



Locke and the Enlightenment

edited by
Brunello Lotti and Paola Rumore

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Introduction

Locke and the Enlightenment

Brunello Lotti and Paola Rumore

“Locke and the Enlightenment” allows of a twofold reading: the first has a strong historico-philosophical commitment and interprets this title as the investigation of the reception of Locke’s thought in 18th-century philosophy and science; the second interprets it instead in the sense of a less historically committed debate on the intrinsic relevance of Locke’s ideas to the Enlightenment. The two readings are by no means mutually exclusive but should coexist in order to find an answer to the question concerning the still extremely vague and stereotyped relationship between Locke’s philosophy and the Enlightenment. On a closer examination the ambiguity of the title reflects the ambiguity of the notion of Enlightenment itself, which can be understood on the one hand as *the historical* Enlightenment, and on the other hand as *a broader historiographical category* that moves beyond the chronological boundaries of the “Age of Enlightenment”.

In a well-established historical perspective, which defines the Enlightenment according to the centrality of the *philosophes* and the *Lumières*, and which places the cultural movement that carries that name in the 18th century, Locke appears quite rightly a ‘proto-Enlightener’. He is the one who paves the way for debates and orientations concerning relevant issues in the theory of knowledge, in political philosophy, in philosophy of religion and education etc. that will flourish in the 18th century. This long interpretive tradition, which in fact goes back to Voltaire and has been strongly promoted even by a certain kind of neo-Kantian philosophical historiography (Ernst Cassirer, Alois Riehl),

is still lively. A few decades ago, it inspired one of the few investigations that clearly address the relationship between Locke and the Enlightenment. In his *Reasoned Freedom: John Locke and Enlightenment* (1992), Peter A. Schouls remarked that Locke “is often referred to as the great progenitor of the Enlightenment,” and emphasises the link between Locke’s ideas and the Enlightenment by stressing the pivotal role the ‘enlightened’ ideas of freedom, progress, mastery, reason, and education play in Locke’s writings¹. Obviously, terms such as ‘progenitor,’ ‘fore-runner,’ ‘forefather,’ ‘proto-Enlightener,’ ‘anticipator,’ and suchlike do not make sense if taken literally; they are rather meant to stress the fact that Locke’s ideas work as a ‘premise’ for prominent debates of the Age of the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, if conceived as a ‘source of inspiration’ for the later Enlightenment, Locke’s ideas are unsurprisingly set out of their original context; Voltaire’s conception of tolerance, for example, is not Locke’s; Voltaire’s relationship to Christianity is certainly not Locke’s; nor is Locke’s idea of the boundaries of reason the same as that found at the basis of Kant’s critical philosophy. But still, Voltaire and Kant themselves promoted Locke’s prestige into the continental milieu by stressing the belief that he had pinpointed relevant issues that would soon come to the center of the philosophical debate².

In the broader and therefore more vague interpretation of the historical category of the Enlightenment – which doesn’t match the idea of the uniqueness of the French 18th-century *Lumières* – Locke himself was considered ‘a leading figure’ of the Enlightenment. In Isaiah Berlin’s selection *The Age of the Enlightenment* (1956) – despite the subtitle “The Eighteenth-Century Philosophers” – a good 80 pages are devoted to Locke and to the theory of knowledge of the *Essay*; the *philosophes* are

¹ P.A. Schouls, *Reasoned Freedom. John Locke and Enlightenment*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1992, p. 1. Nevertheless, Schouls wrote: “Locke is not the greatest of the Enlightenment’s forefathers”, since “the place of pre-eminence belongs to Descartes”; “indeed, Locke might not have exerted much of an influence on the Enlightenment had it not been for the impact of Descartes’ methodology on him” (pp. 1-2).

² For what concerns Voltaire’s opinion on Locke see C. Borghero, *Interpretazioni, categorie, finzioni. Narrare la storia della filosofia*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2017, pp. 156-57 and fn. 6; on the importance of Locke for the development of Kant’s critical philosophy see A. Riehl, *Der philosophische Kritizismus. Geschichte und System*, Kröner, Leipzig 1924 (1908²), vol. I, pp. 19-99.

presented as Locke's faithful, sometimes even uncritical disciples³. It has already been remarked that Berlin's selection is rather peculiar because of its Anglocentric perspective⁴, and because of its almost exclusively theoretical focus (critique of metaphysics, empiricism, the connection between philosophical critique and the intellectual progress of science); nevertheless, many contemporary scholars still claim – sixty-five years of Locke's scholarship on from Berlin's selection – that Locke is 'a philosopher of the Enlightenment'. According to the editors of the recent volume *The Lockean Mind*, "the Essay is one of the most important English language philosophical texts of the Enlightenment"⁵. Charles W. Mills, in discussing the shortcomings of Locke's political philosophy concerning the question of racism, places him on the same level "as the other philosophers of the Enlightenment"⁶; Kim Ian Parker wonders why Locke, "one of the founders of the Enlightenment and, certainly, of the rise of secularism in the West, takes religion, theology and even the Bible so seriously"⁷, a question that appears rather naïve only if one employs a more rigorous definition of the historical Enlightenment and manages to grasp the difference between Locke's 'reasonable' Christianity and the criticism of religion in 18th-century deism or atheism. For these scholars Locke is truly 'a philosopher of the Enlightenment', since the central issues of his philosophy belong to that philosophical orientation: tolerance, the boundaries of reason, the criticism of the principle of authority, the priority of science over metaphysics, the pragmatic component of any philosophical investigation, etc.

³ *The Age of Enlightenment. The 18th Century Philosophers*. Selected, with Introduction and Interpretive Commentary by I. Berlin, A Mentor Book, New York 1956, pp. 19 and 107.

⁴ See H. Hardy, *Editorial Preface to The Age of Enlightenment. The Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*. Selected, with Introduction and Interpretive Commentary by I. Berlin, with the assistance of M. Dick. Second edition edited by H. Hardy, The Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust, Oxford 2017, p. vii.

⁵ J. Gordon-Roth and S. Weinberg, Introduction to J. Gordon-Roth and S. Weinberg (eds.), *The Lockean Mind*, Routledge, New York and London 2022, p. 1.

⁶ C.W. Mills, *Locke on Slavery*, in *The Lockean Mind*, cit., p. 497.

⁷ K.I. Parker, *Locke on Theological Method and Biblical Interpretation*, in *The Lockean Mind*, cit., p. 564. Parker writes that "Locke presents himself as one of the architects of the Enlightenment while still remaining close to the biblical text", since his "understanding of the Fall is one that allows a greater degree of human freedom and human optimism than was generally thought to be the case at the time" (p. 570). This statement doesn't make much sense if one takes the very rigorous historical definition of the Enlightenment as the 18th-century cultural movement.

Whatever definition of Enlightenment we adopt, the relationship between Locke and the Enlightenment remains central. The essays collected in this volume prioritise the distinction between Locke's thought and its interpretations in the European Enlightenments, with special attention to the *philosophes* (see the papers by Anstey, Quintili, and Sciuto), but also with reference to other linguistic and cultural areas (see the papers by McKenna and Mori, Russo, Di Biase, Thiel, Szabelska, and Muceni), without, however, neglecting the broader interpretation of our task, that is the intrinsic relevance of Locke's philosophy to the Enlightenment (see Wolfe's paper).

The essays focus on unexplored aspects of Locke's reception in the 18th century. They are intended as a preliminary investigation in a promising area of research that may lead to improvements in various directions. We suggest considering the following example as a confirmation of the fruitful developments of such a line of research. The French mathematician Sylvestre François Lacroix (1765-1843) – a friend of Condorcet and Laplace, professor at the École Polytechnique (1799) and later at the Collège de France (from 1812), and the author of very successful handbooks of mathematics – published the *Essais sur l'enseignement en général, et sur celui des mathématiques en particulier* in 1805. The book had four editions, the last one in 1838. Its original purpose was to contribute to the reform of public education promoted by Napoleon. In the broad picture of the philosophical and scientific debate from Descartes to the late 18th century presented in the *Introduction*, Locke plays a pivotal role. According to Lacroix, Locke contributed to the popularisation of a kind of 'scientific' metaphysics that would be then developed by Condillac: "La métaphysique rendue par Locke accessible aux esprits justes, qui ne goûtent que les connaissances solides appuyées sur des faits certains et traitées par une déduction rigoureuse, fut cultivée dans ce sens par Condillac"⁸. Locke, the philosopher of the understanding, carried

⁸ S.F. Lacroix, *Essais sur l'enseignement en général, et sur celui des mathématiques en particulier*, Bachelier, Paris 1838⁴, p. 18. Lacroix is explicitly extending what D'Alembert says about Locke in the *Discours Préliminaire*: Locke "réduit la Métaphysique à ce qu'elle doit être en effet, la Physique expérimentale de l'âme" (*Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, par une Société de gens de lettres, chez Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, Paris 1751, t. I, *Discours préliminaire*, p. xxvii).

on Descartes' project and paved the way for the interaction of philosophy and science: "La métaphysique, dégagée par Descartes du jargon inintelligible qu'on lui avait fait parler si long-temps dans les écoles, est rendue accessible à tous les bons esprits par Locke, qui la soumet à des observations précises, faites sur les opérations de notre entendement"⁹. In Lacroix's view, long before Kant Locke claimed that metaphysics should be properly understood as an investigation of the understanding. One-hundred years after Locke's death, this example reveals that his wide popularity extended far beyond the philosophical milieu. It reached prominent intellectual figures who then conveyed the empiricist and scientific culture of the Enlightenment into the 19th century.

⁹ Lacroix, *Essais*, cit., p. 48. We are grateful to the historian of mathematics Paolo Bussotti for this indication.

Articles

Locke and French Enlightenment Histories of Philosophy

Peter R. Anstey

Abstract: This paper examines Locke's place in French Enlightenment historiography. In particular, it is concerned with the manner in which Locke features in two important and influential histories of philosophy from the period, namely, Jean Le Rond d'Alembert's "Preliminary Discourse" of 1751 and Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, marquis de Condorcet's *The Sketch* of 1795. It argues that both histories accord Locke a crucial role in the emergence of a new approach to the study of the human mind and, for Condorcet, a new method for the sciences in general. Moreover, the connections that d'Alembert and Condorcet make between Locke and Descartes are shown to contrast with those made by Voltaire. The paper concludes with some reflections on the implications of d'Alembert's and Condorcet's histories for the historiography of eighteenth-century philosophy today.

Keywords: D'Alembert, Condorcet, Descartes, experimental philosophy, Voltaire.

This paper examines Locke's place in French Enlightenment historiography. In particular, it is concerned with the manner in which Locke features in two important and influential histories of philosophy from the period, namely, Jean Le Rond d'Alembert's "Preliminary Discourse" to the *Encyclopédie* of 1751 and Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, marquis de Condorcet's *The Sketch* of 1795¹. These histories of philosophy are mature works by erudite and gifted philosophers in their own right. While their respective treatments of

¹ See J. Le Rond d'Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot*, trans. by R.N. Schwab, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1995, originally published as 'Discours préliminaire' in D. Diderot and J. Le Rond d'Alembert (eds.), *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Paris 1751, vol. 1, pp. i-iii; Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, *The Sketch*, in *Condorcet: Political Writings*, ed. by S. Lukes and N. Urbinati, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, pp. 1-147. Originally published as *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, Paris 1795.

Locke are only small constituents of much larger wholes, the importance that these works accord him suggest that they will repay careful study. Indeed, we might consider the “Preliminary Discourse” and *The Sketch* as providing the literary equivalent of a Canaletto canvas with two point perspective. The first ‘vanishing point’ is Locke’s place in the Enlightenment historiography of early modern philosophy, and the second, the implications of these perspectives for Enlightenment historiography today².

The structure of this paper is as follows: section one discusses d’Alembert’s treatment of Locke and his appropriation of Lockean ideas; section two provides a parallel treatment of Locke in Condorcet’s *The Sketch*; and the concluding section three provides an assessment of the continuities between the two histories, and a contrast with Voltaire’s treatment of Locke in *Letters Concerning the English Nation*. All of this is with a view to some reflections on the historiography of Enlightenment philosophy, then and now.

1. *Locke in the history of the “Preliminary Discourse”*

D’Alembert’s “Preliminary Discourse” to the *Encyclopédie* sets out the rationale, methodology and philosophical underpinning of the entire encyclopaedic project. In its own day it was regarded as a singular work of genius, and it is still regarded as one of the seminal works of the French Enlightenment. Richard Schwab, the translator of the standard English edition, goes so far as to claim, “[i]t is the Enlightenment insofar as one can make such a claim for any single work”³. The discourse is divided into three parts, the second of which consists of a history of the arts and sciences since the Renaissance⁴. It comprises one third of the content of the whole discourse. D’Alembert structures this history around the progressive manifestation of the three cognitive faculties: memory, imagination and reason. According to d’Alembert, this is not the

² For surveys of Enlightenment historiography, see J.K. Wright, “Historical thought in the era of the Enlightenment”, in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, ed. by L. Kramer and S. Maza, Wiley Blackwell, Oxford 2002, 123-42 and *A Companion to Enlightenment Historiography*, ed. by R.A. Sparling, Brill, Leiden 2013.

³ R.N. Schwab, “Introduction”, in d’Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot*, p. ix. For its reception by d’Alembert’s contemporaries, including Condorcet, see *ibid.*, pp. ix-xi.

⁴ For an overview and analysis of d’Alembert’s history, see G. Piaia, “The history of philosophy in the *Encyclopédie*”, in G. Piaia and G. Santinello (eds.), *Models of the History of Philosophy, Vol. III: The Second Enlightenment and the Kantian Age*, Springer, Dordrecht 2015, pp. 11-21.

normal order which the mind would naturally follow; rather it is the ordering that has happened to unfold in the era of the regeneration of ideas, that is, the Renaissance and beyond⁵. Thus, the application of reason came last, and reason remains the operative faculty of the era in which he is living, to which he has contributed, and about which he has most to say.

What makes d'Alembert's historical narrative distinctive then, is the fact that it diverges from the natural progression of his (and Diderot's) faculty psychology as explicated in Part I and later reflected in the grand scheme of the arts and sciences in Part III of the "Preliminary Discourse"; the normal order being a progression from memory to reason and finally to imagination: "[p]lacing reason ahead of imagination appears to us to be a well-founded arrangement and one which is in conformity with the natural progress of the operations of the mind"⁶. That the whole of Part II of the "Preliminary Discourse" diverges from this progression shows how intentional d'Alembert's artificial historical partitioning is⁷. And it is within this framework that the importance of Locke's contribution to philosophy is assessed.

Thus, there is a very specific sense in which d'Alembert is writing about the age of reason: it is the age of reason in contrast to the age of memory and the age of imagination. We might even gloss this as the age of the faculty of reason. This is not to say that it is the age of reason in contrast to emotion or sentiment, or that it is the age of rationality or rationalism. It is not as if the other two faculties of the mind are now inoperative or have ceased to impact the current age. It is just that gradually, since the early seventeenth century, as a result of the impact of the likes of Bacon and Descartes, reason has come to predominate and to bear fruit in a manner that was not possible in previous ages. In his later *Essai sur les élémens de philosophie* (1759) d'Alembert calls the current age "the century of philosophy *par excellence*"⁸ and this is more-or-less equivalent to calling it the age of reason.

Yet there is another salient background theory to d'Alembert's history of the arts and sciences that complements his faculty psychology, and this is the theory of principles and its relation to the ordering of the sciences and arts. D'Alembert

⁵ D'Alembert, "Preliminary Discourse", cit., pp. 60-61.

⁶ Ibid., p. 51.

⁷ Ibid., p. 76: "[i]f we have not put reason after imagination as he [Bacon] did, it is because we have followed the metaphysical order of the operations of the mind in the encyclopedic system rather than the historical order of its progress since the renaissance of letters".

⁸ J. Le Rond d'Alembert, *Essai sur les élémens de philosophie*, ed. by R.N. Schwab, Olms, Hildesheim 1965, p. 9. See also, d'Alembert, "Preliminary Discourse", cit., p. 91.

is fully committed to what I call the neo-Aristotelian theory of knowledge acquisition, which has as its constituents a theory of principles, a theory of demonstration, and a theory of the sciences⁹. With regard to the theory of principles, d'Alembert is a strong advocate of Principle Minimalism, the view that the fewer principles on which a science is founded the more fecund those principles are, and he entertains the thought that there may even be one ultimate principle from which all the sciences can be derived¹⁰. As for the theory of the sciences, d'Alembert is committed to the view that all of the sciences are linked together in a kind of branching chain and there is a hierarchy of the sciences with metaphysics standing at the pinnacle¹¹. And it is Locke's contribution to metaphysics that d'Alembert focuses on in his appraisal of the Englishman's contribution to the age of reason. Furthermore, like many of his contemporaries, d'Alembert believes that there are two forms of metaphysics: particular metaphysics which is concerned with the science of the soul, and general metaphysics or ontology, which is concerned with the nature of being¹².

With this background in mind, we can now turn to d'Alembert's treatment of Locke in his history of the arts and sciences. I have reproduced the entire extract here together with the preceding paragraph on Newton and metaphysics. It will be immediately clear that the paragraph on Locke cannot be understood without the segue provided by the paragraph that precedes it.

It appears that Newton had not entirely neglected metaphysics. He was too great a philosopher not to be aware that it constitutes the basis of our knowledge and that clear and exact notions about everything must be sought in metaphysics alone. Indeed, the works of this profound geometer make it apparent that he had succeeded in constructing such notions for himself concerning the

⁹ See P.R. Anstey, "Principles in early modern philosophy and science", in D. Jalobeanu and C. Wolfe (eds.), *Springer Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences*, 2020.

¹⁰ See J. Le Rond d'Alembert, and J.-B. de La Chappelle, 'Elémens des sciences', in *Encyclopédie*, cit., vol. 5, ed. by D. Diderot and J. Le Rond d'Alembert, Paris 1755, pp. 491-97; see also P.R. Anstey, "The Principled Enlightenment: Condillac, d'Alembert and Principle Minimalism", in G. Boucher and H.M. Lloyd (eds.), *Rethinking the Enlightenment: Between History, Philosophy, and Politics*, Lexington, Lanham 2018, pp. 131-50.

¹¹ See d'Alembert, "Preliminary Discourse", cit., p. 5 and especially J. Le Rond d'Alembert and J.-B. de La Chappelle, 'Elémens des sciences', p. 491: "if we were able to perceive without interruption the invisible chain that links all the objects of our knowledge, the elements of all the sciences might be reduced to a unique principle, of which the principal consequences would be the elements of each particular science".

¹² See, for example, E. Bonnot de Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Knowledge*, ed. by H. Aasleff, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, p. 3: "[w]e must distinguish two sorts of metaphysics".

principal objects that occupied him. However, he abstained almost totally from discussing his metaphysics in his best known writings, and we can hardly learn what he thought concerning the different objects of that discipline, except in the works of his followers. This may have been because he himself was somewhat dissatisfied with the progress he had made in metaphysics, or because he believed it difficult to give mankind sufficiently satisfactory and extensive enlightenment on a discipline too often uncertain and disputed. Or finally, it may have been because he feared that in the shadow of his authority people might abuse his metaphysics as they had abused Descartes', in order to support dangerous or erroneous opinions. Therefore, since he has not caused any revolution here, we will abstain from considering him from the standpoint of this subject.

Locke undertook and successfully carried through what Newton had not dared to do, or perhaps would have found impossible. It can be said that he created metaphysics, almost as Newton had created physics. He understood that the abstractions and ridiculous questions which had been debated up to that time and which had seemed to constitute the substance of philosophy were the very part most necessary to proscribe. He sought the principal causes of our errors in those abstractions and in the abuse of signs, and that is where he found them. In order to know our soul, its ideas, and its affections, he did not study books, because they would only have instructed him badly; he was content with probing deeply into himself, and after having contemplated himself, so to speak, for a long time, he did nothing more in his treatise, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, than to present mankind with the mirror in which he had looked at himself. In a word, he reduced metaphysics to what it really ought to be: the experimental natural philosophy [*physique*] of the soul—a very different kind of natural philosophy [*physique*] from that of bodies, not only in its object, but in its way of viewing that object. In the latter study we can, and often do, discover unknown phenomena. In the former, facts as ancient as the world exist equally in all men; so much the worse for whoever believes he is seeing something new. Reasonable metaphysics can only consist, as does experimental natural philosophy [*physique expérimentale*], in the careful assembling of all these facts, in reducing them to a corpus of information, in explaining some by others, and in distinguishing those which ought to hold the first rank and serve as the foundation. In brief, the principles of metaphysics, which are as simple as axioms, are the same for the philosophers as for the general run of people. But the meager progress that this science has made for such a long time shows how rarely these principles are applied felicitously, whether because of the difficulty that surrounds such an application, or perhaps also

because of the natural temptations that prevent us from holding ourselves within bounds when we engage in metaphysical speculations¹³.

The translation is by Schwab, and I have made some important modifications, about which more later. First, however, we need to orient ourselves by reviewing d'Alembert's concluding comments on Newton and metaphysics.

D'Alembert is sure that Newton did not neglect metaphysics because he would have been aware that "it constitutes the basis of our knowledge and that clear and exact notions about everything must be sought in metaphysics alone". This comment reflects d'Alembert's belief that metaphysics is the highest of all the sciences, a point that is nicely illustrated in the foldout diagram of the scheme of knowledge where metaphysics comes first in the central column of knowledge that pertains to reason¹⁴. Yet Newton, according to d'Alembert, did not discuss metaphysics in his main publications, and we are left to the writings of his followers to determine what his views were. No doubt d'Alembert has the likes of Samuel Clarke and the notion of absolute space in mind here¹⁵. Whatever the reason for Newton's reluctance to treat of metaphysics, what is clear to d'Alembert is that "he has not caused any revolution here". This sets up the contrast with Locke about whom d'Alembert goes on to claim:

Locke undertook and successfully carried through what Newton had not dared to do, or perhaps would have found impossible. It can be said that he created metaphysics, almost as Newton had created physics.

Without the distinction between particular and general metaphysics this claim might seem obscure. D'Alembert reiterates it a few sentences later, though now with more detail:

he reduced metaphysics to what it really ought to be: the experimental natural philosophy [*physique*] of the soul – a very different kind of natural philosophy [*physique*] from that of bodies, not only in its object, but in its way of viewing that object.

Newton dealt with material bodies, Locke with the soul. Where Newton had engaged in experimental natural philosophy of material bodies, Locke

¹³ D'Alembert, "Preliminary Discourse", cit., pp. 83-84, modified.

¹⁴ Reproduced in d'Alembert, "Preliminary Discourse", cit., pp. 144-45.

¹⁵ See d'Alembert, "Preliminary Discourse", cit., p. 18.

reduced particular metaphysics to “the experimental natural philosophy of the soul”¹⁶.

D’Alembert clearly sees Locke’s *Essay*, whose title he gives in full and which he had carefully read¹⁷, as a work of experimental philosophy and it is worth digressing to flesh this out a little. Not only was d’Alembert committed to the neo-Aristotelian theory of knowledge acquisition and to a tripartite faculty psychology, he was also an advocate of experimental philosophy, and by the late 1740s was *au fait* with the leading British writings of the movement¹⁸. The “Preliminary Discourse” endorses experimental philosophy and rejects speculative philosophy, what in the French context was called the spirit of systems, with its indulging in hypotheses and untested principles. Unfortunately, this is obscured in Richard Schwab’s translation of *physique expérimentale* as ‘experimental physics’ and I have modified the translation accordingly¹⁹. Thus, later in the “Preliminary Discourse” d’Alembert offers an extended attack on the spirit of systems, citing Condillac as one who has “dealt a death blow to it”, alluding to the latter’s *Traité des systèmes*²⁰.

It is important at this juncture to make the historiographical observation that d’Alembert uses the actors’ category of experimental philosophy as a descriptor for Locke’s project in the *Essay*, a book which proponents of the post-Kantian historiography of rationalism versus empiricism would later describe

¹⁶ See also Anne Robert Jacques Turgot’s undated comment in his “Réflexions générales et pensées diverses”: “La vraie métaphysique, dont Locke nous a ouvert le premier le chemin”, in A.R.J. Turgot, *Œuvres de Turgot et documents le concernant*, ed. by G. Schelle, 5 vols., Paris 1913-23, vol. 1, p. 346.

¹⁷ There is ample evidence in the “Preliminary Discourse” alone that d’Alembert had imbibed distinctive Lockean doctrines from the *Essay* itself and not from his Lockean compatriot Condillac. See, for example, his equivalent of the Lockean distinction between intuitive and demonstrative knowledge: “Evidence properly pertains to the ideas whose connection the mind perceives immediately. Certitude pertains to those whose connection can be known only by the aid of a certain number of intermediate ideas”, d’Alembert, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., p. 44. The doctrine of intermediate ideas is absent from Condillac. See also d’Alembert’s critique of logic which bears strong parallels with Locke, *ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁸ See P.R. Anstey ‘D’Alembert, the ‘Preliminary Discourse’ and experimental philosophy’, *Intellectual History Review* 24 (2014), pp. 508-9.

¹⁹ D’Alembert defines *physique* as “the study of Nature”, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., p. 16.

²⁰ D’Alembert, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., pp. 94-95, partially derived from J. Le Rond d’Alembert, *Recherches sur la précession des équinoxes, et sur la nutation*, Paris 1749, pp. vii-viii. See also *ibid.*, p. xxxviii. For further discussion of d’Alembert and the spirit of systems, see V. Le Ru, *Jean Le Rond d’Alembert philosophe*, Vrin, Paris 1994, pp. 173-77. For the origins of the anti-system sentiment in France, see P.R. Anstey, “The Principled Enlightenment”, cit., pp. 135-39. For a collection on the spirit of systems in eighteenth-century France, though one that largely ignores the distinction between experimental and speculative philosophy, see S. Marchand and E. Pavy-Guilbert, (eds.), *L’Esprit de système au XVIII^e siècle*, Hermann, Paris 2017.

as the quintessential work of British empiricism. It must be said that it is hard to see any value in the post-Kantian terms of reference here, whereas the distinction between experimental and speculative philosophy plays an important role in the “Preliminary Discourse” in general and in d’Alembert’s understanding of Locke in particular. Thus, for example, d’Alembert elaborates on Locke’s method by pointing out the parallels with experimental natural philosophy:

Reasonable metaphysics can only consist, as does experimental natural philosophy [*Physique expérimentale*], in the careful assembling of all these facts, in reducing them to a corpus of information, in explaining some by others, and in distinguishing those which ought to hold the first rank and serve as the foundation.

Here ‘reasonable metaphysics’ is the metaphysics of the soul, that is, the science of that which has the faculty of reason²¹, and this, d’Alembert points out, consists in assembling the relevant facts, forming them into a body of data from which we can glean explanatory relations and determining which of those facts can serve as principles of the science. The same goes for experimental natural philosophy, which at one point d’Alembert calls reasoned natural philosophy [*Physique raisonnée*]²². The salient difference is the method by which the facts are acquired. In reasonable metaphysics Locke

was content with probing deeply into himself, and after having contemplated himself, so to speak, for a long time, he did nothing more in his treatise, [...] than to present mankind with the mirror in which he had looked at himself.

Thus, Locke’s method was one of introspective observation whereby one can “experiment in himself”²³, in contrast to the objective method of studying material bodies. Yet the aim of both methods is identical: to establish principles upon which to found a science, those facts which “hold the first rank and serve as the foundation” of reasonable metaphysics.

²¹ In Part III of the “Preliminary Discourse”, d’Alembert and Diderot speak of “the *science of the soul*, which has been subdivided into *science of the reasonable soul* [...] and *science of the feeling soul*”, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., p. 149. Again, in the article on “Catalogue” in the *Encyclopédie*, Michel-Antoine David claims “Metaphysics searches for knowledge of that which is the mind and thought, the properties and operations of the reasonable soul”, *Encyclopédie*, cit., vol. 2, p. 764.

²² D’Alembert, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., p. 55.

²³ See, for example, J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, II.xxi.47, p. 263 and II.xxiii.32, pp. 313-14.

D'Alembert is also aware of the importance of the negative side to Locke's method, the diagnosis of error which is caused by the abuse of words: "[h]e sought the principal causes of our errors in those abstractions and in the abuse of signs, and that is where he found them". This is not just a passing reference to Locke's view of the causes of error, for earlier in the "Preliminary Discourse" d'Alembert elaborates on his own commitment to this very analysis of conceptual errors in the context of his discussion of one of the three leading types of principle, namely, axioms, and it is worth digressing to set out d'Alembert's view.

As some philosophers have observed, we owe many errors to the abuse of words. It is perhaps to this same abuse that we owe axioms. My intention is not, however, to condemn their use; I wish only to point out that their true purpose is merely to render simple ideas more familiar to us by usage, and more suitable for the different uses to which we can apply them. I say virtually the same thing of the use of mathematical theorems, although with the appropriate qualifications. Viewed without prejudice, they are reducible to a rather small number of primary truths. If one examines a succession of geometrical propositions, deduced one from the other so that two neighboring propositions are immediately contiguous without any interval between them, it will be observed that they are all only the first proposition which is successively and gradually reshaped, so to speak, as it passes from one consequence to the next, but which, nevertheless, has not really been multiplied by this chain of connections; it has merely received different forms. It is almost as if one were trying to express this proposition by means of a language whose nature was being imperceptibly altered, so that the proposition was successively expressed in different ways representing the different states through which the language had passed²⁴.

D'Alembert compares the abuse of words with the progression from axioms to theorems in geometry. He does not, of course, reject axioms or theorems, rather he seeks to show how language tends to render the usage of simple ideas more complicated than it ought to be. (Note here the commitment to the theory of ideas and the theory of principles.) Using the analogy of geometrical reasoning, d'Alembert claims that in a series of deductions from a geometrical proposition, each successive proposition is "only the first proposition which is successively and gradually reshaped, so to speak, as it passes from one consequence to the next". It is similar to expressing a proposition in a language that is subtly changing so that the same proposition is expressed using different words

²⁴ D'Alembert, "Preliminary Discourse", cit., p. 28.

as the language mutates. At this point in the text, d'Alembert loses the flow of the claims that instigated the analogy, and he moves on to express wonder at the genius of those who have discovered those fundamental truths from which we are able to extract new geometrical knowledge. Nevertheless, the Lockean analysis of the sources of error remains and he adverts to it again when discussing the difficulty of distinguishing between the sciences and arts: "How many questions and how much trouble we would spare ourselves if we finally determined the meaning of words in a clear and precise way!"²⁵.

We return, in conclusion, to d'Alembert's own historiography. Recall that d'Alembert situates Locke in the age of reason, following his treatment of Newton, and claims that Locke brought about a change in metaphysics that the great Newton himself was either unable or unwilling to attempt, namely, creating a metaphysics of the soul. Two further points can be added now. First, one of the central drivers of d'Alembert's history is the notion of revolution.

The era of philosophy opened under the bondage of Scholasticism: "Scholasticism, which constitutes the whole of so-called science of the centuries of ignorance, still was prejudicial to the progress of true philosophy in that first century of enlightenment"²⁶. It could only be overcome by "bold and new opinions"²⁷. As the previous century opened, Francis Bacon

asserted that the scholastics had enervated science by their petty questions, and that the mind ought to sacrifice the study of general beings for that of individual objects; nonetheless, he seems to have shown a little too much caution or deference to the dominant taste of his century in his frequent use of the terms of the scholastics, sometimes even of scholastic principles, and in the use of divisions and subdivisions, fashionable in his time. After having burst so many irons, this great man was still held by certain chains which he could not, or dared not, break²⁸.

That task was finally achieved by Descartes. It was he who

had the courage to arise against a despotic and arbitrary power and who, in preparing a resounding revolution, laid the foundations of a more just and happier government, which he himself was not able to see established²⁹.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

Unhappily, his natural philosophy was ultimately rejected, and “[h]is metaphysics ... suffered virtually the same fate”³⁰.

Yet it was Descartes who paved the way for Newton who “gave philosophy a form which apparently it is to keep”. This was, of course, the method of experimental philosophy: “That great genius saw that it was time to banish conjectures and vague hypotheses from physics, or at least to present them only for what they were worth, and that this science was uniquely susceptible to the experiments of geometry”³¹. And yet it was left to Locke to apply this method to the study of metaphysics, for Newton “has not caused any revolution here”. It was not that Locke was working from a new set of observations: “facts as ancient as the world exist equally in all men”. It was Locke’s careful assembling of these facts that led to explanatory relations between them and the establishment of principles of reasonable metaphysics that brought about the revolution in metaphysics.

D’Alembert rounds off his treatment of the contributions of Newton and Locke with a kind of ‘swings and roundabouts’ claim concerning national hegemony in the age of reason: “[w]e may conclude from all this history that England is indebted to us for the origins of that philosophy which we have since received back from her”³². Then after a brief discussion of Leibniz and his metaphysics, d’Alembert turns to the theme of the immediate reception of his “[p]rincipal geniuses” Bacon, Descartes, Locke and Newton³³. Our interest is in Locke. D’Alembert’s general observation is that none of them had an impact on the sciences during their lifetimes: this was to follow in future generations. As for Locke, “[f]orgotten for a long time in favor of Rohault and Régis, and still rather poorly known by the multitude, Locke is finally beginning to have some readers and a few partisans among us”³⁴. No doubt d’Alembert has Voltaire and Condillac in mind here, yet the overall impression is that the importance of Locke is yet to be widely appreciated. This is strikingly different to Condorcet’s claim forty-four years later that Locke’s method “was soon adopted by all philosophers”³⁵, and it is to Condorcet that we now turn.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

³¹ Ibid., p. 81.

³² Ibid., p. 85.

³³ Ibid., p. 85; see also p. 60.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁵ Condorcet, *The Sketch*, cit., p. 96.

2. *Locke in Condorcet's The Sketch*

Condorcet's history of human progress is divided into ten epochs. The first nine epochs cover the progress from pre-civil human existence to the revolutionary period of the late eighteenth century; the tenth epoch is a projection beyond Condorcet's day into the future. His treatment of Locke is found in the ninth epoch whose subtitle is "From Descartes to the foundation of the French Republic". This epoch is characterised as that time when reason finally threw off the chains of tyranny and superstition, as Condorcet puts it: "[i]t remains for us to study the stage in which [reason] finally succeeds in breaking these chains, [...] when at last she can go forward unhindered"³⁶.

The focus of the opening section of the ninth epoch is political liberty that is the first form of release from the constrictive chains of the past. Condorcet portrays the gradual progression of political liberty that, in spite of the prevailing forms of despotism, grew from the "spirit of industry and commerce" and, importantly, "through a wider diffusion of the *philosophical ideas of equality and humanity*" and the gradual progress of "enlightenment"³⁷. A critical turning-point resulting from these developments is the newly emerging influence of public opinion on leaders and nations. This has led to national political revolutions, such as that in America and that which France was currently experiencing. Within the swelling voice of public opinion, finally, the "true rights of man" have been discovered, rights which can be deduced from a single truth: that "*man is a sentient being, capable of reasoning and of acquiring moral ideas*"³⁸.

Here we have a very pregnant thought, one that requires careful unpacking. We note first, the gesture to Principle Minimalism, the view that a science can be founded on one fecund principle. Second, we note the emphasis on rights, a key theme of the ninth epoch with the expression "natural rights of man" alluding to such writings as Lafayette's famous "Declaration of the rights of man and the citizen" of 1789 and Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*³⁹, and with the ensuing claim that "the maintenance of these rights was the sole object of men's coming together in political societies"⁴⁰. In fact, Condorcet follows this claim with a kind of précis of a Rousseauian theory of political society in which he speaks

³⁶ Ibid., p. 89.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

³⁹ See T. Paine, *Rights of Man*, London 1791. For Condorcet and Paine, see Williams, *Condorcet and Modernity*, cit., p. 24.

