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Nicholas Wolterstorff interprets and discusses the ethics of belief which Locke developed in the latter part of Book IV of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. After lengthy discussions on the origin of ideas, the nature of language, and the nature of knowledge, Locke got around to arguing what he indicated in the opening Epistle to the Reader to be his overarching aim: how we ought to govern our belief, especially (though by no means only) on matters of religion and morality. Professor Wolterstorff shows that what above all placed this topic on Locke's agenda was the collapse, in his day, of a once-unified moral and religious tradition in Europe into warring factions. Locke's epistemology was thus a culturally and socially engaged one; it was his response to the great cultural crisis of his day. Convinced also that of genuine knowledge we human beings have very little, Locke argued that instead of following tradition we ought to turn "to the things themselves" and let "Reason be your guide." This view of Locke, in which centrality is given to the last book of the *Essay*, invites an interpretation of the origins of modern philosophy different from most of the current ones. Accordingly, after discussing Hume's powerful attack on Locke's recommended practice, Wolterstorff argues for Locke's originality and discusses his contribution to the "modernity" of post-sixteenth-century philosophy.

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**CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN RELIGION
AND CRITICAL THOUGHT 2**

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CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN RELIGION
AND CRITICAL THOUGHT

Edited by
Wayne Proudfoot (Columbia University),
Jeffrey L. Stout (Princeton University),
and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Yale University)

Since the Enlightenment, there has been debate, at times heated, over the implications of critical thought for our understanding of religious ideas and institutions. Disciplinary boundaries have always mattered less to the debate than certain acknowledged exemplars of critical thinking. Locke, Hume, Kant, Marx, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Freud, and Durkheim long ago became canonical figures, but the list of model critics has never been stable, and continues to proliferate. Struggles against sexism, racism, and imperialism have all produced prominent critics of their own. Now, complicating matters further, the idea of critical thought is itself under attack. At the same time, many scholars are returning to religious traditions in search of resources for their critique of contemporary society and culture. Cambridge Studies in Religion and Critical Thought is a series of books intended to address the various interactions of critical thinking and religious tradition in this rapidly changing context. The series will take up the following questions, either by reflecting on them philosophically or by pursuing their ramifications in studies of specific figures and movements: Is a coherent critical perspective on religion desirable or even possible? If so, what would it look like, and how might it answer charges of reductionism, relativism, and nihilism? Should it aspire to take the form of a systematic theory? What sort of relationship to religious tradition ought a critic to have? One of detachment? Of active opposition? Of empathy? Of identification? What, if anything, is worth saving from the Enlightenment legacy or from critics of religion like Hume and Feuerbach? Where else should we look for guidance in critically appraising religious traditions? To premodern philosophers? To postmodern texts? To the religious traditions themselves? When we turn to specific religious traditions, what resources for criticizing modern society and culture do we find? The answers offered will be varied, but will uniformly constitute distinguished, philosophically informed, critical analyses of particular religious topics.

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JOHN LOCKE AND THE ETHICS OF BELIEF

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Preface

There's a story making the rounds today about the beginnings of modern philosophy in which John Locke is either villain or tragic hero – take your pick. According to this story, the core of modern philosophy was epistemology, “theory of knowledge”; and epistemology was the project of discovering the nature, foundations, and scope of knowledge.

Philosophy as a discipline thus [saw] itself as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art, or religion. It [purported] to do this on the basis of its special understanding of the nature of knowledge and of mind. Philosophy can be foundational in respect to the rest of culture because culture is the assemblage of claims to knowledge, and philosophy adjudicates such claims. It can do so because it understands the foundations of knowledge, and it finds these foundations in a study of man-as-knower, of the “mental processes” or the “activity of representation” which make knowledge possible . . . Philosophy's central concern [was] to be a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into the areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (despite their pretense of doing so).¹

It is to the seventeenth century in general, but “especially to Locke” that “we owe the notion of [philosophy as] a “theory of knowledge” based on an understanding of “mental processes.”²

Locke is villain or tragic hero in that story because the story itself has turned out to be either pathetic or tragic: We now know it to have been an illusion that philosophy-as-epistemology could be “an autonomous discipline . . . distinct from and sitting in judgment upon”³ religion and art, science and morality.

