention is that if there is a thinking going on there must surely be

a subject of thought, that is, thing to be doing the thinking.

9. John Locke, "A Letter to the Right Reverend Edward, Lord Bishop of Worcester (Stillingfleet)", *Works*, Vol. IV, (reprinted, Germany, 1963), p. 18.
 10. *John Locke*, pp. 178-79.
 11. *John Locke*, p. 75.
 12. *Ibid*, p. 82.
 13. See O'Connor, *Ibid*, p. 77.
 14. *Problems from Locke*, (Oxford, 1976), p. 75.
 15. *John Locke*, p. 74.
 16. Here Locke seems to be in quite agreement with Hume who says "We have ... no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities, nor have we any other meaning when we either talk or reason concerning it" except that Locke always retains the supposed substantum in which qualities are held together. See *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 16.
 17. See Aaron, *John Locke*, p. 176.
 18. "Locke and Substance", *Dialoguc*, Vol. 8, 243-44.
 19. Locke, *Letter in Works*, Vol. IV, p. 7.
 20. Although Locke talks a great deal about the way in which "active powers" and "passive capacities" of material objects cause ideas in us, it is not to be considered that he holds the view that substance is identical with power. Locke explicitly repudiates this view in his study of Sergeant's philosophy, that "matter is a solid substance and not a power". cf. J. W. Yolton, "Locke's Unpublished Marginal Replies to John Sergeant", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 12 (1951), pp. 528-59.
- Locke's notion of substance is also connected with his distinction between *real* and *nominal* essences. But he does not discuss that topic before Book III of the *Essay* and I leave it aside.
21. *John Locke*, p. 175.
 22. *Ibid*, p. 175.
 23. Odegard tries to show that if substance is a substratum, experience cannot provide ideas of specific substances. "Locke and Substance", p. 251.
 24. *Understanding Locke* (Edinburgh, 1983), p. 90.
 25. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 16.

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