⁴⁰ Condorcet, *The Sketch*, cit., p. 92.

of the individual binding “himself in advance to the will of the majority which then becomes unanimous” and the basis of political obligation. Third, we note the theme of people as sentient, reasoning beings who are able to acquire moral ideas. This takes us back to the Introduction of *The Sketch* where Condorcet’s anthropology sets the terms of reference for the whole work. It also drives us forward to the treatment of Locke who set out in what sense humans are sentient beings and just how our moral ideas are acquired. And so, it is to Locke that we now turn; I quote the extract in full.

Descartes had brought philosophy back to reason; for he had understood that it must be derived entirely from those primary and evident truths which we can discover by observing the operations of the human mind. Soon, however, his impatient imagination snatched it from the path that he had traced for it, and for a time it seemed that philosophy had regained her independence only to be led astray by new errors.

At last, Locke grasped the thread by which philosophy should be guided; he showed that an exact and precise analysis of ideas, which reduces them step by step to other ideas of more immediate origin or of simpler composition, is the only way to avoid being lost in that chaos of incomplete, incoherent and indeterminate notions which chance presents to us at hazard and we unthinkingly accept.

By this same analysis he proved that all ideas are the result of the operations of our minds upon sensations we have received, or, to put it more exactly, that they are the combinations of these sensations presented to us simultaneously by the faculty of memory in such a way that our attention is arrested and our perception is thereby limited to no more than a part of such compound sensations.

He showed that if we attach a word to each idea after analysing it and circumscribing it, we shall succeed in remembering the idea ever afterwards in a uniform fashion; that is to say, the idea will always be formed of the same simple ideas, it will always be enclosed within the same limits and it can in consequence be used in a chain of reasoning without any risk of confusion. On the other hand, if a word is used in such a way that it does not correspond to a determinate idea, it can at different times arouse different ideas in the same person’s mind, and this is the most fecund source of error in reasoning.

Locke, finally, was the first man who dared to set a limit to human understanding, or rather to determine the nature of the truths that it can come to know and of the objects it can comprehend.

This method was soon adopted by all philosophers and, by applying it to moral science, to politics and to social economy, they were able to make almost as sure progress in these sciences as they had in the natural sciences. They were able to admit only proven truths, to separate these truths from whatever as yet remained doubtful and uncertain, and to ignore whatever is and always will be impossible to know.

Similarly, the analysis of our sentiments leads to our finding, in the development of our capacity to feel pleasure and pain, the origin of our moral ideas, the foundation of those general truths which, resulting from these ideas, determine the necessary and immutable laws of justice and injustice, and, finally, the motives that we have for conforming to them, motives which spring from the very nature of our sensibility, from what might be called our moral constitution.

This metaphysical method became virtually a universal instrument. Men learnt to use it in order to perfect the methods of the physical sciences, to throw light on their principles and to examine the validity of their proofs; and it was extended to the examination of facts and to the rules of taste.

Thus, it was applied to all the various undertakings of human understanding, and by means of it the operations of the mind in every branch of knowledge were subjected to analysis, and the nature of the truths and the kind of certainty we can expect to find from each of these branches of knowledge was thereby revealed. It is this new step in philosophy that has forever imposed a barrier between mankind and the errors of its infancy; a barrier that should save it from relapsing into its former errors under the influence of new prejudices, just as it should assure the eventual eradication of those that still survive unrecognised, and should make it certain that any that may take their place will exercise only a faint influence and enjoy only an ephemeral existence⁴¹.

As with d'Alembert's "Preliminary Discourse", the paragraph preceding the discussion of Locke provides a carefully crafted segue. Condorcet claims that it was Descartes who "brought philosophy back to reason" by showing that it is derived from principles that are observed from the operations of our minds. He almost certainly has the *cogito* in mind here and the general project of the *Meditations*. Condorcet attributes the key corrective shift in philosophy to Descartes but claims that he soon lost his way, and Condorcet goes on to argue that it was Locke who "grasped the thread by which philosophy should be guided", thus motivating his treatment of Locke. However, before proceed-

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 95-97.

ing to analyse Condorcet's discussion of Locke, it is worth zooming out and taking a wider view of the overall project of *The Sketch* in order to situate the 'Cartesian corrective' and its working out by Locke within his (Condorcet's) narrative of human progress.

In the Introduction, Condorcet sets out some of the organising principles of his history of human progress. He opens *The Sketch* with a statement of the nature of the metaphysics of the human mind:

Man is born with the ability to receive sensations; to perceive them and to distinguish between the various simple sensations of which they are composed; to remember, recognise and combine them; to compare these combinations; [...] to attach signs to them all in order to recognise them more easily [...] This faculty is developed in him through the action of external objects [...] through communication with other beings like himself; and finally through various artificial methods [...] Sensations are attended by pleasure or pain [...] as a consequence of this capacity and of his ability to form and combine ideas, there arise between him and his fellow creatures ties of interest and duty [...] If one confines oneself to the study and observation of the general facts and laws about the development of these faculties, considering only what is common to all human beings, this science is called metaphysics⁴².

This is Condorcet's basic summary of the relevant features of his conception of humankind that pertain to his history of its progress through the centuries. Note how Lockean it sounds: talk of the action of external objects as the cause of sensations, the talk of simple sensations or ideas which can be combined and decomposed, the attaching of signs to ideas to generate language, the association of pleasure or pain with each sensation. And all of this is a science: "this science is called metaphysics". Clearly Condorcet's conception of human understanding is cut from the same cloth as that of d'Alembert in the "Preliminary Discourse".

More importantly, however, it is this conception of the understanding, this science of metaphysics of the mind, that provides the raw materials of the ensuing history of human progress: "if one studies this development as it manifests itself in the inhabitants of a certain area at a certain period of time and then traces it on from generation to generation, one has the picture of the progress of the human mind"⁴³, a progress that "is subject to the same general laws that can

⁴² Ibid., p. 1.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

be observed in the development of the faculties of the individual⁴⁴. Thus, this Lockean-style science of the human mind provides the terms of reference for understanding the changes in different human societies throughout human history and for instructing us “about the means we should employ to make certain and rapid the further progress that [man’s] nature allows him still to hope for”⁴⁵.

In the master narrative of *The Sketch*, philosophy loses its way and it is only in the final paragraphs of the eighth epoch that the transition to the period of enlightenment begins. There, according to Condorcet, “[t]hree great men have marked the transition from this stage of history to the next: Bacon, Galileo, Descartes”. Bacon provided the method for studying nature through “observation, experiment and calculation”. Galileo “showed by example how to arrive at a knowledge of the laws of nature” but limited himself to the physical sciences⁴⁶. It was Descartes who extended the new method to “all the subjects of human thought” even though he gave too much licence to his imagination. Above all, claims Condorcet, it was Descartes who “commanded men to shake off the yoke of authority [*de seconner le joug de l’autorité*]”, echoing d’Alembert’s almost identical claim that “Descartes dared at least to show intelligent minds how to throw off the yoke ... of authority [*secoüer le joug ... de l’autorité*”⁴⁷. It is this that brings us to Locke.

Thus, it is only with the Cartesian corrective and then Locke’s grasping of the “thread by which philosophy should be guided” that humankind gets back on track and begins to lock in the inevitable progress that is to follow. Interestingly, the very same metaphor of grasping the thread [*saisi le fil*] is used in the second paragraph of Condorcet’s ‘Reception Discourse’ to the French Académie on 21 February 1782, where he claims:

The general system of principles of our knowledge has been developed, in which the method of discovery of truth has been reduced to an art, namely, to formulas, and in which reason has finally recognised the route that she must follow and grasped the thread [*saisi le fil*] which will prevent her from losing her way [*s’égarer*]⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 87, modifying ‘experience’ to ‘experiment’ for *l’expérience*.

⁴⁷ Condorcet, *The Sketch*, cit., p. 88 = *Esquisse*, cit., p. 231; d’Alembert, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., p. 80 = “Discours préliminaire”, *Encyclopédie*, cit., p. xxvi. See also the subtitle to the eighth epoch, Condorcet, *Esquisse*, cit., p. 185.

⁴⁸ J.-A.-N. Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, ‘Discours prononcé dans L’Académie Française’, *Ceuvres de Condorcet*, ed. by A. Condorcet O’Connor and M.F. Arago, Paris 1847, vol. 1, p. 390.

Here the nature of ‘the general system of principles of our knowledge’ is not specified. However, in Condorcet’s *Life of Voltaire* it becomes clear what Condorcet had in mind: it is the method of Locke: “he [Locke] had given the first theory of the human mind founded on experience, and had shown the route that it was necessary to follow in metaphysics in order that it not lose its way [s’égarer]”⁴⁹. Indeed, in the tenth epoch of *The Sketch*, Condorcet goes further and claims not only has the correct method been established, but the principles themselves have been discovered:

Since the discovery, or rather the exact analysis of the first principles of metaphysics, morals and politics is still recent and was preceded by the knowledge of a large number of detailed truths, the false notion that they have thereby attained their destination has gained ready acceptance⁵⁰.

Thus, this notion of the discovery of the true method and its widespread implementation predates *The Sketch*, but it is only in this latter work that its nature and efficacy are elaborated. Let us, therefore, turn to his appraisal of Locke.

Condorcet’s central claim about Locke is that he introduced a new and correct method, one which has subsequently borne much fruit in its various applications. This method revolves around Locke’s theory of ideas: “he showed that an exact and precise analysis of ideas, which reduces them step by step to other ideas of more immediate origin or of simpler composition, is the only way to avoid being lost in that chaos of incomplete, incoherent and indeterminate notions which chance presents to us at hazard and we unthinkingly accept”. It is by understanding the combinatorial nature of our ideas that we are able to avoid error. Moreover, if we attach a word to each particular idea, we are able not only to recall that idea from then on, we are also able to reason using that idea without “risk of confusion”. It is the misuse of words, attaching them to indeterminate ideas, that is the primary source of errors of reasoning. The development of a precise and exact language of science had long been a desideratum for Condorcet and he discusses this further in the tenth epoch⁵¹.

⁴⁹ Condorcet, *Vie de Voltaire*, in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, cit., vol. 4, p. 19.

⁵⁰ Condorcet, *The Sketch*, cit., pp. 137-8.

⁵¹ See Condorcet, ‘Discours’, *Œuvres de Condorcet*, cit., vol. 1, p. 392: “[the moral sciences and the physical sciences] must follow the very same method, acquiring a language equally exact and precise to attain to the same degree of certitude”; see also his comments in the tenth epoch in, Condorcet, *The Sketch*, cit., p. 139.

The parallels with d'Alembert's discussion of Locke are obvious, and yet he plies Locke's theories of ideas and language for his own purposes, purposes that differ markedly from those of his older mentor and patron⁵². While he does claim that Locke's method was "virtually a universal instrument" used "to perfect the methods of the physical sciences" and even the rules of taste, his primary concern is with the application of that method to morality, politics and social economy.

This method was soon adopted by all philosophers and, by applying it to moral science, to politics and to social economy, they were able to make almost as sure progress in these sciences as they had in the natural sciences.

Condorcet does not go into details, and there is certainly an element of hyperbole in his claims about the reach and efficacy of Locke's "metaphysical method". However, it is worth teasing out just what he has to say about the application of the method to morality and politics.

First, Condorcet is concerned to stress that Locke's method set limits to what we can know: "the first man who dared to set a limit to human understanding" by circumscribing in morals, politics and social economy those truths that we can come to know, and by enabling us to distinguish between certain and uncertain or doubtful truths, such that theorists in these sciences "were able to admit only proven truths, to separate these truths from whatever as yet remained doubtful and uncertain, and to ignore whatever is and always will be impossible to know".

Next, Condorcet sets this out in a little more detail. We find through "the analysis of our sentiments" a capacity to feel pleasure or pain which, in turn, aids us in the formation of our moral ideas, ideas which become the constituents of general moral truths: "the foundation of those general truths which, resulting from these ideas, determine the necessary and immutable laws of justice and injustice". And while Condorcet restricts himself to generalities here, we saw above that in the opening section of the ninth epoch, just a few pages earlier, he had referred to that truth "man is a sentient being, capable of reasoning and of acquiring moral ideas". Indeed, he also alludes to some specific moral and political principles espoused by Locke and Algernon Sidney, "principles,

⁵² David Williams rightly points out Condorcet's appropriation of d'Alembert's notion of the chain linking the sciences. In the 'Discours' of 1784 he had claimed: "[T]he sciences are held together by a chain which links each one to all the others", D. Williams, *Condorcet and Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 95, quoting Condorcet, *Œuvres de Condorcet*, cit., vol. 1, p. 439.

which the noble Sydney paid for with his blood and on which Locke set the authority of his name, [and] were later developed by Rousseau with greater precision"⁵³. Condorcet refers here to implications of the principle of human equality: that there are not two races, the rulers and the ruled, and that "all men have an equal right to be informed on all that concerns them". And so, we can see that Locke's universal instrument, his way of ideas, his metaphysical method, ties in seamlessly with the broader social and political dimensions of Condorcet's agenda in the ninth epoch.

Finally, Condorcet portrays Locke's method as drawing a line in the sand: "this new step in philosophy [...] has forever imposed a barrier between mankind and the errors of its infancy; a barrier that should save it from relapsing into its former errors under the influence of new prejudices". The Lockean method provides a kind of guarantee that humankind will not regress to the errors of former epochs, while at the same time making it certain that any new errors or prejudices "will exercise only a faint influence" and will not last. The Lockean method then, is portrayed by Condorcet as a kind of panacea for humankind that both prevents social devolution and guarantees protection over the *longue durée* from the deleterious effects of new errors and vices.

3. *Comparisons and conclusions*

The two histories of philosophy that we have examined are marvellous works, works that many regard as the quintessence of the French Enlightenment, and the philosophy of Locke plays an important role in both. While the "Preliminary Discourse" and *The Sketch* have different aims and were composed nearly half a century apart, there are striking continuities between the two in their handling of Locke and his place in the development of enlightenment and, therefore, of human progress.

Here is a list of the features they have in common. First, both authors use a dialectical structure that sets out progress from the Renaissance to the modern era in terms of liberation from a form of intellectual bondage, with the new era being ushered in by Descartes and consolidated by Locke; second, both authors deploy similar structural motifs, including the use of small groups of "principal geniuses" – d'Alembert's Bacon, Descartes, Locke and Newton; Condorcet's

⁵³ Condorcet, *The Sketch*, cit., p. 93.

Bacon, Galileo and Descartes⁵⁴ – and the effective use of segue paragraphs and short pithy summaries of key doctrines; third, both authors use geographical markers and ‘map-hopping’ from England to France and back again; and more specifically, both authors add a modest Leibnizian postscript following their treatments of Locke⁵⁵. Each of these stylistic and structural features of their histories contribute to a vivid sense of forward momentum in the history of philosophy and the arts and sciences. While d’Alembert’s history is prefatory to the *Encyclopédie* and Condorcet’s is a broad-ranging vision for indefinite social and intellectual progress, both works utilise Locke’s account of the understanding with its theory of ideas, its epistemic humility and its analysis of the source of errors of reason to great effect. Neither work attempts a detailed exposition of any aspect of Locke’s philosophy: Locke after all is one small constituent of far larger projects. Finally, in neither case is Locke used for point scoring against antagonists, and here the contrast with Voltaire is instructive.

In his letters on M. Locke in *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733) and its French equivalent, *Lettres philosophique* (1734), Voltaire introduces Locke as a kind of philosophical counterpoint to the excesses of Descartes’ philosophy⁵⁶. It was “Our *Des Cartes*” who substituted the errors of the ancients with his own, who “hurried away by that systematic Spirit which throws a Cloud over the Minds of the greatest Men”⁵⁷. He “thought he had demonstrated that the Soul is the same Thing as Thought ... He asserted, that Man thinks eternally, and that the Soul, at its coming into the Body, is inform’d with the whole Series of metaphysical Notions”⁵⁸. It is this summary of Cartesian doctrines and its mocking tone that provides the entrée and rationale for his treatment of Locke’s philosophy. Thus, Voltaire ranges over a number of Lockean doctrines, including the rejection of innate ideas, the critique of the Cartesian doctrine that the mind thinks all the time and the limits of human knowledge, but he devotes most attention to Locke’s suggestion concerning thinking matter. To be sure, Voltaire cleverly captures Locke’s agnosticism on this issue, indeed he is singularly impressed by Locke’s epistemic humility throughout. However, he cannot resist driving home the materialist implications of the thinking matter issue

⁵⁴ D’Alembert, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., pp. 74-85, 90-91; Condorcet, *The Sketch*, cit., p. 87.

⁵⁵ D’Alembert, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., pp. 86-87; Condorcet, *The Sketch*, cit., p. 97.

⁵⁶ On Voltaire as an historian and historiographer, see S. Pierce, “Voltaire: polemical possibilities of history”, in *A Companion to Enlightenment Historiography*, cit., pp. 153-87.

⁵⁷ Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, ed. by N. Cronk, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1994, p. 55.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

against his clerical targets. By contrast, the issue of thinking matter is not alluded to at all in either the “Preliminary Discourse” or *The Sketch*. D’Alembert, who was openly dualist in his philosophy of mind in the “Preliminary Discourse”⁵⁹, would have been well aware of Condillac’s dismissal of Locke’s thinking matter suggestion in the former’s *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*⁶⁰. Moreover, d’Alembert’s *Essai sur les élémens de philosophie* contains a long discussion of the ontological status of the soul that affirms Locke’s rejection of innate ideas⁶¹, yet he avoids the thinking matter entirely in the “Preliminary Discourse”⁶². For his part, Condorcet was as opposed to religious superstition as Voltaire and yet he too chose not to engage with this issue of metaphysical speculation. It was the Lockean method with its theory of ideas and the signification of words that both philosophes regarded as transformative.

More importantly for our purposes, Voltaire’s anti-Cartesian stance was part of his broader polemical agenda to undermine the hegemony of Cartesian natural philosophy and its concomitant commitment to speculative philosophy in France, and to promote in its stead experimental natural philosophy particularly as it was exemplified by Newton. This polemical thread begins with the letter on Bacon: “He is the father of Experimental Philosophy”, “no one, before the Lord Bacon, was acquainted with experimental Philosophy”⁶³. And it is Descartes who provides the contrast class. In the letter on Locke, Descartes is the one who was “hurried away by that systematic spirit”, that is, speculative philosophy. Again, in the subsequent letter on Descartes and Newton, Descartes “gave entirely into the Humour of forming Hypotheses; and then Philosophy was no more than an ingenious Romance”⁶⁴. Interestingly, for “the Humour of forming Hypotheses” the French version has *se livra à l’esprit de Système*⁶⁵, that is, the French equivalent of speculative philosophy. Locke, by contrast, “has display’d the human Soul, in the same Manner as an excellent

⁵⁹ D’Alembert, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., pp. 13 and 52.

⁶⁰ Condillac, *Essay*, cit., p. 13. See also, J.O. de La Mettrie, “Man Machine”, in *Man Machine and Other Writings*, ed. by A. Thomson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, p. 3.

⁶¹ See d’Alembert, *Essai*, cit., pp. 165-78. For d’Alembert’s critique of innate ideas, see *ibid.*, pp. 176-77, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., p. 7 and 80.

⁶² David Renaud Boullier, in his critical review of d’Alembert’s discussion of Locke in the “Preliminary Discourse”, was quick to draw the link with thinking matter. See D.R. Boullier, *Apologie de la métaphysique*, Amsterdam 1753, pp. 13-16. For a survey of discussions of Locke and thinking matter in eighteenth-century France, see J.W. Yolton, *Locke and French Materialism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1991.

⁶³ Voltaire, *Letters*, cit., p. 51 and p. 52.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁶⁵ Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, Amsterdam 1734, p. 128.

Anatomist explains the Springs of the human Body. He every where takes the Light of Physicks [natural philosophy] for his Guide”⁶⁶. It is this claim that provides the point of connection with d’Alembert.

However, by the time d’Alembert came to write the “Preliminary Discourse” Voltaire’s view had become *de rigueur*: experimental philosophy was widely accepted in France and the spirit of systems, together with Cartesianism, were on the outer. Thus, while d’Alembert, in one sense, mimics Voltaire by claiming Locke “reduced metaphysics to ... the experimental natural philosophy of the soul”, there is no polemical undertone to d’Alembert’s claim: he has no axe to grind the against the method of the last generation of French Cartesians and the spirit of systems. Indeed, for d’Alembert, “times have changed, and a writer among us who praised systems would have come too late”⁶⁷. Needless to say, by the time Condorcet composed *The Sketch*, this ship had well and truly sailed: there was simply no need to explain or defend the method of experimental philosophy⁶⁸.

This brings us, in conclusion, to some historiographical reflections, reflections that bear both on Enlightenment historiography of the eighteenth century and that of our own day. If the foregoing analyses of Voltaire’s, d’Alembert’s and Condorcet’s treatments of Locke are accurate, two points are clear. First, the distinction between experimental and speculative philosophy provided some of the actual terms of reference through which Locke’s contributions and importance were understood. This is especially true of Voltaire and d’Alembert. One does not need to force this interpretation onto the texts; this is not an instance of historiographical confirmation bias. D’Alembert’s Locke created the experimental natural philosophy [*physique expérimentale*] of the soul in the way Newton created physics. It is not too much to claim, therefore, that any interpretation of Locke’s place in the French Enlightenment that ignores this seam is effacing the philosophes’ own historiographical perspective.

Secondly, and finally, two of the three treatments of Locke juxtapose him, not with Berkeley, not with Hume, but with Descartes. In the case of Con-

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

⁶⁷ D’Alembert, “Preliminary Discourse”, cit., p. 94. D’Alembert also differs from Voltaire in claiming that it was Robert Boyle, not Bacon, who was “the father of experimental natural philosophy [*physique*]", ibid., p. 86, reflecting his deeper and wider reading in the writings of early English experimental philosophers. For his part, Condorcet claims experimental philosophy “was born in the school of Galileo”, *The Sketch*, cit., p. 83; see also ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁸ For the reception of experimental philosophy in France in the eighteenth century, see P.R. Anstey and A. Vanzo, *Experimental Philosophy and the Origins of Empiricism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2023, pp. 149-75.

dorcet this pairing is one of philosophical continuity; Descartes is portrayed as having taken the initial innovative steps, only to be derailed by speculation, so it was left to Locke to implement the true method for the study of the human mind. In other words, Locke completes what Descartes had begun. Locke is not the antidote to Descartes, but a philosophical counterpart of a genius who was, unhappily, side-tracked by his own rich imagination⁶⁹. The post-Kantian historiographical categories of rationalism and empiricism could not be further from Condorcet's conception. For promoters of this post-Kantian historiography today, Locke is the antithesis of Descartes; for Condorcet, Locke carried through what Descartes had started. Berkeley and Hume, the other so-called British empiricists, are not even in the frame. Indeed, Berkeley and Hume are entirely absent from both the "Preliminary Discourse" and *The Sketch*⁷⁰; they have no role to play in the two leading French Enlightenment histories of philosophy. Thus, the histories of d'Alembert and Condorcet, like Locke's own study of human understanding, provide us with a kind of mirror for our own historiographical proclivities and post-Kantian projections. In our post-colonialist age, these accounts of the unstoppable progress of reason and the unparalleled achievements of European civilisation have become key targets of the culture wars. And yet, whatever stand we take on these matters, there is no doubting that Locke was and is a pivotal player in it all.

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⁶⁹ Turgot, who provided inspiration for Condorcet's history of human progress, said of Locke, Berkeley and Condillac, "they are all children of Descartes", in "On universal history", in *The Turgot Collection*, ed. by D. Gordon, Mises Institute, Auburn AL 2011, p. 386. For Turgot and Condorcet on *le tableau historique*, see B. Binoche, *Les trois sources des philosophies de l'histoire*, Hermann, Paris 2008, pp. 47-69.

⁷⁰ For Condorcet and Hume, see R.H. Popkin, "Condorcet and Hume and Turgot", in *Condorcet Studies* 2 (1984), pp. 47-62.

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Locke e il “Lockianesimo” nell’*Encyclopedie*. Confronti e intersezioni

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Abstract: In the *Discours préliminaire* of the *Encyclopédie* D’Alembert does not hesitate to place Locke on the level of a «Newton of philosophy», as the inventor of a new metaphysics: «On peut dire qu’il créa la Métaphysique à peu-près comme Newton avoit créé the Physique» (*Enc.*, I, p. xxvii). Metaphysics is conceived no longer as a Science of Being, but as a Physics of the ideas of the human mind. But this is not the only image that emerges from the kaleidoscope of figures, offered by the various contributions, such as the famous (and authoritative) one of the co-director. Undoubtedly, the representation of an essentially «Pyrrhonian» philosopher in regards to Religion and Theology prevails, intersecting with that image of the inspirer of the various materialisms that runs through the 17 volumes of the *Dictionnaire raisonné*. The comparison between these representations reveals the figure of a thinker who is not at all «moderate», or inspirer of the conservative Enlightenment (as claimed, for example, by J. I Israel in *Radical Enlightenment*), but rather that of the (masked) «supporter» of the more subversive fringes of the French Enlightenment.

Keywords: Materialism, Sensualism, Radical Enlightenment, Metaphysics, Pyrrhonism.

1. *L’empirismo lockiano nel Discours préliminaire di D’Alembert*

La figura di Locke e la posizione del «lockianesimo» nell’*Encyclopédie* di Diderot e D’Alembert, sono di un rilievo eccezionale e forse maggiore rispetto ad ogni altro autore o dottrina considerata dai diversi redattori del grande *Dictionnaire raisonné*¹. Tuttavia, come in molti altri casi, l’immagine del pen-

¹ Oltre ai ben noti studi classici di F. Venturi, *Jeunesse de Diderot*, Skira, Paris 1939 [riedito in italiano: *La giovinezza di Diderot. 1713-1753*, Sellerio, Palermo 1988]; J. Lough, *The Encyclopédie of Diderot et D’Alembert*, University Press, Cambridge 1954; *Id.*, *The Contributors to the Encyclopédie of Diderot and D’Alembert*, Grant & Cutler, London 1973; J. Proust, *Diderot et l’Encyclopédie*, A. Colin, Paris 1962 [1995²], pp. 196-99; P. Casini, *Diderot Philosophe*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1962; A. M. Wilson, *Diderot. Sa vie, son œuvre*, Laffont, Paris 1985 [1972¹]; ci permettiamo di rinviare ai nostri

siero di Locke si diffrange nel prisma delle molteplici fonti comuni cui hanno attinto i diversi enciclopedisti, non il solo Diderot². La prima rappresentazione che l'*Encyclopédie* offre del compito storico del pensatore inglese, nel quadro delle intenzioni dei direttori, è di D'Alembert, che nel *Discours préliminaire* presenta Locke come il vero e proprio inventore di una nuova forma di «metafisica» come scienza. Non più «filosofia prima» o «Scienza dell'Essere», divisa scolasticamente in teologia, ontologia e psicologia razionale, la metafisica è «Scienza delle ragioni delle cose»³, o, come la definirà D'Alembert, «Scienza sperimentale dell'anima». Locke è perciò accostato a Isaac Newton, nel medesimo intento di liberare le conoscenze umane dal vincolo dei dettami di una scolastica che non viene neanche nominata, in un compito che tuttavia il grande matematico non riuscì a realizzare:

Ce que Newton n'avait osé, ou n'aurait peut-être pu faire, Locke l'entreprit & l'exécuta avec succès. On peut dire qu'il créa la Métaphysique à peu-près comme Newton avait créé la Physique. Il conçut que les abstractions & les questions ridicules qu'on avait jusqu'alors agitées, & qui avoient fait comme la substance de la Philosophie, étoient la partie qu'il fallait surtout proscrire. Il chercha dans ces abstractions & dans l'abus des signes les causes principales de nos erreurs, & les y trouva. Pour connaître notre âme, ses idées & ses affections, il n'étudia point les livres, parce qu'ils l'auraient mal instruit; il se contenta de descendre profondément en lui-même; & après s'être, pour ainsi dire, contemplé longtemps, il ne fit dans son *Traité de l'entendement humain* que présenter aux hommes le miroir dans lequel il s'était vu. En un mot il réduisit la Métaphysique à ce qu'elle doit être en effet, la Physique expérimentale de l'âme; espèce de Physique très-différente de celle des corps non-seulement par son objet, mais par la manière de l'envisager. Dans celle-ci on peut découvrir, & on découvre souvent des

studi: P. Quintili, a c. di, *Arti, scienze e lavoro nell'età dell'Illuminismo. La filosofia dell'Encyclopédie*, Pellicani Editore, Roma 1995; Id., *La pensée critique de Diderot. Matérialisme, science et poésie à l'âge de l'Encyclopédie. 1742-1782*, Honoré Champion, Paris 2001 [2016²], pp. 219-20.

² Proust, *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*, cit., p. 159, ha parlato al proposito di una «communauté de sources».

³ È la definizione datane da Diderot nell'articolo «METAPHYSIQUE»: «c'est la science des raisons des choses. Tout a sa *métaphysique* & sa pratique: la pratique, sans la raison de la pratique, & la raison sans l'exercice, ne forment qu'une science imparfaite. Interrogez un peintre, un poète, un musicien, un géomètre, & vous le forcerez à rendre compte de ses opérations, c'est-à-dire à en venir à la *métaphysique* de son art. Quand on borne l'objet de la *métaphysique* à des considérations vides & abstraites sur le temps, l'espace, la matière, l'esprit, c'est une science méprisabile; mais quand on la considère sous son vrai point de vue, c'est autre chose. Il n'y a guère que ceux qui n'ont pas assez de pénétration qui en disent du mal» (D. Diderot-J. Le Rond D'Alembert et al., *Encyclopédie (=Enc.)*, Le Breton-Briasson-David-Durand, Paris 1751-72, X, 440b). Anche qui la metafisica scolastica viene semplicemente ignorata.

phénomènes inconnus; dans l’autre les faits aussi anciens que le monde existent également dans tous les hommes: tant pis pour qui croit en voir de nouveaux. La Métaphysique raisonnable ne peut consister, comme la Physique expérimentale, qu’à rassembler avec soin tous ces faits, à les réduire en un corps, à expliquer les uns par les autres, en distinguant ceux qui doivent tenir le premier rang & servir comme de base. En un mot les principes de la Métaphysique, aussi simples que les axiomes, sont les mêmes pour les Philosophes & pour le Peuple⁴.

Locke, con il suo empirismo che confuta la tesi dell’esistenza delle idee innate, è considerato quindi come un «restauratore delle Scienze», dopo la parentesi (lunga) della «barbarie» e del «disprezzo dei nostri padri» (*ibidem*), di cui è stato, tra molti altri, vittima:

Il en a été de Locke à peu-près comme de Bacon, de Descartes, & de Newton. Oublié long-tems pour Rohaut & pour Regis, & encore assez peu connu de la multitude, il commence enfin à avoir parmi nous des lecteurs & quelques partisans. C’est ainsi que les personnages illustres souvent trop au-dessus de leur siècle, travaillent presque toujours en pure perte pour leur siècle même; c’est aux âges suivants qu’il est réservé de recueillir le fruit de leurs lumières (*Enc.*, I, p. xxx).

Locke, dunque, è alla fonte delle nuove *Lumières* che l’*Encyclopédie* propone ai suoi di diffondere. Ma l’affermazione positiva dei saperi liberati è sempre *postuma*, in un processo di avanzamento del conoscere – Bacon è ugualmente associato all’altro «grande inglese» – di cui non si possono afferrare i due capi, come non manca di riconoscere D’Alembert. Saranno perciò i discepoli di Locke, e non Locke stesso, a portare avanti l’emancipazione del pensiero umano dai pregiudizi scolastici. In questo processo di confronto continuo tra l’opera del maestro e le lezioni dei suoi seguaci, viene costruendosi l’orizzonte di un «lockianesimo» che oltrepasserà largamente i confini posti alla filosofia dall’*Essay concerning human understanding* (1690)⁵.

⁴ *Enc.*, I, pp. xxvii-viii.

⁵ Com’è noto, l’opera di Locke venne tradotta in francese da Pierre Coste, con il titolo: *Essai Philosophique concernant l’Entendement humain, où l’on montre quelle est l’étendue de nos connaissances certaines, et la manière dont nous y parvenons, par M. Locke, traduit de l’anglais par M. Coste*, Amsterdam, chez Henri Schelte, 1700. Questa traduzione, più volte riedita [1742⁴], segnò la diffusione del pensiero lockiano in Francia e ispirò le successive interpretazioni «materialiste» dell’*Essai*; citeremo perciò Locke da questa edizione; cfr. D. Soulard, «L’œuvre de premiers traducteurs français de John Locke: Jean Le Clerc, Pierre Coste et David Mazel», in *Dix-septième siècle* 4, 2011, pp. 739-62; e Margaret E. Rumbold, *Traducteur Huguenot: Pierre Coste*, P. Lang, New York-London 1991.

2. *Il problema dell'anima e del corpo, alla luce di Locke*

Già nei primi articoli contenuti nel volume I (1751) dell'*Encyclopédie* è possibile constatare un effetto di rifrazione importante, attorno al delicato problema del dualismo anima/corpo, letto alla luce dell'insegnamento di Locke. Nel celebre (e interminabile) articolo «ÂME», dell'abate Claude Yvon (1714-1789)⁶, cui Diderot aggiunge un'appendice con l'asterisco d'editore, si scontrano due opposti giudizi su Locke o piuttosto sulla prospettiva empiristico-materialista che l'*Essai* aveva sembrato cauzionare. Ma entrambi gli articoli di Yvon e di Diderot, erano convergenti sull'idea che quella prospettiva lockiana – chiamando in causa il fatto che ogni conoscenza umana ha la sua fonte nell'esperienza e nella sensibilità – apriva al materialismo psicologico, o temuto (Yvon) o auspicato (Diderot). Una lunga digressione dell'abate Yvon è infatti dedicata alla tesi lockiana della materia pensante e alle sue implicazioni in vista di una confutazione. Il passaggio incriminato dell'*Essai* di Locke divenne poi celebre ed è il seguente, dal Libro IV «De la Connaissance» (*Of Knowledge and Probability*), nella traduzione di Coste:

Nous avons des idées de la *Matière* & de la *Pensée*; mais peut-être ne serons-nous jamais capables de connaître si un Être purement matériel pense ou non, par la raison qu'il nous est impossible de découvrir par la contemplation de nos propres idées, sans Révélation, si Dieu n'a point donné à quelques amas de Matière disposé comme il le trouve à propos, la puissance d'apercevoir & de penser; ou s'il n'a pas uni & joint à la Matière ainsi disposée une substance immatérielle qui pense. Car par rapport à nos notions il ne nous est pas plus mal aisé de concevoir que Dieu peut, s'il lui plait, ajouter à notre idée de la Matière *la faculté de penser*, que de comprendre qu'il y joigne *une autre substance avec la faculté de penser*, puisque nous ignorons en quoi consiste la pensée, & à quelle espèce de substances cet Être tout-puissant a trouvé à propos d'accorder cette puissance qui saurait être dans aucun Être créé qu'en vertu du bon plaisir & de la bonté du Créateur. Je ne vois pas quelle contradiction il y a, que Dieu, cet Être pensant, éternel & tout-puissant donne, s'il veut, quelque degré de sentiment, de perception & de pensée à certains amas de Matière créée & insensible, qu'il joint ensemble comme il le trouve à propos⁷.

⁶ Cfr. la *Notice* molto dettagliata di S. Albertan-Coppola, in ENCCRE (*Édition Numérique, Collaborative et Critique de l'Encyclopédie*): <http://enccre.academie-sciences.fr/encyclopedie/contributeur/yvon>.