In this book I tell a different story about the same events. In this

¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 3. ² *Ibid.*, p. 131. ³ *Loc.cit.*

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alternative story Locke is not the philosopher in the tower rendering judgments on who knows what and how, but the philosopher in the street offering advice to his anxious combative compatriots on how to overcome the cultural crisis engulfing them. Locke was as much a cultural philosopher in his epistemology as he was a social philosopher in his political theory. For centuries European humanity had resolved its moral and religious quandaries by appealing to its intellectual inheritance – its tradition. By Locke’s day and in Locke’s place this tradition had split into warring fragments. Thus on the cultural agenda there was the question: How should we form our beliefs on fundamental matters of religion and morality so as to live together in social harmony, when we can no longer appeal to a shared and unified tradition? This anxious question motivated Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke does indeed offer a “theory of knowledge.” But that theory of knowledge, though important in its own right, and no doubt regarded by Locke as important in its own right, is placed in the *Essay* as a step on the path toward answering that other question which Locke regarded as much more important. Knowledge, said he, is “short and scanty.” How are we to pick our way when we find ourselves forced, as we all are, to leave the small clearing of knowledge and enter the twilight of belief and disbelief?

I did not *set out* to tell a different story about the origins of modern philosophy; I set out to understand better the traditional story so as to resolve some of my own perplexities. The alternative story emerged unexpectedly, slowly, fitfully – begging a reluctant author to tell it, like Pirandello’s characters in search of an author.

It is about twenty-five years ago now that I first became perplexed over the challenge so widely issued to religious people that they must have evidence for their religious beliefs – evidence consisting of other beliefs. It was insisted that at bottom a person might not *reason from* his or her religious beliefs but had to *reason to* them from other beliefs. Why was this? I asked. Nobody assumed, for example, that all our perceptual beliefs had to be based on other beliefs; what was it about one and all religious beliefs that made them different? Eventually I (along with colleagues of mine at Calvin College) concluded that the culprit in the matter was the assumption that foundationalism, specifically, “classically modern” foundationalism, states the truth of the matter concerning proper belief-formation.⁴ So I reflected on the

⁴ By a *classical* foundationalist I mean one who holds that the only *immediate* (basic) beliefs which possess whatever be the doxastic merit in question are those whose content is either a

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tenability of this epistemological position, eventually concluding that, when clearly formulated and then held up to the light, it is decisively mistaken – and it makes no difference whether it is offered as a criterion for acceptance of scientific theories, as a criterion for entitlement to ordinary beliefs about the world and religious matters, or whatever. Almost two decades ago, then, I published my objections; and along with my then-colleague, Alvin Plantinga, worked out an alternative in the domain of religious belief which we called “Reformed epistemology.”⁵

But my attack, and that of others of which I was aware, left me feeling uneasy. If classical and near-classical foundationalism, in the versions of it which I and others had attacked, seemed to me so obviously unacceptable, why had so many great philosophers found it compelling? Why did my own students so often find the prospect of surrendering it disturbing? Apparently something deep was at stake. Our attack remained too superficial; the depths had not yet been probed, the motivation and attraction not yet laid bare. So I looked for exponents of (classical and near-classical) foundationalism in whom what was deep came to the surface. This led me eventually to Locke. Not to Descartes; though I looked there first. But I became persuaded – I shall present my case in the pages that follow – that Descartes’s foundationalism was far more restricted and traditional in its scope than was Locke’s. Descartes espoused a foundationalist account of *scientia* (science) and only of that – though it must at once be added that he had expansive expectations concerning the potential scope of *scientia*. Locke’s foundationalism was meant for all human beings, whether or not they were engaged in science. It is that wider Lockian foundationalism which has shaped the modern mind. More important for me: In Locke’s foundationalism there is revealed, more clearly than in Descartes’s, that depth for which I was looking. What lures and inspires the typical foundationalist is the conviction that it is possible for us human beings to have direct insight into certain of the facts of reality – to have direct awareness. An added benefit was that

proposition self-evident to the person, or a proposition which is an incorrigible report of a mental act or object of the person.

