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Introduction

To study the writings of John Locke is to expose oneself to a whole range of issues and concepts typical of seventeenth-century thought. Both in his actions and in his thought, Locke touched most aspects of his century. Born in 1632, during the reign of Charles I, Locke was at Westminster School (1647–52) when Charles was tried and executed in 1649. During the civil wars that preceded this dramatic event (1642–6), Locke's father, a modest landowner and attorney in Somerset, fought for a while in the Royalist army. From 1649 to 1660, Oliver Cromwell and Parliament ruled England in place of a monarch. Cromwell was given the title of Protector in 1653, one year after Locke entered Christ Church at Oxford. When the country returned to a monarchy – of a modified sort – in 1660, Locke was still at Oxford, as a tutor.

These social and political events gave Locke an early exposure to issues that were reflected in his writings. The constitutional struggles between Charles I and Parliament raised, in a striking way, questions about the nature of government, the relations between government and the people, the limits of responsibility and sovereignty. The bold experiment in rule by Parliament tested an alternative to monarchy. These and later conflicts turned Locke's thoughts toward the topics in his *Two Treatises*. The Civil War also raised issues of religious toleration, issues that came more to a head later in the century and about which Locke also wrote.

Locke's education at Westminster School was a standard classical one. The curriculum at Oxford was very traditional, but Locke and other students at Oxford – even some of the faculty – were questioning aspects of the subjects taught and the books read. Locke's discontent with the curriculum at Oxford is reflected in remarks he makes in some of his writings. We know too that he made contacts while at Oxford with some of the important figures in the developing new sciences – Robert Boyle, Robert Hooke, John Wallis, John Wilkins, Thomas Sydenham – who helped to form the Royal Soci-

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ety. A friendship with Newton came later. Locke also studied medicine while at Oxford, taking a bachelor's degree in that subject in 1674. He became something of a practitioner in medicine. His friendship with Dr. Sydenham was stimulated by their common interests in breaking free from the confines of traditional diagnostics based on theories instead of observation.

Locke did not just think and write about issues raised in politics, religion, science, and philosophy; he was a man of action also. He went as secretary to the diplomatic mission of Sir Walter Vane to Brandenburg (1665). Later he held the posts of Secretary to the Lords Proprietors of Carolina (1668–75), Secretary to the Council of Trade and Plantations (1673–5), and Commissioner in the Board of Trade (1696–1700). Perhaps the most important post held by Locke was that of secretary and family doctor to Anthony Ashley Cooper (later, Lord Shaftesbury) from 1667 to 1683. Shaftesbury played a prominent role in Charles II's reign, engaging in actions after 1672, that were interpreted as treasonable. Shaftesbury fled to Holland, where he died in 1683. Locke believed himself possibly to be in jeopardy, because of his close association with Shaftesbury. There were in fact government spies at Christ Church keeping watch on Locke. Locke followed Shaftesbury to Holland in 1682. He was formally expelled from Christ Church by royal decree shortly thereafter.

All of Locke's writings (published and unpublished) came as reactions and responses to events around him. *Two Treatises* and some early essays on the civil magistrate (1660–1) were clearly responding to social and political events. These two works were also and more directly responses to specific publications with which Locke took exception: for *Two Treatises* it was Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, for the civil magistrate essays it was Edward Bagshawe's *The Great Question concerning Things Indifferent in Religious Worship*.[1] His *A Letter concerning Toleration* articulated his thoughts on religious toleration, activated by events and by discussions with a Dutch theologian, Philip Limborch. The *Essay concerning Human Understanding* was begun when, in 1671, Locke and a few friends were discussing certain problems in religion and morality. Correspondence with a close friend concerning a son's education, resulted in extensive advice from the bachelor Locke, which eventually became his *Some Thoughts concerning Education*. When economic problems arose during the reign of William

1 Locke's replies to Bagshawe have recently been published by Philip Abrams as *John Locke: Two Tracts on Government* (Cambridge University Press, 1967).

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and Mary, Locke wrote several tracts on coinage, which he meant as advice to the government.