⁷ Cfr. J. Locke, *Essai philosophique*, cit., IV.iii: «De l'étendue de la connaissance humaine», § 6: «Par conséquent, notre Connaissance est plus bornée que nos idées», pp. 686-87; cfr. con J. Locke,

Locke qui non solo s’interroga sulla possibilità della materia pensante in forza dell’incapacità della conoscenza umana di concepire una simile idea, un concetto (materia-pensante) ritenuto da Locke non in contraddizione però con l’onnipotenza del Creatore, ma avanza anche, sul finire del ragionamento, il motivo centrale del «passaggio» della materia, dall’inerte (insensibile) al sensibile e infine al pensante. È la serie di passaggi che Diderot stesso seguirà, argomentandoli, nel *Sogno di D’Alembert*, per dimostrare la concreta esistenza (non più la semplice possibilità) della materia pensante⁸. Nell’articolo «ÂME», l’abate Yvon si adopera invece a esporre e a confutare quella che s’era intanto trasformata, in molti scritti filosofici coevi, soprattutto clandestini, da semplice ipotesi – legata alle congetture sulle idee e sull’estensione possibile della conoscenza umana – in una tesi materialista o «corporealista», che Yvon contesta. Il redattore evoca i ragionamenti ipotetici di Locke traducendoli in vere e proprie tesi o errori filosofici da rettificare, che consisterebbero, in sintesi, nel «mettere la nostra anima nel rango dei corpi». Come in questo passaggio:

Ce n’est pas l’incompréhensibilité seule, qui fait refuser la pensée à la matière, mais que c’est l’impossibilité intrinsèque de la chose, & les contradictions où l’on s’engage, en faisant le principe matériel pensant. De-là on n’est plus en droit de recourir à la toute-puissance de Dieu, pour établir la matérialité de l’âme. C’est pourtant ce qu’a fait M. Locke: on sait que ce Philosophe a avancé, que nous ne serons peut-être jamais capables de connaître si un être purement matériel pense, ou non (*Enc.* I, p. 337a).

Yvon menziona, subito dopo, un «celebre scrittore» (Voltaire) che ha difeso in modo «spiritoso», ma non «filosofico», la posizione di Locke, e ha ammesso la corporalità dell’anima umana come un fatto «possibile» in forza dell’onnipotenza divina, concludendo infine alla nostra insuperabile *ignoranza* in materia⁹. Per Yvon, lo scetticismo metafisico e gnoseologico di Voltaire è

An Essay concerning Human Understanding, collated and annotated, with *Prolegomena*, Bibliographical, Critical and Historical by A. Campbell Fraser, University Press, Oxford 1959, vol. II, pp. 192-93: «*Wheter Matter may not be made by God to think is more than man can know*».

⁸ Cfr D. Diderot, *Il Sogno di D’Alembert*, trad. it. a c. di P. Quintili, in *Opere complete, romanzi e racconti*, Bompiani, Milano 2019, pp. 537-39.

⁹ *Enc.*, I, pp. 337b-338a, è la posizione di Voltaire, citato qui da Yvon: «*Que vous importe que l’âme soit un de ces êtres incompréhensibles qu’on appelle matière, ou un de ces êtres incompréhensibles qu’on appelle esprit? Quoi! Dieu le créateur de tout ne peut-il pas éterniser ou anéantir votre âme à son gré, quelle que soit sa substance? Le superstitieux vient à son tour, & dit qu’il faut brûler pour le bien de leurs âmes ceux qui soupçonnent qu’on peut penser avec la seule aide du corps: mais que dirait-il si c’était lui-même qui fût coupable d’irreligion? En effet quel est l’homme qui osera as-*

un'opzione inaccettabile; per risolvere la questione infatti non occorre conoscere l'essenza e la natura della materia, perché è solo sull'ignoranza di questi due aspetti, secondo Yvon, che Locke fonda infatti i suoi ragionamenti, «niente affatto concludenti». L'obiezione che Yvon avanza è che l'anima, o «il soggetto del pensiero deve essere uno» e per contro «un ammasso di materia non è uno, è una moltitudine» (*ibidem*). Ecco che l'ipotesi/tesi di Locke sarebbe, secondo Yvon, metafisicamente e logicamente infondata, in quanto non garantirebbe l'*unità* del principio pensante in noi – un'anima come «un'unità perfetta (...) una stessa sostanza semplicissima che è in noi» – che opera *synthesi* del molteplice. L'argomento dell'abate Yvon è un topos «classico» della tradizione idealista, molto bene articolato con dovizia di ragionamenti particolari, nell'articolo «ÂME», e che si ritroverà, raffinato ed esteso, fino in Kant¹⁰. L'articolo si conclude infatti su tale tema che va a sfociare nell'argomento dell'immortalità dell'anima, ovvero il suo «destino» o destinazione finale. L'articolo teologico dell'abate si sviluppa infatti in quattro capi principali: 1/ L'origine dell'anima (Dio e la creazione); 2/ La sua natura (immaterialità e spiritualità: su questo punto viene preso in considerazione Locke); 3/ Il suo destino (immortalità e vicinanza/lontananza rispetto a Dio); 4/ Gli esseri nei quali esiste, bestie e uomini: su questa spinosa questione Yvon si limita a rinviare qui all'articolo «Anima delle bestie», che figurerà al seguito dell'articolo «ÂME» come una voce a parte (*Enc.*, I, 343b-253b).

A questo punto, apponendo il consueto asterisco dell'editore, in fondo all'articolo, Diderot aggiunge una «quinta questione» di «fisica e anatomia» che richiama in causa, confutandole in modo indiretto, le dottrine metafisiche appena esposte da Yvon. In realtà, questo approccio medico-biologico non era del tutto nuovo. Anche la tradizione scolastica conosceva bene le implicazioni biologiche della grande opera di Aristotele: il *De anima* insegnava a distinguere

surer sans une impiété absurde, qu'il est impossible au Créateur de donner à la matière la pensée & le sentiment? Voyez, je vous prie, à quel embarras vous êtes réduits, vous qui bornez ainsi la puissance du Créateur?»; cfr. Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, éd. par J.-P. Caput, Larousse, Paris 1990, p. 75, Lettre XIII: «Sur M. Locke».

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 338a: «Or, que notre âme doive être une d'une unité parfaite, c'est ce qu'il est aisé de prouver. Je regarde une perspective agréable, j'écoute un beau concert; ces deux sentiments sont également dans toute l'âme. Si l'on y supposait deux parties, celle qui entendrait le concert n'aurait pas le sentiment de la vue agréable; puisque l'une n'étant pas l'autre, elle ne serait pas susceptible des affections de l'autre. L'âme n'a donc point de parties, elle compare divers sentiments qu'elle éprouve. Or, pour juger que l'un est douloureux, & l'autre agréable, il faut qu'elle ressente tous les deux; & par conséquent qu'elle soit une même substance très-simple. [...] l'âme est donc sans parties & sans nulle composition».

un'"anima" come principio vitale, materiale, indissociabile dalle funzioni sensitive e corporee, che nasceva e moriva con l'individuo, rispetto a un'"anima razionale" o intelletto, di natura diversa e superiore, destinata a conoscere le verità supreme, Dio, il bene e l'immortalità. Il tutto, compatibile con lo spiritualismo cristiano di tipo tomista. Fin qui, Yvon e Diderot, dividendosi il lavoro, seguono la tradizione dei medici padovani, come Girolamo Fabrici d'Acquapendente (1533-1619), maestro del grande medico inglese William Harvey (1578-1657), scopritore della circolazione sanguigna, e del romano Giovanni Maria Lancisi (1654-1720), caposcuola e archiatra del Papa, autore di alcune importanti *Dissertationes de physiognomia et de sede cogitantis animae* (Venezia, 1713), pure menzionate da Diderot.

La novità è introdotta con l'esposizione e la confutazione delle dottrine cartesiane relative al problema della «sede dell'anima». In uno stile brioso, velato di leggera ironia, e senz'altro ispirato al Locke dell'*Essai*, Diderot non si limita a indagare il versante biologico-medico dell'anima, ma confuta l'attendibilità teorico-pratica di ogni genere di dualismo – metafisico o medico – che tenda a *considerare* o a *mantenere separati* anima e corpo, situando l'anima in un *locus*. Molte sono le dottrine che localizzano l'anima in una specifica parte del corpo – Cartesio nella ghiandola pineale, Lancisi nelle meningi, Vieussens nel «centro ovale» ecc. – o la vedono presente e diffusa in tutte le parti di esso (gli scolastici). L'errore, secondo Diderot, sta nel criterio che presiede a queste indagini, ossia l'individuazione di *un luogo di contatto tra corpo e anima*, il che implica l'idea inadeguata (dualistica) del «commercio delle sostanze» e la loro distinzione. In quest'ottica, ispirata a Locke e alla sua lettura materialistica, l'ipotesi più attendibile resta quella dell'anatomista François de La Peyronie (1678-1747), che colloca l'anima nel cervello (in tutto l'encefalo) e ha il pregio di appoggiarsi più solidamente ai dati empirici, cioè al metodo sperimentale e all'osservazione, gli unici ritenuti validi. Ma La Peyronie non può pretendere d'aver risolto l'arcano, l'ironia è graffiante:

Voilà donc l'âme installée dans le corps calleux, jusqu'à ce qu'il survienne quelque expérience qui l'en déplace, & qui réduise les Physiologistes dans le cas de ne savoir plus où la mettre. En attendant, considérons combien ses fonctions tiennent à peu de chose; une fibre dérangée; une goutte de sang extravasé; une légère inflammation; une chute; une contusion: & adieu le jugement, la raison, & toute cette pénétration dont les hommes sont si vains: toute cette vanité dépend d'un filet bien ou mal placé, sain ou mal sain. Après avoir employé tant d'espace à établir la spiritualité & l'immortalité de l'âme, deux sentiments très capables d'enorgueillir l'homme sur sa condition à venir; qu'il nous soit per-

mis d'employer quelques lignes à l'humilier sur sa condition présente par la contemplation des choses futiles d'où dépendent les qualités dont il fait le plus de cas. Il a beau faire, l'expérience ne lui laisse aucun doute sur la connexion des fonctions de l'*âme*, avec l'état & l'organisation du corps; il faut qu'il convienne que l'impression inconsiderée du doigt de la Sage-femme suffisait pour faire un sot, de Corneille, lorsque la boîte osseuse qui renferme le cerveau & le cervelet, était molle comme de la pâte (*Enc*, I, p. 342b).

Più che sul "commercio" delle sostanze o sulla localizzazione, Diderot intende insistere dunque sul tema dell'*unione indissolubile del corpo e dell'anima* concepita come un fatto incontrovertibile, «ma le cui modalità ci sono ignote. È solo l'esperienza che ce le insegna» e il filosofo deve attenersi a queste. L'articolo «ÂME», nella parte redatta da Diderot, non fa che riferire esempi di esperienze, referti e casi clinici volti a mostrare, in modo eloquente per la psicologia e la biologia del tempo, attraverso la testimonianza delle malattie fisiche e delle guarigioni, l'*unità materiale* dell'uomo. Risultato: «In qualunque modo si concepisca ciò che pensa in noi, consta che le sue funzioni dipendono dall'organizzazione e dalle condizioni in atto nel nostro corpo durante la vita. Una tal dipendenza reciproca fra il corpo e l'elemento pensante dell'uomo, è quella che si chiama *unione del corpo con l'anima*» (*Enc.*, I, p. 341b). Sottolinea Diderot: "unione" sostanziale, materiale, e non semplice "unità" funzionale.

3. *L'uso del linguaggio e l'abuso delle parole. L'articolo «Arte»*

Nello stesso primo volume dell'*Encyclopédie* è trattato un tema centrale del progetto, esposto all'articolo «ART», il vero e proprio manifesto dell'enciclopedismo tecnologico dell'Illuminismo, della penna di Diderot. È il tema della «lingua delle arti», meccaniche e liberali, che dà il titolo a uno dei capitoli in cui è diviso l'articolo. Ben noto è il debito contratto da Diderot nei confronti di Francis Bacon, che con il *Novum Organum* ne ispira i temi conduttori: Le arti meccaniche – argomento principale – non sono meno onorevoli e «nobili» delle arti liberali e vanno perciò rivalutate; il caso (*hasard*) è all'origine della maggior parte delle scoperte in questo campo, che sarebbero più numerose ed efficaci se accompagnate dalla ragione; la storia delle arti deve seguire e prolungare la storia della natura ecc. tutti motivi dichiaratamente ispirati al «gran Cancelliere», il quale viene nominato e citato più volte nel corso dell'artico-

lo¹¹. Il tema del linguaggio usato dagli artigiani e dagli artisti per definire i loro termini tecnici, *les mots propres* di ciascun'arte, è invece di chiara ispirazione lockiana. Nel libro III dell'*Essai*, ai capitoli X e XI, Locke aveva puntato il dito anzitutto sull'«abuso delle parole», che dà adito a ogni sorta di speculazione inutile e oziosa – e che l'*Essai* stesso intende sradicare (cap. X: «*De l'Abus des Mots*») – per poi procedere ad una sottile disamina «*Des Remèdes qu'on peut apporter aux imperfections, & aux abus dont on vient de parler*» (cap. XI). Qui Locke avanzò l'idea di un *Dictionnaire* delle «idee semplici e complesse» che sono alla base delle parole usate nel linguaggio delle arti e delle loro definizioni, osservando:

Il serait à souhaiter que ceux qui se sont exercés à des recherches Physiques & qui ont une connaissance particulière de diverses sortes de Corps naturels, voulussent proposer les idées simples dans lesquelles ils observent que les Individus de chaque Espèce conviennent constamment. Cela remédierait en grande partie à cette confusion que produit l'usage que différentes personnes font du même nom pour désigner une collection d'un plus grand ou d'un plus petit nombre de Qualités sensibles, selon qu'ils ont été plus ou moins instruits des Qualités d'une espèce de Choses qui passent sous une seule dénomination, ou qu'ils ont été plus ou moins exacts à les examiner. Mais pour composer un Dictionnaire de cette espèce qui contint, pour ainsi dire, une Histoire Naturelle, il faudrait trop de personnes, trop de temps, trop de dépense, trop de peine & trop de sagacité pour qu'on puisse jamais espérer de voir un tel Ouvrage¹².

È impossibile, leggendo queste righe, non pensare al *Dictionnaire raisonné* di Diderot, che ebbe esattamente questa precisa intenzione, quando reclamava, all'articolo «ART» l'esigenza della chiarezza e della precisione tecnica dei termini che definiscono gli strumenti in uso nelle diverse arti meccaniche, lamentando la scarsità dei termini tecnici e l'eccesso dei sinonimi. Diderot sembra qui essersi ispirato, nello stesso progetto della *Description des Arts* della sua opera¹³, proprio all'auspicio di Locke, tentando così di realizzarlo. Non va dimenticato che il *Prospectus* pubblicitario, proposto ai sottoscrittori dell'*Encyclopédie* nel

¹¹ Cfr. D. Diderot, «Arte», in P. Quintili, a c. di, *Arti, scienze e lavoro nell'età dell'Illuminismo*, cit., pp. 97-134.

¹² J. Locke, *Essai philosophique*, cit., Livre III, chap. XI, § 24 («*Les idées des Substances doivent être conformes aux Choses*») e § 25 («*Il n'est pas aisé de les rendre telles*»), pp. 660-61.

¹³ Come vide bene J. Proust, *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*, cit., p. 198: «C'est donc en méditant les idées de Bacon et de Locke que Diderot a fait le plan de la *Description des arts*, choisi ses collaborateurs, dépouillé les ouvrages techniques, visité les ateliers».

1750, per raccogliere fondi, conteneva come *specimen* dei contenuti dell'intera opera – per esaltarne la novità – proprio l'articolo «ART», che fu perciò tra i primi ad essere redatti:

De la langue des Arts. J'ai trouvé la langue des Arts très-imparfaite par deux causes; la disette des mots propres, & l'abondance des synonymes. Il y a des outils qui ont plusieurs noms différens; d'autres n'ont au contraire que le nom générique, engin, machine, sans aucune addition qui les spécifie: quelquefois la moindre petite différence suffit aux Artistes pour abandonner le nom générique & inventer des noms particuliers; d'autres fois, un outil singulier par sa forme & son usage, ou n'a point de nom, ou porte le nom d'un autre outil avec lequel il n'a rien de commun. Il serait à souhaiter qu'on eût plus d'égard à l'analogie des formes & des usages. Les Géomètres n'ont pas autant de noms qu'ils ont de figures: mais dans la langue des Arts, un marteau, une tenaille, une auge, une pelle, &c. ont presque autant de dénominations qu'il y a d'Arts¹⁴.

C'è poi un altro aspetto che avvicina il modello lockiano della definizione esatta delle «idee delle sostanze» come conformi alle cose stesse: ossia l'esigenza che la parola, in questo «Dizionario impossibile», utopistico ma auspicabile, sia accompagnata dalle *immagini*. È un altro motivo oserei dire profetico che Diderot, senz'altro intenzionalmente, tentò di realizzare con e nell'*Encyclopédie*. Locke lo presenta come uno strumento necessario ad una migliore *comunicazione* reciproca delle idee legate alle parole, troppo variabili da popolo a popolo e da individuo a individuo, come è espresso nello stesso cap. XI dell'*Essai*:

Mais parce que l'Usage ordinaire est une Règle fort incertaine qui se réduit enfin aux idées des Particuliers, c'est souvent un modèle fort variable. Au reste, quoiqu'un Dictionnaire tel que celui dont je viens de parler, demandât trop de temps, trop de peine & trop de dépense pour pouvoir espérer de le voir dans

¹⁴ *Enc.*, I, p. 716a; D. Diderot, «Arte», in P. Quintili, a. c. di, *Arti, scienze e lavoro*, cit., p. 113: «Sulla lingua delle Arti. Ho trovato la lingua delle *Arti* molto imperfetta per due ragioni: la scarsità di termini propri e l'abbondanza dei sinonimi. Vi sono utensili che hanno parecchi nomi di diversa specie; altri al contrario hanno solo il nome generico, *apparecchio*, *macchina*, senza alcuna aggiunta che ne dia specificazione. Talvolta la minima differenza è sufficiente agli Artisti per abbandonare il nome generico e inventare dei nomi specifici; altre volte un attrezzo, singolare per la sua forma e l'uso, o non ha affatto un nome o porta il nome di un altro utensile con il quale non ha nulla in comune. Sarebbe da auspicare che si facesse più attenzione all'analogia delle forme e degli usi. I Geometri non hanno abbastanza nomi per le figure di cui dispongono: ma nella lingua delle *Arti*, un martello, una tenaglia, una tramoggia, una pala ecc. hanno pressoché altrettante denominazioni quante sono le *Arti*».

ce siècle, il n'est pourtant pas, je crois, mal à propos d'avertir que les mots qui signifient des choses qu'on connaît & qu'on distingue per leur figure extérieure, devraient être accompagnés de petites tailles-douces qui représentassent ces choses. Un Dictionnaire fait de cette manière enseignerait peut-être plus facilement & en moins de temps la véritable signification de quantité de termes, surtout dans des Langues de Pays ou de siècles éloignés, & fixerait dans l'Esprit des hommes de plus justes idées de quantité de choses dont nous lisons les noms dans les Anciens Auteur, que tous les vastes & laborieux Commentaires des plus savants Critiques¹⁵.

È evidente che il progetto, infine realizzato negli undici volumi di tavole che accompagnano i diciassette volumi di testo, a questi intimamente legati, fu il merito maggiore dell'*Encyclopédie* e ne garantì il grande successo, legato anch'esso senz'altro alla lezione di John Locke. L'eco delle pagine dell'*Essai* è chiaramente percepibile, in filigrana, nel testo di Diderot, anche per ciò che concerne il tema della «grammatica delle arti»:

Il serait donc à souhaiter qu'un bon Logicien à qui les *Arts* seraient familiers, entreprît des éléments de la *grammaire des Arts*. Le premier pas qu'il aurait à faire, ce serait de fixer la valeur des corrélatifs, *grand, gros, moyen, mince, épais, faible, petit, léger, pesant*, &c. Pour cet effet il faudrait chercher une mesure constante dans la nature, ou évaluer la grandeur, la grosseur & la force moyenne de l'homme, & y rapporter toutes les expressions indéterminées de quantité, ou du moins former des tables auxquelles on inviterait les Artistes à conformer leurs langues. Le second pas, ce serait de déterminer sur la différence & sur la ressemblance des formes & des usages d'un instrument & d'un autre instrument, d'une manœuvre & d'une autre manœuvre, quand il faudrait leur laisser un même nom & leur donner des noms différents¹⁶.

¹⁵ J. Locke, *Essai philosophique*, cit., Livre III, chap. XI, § 25, pp. 661-62.

¹⁶ D. Diderot, «Arte», in P. Quintili, a c. di, *Arti, scienze e lavoro*, cit., p. 114: «Sarebbe dunque da auspicare che un buon logico, cui le *Arti* siano familiari, intraprenda ricerche sugli elementi della *grammatica delle Arti*. Il primo passo che andrebbe fatto sarebbe quello di fissare il valore dei correlativi, *grande, grosso, medio, sottile, spesso, solubile, piccolo, leggero, pesante* ecc. Per questo bisognerebbe cercare una misura costante nella natura, o valutare la grandezza, la portata e la forza media dell'uomo e rapportarvi tutte le espressioni indeterminate di quantità, o almeno approntare delle tavole sulla base delle quali si inviterebbero gli Artisti a conformare i loro linguaggi. Il secondo passo sarebbe quello di determinare, in base alla differenza o alla somiglianza delle forme e degli usi di questo o di quell'altro strumento, di una data manovra o di un'altra, quando bisognerà lasciar loro uno stesso nome o assegnare nomi differenti»; è un tema questo già presente in Bacon, *Novum Organum*, § LIX-X, in *Opere Filosofiche*, 2 vols., a c. di E. De Mas, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1965, vol. 1, pp. 274-75, la critica dei cosiddetti *Idola fori*.

La conclusione, ben nota, è di proporre all'autorità politica di fondare dei nuovi istituti di formazione e di sviluppare le grandi manifatture, nelle quali quel proposito di Locke, di «*insegnare forse più facilmente e in minor tempo il vero significato di una gran quantità di termini*», avrebbe sicuramente trovato una concretizzazione non più soltanto letteraria e filosofica, ma anche economica, sociale e politica.

4. *Il Locke dei diversi redattori dell'Encyclopédie. Yvon, Jaucourt, Formey. Verso l'illuminismo radicale*

Come si diceva al principio, l'immagine di questo Locke sensualista e «filosofo delle cose» che danno la regola all'uso delle parole, si rifrange in tanti specchi diversi quanti sono i redattori della *Grande Œuvre*. Ciò creava nel lettore quell'effetto di confronto, scontro e intersezione di prospettive che costituiva tutta la ricchezza e la grandezza dell'*Encyclopédie*, anzi simboleggiava il suo stesso ideale di *dialogo aperto* tra opinioni filosofiche talora contrastanti e di reciproca tolleranza, nel dibattito pubblico. Fu già il caso, osservato sopra, dell'abate Yvon, che redasse, con Diderot, oltre all'articolo «AME», altre due voci in cui è fatta menzione di Locke, come di un autore che sgombra il campo, con la sua «fisica delle idee», da ogni forma di superstizione, operando, di fatto, da scettico o «pirroniano» nei riguardi delle sette: la prima è la voce «ASSOCIATION»¹⁷. La seconda, è la voce «AXIOME» in cui l'*abbé* chiama poi in causa Locke a tenere lo stesso ruolo scettico di fronte alla pretesa (cartesiana) della validità universale, in termini di chiarezza ed evidenza, di principi metafisici (gli assiomi, appunto, ad esempio: «*De quelque chose que ce soit, la négation ou l'affirmation est vraie*» ecc.) che non dipendono dall'esperienza e dalla sensibilità¹⁸. Yvon si mostra infine molto più lockiano e sensista, in queste

¹⁷ *Enc.*, I, pp. 771b-772a, «ASSOCIATION»: «Ces fausses combinaisons d'idées sont la cause, selon M. Locke, de l'opposition irréconciliable qui est entre les différentes sectes de philosophie & de religion; car on ne peut raisonnablement supposer, que tant de gens qui soutiennent des opinions différentes, & quelquefois contradictoires les unes aux autres, s'en imposent à eux-mêmes volontairement & de gaieté de cœur, & se refusent à la vérité: mais l'éducation, la coutume, & l'esprit de parti, ont tellement joint ensemble dans leur esprit des idées disparates, que ces idées leur paraissent étroitement unies».

¹⁸ *Enc.*, I, p. 907a: «Or c'est de tous ces axiomes, qui ne semblent pas dans l'esprit de bien des gens, avoir de bornes dans l'application, que nous osons dire d'après M. Locke, qu'ils en ont de très-étroites pour la fécondité, & qu'ils ne mènent à rien de nouveau».

voci secondarie, di quanto non lo sia stato nell'importante voce «AME»¹⁹. Ciò è anche dovuto al fatto che l'abate, come molti altri redattori, si avvale di fonti disparate (senza ovviamente citarle), talora anche in contraddizione tra loro – ad esempio, nella voce ÂME DES BÊTES, oltre Locke anche il saggio anticartesiano del pastore D. R. Bouiller, *Essai philosophique sur l'âme des bêtes* (Amsterdam, 1728) che riconosceva alle bestie addirittura un'anima spirituale, tesi strategicamente utile a tenere ferma la stessa spiritualità dell'anima umana –, preoccupandosi poco della coerenza concettuale e filosofica²⁰.

C'è poi l'infaticabile redattore cui si devono ben 17454 voci (per lo più) compilative dell'*Encyclopédie*, il cavaliere Louis de Jaucourt (1704-80, di famiglia ugonotta costretta alla conversione), il quale fa dell'*Essai* di Locke il proprio «manuale» di lavoro quotidiano, cui rinviare o attingere a piene mani, per le voci più complesse, come «COMPTER, (*art de*) *Métaph. Logiq. faculté de l'ame, attent. mém.*» (*Enc.*, III, p. 795b), ispirata alla genesi e alla costruzione delle idee complesse dei numeri a partire dall'idea di unità; o anche l'importante voce «CONSCIENCE, subst. f. (*Phil. Log. Métaph.*)», in cui viene fatta propria la tesi di Locke della coscienza (*Consciousness*, segnalata in quanto neologismo introdotto proprio da Locke, *Essai*, Liv. II, chap. XXVII), come di una particolare forma «avvertita» di percezione (*Enc.*, II, p. 902a). Anche sul piano politico e morale Locke, insieme a Montesquieu cui è spesso associato, la fa da padrone nell'*Encyclopédie*, con i suoi *Trattati sul governo civile*, a più riprese menzionati dallo stesso de Jaucourt in diversi luoghi²¹. All'importante voce «IDEE», viene avanzata la considerazione sospensiva e pirroniana, ancora una volta, concernente l'origine e la natura dell'anima, per cui la produzione delle idee resta un fatto, sì, ma inspiegabile nelle sue origini, su cui va sospeso il giudizio. Ed è ancora Locke a cauzionare la nozione di *Consciousness* («Conscience»), come il luogo fisico in cui tale fatto è percepito²².

¹⁹ Non va dimenticato che Yvon venne presto coinvolto nello scandalo legato alle tesi dell'*abbé* De Prades, suo intimo amico, e fu costretto alla fuga e all'esilio, dal 1752, in quanto accusato di aver collaborato alla redazione della *Jaerusalem Coelestis* del De Prades (cfr. S. Albertan Coppola, *Notice sur l'abbé Yvon, supra*, nota 5).

²⁰ Cfr. M. Crampe-Casnabet, «Les articles AME de l'*Encyclopédie*», in *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie*, n. 25, octobre 1998, pp. 91-99.

²¹ Art. «DEMOCRATIE, s.f. (*Droit politique*)», *Enc.*, IV, p. 817a; «ENVIE, s.f. (*Morale*)», *Enc.*, V, p. 734b; «HARDIESSE, s. f. (*Morale*) Locke la définit une puissance de faire ce qu'on veut devant les autres, sans craindre ou se décontenancer. La confiance qui consiste dans la partie du discours, avait un nom particulier chez les Grecs; ils l'appelaient *παρρησία*. Le mot de *hardiesse*, dans notre langue, désigne communément une résolution courageuse, par laquelle l'homme méprise les dangers & entreprend des choses extraordinaires» (*Enc.*, VIII, p. 45a).

²² *Enc.*, VIII, p. 490b: «Que notre âme ait des perceptions dont elle ne prend jamais connaissance,

Incontriamo, a seguire, tra i lockiani più o meno dissimulati, Jean Henri Samuel Formey (1711-97), letterato e pastore calvinista, figlio di un emigrato ugonotto che trovò rifugio alla corte di Prussia. Formey, enciclopedista della prima ora, ricoprì un ruolo di rilievo, alle origini del progetto enciclopedico, in quanto ebbe l'idea di un *Dictionnaire philosophique* che vendette manoscritto, nel 1747, ai librai dell'*Encyclopédie* i quali ne ricavarono più di un centinaio di articoli di argomento vario, editi per lo più nei primi sette volumi (1751-58). Tra questi, l'articolo «DEFINITION, s.f. (*Logique*)», che fin dall'esordio marca la sua ispirazione lockiana:

DEFINITION, s. f. *en Logique*, est une énumération que l'on fait des principales idées simples dont est formée une idée composée, pour déterminer ou expliquer sa nature & son caractère. Les philosophes de l'école donnent des notions fort imparfaites de la *définition*.

Anche secondo Formey, come logico, Locke ha fornito gli strumenti per difarsi dei pregiudizi relativi alle definizioni delle cose, e di superare il principale errore che è quello di scambiare i nomi con le cose, perché «è ben più comodo supporre nelle cose una realtà di cui si considerano le parole come i veri e propri segni; di intendere con questi nomi, *uomo, animale*, ecc. un'entità che determina e distingue queste cose, piuttosto che fare attenzione a tutte le idee semplici che entrano nella nozione che ci formiamo di esse (...) basta aver supposto che le parole rispondono alla realtà delle cose, per confonderle con quelle e concluderne che le parole ne spiegano perfettamente la natura» (*Enc.*, IV, p. 746b). Una chiara dottrina del linguaggio, dunque, e una teoria dell'*analisi* linguistica, secondo Formey, dovrebbero sostituirsi alle definizioni, astratte e inconcludenti, dei metafisici²³. L'impronta di Locke sugli articoli di logica e

dont elle n'a pas la *conscience* (pour me servir du terme introduit par M. Locke) ou que l'âme n'ait point d'autres *idées* que celle qu'elle aperçoit, en sorte que la perception soit le sentiment même, ou la conscience qui avertit l'âme de ce qui se passe en elle; l'un ou l'autre système, auxquels se réduisent proprement tous ceux que nous avons indiqués, n'explique point la manière dont le corps agit sur l'âme, & celle-ci réciproquement. Ce sont deux substances trop différentes; nous ne connaissons l'âme que par ses facultés, & ces facultés que par leurs effets: ces effets se manifestent à nous par l'intervention du corps. Nous voyons par-là l'influence de l'âme sur le corps, & réciproquement celle du corps sur l'âme; mais nous ne pouvons pénétrer au-delà. Le voile restant sur la nature de l'âme, nous ne pouvons savoir ce qu'est une *idée* considérée dans l'âme, ni comment elle s'y produit; c'est un fait, le comment est encore dans l'obscurité, & sera sans doute toujours livré aux conjectures».

²³ *Enc.*, IV, p. 747a: «Voilà pourquoi celui qui fait une question, & qui s'informe ce que c'est que tel ou tel corps, croit, comme Locke le remarque, demander quelque chose de plus qu'un nom; & que celui qui lui répond, *c'est du fer*, croit aussi lui apprendre quelque chose de plus. Mais avec un tel jargon

metafisica, di mano di Formey, è profonda, in funzione spesso «pirroniana»²⁴.

C'è infine il Locke dell'omonimo, lungo articolo dell'*Encyclopédie*, facente parte del corpus di voci d'*Histoire de la philosophie* a cura di Diderot, compilate a partire dalla *Historia critica Philosophie* (1742) dello storico e filosofo protestante Jakob Brucker²⁵. È ancora argomento di discussione la misura dell'intervento del redattore/traduttore sul testo originale latino dell'erudito tedesco, ma certo è che il «metodo» di lavoro di Diderot comportò sempre degli interventi di interpolazione, talora notevoli, che piegavano l'argomentazione del pastore luterano verso motivi contrari all'ortodossia, cattolica o riformata che fosse²⁶. Ed è proprio il caso esemplare di questa voce «LOCKE», che viene orientata verso il materialismo più maturo del traduttore:

Locke avait dit dans son essai sur l'entendement humain, qu'il ne voyait aucune impossibilité à ce que la matière pensât. Des hommes pusillanimes s'effrayèrent de cette assertion. Et qu'importe que la matière pense ou non? Qu'est-ce que cela fait à la justice ou à l'injustice, à l'immortalité, & à toutes les vérités du système, soit politique, soit religieux? Quand la sensibilité serait le germe premier de la pensée, quand elle serait une propriété générale de la matière; quand inégalement distribuée entre toutes les productions de la nature, elle s'exercerait avec plus ou moins d'énergie selon la variété de l'organisation, quelle conséquence fâcheuse en pourrait-on tirer? aucune. L'homme serait toujours ce qu'il est, jugé par le bon & le mauvais usage de ses facultés (*Enc.*, IX, p. 627a).

il n'y a point d'hypothèse, quel qu'inintelligible qu'elle puisse être, qui ne se soutienne. Il est donc bien important de ne pas réaliser nos abstractions. Pour éviter cet inconvénient je ne connais qu'un moyen; c'est de substituer toujours des analyses aux définitions des philosophes: les analyses sont les meilleures définitions qu'on puisse en faire. Mais ce moyen, tout simple qu'il est, a été inconnu aux philosophes. La cause de leur ignorance à cet égard, c'est le préjugé où ils ont toujours été qu'il fallait commencer par les idées générales; car lorsqu'on s'est défendu de commencer par les particulières, il n'est pas possible d'expliquer les plus abstraites qui en tirent leur origine».

²⁴ Articoli «CONGRUENCE» (*Enc.*, III, p. 869b); «CONTINGENT» (*Enc.*, IV, p. 114b); «CONTRADICTION» (*Enc.*, IV, p. 119a); «DIFFERENCE» (*Enc.*, IV, p. 984a); «ESSENCE» (*Enc.*, V, p. 996a); «ÉTERNITÉ» (*Enc.*, VI, p. 47b), per menzionarne solo i primi e più importanti.

²⁵ J. Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostram usque etatem deducta*, 6 vols., Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, Lipsiae 1742-44 e 1767.

²⁶ Cfr. Anzitutto J. Proust, *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*, cit., chap. VII: «Diderot traducteur de Brucker. Du déisme au matérialisme»; per quel che concerne la riutilizzazione di questi testi da parte del discepolo «militante» J.-A. Naigeon, cfr. P. Quintili, «Jacques-André Naigeon et l'Histoire de la Philosophie dans l'*Encyclopédie Méthodique*», in M. Groult, a. c. di, *Panckoucke et l'«Encyclopédie Méthodique»: ordre de matières et transversalité*, Garnier, Paris 2019, pp. 197-217; Id., «Descartes nel materialismo del tardo Settecento. *Encyclopédie*, Diderot, d'Holbach, Helvétius, Naigeon», in C. Borghero, A. Del Prete, a. c. di, *Immagini filosofiche e interpretazioni storiografiche del cartesianismo*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2011, pp. 165-96.

Quest'ultimo capoverso è un'aggiunta conclusiva molto ardata, ovviamente assente nell'originale del Brucker. L'articolo «LOCKE» compare nel nono volume dell'*Encyclopédie*, che appartiene al novero dei dieci volumi «liberati» nel 1765, dopo la seconda censura dell'opera – la più grave – subita nel 1758. Con la soppressione in Francia (1762 e poi nel resto d'Europa) dell'ordine dei Gesuiti, principali avversari degli enciclopedisti, a partire dal vol. VIII, l'orientamento dell'opera si fa molto più esplicito e determinato in senso eterodosso, malgrado i «tagli» operati da Le Breton, timoroso di nuove proibizioni, all'insaputa di Diderot²⁷.