⁵ We called it (not very felicitously) “Reformed epistemology” because we took it to be characteristic of the Reformed tradition of Christianity. My earliest objections to classical foundationalism can be found in *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1976). The best statement of Reformed epistemology was given in the essays by Alston, Plantinga, and myself in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

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with great care and articulateness Locke drew out of his foundationalism its evidentialist implications for religious belief.

I had to overcome strong prejudices. In the philosophical world I inhabit, Locke has the reputation of being boringly chatty and philosophically careless – having been too busy with the practical matters of making money and participating in revolutionary politics to have thought with profundity. Quite some time ago I had read Books I and II of Locke's *Essay*. The reputation seemed to me eminently just. The prose itself seemed plodding and lustreless, compared to the quick glittery sheen of Descartes's writing. But now I leaped over the first three books of the *Essay* and plunged into Book IV, concentrating on its second half. I felt myself present at the making of the modern mind.

A second path led me to Locke. It is widely assumed nowadays that anti-foundationalism in epistemology requires anti-realism in metaphysics – requires embracing the view that there is no way the world is except relative to some conceptual scheme. In fact there is no such requirement. I remain a thorough-going metaphysical realist who is also an anti-foundationalist. One day I happened to read some pages of Thomas Reid; I do not remember why. Reid, in spite of his eighteenth-century fame and nineteenth-century influence, has fallen out of the canon of modern philosophy. At once I recognized a soul-mate, a metaphysical realist who was an anti-foundationalist. Indeed, Reid was the first great anti-foundationalist of the modern tradition; intervening centuries have dimmed neither the rhetorical brilliance nor the philosophical power of his attack. So I resolved to write a book on Thomas Reid, not only to rescue him from his undeserved oblivion but to give presence in the current discussion to this overlooked option of anti-foundationalist realism. But I found I could not lay out Reid's thought without first laying out Locke's thought. Reid's thought on epistemological matters was shaped by his polemic against what he called "The Way of Ideas"; and though Reid regarded Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume as all espousing The Way of Ideas, it came to seem to me that Locke was the central formative figure. So I planned an introductory chapter on Locke's epistemology. That chapter insisted on becoming a book.

There was yet a third path which led me to Locke. In an essay I had written defending religious belief against foundationalist critique,⁶ I

⁶ "Can Religion be Rational if it has no Foundations?" in Plantinga and Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality*.

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had joined a wide range of epistemologists in speaking of us human beings as having responsibilities for our beliefs; and I had announced that I would make it my practice to use “rational” as a synonym for “permissible”: The rational belief is the permissible belief, i.e., the belief which does not violate the relevant norms. I thought of myself, in this resolution, as following established linguistic practice. What had struck me was the fact that discussions concerning what we *ought to* believe were regularly conducted in the language of what it was rational to believe. I noticed that there was a powerful impulse toward saying of everything judged acceptable for believing that it was rational to believe it, and of everything judged unacceptable, that it was not rational to believe it. “Rational,” I concluded, was a synonym of “permissible” in these discussions.

Then doubts set in. Does not rationality, at its core, have to do with reasons, or reasoning, or Reason? If so, then surely rationality is not simply to be *identified* with the root idea behind such words as “should,” “permissible,” “ought,” and “responsible.” In the interweaving of the language of rationality with the language of obligation we are dealing with something deeper than mere linguistic practice. Coming to the surface is the unspoken assumption that what we ought to believe has something intimate to do with reasons, and/or reasoning, and/or Reason. But why make that assumption? There is more to human life, more even to the life of the mind, than reasons, reasoning, and Reason. So why give rationality such exalted status? Obviously a look into the literature on rationality was called for.

I immersed myself for a while. But the immersion had on me the opposite effect of that hoped for. I had hoped to understand why rationality was assumed to have something special to do with what we ought to believe. Instead of illumination I experienced bewilderment. Obviously those participating in the discussions saw themselves as having sharp disagreements with each other. Often intense passions were attached to those disagreements. One thinker saw rationality as an instrument of oppression; another, as a source of enlightenment and liberation. One lamented the spread of rationality in the modern world; another, its lack. But were they talking about the same phenomenon? And those who offered theories of rationality: Were they offering competing analyses of the same concept and competing theories as to the conditions under which that concept has application, or were they working with different concepts and thus just missing each other?

