Introduction

The trajectory of John Locke's impact in the eighteenth century has been traced in numerous ways by historians of philosophy. The most familiar approach has been to link him with Berkeley and Hume as part of a group which developed (and complicated) an empirical account of knowledge acquisition. This book describes an alternative triptych, connecting Locke with the third Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson. The argument between them focused on the problem of diversity and the question of whether any moral consistency could be located in mankind. Such a perspective explicitly joins their work with a number of current concerns in philosophy and politics, giving this study a dual purpose: to recover a neglected theme in intellectual history, in which a debate over the content of human nature and issues of cultural difference emerged during the English, Irish, and Scottish Enlightenments; and in conclusion, to explore the relationship between these arguments and some major dilemmas in contemporary thought.

Locke's decisive role was ensured by the publication of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and above all the opening book in which he supplied a critique of innate ideas and principles. In order to unseat the mistaken notion that human beings inherently recognise certain moral truths as well as the idea of the divine, Locke pointed out evidence of widespread cultural diversity: what one country embraced, another one abhorred. Some groups believed in God and others remained entirely atheist. No consensus existed in morals or religion, which Locke maintained was essential if the innateness argument had any merit. The purpose of Locke's critique was not to introduce scepticism but rather to eradicate a false foundation for knowledge and to make way for something more reliable. But he undermined a widely held position, and his critics charged him with calling into question the difference between right and wrong, virtue and vice. By doing so, he set the problem of diversity in motion in a new way.

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The challenge facing Shaftesbury and Hutcheson was to undo the damage of Locke's argument. They attempted to rescue some sense of consistency in moral judgements and practices, and to restore unifying norms in the territory of ethics and religion. Locke's contribution and the response it inspired from Shaftesbury and Hutcheson continued to pre-occupy philosophers throughout the eighteenth century, most notably in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment.

The scale of this discussion and the traditions that informed it have not been adequately appreciated or explored. At a local level, this may be due to the common assumption that Locke's critique had swept all before it by the beginning of the eighteenth century, despite some initial skirmishing from backward-looking critics when the *Essay* first appeared. Such a view is quite mistaken. But, more generally, the Enlightenment has been understood as a period in which philosophers dedicated themselves solely to establishing uniformity in mankind, whether they located it in the capacity for reason or a conception of human nature as informed by common sentiments. Whatever truth we may assign this characterisation, we have neglected the extent of opposition to this view and the degree of struggle involved in maintaining the argument. In general, scholars of the French and German Enlightenments have been more alert to this question.[1] Thus my purpose is to differentiate the Enlightenment rather than to totalise it, looking for oppositions and tensions instead of unanimity.

In advance of a more detailed description of this book, a brief historical sketch of the place of diversity in the history of philosophy may be of benefit. For Plato and Aristotle, the existence of cultural variation did not pose particular difficulties. The strong cultural emphasis on a Greek/barbarian distinction had something to do with this, inhibiting the force of examples of cultural inconsistency assembled by figures like Herodotus from the prac-tices of Scythians, Persians, and others. More importantly, the variant forms of teleological reasoning employed by Plato and Aristotle in the fourth century BC had a normative dimension which answered sophistic objections about the relativity of beliefs and practices. With the development of Pyrrhonian and Academic scepticism in the Hellenistic period, the problem of diversity emerged fully as a significant challenge, unsettling the confident

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[1] See Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); Henry Vyverberg, *Human Nature, Cultural Diversity, and the French Enlightenment* (New York, 1998); C. P. Courtney, 'Montesquieu and the Problem of "la Diversité"', in *Enlightenment Essays in Memory of Robert Shackleton*, ed. Giles Barber and C. P. Courtney (Oxford, 1988), 61–81; Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, 2003).

assumptions of Stoics and other dogmatists committed to universal claims about morality. These arguments took place in the wake of Alexander the Great's campaigns, and later in the context of an expanding Roman empire.