Gli esempi di interventi «pirroniani» o filo(cripto)-materialisti sul testo di Locke e sulla sua figura potrebbero moltiplicarsi – incontriamo ben 116 occorrenze esplicite dell'autore, oltre alle innumerevoli citazioni implicite: lavoro di spoglio che resta ancora da fare – ma già da questo primo confronto, tra tante e tali rappresentazioni diffrante, emerge una figura di pensatore niente affatto «moderato», o ispiratore dell'Illuminismo meno «radicale» come pretende ad esempio Jonathan I. Israel²⁸, quanto piuttosto quella del «fiancheggiatore» (mascherato) delle frange più eversive del pensiero dei Lumi francesi. A questo tema andrà dedicata una ricerca ulteriore, che metta a confronto ciò che potremmo chiamare l'«effetto di radicalismo» operato da Locke e dalle traduzioni in Francia delle sue opere, con le altre *Lumières radicales* prodotte, nel medesimo arco storico di tempo (1650-1750), dalla corrente spinozista, maggiormente presente soprattutto nella letteratura clandestina²⁹.

²⁷ È molto interessante seguire (cosa che qui non possiamo fare, per ragioni di spazio) la medesima pista di ricerca nel «diciottesimo volume» non pubblicato, ma ricostruito dagli storici dell'Università di Chicago, nel loro data-base dell'*Encyclopédie ARTLF*, con i lacerti delle voci e dei testi delle bozze, e dei 46 articoli presumibilmente censurati da Le Breton, listati e ricostruiti con magistrale attenzione (e sagacia) filologica da Robert Morrisey e Glenn Roe: <https://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/node/8>. Cfr. soprattutto la voce «PYRRHONIENNE ou SCEPTIQUE Philosophie, (*Hist. de la Philosophie.*)».

²⁸ J. I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity. 1650-1750*, University Press, Oxford 2001; trad. fr. *Les Lumières radicales. La philosophie, Spinoza et la naissance de la modernité (1650-1750)*, a c. di P. Hugues, Ch. Nordmann e J. Rosanvallon, Éditions Amsterdam, Paris 2005, pp. 33, 41, 308-11 e *passim*.

²⁹ Una prima analisi: F. Lodoli, P. Quintili, «Spinoza nella letteratura clandestina francese», in C. Altini, a c. di, *La fortuna di Spinoza in età moderna e contemporanea*, vol. 1 («Tra Seicento e Settecento»), Edizioni della Normale, Pisa 2020, pp. 115-31; per un confronto con le tesi di Israel: P. Quintili, «Diderot dans les Lumières radicales, selon J. I. Israel. De quelle 'radicalité' parle-t-on ?», in M. Garcia-Alonso, a c. di, *Les Lumières radicales et le politique. Études critiques sur les travaux de Jonathan Israel*, Honoré Champion, Paris 2017, pp. 263-80; e A. Thomson, «Diderot, l'*Encyclopédie* et les Lumières radicales», in *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie*, n. 49, 2014, pp. 259-64, mis en ligne le 10 novembre 2016 (<http://journals.openedition.org/rde/5169>).

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Bringing together the *Essay* and the *Second Treatise*: d'Holbach Interpreter of Locke

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Abstract: The present article focuses on eighteenth-century French radical and atheist philosopher Paul-Thiry d'Holbach to gauge the extent to which his political ideas may be informed by Locke's *Second Treatise*. While rejecting the Rousseauian notion of a state of nature intended as a historical period when human beings lived outside society, d'Holbach inherits from Locke the idea that particular polities are the result of a constantly renewed social contract. As the products of a covenant, governments must pursue the preservation and best interests of the 'community' or 'Nation', as Locke and d'Holbach would respectively call it, prolonged failure to do so necessarily resulting in their loss of legitimacy and ultimately paving the way to revolution. Naturally wary of Locke's decision to ground the legitimacy of an authority (and therefore a community's right to rebel against it) on its exactitude in enacting a 'Law of Nature' based, in turn, on God's will, d'Holbach replaces this 'Law of Nature' with what he terms 'amour éclairé de soi'. For d'Holbach, a person's 'amour éclairé de soi' – their realisation, that is, that their individual well being is inextricably connected to that of others – depends on their more or less intuitive understanding that an action is good in so far as it promotes happiness or pleasure and wrong when it brings about unhappiness or pain (Principle of Utility). While d'Holbach's replacement of the 'Law of Nature' with the secular notion of 'amour éclairé de soi' may seem to undermine Locke's philosophy at its very core, the reality is that the two principles are extremely close and fundamentally interchangeable. Locke's political philosophy, d'Holbach seems to wish his most perceptive readers would realise, can easily be turned into a consistent secular theory. He thus (artificially) brings together Locke's epistemology and more radical political ideas, and successfully overcomes a well-known aporia within the British empiricist's philosophical corpus, one that has been investigated by Leo Strauss and Peter Laslett, among others, and that is still the subject of much scholarly debate.

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Keywords: John Locke, *Second Treatise*, Paul-Thiry d’Holbach, Radical Enlightenment, political philosophy, utilitarianism.

Introduction

Building on the work of Peter Laslett and Richard Ashcraft, recent scholarship has challenged the traditional interpretation of Locke as the theorist of (eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British) liberalism, placing greater emphasis, instead, on the radicality of his political thought². The *Second Treatise* has obviously been at the centre of this shift in interpretation, and considerable progress has been made in identifying ideas and theories in this work that would have been utterly foreign to the supporters of the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 – to that landed gentry, that is, whose interests Locke was supposedly voicing. Nevertheless, the so-called Radical Enlightenment’s debt to Locke has yet to be fully investigated, and Jonathan Israel’s publications, which have revived among eighteenth-century specialists an outdated interpretation of the author of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as a moderate thinker, are certainly not likely to foster (at least directly) much research in this sense³. To the scholar working on the British roots of the (French) Radical Enlightenment, the name of Locke is still very much overshadowed by that of Hobbes.

The existing scholarship on eighteenth-century atheist, materialist, and determinist thinker Paul-Thiry, baron d’Holbach (1723-1789), the author of

² See P. Laslett, “The English Revolution and Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*”, in *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 12 (1956), 1, pp. 40-55; R. Ashcraft, “Revolutionary Politics and Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*: Radicalism and Lockean Political Theory”, in *Political Theory* 8 (1980), 4, pp. 429-86; and R. Ashcraft, “The Radical Dimensions of Locke’s Political Thought: A Dialogic Essay on Some Problems of Interpretation”, in *History of Political Thought*, 13 (1992), 4, pp. 703-72. For a traditional interpretation of Locke as theorist of modern liberalism see, for instance, H. Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism: An Essay in Interpretation*, Allen & Unwin, London 1936.

³ J. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, pp. 51-60, especially p. 58: ‘Despite being heterodox on religious issues and vigorous advocates of toleration, Locke and Hume, like Voltaire and the great American Deist Benjamin Franklin, were politically, socially, morally, and, in some respects, religiously—and in their views on philosophy’s proper scope—essentially conservative thinkers who opposed many or most of the radical and democratic ideas of their age and, as such, were, in the main, opponents of the Radical Enlightenment’. Some interesting remarks on the reception of Locke’s ideas amongst eighteenth-century European political thinkers, both radical and not, can be found in R. Ashcraft, *Locke’s Two Treatises of Government*, Allen & Unwin, London 1987, chp. 10 (‘Locke and the Tensions of Liberalism’).

such earthshattering texts as *Le Système de la nature* and *Le Bon Sens*, and one of the most prominent figures, alongside Diderot, of the so-called *Lumières radicales*, provides an obvious case in point⁴. While the philosopher of Malmesbury is now recognised as a key interlocutor in the development of d'Holbach's philosophy, very little is known about the baron's attitudes towards Locke⁵. In the last chapter of his study of the reception of Locke in eighteenth-century France, John Yolton mentions, almost in passing, d'Holbach's endorsement of the Peripatetic Axiom (or Locke's Principle, as he dubs it), further insisting on the importance of Locke's hypothesis of thinking matter to the baron's overcoming of Cartesian dualism and establishment of a rigorous materialistic monism⁶. Meanwhile, Virgil W. Topazio has shown how crucial Locke's (partial) rejection of innate morality was in the elaboration of the baron's entirely secular theory of ethics⁷. Yet, nowhere is d'Holbach's debt to Locke more size-

⁴ For an introduction to d'Holbach's life, works, and ideas see W.H. Wickwar, *Baron d'Holbach: A Prelude to the French Revolution*, Allen & Unwin, London 1935. See also A. Sandrier, *Le Style philosophique du baron d'Holbach: Conditions et contraintes du prosélytisme athée en France dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle*, Champion, Paris 2004; G. Chaussinand-Nogaret, *Les Lumières au péril du bûcher*, Fayard, Paris 2009; and A.Ch. Kors, *D'Holbach's Coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1976 (reprint 2015).

⁵ On Hobbes and d'Holbach see V.W. Topazio, *D'Holbach's Moral Philosophy: Its Background and Development*, Institut et musée Voltaire, Geneva 1956, and A. Staquet, "Hobbes, d'Holbach et la théorie des passions: Importance du passage par la physique et la théorie de la connaissance", in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 71 (2011), 3, pp. 385-404.

⁶ J.W. Yolton, *Locke and French Materialism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1991, pp. 198-201.

⁷ Topazio, *D'Holbach's Moral Philosophy*, cit., p. 37: 'With the rejection of an innate morality, Locke had taken an important step toward what was to be d'Holbach's position – the repudiation of any religious morality based upon some form of communication between God and man'. In the 'Préface' to *La Morale universelle* ([P.-Th. d'Holbach], *La Morale universelle, ou Les Devoirs de l'homme fondés sur sa nature*, Marc-Michel Rey, Amsterdam 1776, 3 vols, p.viii), d'Holbach explicitly mentions Locke while discussing the issue of innate moral ideas (here and in all subsequent quotations, the original spelling has been retained): 'En vain le profond Locke a-t-il prouvé que les idées *innées* n'étoient que des chimères; [l]es Moralistes persistent dans leur préjugé [...]. Nous ferons voir [...] que l'homme ne possède en venant au monde que la faculté de sentir, & que sa façon de sentir est le vrai *Criterion*, ou la seule règle de ses jugemens, ou de ses sentimens moraux sur les actions ou sur les causes qui se font sentir à lui'. It is interesting to note how, shortly after mentioning Locke, in this passage d'Holbach goes on to quote with disapproval a famous verse from St Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* (II.15), which also appears in section 11 of Locke's *Second Treatise* and is in fact one of the clearest marks of the British empiricist's reconsideration of his original rejection of moral innate ideas in Book 1 of the *Essay*. See N. Jolley, *Locke: His Philosophical Thought*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, p. 198. In *La Morale universelle* (vol. 1, p. 221), d'Holbach also quotes a famous anecdote about Locke and Lord Shaftesbury, which he probably read in Jean Le Clerc's *Life and Character of Mr John Locke, Author of the Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, London 1706, originally published in French in the 6th volume of the *Bibliothèque choisie* (1705).

able than in the field of political thought – a fact which seems to have entirely escaped scholars to date. As will be outlined below, d’Holbach had a very good, first-hand knowledge of the *Second Treatise*, and, despite Locke’s famous pronouncement against atheism in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, evidence suggests that the baron engaged closely with some of Locke’s most interesting political ideas⁸.

The present article aims to provide an analysis of d’Holbach’s attitudes towards Locke’s philosophy in general and political thought more specifically. Building on Yolton’s work, in a first short section I shall review some of the elements that d’Holbach borrowed from Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, paying particular attention to how the baron turned Locke’s empiricism and critique of innatism into powerful antitheological tools. Shifting the focus from the *Essay* to the *Second Treatise*, I shall then attempt to understand exactly which elements of Locke’s political philosophy d’Holbach may have retained. Looking at two regrettably little-studied works, the *Système social* and *La Politique naturelle* (both published in 1773), I shall argue that the baron inherited from Locke a strong belief, ultimately based in social contract theory, that, in order to be legitimate, a government must pursue the well-being of the community, failure to do so providing fertile ground for rebellion. As I argue, however, d’Holbach diverges from Locke in at least one important respect. Clearly aware of the theological foundations of the *Second Treatise*, in his political works the baron attempts to replace Locke’s fundamental ‘Law of Nature’ with an entirely secular principle: the ‘amour éclairé de soi’, or enlightened self-interest. He thus (artificially) brings together Locke’s epistemology and more radical political ideas, and successfully overcomes a well-known aporia within the British empiricist’s philosophical corpus, one that has been investigated by Leo Strauss and Peter Laslett, among others, and that is still the subject of much scholarly debate⁹. My essay will thus contribute to the study of Locke’s reception in eighteenth-century France, while at the same time shedding light on d’Holbach’s much-neglected political philosophy.

⁸ On Locke and atheism see, for example, J. Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations of John Locke’s Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, chp. 8 (“Tolerating Atheists?”), and D.J. Lorenzo, “Tradition and Prudence in Locke’s Exceptions to ‘Toleration’”, in *American Journal of Political Science* 47 (2003), 2, pp. 248-58.

⁹ L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1953, and P. Laslett, “Introduction”, in J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. by P. Laslett, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2021.

1. *D'Holbach and the Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

On nous assure que l'ame humaine est une substance simple; mais si l'ame est une substance si simple, elle devrait être précisément la même dans tous les individus de l'espece humaine, qui tous devoient avoir les mêmes facultés intellectuelles: cependant celà n'arrive pas; les hommes different autant par les qualités de l'esprit, que par les traits du visage. [...] Quelle distance infinie n'y a-t-il pas entre le Génie d'un Locke, d'un Newton, & celui d'un Paysan [...] ¹⁰

Reacting to Helvetius' utopia of universal learning and echoing d'Alembert's words in the *Discours préliminaire* to the *Encyclopédie*, in section 96 of *Le Bon Sens* d'Holbach equates Locke's genius to Newton's and presents the achievements of both British thinkers as practically unmatched¹¹. The immediate reasons behind d'Holbach's praising of Locke are not hard to guess. The baron could not but look with favour upon Locke's empiricist epistemology, which allowed him to dismiss the notions of both a transcendental God and an immaterial soul as incomprehensible to the human mind and ultimately chimerical: 'l'homme', d'Holbach writes in chapter II.4 of the *Système de la nature*, 'ne peut avoir d'idées réelles que des choses qui agissent, ou qui ont précédemment agi, sur ses sens; or il n'y a que des objets matériels, physiques ou naturels qui puissent remuer nos organes & nous donner des idées'¹². While the French *philosophe* may be unwilling completely to break with universal moral principles, Locke's rejection of innatism provides him with solid arguments to refute Descartes' statement in the *Third Meditation* that one can conclude from the innateness of the primary idea of God to His formal

¹⁰ [P.-Th. d'Holbach], *Le Bon Sens, ou Idées naturelles opposées aux idées surnaturelles*, [Marc-Michel Rey], London [Amsterdam] 1772, pp. 113-14.

¹¹ J. le Rond d'Alembert, "Discours préliminaire", in D. Diderot and J. le Rond d'Alembert (eds), *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, Paris 1751-72, 28 vols., vol. 1, p. xxvii: 'Ce que Newton n'avoit osé, ou n'auroit peut-être pû faire, Locke l'entreprit & l'exécuta avec succès. On peut dire qu'il créa la Métaphysique à peu-près comme Newton avoit créé la Physique'. In the entry 'Génie' (vol. 7, pp. 582-84), Jean-François de Saint-Lambert proves somewhat less enthusiastic in his praises of the British philosopher: 'Il y a bien peu d'erreurs dans Locke & trop peu de vérités dans milord Shafsterbury [sic]: le premier cependant n'est qu'un esprit étendu, pénétrant, & juste; & le second est un *génie* du premier ordre. Locke a vû; Shafsterbury [sic] a créé, construit, édifié'. For more on d'Holbach's stance on natural inequality and rejection of Helvétius' utopia of universal learning see R. Sciuto, *Determinism and Enlightenment: The Collaboration of Diderot and d'Holbach*, Liverpool University Press, forthcoming in May 2023 in the *Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment*.

¹² [P.-Th. d'Holbach], *Système de la nature, ou des Loix du monde physique et du monde moral*, [Marc-Michel Rey], [Amsterdam] 1770, 2 vols, vol. 2, pp. 90-91. Similar ideas can be found in chapter I.7 (vol. 1, p. 98). See also Topazio, *D'Holbach's Moral Philosophy*, cit., p. 34.

reality. Accordingly, this aspect of Locke's philosophy is commended in both the *Système social* ('l'illustre Locke a sagement reléguées [les idées innées] dans la poussière de l'école') and *La Morale universelle*¹³. In the baron's hands, Locke's critique of innatism also becomes a formidable weapon against the traditional body-soul dichotomy. Nowhere perhaps is d'Holbach more explicit in drawing connections between the rejection of the notion of a self-regulating soul – which he sees as incompatible with holism – and the establishment of a rigid materialistic monism and deterministic *Weltanschauung*, than in the following passage from chapter I.10 of the *Système de la nature*:

ceux qui s'obstinent à faire de l'ame une substance distinguée du corps ou d'une essence totalement différente de la sienne [...] se fondent sur ce qu'ils prétendent que cet organe intérieur a le pouvoir de tirer des idées de son propre fond; ils veulent que même en naissant l'homme apporte des idées, qu'ils ont appellées *Innées* d'après cette notion merveilleuse. Ils ont donc cru que l'ame par un privilege spécial jouissoit, dans une nature où tout est lié, de la faculté de se mouvoir d'elle-même, de se créer des idées, de penser à quelque objet sans y être déterminée par aucune cause extérieure, qui en remuant ses organes lui fournit l'image de l'objet de ses pensées¹⁴.

Certainly filtered through Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*, Locke's well-known hypothesis of thinking matter from Book IV of the *Essay* also finds its place within the baron's extensive arsenal of anti-dualistic arguments¹⁵. 'De quel droit les Théologiens refuseroient-ils à leur Dieu le pouvoir de donner à cette matiere la faculté de penser?', asks d'Holbach, shrewdly fashioning himself as a defender of orthodoxy; 'Lui seroit-il donc plus difficile de créer des combinaisons de matiere dont la pensée résultât, que des esprits qui pensent? Au moins, en supposant une matiere qui pense, nous aurions quelques notions du sujet de la pensée, ou de ce qui pense en nous, tandis qu'en attribuant la pensée à un être immatériel, il nous est impossible de nous en faire la moindre idée'¹⁶.

¹³ See [P.-Th. d'Holbach], *Système social, ou Principes naturels de la morale et de la politique, avec un examen de l'influence du gouvernement sur les mœurs*, [Marc-Michel Rey], London [Amsterdam] 1773, 3 vols, vol. 1, p. 91 (ch. I.9). As for *La Morale universelle* see supra n.7.

¹⁴ [D'Holbach], *Système de la nature*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 157-58.

¹⁵ Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, ed. by N. Cronk, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, Voltaire Foundation, Oxford 1968-2022, vol. 6B. For more on d'Holbach's attitudes towards Voltaire see R. Sciuto, "The Absent Guest: d'Holbach's Strategic Use of Voltaire's Texts", in L. Nicoli (ed.), *The Great Protector of Wits. Baron d'Holbach and his Time*, Brill, Leiden 2022, pp. 116-34.

¹⁶ [D'Holbach], *Le Bon Sens*, cit., p. 129 (§104). See also [d'Holbach], *Système de la nature*, cit., vol. 2, p. 131 (sect. II.4).

2. *D'Holbach and the Second Treatise*

If the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* obviously captured the baron's attention, his knowledge of the British philosopher was not limited to this text. While systematically reviewing and debunking various proofs for the existence of God, in chapter II.4 of the *Système de la nature*, d'Holbach quotes a memorable passage from a letter that Locke sent to Molyneux on 4 March 1697 to make the point that theologians cannot possibly act in good faith when speculating about divine attributes¹⁷. A quick perusal of d'Holbach's library catalogue reveals, moreover, that, in addition to a copy of the 7th edition of John Wynne's *Abridgment of the Essay* (1752), the baron owned a 1731 French translation of *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, as well as a 1732, 2-volume Dutch edition of Locke's *Œuvres diverses*, including, among other texts, the *Lettre sur la tolérance* and the *Conduite de l'esprit dans la recherche de la vérité*¹⁸. He also possessed a 1761 miscellany of essays on education featuring Milton's *Of Education* alongside Locke's *Thoughts*, which he mentions in *La Morale universelle*, and, most importantly for our present discussion, a 3-volume, 1727 edition of Locke's *Works* containing both the *Essay* and the *Two Treatises of Government*¹⁹. D'Holbach was entirely capable of reading these texts in the original: the translator of Hobbes' *Humane Nature or, the Fundamental Elements of Policy* (the first part, that is, of the *Elements of Law*), of Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, and Swift's *History of the Reign of Queen Anne*, d'Holbach acquired a solid grasp of English while still a student in Leiden and systematically used this language when writing to his correspondents across the Channel – Wilkes, Hume, and Garrick, among others²⁰.

¹⁷ *Some Familiar Letters between Mr. Locke and Several of his Friends*, Churchill, London 1708, p. 180: 'all fair contenders for the opinions they have, I like mightily; but there are so few that have opinions, or at least seem, by their way of defending them, to be really persuaded of the opinions they profess, that I am apt to think there is in the world a great deal more scepticism, or at least want of concern for truth, than is imagin'd. In the *Système de la nature* (cit., vol. 2, p. 127), d'Holbach translates this passage as follows: 'J'aime beaucoup [...] tous ceux qui défendent leurs opinions de bonne foi, mais il y a si peu de gens qui, d'après la manière dont ils les défendent, paroissent pleinement convaincus des opinions qu'ils professent, que je suis tenté de croire qu'il y a dans le monde bien plus de scepticisme qu'on ne pense'.

¹⁸ *Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque de feu M. le Baron d'Holbach*, De Bure, Paris 1789, pp. 60, 22, and 174. D'Holbach's books were regrettably dispersed at an auction in 1789.

¹⁹ *Catalogue des livres*, cit., pp. 48 and 174. D'Holbach also owned (p. 58) Antoine-Martin Roche's 2-volume *Traité de la nature de l'ame & de l'origine de ses connoissances, contre le système de Locke*, Veuve Lottin, Paris 1759.

²⁰ D'Holbach's letters can be read in H. Sauter and E. Loos (eds), *Paul Thiry Baro d'Holbach. Die gesamte erhaltene Korrespondenz*, Franz Steiner, Stuttgart 1986.

D'Holbach's knowledge of the *Two Treatises of Government* – or *Traité du gouvernement civil*, as the whole text was (and still is) commonly referred to in French-speaking countries – is in itself noteworthy. While David Mazel's 1691 translation of the *Second Treatise* circulated rather widely among Francophone protestant readers, it is still a fact that, as argued by Michel Baridon, knowledge of this text in *Ancien Régime* France was extremely limited – *et pour cause* – until at least the 1770s²¹. The *Encyclopédie* mentions it only twice, and both times in passing. In his entry 'Locke, philosophie de', Diderot limits himself to remarking that, in this 'short work', Locke 'exposed the injustice and disadvantages of despotism and tyranny' ('exposoit l'injustice & les inconvénients du despotisme & de la tyrannie'). The chevalier de Jaucourt, for his part, merely refers to the *Two Treatises* at the end of his article 'Démocratie', where Locke's work features alongside William Temple's *Essay on the Origin and Nature of Government* and Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government*, a text which, like Locke's, was written in response to Filmer's *Patriarcha*²². Voltaire appears to have owned a copy of Mazel's translation of the *Second Treatise* but he never explicitly mentions this work in any of his texts or letters, and John Dunn has already dismissed Montesquieu's supposed indebtedness to the *Second Treatise* as a historiographical myth²³. Rousseau is of course an important exception in this sense, and some interesting remarks on his attitudes towards Locke can be found, for instance, in the works of Richard Ashcraft²⁴.

²¹ S.-J. Savonius, "Locke in French: The *Du Gouvernement civil* of 1691 and its Readers", in *The Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), 1, pp. 47-79 and M. Baridon, "Locke en France: Courants et contre-courants", in *Le Continent européen et le monde anglo-américain aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Presses Universitaires de Reims, Reims 1986, pp. 104-18, esp. p. 107. See also I.M. Wilson, *The Influence of Hobbes and Locke in the Shaping of the Concept of Sovereignty in Eighteenth-Century France*, Voltaire Foundation, Oxford 1973 (*Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. CI), p. 163: 'In the French and Dutch gazettes of the period 1735-67, Locke's *Second Treatise* remains almost unmentioned. [...] It seems probable, therefore, from this paucity of evidence, that Locke's two treatises were either not readily available to francophone readers in the period in question, or else were far less successful than certain of his other translated works in capturing the attention of French speaking readers.'

²² *Encyclopédie*, vol. 9, pp. 625-27 (here p. 626 – translation mine) and vol. 4, pp. 816-18 (here p. 818). For more on the article 'Locke, philosophie de' see Paolo Quintili's article in this collection.

²³ The *Traité du gouvernement civil* is mentioned in an eighteenth-century manuscript catalogue of Voltaire's library (f.11r) printed at the end of the catalogue of Voltaire's library in Saint Petersburg (*Biblioteka Voltera*, Editions de l'Académie des Sciences de l'URSS, Moscow 1961). Voltaire's copy of this book, however, has been lost. The Oxford Edition of Voltaire's marginalia (*Corpus des notes marginales*) accordingly does not list any marginal notes for this text. As for Montesquieu, see J. Dunn, *Locke. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, p. 8 and Wilson, *The Influence of Hobbes and Locke*, cit., pp. 99-118.

²⁴ Ashcraft, *Locke's Two Treatises of Government*, cit., pp. 278-80. A forthcoming collection of es-

In his political texts, d'Holbach engages very closely with the ideas that Locke expresses in the *Two Treatises* and in the *Second Treatise* more specifically. With the British philosopher he shares, first and foremost, the idea that a government should pursue the happiness and well-being of its citizens to count as legitimate. If Locke had identified in the 'Peace, Safety, and publick good of the People' the end to which all legislative power should strive, the French *philosophe* appears almost to echo him when, in *La Politique naturelle*, he writes that 'le Gouvernement est [...] la force établie par la volonté publique pour régler les actions de tous les membres de la Société, & les obliger de concourir au but qu'elle se propose: ce but est la sûreté, le bonheur, la conservation du tout & de ses parties'²⁵. Importantly, this definition appears to bestow upon the government a duty not only to allow the people to pursue their interests, but also to enact measures aimed at increasing in the people themselves a (supposedly natural) desire to contribute to the well-being of society as a whole. Both d'Holbach and Locke ground their notion that a legitimate government must pursue the best interests of society in social contract theory: it is because the people have surrendered some of their natural rights and liberties and entrusted them to the authority, that the latter must further the common good. Sure enough, chapter I.2 of *La Politique naturelle* opens by dismissing the state of nature as a simple thought experiment with no foundation in reality:

La plupart des Philosophes nous parlent d'un *état de Nature* qui n'eût jamais d'existence que dans l'imagination. On croit qu'il fut un tems où les hommes vécurent épars, isolés, sans aucune communication avec les êtres de leur espece; en un mot, entièrement semblables à quelques bêtes féroces. Rien de plus chimérique & de plus opposé à la nature humaine, que cet état de Nature. L'homme, fruit d'une Société contractée entre un mâle & une femelle de son espece, fut toujours en Société; dès qu'il vit la lumiere il vécut avec ses parens, avec ses freres & ses sœurs. Ses besoins, l'habitude & l'expérience lui rendirent

says edited by Céline Spector and Johanna Lenne-Cornuez for the *Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment (Rousseau et Locke: Dialogues critiques*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2022) promises to cast additional light on Rousseau's attitudes towards Locke.

²⁵ [P.-Th. d'Holbach], *La Politique naturelle, ou Discours sur les vrais principes du gouvernement*, [Marc-Michel Rey], London [Amsterdam] 1773, 2 vols, vol. 1, p. 53 (sect. II.3). Locke's original text can be read in Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, cit., pp. 353. A similar definition can be found in the *Système social*, cit., vol. 2, p. 6 (sect. II.1): 'Le Gouvernement est la somme des forces de la Société déposées entre les mains de ceux qu'elle a jugé les plus propres à la conduire au bonheur. D'où il suit évidemment qu'un Souverain n'est pas le Maître, mais le Ministre de la Société.'

cette Société de plus en plus nécessaire; il l'augmenta lui-même, lorsque sa nature eut fait éclore en lui le besoin de se multiplier²⁶.

This, however, is but an obvious stab at Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, and evidence suggests that d'Holbach firmly believed all particular governments to be founded on a 'pacte social'²⁷. Dismissing the possibility of express consent either because it created unnecessary theoretical difficulties or because he wished to widen the pool of potential covenant signatories, in a rhetorically very elaborate passage of the *Système social* the baron spells out for his readers the terms in which the tacit compact between people and sovereign is basically phrased:

Il subsiste [...] entre les peuples & leurs chefs un Pacte dont les articles doivent être conçus à-peu-près en ces termes. « Engagez vous à nous bien gouverner, c'est-à-dire à veiller à notre sûreté, à nous procurer le bien-être, à nous garantir de toute oppression; & nous nous engagerons de notre côté à vous obéir, à vous honorer, à nous occuper de votre bien-être & de votre sûreté. Si vous ne nous faites jouir d'aucuns biens, vous nous serez indifférent. Si vous ne nous faites que du mal, nos engagements seront nuls; *c'est vous qui les anéantirez vous-même*. Si vous nous faites endurer des maux insupportables, nous vous détesterons, nous vous traiterons en ennemi. Si nous sommes trop foibles pour secouer votre joug, nous le porterons en frémissant, vous aurez un ennemi dans chacun de vos esclaves, & vous serez à chaque instant obligé de trembler sur ce trône dont vous ne serez qu'un injuste usurpateur »²⁸.

²⁶ [D'Holbach], *La Politique naturelle*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 4-5 (sect. I.2).

²⁷ See [d'Holbach], *La Politique naturelle*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 13-14 (sect. I.6): '[Le] Pacte Social [...] lie l'homme à la Société & la Société à l'homme. Il se renouvelle à chaque instant; l'homme tient continuellement la balance pour peser & comparer les avantages & les désavantages qui résultent pour lui de la Société dans laquelle il vit'. For more on d'Holbach's social contract theory, see C. Devellennes, "A Fourth Musketeer of Social Contract Theory: The Political Thought of the Baron d'Holbach", in *History of Political Thought*, 34 (2013), 3, pp. 459-78.

²⁸ [D'Holbach], *Système social*, cit., vol. 2, p. 12 (sect. II.1). Italics mine. See also [d'Holbach], *La Politique naturelle*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 12-13 (sect. I.6): 'Si l'homme est lié à la Société, celle-ci, à son tour, prend des engagements avec lui. Chaque individu contracte à-peu-près en ces termes avec elle. « Aidez-moi, lui dit-il, & je vous aiderai de mes forces; prêtez-moi vos secours; & vous pourrez compter sur les miens: travaillez à mon bonheur, si vous voulez que je m'occupe du vôtre: prenez part à mes infortunes & je partagerai les vôtres. Procurez-moi des avantages assez grands pour m'engager à vous sacrifier une partie de ceux que je possède ». La Société lui répond, « mets en commun tes facultés; alors nous te prêterons nos secours; nous multiplierons tes forces; nous travaillerons de concert à ta félicité; nous soulagerons tes peines; nous assurons ton repos, & nos efforts réunis repousseront de toi les maux que tu redoutes, avec bien plus d'énergie que tu ne ferois sans nous. Les forces de tous te protégeront; la prudence de tous t'éclairera, les volontés de tous te guideront. L'amour, l'estime &

While d'Holbach may not be positive as to the form of government he deems the best, he shares with Locke a strong disapproval of despotic rule or tyranny²⁹. Unlike the British philosopher, who, in the *Second Treatise*, often conflates arbitrary and absolute power, d'Holbach tends to keep the two notions separate, addressing his criticisms to what he dubs 'pouvoir arbitraire'³⁰. 'Liez à jamais les mains cruelles du pouvoir arbitraire', he pleads with the British nation, whose faulty representative system, he reasons, does not place sufficient constraints on the monarch's authority³¹. Time and again, he draws attention to the nefarious impact of tyranny on the people's behaviour and well-being: 'Sous un Gouvernement arbitraire', he writes, 'nul citoyen n'est tenté d'acquérir du mérite & des talents; il sçait que les récompenses & les places ne sont réservées qu'à l'intrigue [...]; il devient donc intrigant, & s'embarrasse fort peu de mériter'³². And again: 'Les pays soumis au pouvoir arbitraire, ne renferment que des hommes entièrement abrutis ou frivoles, également incapables de réflexions'³³. In chapter II.2 of the *Système social*, after referring in passing to the works of Sidney, he then uses a famous image from the *Second Treatise* to argue that despotism cannot possibly guarantee true peace to a country's citizens:

La tranquillité des Monarchies & des Etats despotiques ressemblent à ces maladies chroniques, qui minent peu à peu le corps de l'homme, & lui causent une foiblesse dont il ne se relève jamais. Locke compare la paix que procure le Despotisme à l'antre de Polyphème où Ulysse et ses compagnons étoient forcés d'attendre en silence leur tour pour être dévorés³⁴!

les récompenses de tous payeront tes actions utiles & seront le salaire de tes travaux. En un mot, les biens que tous te procureront, te dédommageront amplement des sacrifices que tu seras obligé de leur faire »'. In the *Système social*, cit., vol. 2, p. 4 (sect. II.1), d'Holbach states clearly that 'pour n'être pas rédigé par écrit ou clairement énoncé [le pacte tacite que chaque citoyen fait avec la Société], n'en est pas moins réel.

²⁹ As for d'Holbach's views on the possible forms of government see Devellennes, "A Fourth Musketeer of Social Contract Theory", cit., p. 463, which, however, arguably errs in overdoing d'Holbach's republicanism.

³⁰ On the difference between arbitrary and absolute power see Jolley, *Locke*, cit., p. 212.

³¹ [D'Holbach], *Système social*, cit., vol. 2, p. 75 (sect. II.6).

³² *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 18-19 (sect. III.2).

³³ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 48 (sect. III.5).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 29 (sect. II.2). The reference is to a passage in sect. 228 of the *Second Treatise* (p. 417): 'Who would not think it an admirable Peace betwixt the Mighty and the Mean, when the Lamb, without resistance, yielded his Throat to be torn by the imperious Wolf? *Polyphemus's* Den gives us a perfect Pattern of such a Peace, and such a Government, wherein *Ulysses* and his Companions had nothing to do, but quietly to suffer themselves to be devour'd'.

In keeping with the distinction he makes between absolute and arbitrary power, d'Holbach is clear that the word 'despotisme' should not, under any circumstances, be used to refer to the reign of good absolute rulers. As he writes in section II.1 of the *Système social*, 'Le pouvoir absolu, ou ce qu'on appelle le *Despotisme* seroit, dit-on, un gouvernement admirable entre les mains d'un Trajan, d'un Titus, d'un Marc-Aurele; mais un pouvoir exercé par un homme de bien, qui se conforme aux regles de la justice & de la raison, n'est plus un Despotisme, & ne doit pas être désigné sous ce nom déshonorant'³⁵. Indeed, one can only hope that the power of a good ruler be without constraints, the baron appears to be saying in *La Politique naturelle*: 'Donnez des Trajan, des Antonin, des Marc-Aurele au monde, & alors il ne sera pas nécessaire de limiter leur pouvoir; plus leur autorité sera grande, plus leurs Sujets seront fortunés'³⁶. Crucially, these statements are made explicitly in opposition to what Locke argues in section 166 of the *Second Treatise*, namely that the reign of an enlightened monarch is absolutely nefarious, for it instils in the people a positive image of autocracy and leaves them completely defenceless against any unenlightened despots who may follow³⁷.

