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978-0-521-85271-5 - Locke, Language and Early-Modern Philosophy

Hannah Dawson

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LOCKE, LANGUAGE AND EARLY-MODERN PHILOSOPHY

In a powerful and original contribution to the history of ideas, Hannah Dawson explores the intense preoccupation with language in early-modern philosophy, and presents a groundbreaking analysis of John Locke's critique of words. By examining a broad sweep of pedagogical and philosophical material from antiquity to the late seventeenth century, Dr Dawson explains why language caused anxiety in writers such as Montaigne, Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Gassendi, Nicole, Spinoza, Pufendorf, Boyle, Malebranche and Locke. *Locke, Language and Early-Modern Philosophy* demonstrates that new developments in philosophy, in conjunction with weaknesses in linguistic theory, resulted in serious concerns about the capacity of words to refer to the world, the stability of meaning, and the duplicitous power of words themselves. Dr Dawson shows that language so fixated all manner of early-modern authors because it was seen as an obstacle to knowledge and society. She thereby uncovers a novel story about the *problem* of language in philosophy, and in the process reshapes our understanding of early-modern beliefs about nature, epistemology, morality and politics.

HANNAH DAWSON is Lecturer in Intellectual History at the University of Edinburgh.

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The books in this series will discuss the emergence of intellectual traditions and of related new disciplines. The procedures, aims and vocabularies that were generated will be set in the context of the alternatives available within the contemporary frameworks of ideas and institutions. Through detailed studies of the evolution of such traditions, and their modification by different audiences, it is hoped that a new picture will form of the development of ideas in their concrete contexts. By this means, artificial distinctions between the history of philosophy, of the various sciences, of society and politics, and of literature may be seen to dissolve.

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for Joy Denyer

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Queens' College, Cambridge

Notes on the text

REFERENCES

I use the author-date system to refer to both primary and secondary materials. In the case of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, I also give the book, chapter and section references, in that order, to provide a clearer sense of where we are in the work. In facsimile editions of works where the editor's pagination differs from the original, I cite the original pagination. In the case of Locke's manuscripts, where his own pagination goes awry and the editors have added consistent numbering, I cite the editors' pagination first, followed by Locke's in brackets.

TRANSCRIPTION

While, in the main, I preserve the spelling and punctuation of the texts cited in the bibliographies, I sometimes disrupt it in order to smooth out my prose. For example, I modernise early-modern orthographical traditions, such as the use of the long 's'. Very rarely, in order to integrate quotations into my sentences, I make a grammatical alteration to a word, for example 'defrauded' becomes 'defrauds'. I thin out the profusion of capital letters and italics in early-modern works.

TRANSLATION

When quoting from texts written in languages other than English, I use the translations cited. Where none are available or appropriate, I make my own. Where I disagree with the translation, or do not think it captures the force of the original, I supply the original words, sometimes suggesting an alternative translation.