The Christian response to diversity emerged in different ways. As a phenomenon of nature, diversity spoke to the wisdom and magnificence of divine creation. But as a human event, it had different consequences. Mankind shared the same nature by definition; diversity, in the form of barbarous or unaccountable customs, however regrettable, merely testified to the corruption of human nature after the Fall rather than raising a profound philosophical dilemma. Although everyone sprang, ultimately, from the same parentage, some account of difference was also possible in relation to the sons of Noah and the dispersal of mankind after the Flood.[2] In a less theological vein, custom and education were also understood as powerful forces, shaping nature in new and surprising ways. This acknowledgement invited the worrying conclusion, however, that nature had no normative content and merely gave way to the fragmenting effect of cultural variation.

In some sense diversity, then, has always been recognised. The question is whether it constitutes a 'problem'. In a descriptive mode, historians, geographers, and philosophers, at least from the time of Ptolemy, addressed the issue of cultural difference, often assigning climate a leading role in producing variation in character and custom. Survivals of this pattern of thought appear throughout the medieval and early modern periods, most famously in the work of Jean Bodin (*c.* 1530–96), and long into the eighteenth century with Montesquieu (1689–1755) and Kant (1724–1804). But the perspective, in this case, is not principally moral. Diversity begins to represent a challenge when it is framed as qualifying moral certainties. The modern reinvention of this strategy occurred with the sceptics, particularly Montaigne (1533–92), who emphasised the lack of any common pattern in human beliefs, attitudes, or customs. Responses to this view came from many quarters, including some constructions of natural law theory. However, we find that the jurist Samuel Pufendorf (1632–94), for example, did not deny, in the words of his English translator, 'This strange Diversity of Laws and Manners, by which most Nations in the World contradict each other'.[3]

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[2] See Benjamin Braude, 'The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54:1 (1997): 1–42; See also Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1964; Philadelphia, 1971), ch. 6.

[3] Samuel Pufendorf, *The Law of Nature and Nations* [1672–3], trans. Basil Kennet, 5th edn (London, 1749), 125 (II.iii.10).

During the British Enlightenment, the terms of the argument started to change in important ways with Locke (1632–1704). In the *Essay*, Locke set out an empirical basis for knowledge. While he stressed our limited access to essences, including the essence of human nature itself, he advocated the use of reason to regulate the understanding. Appeals to innate ideas or principles had no merit. To make his point, Locke drew attention to anthropological evidence of human difference, and by doing so he brought the problem of diversity squarely back into play. He eradicated internal criteria and impulses separating good from evil or locating an idea of God which gave reassurance of the norm of religious belief. His discussion took place in an era of increasing exotic travel, principally for purposes of colonisation and trade, as it had earlier in the context of sceptical argument. With this information, Locke denied an alleged *consensus gentium* which ostensibly flowed from an identical moral inheritance. His approach, designed to clear a ground for the understanding to proceed on a more authentic basis, undermined some cherished certainties.

Locke had various ways of avoiding the sceptical consequences of his argument, but they did not satisfy the third Earl of Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper, 1671–1713). Although he was educated under Locke's care (as grandson of Locke's patron, the first earl), Shaftesbury resisted the implications of his mentor's position in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711). He returned to a form of reasoning favoured by the ancients. Stoic reflection on the beauty of the universe established a principle of order in creation which was matched by the unity of human nature, evident in shared convictions in matters of taste, morality, and a recognition of the divine. Shaftesbury reasserted the notion of innateness, attempting to shield it from Locke's critique by insisting on the existence of natural dispositions toward virtue. He rejected Locke's unsociable portrait of human beings as motivated by self-interest. The normative thrust of Shaftesbury's philosophy led him to characterise diversity as the simple effect of custom and education, or more provocatively as the outcome of pernicious religion.

Shaftesbury not only objected to Locke's views on innateness, he also turned against Locke's positive theory of morals. In particular, the assumption that mankind required rewards and punishments to maintain any degree of moral commitment offended him. Locke had situated human beings as appetitive agents who merely obeyed the law prudentially, but for Shaftesbury disinterestedness was consonant with our nature. Locke had come to rely increasingly on Scripture to remedy the deficiencies of human reason, that is, the failure to pursue notions of duty with adequate

attention. Shaftesbury's anti-clerical stance led him to make religion a moral affair, but it was not dependent on a revealed text. He defined a complex position in which consensus on matters of morality enabled him to open up a space for diversity and disagreement in the realm of religious doctrine.