Despite these occasional divergences, d'Holbach follows the author of the *Two Treatises* (and the author of the *Vindicius Liberius*, too, incidentally) in advocating for the people (or at least for the contractors) a right of resistance to unjust authority³⁸. As he writes in chapter II.5 of the *Système social*:

³⁵ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 14.

³⁶ [D'Holbach], *La Politique naturelle*, cit., vol. 2, p. 56.

³⁷ Indeed, in the sentence immediately preceding the passage just quoted from section II.1 of the *Système social*, d'Holbach shows perfect awareness of Locke's view on good princes as expressed in section 166 of the *Second Treatise*: 'Locke [...] remarque que souvent les meilleurs Princes, en s'attirant par leurs vertus la confiance de leurs sujets, leur ont fait un tort véritable, vû que ceux-ci, séduits par leurs bonnes qualités, leur ont adjugé des prérogatives & des droits, dont leurs successeurs moins équitables ont indignement abusé'. Locke's view was later appropriated by Diderot who, in the *Observations sur le Nakaz* (in D. Diderot, *Ceuvres complètes*, ed. by L. Versini, Paris: Laffont, 1994-97, 5 vols, vol. 3, p. 515) writes: 'si l'Angleterre avait eu trois souverains de suite, tels qu'Elizabeth, l'Angleterre était asservie pour des siècles'.

³⁸ On John Toland's views on the right to resistance see *Vindicius Liberius: or M. Toland's Defence of himself; against the late Lower House of Convocation*, London 1702, pp. 125-26: 'I have bin wholly devoted to the self evident Principle of *Liberty*, and a profest Enemy of to *Slavery* and *arbitrary Power*. I have always bin, now am, and ever shall be persuaded that all Sorts of Magistrats are made for and by the People, and not the People for or by the Magistrats: that the Power of all Governors is originally conferr'd by the Society, and limited to their Safety, Wealth, and Glory, which makes those Governors accountable for their Trust: and consequently that it is lawful to resist and punish Tyrants of all Kinds, be it a single Person or greater Number of Men.'

Un Gouvernement, quelqu'il soit, est fait pour la Nation, & non la Nation pour le Gouvernement. Les Rois sont faits pour les Peuples, & non les Peuples pour les Rois. Une Nation est donc en droit de révoquer, d'annuler, d'étendre, de restreindre, d'expliquer, d'altérer tous les pouvoirs qu'elle a donnés: quand elle combat un Tyran, elle combat un furieux, elle se défend de ses coups; *ce n'est pas elle qui se révolte, c'est le Tyran*. Si chaque individu de notre espece a le droit de se défendre contre l'agresseur qui l'attaque, *par quelle étrange jurisprudence une Nation en corps seroit-elle privée d'un droit que l'on ne peut contester au dernier des citoyens?* Un Peuple peut, non seulement résister au Tyran qui l'outrage & qui travaille à sa ruine, mais encore il peut le traiter en ennemi: s'il a violé les loix, de quel droit réclamerait-il la protection de ces loix³⁹?

At least two things ought to be noted about the passage just quoted. The first one is that, according to d'Holbach, it is the ruler or government, rather than the Nation itself, who should normally be blamed in the event of a *general* rebellion, for, indeed, the people would have no reason to revolt against a legitimate authority that duly protected their interests. This idea, which one also finds in chapter I.3 of the *Politique naturelle* ('le Tyran, l'Usurpateur sont [...] les seuls rebelles; ils résistent à la volonté générale contre laquelle il ne leur est point permis de s'élever') has of course its source in section 226 of the *Second Treatise*, where Locke famously writes that

those, whoever they be, who by force break through, and by force justify their violation of [the Constitutions and Laws of the Government], are truly and properly *Rebels*. For when Men by entering into Society and Civil Government, have excluded force, and introduced Laws for the preservation of Property, Peace, and Unity amongst themselves; those who set up force again in opposition to the Laws, do *Rebellare*, that is, bring back again the state of War, and are properly Rebels: Which they who are in Power (by the pretence they have to Authority, the temptation of force they have in their hands, and the Flattery of those about them) [are] likeliest to do⁴⁰.

³⁹ [D'Holbach], *Système social*, cit., vol. 2, p. 57. Italics mine. It is interesting to remark that the sentences immediately preceding this passage contain what appears to be a likely allusion to section 225 of the *Second Treatise*: 'Locke nous dit, qu'une longue suite d'oppressions, d'abus, de négligences, d'injustices, de prévarications font assez connoître à tout citoyen raisonnable, l'état de son pays, & en cas que pour lors la nation vienne à s'expliquer, il sçaura qu'il ne doit pas se ranger du côté des brigands & des pirates.'

⁴⁰ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, cit., pp. 415-16. For more on Locke's notion that it is the government who should be taken as the true initiator of a rebellion see D. Lloyd Thomas, *Locke on Government*, Routledge, London 1995, p. 61. D'Holbach's text can be read in *La Politique naturelle*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 161-62 (sect. IV.3). Chapter II.5 of the *Système social* often comes back to this idea. See

The second noticeable thing about the quotation above from chapter II.5 of the *Système social* is that d'Holbach is arguably more careful than Locke to stress that an individual has the right to rebel against the authority under which they live only when the majority of the people – the ‘community’, as Locke would put it, or ‘la Nation’, to use the baron’s own word – withdraws its consent or trust: ‘si les Nations jouissent incontestablement du droit de punir les Tyrans qui les outragent’, he writes, ‘ce droit n’appartient aucunement au citoyen isolé; celui-ci ne pourroit sans crime se rendre juge dans sa propre cause’⁴¹. Clearly mindful of both François Ravaillac’s regicide in 1610 and Robert-François Damiens’ attempt to assassinate Louis le Bien-Aimé in 1757, d'Holbach then adds: ‘Le plus juste des Princes, le plus cher à son peuple ne seroit pas à couvert des attentats d’un fanatique ou d’un scélérat, s’il étoit permis à tout citoyen de juger ou de punir les chefs de la Société’⁴². To further dispel any accusations of preaching sedition to the French public, d'Holbach hastens to point out that under no circumstances can a person’s freedom be taken as involving a right to rebel against a legitimate authority: “Un citoyen”, he writes, using a word close to Rousseau’s heart, ‘n’exerce pas sa liberté en résistant à une autorité légitime; il est alors un insensé qui brise la barriere destinée à le garantir lui-même’. In support of this statement, he refers to section 230 of the *Second Treatise*, suggesting, perhaps, that he may not have thought of Locke’s ideas as diverging significantly from his own: ‘*Tout citoyen, dit Locke, qui renverse un gouvernement équitable, se rend coupable du sang & des maux de ses concitoyens. Tout souverain qui anéantit les loix, est un forcené qui s’expose à la licence des citoyens qu’il a lui-même déchaînés*’⁴³.

pp. 56-57: ‘Il n’y a pour l’ordinaire que l’excès de la tyrannie, qui mette les nations en feu; c’est alors les Tyrans que l’on doit regarder comme les vrais incendiaires.’

⁴¹ [D’Holbach], *Système social*, cit., vol. 2, p. 58. D’Holbach reiterates the idea several times in the same chapter. See, for example, p. 57: ‘C’est, je le répète, à la Nation, source unique & véritable de toute autorité légitime, qu’il appartient de juger si elle est bien ou mal gouvernée, bien ou mal représentée; si ses loix lui sont utiles ou nuisibles’. Locke is famously ambivalent on this topic. See in particular section 168, which appears initially to extend the right of resistance to ‘any single Man’ but then concludes with the following caveat: ‘Nor let any one think, this lays a perpetual foundation for Disorder: for this operates not, till the Inconvenience is so great, that the Majority feel it, and are weary of it, and find a necessity to have it amended’. For more on this topic see R. Ashcraft, “Locke’s Political Philosophy”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. by V. C. Chappell, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, pp. 226-51, and Lloyd Thomas, *Locke on Government*, cit., pp. 63-65, the latter being more inclined to interpret Locke as not recognising a right to rebel to single individuals.

⁴² [D’Holbach], *Système social*, cit., vol. 2, p. 58.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 43 (sect. II.3). Another possible explanation for this mention of Locke will become

3. Locke's 'Law of Nature' and d'Holbach's 'amour éclairé de soi'

If d'Holbach is, on the whole, consistent in his praises of Locke and borrows extensively from him in the fields of both epistemology and politics, in at least one (or another) crucial respect he is careful to distance himself from the British empiricist⁴⁴. It is often suggested that Locke did not regard his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as religiously subversive⁴⁵. And yet most of his readers, both in the early modern period and more recently, have pointed to the existence of a fundamental inconsistency within his philosophy: if on the one hand the *Essay* can be seen as naturally lending itself to radical interpretations and undermining some of the fundamental tenets of Christianity, the *Second Treatise* is best interpreted as a politically subversive text, which, however, derives the people's right to overturn an unjust ruler from a fundamentally orthodox premiss: all human beings are God's property and ought not harm themselves or other fellow human beings⁴⁶. As Locke himself puts it in Section 6,

apparent towards the end of this essay. Locke's original text (p. 418) reads: 'whoever, either Ruler or Subject, by force goes about to invade the Rights of either Prince or People, and lays the foundation for *overturning* the Constitution and Frame of *any Just Government*, is guilty of the greatest Crime, I think, a Man is capable of, being to answer for all those mischiefs of Blood, Rapine, and Desolation, which the breaking to pieces of Governments bring on a Countrey. And he who does it, is justly to be esteemed the common Enemy and Pest of Mankind; and is to be treated accordingly.'

⁴⁴ At least two other passages from the *Système social* in addition to the ones quoted contain references to Locke's *Second Treatise*. In chapter II.1 (vol. 2, p. 16) d'Holbach quotes from section 175 ('*Conquest* is as far from setting up any Government, as demolishing an House is from building a new one in the place') to make the point that the people's consent is necessary for the establishment of a legitimate authority and that, as a consequence, a ruler who were to annex a territory by force could hardly ever rule lawfully over its citizens: 'Il n'y a que le consentement libre & subséquent des peuples, qui puisse légitimer le pouvoir usurpé d'un conquérant. Mais les peuples ne peuvent donner ce consentement que sous la condition d'être bien gouvernés. *La conquête*, dit Locke, *est aussi peu l'origine & le fondement des Etats, que la démolition d'une maison est la vraie cause de la construction d'une autre*'. The second passage is in chapter III.3 (vol. 3, p. 25): 'les loix sont faites pour les Peuples, & non les Peuples pour les loix. *Une loi*, dit Locke, *doit disparaître, dès que la Société est plus heureuse sans cette loi*'. D'Holbach's source here is section 57 of the *Second Treatise*: 'Could [those under a Law] be happier without it, the Law, as an useless thing would of it self vanish.'

⁴⁵ See Dunn, *Locke*, cit., p. 20.

⁴⁶ See Jolley, *Locke*, cit., p. 194: 'to some readers the [*Essay* and the *Second Treatise*] seem to be very different in philosophical tendency; the *Second Treatise* appears to be infused by a more dogmatic, less critical spirit than the *Essay*. Even on specific issues the relationship between the two books is problematic; for instance, Locke's position in the *Second Treatise* is not obviously consistent with the denial of innate moral knowledge which is defended in the *Essay*'.

the *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions. For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker; All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the World by his order and about his business, they are his Property, whose Workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one anothers Pleasure⁴⁷.

Crucially, the ‘Law of Nature’ does not apply to the state of nature alone, for, at least in theory, even the positive laws of a commonwealth or civil society must be informed by it. Indeed, ‘the *Rules* that [legislators] make for other Mens Actions, must, as well as their own and other Mens Actions, be conformable to the Law of Nature, *i.e.* to the Will of God⁴⁸’.

As shown by the following passage from the *Système de la nature*, d’Holbach, like many of his contemporaries across the Channel, was perfectly aware of the fundamental ambiguity underpinning Locke’s philosophy:

Comment le profond Locke qui, au grand regret des Théologiens, a mis le principe d’Aristote dans tout son jour; & comment tous ceux qui, comme lui, ont reconnu l’absurdité du système des *idées innées*, n’en ont-ils point tiré les conséquences immédiates & nécessaires? [...] N’ont-ils pas vu que leur principe sapoit les fondemens de cette Théologie qui n’occupe jamais les hommes que d’objets inaccessibles aux sens, & dont par conséquent il leur étoit impossible de se faire des idées? Mais le préjugé, quand il est sacré sur-tout, empêche de voir les applications les plus simples des principes les plus évidens; en matière de religion les plus grands hommes ne sont souvent que des enfans, incapables de pressentir & de tirer les conséquences de leurs principes! M Locke, & tous ceux qui ont adopté son système si démontré, ou l’axiome d’Aristote, auroient dû en conclure que tous les êtres merveilleux dont la Théologie s’occupe sont de pures chimères⁴⁹.

Now, of course, d’Holbach may well have the *Reasonableness of Christianity* or the *Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* in mind when accusing Locke of religious conservatism, but nothing prevents us from supposing that, in the passage above, he may be alluding to the *Second Treatise*, too⁵⁰. And

⁴⁷ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, cit., p. 271.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

⁴⁹ [D’Holbach], *Système de la nature*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 166-67.

⁵⁰ All these texts can be found in the 1727 edition of *The Works of John Locke Esq.*, a copy of which, as we mentioned previously, d’Holbach had in his library.

indeed it is quite telling that, while drawing heavily from this text, the baron is careful to cast aside Locke's notion of 'Law of Nature'. He replaces it with the idea that individuals are naturally animated by a self-interested love of other fellow human beings, a feeling which, in *La Politique naturelle*, he dubs 'amour éclairé de soi':

l'intérêt, ou l'*amour éclairé de soi* est le fondement des vertus sociales; c'est le véritable motif de tout ce que l'homme fait pour le service de ses semblables. La vertu n'est que l'utilité des hommes vivants en Société. Etre vertueux, c'est être sociable, c'est contribuer au bonheur de ceux avec lesquels notre destin nous lie, afin de les exciter à contribuer à notre propre félicité⁵¹.

It is precisely this realisation that one's own happiness is inextricably connected to society's – a realisation that d'Holbach supposes to be natural (or at least in keeping with human nature), and corroborated, in equitable societies, by education and experience – that d'Holbach takes as the foundation of social rights, duties, and, ultimately, social life itself. As he emphatically puts it in the opening section to *La Politique naturelle*,

l'homme, ayant le desir de se conserver & de se rendre heureux, en chérit les moyens; [...] né avec la faculté de sentir, il préfère le bien au mal; [...] susceptible d'expériences & de réflexions, il devient raisonnable, c'est à dire, capable de comparer les avantages que la vie sociale lui procure avec les désavantages qu'il éprouveroit, s'il étoit privé de la Société. D'après ces expériences, ces réflexions, cette comparaison, il préfère un état qui lui procure une existence agréable & conforme à son être à la solitude qui lui déplaît, qui l'inquiète, qui le laisseroit dépourvu de secours. En un mot, l'homme est sociable, parce qu'il aime le bien-être & se plaît dans un état de sécurité. *Ces sentimens sont naturels, c'est-à-dire découlent de l'essence ou de la nature d'un être qui cherche à se conserver*, qui s'aime lui-même, qui veut rendre son existence heureuse, & qui saisit avec ardeur les moyens d'y parvenir. Tout prouve à l'homme que la vie sociale lui est avantageuse; *l'habitude l'y attache*, & il se trouve malheureux,

⁵¹ [D'Holbach], *La Politique naturelle*, cit., vol. 1, p. 10 (sect. I.5). See also vol. 2, p. 94 (sect. VI.22): 'Nul repos, nulle sûreté, nulle félicité pour le plus grand nombre, dans un pays d'où le pouvoir arbitraire a banni la liberté. Ce n'est que dans les sociétés où elle regne que l'on trouve de la puissance, c'est là seulement qu'il existe une Patrie. *Qu'est-ce donc que la Patrie?* dira l'esclave dont l'ame avilie n'est point accoutumée à réfléchir; *est-ce cet amour imbécille du sol qui nous a vu naître?* Non; c'est un amour éclairé de nous-mêmes qui nous apprend à chérir le Gouvernement qui nous protège, les loix qui nous assurent notre personne & nos biens, la société qui travaille à notre félicité. La liberté seule peut procurer ces avantages; sans elle il ne peut donc y avoir de Patrie; l'amour de notre pays n'est jamais que l'amour de nous-mêmes.'

dès qu'il est privé de l'assistance de ses semblables. Voilà le vrai principe de la Sociabilité⁵².

As the passage above already makes clear, the 'amour éclairé de soi' rests, in turn, on two fundamental principles. The first one is the hedonistic notion that human beings naturally seek pleasure and flee from sorrow, a statement that recurs almost obsessively across d'Holbach's textual corpus. To quote from the *Système de la nature*: 'un être sensible doit nécessairement chercher le plaisir & fuir la douleur'⁵³. The second one is the identification of right or good with any behaviours that increase (general) happiness and well-being, and symmetrical-ly of wrong or bad with any actions that produce unhappiness and ill-being. The 'amour éclairé de soi', in other words, is ultimately based on that notion, so crucial to the philosophical enquiry of both Helvétius and Bentham, that is the Principle of Utility⁵⁴. 'La vertu', the baron writes in chapter I.9 of the *Système de la nature*, 'est tout ce qui est vraiment & constamment utile aux êtres de l'espece humaine vivants en société; [...] le vice est tout ce qui leur est nuisible'⁵⁵. And again, in the *Lettres à Eugénie*: 'par vertu nous devons entendre des dispositions habituelles à faire ce qui peut procurer le bonheur de nos semblables'⁵⁶.

D'Holbach's decision to replace Locke's religiously connoted 'Law of Nature' with the more secular 'amour éclairé de soi' may appear to be a most severe blow to the British philosopher's political system. And yet, as the present article hopes to have shown, it in no way precludes the French *philosophe* from subscribing to most of the conclusions drawn in the *Second Treatise*. This is possible because Locke's 'Law of Nature' and d'Holbach's 'amour éclairé de soi', however differ-

⁵² Ibid., vol. 1, p. 4 (sect. I.1). Italics mine. D'Holbach emphasises again the importance of education in ensuring that citizens realise that their happiness is contingent upon society's in chapter I.9 of the *Système de la nature* (vol. 1, p. 150). 'Lorsque notre éducation, les exemples qu'on nous donne, les moyens que l'on nous fournit sont approuvés par la raison, tout concourt à nous rendre vertueux, l'habitude fortifie en nous ces dispositions, & nous devenons des membres utiles de la société, à laquelle tout devrait nous prouver que notre bien être durable est nécessairement lié. Si au contraire notre éducation, nos institutions, les exemples qu'on nous donne, les opinions qu'on nous suggere dès l'enfance, nous montrent la vertu comme inutile ou contraire & le vice comme utile & favorable à notre propre bonheur, alors nous deviendrons vicieux & nous nous croirons intéressés à nuire à nos associés.'

⁵³ [D'Holbach], *Système de la nature*, cit., vol. 1, p. 17. D'Holbach normally replaces the somewhat ambiguous notion of pleasure with that of 'well-being'. See, for instance ibid., p. 190: 'Il est de l'essence actuelle de l'homme de tendre au bien être ou de vouloir se conserver.'

⁵⁴ D'Holbach was arguably aware of Helvétius' views on ethics even before the posthumous publication of *De l'Homme* in 1773.

⁵⁵ [D'Holbach], *Système de la nature*, cit., vol. 1, p. 135.

⁵⁶ [P.-Th. d'Holbach], *Lettres à Eugénie, ou Préservatif contre les préjugés*, [Marc-Michel Rey], London [Amsterdam] 1768, 2 vols, vol. 2, p. 103.

ent, are in fact fundamentally interchangeable. John Simmons has remarked that, in Locke's political theory, 'the fundamental law of nature is [...] meant to function [...] much as the principle of utility has been thought to function in some rule-utilitarian schemes'⁵⁷. Locke, after all, was almost as enthusiastic a subscriber as d'Holbach to the hedonistic equation of good with happiness and pleasure (as opposed to harm), and the case has been made by A. P. Brogan that the premisses of Locke's social theory are ultimately not different from those of eighteenth-century utilitarianism, a tradition which, in fact, owes much to the British philosopher⁵⁸. Both Locke's 'Law of Nature' and d'Holbach's 'amour éclairé de soi', moreover, are said to be in keeping with reason and good sense, or even to overlap with them. 'The *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions', states Locke in a passage already quoted above. As for d'Holbach, in *La Politique naturelle* he defines reason as the ability to discern what is useful and what is not ('La raison n'est que la connoissance de ce qui nous est *utile* ou nuisible'), further stating that it is this mental faculty that prompts men and women to pursue their natural goal of living in society by instilling in them an awareness of some fundamental impulses and truths (which he interestingly calls 'loix naturelles'), such as the self-preservation instinct or the equation of good and useful:

Si c'est le besoin qui force les hommes à demeurer réunis, c'est le besoin encore qui leur fournit les moyens de maintenir leur association. C'est donc le besoin qui les oblige ou qui leur impose des devoirs. Les devoirs ne sont que les moyens nécessaires pour parvenir à la fin qu'on se propose. L'expérience, qui constitue la raison, nous découvre ces moyens, elle nous fait sentir leur nécessité, elle nous en montre l'application; ainsi c'est la raison qui donne à notre espèce les Loix que l'on appelle *Naturelles*, parce qu'elles découlent de notre nature, de notre essence, de l'amour qui nous attache à notre existence, du désir de la conserver, de l'attrait invincible que nous éprouvons pour l'utile & l'agréable, & de notre aversion pour tout ce qui nous est nuisible & fâcheux⁵⁹.

It is reason, basically, that turns 'amour de soi' in 'amour éclairé de soi', egoistic self-interest in *enlightened* self-interest.

⁵⁷ J. Simmons, *The Lockean Theory of Rights*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992, p. 50.

⁵⁸ A.P. Brogan, "John Locke and Utilitarianism", in *Ethics*, 69 (1958), 2, pp. 79-93.

⁵⁹ [D'Holbach], *La Politique naturelle*, cit., vol. 1, p. 3 and 14 (sect. I.1 and I.7).

Despite its apparent fundamental differences, d'Holbach's theory of the foundation of the rights and duties of governments is therefore not unlike Locke's. Rather it is a secular, specular version of it. As this article hopes to have demonstrated, d'Holbach actively engaged with Locke's philosophy. Fully aware of its merits as well as of the tensions within it, he tweaked it in places but eventually made it his own. In fact, the baron's decision often openly to mention or footnote Locke when borrowing or adapting any of his politically radical ideas offered eighteenth-century readers a somewhat distorted, more consistently radical image of the British thinker, one that could very easily be reconciled with the materialistic, anti-theological conclusions that d'Holbach's contemporaries were accustomed to drawing from the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* – or that d'Holbach drew from this text, at any rate⁶⁰. In a bold move, d'Holbach brought together the *Essay* and the *Second Treatise*. He overcame what eighteenth-century commentators already perceived as the most glaring tension between the two texts, and claimed the British philosopher for the cause of atheism and radicalism. As recent research has shown, after all, d'Holbach was an extremely manipulative writer, one who used all available means to achieve his philosophical aims and disseminate his ideas⁶¹.

Conclusion

The present article has shown that, unlike many other eighteenth-century French philosophers, radical thinker Paul-Thiry d'Holbach had first-hand knowledge of Locke's *Second Treatise* and drew extensively on it when penning his main political works: *La Politique naturelle* and the *Système social*⁶². While

⁶⁰ Some commentators may even argue that d'Holbach's is in fact a fairly accurate rendition of Locke's views. Locke's stance on religion, after all, has been the subject of much discussion, and some scholars, Leo Strauss, for one have seen in the British philosopher a closet atheist. See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, cit. See also J.W. Tate, "Dividing Locke from God: The Limits of Theology in Locke's Political Philosophy", in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 39 (2013), 2, pp. 133-64, which argues for the independence of Locke's political conclusions from their alleged theological premisses, and Dunn, *Locke*, cit., p. 36: '[Locke] chose not to discuss at all the question of how men can naturally know the law of nature, the binding law of God, on which, according to the argument of the book, all human rights rested and from which the great bulk of human duties more or less directly derived. The omission has attracted much intellectual criticism from later writers on political theory. It has also earned, both at the time of publication and more recently, some suspicion that the pious tone of its discussion of the law of nature might have been evasive or insincere.'

⁶¹ See Sciuto, "The Absent Guest", cit.

⁶² More research is needed to understand whether the ideas expressed in the *Système social* and *La*

rejecting the Rousseauian notion of a state of nature intended as a historical period when human beings lived outside society, d'Holbach inherits from Locke the idea that particular polities are the result of a tacit, constantly renewed social contract. As the products of a covenant, governments must pursue the preservation and best interests of the 'community' or 'Nation', as Locke and d'Holbach would respectively call it, prolonged failure to do so necessarily resulting in their loss of legitimacy and ultimately paving the way to revolution. Naturally wary of Locke's decision to ground the legitimacy of an authority (and therefore a community's right to rebel against it) on its exactitude in enacting a 'Law of Nature' which is based, in turn, on God's will, d'Holbach replaces this 'Law of Nature' with what he terms 'amour éclairé de soi'. For d'Holbach, a person's realisation that their individual well-being is inextricably connected to that of others depends on their more or less intuitive understanding that an action is good in so far as it promotes happiness or pleasure and wrong when it brings about unhappiness or pain (Principle of Utility). While d'Holbach's replacement of the 'Law of Nature' with the secular notion of 'amour éclairé de soi' may seem to undermine Locke's philosophy at its very core, the reality is that the two principles are extremely close and fundamentally interchangeable. Locke's political philosophy, d'Holbach seems to wish his most perceptive readers would realise, can easily be turned into a consistent secular theory, and reconciled with the conclusions drawn in (or from) the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*⁶³.

The present study is of course not exhaustive in its treatment of d'Holbach's attitudes towards the *Two Treatises of Government*. Evidence suggests that d'Holbach may have been influenced by Locke even in his views on patriarchy, slavery, and private property – and indeed further research in this area would be particularly welcome, given the influence that the baron's writings are often said to have had on the development of Marx's philosophy⁶⁴. And yet, while

Politique naturelle match those put forward in the *Ethocratie*, a book published in 1776, and in which d'Holbach appears to target a different audience.

⁶³ This is not to suggest that d'Holbach's philosophy as a whole is consistently radical. See Sciuto, *Determinism and Enlightenment*, cit.

⁶⁴ For d'Holbach's views on private property see, for instance, section I.25 of *La Politique naturelle* (p. 38): 'il est impossible que l'homme se conserve ou rende son existence heureuse, s'il ne jouit des avantages que ses soins & sa personne lui ont acquis. Ainsi les loix de la Nature donnent à chaque homme, un droit que l'on appelle *propriété*, qui n'est que la faculté de jouir exclusivement des choses que le talent, le travail & l'industrie procurent; ce droit est juste & le sentiment qui en assure la possession s'appelle *Justice*. Troubler un homme dans sa liberté & dans sa propriété, c'est lui ôter les moyens de se conserver & l'empêcher d'être heureux; la loi de sa nature l'autorise à tout faire pour remplir

limited in scope, this article hopes to contribute to a large-scale re-evaluation of d'Holbach's political philosophy and of its importance in the context of pre-Revolutionary France.

'[Voilà] nos grands hommes, voilà nos Dieux': the people of France hail Voltaire and Rousseau in Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Chaussard's 1792 play *La France régénérée*⁶⁵. And indeed, these were the intellectual heroes of Revolutionary France; these were the first writers to be pantheonized in the 1790s. D'Holbach's fate could not have been more different. He had published all of his works either anonymously or pseudonymously and taken all possible measures to ensure that his authorial persona would remain shrouded in mystery. His grave, like Diderot's, was destroyed when the revolutionary mob ransacked the Eglise Saint-Roch in Paris. And yet, as my new monograph project hopes to show, the members of the revolutionary assemblies were for the most part familiar with the works that we now know to be d'Holbach's: they read them and quoted extensively from them in their speeches and writings. As this article hopes to have shown, through d'Holbach's works eighteenth-century readers may have become acquainted with some of the most earthshattering political ideas advanced in the early modern period: Locke's. In them, the members of the revolutionary assemblies may have found valid arguments to prove that political power must rest with the people and that nations have a right to withdraw their trust from an unjust authority and rebel. In the *Essai sur les préjugés*, d'Holbach expressed his wish that the nascent American nation, at least, would benefit from Locke's ideas, as well as from Harrington's and Montesquieu's:

Ainsi que l'astre du jour, la lumière de la vérité semble éclairer successivement les différentes parties de notre globe; la sagesse venue du fond de l'Orient le laisse maintenant dans les ténèbres pour éclairer l'Occident. Harrington, Locke, & vous sublime Montesquieu! c'est peut-être pour l'Amérique que vos leçons sont destinées. Tout l'univers a des droits sur les lumières d'un grand homme; c'est dans ce sens que le Sage est un *citoyen du monde*; il doit servir la grande société; la vérité est un bien commun à toute la race humaine; ceux qui trouvent ce trésor sont tenus de lui en rendre compte; c'est un vol de l'en priver. L'homme n'est

ces objets; la Société doit l'en faire jouir; elle cesseroit d'avoir des avantages pour lui, si elle violoit la justice à son égard; elle ne peut lui ravir sa liberté, que lorsqu'elle devient nuisible aux autres; elle ne peut le priver de sa propriété, parce qu'elle est faite pour l'assurer'. For more on d'Holbach and Marx see, for instance, D. Lecompte, *Marx et le baron d'Holbach: Aux Sources de Marx, le matérialisme athée holbachique*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1983.

⁶⁵ P.-J.-B. Chaussard, *La France régénérée, pièce épisodique en vers et à spectacle*, Limodin, Paris 1792, p. 25.

estimable qu'en raison du bonheur qu'il procure à ses semblables; l'homme de bien n'a point perdu son temps s'il a fait un seul heureux⁶⁶.

But with the *Système social* and *La Politique naturelle*, he also made sure that, in the Age of Revolutions, France would not be left behind.

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⁶⁶ [P.-Th. d'Holbach], *Essai sur les préjugés, ou de l'Influence des opinions sur les mœurs & sur les bonheur des hommes*, [Marc-Michel Rey], London [Amsterdam] 1770, pp. 235-36.

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A short history of Locke's "superaddition": from Father Mersenne to Voltaire

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Abstract: Far from being a product of Locke's philosophical genius, the theory of the divine superaddition of thought to matter is rooted in the discussions about Descartes' conception of the soul as *res cogitans* which took place in France and in the Netherlands in the years 1640-1680, from Mersenne to Regius and Bayle. Locke's historical and theoretical relationship with these sources can be clearly documented, as well as the influence of the superaddition theory in the eighteenth century, mostly in the realm of free-thinking, from Collins to Bolingbroke and above all Voltaire. In the light of this intellectual genealogy, the accusations of materialism, or even Spinozism, frequently levelled against Locke acquire a new significance and are worth exploring again.

Keywords: Locke, Mersenne, Regius, Bayle, Collins, Bolingbroke, Voltaire, thinking matter, materialism, atheism, Spinozism.

There has been a wide debate in Locke scholarship about the theory of the divine "superaddition" of thought to matter (*Essay*, IV.iii.6)¹. However, while the internal coherence of Locke's position has been thoroughly explored, the question of its historical origin has never been addressed systematically. With very few exceptions, everyone seems to assume, implicitly or explicitly, that the superaddition theory derives directly from Locke's philosophical genius². This

¹ J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, IV.iii.6, p. 541. See below, Bibliography (I), for a list of the most important papers on this topic published over the last fifty years. All Latin and French quotations are accompanied by our own translation.

² For a partial exception, see D. Clarke, "Henricus Regius", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), ed. by E.N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/henricus-regius/>: "[Regius] argues that the concepts of extension and thinking are not incompatible and [that], 'accordingly, they may both be present in the same simple subject'. This anticipates the question (and the implied answer) that was discussed by Locke, in the *Essay* IV, iii, 6, whether God may have superadded thought to a material substance". As we shall see, it is historically questionable

is far from the truth: Locke is the inventor neither of the hypothesis of thinking matter as a possible effect of God's omnipotence, nor of its philosophical interpretation in terms of a "superaddition" of a property to a pre-existing subject³. It is worthwhile, therefore, to trace the historical path of this doctrine and the chain of sources which lie behind it, in order to better understand its use by Locke and its subsequent fortune in the early Enlightenment up to Voltaire's double *Lettre sur M. Locke* (the official and clandestine versions).

1. *Before Locke: Mersenne, Regius, and Bayle*

Within the framework of Aristotelianism, the possibility of a thinking body was not a scandalous thesis: Aristotle's substance was both body and soul, matter and form, power and act. It was Descartes who revolutionized the conception of substance, but in two directions: he saved spiritualism by maintaining that the mind is a distinct substance in itself (*res cogitans*), without need of a material substrate, but at the same time he opened the door to materialism by declaring that matter, too, is a substance (*res extensa*) which can exist as such even in the absence of any spiritual being. For at least a century, this Cartesian distinction defined the intellectual framework of discussions on the soul and its relation to the body. Locke's theory of the possibility of thinking matter emerge precisely in this context, inheriting positions that had appeared in the course of the debate on Cartesian dualism.

In the letter from the purported "*Philosophi et geometra*" included in the "Sixth Objections" to Descartes' *Meditations* – of which Mersenne was in fact the sole author⁴ – it is argued that the existence of a thinking substance is not

to argue that here Regius *anticipates Locke*. It would be more appropriate to maintain that he *follows Mersenne*.

³ Although very popular in critical literature, the term "superaddition" seems to be absent from Locke's own writings (see *EEBO* and *ECCO* databases) and letters (at least in the years 1680-1704). We will employ it as a legitimate substantive form of the verb "to superadd", that Locke, following Bayle (see below, n. 14), uses several times in the *Essay* and in the debate with Stillingfleet.

⁴ Mersenne admits to being the author of the 2nd and 6th Objections in a letter to Gijsbert Voet dated 13 December 1642 and published in R. Descartes, *Œuvres complètes* (henceforth AT), ed. by C. Adam and P. Tannery, Vrin, Paris 1996, III, 602: "[...] cum sex illas Meditationes de prima Philosophia saepius, ut se velle testabatur Author, perlegissem, illas objectiones, quae in secundo sunt loco, proposui (quod tibi velim in aurem dictum, nec enim ipse novit cujus fuerint), quibus etiam postea sextas adjunxi". ["after reading several times (as the author required) the six Meditations which he had written concerning the first philosophy, I proposed to him these objections which he placed in the

as certain as the truth of mathematical propositions or logical axioms:

We understand very well that 2 plus 3 makes 5, and that, if from equal things one takes away equal things, the remainders will be equal [...] why then are we not equally convinced by the means of your [i.e. Descartes'] ideas or even by our own, that the soul of man is really distinct from the body [...]?

[*nos optime percipere 3 et 2 facere 5, et, si aequalia ab aequalibus auferas, adhuc aequalia futura; his et mille aliis convincimur, idemque penes te reperies. Cur similiter non convincimur ex ideis tuis vel nostris, animam hominis esse distinctam a corpore [...]?⁵*]

But Mersenne does not stop there. From the observation that it is impossible to consider dualism as an indubitable mathematical truth (which would render contradictory any attempt to attribute thought to matter), he draws the consequence that one cannot deny that God could lend thought to matter. He also adds that this conclusion is made even more cogent by the fact that we do not fully know the capacities of matter and therefore we cannot deny *a priori* that they include the ability to have thoughts (i.e., in a broad sense, conscious cognitive states). We thus observe that what is generally called "Locke's hypothesis" was actually formulated by a Minim friar, in France, some time during the year 1640, half a century before the first edition of the *Essay on human understanding* was published:

As we do not know how far the powers of bodies and their movements can reach, since you [Descartes] confess that there is no one who can know all that God has put or can put in a subject without a particular revelation on his part, where can you have learned that God did not put this power or property in some body, to think, to doubt, etc.?