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There are fundamentally two ways of extricating oneself from an intellectual predicament of this sort. One can compose a taxonomy in which one distinguishes the issues under discussion and lays out the structurally distinct options on those issues. Or one can engage in the archaeology of cultural memory, with the aim of telling the story of how we got to where we are in our thinking – in this case, in our thinking about rationality and our assuming that what we ought to believe has something special to do with rationality. A good telling of the story would uncover the assumptions behind our way of thinking, some of which have perhaps fallen out of consciousness; and would uncover the purposes which those ways of thinking once served or were thought to serve. Thus it would help us understand our confusion: We would see that concepts which may once have had a function in a certain intellectual and social milieu no longer have that in ours. We would see the whole to which the shards once belonged. Thus the taxonomic and archaeological approaches ideally serve the same end, that of illuminating our predicament and inviting suggestions as to how to extricate ourselves from it.

I decided to practice the archaeology of cultural memory so as to tell the story of how we got to where we are in our thinking. To my considerable surprise I was once again led to John Locke. Locke was the first to develop with profundity and defend the thesis that we are all responsible for our believings, and that to do one's duty with respect to one's believings one must, at appropriate junctures and in appropriate ways, listen to the voice of Reason. Reason must be one's guide. Locke had forebears and cohorts in this line of thought; I want not only to concede but to insist on this. Nonetheless, Locke was the great genius behind our modern ways of thinking of rationality and responsibility in beliefs. And Locke's vision became classic: for many, compelling; by some, contested; by no one, ignored. Locke, *on this issue*, is the father of modernity.

In short, three different paths of inquiry led me to Locke's epistemology. His thought has proved maddeningly elusive, however. Over and over, lines of interpretation which initially seemed promising led to dead ends. Rather soon I concluded, along with other recent commentators, that the traditional school-book interpretation of Locke, which places the *Essay's* center of gravity in Book II, must be rejected. The center of gravity is Book IV; that is clear from Locke's own comments about the *Essay*. It's true that issues of intrinsic interest are raised in the other three books, issues intrinsically interesting to

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Locke himself. Nonetheless, these books *as a whole* are to be read as preparation for Book iv. The traditional neo-Hegelian interpretation of Locke as an empiricist is based on emphasizing Books i and ii and all but ignoring Book iv. When Book iv is given its due and intended weight, it becomes clear that Locke is one of the great rationalists of the Western philosophical tradition. More precisely: In his discussion concerning the origin of “ideas” in Book ii, Locke is an empiricist; but in his discussion of the nature of knowledge and the proper governance of belief in Book iv, Locke gives to Reason a central role. It is not hard to see how the neo-Hegelian misinterpretation, once it arose, got perpetuated. Most readers, by the time they get to the end of Book ii, have run out of time and patience; they move on to something else. Long books in which the main point gets developed only toward the end inevitably run the great risk of being misunderstood!

Another feature of the *Essay* proved to be a far greater obstacle to interpretation. Eventually I concluded that to make sense of Locke, I had to distinguish between what in the following exposition I call the *visionary* passages of the *Essay* and the *craftsmanly* passages. A typical strategy of Locke, when discussing a topic, is first to present his thought in eloquent visionary unqualified language, then to elaborate and articulate his thought with great philosophical craftsmanship, and then to close by returning to the visionary. Unfortunately, he never brings these two sides of his genius into harmony with each other. For what he says in the detailed working out of his thought regularly undercuts the visionary statement; the qualifications and elaborations not only amplify but deconstruct the official formulations. Locke is to be counted among Locke’s most acute critics. Thus arise many, though indeed not all, of the oft-remarked “inconsistencies” in Locke. Obviously this pattern confronts the interpreter with a serious problem. The solution must consist of keeping both sides of Locke’s genius in view – the visionary and the craftsmanly. But it takes a long time before one feels able to draw the line with any confidence.