Francis Hutcheson's (1694–1746) influential contribution was to attempt a synthesis of two deeply opposing figures – Locke and Shaftesbury. Like Shaftesbury he wanted to embed moral feelings or 'affections' in human nature, seeing morality as natural and instinctive rather than purely external, prudential, or socially constructed and artificial. As such he regarded diversity as a potential threat which undermined his position. However, Locke's prestige was such that Hutcheson could not deny the critique of innateness. Indeed he admitted at one point that the existence of a '*vast Diversity of moral Principles, in various Nations*, and *Ages*' was a good argument against such a view.[4] The challenge was to devise an alternative structure for moral reactions. Hutcheson delegated them to the 'moral sense', understood as common equipment for mankind. This sense was somehow free from the accusation of innateness. What is more, he described its operation by using Lockean terminology for knowledge acquisition.

The changes of position between Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, although subtle, meant that Hutcheson encountered the problem of diversity on new and potentially more difficult grounds. He looked for a democratic expansion of the moral sense and had more at stake in locating a wider empirical confirmation of human agreement in ethics. Shaftesbury had remained surprisingly untroubled by the possible absence of common consent, but his aristocratic account of the highest levels of moral and aesthetic appreciation was unavailable to Hutcheson. We can see that Hutcheson bequeathed a problem to his successors in the Scottish Enlightenment but not necessarily a solution. Although diversity remained a distinctively moral issue, the alternative favoured in the later eighteenth century was to interpret it as a consequence of history, indicating stages of social progression, not as testimony that threatened to falsify the moral sense empirically.

If we consider the argument conducted by Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson in the light of present-day philosophical concerns, we may be struck initially by the discontinuities between their outlook and our own, rather than any affinities. For us, diversity is widely accepted as an irreducible feature of human life. In culture, politics, and morality, we no longer

[4] Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (London, 1725), 182–3.

expect to locate agreement or consistency, but recognise the inevitability
of disparities, both within the state and beyond national borders. The
acknowledgement of diversity may require management by governments
and institutions, it may complicate the task of international relations and
raise constitutional issues that trouble the work of political theorists, but
it is not something we can overlook or avoid. Indeed, diversity emerges
in contemporary discourse as an achievement, in some sense, of human
development, an outcome of our own distinctive version of enlightenment.
If it casts a shadow of relativism and incommensurability, it brings with it
other sources of liberation and light. We have abandoned, it seems, the
notion of establishing regularities in the human community, seeing agree-
ment as a lost hope, or more likely an ambition or imposition to be viewed
with suspicion. An awareness exists that human behaviour cannot be
collapsed into a compelling oneness, while the concept of human nature –
as a normative, unifying essence – has largely receded from moral discus-
sion. This paradoxical consensus regarding a non-consensual force suggests
a strong disjunction, at least with Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, if not
precisely Locke. But in reality, of course, the account of contemporary
thought I have given is overstated, not least because we are committed, in
various ways, to unifying notions connected with natural rights, demo-
cratic forms of political association, and even, more contentiously, a sense
of human sociability or 'sociality'.

This book investigates an historical argument over the implications of
cultural diversity. The issue of religious toleration forms part of the
discussion but does not appear at the centre of it. There are several reasons
why toleration is located in this way. While Locke's political position in his
Letter concerning Toleration (1689) assumes the existence of religious differ-
ences as a given, it does not trace these disparities to an epistemic source.
The *Essay* provides such an analysis at a more general level, largely through
the critique of innateness. In fact, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson agreed with
Locke's views on toleration and therefore accepted an area of intractable
social difference (addressed politically by a policy of toleration).
Nonetheless, in their moral theories they attempted to remedy or balance
the situation by appealing to a deeper consensus in human nature asso-
ciated with innateness, instinct, or a moral sense. In this way, Shaftesbury's
encouragement of a free space for religious dispute emerges as dependent
on an account of human nature that retained basic norms of sociability and
morality. Similarly, Hutcheson, who benefited personally from measures
of extended toleration in eighteenth-century Ireland, was an advocate both
of toleration and of an account of human beings that emphasised their

shared nature and capacity for moral agreement. Locke's critique made any strategy that depended on a normative account of human nature difficult to negotiate. In their estimation, he opened up the prospect of diversity without limits. Thus, if we focus solely on religious toleration we miss the tensions in their positions.