[*Denique, quamdiu nescimus quid a corporibus et illorum motibus fieri possit, cum et fatearis nullum omnia scire posse, que Deus in aliquo subjecto posuit atque ponere valet, absque ipsius Dei revelatione, qui scire potuisti hanc a Deo non fuisse positam in quibusdam corporibus vim et proprietatem ut dubitent, cogitent etc.⁶*]

To this objection Descartes replied simply by reiterating his position: if God can give to the body the faculty of thought, He can also separate them,

second rank (but I beg you to keep that between us, because he does not know where they come from), to which I have recently added the sixth [objections"].

⁵ Ibid., VII, p. 421.

⁶ Ibid.

which confirms that the soul is a distinct and complete substance⁷. In other words, Descartes either did not understand the objection, or he pretended not to understand it. His reply entirely misses the point and avoids examining the possibility of thinking matter. The fact remains that Mersenne, while prudently limiting himself to reasoning by negation, or *ex ignorantia*, had imposed four arguments which were to dominate the ensuing debate:

- 1) since man does not know all the properties of matter, the notion of thinking matter cannot be considered contradictory (as would be the case with $3+2 \neq 5$);
- 2) since we do not know how far God's creative power extends, it cannot be denied that God can create thinking matter;
- 3) what we call "thought", in this case, would not be a substance "really distinct" from the body, as Descartes imagined, but a property or a "power" of the body itself;
- 4) only "God's revelation" could enable us know the real essence of the body and its various properties.

All these arguments return, with even greater conviction and resoluteness, in the works of a Dutch physician and philosopher who, after being initially the most faithful Dutch Cartesian, soon became an apostate of Cartesianism to the point of being repudiated by Descartes himself, namely Henricus Regius (1598-1679).

With Regius, the ground immediately becomes slippery: a former pupil, in Padua, of the Aristotelian Cremonini, who, in turn, was a well-known unbeliever and supporter of the mortality of the soul⁸, Regius had not the slightest desire to pass for a spiritualist and was careful to maintain that, from a philosophical point of view, the soul is not necessarily a "substance". But Regius was equally anxious not to pass publicly for a materialist, much less an atheist, and was therefore reduced to disguising his true position. He thus argues that the "mind" *can* be conceived in three different ways: 1) as a "substance"; 2) as a

⁷ See *Ibid.*, IX, p. 242.

⁸ See especially F. Hallyn, "La philosophie naturelle de Regius et l'écriture athée", in *Libertinage et philosophie au XVII^e siècle*, "Les Libertins et la science" 9 (2005), pp. 37-49. On Regius' pre-Cartesian period, see A. Strazzoni, "How Did Regius Become Regius? The Early Doctrinal Evolution of a Heterodox Cartesian", *Early Science and Medicine* 23 (2018), 4, pp. 362-412. On the link between Regius and Guy Patin, author of the first atheist treatise of early modern age, the *Theophrastus redivivus*, see G. Mori, *Athéisme et dissimulation au XVII^e siècle: Guy Patin et le Theophrastus redivivus*, H. Champion, Paris 2022, pp. 142-48.

non-essential property ("accident") of matter; or 3) as an attribute of an underlying "subject", i.e. of a substance which is in itself neither thinking nor material. In the third case, "thought" and "matter" would be different attributes of the same kind of substance, and they would co-exist in the same way that "beauty and eloquence" can co-exist in the same human being.

As far as the nature of things is concerned, it seems that the human mind could be either a substance, or an accident of a corporeal substance, or, if we follow some other philosophers who maintain that the extension and size of the body, and the ability of the mind to think, are attributes that are present in certain substances as subjects, since these attributes are not opposite, but different, nothing prevents us from thinking that the mind could be an attribute that co-exists in its subject together with extension, although the mind is not included, as some claim, in the concept of the latter. [...]

[Quantum ad naturam rerum attinet ea videtur pati ut mens humana possit esse vel substantia vel quoddam substantiae corporeae accidens vel si nonnullos alios Philosophantes sequamur qui statuunt extensionem, sive magnitudinem corporis, & cogitandi facultatem mentis attributa quae certis substantiis tanquam subjectiis insunt, cum illa attributa non sint opposita sed diversa, nihil obstat quo minus mens possit esse attributum quoddam eidem subjecto cum extensione sive magnitudine corporea conveniens quamvis unum in alterius conceptu ut quidam volunt non comprehenderetur⁹.]

All these three cases being perfectly conceivable, it follows that God can create the human mind in these three different ways. Regius' syllogism runs as follows:

[1] Whatever we can rightly conceive can indeed be done by divine power, but [2] the mind can be or can be conceived without contradiction in these three ways, since, whether it be substance, accident or attribute, it will always remain a faculty of thinking; ergo [3] the mind can exist in one of these three ways.

[Quicquid autem recte possumus concipere, id saltem per divinam potentiam potest esse. Atqui, ut mens aliquid horum sit vel esse possit concipi, potest nam nullum horum implicat contradictionem, cum mens, sive sit substantia, sive accidens, sive attributum, manebit tamen semper facultas cogitandi. Ergo ea aliquid horum esse potest¹⁰.]

⁹ H. Regius, *Medicina et Praxis medica, medicationum exemplis demonstrata*, Ex officina Theodori ab Ackersdijck, Trajecti ad Rhenum 1668, pp. 65-66; the same text is already to be found, with a few minor variants, in Regius' *Explicatio mentis humanae*, 1647, quoted by Descartes, "Notae in programma quoddam", in AT VIIIb, p. 645; 2nd edition, *Brevis explicatio mentis humanae*, Utrecht 1648, p. 7.

¹⁰ Ibid.

As to Regius' choice between these three possible ontologies of the mind, it is quite clear that he despises the substantialist (or Cartesian) theory of the mind as *res cogitans* – even though the Bible obliges us to adopt this conception (*Fundamenta physices*, 1646, p. 251). So Regius' philosophical choice will be between the two non-substantialist theories, which correspond, respectively, to a materialist (Hobbesian) ontology, where thought is a non-essential property of matter, and a monist (proto-Spinozist) ontology where thought and matter are different attributes of the same underlying substance. Regius does not seem to make his choice between the two, but he is entirely clear on the most important point of the whole dispute: thought and matter are not incompatible and, in his eyes, to say the contrary is to beg the question (*petitio principii*)¹¹.

Regius died in 1679. In that same year, Pierre Bayle entered the debate with one of his first writings: the Latin objections addressed to the Cartesian Pierre Poiret, which were to be published in the second edition of Poiret's *Cogitationes rationales de Deo, anima, et malo* (1685)¹². In Bayle's objections to Poiret, Mersenne's arguments for the possibility of thinking matter take explicitly the form of a "superaddition" – by God – of a property to a substance which was originally devoid of that property¹³. But Bayle does not limit himself to reproducing Mersenne's short argument: he also integrates Regius' reflections

¹¹ H. Regius, *Philosophia naturalis. In qua tota rerum universitas, per clara et facilia principia, explanatur* [1654], L. Elzevier, Amsterdam 1661, p. 401: "Nec obest si quis dicat cogitationem nihil extensionis & extensionem nihil cogitationis in suo conceptu includere atque ideo illa attributa esse opposita ac proinde illa eidem simplici subjecto in homine tanquam diversa attribui non posse neque etiam mentem sive facultatem cogitandi corpus extensum posse modificare. Respondetur enim per negationem istius consequentiae quam nemo nisi per petitionem principii probabit unquam".

¹² For the attribution of this text to Bayle, see G. Mori, *Bayle philosophe* [1999], H. Champion, Paris 2020, 2nd edition, pp. 55-88.

¹³ Thus, Bayle is definitely the hidden source which scholars have often tried to identify for Locke's use of the verb "to superadd" in the context of the debate on thinking matter (see M.R. Ayers, "Mechanism, Superaddition, and the Proof of God's Existence in Locke's Essay", in *Philosophical Review* 90 (1981), p. 228; K.P. Winkler, "Locke on Personal Identity", in V. Chappell (ed.), *Locke*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, pp. 162-63; Ph. Hamou, "L'hypothèse de la matière pensante et ses implications métaphysiques dans l'Essai sur l'entendement humain de Locke", in *Libertinage et philosophie à l'époque classique (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)* 18 (2021), p. 150). It should also be noted that, like Locke subsequently, Bayle uses the term "super-adjunctus /-a /-um", which is the past participle of the verb "super-adjungere" ("to superadd"), but not the corresponding noun "super-adjunctio" (superaddition). See also P. Bayle, *Œuvres diverses* (henceforth *OD*), Compagnie des libraires, La Haye 1727-31, IV, p. 423 ("entia super adjuncta"), p. 499 ("entitas super adjuncta"); both occurrences are to be found in *Institutio [...] totius philosophiae* – also known as Bayle's "Cours" – written in Sedan around 1675.

– which he certainly knows¹⁴ – on the total independence of thought, understood as a mere property, from the substance in which it inheres, which can be either extended or not extended. In this sense it is also conceivable that there exists a non-extended but non-thinking substance (and, conversely, an extended and thinking substance, as in Mersenne's hypothesis):

There could exist a substance which is both non-extended and non-thinking. Therefore, to conceive a substance deprived of thought is not necessarily to conceive a body. It also follows from this that *thought is a being superadded to a non-extended substance*. If this is so, it will not be difficult to prove that the body is capable of thinking. For, if thought and non-extension could be associated, by God, in spirits, although we do not conceive of any affinity between thought and non-extension, *why could not God unite thought with extension, although we do not perceive any affinity between these two natures?*

[*Ergo substantia posset esse simul non extensa et non cogitans. Ergo qui concipit substantiam sine cogitatione, non ideo concipit corpus. Hinc ulterius sequitur cogitationem esse ens super adjunctum substantie non extense. Quod si res est, tunc certe facile probabitur corpus esse capax cogitandi. Nam si cogitatio et non extensio potuerunt à Deo uniri in spiritibus, licet nullam concipiamus affinitatem inter cogitationem et non extensionem; quidni posset Deus unire cogitationem cum extensione, licet nos non videamus has duas naturas congruere sibi invicem?*¹⁵]

Bayle pursues his argument, leaning heavily on divine omnipotence and following again Regius' reply to Descartes: it is only by assuming *a priori*, but without any argument, that thought and extension are opposite and incompatible attributes, that one can come to the conclusion that a thinking body is contradictory (a mere *petitio principii*, indeed, just as Regius had maintained):

I ask whether God, by his infinite and all-powerful efficacy, can or cannot make a body become aware of its own existence or of some object. To deny it is to limit the power of God and his omnipotence and it is to say, implicitly, that God composed the universe of a species of substances which are radically unsuitable for their Creator to communicate to them – for God only truly communicates to his creatures in so far as he makes them capable of knowing him. Moreover, since anything that does not imply a contradiction is possible, I ask what contradiction there would be if bodies were made thinking in act. Will it be

¹⁴ See P. Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 2 vols., Reinier Leers, Rotterdam 1697, "Gorlaeus", rem. A, "André", rem. D; "Emilius", rem. B. See also the eulogy of Regius' *Philosophia naturalis* (in French version) that Bayle publishes in the *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, Oct. 1686, OD I, p. 675.

¹⁵ P. Bayle, "Objections to Poiret" (1679), in OD IV, p. 150.

claimed that it would follow that bodies must be both body and non-body – body, by hypothesis, but non-body, because what thinks is spirit, and therefore really distinct from the body? This is simply begging the question.

[*Quero, num Deus Virtute sua infinita et omnipotenti efficere valent ut corpus existentiae suae, alteriusve cujusdam rei, fiat sibi conscium? Si neget, imminuis Dominium Dei ejusque omnipotentiam, asserisque Deum composuisse Universum ex eo genere substantiarum quae prorsus inepte sint quibus Creator suus seipsum communicet: neque enim Deus vere communicat se suis creaturis nisi in quantum reddit eas capaces suae cognitionis. Praeterea, cum quaecumque non implicent contradictionem possibilis sint, rogo quanam contradictio emergeret ex eo quod corpus redderetur actu cogitans? Fortasse sequeretur illud fore corpus, et simul non fore corpus: foret enim corpus, ex suppositione; non foret vero, quia quod cogitat est spiritus, adeoque distinguitur realiter à corpore. At haec est mera petitio principii¹⁶.]*

Bayle thus gives new visibility to the hypothesis rapidly evoked by Mersenne and Regius and which had received from Descartes such an evasive and disappointing answer, but he takes a step forward and shows for the first time that the thesis of superaddition actually paves the way for materialism, because it certifies the natural compatibility between matter and thought:

Is it not necessary to know the two terms separately when we want to determine their respective incompatibility? Let it not be said that a body can certainly think by the effect of a miracle: for I will clearly deduce from this that it therefore belongs to the nature of the body to be able to think.

[*Nonne necesse est distincte cognoscere duos terminos si velimus pronuntiare alterum esse impossibilem cum altero? Nec dicas fieri equidem posse per miraculum ut corpus cogitet: nam inde ego manifeste colligam corpus habere sua natura ut sit capax cogitandi¹⁷.]*

As Bayle will later argue, a “pear” miraculously created by God is not different, once created, from a natural pear which exists by itself (according to the “Stratonic” system of atheism): the two have the same properties and the same powers¹⁸. In other words, once a being exists with certain properties (including a goal-oriented, or intentional, behaviour), the explanation of its origin (and of

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁸ See Bayle, *Réponse aux Questions d'un Provincial*, II, § 180, in OD III, p. 882 : “Une poire que Dieu feroit par miracle et qui d’ailleurs ressembleroit en toutes ses qualitez à une poire produite naturellement, ne seroit pas d’une autre espèce que celle-là, et ne seroit propre qu’aux mêmes effets que les poires ordinaires.”

its behaviour) in terms of a free creation by an intelligent being or the simple hypothesis of the *necessity* of that being are exactly equivalent, and neither is epistemologically better founded than the other. Accordingly, either one follows Descartes with his purported perfect knowledge of the essence of mind and body, which implies the logical impossibility of thinking matter, or one admits that man is unable to attain knowledge of the essences of things. In the latter case, the possibility of a naturalistic, or atheistic, theory of the origin of the human mind can no longer be refuted, because mind can be what it is by its nature – i.e. by the simple necessity of things.

2. From Bayle's *super-adjunctio* to Locke's *superaddition*

It is evident from what we have seen so far that, when Locke argued for the possibility of thinking matter, he found the ground already cleared. Moreover, he was perfectly acquainted with all the sources involved: he possessed not only the 1658 edition of Descartes' *Meditations*, followed by the "Objections" and "Replies" (which include Mersenne's "Sixth Objections" and in particular the letter ascribed to some "*Philosophi et geometrae*": cf. *The Library of John Locke* [LL], n. 602), but also Regius' *Medicina, et praxis medica, medicationum exemplis demonstratae* [ed. 1668 – LL 2460a], in which are reproduced the same positions on the mind as a faculty of the body that Regius had already expressed in his *Fundamenta physices* (1646) and in the [*Brevis*] *Explicatio mentis humanae* (1647-48, 1657). Locke was probably influenced even more directly by Bayle, as his reference to the divine "superaddition" suggests. The 1677 edition of Poirer's *Cogitationes* is indeed to be found in his library (LL 2365a), and it is likely that Locke, who lived in Amsterdam at that time¹⁹, also saw the 1685 Amsterdam edition, in which Bayle's objections were published for the first time, since Bayle had himself given a review of the work in the April 1685 issue of his *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (which Locke possessed – LL 2099).

Whatever the case, the passage from Bayle's *super-adjunctio* to Locke's *superaddition* presents no difficulties, the two doctrines being founded on the same theological premises:

We have the Ideas of Matter and Thinking, but possibly shall never be able to

¹⁹ Locke resided more or less regularly in Amsterdam from May to September 1685. See J. Locke, *Correspondence*, ed. by E.S. de Beer, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1976, p. vii.

know, whether any mere material Being thinks, or no; it being impossible for us, by the contemplation of our own Ideas, without revelation, to discover, whether Omnipotency has not given to some Systems of Matter fitly disposed, a power to perceive and think, or else joined and fixed to Matter so disposed, a thinking immaterial Substance: It being, in respect of our Notions, not much more remote from our Comprehension to conceive, that GOD can, if he pleases, superadd to matter a Faculty of Thinking, than that he should superadd to it another Substance, with a Faculty of Thinking; since we know not wherein Thinking consists, nor to what sort of Substances the Almighty has been pleased to give that Power, which cannot be in any created Being, but merely by the good pleasure and Bounty of the Creator²⁰.

As is plain to see, all the main points of this renowned passage of the *Essay on Human Understanding* are taken from the preceding debate: 1) our ignorance of the properties of matter and thought (Mersenne, Bayle); 2) the impossibility of denying that God, being omnipotent, can give thought to matter (Regius, Bayle); 3) the reference to “revelation” as the only possible source of our knowledge of the soul (Mersenne, Regius); 4) the “superaddition” theory, which conceives thought in terms of a simple “power” – or faculty – given by God to a created substance (Bayle). Even the notorious allusion by Locke to the fact that matter must be “fitly disposed” in order to receive a thinking “addition” from God could be an echo of Bayle’s observation that, “in the presence of certain movements”, matter can be modified by God so that it can rejoice or grieve (“*Dicam ego pariter, ad praesentiam certorum motuum materiam sic posse modificari à Deo ut ipsa gaudeat vel doleat*” – Bayle, *Objections à Poiret* [1679, 1685], *OD IV* (1731), p. 151).

Locke returns to the question extensively in his replies to Stillingfleet (1697-99), but even there he still appears to be influenced by the three main actors in the French and Dutch “superaddition” debate of the years 1640-80 (Mersenne, Regius, and Bayle):

You cannot conceive how an extended solid Substance should Think, therefore God cannot make it Think: Can you conceive how your own Soul, or any Substance Thinks? You find indeed, that you do Think, and so do I; but I want to be told how the Action of Thinking is performed: This, I confess, is beyond my Conception; and I would be glad if any one, who conceives it, would explain it to me. God, I find, has given me this Faculty; and since I cannot but

²⁰ Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.iii.6, p. 541.

be convinced of his Power in this Instance, which though I every moment Experiment in my self, yet I cannot conceive the manner of; what would it be less than an insolent Absurdity, to deny his Power in other like Cases only for this Reason, because I cannot conceive the manner how?²¹

Far from being original, this "retort" (that if the "manner how" of thinking matter is impossible to conceive, the same should be said of a thinking soul) is indeed the precise paraphrase of Bayle's objection to Poiret:

Do we know the manner in which God applies himself to the spiritual creature in order to move it from one object to another, that is to say, to make succeed to his present thought another quite different thought? Of course, I recognize that necessarily, the action of God, as he changes and modifies our soul in various ways, must remain inaccessible to us. No doubt, we know the effect, namely, we perceive the new excited thought in our mind; but we do not at all perceive the very action of God, the way in which he leads the soul from one thought to another. So, since we do not know how God applies himself to spirits by giving them new modifications, how dare we say that God cannot apply himself to bodies in the same way?

[*An cognoscimus modum quo Deus sese applicat creature spirituali ut ab uno objecto trahat eam ad aliud, hoc est, ut mutet ejus presentem cogitationem alia longe diversa cogitatione? Certe fateamur necesse est, actionem Dei immutantis, diversimodeque modificantis animam, imperviam esse nobis. Ipsum effectum equidem cognoscimus, nempe novam cogitationem in mente excitatam percipimus, neutiquam vero actionem Dei, seu modum quo animam ab una cogitatione in alteram perducit. Si autem ignoremus modum quo Deus sese applicat Spiritibus, ut novam ipsis modificationem tribuat, qua fronte affirmare audemus Deum non posse eodem modo se applicare corporibus?*²²]

The most interesting novelty of Locke's replies to Stillingfleet (compared to the first enunciation of the superaddition theory in the *Essay*) is the fact that – like Regius and Bayle before him – he now *explicitly* isolates the property "thought" (considered as a "power" or even as an "accident")²³ from *any* sub-

²¹ J. Locke, *Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Second Letter*, London 1699, p. 402.

²² Bayle, "Objections to Poiret", cit., p. 150.

²³ The roots of this position may also be found in *Essay*, II.xxiii.15, p. 305: "And thus by putting together the *Ideas* of Thinking, Perceiving, Liberty and Power of moving themselves and other things, we have as clear a perception, and notion of immaterial Substances, as we have of material. For putting together the *Ideas* of Thinking and Willing, or the Power of moving or quieting corporeal Motion, joined to Substance, of which we have no distinct *Idea*, we have the *Idea* of an immaterial Spirit

stantial subject. From this point of view, it is completely indifferent whether “thought” is added to an extended substance or to a non-extended substance:

Both these Substances [i.e. an extended substance and a non-extended one] may be created, and exist, without Thought; neither of them has, or can have the Power of Thinking from itself: God may give it to either of them according to the good Pleasure of his Omnipotency; and in which ever of them it is, it is equally beyond our Capacity to conceive, how either of those Substances thinks²⁴.

Thus, for Locke, an unextended substance “may be created, and exist without thought” – which is exactly, once again, the same position that Bayle had taken in the *Objections to Poiret*: “I do not grasp any natural connection or ineluctable harmony between non-extension and thought. From which I conclude that there could be a substance which is at the same time non-extended and non-thinking.” (“*nullam enim deprehendo naturalem connexionem aut indispensabilem concordiam inter non extensionem et cogitationem. Ergo substantia posset esse simul non extensa et non cogitans*” – Bayle, *OD IV*, p. 150; the same position can be found in Regius, see above, note 7).

It is true that, at the end of his last reply to Stillingfleet, Locke returns to square one, i.e. to Mersenne, and clings again to the mere non-contradiction, or logical possibility, of the hypothesis of thinking matter. Divine omnipotence is still a safe haven, after all:

So that all the Difficulties, that are raised against the Thinking of Matter from our Ignorance or narrow Conceptions, stand not at all in the way of the Power of God, if he pleases to ordain it so; nor prove any thing against his having actually

[See Jolley, *Touchy subjects: Materialism and Immortality*, Oxford University Press, New York-Oxford 2015, p. 74, where “immaterial” is an addition of the fourth edition]; and by putting together the *Ideas* of coherent solid parts, and a power of being moved, joined with Substance, of which likewise we have no positive *Idea*, we have the *Idea* of Matter. The one is as clear and distinct an *Idea* as the other: The *Idea* of Thinking, and moving a Body, being as clear and distinct *Ideas*, as the *Ideas* of Extension, Solidity and being moved. For our *Idea* of Substance, is equally obscure, or none at all, in both; it is but a supposed I know not what, to support *those Ideas we call Accidents*.” [our italics]. On Locke’s monist ontology, see L. Downing, ‘Locke’s Ontology’, in L. Newman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Locke’s Essay*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 352-80 and “Locke’s Metaphysics and Newtonian Metaphysics”, in Z. Biener and E. Schliesser (eds.), *Newton and Empiricism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp. 97-118.

²⁴ Locke, *Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Worcester’s Answer to his Second Letter*, cit., pp. 404-5.

ended some parcels of Matter, so disposed as he thinks fit, with a Faculty of Thinking, till it can be shewn, that it contains a Contradiction to suppose it²⁵.

However, despite this outburst of prudence, the concession made above – that is, the reduction of thought to a mere “accident”, in other words the eradication of thought from the essence of substance, perhaps Locke’s most anti-Cartesian move – could not fail to have important consequences for the fortune of his doctrine.

3. *After Locke: Bayle (again)*

In the late 1690’s and in the early years of the next century, the question of the superaddition was at the fore in philosophical debate. Bayle, who could not read English, could find an extensive account of the Locke–Stillingfleet debate in Jacques Bernard’s *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (1699)²⁶. He reacted immediately – that is, in the second edition of the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1701) – with new additions to be found in the articles “Dicéarque” and “Jupiter”, and then, at length, in the *Réponse aux questions d’un Provincial* (1703-7). In the latter text, he attacks Locke on the question of our ignorance of the “nature” of substances:

Mr Locke, one of the most profound metaphysicians of recent times, did not believe that we know the nature of substances. He admitted that impenetrable extension, divisibility, mobility are properties of matter, or of bodily substance, but are not the essence or the constituent attribute of the substance of matter. He believed, therefore, that these properties subsisted in a subject that we do not know. [*Mr. Locke, l’un des plus profonds Métaphysiciens de ces derniers tems, ne croïoit pas que nous conussions la nature des substances. Il avoïoit que l’étendue impénétrable, la divisibilité, la mobilité étoient des propriétés de la matiere, ou de la substance corporelle, mais non pas l’essence ou l’attribut constitutif de la substance de la matiere. Il croïoit donc que ces propriétés-là subsistoient dans un sujet que nous ne connoissons pas*²⁷]

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 405-6.

²⁶ See also Bayle’s letter to Shaftesbury, 23 novembre 1699, in P. Bayle, *Correspondance*, ed. by E. Labrousse, A. McKenna et al., vol. 12, Voltaire Foundation, Paris 2015, letter 1456, p.136: “J’ai lû, dans les *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* du mois dernier, un Extrait du dernier Livre de Mr. Locke contre le feu Evêque de Worcester.”

²⁷ P. Bayle, *Réponse aux Questions d’un Provincial*, III, chp. 15, in *OD* III, p. 941.

He then addresses to Locke the same remarks and objections he had already put forward in the debate with Poiret, including the hypothesis of a “non-thinking soul” [i.e. a non-thinking immaterial substance], which implies the possibility of “thinking matter”:

If [...] thought is only an accident of the soul, it follows that the soul, considered according to what it possesses essentially and substantially, is not thinking, and that it can exist in the nature of things without having any thought. Mr. Locke could not deny that he was unaware of what matter would be stripped of all extension, and what the soul would be stripped of all thought. Now if we do not know this, I do not see that we can say that there is in matter some attribute incompatible with thought, or that there is in the soul some attribute incompatible with extension. [*Si [...] la pensée n'est qu'un accident de l'ame, il s'ensuit que l'ame considérée selon ce qu'elle a d'essentiel et de substantiel n'est point pensante, et qu'elle peut exister dans la nature des choses sans avoir aucune pensée. Mr. Locke ne pouvoit nier qu'il n'ignorât ce que seroit la matiere dépouillée de toute étendue, et ce que seroit l'ame dépouillée de toute pensée. Or quand on ignore cela je ne vois point que l'on puisse dire qu'il y ait dans la matiere quelque attribut incompatible avec la pensée, ni qu'il y ait dans l'ame quelque attribut incompatible avec l'étendue*²⁸.]

As Bayle had already objected to Poiret (and as Regius had admitted back in 1647), thought and extension could be attributes of the same substance, neither thinking nor extended as such. This is, for Bayle, the necessary conclusion of Locke's line of reasoning. Both extension and thought thus appear as “accidents” – or “properties” – which are “added” to an underlying unknown subject (or “substance”). And Bayle finally draws this quasi-Spinozist conclusion – in so far as it is based on the existence of “neutral” substances which are the subjects of the modalities of both thought and extension:

In a word, this doctrine of Mr. Locke leads us straight away to admit only one kind of substance, which by one of its attributes will have extension, and by the other thought, which being once accepted, we can no longer conclude that if a substance thinks, then it is “immaterial”. [*En un mot cette doctrine de Mr. Locke nous mene tout droit à n'admettre qu'une espece de substance, qui par l'un de ses atributs s'alliera avec l'étendue, et par l'autre avec la pensée, ce qui étant une fois posé on ne pourra plus conclure que si une substance pense elle est immatérielle*²⁹.]

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Locke's proximity to Spinoza's position is made explicit in the article on "Jupiter", in which Bayle contends that Locke, recognizing the purely modal status of thought, strengthens Spinoza's position and provides him with an unexpected defence against an aporia that threatened to destroy his system. According to Bayle, "Spinoza, who taught that the Eternal and Necessary Being had both the attribute of thinking and the attribute of extension, recognized that this combination was incomprehensible, and the weakest and most confused doctrine in his system" (Bayle, *OD* III, 942: "Spinoza qui enseignoit que l'Être éternel et nécessaire avoit tout ensemble l'attribut de pensant et l'attribut d'étendu, reconnoissoit que cet alliage étoit incompréhensible, et l'endroit le plus foible et le plus embarrassé de son système."). On the contrary, for Bayle, Locke's thesis not only establishes the logical possibility of thinking matter but ends up positing its real (or physical) possibility, despite Locke's attempt to consider thinking matter as an effect of God's arbitrary "good pleasure". The argument already adopted in the *Objections to Poiret* comes back in order to demonstrate that Locke's thesis opens the door to materialism, if not to atheism, by rendering matter and thought independent of any supernatural causality; nature will accomplish everything that, according to Locke, God alone could do:

[...] there are Philosophers in Christianity who maintain that matter is capable of thinking; and they are Philosophers of very great mind, and of very deep meditation. [...] One does not avoid the objection by the corrective that matter becomes thinking only through a very particular gift from God. This would not prevent it from being true that by its nature it is susceptible of thought, and that to make it actually thinking, it suffices to agitate it, or to arrange it in a certain way, from which it follows that an eternal matter without any intelligence, but not without movement, could have produced Gods and men, as the Poets, and some Philosophers of Paganism have madly claimed.

[il y a des Philosophes dans le Christianisme qui soutiennent que l'étendue est capable de penser; et ce sont des Philosophes d'un très-grand esprit, et d'une méditation très-profonde. [...] On ne prévient pas l'inconvénient par ce correctif; c'est que la matière ne devient pensante que par un don tout particulier de Dieu. Cela n'empêcheroit point qu'il ne fût vrai que de sa nature elle est susceptible de la pensée, et que pour la rendre actuellement pensante, il suffit de l'agiter, ou de l'arranger d'une certaine façon, d'où il s'ensuit qu'une matière éternelle sans aucune intelligence, mais non pas sans mouvement, eût pu produire des Dieux et des hommes, comme les Poètes, et quelques Philosophes du Paganisme l'ont débité folement³⁰.]

³⁰ Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, cit., art. «Jupiter», rem. G.

This passage from the article “Jupiter” and the text quoted above from the *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial* are possibly the source of a surprising observation by Des Maizeaux, already known to scholars but never fully explained. Des Maizeaux was a friend and correspondent of Bayle in London, and a great *connoisseur* of the English and Dutch intellectual underground. In December 1706, two years after Locke's death and a few days before Bayle's, he began to spread the rumour that Locke was a Spinozist. This is what we can deduce from the reply of Des Maizeaux's correspondent (Jean Barbeyrac), who explicitly links Locke's purported “Spinozism” to his position on man's ignorance on “the nature of substance”:

What you say about the late Mr. Locke's Spinozism surprises me very much. As you have 'very good reasons to believe that Mr. Locke held that thought', this must appear in one of his posthumous works or in private conversations in which he expressed his opinion on it. I do not think one can conclude anything of the sort from his *Essay* and I have not read anything on it in the Extracts of diverse letters by Mr. Bernard. What he said on our ignorance of the nature of substances in no way seems to me to authorize attributing to him anything smacking of Spinozism³¹.

Admittedly, Des Maizeaux was not the first (nor the last) to claim that Locke held Spinozist views³², but he was probably the only sympathizer

³¹ Jean Barbeyrac to Pierre Des Maizeaux, 22 December 1706, in A. Thomson, *Bodies of thought. Science, Religion and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, pp. 143-44, who also gives the original French text: “Ce que vous dites du Spinozisme de feu Mr Locke, me surprend beaucoup. Puis que vous avez de très bonnes raisons de croire que Mr Locke avoit cette pensée, il faut que cela paroisse ou par quelcun de ses Ouvrages posthumes, ou par des conversations particulières où il ait déclaré ses sentimens là-dessus. Je ne crois pas qu'on puisse rien conclure de tel de son Essai sur l'Entend. & je n'ai rien lû encore là-dessus dans les Extraits des div. Lett. de Mr Bernard. Ce qu'il a dit sur l'ignorance où nous sommes de la nature des Substances, ne me paroît nullement autoriser à lui attribuer quoi que ce soit qui sente le Spinozisme” (B.L., Add. MS 4281, fol. 20). On Locke and Spinoza, see W. Klever, “Slocke, alias Locke in Spinozistic profile”, in W. van Bunge and W. Klever (eds.), *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700*, Brill, Leiden 1996, pp. 235-60 and *Id.*, “Locke's Disguised Spinozism (Part I)”, in *Revista Conatus: Filosofia de Spinoza 6* (2012), 11, pp. 61-82; Klever's analysis is often questionable as the “evidence” he presents is not always convincing. Curiously enough, he does not mention the superaddition theory among the aspects of Locke's philosophy which show the influence of Spinoza.

³² See S. Brown, “Locke as secret 'Spinozist': the Perspective of William Carroll”, in van Bunge and Klever (eds.), *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700*, cit., pp. 213-25. For Carroll, Locke was a Spinozist since he argued “the Eternal Existence of only one Cogitative and Extended Material Substance, differently modified in the whole World, that is, the Eternal Existence of the whole World itself”. In the article quoted above, Klever also mentions Ruard Andala, who used to show his students the Spinozistic foundations of Locke's thought (“*non pauca etiam Lockii [...]* *Spinozistica fundamen-*

of Locke (and close friend of many of Locke's friends, especially Collins) to say so, and his privileged standpoint gives a certain weight to his perception of Locke's real position. Be that as it may, Locke's superaddition hypothesis, whose sources are to be found in the radical wing of Cartesianism (Mersenne, Regius, Bayle), soon became the weapon of all free-thinkers who intended to oppose spiritualism and the existence of a spiritual and immortal soul.

4. *After Locke (II): Collins, Bolingbroke, and Voltaire*

One of Locke's closest disciples, Anthony Collins, was among the first to grasp immediately the anti-spiritualistic potential of the Lockean "superaddition". Collins was engaged since 1706 in a controversy with Samuel Clarke on the nature of the human soul, sparked by the latter's refutation of Henry Dodwell's work entitled: *An Epistolary Discourse, proving from the Scripture and first Fathers, that the Soul is a Principle naturally Mortal* (1706).

Indeed, the first to bring up the question of "superaddition" was Clarke, who argues for a spiritualist version of Locke's position (not so different from Descartes' reply to Mersenne). According to Clarke, the superaddition of thought to matter implies the creation of an immaterial and individual *substratum*, in which individual conscience, superadded by God, will inhere:

If you will suppose God by his infinite Power superadding Consciousness to the united Particles, yet still those Particles, being really and necessarily as distinct Beings as ever, cannot be themselves the Subject in which that individual Consciousness inheres, but the Consciousness can only be superadded by the addition of Something, which in all the Particles must still itself be but one individual Being. The Soul therefore, whose Power of Thinking is undeniably one Individual Consciousness, cannot possibly be a *Material Substance*³³.

But Collins could not agree. For him, it is not necessary that thought be superadded to an individual subject, it is sufficient that it be superadded to a

ta"). Andala associated Locke with the crypto-Spinozists De Volder and Boerhaave; W. Klever, "Burchard De Volder (1643-1709). A Crypto-spinozist on a Leiden Cathedral", in *LLAS* 15 (1988), pp. 191-241 and *Id.*, *Boerhaave sequax Spinozae: de beroemde medicus als Spinoza's volgeling en eminent uitlegger van de Ethica*, Vrijstad 2006.