The difficulty of getting hold of Locke’s thought proved, in my own case, to have a source deeper yet than either of these. As will be evident from the foregoing, I came to Locke with my own questions and assumptions. So it always is. I concluded after a while that Locke’s main aim in Book iv was to offer a theory of entitled (i.e., permitted, responsible) belief. His picture, so I concluded, was that there are norms for believing and that beliefs are entitled if they do not violate those norms. I saw him as endeavoring to formulate those

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norms and defend his formulation. I recognized that he also proposed a theory of knowledge earlier in Book iv, and the rudiments of a theory of rationality. But these, though important, were situated as components in his larger endeavor of offering a theory of entitled belief.

More generally, I saw Locke as primarily engaged in *regulative*, as opposed to *analytic*, epistemology. In analytic epistemology one explores the conditions under which one or another merit is present in beliefs. Theories of knowledge and theories of rationality belong to analytic epistemology. They are not meant to offer guidance, except, of course, guidance in analysis for those who wish to pick out knowledge from non-knowledge and rationality from non-rationality. In regulative epistemology, on the other hand, one discusses how we ought to conduct our understandings – what we ought to do by way of forming beliefs. The title of one of Locke’s small books, *The Conduct of the Understanding*, was for me the clue that his concern was regulative epistemology – that, plus the fact that he so regularly spoke about our *obligation* to govern our belief-forming faculties.

Only recently did I see that I was mistaken. Not mistaken in my conviction that regulative epistemology was Locke’s over-riding concern, and that his excursions into analytic epistemology are ancillary to that. Mistaken in assuming that his intent was to offer a criterion for entitled belief. For one thing, I had quite early concluded that one of the main motivations of Locke’s endeavor was his wish to address the cultural crisis of his day; I have already spoken of that. But a criterion of entitled belief would not be a response to this crisis. It would not address this anxiety. It took me a long time to acknowledge this.

Secondly, though the recommendations Locke offers for one’s conduct of one’s understanding are typically couched in universalistic language, it gradually became clear to me that he did not intend them to be interpreted universalistically – that I had to draw the line between the visionary and the craftsmanly passages differently from how I had been drawing it. “Listen to the voice of Reason,” Locke says; “let Reason be your guide.” But in the course of explaining what this listening and guidance come to, Locke makes clear his view that one is obligated to do this only for propositions which are of maximal “concernment” to one, as he calls it. Only if a proposition is of maximal “concernment” to one does entitlement to believe require listening to the voice of Reason. Concerning all other cases, Locke has nothing to say. For a long time I tried to make him say something

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about all those other cases. But he has nothing to say. Locke has no general theory of belief-entitlement.

I think we can best understand what Locke was doing by employing the concept of a *doxastic practice* (Greek *doxa* = belief). Locke was proposing a reform in the doxastic practices of his day. Those practices, he thought, were incapable of coping with the cultural crisis engulfing Europe in general and England in particular; they had, in fact, contributed to that crisis. Sometimes the issue of whether or not to believe a certain proposition is of such importance to one – such “concernment” – that one is obligated to try seriously to do one’s best to get in touch with reality on this point. Locke’s proposals, I came to see, were proposals as to what *doing one’s best* consists of. Locke is indeed a near-classical foundationalist – but not with respect to *scientia*, or knowledge, or warrant, or justification, or entitlement – or any of the other merits in belief so regularly discussed in present-day epistemology. Locke was a near-classical foundationalist concerning doing one’s best to get in touch with reality. And since Locke regarded his fellow citizens as not doing their best, when they should be, and not believing with a firmness appropriate to the results of that endeavor, his proposals had the status of proposals for reform. Locke was urging on his fellows that they reform their doxastic practices; he was persuaded that if they did reform them, in accordance with his advice, the cultural crisis would be overcome. For doing one’s best, as Locke understood it, consists of setting aside all unverified tradition and getting down to “the things themselves.”

I have borrowed the term “doxastic practice” from William P. Alston.⁷ By a doxastic practice I mean, and Alston means, a certain mode of belief-formation. However, the sort of mode I have in mind differs a bit from that which Alston has in mind. For Alston, a doxastic practice is a *habit* – or rather, a system of habits. He says that

The term “practices” will be misleading if it is taken to be restricted to voluntary activity; for I do not take belief-formation to be voluntary. I am using “practice” in such a way that it stretches over, e.g., psychological processes such as perception, thought, fantasy, and belief-formation, as well as voluntary action. A doxastic practice can be thought of as a system or constellation of *dispositions* or habits, or, to use a currently fashionable term, *mechanisms*, each of which yields a belief as output that is related in a certain

⁷ Wm. P. Alston, “A ‘Doxastic Practice’ Approach to Epistemology,” in M. Clay and K. Lehrer (eds.), *Knowledge and Skepticism* (Boulder, Colo., Westview Press, 1989).