Locke's reactions to events and issues were usually preceded by careful reading in books and pamphlets relevant to each topic. His library provides a handy guide to the publications of his time, as well as to Locke's own interests and knowledge.[2] His holdings are extensive in religion and theology; in the sciences, politics, philosophy; and in travel books. He used his books to make extensive notes in his journals. Often these journal entries were quotations from his readings; sometimes they took the form of jottings of his own ideas. He frequently wrote drafts of his later books; the *Essay* alone had four drafts.[3] With the careful catalogue that Locke made of his library, and from his notebooks, drafts, and occasional jottings, we can reconstruct a fairly trustworthy account of the source and nature of many of his ideas. We are thus able to avoid the error of pushing Locke's thought into molds for which it was not designed. Nor do we have merely to assume that he had some author in mind when he wrote on a particular issue; in very many cases, we can discover whom he had in mind, even when Locke does not always name his target.

It is evident that in philosophy he wrote from an intimate acquaintance with Descartes and the debates among the Cartesians; he followed Arnauld and the Port Royal *Logic* rather than Malebranche.[4] Gassendi's combination of Aristotle and scholastic doctrines is also much in evidence in Locke's writing. That he had a good knowledge of Bacon and had read widely in the many reformulations and modifications of Bacon to be found in writers on the new sciences is also plain from his *Essay* and his library holdings.[5] In religion, it was the Deist and Unitarian notions that

2 Locke's catalogue of his library has been published by John Harrison and Peter Laslett, *The Library of John Locke* (Oxford, 1965; second edition, 1971).

3 Draft A is available as, *An Early Draft of Locke's Essay*, ed. Aaron and Gibb (1936). All drafts will be printed in the collected edition of Locke's works now under way by the Oxford University Press.

4 See Antoine Arnauld and P. Nicole, *La Logique ou l'Art de penser* (Paris, third edition, 1668). Arnauld also had an extended debate with Malebranche over the nature and role of ideas in knowledge, a debate that Locke followed closely: see Arnauld's *Des vraies et des fausses idées* (Cologne, 1683) and Malebranche's *De la recherche de la vérité* (Paris, 1674).

5 Gassendi's works were published in Latin. They were available to Locke but all that was in his library was an abridgment by Bernier, *Abrégé de la philosophie de Gassendi* (Lyon, 1678). For a detailed study of Gassendi, see O. R. Bloch, *La philosophie de Gassendi* (The Hague, 1971). For Locke's knowledge of Bacon, see the important article by Neal Wood, "The Baconian Character of Locke's Essay," in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* (1975).

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he found attractive.[6] In general, it was the newer ideas in all areas of thought to which Locke was attracted and gave support. In the disputes between ancients and moderns, Locke was on the side of the latter. Hobbes was of course well known, although the references to him by Locke are few. His reading among the contemporary theologians, as among the writers on politics and the law of nature, was also extensive.

Locke's association with and sympathies for the new and the modern, against tradition, meant that during his life he was never very far from controversy and radical change. A member of the Royal Society, he was associated with those who were the object of attack against the new science. His association with Thomas Sydenham, the doctor, led him into challenges against the medical practices of his day: Sydenham and Locke insisted upon careful observation of symptoms and on cures based upon those observations. Diagnostics in medicine thus broke free of the more traditional indifference to experimentation and observation. Locke's close association with Shaftesbury undoubtedly contributed to his expulsion by royal order from Christ Church, Oxford, and forced him to retreat to Holland. He returned to England as William of Orange came to assume the throne. *Two Treatises*, whether designed to nudge the revolution of 1688 or to justify it, aligned itself with these changing political developments. Holding office in the Board of Trade, he had interests in and business with the new world of America. His sympathies with some of the newer currents in religion placed him again on the side of those who were challenging orthodoxy: the reasonableness and simplicity of doctrine that he insisted upon were seen as threats to religious beliefs.