³³ S. Clarke, *A Letter to Mr. Dodwell wherein All the Arguments in his Epistolary Discourse against the Immortality of the Soul are particularly answered*, London 1708; see the 1731 edition, p. 23, www.u.arizona.edu/~scmitche/clarkecollins.html.

system of material parts, in the same way that an “agreeable sensation” of perfume is connected to that system of material parts that we call “a rose”:

[...] If an Individual Power can be lodged by God in, or superadded to that which is not an Individual Being, or follows from the Composition or Modification of a Material System, consisting of actually separate and distinct Particles, the very Soul and Strength of Mr. Clarke’s Demonstration is gone. And Matter of Fact is so plain and obvious, that a Man cannot turn his Eye but he will meet with Material Systems, wherein there are Individual Powers, which are not in every one, nor in any one of the Particles that compose them when taken apart, and considered singly. Let us instance for example in a Rose. That consists of several Particles, which separately and singly want a Power to produce that agreeable Sensation we experience in them when united. And therefore either each of the Particles in that Union contributes to the Individual Power, which is the external Cause of our Sensation; or else God Almighty superadds the Power of producing that Sensation in us upon the Union of the Particles And therefore either each of the Particles in that Union contributes to the Individual Power, which is the external Cause of our Sensation; or else God Almighty superadds the *Power* of producing that Sensation in us upon the Union of the Particles. And this, for ought I can see, may be the Case of Matter’s Thinking³⁴.

With Collins, the shift – predicted by Bayle – from “superaddition” to materialism (or Spinozism) was now very real. In fact, Collins takes possession of Locke’s (and now Clarke’s) “superaddition” to make of it a sort of screen that allows him to insinuate materialist doctrines. Bayle had said that, since God can add thinking modalities to matter, it follows that thought is not incompatible with matter, and that therefore matter could have those qualities by itself, even without God’s intervention. Bayle did not overtly assume the latter position: he simply showed that this is the secret poison of the ostensibly pious doctrine of superaddition. Collins, certainly a friend and disciple of Locke, but also a die-hard admirer of Bayle, is less prudent than his hero and argues explicitly that matter can have the “power of thinking” by itself. He says it almost *en passant* (Clarke doesn’t even notice), but he makes it quite explicit:

Those Particles which compose the Brain, may under that Modification *either have the Power of Thinking necessarily flowing from them*, or else may have the Power of Thinking superadded to them by the Power of God, though singly and separately they may not have the Power of Thinking³⁵.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 79.

³⁵ Ibid.

As one can see, any mention of divine omnipotence (Regius, Locke), or even just of the impossibility of putting limits on the action of God (Mersenne, Locke) has now disappeared. There are only two mutually independent "powers" left: the "power" of matter to be (sometimes) thinking and the "power" of God to perhaps add thought to matter, but the latter is now completely unnecessary since it is assumed that the various parts of matter in the brain may, under certain conditions, "have the Power of Thinking necessarily flowing from them". The word "necessarily" is highly significant. It means that matter could be thinking in some configurations, simply out of natural necessity (like the qualities of Bayle's pear), which obviously implies that there is no longer any need to suppose a divine "superaddition".

Thus, even if Locke's theory had been conceived in order to offer a more or less effective barrier against materialism, showing how *only* God could create thinking matter, it allowed Collins to argue exactly the opposite, against Locke's explicit text but following the dangerous concession that Locke had made in his last reply to Stillingfleet concerning the non-substantiality of thought, and the absence of any necessary link between thought and an unextended substance. As Bayle had perfectly understood, the necessity of nature is the strongest reply that a Spinozist atheist (like Collins) could oppose to the objections of theologians.

It not at all surprising, then, to see that, after his second reply to Clarke, Collins no longer mentions God when he evokes "thinking matter" and "consciousness superadded to it": "The Question is, Whether a System of Matter can have a Power of Thinking, or an Individual Consciousness superadded to it, or flow from any Modification of that System³⁶."

Finally, Collins challenges Clarke to prove the possibility of *ex nihilo* creation: "for unless we have an Idea of the Creation of Matter *ex nihilo*, we must inevitably conclude Matter a Self-existent Being" – which is obviously Collins' philosophical conclusion, and the foundation of his theory of thought as "necessarily flowing" from the powers of matter. Collins ascribes the same conclusion to Spinoza and, more generally, to the "atheists" of his time, including the Chinese *literati*:

As far as I can judge of the Opinions of *Strato*, *Xenophanes*, and some other antient Atheists, from a few Sentences of theirs which yet remain, and of the

³⁶ S. Clarke and A. Collins, *Correspondence*, ed. by W.L. Uzgalis, Broadview Press, Calgary 2011, p. 69.

Opinions of that *Sect* called *Literati* in *China*, from the Accounts we have in the several Voyages thither, and more particularly from Father *Gobien's* Preface before his *Histoire de l'édit de l'Empereur de la Chine en faveur de la Religion Chretienne*, 8^{vo}, Par[is] 1698, they seem all to me to agree with *Spinoza* (who in his *Opera Posthuma* has endeavoured to reduce Atheism into a System) that there is no other Substance in the Universe but Matter, which *Spinoza* calls *God*, and *Strato*, *Nature*. (*The Correspondence of Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins*, ed. Uzgalis, p. 245)

Collins was the first but certainly not the only “Spinozist” to adopt Locke’s superaddition hypothesis in order to make his positions more presentable. Bolingbroke’s case is just as interesting – with Voltaire still behind the scenes.

Henry St John, better known as Viscount Bolingbroke, is a neglected author – perhaps for good reason, given the chaos of his writings – but seems to have been more influential than has been thought in the British and French Enlightenment (even Hume seems to take account of his ideas in the *Dialogues on natural religion*)³⁷. For Bolingbroke, as for Collins (and Regius), the mind is not a substance but a faculty of the body, and only by abstraction could we conclude that matter cannot think. Bolingbroke ironically addresses the position of the “ontosophists” and “metaphysicians” who believe that mind is substantially different from body:

We metaphysicians and ontosophists have fixed the essence of matter. It can be no other than it is represented in our abstract ideas, those eternal natures independent of God himself. If you suppose it modified or mixed in any system so as to be no longer inert and senseless, it is no longer conformable to our ideas, it is therefore no longer matter such as it came out of the region of possibility into that of actuality, it is another substance and must be called by another name. God cannot make our ideas of incogitativity to be ideas of thinking, nor our ideas of necessity to be ideas of acting freely³⁸.

Once again, the superaddition theory serves as a shortcut to materialism or naturalist monism, with the weaker and weaker justification of divine omnipotence. For Bolingbroke both “cogitativity” (i.e. the faculty of thinking) and “mobility” are powers “given” by God to “systems of matter”, whose essence is determined by solidity and extension:

³⁷ See G. Mori, “Hume, Bolingbroke, and Voltaire: *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Part XII”, in *Etica & Politica* 20 (2018), 3, pp. 319-40.

³⁸ H.St.J. Bolingbroke, *The Philosophical Works*, ed. by D. Mallet, vol. 3, J. Whitston and B. White, London 1755, pp. 516-18.

It would be nonsense to assert, what no man does assert, that the idea of incogitativity can be the idea of thinking, but it is nonsense, and something worse than nonsense to assert what you assert, that God cannot give the faculty of thinking – a faculty [of which] the principle [is] entirely unknown to you – to systems of matter whose essential properties are solidity extension & not incogitativity. This term of negation can be no more the essence of matter than that other <immateriality> can be the essence of spirit. Our ideas of solidity and extension do not include the idea of thought, neither do they include that of motion, but they exclude neither and the arguments you draw from the divisibility of matter against its cogitability, which you deny, might be not ill employed against its mobility, which you admit, as I suppose³⁹.

Bolingbroke is indeed a Spinozist who, like Collins, argues that God is necessary⁴⁰: therefore, to argue that God can “give” thought to matter – from his point of view – simply means to argue that nature, sooner or later, necessarily generates thought on the occasion of certain configurations of matter. The conflation of liberty and necessity in God, another typically Spinozist point, erases any difference between the superaddition theory and pure materialism or naturalism.

Far from being without influence on continental philosophy, Bolingbroke was an important source for Voltaire, and it is not arbitrary to suppose that it was by Bolingbroke that Voltaire was induced to adopt the superaddition theory. The two met for the first time in 1722, when Bolingbroke was in France, and it is well known that it was Bolingbroke who recommended his young friend to read Locke's *Essay*⁴¹. But Voltaire certainly also knew Mersenne's “Sixth

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 518-19.

⁴⁰ See Bolingbroke, *Philosophical Works*, ed. by D. Mallet, vol. 1, J. Whitston and B. White, London 1754, pp. 20-21 (with a reference to Locke's thesis of thought *superadded* by God to matter), and also Ibid., p. 220.

⁴¹ See Bolingbroke to Voltaire, June 27, 1724 (D190): “La Nature vous a donné un grand fonds de bien, dépêchez vous à le faire valoir. Joignez ensemble, il ne tient qu'à vous, deux choses qui se trouvent rarement unies, et dont l'union pourtant forme ce qu'il y a de plus parfait dans notre monde intellectuel; la faculté d'inventer et d'orner, avec celle de tordre ces fils de raisonemens sans le secours des quels il est impossible de tirer la vérité des Recoins de ce Laberinth où elle se cache fort souvent. Si vous lisez l'Essay sur l'Entendement humain, vous lisez le livre que je connois le plus capable d'y contribuer. Si vous n'y trouvez que peu de choses, prenez garde que ce ne soit votre faute. Vous y trouverez des vérités prodigieusement fertiles. C'est à vous à en faire les applications, et à en tirer les conséquences”. See Voltaire, *Œuvres complètes* (henceforth OCV), ed. by T. Besterman *et al.*, Voltaire Foundation, Genève, Banbury, Oxford 1968-, *Correspondence*, vol. 85, p. 203. Voltaire had made the acquaintance of Bolingbroke at La Source in December 1722 and had given an account of his visit to Thiriot in his letter of December 4, 1722 (D135): “Il faut que je vous fasse part de l'enchantement

Objections” to Descartes’ *Meditations*, and had been a voracious reader of the Clarke-Collins debate on free will, where he always took Collins’ side⁴². In any case, it is easy to show that all the arguments for the materiality of soul that had emerged in the previous decades reappear in Voltaire’s *Letter on Mr. Locke* (of which the official version was published in 1733, in the English version of the *Lettres philosophiques*, while the clandestine version began to circulate in the late spring of 1736, probably by a vengeful manoeuvre of Alexis Piron)⁴³:

- 1) Mersenne’s and Locke’s epistemological scepticism on the essence of matter and thought;
- 2) Regius’ and Locke’s theological argument of God’s omnipotence as the foundation for the possibility of thinking matter;
- 3) Bayle’s and Collins’ line of reasoning, which allows the switch from the possible creation (by God) of thinking matter to its natural possibility or even reality based on the mere necessity of things;
- 4) A Spinozist conclusion: thought could be an eternal and original character of being, which can be associated, as a property, to matter, or to single parts of matter endowed with a special “organisation”.

The official *Letter on Mr. Locke* is obviously very prudent regarding the issue of “thinking matter”. Voltaire mentions again the epistemological argument (our ignorance of the essences of substances) coupled with the theological dogma of God’s omnipotence:

At least confess yourselves to be as ignorant as I. Neither your imaginations nor mine are able to comprehend in what manner a body is susceptible of ideas; and do you conceive better in what manner a substance, of what kind soever, is susceptible of them? Since you cannot comprehend either matter or spirit, why will you presume to assert anything? [...] And indeed, what man can presume to assert, without being guilty at the same time of the greatest impiety, that it is impossible for the Creator to form matter with thought and sensation?⁴⁴

The clandestine version of the *Lettre sur M. Locke* takes a decisive step: the whole question is now analysed on the basis of Newton’s empiricist epistemology.

où je suis du voiage que j’ai fait à la Source chez milord Bolimbrok et chez madame de Villette. J’ai trouvé dans cet illustre anglois, tout l’érudition de son pays, et toute la politesse du nôtre”. See OCV, Vol. 85, p. 143.

⁴² See, for example, Voltaire, *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton*, in OCV, vol. 15, pp. 213-14.

⁴³ See A. McKenna, G. Mori, “Introduction”, in Voltaire, *Lettre sur M. Locke, manuscrit clandestin*, ed. by A. McKenna and G. Mori, OCV, vol. 6C, pp. 15-33.

⁴⁴ Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, C. Davis and A. Lyon, London 1733.

Newton's Rule n° 1 ("*I must not* attribute to several causes, and above all not to unknown causes, what can be attributed to a known cause" – in Voltaire's formulation) constitutes the major – negative – premise of Voltaire's argument, while the minor premise is provided by Locke's dogma of our invincible ignorance of essences, which implies provisionally the possibility of materialism ("*I can* attribute to my body the faculty of thinking and feeling"). The conclusion drawn by Voltaire is also negative: "*I must not* seek this faculty in another being called soul, or spirit, of which I have not the slightest idea". But this conclusion masks a corollary which, while remaining unexpressed and implicit, is nevertheless obvious: if we are seeking the cause of the faculty of thought, materialism is alone feasible, since spiritualism is excluded by its lack of empirical evidence⁴⁵.

We can thus grasp the obvious dissymmetry which is at the heart of Voltaire's Lockean-inspired empiricism: while it is clear in general that "we do not know the essence of things", this does not imply that our knowledge of the body and the knowledge that we might claim to possess of a being different from the body and devoid of extension have the same status. For Voltaire, as for Collins, we know the body more easily than the mind: the body is a "known cause", although imperfectly known; the mind is totally unknown and all that we can say about a possible "immaterial soul" is that it is not extended or that it is "not a body". Voltaire thus adopts Collins' position (possibly harking back to Hobbes)⁴⁶.

As we have seen, for Bayle, however mysterious may be the way in which the body engenders thought – and even because of that very mystery – Locke's thesis opens the door to materialism and even to atheism. Voltaire seems to adopt the same anti-spiritualist conclusion in the clandestine version of the *Letter on Locke*. "Thought" is no longer a substance, it is a faculty, or a mode, of the body and it is a logical flaw (as Regius and Bayle had underlined) to suppose that matter and thought are incompatible.

⁴⁵ See Voltaire, *Lettre sur M. Locke*, OCV, vol. 6B, pp. 136-39.

⁴⁶ See also Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, OCV, Vol. 17, p. 567, art. «Bêtes»: "Nous ne pouvons entendre par esprit que quelque chose d'inconnu qui n'est pas corps". See A. Collins, "An Answer to Mr. Clarke's Third Defence of his Letter to Mr. Dodwell", in S. Clarke, *Works*, Garland Press, New York 1928, vol. 3, p. 318: "[...] But as far as I can judge, all this talk of the Essences of Things being unknown, is a perfect Mistake: and nothing seems clearer to me, than that the Essence or Substance of Matter consists in Solidity, and that the Essence or Substance of a Being, distinct from Matter, must consist in want of Extension, and is truly defined an unextended Being". See also Voltaire to Formont, 15 August 1733: "l'immortalité [peut] être attachée tout aussi bien à la matière, que nous ne connaissons pas, qu'à l'esprit, que nous connaissons encore moins", OCV, Vol. 86, p. 379.

By “mind”, you can only imagine the faculty of thinking; by “matter” you can only understand a certain assemblage of qualities, colours, extent, solidity, and you like to call that “matter”, and you assign the limits of matter and soul before being sure of the very existence of one and the Other. As for matter, you gravely teach that there is only extension and solidity in it. And I inform you modestly that it is capable of a thousand properties that you and I do not know: you say that the soul is indivisible, eternal, and you are begging the question.

[Par l'esprit, vous ne pouvez vous imaginer que la faculté de penser; par matière vous ne pouvez entendre qu'un certain assemblage de qualités, de couleurs, d'étendue, de solidité, et il vous a plu d'appeler cela matière, et vous avez assigné les limites de la matière et de l'âme avant d'être sûr seulement de l'existence de l'une et de l'autre. Quant à la matière, vous enseignez gravement qu'il n'y a en elle que de l'étendue et de la solidité. Et moi, je vous dirai modestement qu'elle est capable de mille propriétés que vous ni moi ne connaissons pas: vous dites que l'âme est indivisible, éternelle, et vous supposez ce qui est en question⁴⁷]

However, despite this first step down the pathway of mechanical materialism, Voltaire recoils and refuses to envisage thought as the simple effect of the organisation of matter, being content to observe that thought exists *where there is organisation and in direct proportion to the degree of organisation*⁴⁸. Thought thus remains a *property* of the body – an activity of which the body is capable – when it is – we do not know how – organised or animated. In this sense, thought is conceived as a modality of matter but which is not engendered by matter; this modality is supposed to have existed eternally: it cannot be born of nothing and cannot be born of something that does not think (inert matter)⁴⁹.

In the last years of his life, Voltaire espouses a revised version of Spinozism, based on the existence of an eternal being, source of matter and thought⁵⁰. In Voltaire's new theology – or “theism”, as he calls it, again following Bolingbroke – God is a necessary being, whose action is limited by his own essence

⁴⁷ Voltaire, *Lettre sur Locke*, OCV, vol. 6C, pp. 196-97.

⁴⁸ See Voltaire, *Traité de métaphysique*, OCV, Vol. 22, p. 210: “c'est donc Dieu qui avait donné à tous ces corps la puissance de sentir et d'avoir des idées dans des degrés différents, proportionnés à leurs organes: voilà assurément ce que je soupçonnerai d'abord.”

⁴⁹ See N. Jolley, *Locke's Touchy Subjects*, cit., chap. 5 (on Locke's “soft materialism”). T. Dagron, *Toland et Leibniz. L'invention du néo-spinozisme*, Vrin, Paris 2009, offers a detailed analysis of the debate between Locke, Toland, Bayle and Leibniz (among others) and suggests the influence of this conception of thought (or of the soul) as an “effect of the organization of matter” on Collins, La Mettrie, Diderot and d'Holbach.

⁵⁰ On this point, see G. Mori, *Early Modern Atheism from Spinoza to d'Holbach*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2021, chap. 6.

and whose powers are strictly included in his nature⁵¹.

I am a body, and this arrangement of my body, this power to move and to move other bodies, this power to feel and to reason, I derive them all from the intelligent and necessary power which animates nature.

[Je suis corps, et cet arrangement de mon corps, cette puissance de me mouvoir et de mouvoir d'autres corps, cette puissance de sentir et de raisonner, je les tiens donc de la puissance intelligente et nécessaire qui anime la nature⁵²]

Just like Collins and Bolingbroke before him, Voltaire has moved quietly from his early sympathy for the "modest" Locke to a more ambitious Spinozist *credo* where the superaddition argument (which he still mentions, from time to time, even in his later years⁵³) dissolves within a theory of God's eternal necessity, where there is no longer any place for the myth of a "soul" separated from the body. Accordingly, thought is reduced once again to a non-essential property of matter which is the direct effect of the action of the "Great Being" on man:

How do we think? how do we feel? Who can tell us? God did not put (it must be repeated over and over again), God did not hide in plants a secret being called vegetation; they vegetate because it was thus ordained throughout the centuries. There is not in the animal a secret creature called sensation; deers run, eagles fly, fishes swim, without needing an unknown substance residing in them, which makes them fly, run, and swim. What we have called their instinct is an ineffable faculty, inherent in them by the ineffable laws of the great Being. We have in the same way an ineffable faculty in the human understanding; but there is no real being which is human understanding, nor is there one which is called the will. Man reasons, man desires, man wants; but his wills, his desires, his reasoning, are not separate substances. The great fault of the Platonic school, and then of all our schools, was to take words for things: let us not fall into this error. We are sometimes thinking, sometimes not thinking, sometimes awake, sometimes sleeping, sometimes excited by involuntary desires, sometimes plunged into a fleeting apathy; slaves, from our childhood until death, of all that surrounds us; unable to do anything by ourselves, receiving all our ideas without ever being able to foresee

⁵¹ See OCV, vol. 80C, p.139: "The fact that an architect has built a fifty-foot house out of marble, does not mean that he could have made a fifty-mile house out of jam. Each being is circumscribed in its nature; and I dare believe that the Supreme Being is circumscribed in his".

⁵² Voltaire, *Lettres de Memmius à Ciceron* (1771), OCV, vol. 72, p. 258.

⁵³ See one of Voltaire's last writings, *Dernières remarques sur les Pensées de Mr. Pascal* (1777), OCV, vol. 80C, p. 182: "Locke, the wise Locke, did he not confess that man cannot know if God cannot grant the gift of thought to such a being that he will deign to choose? Did he not thereby confess that it is not given to us to know the nature of our understanding any more than to know the way in which our blood is formed in our veins?".

those that we will have the next moment, and always under the hand of the great Being who acts in all nature by ways as incomprehensible as himself.

[Comment pensons-nous? comment sentons-nous? Qui pourra nous le dire? Dieu n'a pas mis (il faut le répéter sans cesse), Dieu n'a pas caché dans les plantes un être secret qui s'appelle végétation; elles végètent parce qu'il fut ainsi ordonné dans tous les siècles. Il n'est point dans l'animal une créature secrète qui s'appelle sensation; et le cerf court, et l'aigle vole, et le poisson nage, sans avoir besoin d'une substance inconnue, résidante en eux, qui les fasse voler, courir, et nager. Ce que nous avons nommé leur instinct est une faculté ineffable, inhérente dans eux par les lois ineffables du grand Être. Nous avons de même une faculté ineffable dans l'entendement humain; mais il n'y a point d'être réel qui soit l'entendement humain, il n'en est point qui s'appelle la volonté. L'homme raisonne, l'homme désire, l'homme veut; mais ses volontés, ses désirs, ses raisonnements, ne sont point des substances à part. Le grand défaut de l'école platonicienne, et ensuite de toutes nos écoles, fut de prendre des mots pour des choses: ne tombons point dans cette erreur. Nous sommes tantôt pensants, tantôt ne pensant pas, comme tantôt éveillés, tantôt dormants, tantôt excités par des désirs involontaires, tantôt plongés dans une apathie passagère; esclaves, dès notre enfance jusqu'à la mort, de tout ce qui nous environne; ne pouvant rien par nous seuls, recevant toutes nos idées sans pouvoir jamais prévoir celles que nous aurons l'instant suivant, et toujours sous la main du grand Être qui agit dans toute la nature par des voies aussi incompréhensibles que lui-même⁵⁴.]

Yet the fact that the superaddition theory, after being invented by cryptomaterialists or Devil's advocates such as Mersenne, Regius and Bayle, was adopted, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, by three philosophers who ended up embracing Spinozism (*lato sensu*) or materialism⁵⁵, does justice to Bayle's prediction and gives new significance to Des Maizeaux's conclusion, or insinuation, about Locke's hidden thoughts. The superaddition theory was indeed entirely compatible with a materialist (or monist) ontology and needed

⁵⁴ Voltaire, *Les Adorateurs* (1769), OCV, vol. 70B, p. 287.

⁵⁵ Beside the authors quoted above, we should add the manuscript treatise intitled *L'Âme matérielle* (written ca. 1720-25 and possibly authored by the abbé Guillaume), on which see J. Yolton, *Locke and French Materialism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991, p. 57: "Almost six pages [of *L'Âme matérielle*, see Niderst's edition, pp. 143-49] are inserted from Locke's reply to Stillingfleet's attack on the IV.iii.6 *Essay* passage, Locke's suggestion about thinking matter. Niderst reminds us that these passages had also appeared in Coste's second edition of the French translation of the *Essay* in 1729, and in the *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* in 1699". For the attribution of *L'Âme matérielle* to the abbé Guillaume, see G. Mori, A. Mothu, "'L'Âme matérielle': 'De la conduite qu'un honnête homme doit garder pendant sa vie': 'Préface du traité sur la religion de M.***': trois manuscrits, un seul auteur?", in *La Lettre clandestine* 12 (2003), pp. 311-39.

only to be associated with a necessitarian conception of God – as adopted precisely by Collins, Bolingbroke and the late Voltaire – to become a weapon against orthodox and non-orthodox Christian theologies. This was the written fate of Locke's theory and of his anti-substantialist and anti-Cartesian strategic move. Was it also Locke's concealed intention? In other words – as Voltaire claimed in a letter to Formont in December 1735 – was "thinking matter" really "what Locke thought but did not dare to say"⁵⁶? We may never know, but the question is worth raising again, in a historical and contextual perspective⁵⁷.

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⁵⁶ See Voltaire to Formont, 13 December 1735 (D960), OCV, vol. 88, p. 32: "c'est ce que pensait Locke, et ce qu'il n'a pas osé dire".

⁵⁷ Recent research by Philippe Hamou, Nicholas Jolley, and Lisa Downing shows that a certain amount of dissimulation must be supposed in Locke's philosophical and theological reflections. On the question of God's infinite extension, see G. Gorham, "Locke on Space, Time and God", in *Ergo* 7 (2020), 7, pp. 219-40. See also Locke's 30 June 1704 letter to Collins, published by Des Maizeaux in *A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Locke, Never Before Printed, Or Not Extant in His Works*, London 1720, p. 318 (Locke, *Correspondence*, cit., vol. 8, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989, pp. 337-38): "[...] tho' I call the thinking faculty in me, Mind, yet I cannot, because of that name, compare or equal it in any thing to that infinite and incomprehensible Being which for want of right and distinct conceptions is call'd Mind also or the eternal Mind". One could conclude that, for Locke, "God" was an "eternal mind" bounded with an equally eternal and infinite extension, which resembles what in 18th century Europe was (rightly or wrongly) called "Spinozism" (see Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, cit., art. "Spinoza", A). On Locke's secret reading of Hobbes, see F. Waldmann, "John Locke as a Reader of Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan: A New Manuscript", in *The Journal of Modern History* 93 (2021), 2, pp. 245-82.

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I lockiani di Cambridge e le origini dell'utilitarismo

Raffaele Russo

Essere Dio significa, in fin dei conti, giovare ai mortali
(Erasmus da Rotterdam, *Elogio della follia*)

Abstract: Già molto prima di Bentham, a partire dagli anni '30 del diciottesimo secolo, alcuni scrittori di orientamento dichiaratamente religioso utilizzarono il principio di utilità come fondamento delle loro analisi etiche. Tutti loro si erano formati nell'università di Cambridge, tutti erano in rapporto gli uni con gli altri, tutti erano anglicani e tutti erano impegnati in una complessa opera di ricezione e rielaborazione delle idee filosofiche di Locke. Questo saggio si propone di esaminare le caratteristiche e i limiti di questa ricezione, durante la protostoria della tradizione utilitaristica, della filosofia morale di Locke.

Keywords: Edonismo, teodicea, latitudinarismo, Locke, utilitarismo anglicano, utilitarismo secolare.

1. *Gli utilitaristi di Cambridge*

“Non è infrequente sentire che qualcuno accusi l'utilitarismo di essere una dottrina senza Dio”, scrisse in un'occasione Stuart Mill, con una certa tendenza all'*understatement*. Mill scriveva questa frase in *Utilitarianism* (1863), un saggio importante, che costituì una sorta di urbanizzazione dell'utilitarismo aggressivamente secolare di Bentham, e che nel riformulare i principi generali della dottrina mirava a difenderla dalle accuse di empietà che comunemente le venivano mosse. La versione dell'utilitarismo proposta da Stuart Mill per molto tempo ha rappresentato – a torto o a ragione – la versione più conosciuta e citata di questa dottrina. Fra le molte cose sostenute da Mill in quel saggio c'è

anche la netta affermazione della compatibilità tra l'utilitarismo bene inteso e una concezione illuminata della religione¹.

Il contesto nel quale il saggio di Mill si collocava era quello dell'Inghilterra vittoriana, nella quale egli si trovava a operare come tardo e legittimo rappresentante degli insegnamenti del suo maestro Bentham. Non c'è dubbio sul fatto che, in quel tempo, la denuncia del carattere irreligioso dell'utilitarismo fosse molto frequente, nella stampa popolare, nella pubblicistica colta, ed anche e soprattutto dal pulpito. Inoltre, per quanto eloquente sia stata la complessa e problematica apologia dell'utilitarismo cui Mill diede forma in quell'influente saggio (e in molti altri scritti), molti autori hanno ritenuto che una difesa del genere ammontasse a una radicale reinterpretazione dei principi fondanti della dottrina, forse a un tradimento. Uno dei punti su cui sembrava più difficile reinterpretare l'utilitarismo di Bentham era proprio quello che ne faceva – enfaticamente e programmaticamente – una “godless doctrine”.

Peraltro, benché la prima descrizione sistematica dell'utilitarismo sia stata quella proposta da Bentham, a partire dalla sua *Introduzione ai principi della morale e della legislazione* (1789), le intuizioni fondamentali che strutturavano questa dottrina erano di molto precedenti. Il principio di fondo dell'utilitarismo è il principio di utilità, secondo cui il comportamento giusto è quello che non solo non danneggia gli altri, ma promuove il maggior bene per la società nel suo insieme. A questo principio normativo si aggiunge un'analisi psicologica della motivazione dell'agente, secondo cui ciascuno è spinto ad agire anzitutto dalla ricerca della propria felicità – che gli utilitaristi intendono, in accordo con la tradizione edonistica – come una netta prevalenza dei piaceri sui dolori.

Posizioni di questo tipo sono ben rappresentate nella storia del pensiero morale britannico, anche tra classici del pensiero come Cumberland, Locke, Shaftesbury, Berkeley, Hutcheson, Hume, etc., mescolate però ad altri principi e ad altre considerazioni. Già molto prima di Bentham, peraltro, a partire dagli anni '30 del diciottesimo secolo, alcuni scrittori di orientamento dichiaratamente religioso utilizzarono il principio di utilità come fondamento delle loro analisi etiche: tra essi John Gay, John Brown, Soame Jenyns, Edmund Law e William Paley, tutti formati nell'università di Cambridge, tutti in rapporto gli uni con gli altri, tutti anglicani e tutti impegnati in una complessa opera di ricezione e ammodernamento delle idee filosofiche di Locke: possiamo

¹ “We not uncommonly hear the doctrine of utility inveighed against as a *godless doctrine*”, in J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Fontana Press, London 1962, p. 273.

chiamarli “gli utilitaristi di Cambridge”, per sottolineare il loro rapporto con l'ambiente cantabrigense in cui si formarono e operarono. Ad essi si deve aggiungere anche un pensatore più isolato ma storicamente importante, molto vicino a loro dal punto di vista teorico e delle ascendenze intellettuali, anche se estraneo all'ambiente dell'università di Cambridge ed alla carriera ecclesiastica: Abraham Tucker. Tutti questi autori possono essere considerati “utilitaristi”, in quanto sostengono che il criterio del giusto e dello sbagliato è la felicità collettiva, in accordo col benevolo disegno di Dio per gli uomini e per tutte le creature in genere: pertanto le azioni umane dovrebbero essere approvate o disapprovate in rapporto al livello di felicità o di infelicità che esse producono.

Per molto tempo l'interpretazione storica dominante è stata proprio quella di vedere una netta discontinuità tra gli utilitaristi anglicani della prima metà del Settecento e gli utilitaristi secolari dell'epoca di Bentham, discontinuità resa ancora più evidente dal grande ammontare di scritti polemici, da una parte e dall'altra, che dall'inizio dell'800 in poi hanno marcato con apparente nettezza la discontinuità fra i due campi. La netta opposizione fra i due utilitarismi è stata affermata dalla maggior parte degli storici del pensiero utilitarista, fino a non molti decenni or sono: tra loro Halévy² (1901), Albee³ (1902), Plamenatz⁴ (1949) e molti altri. Questi storici riconoscevano senza difficoltà che molti autori religiosi hanno avuto posizioni di tipo pre-utilitaristico, a partire almeno dalla prima metà del '700, ma la cronologia che essi delineavano descriveva una netta cesura: da una parte l'utilitarismo *teologico* e anglicano, dall'altra l'utilitarismo *secolare* e radicale dell'epoca di Bentham.

Eppure, tutti questi autori, sia quelli religiosi che quelli secolari, avevano in comune la struttura generale della dottrina etica. Per tutti gli utilitaristi la felicità che scaturisce da un'azione può essere determinata – in linea di principio – dal calcolo delle conseguenze positive per tutte le parti in causa. La differenza tra gli utilitaristi religiosi e quelli secolari sta nel fatto che i primi fanno entrare nel calcolo le conseguenze *eterne* delle azioni, sia sul soggetto che agisce, sia sulle altre parti in causa, mentre per gli utilitaristi secolari le conseguenze eterne scompaiono dal quadro, per lo meno come incalcolabili, e dunque irrilevanti per il ragionamento etico, se non come del tutto illusorie. È su questo punto che – comprensibilmente – si è sempre tracciata la grande e apparentemente invalicabile linea divisoria fra l'utilitarismo religioso canta-

² E. Halévy, *La formation du radicalisme philosophique*, Les Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1995.

³ E. Albee, *A History of English utilitarianism*, Thoemmes, Bristol 1902.

⁴ J. Plamenatz, *The English Utilitarians*, Blackwell, Oxford 1949.

brigense e l'utilitarismo secolare ispirato da Bentham.

In tempi più recenti, però, in seguito a ricerche mirate più alla struttura delle teorie esposte che alla appariscente modalità della loro formulazione, questa netta cronologia è stata messa in dubbio, a partire almeno dai numerosi studi di James E. Crimmins sulla storia dell'utilitarismo. Esaminando da vicino i testi degli utilitaristi anglicani e di quelli secolari, e confrontandoli gli uni con gli altri – sostiene Crimmins – si possono notare elementi secolari che informano la versione religiosa delle teorie utilitariste, ed elementi religiosi che percorrono – sorprendentemente – la versione aggressivamente secolare di quelle stesse dottrine⁵. I prossimi paragrafi mirano a fornire una breve descrizione della *protostoria* dell'utilitarismo classico, e per farlo sarà opportuno fare un passo ancora più indietro, rispetto alla collocazione degli utilitaristi di Cambridge, per esaminare alcuni aspetti del contesto intellettuale che influenzò più direttamente la peculiare sintesi che caratterizzò la loro soluzione del problema etico.

2. *La tradizione epicurea*

Il primo rilevante elemento di contesto cui fare riferimento per collocare le origini dell'utilitarismo è senz'altro il grande revival dell'epicureismo in Inghilterra. La diffusione dell'epicureismo oltremanica ha una data precisa a cui fare riferimento, il 1650, l'anno della prima traduzione inglese completa del *De Rerum Natura*, ad opera della poetessa Lucy Hutchinson. È a partire da quel momento che l'atomismo diviene un fattore decisivo nello sviluppo della scienza in Inghilterra, e con l'atomismo le dottrine connesse nella tradizione epicurea, in teologia ed in etica⁶. A partire da quella data, infatti, si succedet-

⁵ Cfr. in proposito il saggio di Crimmins, "Religious Advocates of the Utility Principle", in J.E. Crimmins, *Utilitarians and Religion*, Thoemmes, Bristol 1998, p. 3. Cfr. anche R. Russo, *L'ipotesi non necessaria: Ermeneutica demitizzante e critica utilitarista della religione in Jeremy Bentham*, [Tesi di dottorato], Università di Trento, 2013, pp. 137-59.

⁶ La soglia del 1650 è quella stabilita dall'influente lavoro di T.F. Mayo, *Epicurus in England (1650-1725)*, The Southwest press, Dallas 1934. Vero è che la critica più recente ha spostato all'indietro di qualche decennio la presenza di idee epicuree e lucreziane nella cultura inglese, rintracciabile ad esempio in molti aspetti della filosofia di Francis Bacon e in alcune immagini usate da Shakespeare e John Donne (cfr. A. Rzepka, "Discourse Ex Nihilo: Epicurus and Lucretius in Sixteenth-Century England", in B. Holmes and W.H. Shearin, a c. di, *Dynamic Reading: Studies in the Reception of Epicureanism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, pp. 113-32). Ma rimane oggi abbastanza affidabile il riferimento del 1650 – l'anno in cui fu disponibile la prima traduzione integrale – per segnare il raggiungimento di una massa critica di idee epicuree nella cultura filosofica e letteraria d'oltremanica.

tero numerose pubblicazioni su Epicuro e su Lucrezio, ma l'epicureismo filosofico inglese prese una fisionomia più precisa a partire dalla influenza della filosofia di Gassendi, che – a sua volta influenzato dall'epicureismo cristiano dell'umanista Lorenzo Valla, diffuse nella cultura europea un epicureismo non incompatibile con una visione cristiana del mondo.