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way to an “input.” The sense perceptual doxastic practice . . . is a constellation of habits of forming beliefs in a certain way on the basis of inputs that consist of sense experiences. (p. 5)

Alston emphasizes that, on his understanding of doxastic practices, we all “engage in a plurality of doxastic practices, each with its own sources of belief, its own conditions of justification, its own fundamental beliefs, and, in some cases, its own subject matter, its own conceptual framework, and its own repertoire of possible ‘overrides.’”⁸ Likewise he emphasizes that “These practices are acquired and engaged in well before one is explicitly aware of them and critically reflects on them”;⁹ that they “are set in the context of wider spheres of practice”;¹⁰ and that the habits in question “are thoroughly *social*: socially established by socially monitored learning, and socially shared.” He goes on to say that “This is not to deny that innate mechanisms and tendencies play a role here. We still have much to learn about the relative contribution of innate structures and social learning in the development of doxastic practices . . . But whatever the details, both have a role to play; and the final outcome is socially organized, reinforced, monitored and shared.”¹¹

Though I have found the notion of doxastic practices indispensable to understanding and explaining what Locke was up to, I shall not be understanding them quite as *habits* or *constellations of habits*. As Alston remarks, the activation of a habit is not a case of voluntarily doing something. But the doxastic practice which Locke promotes as doing one’s best incorporates various types of voluntary action – gathering evidence, appraising that evidence so as to determine probability, etc. The picture which Locke takes for granted is not just that we all possess habits of belief-formation which get activated by certain experiences, these habits being the product of innate dispositions which have undergone conditioning, but that we have all been tutored – self-tutored and socially tutored – in how to put these habits to use. We learn how to use our sense-perceptual habits; we learn, for example, when to be suspicious of what our eyes tell us and what to do to overcome the suspicion, how to move about so as best to determine the shape of an object, how to go about judging whether the light is right for determining the “real” color of an object, and so on.

So let us for our purposes think of doxastic practices as ways of using our belief-forming habits. A doxastic practice, thus understood, is a

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

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way of *using* what *Alston* calls “doxastic practices.” Locke was persuaded that there was something seriously amiss in how his compatriots were using their belief-forming dispositions. Their tutoring in how to use this equipment was deficient. He outlined a new practice which, so he argued, had the merit of constituting doing one’s best to bring it about, for some proposition, that one believes it if and only if it is true. Whenever one wants to do one’s best, this is the practice to try to implement; whenever one *ought to* try seriously to do one’s best, this is the practice that one *ought to* try to implement. As we shall see, Locke recognized that the implementation of his proposal would require more than preachments; it would require tutoring – even *school* tutoring. European men and women would have to be tutored differently in the use of their belief-forming dispositions if the cultural crisis was to be overcome – the crisis, namely, of a people schooled to consult tradition who now find their tradition fractured. Locke’s epistemology is the epistemology of a culturally engaged philosopher.

I said that I wanted to tell a story. But all I have done in this book is talk about the role of Locke and Descartes in the first half of the story. And as to the second half, I only talk about Hume; in particular, I never get to Reid. We all know Kant’s famous statement that Hume awakened him from his dogmatic slumbers. The school-book narratives of modern philosophy, stemming ultimately from the neo-Hegelian historians, go straight from Hume to Kant, usually with the moralism attached that Hume exhibited the bankruptcy of empiricism, whereupon Kant showed that the way ahead was a synthesis of continental rationalism with British empiricism. The story has to be revised. Reid and Kant are *together* the great eighteenth-century responses to Hume’s mode of challenging Locke’s vision. Not only that; even their modes of response, and sometimes their language, are strikingly similar. In words which immediately bring to mind Kant’s remark, Reid says that Hume shocked him out of his unquestioning acceptance of “The Way of Ideas.”