Many of the doctrines of his *Essay* were quickly seized upon as undermining traditional religion. His rejection of innate ideas and principles, his account of substance and of our limited knowledge of nature, his general skepticism about the extent of human knowledge, his suggestion that matter might be given the power of thought, that immateriality of the soul was not necessary for immortality, that sameness of body was not needed for resurrection after death; all these and more were direct and disturbing challenges to the accepted practices, doctrines, and beliefs of his day. The study of the reception of Locke's works reveals the extent of the reactions against most of his views. The reactions came from learned divines and philosophers, as well as more general readers. But the *Essay*, the *Reasonableness*, the *Education*, his *Toleration*,

6 See my *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* (Oxford, 1956, reprinted 1968), Chapters IV and V.

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and his *Two Treatises* spoke for most of the forward-looking movements of the seventeenth century. He himself kept in touch with new developments in all these areas, as his library and reading notes indicate. He became the spokesman for most of the newer views, absorbing ideas, changing and clarifying them, questioning some, articulating doctrines in a more systematic and felicitous way than most other writers. Although some writers anticipated many of the epistemological views of Locke's *Essay*, they tended to stay with more traditional attitudes in religion, or to show little awareness of the developments in science and medicine. Locke, of course, borrowed much from his close friend Robert Boyle, but even there Locke located Boyle's account of original or absolute qualities (in contrast with relative ones), or Boyle's recognition of the conventional nature of our classifications, in a more extensive account of knowledge and meaning. The Cartesian influence on Locke is marked (that of Arnauld in particular), the way of ideas of the *Essay* is Locke's translation of and transmission to Britain of many of the Cartesian concepts and doctrines, but Locke adapts these doctrines to philosophy of science in a way that differs markedly from Descartes' account of science or of scientific knowledge. The recognition of the importance of language for knowledge and communication also finds its defenders in his predecessors (in Wilkins, for example),[7] but here again, Locke gives greater attention to language as a system of signs, relating it more directly to human knowledge and to ideas. There were also many treatises of psychology, works on the soul (Digby, Charleton, Burthogge),[8] that anticipated the more extended developments in Locke's writings, but no one before Locke gave such a systematic account of the operations of the mind.

Developments in logic, an area that Locke is usually thought to have despised, especially those represented by the Port Royal *Logic*, were also picked up and extended by Locke. These logics, and those that followed and for the most part copied Locke in eighteenth-century Britain (Watts, Duncan, Edward Bentham),[9]

7 John Wilkins, *As Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (London, 1668).

8 Walter Charleton, *The Immortality of the Human Soul* (London, 1657) and *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charletoniana* (London, 1654); Sir Kenelm Digby, *Two Treatises* (Paris, 1644); Richard Burthogge, *An Essay upon Reason, and the Nature of Spirits* (London, 1694) and *Organum Vetus et Novum* (London, 1678).

9 Edward Bentham, *Reflections upon Logick* (London, 1740; second edition, 1755), *Introduction to Logic* (Oxford, 1773); William Duncan, *The Elements of Logic* (London, 1748); and Isaac Watts, *Logick: Or, the Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry After Truth* (London, 1726).

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were epistemic logics concerned with the natural history of the understanding. They, like Locke's *Essay*, followed the classifications of the operations of the mind used by the older logics: simple apprehension, perception, judgment, and reasoning. One of the most popular logics in the eighteenth century was *The Elements of Logic* (1748), by William Duncan. Duncan even calls logic "the History of the human Mind, inasmuch as it traces the Progress of our Knowledge, from our first and simple Perceptions." Duncan's language, examples, and order of presentation are very close copies (sometimes verbatim) of passages in Locke's *Essay*. This fact may seem to tell us more about Duncan than it does about logic, but the truth is that it tells us a very great deal about the nature of eighteenth-century British logics. It also helps us appreciate how Locke was viewed as an important logician, at least as a contributor to logic. Edward Bentham (*Reflections upon Logick*, 2nd edition, 1755) even compared "The Logical Theory contained in *Mr. Locke's Essay*" with "that of the Schools," although Bentham thought Locke went too much into the details of the operations of the mind for a proper logic. Bentham tried to separate the natural history of man from logic, but even he, in his later *Introduction to Logic* (1773), starts off with a chapter on the soul, its powers and operations.