To assess their dispute, then, we must move the ground to the characterisation of human nature as a whole. Here we see that the debate between Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson was often distinctively anthropological, and the paradigm cases of difference they discussed were typically extreme: parricide, infanticide, incest, cannibalism. These practices threw into relief problems of incommensurability and inconsistency in moral values and judgements. Could they be written off as mere depravity or did they tell against a normative conception of human nature? Religious diversity formed, in one respect, a subset of this phenomenon. Certainly Locke's anthropological interests were often predicated on observation of extravagant religious opinion and practice, a point he held in common with Shaftesbury who was inclined to advertise difference in this sphere rather than eradicate it. Nonetheless, conflict remained over whether the idea of God was innate. Locke said it was not, but Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had something at stake in recovering a natural impulse to embrace the Deity. They found ways to stabilise the proliferation of difference and contain it, at the same time as they rejected Locke's own solution of placing the burden on reason.

The argument advanced in this book can now be broached in more detail. The first chapter considers Locke's engagement with the phenomenon of cultural diversity as constituting a natural history of man. The project of natural history, advanced by Francis Bacon, Robert Boyle, and others associated with the new science, accepted diversity as an inescapable fact of nature. Locke adhered to this method by refusing to draw conclusions in advance about the nature of mankind. Rather, he treated 'customs and manners' as effects of human nature, and he accumulated testimony drawn from the work of travellers in an inductive fashion, to establish whether any regularities of practice and belief existed. The rationale for this approach ultimately stemmed from his position on real and nominal essences. For Locke, access to the real essence of created things was unavailable. But it did not follow that we should abandon investigation. Instead, we could improve our grasp of 'nominal' essences by conducting empirical research. The predicament with respect to human nature was the same. We must examine it without supposing an *a priori* understanding of its essence.

When confronted by diversity Locke declined a number of familiar explanations: he refused to treat it as the outcome of the Fall and the effect of custom acting against a determinate norm supplied by nature (or for that matter as explainable in biblical terms by derivation from the sons of Noah). The preliminary task was to accumulate evidence without presuppositions or hypotheses. Eventually this approach furnished him with grounds for a negative conclusion regarding the existence of allegedly innate ideas or principles. But we can also see the basis for a descriptive, 'sociological', outlook on human practice which he developed elsewhere in the *Essay*. In Book II of that work he described a so-called 'law of *Opinion* or *Reputation*', intended to capture the way morality was regulated in practice on the basis of social sanction. This law spoke to the fact that human communities often failed to refer their actions to any higher code than purely social praise or blame.

The relative 'novelty' of Locke's method potentially obscures the fact that his strategy for unseating innateness – by citing the evidence of diversity – placed him in a long philosophical tradition associated with scepticism. In the second chapter, I investigate the debate in antiquity between sceptics and Stoics over the content of human nature, and the way their arguments were replicated in the early modern period. Sceptics routinely pointed to incommensurable attitudes on child murder, parricide, cannibalism, and incest, in order to question the universal validity of moral rules. Locke drew on the same group of well-established examples to combat a Stoic assumption, namely that innate ideas or 'common notions' (*koinai ennoiai*) structured human nature. Locke's critics, including Bishop Stillingfleet (1635–99), rehearsed a Stoic reply, insisting that diversity was superficial and that a deeper unity in fact underlay human differences. Although Locke had ways of tempering the more radical consequences of his views, he was criticised for jeopardising moral distinctions and introducing scepticism. The 'law of opinion' merely confirmed what his opponents feared about the dangerous implications of Locke's position. With no internal resources to lead us to the good and to God, morality regulated by social preference alone was the inevitable outcome.

In the third chapter I explore the anthropological implications of Locke's position more closely. Locke depended on a number of printed travel accounts to make the point that various nations did not possess an idea of God or form of worship. The question is whether he represented their testimony accurately. In the case of atheist tribes in Brazil and the Caribbean, Locke arguably manipulated the accounts he had read, eliding those occasions in which his authorities restored a Stoic reading of human uniformity in matters of religious sentiment. With polite nations like Siam

and China, his use of sources was certainly debatable. Yet Locke needed support from civil peoples of this kind even more than he did from the primitive. A long-standing argument for common consent (in Grotius, Stillingfleet, and others) had recommended setting aside the impolite as outside the norm.