I hope at some later time to continue the story begun here, a story of tradition, awareness, and interpretation. That larger story within which the present one is framed is more important. For it speaks not only to our intellectual, but also to our social, concerns. The issue which Locke addressed, of how to govern one’s beliefs when tradition has been fragmented and pluralized, so far from disappearing, has become more pressing and insistent than ever. It remains on our

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cultural agenda. And the proposed answers all turn up again. We in our century have been replaying the intellectual drama that unfolded from Locke to Hegel. With these two big differences: God is now regularly missing from the picture, and it is now widely believed that everything is contingent. For the present, though, it will be enough to articulate Locke's vision, show its originality, appraise its tenability, and defend this reading of one strand within the beginnings of modern philosophy. Reid will have to remain in the waiting room for a while yet.

A final word: In the last couple of decades there has merged, from the seedbed of analytic philosophy, a truly admirable flowering of studies in the philosophers of the past, including studies in Locke. Once upon a time the engagement of the analytic philosopher with the history of philosophy – I caricature a bit – was of the mode: Thoughts that occurred to me one day upon reading a sentence in an English translation of Descartes. The result, unsurprisingly, was that the philosophers of the past all looked rather like analytic philosophers, albeit befuddled ones. By contrast, the practitioners of the new wave bring an admirably wide range of learning to bear on determining *what the philosopher himself was saying*. The results, in my judgment, are vastly more interesting – sometimes strange, often provocative, frequently instructive. I have consulted all such studies as I could discover that were relevant to the topics I discuss here – though it remains the case, in my judgment, that the latter part of Book iv of the *Essay* is a relatively neglected part of Locke. Not neglected, as before; but still *relatively* neglected. I have benefited from many of those studies. What follows, though, is not a typical specimen of this new wave of historical studies.

It differs in at least four respects from typical specimens. First, I pay relatively little attention to matters of influence and development – little attention to philosophical and other forms of intellectual influence on or by Locke, and little attention to the development of Locke's own thought. My concern is to understand Locke's thought on the matters at hand in its final form. And though I claim that Locke's thought on these matters was extraordinarily influential, I don't here defend that claim.¹²

¹² Let me refer any reader who might be dubious on the matter to Hans Aarsleff, "Locke's Influence," in Vere Chappell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994).

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Secondly, my explication of Locke's thought in its final form is defended almost exclusively by citations from the texts of Locke in which that thought finds expression – those being, let me add, a rather wide range of Locke's texts, not just the *Essay*. I have profited from the endeavors of such historians as John Yolton and Michael Ayers to illuminate Locke's thought by setting him within the philosophical debates and traditions of his day; but I have not myself tried to add to what they and others have done on this score. Mainly I have used other texts of Locke himself to illuminate obscure passages in the Lockian text.

Thirdly, I do rather less than most historians by way of explicitly interacting, either in agreement or disagreement, with the historians who have discussed the same topics. For example: There is a well-known article by J. A. Passmore titled "Locke and the Ethics of Belief" on Locke's views as to the relation of belief to the will. It will be evident to everyone who reads what Passmore says on this topic, and then what I say, that I think Passmore's interpretation is seriously misguided; but I don't detail our differences of interpretation.

Lastly, my attempt throughout is to get beyond the words of Locke and down to what he was getting at. The best of the new historians do the same. But my attempt to do so takes a form closer to "rational reconstruction" than is typical of the historians. I have no interest in submitting Locke to what is nowadays blandly called by some a strong reading. But I do see Locke as a dialogue partner for contemporary epistemology; and that shapes my discussion.

It is my judgment that in his late writings, especially in the second part of Book IV of his *Essay*, Locke developed a line of thought on the governance of belief which has played an extraordinarily prominent role in subsequent culture and which remains fascinating to this day. Locke was by no means the only one thinking along those lines at that time; he was, though, the most profound and influential. I have done my best to understand and explicate that line of thought without letting much else get in the way – other than citations from the texts which express that line of thought.

My quotations from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* are all from the edition by Peter Niddich (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975). I have modernized most of the spelling, and followed modern practices of capitalization. The edition of Locke's *Works* that I have used is the twelfth edition (London, 1824).