Locke was classed among the logicians by several historians of logic in the early nineteenth century. *Lectures on Locke; or, The Principles of Logic* (1840) was in large part an outline of Locke's *Essay*. The anonymous author divides logic into practical and speculative, the latter being mental philosophy. Before Locke, the author says, this latter kind of logic was never carried very far. Similarly, in his *Historical Sketch of Logic* (1851), Robert Blakey says that Locke's *Essay* "has given birth to a more diversified series of logical systems and speculations, as well as modes of teaching, than any other work since the days of Aristotle." Another late eighteenth-century logic followed Locke closely, *Lectures on Belles Lettres and Logic* (1806), lectures given by William Baron for many years at the University of Saint Andrews.

I stress the developments in eighteenth-century British logics, and Locke's role in them, because it is one way to appreciate how Locke's *Essay* and his *Conduct* set the issues and the language for the eighteenth century. But it is important to be aware of these epistemic logics for another reason: for the way in which they helped to develop the foundations of psychology. They were, as was Locke, in the same tradition with Hume, in seeking bases for

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the science of man, to match those supplied by Newton for the science of nature. Locke considered theory of knowledge to be the foundation for all three of the divisions of knowledge cited at the end of the *Essay*. Theory of knowledge was for him primarily descriptive. The distinction between it and psychology was hardly drawn. Just as Locke and many of his friends in the Royal Society thought advances in science at that time required much more information, so Locke saw the advance of the sciences of man to be dependent upon a careful account of the various operations, faculties, and capacities of the human mind. Philosophy of mind merged imperceptibly with psychology. The extensive vocabulary of mental-operation words in the *Essay*, together with the fact that the main divisions of the *Essay* were based upon the basic kinds of mental activity recognized in old and new logics, is a clear indication of the extent to which Locke contributed to the emerging science of psychology. That psychological-epistemological doctrines were recognized by Locke's contemporaries as essential to religious and moral doctrines as well is what the many and often violent reactions of divines to Locke's writings indicate. Thus, to read Locke's works in religion, on education, and on political theory with his psychological-epistemological concepts in hand is to arm ourselves with some of the conceptual tools for the science of man that he and some of his followers were supplying.

It was not only the epistemology of the *Essay* that embroiled Locke in heated controversy (in which he seldom took any part). His account of the person and of human action also raised various protests, but it also had several defenders. The concept of the person is especially important for education and politics. Locke's distinction between man and person puzzled many of his readers, especially since he discounted sameness of substance for person identity. The denial of substance as relevant to sameness of person was, in the late seventeenth century, somewhat novel. *Person* for Locke was, as he said, a forensic term, referring to the subject of praise and blame, obligation and duty. Locke did not mean that the person was divorced or separated from the body, only that person and body make up the man, the *moral* man. The person is the agent of action, but actions take place in the world: they require the body for their execution. It is the moral man – the person – on whom we direct our training, for whom civil government is formed. The person is also the basis for Locke's account of property in *Two Treatises*, for my person (an odd phrase but one Locke needs to make his point) is my property; it is also the

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means whereby I can legitimately acquire more property. The person is the source of privacy, but the person is also a public figure, a social being. It was most important for Locke's view of society that we understand the proper nature of the person: not a metaphysical substance whose nature is unavailable to us, but a living, responsible, responsive being, aware of his intentions and actions, expressing them by means of his organic body.

Another feature of the *Essay* that excited Locke's contemporaries was his offhand suggestion that God might be able to superadd to matter the power of thinking. The controversy surrounding this suggestion extended to the end of the eighteenth century. Around it there focused many important debates over the nature of matter and spirit, debates that involved the Newtonians as well as more general readers. These debates, conducted for the most part after Locke's death, began to modify Locke's concept of the person. They were concerned to understand how it is that the person acts in his body. As long as the body, as matter, was thought of as passive and inert, the defenders of the view that the person or soul is aloof from its body even while attached to it had room for argument. But as the concept of matter moved more toward power and force, many writers were able to make a case for a close integration of self and body. In fact, a new materialism emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century that stressed the complexity of the brain and that sought for some way of expressing the integration of intention and action in one organized piece of matter.