This chapter also describes an important anthropological alternative in Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. Although continuities exist between the perspectives evident in the *Essay* and in his political writing, Locke's ethnographic references in the 'Second Treatise' have very different implications. Specifically, they do not raise the problem of diversity. Instead, Locke treated differences in mode of government and social organisation as the effect of variation in historical development. In other words, his references to Amerindian practices in this context do not relativise European custom. On the contrary, they suggest that history will assist primitive peoples in progressing toward a condition mirroring the polite.

Shaftesbury's reply to Locke in the *Characteristicks* took many forms, including an attack on Locke's use of travel literature, and rejection of his legalistic framework for morality and theory of motivation, as well as his understanding of the relationship between religion and morality. But at the heart of the dispute was innateness and with it the problem of diversity. Shaftesbury sought to reinstate some form of innateness in order to guarantee a distinction between virtue and vice which was rooted in nature. He returned to Stoic teaching on this matter in order to answer the sceptical advertisement of diversity. In particular, Shaftesbury reintroduced the Stoic notion of 'prolepsis'. A prolepsis was a natural 'anticipation' or inclination which made it possible to recognise certain ideas or to hold certain beliefs. Effectively, it was an innate idea or common notion. But Shaftesbury emphasised some important differences which freed prolepses from Locke's critique. Prolepses were natural and yet they did not guarantee moral knowledge *per se*. They supplied criteria, but they required some cultivation and development. Furthermore, prolepses could be misapplied. With this, Shaftesbury evaded a major requirement insisted upon by Locke – that innatists must show not merely verbal agreement to innate notions but also 'Conformity of Action' in the world.[5] Prolepses were never expected to secure consistency at this level.

Shaftesbury was more than happy to note failures to replicate true taste and departures from the moral norm, which may cause us some surprise. In

[5] John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, corrected edn (Oxford, 1979), I.iii.3.

fact, rather than threatening his system, such manifestations of diversity only exposed the effects of erroneous custom and education, false religion, or improper government. In a convergence with Locke's anthropology in the 'Second Treatise', these departures indicated differences in historical situation and the consequences of incivility. Shaftesbury's reduced circle of consensus allowed him to make his boldest claim with respect to diversity: in the context of religion, no agreement should be expected or enforced. Freethought was essential in this arena, in which he anticipated intractable differences of outlook and interpretation. The stability of Shaftesbury's moral and aesthetic system made it possible to encourage dispute in the religious sphere. Toleration of diverse opinion became the answer to this predicament.

Although Hutcheson owed much to Shaftesbury, his adherence to an ostensibly 'observational' methodology, combined with a denial of innate ideas, required him to provide a more strenuous response to the data of diversity. The fifth chapter describes the delicate balance he achieved between rival inheritances from Locke and Shaftesbury. While on the surface of things he accepted Locke's critique of innateness, he needed to shield the moral sense from the accusation that it too succumbed to the refutation from diversity. Hutcheson did so by describing the moral sense as an inbuilt faculty which made moral experience possible. But the question remained whether this was merely a formal possession, necessary in logical terms but empty of real content. Clearly Hutcheson wanted to say something normative about the moral judgements people made, to identify their substance and the fact that mankind shared such beliefs and impulses. He was obliged to adopt a dispositional rendering of innateness, similar to Shaftesbury, to make his case.

In a lengthy section of his *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), Hutcheson tackled the problem of diversity directly. On the one hand, he asserted that reports of moral difference had been exaggerated; on the other, he introduced a number of explanations for its existence. Rival notions of happiness had some effect here, as did the unfortunate limitation of people's moral reference to their immediate circle of concern. Religion could not be discounted as a sometimes regrettable influence, although he did not pursue Shaftesbury's adventurous, deistic, position in these matters. Finally, he made the novel suggestion that the association of ideas played some part. Hutcheson's answers were not entirely persuasive, but they suggest forcefully that diversity could not be overlooked or ignored. Locke's intervention had made this impossible. Hutcheson's strongest point was to maintain that everyone agreed on