I have given these brief hints of the fate of Locke's doctrines in eighteenth-century British thought – hints that have not yet been fully explored or documented – because it may help us appreciate the centrality of most of Locke's doctrines for those that followed him. Locke's influence on eighteenth-century thought in Britain is extensive. Often that influence goes along with that of the Cartesians, especially Malebranche. The nature of human action (e.g., how I am able to move my arm), the physiological basis for thought and action, the connection or lack of connection between thought and matter: these were eighteenth-century issues that are repeatedly traced to Locke's formulation of them in the seventeenth century. One can find, in the tracts and pamphlets of the eighteenth century, frequent usage of Lockean terminology and concepts. That usage is found not only in the logics, but in works on science, in the sermons and books of theologians, in more general publications such as *The Annual Register, The Monthly*

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Review, The Spectator. This absorption of Lockean language and concepts occurred earlier as well, almost as soon as the *Essay* appeared. Many of the divines who attacked Locke were the first to accept or to use his doctrines. Although a writer might attack Locke on his definition of knowledge, that same writer would often accept Locke's account of our ignorance of the real essence of matter. Another writer objects to the many new words Locke introduced into the language, while himself employing some of those words elsewhere in his writing. The quick absorption of Locke's language and concepts by his contemporaries is another indication of the impact his ideas had on his own and the following centuries.

Thus, not only is Locke an important figure in the seventeenth century, but to read eighteenth-century philosophy (certainly in Britain, but also in France, where certain aspects of his theory of knowledge in particular were influential) is to find oneself pursuing problems and issues raised by Locke. Hume's influence did not really get under way much before the nineteenth century. The combination of Hume and Kant has dominated English-speaking philosophy down to our own time. But there were of course a number of philosophical movements in the twentieth century that hark back to Locke, sometimes filtered through Reid and Stewart (even, perhaps, distorted). It is probably fair to say that even the tradition stemming from Kant and Hume has been working with the problems articulated by Locke and other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers influenced by him in one way or other.

We should not conclude from the sentiments expressed by Locke in the epitaph he wrote for his gravestone (see the Frontispiece) that, like the stone itself, he expected his doctrines to perish. He would not think truth would perish, though he would hope what errors there may be in his works would. What is true is that neither the tablet near his grave nor his doctrines have dissolved with time. The tablet at All Saints Church, High Laver in Essex, has been aided in its survival by being moved inside the Church by persons concerned that this memorial should survive. Locke's doctrines have survived even under the eroding climate of adverse opinion and repeated attacks. Locke is a good place to look for anyone interested in the basic problems of philosophy.

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Preliminary: Locke on Hermeneutics

In approaching the work of any author, we need to be aware of his context, of the assumption he may have taken for granted, meanings of words that may be indigenous to his time and place. Texts in languages other than our own, ancient texts distant from our own time pose even greater obligations for us to discover the author's meaning and intention. Locke is not so distant from us that we cannot with care and attention understand him without importing interpretations not intended by Locke. Being not so distant is in fact a hazard, for we are tempted to think Locke's speech and thought are more like our own than they may in fact be. Philosophers have not helped by using labels for linking doctrines in various periods. *Empiricism* applied to Locke and to philosophers in each succeeding century has done much damage in this way. The interpreters of Locke have subjected him to a host of such labels, all of which should be put aside if we want to discover what Locke was saying. Knowledge of the art of reading a text is necessary if we want to understand Locke, not just use him for our own devices.

We know a good deal about Locke's reading; we have his own catalogue of his library. We can acquaint ourselves with the scientific, theological, and philosophical world in which Locke lived. We can discover what doctrines he was writing against, trace out ideas and concepts borrowed from others. By reading Robert Boyle or Robert Hooke, for example, we can find in more detail the general attitudes toward science and some specific doctrines of science reflected in Locke's *Essay*. By reading in the Cartesian literature (e.g., Malebranche, Arnauld, and of course Descartes) we can appreciate better the notion of ideas em-

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