L'assimilazione dell'epicureismo all'interno di una cultura cristiana presentava però ovvi problemi, per la difficoltà di conciliare l'indipendenza della materia, che risultava dalla descrizione atomistica della natura, con le nozioni di onnipotenza e provvidenza di Dio. Gli scienziati cristiani della Royal Society praticarono il loro atomismo con grande cautela metodologica, applicando le due facce di quella che Victor Nuovo ha chiamato la “regola di Bacone”: da un lato garantire agli scienziati completa libertà e autonomia di investigare la natura guidati solo dal lume naturale, dall'altro proibire loro di usare quella stessa luce per indagare i sacri misteri di Dio⁷. Essi non potevano ignorare, peraltro, che agli occhi di molti dei loro contemporanei la spiegazione atomistica dei fenomeni minava alla radice le tradizionali idee di Dio, natura, religione, ragione, morale, fino ai vincoli tradizionali della società in cui vivevano. Di qui, da parte di Locke in particolare, la necessità di una visione dell'obbligazione etica, che abbandonasse le vecchie forme di fondazione dell'obbligo morale e delle norme sociali, e la ricerca di una nuova forma di etica che fosse all'altezza della sfida rappresentata dalla nuova cultura scientifica, fondata sull'atomismo.

Era peraltro chiaro, agli occhi di Locke, che l'epicureismo per sé stesso non poteva bastare per la fondazione di un'etica adeguata alla società moderna. Per l'epicureismo classico, infatti, l'utilità (ovvero il piacere) era sì il fondamento del giusto e dell'equo (*utilitas iusti proper mater et equi*, secondo la massima di Orazio), e la vita del saggio doveva essere improntata alla ricerca equilibrata del piacere e della serenità d'animo. Ma restava il fatto che l'epicureismo della tradizione classica era una dottrina dichiaratamente egoistica, e non prevedeva che il quieto edonismo che veniva raccomandato al saggio fosse una fondazione delle virtù sociali: era fundamentalmente l'indicazione su come condurre la propria vita, nella tranquilla quiete del Giardino, insieme a pochi amici di inclinazioni e idee simili. La felicità che il saggio ricercava era anzitutto la propria, non quella della polis o della società nel suo insieme⁸.

⁷ V. Nuovo, *John Locke: The Philosopher as Christian Virtuoso*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, pp. 10-13.

⁸ Nel poco che Epicuro ci ha lasciato in merito all'idea di giustizia, egli dice che “il giusto fondato sulla natura è l'espressione dell'utilità che consiste nel non recare né ricevere reciprocamente danno” (*Massime capitali*, xxxi, in Epicuro, *Opere*, UTET, Torino 2013, p. 145). La società, secondo Epicuro,

3. *I latitudinari inglesi ed "i vantaggi della religiosità"*

Il latitudinarismo è stato un primo importante tentativo, in terra d'Inghilterra, di costruire un'etica sociale religiosa che non fosse estranea alle esigenze di una società mercantile in espansione, e fosse capace di costruire, nel nuovo contesto, una rete di riferimenti per la vita spirituale e per la vita pratica dei fedeli. I primi filosofi e predicatori latitudinari si sono formati anch'essi nell'università di Cambridge, nei decenni successivi alla Restaurazione degli Stuart. Nei sermoni e nelle opere di autori come Whichcote, Tillotson, e soprattutto di Isaac Barrow, il tema della ricerca dell'utile e del profitto non veniva più demonizzato, come era avvenuto a lungo nella trattatistica religiosa, ma trovava la sua opportuna collocazione nella descrizione di una vita saggia ed operosa, in cui il buon cristiano potesse essere di giovamento a sé stesso ed alla propria comunità.

Queste idee si trovano dappertutto, nelle opere e nella predicazione dei latitudinari. Già in uno dei "manifesti" del movimento, il sermone di John Tillotson su "The Wisdom of being Religious", troviamo i termini generali di una concezione della religione come conoscenza di ciò che è desiderabile anzitutto per il fine principale dell'uomo, la salvezza eterna, ma anche come saggezza pratica e mondana, in quanto essa guida l'uomo al conseguimento del suo proprio interesse, che coincide con la sua felicità⁹. Secondo Tillotson non è interesse di nessun uomo essere empio, non solo su base religiosa ma appunto su base pratica: "Essere buoni e giusti è nell'interesse generale della società umana, e dunque anche delle persone particolari"¹⁰.

Tillotson rese più esplicite le implicazioni sociali della sua concezione della religione in un altro sermone, "The Advantages of Religion to Societies", che partiva da una affermazione che si colloca esplicitamente nella vasta tradizione eudemonistica, quella secondo cui uno dei primi principi piantati nel cuore

nasce da un patto, quello con cui gli uomini si associano per poter ricercare insieme ciò che è utile. Locke era certamente d'accordo con molte di queste affermazioni, e da parte sue ne diede uno sviluppo ampio e sistematico nella sua teoria politica. Ma le indicazioni che egli poteva trovare in Epicuro o Lucrezio per la fondazione delle virtù sociali e politiche erano piuttosto generiche, e indirizzate soprattutto alla ricerca della tranquillità del saggio, cui Epicuro consigliava esplicitamente di vivere nascosto e di impegnarsi il meno possibile nella vita politica (Diogene Laerzio, *Vite di eminenti filosofi*, X.119), tranne che in circostanze eccezionali (Cicerone, *De re publica*, I, 10; Seneca, *De brevitate vitae*, 3, 2).

⁹ J. Tillotson, "The Wisdom of being religious", in *Works of... John Tillotson ... containing fifty four sermons and discourses, on several occasions*, London, 1699², pp. 5-7.

¹⁰ Tillotson, "The Wisdom of being religious", cit., p. 25.

dell'uomo è la ricerca della propria preservazione e felicità¹¹. Secondo Tillotson, anche dal punto di vista dei piaceri terreni, la religione è la scelta più saggia, in quanto non ha una natura ascetica e ostile ai piaceri dell'uomo, e non solo tende a far felice ogni individuo, ma anche le società nel loro insieme. La religione, infatti, tende a rendere gli uomini più pacifici gli uni verso gli altri, a spegnerne molti dei vizi antisociali, e collabora in questo modo al bene delle società. Se non fosse per il poco di religione che c'è ancora tra gli esseri umani, argomentava Tillotson (con un evidente riferimento ad Hobbes), le società umane sarebbero da tempo sciolte, e il mondo sarebbe ridotto ad una grande foresta, nella quale gli uomini andrebbero a caccia gli uni degli altri¹².

Queste considerazioni tutto sommato generali sull'utilità della religione vennero riprese e rese più determinate da un altro predicatore latitudinario, Isaac Barrow, un esponente importante del mondo intellettuale inglese del suo tempo. Barrow era conosciuto e rispettato anzitutto nel mondo scientifico, anche perché aveva occupato a lungo la cattedra di matematica dell'università di Cambridge, ma nel frattempo non aveva mai abbandonato lo studio della teologia. Poco dopo aver lasciato la cattedra di matematica a Cambridge era stato nominato cappellano reale a Londra (nel 1670), ed era poi diventato Master del Trinity College di Cambridge (1673).

Un sermone importante tra i molti tenuti da Barrow fu quello su "The Profitableness of Godliness", che partiva proprio dalla descrizione degli uomini come creature dedite al perseguimento del proprio interesse (*profit*). Per lo più gli uomini identificano questo interesse, per il quale si danno tanto da fare, col proprio interesse materiale ed economico (*business*). Il quadro dell'affaticarsi degli uomini per ottenerlo è tratteggiato con eloquenza, e sottolineato con immagini di crescente pathos, che evocano in rapidi tratti una società operosa fino alla frenesia, che si affanna nelle strade, nei negozi, nel commercio, nei campi, e sui mari, tra rocce e tempeste. Questa ricerca può portare ad una competitività esasperata, e certamente peccaminosa, nella prospettiva di Barrow. Ma c'è la possibilità di orientamento in questa ricerca frenetica, che la può rendere un'attività non solo compatibile con la spiritualità cristiana, ma addirittura una delle sue più lodevoli incarnazioni. Barrow, infatti, ammetteva senz'altro che cercare il proprio interesse è una cosa molto ragionevole, e che è per questo che gli uomini, che sono creature ragionevoli, si comportano in modo da conseguirlo,

¹¹ "Hence it is that every man is led by interest, and does love or hate, chuse or refuse things, according he apprehends them to be conducive to this end, or contradict it", John Tillotson, "The Advantages of Religion to Societies", in *Id.*, *Works*, cit., p. 43.

¹² Tillotson, "The Advantages of Religion to Societies", cit., p. 46.

per quanto possono. Ma c'è un modo per conseguire il proprio interesse facile da praticare, e incomprensibilmente trascurato dai più, un modo al confronto del quale tutte le altre vie sono dannose e controproducenti. Questo accessibile modo di fare al meglio il proprio interesse consiste nell'essere religiosi, ovvero credere in Dio, e comportarsi di conseguenza, con *pietas* (piety), osservando le leggi divine in tutte le nostre azioni¹³.

Barrow argomenta così la propria posizione: la *pietas* si rivela utile sia al ricco che al povero. Il primo, infatti, è protetto dai mali che possono derivare proprio dalla prosperità, quali l'orgoglio, la superbia, o la vana presunzione, e la *pietas* gli ricorda che le sue ricchezze sono solo un dono di Dio, da accettare con gratitudine, e da usare per il bene della comunità in cui vive, considerando che poi verrà il momento in cui "dovrà rendere conto della buona gestione di esse". Il secondo riesce, grazie alla *pietas*, a sopportare il proprio stato senza disperazione e risentimento, confidando nella provvidenza divina¹⁴.

Pertanto, Barrow può concludere che la *pietas* è davvero il miglior modo di fare i propri interessi (*the best business*), sia a breve che a lungo termine. La vita dell'uomo pio è la più piacevole, per il favore divino, per il perdono dei suoi peccati e per le speranze che egli può riporre in un'eterna benedizione: al confronto i piaceri dell'empio, impuri e sensuali, sono soltanto "brevi sprazzi di diletto", del tutto privi di sapore per un "appetito razionale". La vita dell'uomo pio è altresì molto più sicura di quella dell'empio, protetta com'è dalle tentazioni della carne e del peccato. L'uomo pio gode di un benessere molto superiore, vivendo egli in pace e con serenità d'animo. La società in cui vive è benedetta e resa migliore dalla sua vita e dalla sua opera.

Idee come queste venivano espresse a più riprese nei sermoni dei pastori della chiesa anglicana del tempo, nella quale il latitudinarismo costituì a lungo la corrente teologica egemone: i pastori anglicani si rivolgevano non solo ai comuni fedeli, ma agli studenti ed ai corpi docenti delle università, alle assemblee parlamentari, alla corte, a tutti i gangli decisivi per la formazione dell'opinione pubblica. Tra gli attenti e interessati ascoltatori dei predicatori latitudinari ci fu, a Londra, anche il giovane John Locke, che elaborò molte di quelle idee, rendendole parte integrante della propria visione del mondo.

¹³ I. Barrow, "The Profitableness of Godliness", in *The Works of the Learned Isaac Barrow* (published by Dr. Tillotson), London 1683-87, vol. I, pp. 13-14.

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 18.

4. *Locke e le origini dell'utilitarismo*

Molti studiosi di storia dell'etica e di filosofia sociale hanno riconosciuto che l'utilitarismo delle origini, da John Gay a William Paley, e fino a Jeremy Bentham, si è sviluppato in un'atmosfera intellettuale largamente dominata dal pensiero di John Locke, non solo in etica, ma anche in psicologia e in politica¹⁵.

In effetti, l'impostazione eudemonistica del pensiero di Locke è presente in tutte le sue opere più influenti, e fin dalle prime pagine del *Saggio sull'intelletto umano* leggiamo che la natura ha innestato negli esseri umani un profondo desiderio di felicità e una profonda avversione per l'infelicità, che funzionano a tutti gli effetti come principi pratici innati e universali¹⁶. La felicità è il maggior bene che gli uomini ricercano con le loro azioni, l'infelicità è il maggior male che vogliono evitare. Felicità e infelicità, bene e male, sono identificati rispettivamente come una prevalenza dei piaceri sui dolori o come una prevalenza dei dolori sui piaceri. Entrambe queste condizioni non possono essere vissute nella loro purezza (solo piaceri o solo dolori) nell'ambito della vita terrena¹⁷, anche se possono (e devono) essere sperate o temute per la vita ultraterrena.

Queste considerazioni di Locke, peraltro, non esauriscono la profondità e originalità del suo peculiare tipo di edonismo: nel *Saggio sull'intelletto umano* Locke afferma che per lo più la volontà non è mossa dalla ricerca del maggior bene possibile nel futuro, quanto piuttosto dal desiderio di sfuggire da un disagio, avvertito nel presente, per la mancanza di qualche piacere desiderato. Questo disagio presente può anche avere come causa il fondato timore di non poter godere di un piacere desiderato nel futuro, o, ancora più spesso, può derivare dal timore di dover soffrire, presto o tardi che sia, un dolore futuro. In entrambi i casi, perché queste condizioni future abbiano effetto sulle nostre azioni nel presente, c'è bisogno che il disagio sia avvertito qui ed ora, attraverso la capacità di previsione razionale (che è in grado di mettere in rapporto il presente col prevedibile futuro) e con l'immaginazione, che fa sì che io soffra già ora per ciò che ho motivo di temere per il futuro, come se questa condizione fosse già presente¹⁸.

¹⁵ A. P. Brogan, "Locke and Utilitarianism", in *Ethics* LXIX (1959), 2, p. 79. Cfr. anche G.R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of Changes in Religious Thought within the Church of England, 1660 to 1700*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1964, pp. 276-83 e Crimmins, "Religious Advocates", cit., pp. 9-10, 16, 19, 30.

¹⁶ J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, a c. di P.H. Nidditch, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975, I.iii.3, p. 67.

¹⁷ Ivi, II.xxviii.11, p. 356.

¹⁸ Ivi, II.xxi.35, p. 253.

La capacità di legare il presente e col futuro è, in Locke, costitutiva della teoria lockiana dell'identità personale, che rappresenta la *cura della felicità* ("concern for happiness") come l'elemento costitutivo sia della coscienza che del valore morale delle azioni¹⁹. Il sé di cui parla Locke ha una natura giuridica (*forensic self*), anzitutto in quanto a lui sono imputabili tutte le sue azioni passate (e solo le sue, non quelle di qualche lontano progenitore, come potrebbero essere Adamo ed Eva). L'io è vitalmente interessato a queste sue condizioni future, in quanto non può ignorare la prospettiva del piacere né quella del dolore. Proprio per questo ogni agente razionale dovrebbe agire in modo da tenerne conto, a maggior ragione se esse sono da considerarsi eterne. Questo legame tra condizioni temporali ed esistenziali diverse costituisce la coscienza. Victor Nuovo ha indagato la condizione di perenne ansietà per il proprio futuro che questa condizione comporta, nella sua analisi della costruzione lockiana dell'identità: "la coscienza è una condizione di presente consapevolezza, uno stato inquieto della mente, che è desiderosa della propria felicità ed è capace di riconoscimento del proprio passato, passato che, secondo i casi, può allievare o aumentare la sua inquietudine"²⁰.

Locke ha tracciato le linee generali di un metodo in base a cui valutare le azioni morali e orientare le azioni degli uomini, ma – come è noto – non ha mai portato a termine il suo progetto di costruzione di una morale razionale, dimostrata a partire dalle premesse psicologiche e teologiche tracciate fin qui. In ogni caso, se si leggono con attenzione le pagine che Locke dedica all'argomento, si trova che egli è sempre molto prudente nel derivare comandamenti concreti dalla volontà di Dio, che è data come postulato fondamentale della legge di natura, mentre invece argomenta in più casi sul fatto che la legge di natura è universalmente rispettata proprio in quanto dal seguirla derivano conseguenze piacevoli, e dal trasgredirla conseguenze dannose – tanto in questa vita che in quella ultraterrena:

Dio ha unito, con una connessione inseparabile, la virtù e la felicità pubblica, ha reso la pratica della prima necessaria alla felicità pubblica, e ha reso il comportamento dell'uomo virtuoso visibilmente benefico per il benessere di tutti coloro con cui egli ha a che fare; non c'è nulla di strano nel fatto che ciascuno non solo consenta, ma raccomandi ed esalti agli altri regole, dalla cui osservanza sa di avere tanto da guadagnare²¹.

¹⁹ A. Lupoli, "Boyle's Influence on Locke's 'Study of the Way of Salvation'", in L. Simonutti, a c. di, *Locke and Biblical Hermeneutics*, Springer, Cham 2019, p. 23.

²⁰ V. Nuovo, *John Locke: The Philosopher as Christian Virtuoso*, cit., pp. 210-12.

²¹ "For, God having, by an inseparable connexion, joined virtue and public happiness together, and made the practice thereof necessary to the preservation of society, and visibly beneficial to all with

Certo, la posizione di Locke non coincide con quella che sarà propria dell'utilitarismo, neanche di quello anglicano. Per quest'ultimo, l'azione giusta sarà quella le cui conseguenze conducono al bene comune. Per Locke, la legge di natura più fondamentale è quella che induce a mantenere la pace e a preservare l'umanità, ma quest'ultima è suddivisa in una parte dichiaratamente individualistica e in una parte sociale (subordinata). Anzitutto, dice Locke, ciascuno è tenuto a preservare sé stesso, e in secondo luogo ciascuno è tenuto a preservare il resto dell'umanità, *se quest'azione non confligge con la propria preservazione individuale*.

La posizione morale di Locke è determinata in sostanza dalla sua adesione alla psicologia edonistica, per la quale la natura umana è fatta in modo da cercare come proprio fine sempre ciò che è piacevole, e quando affronta volontariamente un dolore, lo fa per evitare un dolore più grande, o anche in vista di un piacere maggiore. Posizione, questa, che costituisce uno dei suoi principali lasciti di Locke all'utilitarismo che verrà dopo di lui.

Da queste considerazioni deriva direttamente la concezione che Locke aveva del carattere *obbligante* di qualsiasi legge. Locke intendeva il bene e il male come la conformità e la discordanza delle nostre azioni volontarie rispetto alla *legge* morale. L'idea di legge presuppone per lui un rapporto delle nostre azioni con un legislatore, che abbia la possibilità di premiarci o di punirci in base al nostro comportamento:

[...] poiché sarebbe del tutto vano supporre una norma, imposta alle libere azioni degli uomini, senza che le vada connessa una qualche sanzione per il bene o per il male, tale da determinare la loro volontà, dovunque supponiamo che esista una legge dobbiamo supporre anche che esista qualche compenso o punizione connesso a quella legge²².

Questo vale per ogni legge, sia umana che divina, ed è un principio fatto proprio da tutti gli scrittori utilitaristi, dal '700 in poi. Il legame tra legge e remunerazione è afferrato dalla mente umana per via intuitiva (*intuition*), ovvero, impiegando la terminologia di Locke, la mente è in grado di percepire la relazione tra le due idee immediatamente, senza l'ausilio di alcun'altra idea intermedia²³.

whom the virtuous man has to do; it is no wonder that every one should not only allow, but recommend and magnify those rules to others, from whose observance of them he is sure to reap advantage to himself", Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, cit., I.2.6, p. 69.

²² Ivi, II.xxviii.6, cit., p. 351.

²³ Ivi, IV.ii.1, IV.iii.2, pp. 530-31 e p. 539. Nel linguaggio tecnico adoperato nell'*Essay*, l'intuizione è

Locke ricorre a un esempio eloquente per descrivere una situazione nella quale si può agire senza temere le conseguenze delle proprie azioni: è l'esempio della città conquistata. Nelle prime pagine dell'*Essay* leggiamo infatti di un esercito impegnato nel saccheggio di una città, dopo la conclusione vittoriosa di un assedio. I soldati dell'esercito vincitore si dedicano a furti, omicidi e stupri: questo è per Locke il comportamento degli uomini che si sentono liberi dalla punizione per le loro azioni malvagie, o anche solo dalla censura dell'opinione degli altri per quello che fanno. Naturalmente, anche un esercito saccheggiatore agisce sotto lo sguardo di Dio, nella prospettiva di Locke. Ma la punizione divina è sentita da quei soldati come lontana, in un remoto e vago futuro, mentre la brama del saccheggio e della violenza è descritta da Locke come una passione viva e presente, in grado di offuscare la ragione e il giudizio. Si tratta evidentemente di una applicazione della teoria del disagio che è alla base dell'etica e della psicologia dell'*Essay*, e – quanto alla violenza che qui è descritta – è evidente che Locke sapeva di cosa stesse parlando, avendo vissuto nel secolo di ferro, quello della Guerra dei trent'anni (di cui molto aveva sentito parlare) e della guerra civile inglese, l'evento che aveva segnato il primo periodo della sua vita²⁴.

Sia la rivelazione che la ragione dichiarano il rapporto tra le nostre azioni in questa vita e il destino eterno della nostra anima. La rivelazione lo fa esplicitamente, quando parla ad esempio di regno dei cieli per i giusti e di Geenna per i malvagi, “dove sarà pianto e stridore di denti”. Ma l'esistenza di premi e punizioni ultraterrene non è una verità al di sopra delle capacità di scoperta della ragione umana (non si tratta cioè, nel vocabolario di Locke, di una verità *above Reason*). La ragione è infatti in grado di scoprire da sola che Dio ha dato agli uomini una legge, semplicemente riflettendo sulla condizione di creaturalità che è propria di tutti gli esseri umani: “Egli aveva il diritto di farlo: noi siamo sue creature: ed Egli ha bontà e saggezza sufficienti per dirigere le nostre azioni verso ciò che è meglio”. È chiaro, per quanto detto sopra, che l'esistenza stessa di una legge divina implica l'esistenza di una “remunerazione” del nostro comportamento, adeguata e infallibile. Locke dice di Dio che “Egli ha il potere di rinforzarla (la legge divina) con ricompense e punizioni di infinito peso e durata, in un'altra vita: poiché nessuno può toglierci dalle sue mani”²⁵, e trae

il genere più certo di conoscenza, e Locke la paragona alla chiara luce del sole, in quanto, come quella, “si impone immediatamente alla percezione” (ivi, p. 530).

²⁴ Ivi, L.iii.9, p. 70.

²⁵ Ivi, II.xxviii.8, p. 352.

questa affermazione tanto dalla ragione che dalla Bibbia²⁶. Si tratta insomma di una proposizione *according to Reason*.

Per tutto questo, preferire il vizio alla virtù è manifestamente un errore di giudizio, derivante da un uso scorretto del nostro intendimento: la scelta infatti può esser fatta in base al criterio eminentemente razionale del maggior piacere (o del minor dolore) annesso alle conseguenze di una determinata azione, secondo lo schema tipico del pensiero etico di Locke²⁷. E l'esistenza di un insieme articolato di leggi – umane e divine – fa sì, secondo Locke, che sia razionalmente comprensibile che conseguenze spiacevoli scaturiscono dagli atti malvagi, mentre da quelli virtuosi scaturiscono conseguenze piacevoli.

Questa posizione è la coerente applicazione della psicologia edonistica, ed è con la stessa coerenza che, sempre in base a questo schema, il Locke dell'*Epistola de tolerantia* esclude gli atei dalla tolleranza. Se infatti il principio che determina le mie azioni è quello del maggior piacere, e se d'altra parte non mi aspetto una vita ultraterrena, nella quale essere punito per i miei peccati, è chiaro che l'unica cosa che può trattenermi dal commetterli (se danno piacere, e se sono privi di conseguenze naturali dannose) è il rischio d'essere scoperto: rischio che è possibile limitare, con un po' d'accortezza, e che pertanto non è considerato da Locke un vincolo sufficiente a tenere unita una società. Se non c'è Dio, tutto è permesso. Il giudizio di Dio, invece, come lo intende Locke, è rivolto a tutte le azioni a noi imputabili, ovvero a tutte quelle che dipendono dalla nostra volontà: per questo, nel giorno del giudizio, saremo puniti per tutte le nostre azioni malvagie, anche le più nascoste, e persino per le intenzioni che ci hanno determinato ad agire, visto che in quel giorno "i segreti di tutti i cuori saranno svelati"²⁸.

In ogni caso va sottolineato che la mente umana, secondo Locke, non fa ogni volta per intero il calcolo delle conseguenze di una determinata azione, anche quando è impegnata nel valutarla dal punto di vista morale. Una volta che essa ha osservato che a un determinato comportamento fanno seguito costantemente conseguenze di un certo tipo, essa finisce con l'associare in anticipo quelle conseguenze a quell'atto, secondo le regole generali dell'associa-

²⁶ Cfr. *ivi*, IV.xiv.2, p. 652, dove Locke parla della vita terrena degli uomini come di uno stato di passaggio e di prova e afferma: "sarebbe del tutto razionale pensare, anche se la Rivelazione in proposito tacesse, che come gli uomini impiegheranno quei talenti che Dio ha dato loro, così essi saranno ricompensati, quando riceveranno la loro remunerazione alla fine del giorno, quando il sole sarà calato, e la notte avrà posto un termine alle loro fatiche".

²⁷ *Ivi*, II.xxi.70, pp. 281-82.

²⁸ *Ivi*, II.xxvii.22, p. 344.

zionismo che guida la psicologia filosofica di Locke. Se le conseguenze sono positive allora il giudizio che si tende a dare a quel tipo di azione è positivo, e la chiamiamo “buona”, e continueremo a farla anche quando non vedremo più immediatamente le conseguenze positive, per il nostro benessere, che derivano da quell’azione. Viceversa avviene, con lo stesso procedimento associativo, se le conseguenze sono negative.

Interessanti, in questa prospettiva, sono le ragioni della critica da Locke rivolta al pensiero etico pagano, che non ricorre all’idea di Dio per fondare i doveri morali, né al meccanismo dei premi e delle punizioni nella vita futura, per rendere psicologicamente invitante la pratica di una vita onesta. Delle opere dei filosofi morali antichi Locke fu un attento lettore, e in particolare apprezzava l’etica di Cicerone del *De Officiis*, che era da lui visto come una delle opere in cui la ragione, non assistita da Dio, è andata più avanti nel campo morale. L’intento dell’etica ciceroniana era per Locke decisamente attraente – entrambi gli autori avevano tra le loro prime preoccupazioni quella di fondare una morale adeguata alle responsabilità ed ai compiti della classe dirigente del proprio paese – ma ci sono importanti differenze tra i due sul piano dell’analisi motivazionale dell’azione etica. Per Cicerone l’*utile* individuale bene inteso coincide in effetti con l’*honestum*, in quanto il bene dell’individuo è inseparabile da quello della *res publica*. La separazione tra *utile* ed *honestum* è definita nel *De Officiis* “l’errore degli uomini malvagi”, da cui nascono una serie di colpe e di reati. Ma, secondo Cicerone, la punizione di coloro che riescono ad eludere le leggi a proprio vantaggio è fondamentalmente nel carattere disonorante di questo comportamento: “con i loro fallaci giudizi essi vedono i guadagni connessi alle loro azioni, ma non vedono la pena, non dico quella delle leggi, che spesso eludono, ma nemmeno vedono quella insita nell’essere disonesti, che è la più acerba”²⁹. Le azioni morali vanno quindi intraprese perché sono onorevoli, e appropriate alla dignità dell’uomo in quanto essere razionale, al contrario di quelle immorali.

L’analisi motivazionale di Locke è invece del tutto differente, e per lui il carattere disonorante di un’azione non è sufficiente per far sì che gli uomini non desiderino commetterla, se la trovano vantaggiosa o piacevole. Diverso è il caso, naturalmente, se si può far venire nel discorso il potere di un Dio onnipotente, onnisciente e custode del giusto, armato delle ricompense e delle pene inevitabili di una vita futura. Solo in questo modo sembra a Locke che siano fondati in modo sufficientemente chiaro ed efficace gli obblighi morali, il cui rispetto

²⁹ Cicerone, *De Officiis*, III, 36.

è indispensabile per il funzionamento di qualunque società. Concederà con questa analisi, in modo molto più pungente, uno degli utilitaristi religiosi più espliciti nel trarre conseguenze politiche dalle proprie dottrine: Soame Jenyns. Per Jenyns, coloro che innalzano verità, bellezza ed armonia della virtù, indipendentemente dalle sue conseguenze, fanno solo un esercizio di “pomposo non senso”, e da questo punto di vista l'etica degli antichi era specialmente manchevole, in quanto si basava solo “sulle sabbiose fondamenta della innata bellezza della virtù, o sul patriottismo entusiastico”³⁰.

5. *L'utilitarismo teologico di John Gay*

La complessa storia dell'utilitarismo può essere tracciata a partire dal 1731, quando il reverendo anglicano John Gay pubblicò anonimamente un breve saggio intitolato *Preliminary Dissertation. Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue and Morality*, a titolo di prefazione per la traduzione in inglese della teodicea di William King, *Essay on the Origin of Evil*. È a questo saggio che molti tra i maggiori storici dell'utilitarismo hanno fatto risalire la fondazione di questa nuova dottrina, saggio nel quale si può trovare la sua prima formulazione nella sua purezza originaria³¹.

Il problema da cui partiva Gay era la natura del giudizio morale, ovvero egli cominciava col chiedersi come facciano gli uomini a dire che qualcosa è bene o male, visto che poi di solito non sanno dare una ragione per queste valutazioni. Gli uomini giudicano continuamente, in proposito, lo fanno anche – di solito – con una certa sicurezza, persino con accettabile accuratezza (anche se poi non sempre mettono in pratica il loro giudizio). Quello su cui non c'è accordo tra gli studiosi di etica, dice Gay, non è tanto cosa sia buono e cosa sia malvagio, ma quale sia *il motivo* per cui di solito valutiamo che il bene è bene e il male è male. Il problema di Gay non è dire che *dovremmo* giudicare le cose in un certo modo, ma è chiedersi *come mai* le giudichiamo di fatto così.

Ciò è tanto più sorprendente – osservava Gay – se consultiamo gli scritti dei moralisti, i quali di solito convergono con l'opinione comune nel conside-

³⁰ S. Jenyns, *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*, London 1758³, p. 84, e pp. 91-92.

³¹ Cfr. E. Albee, *A History of English Utilitarianism*, cit., p. 83 e Halévy, *La formation du radicalisme philosophique*, cit., p. 7: “Gay, qui se donne, d'ailleurs, pour un disciple de Locke, peut être considéré comme ayant véritablement fondé la nouvelle philosophie, la morale de l'utilité et la psychologie de l'association”. Cfr. A. Quinton, *Utilitarian Ethics*, Macmillan Limited, London 1973, p. 23, e G. Lustila, “John Gay and the Birth of Utilitarianism”, in *Utilitas* 30 (2018), 1, pp. 86-106.

rare giuste ed ingiuste le medesime classi di azioni³², ma forniscono motivazioni e fondazioni completamente diverse delle loro dottrine. Uno dei problemi certamente deriva, secondo Gay, dal fatto che le idee morali sono *modi misti*, assemblati arbitrariamente nel corso dei secoli, e ciò rende particolarmente difficile il compito di interpretare gli scritti dei moralisti. In effetti i loro termini fondamentali vanno interpretati nell'accezione precisa che dà loro l'autore, ovvero con la stessa precisa collezione di idee semplici. E in proposito Gay, che traeva questo modo di ragionare (e questa terminologia) da Locke, riprendeva quasi letteralmente le parole di Locke a proposito della peculiare difficoltà che si incontra nell'interpretare questo genere di idee.

In ogni caso, al di là di questi problemi linguistici, Gay riteneva che l'oggettiva convergenza delle valutazioni morali delle persone comuni e dei filosofi, su quali siano le azioni virtuose, non dipendesse da nulla di misterioso, ma che avesse un fondamento comune nella ragione, presente in tutti gli uomini. Gay riteneva infatti che si possa dimostrare che la nostra approvazione della moralità, e tutti i sentimenti correlativi, sono in ultima analisi riportabili a ragioni che portano verso la ricerca di felicità: le azioni considerate buone sono quelle che – in ultima analisi – producono piacere e felicità, quelle considerate malvagie sono quelle che finiscono col provocare miseria e dolore. Questo è infatti il movente razionale delle azioni degli uomini, che sono sempre motivati, in un modo o nell'altro, e che lo sappiano o no, appunto dalla ricerca della felicità.

È vero – proseguiva Gay nella sua analisi – che spesso il legame tra le nostre scelte e la loro ragione ultima non è percepito, ma la valutazione morale spesso rimane in piedi anche dopo che la sua ragione è stata persa di vista, a causa dell'*associazione delle idee*, che crea le *abitudini* da cui nasce il giudizio dei singoli. Anche questo approccio associazionistico al problema etico Gay lo traeva da Locke, e lo tramise ai successivi pensatori utilitaristi³³. Gay proponeva, in effetti, di estendere il principio di associazione a tutti i fenomeni psicologici, in

³² J. Gay, "Preliminary Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue and Morality", in W. King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil. By Dr. William King, ... Translated from the Latin with large notes. To which are added, two sermons by the same author, ... The fourth edition corrected*, Cambridge 1758, p. xxi. Su questo punto l'ottimismo di Gay era certo superiore alle cautele di Locke o di Montaigne.

³³ A dire il vero, Gay fa un uso del principio associativo molto più ottimistico di quello di Locke, per il quale la tendenza ad associare idee era non solo una utile possibilità dell'intelletto, ma più spesso era una delle sue più gravi malattie. Il riferimento storico più diretto di Gay era piuttosto l'associazionismo di Hartley. Resta il fatto che Hartley stesso rimandava a Locke quando parlava dell'influenza dell'associazione sulle nostre idee, opinioni e affetti: "the word association, in the particular sense here affixed to it, was first brought into use by Mr. Locke", D. Hartley, *Observation on Man*, London 1749, II.2, p. 65.

modo da costituire una filosofia morale basata sul principio di utilità.

Sulla base di queste premesse, Gay poteva definire la virtù come “conformità ad una regola di vita che diriga le azioni di tutti gli uomini in riferimento alla reciproca felicità”³⁴. Non era certo la prima etica eudemonistica mai apparsa, ma Gay può essere considerato come il primo utilitarista in quanto è stato il primo a definire l'azione buona non semplicemente come la più piacevole *per chi la compie* – come hanno fatto tanti edonisti prima di lui – ma come quella che ha le conseguenze più piacevoli *per l'insieme delle persone coinvolte*. Più precisamente, Gay è il primo utilitarista per aver fatto questo senza mescolare a questo suo principio altri principi, come hanno fatto prima di lui altri filosofi (ad esempio Cumberland e Hume, oltre allo stesso Hutcheson³⁵).

Questa impostazione implica un ovvio problema, che anche dopo Gay è stata la *crux* del pensiero utilitarista: cosa succede quando la ricerca del piacere e della felicità del singolo si scontra con il bene dell'insieme delle persone coinvolte? Se sono motivato solo dalla ricerca del piacere – come pensa Gay³⁶ – perché mai dovrei tener conto del bene e del piacere degli altri, quando confligge con la mia felicità?

Gay ha una risposta molto articolata, che consiste nella sua teoria dell'obbligazione: anzitutto, “*l'obbligazione è la necessità di fare o omettere un'azione allo scopo di essere felici*”. Questo sentimento di obbligazione, dice Gay, può derivare da quattro fonti diverse: (1) può nascere dalla percezione delle conseguenze naturali delle cose (*obbligazione naturale*); (2) può nascere dal merito o dal demerito, in quanto essi sono atti a procurarci la stima e il favore dei nostri simili, o il loro contrario (*obbligazione virtuosa*); (3) può nascere dall'autorità del magistrato civile (*obbligazione civile*); (4) può nascere dalla volontà e dall'autorità

³⁴ Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation”, cit., p. xxvii.

³⁵ Le teorie morali di Hume e Cumberland usavano il principio di utilità come uno dei principi del giudizio morale, insieme ad altri principi, tra cui il principio humeiano della simpatia e la legge naturale di Cumberland. Hutcheson era invece il principale sostenitore, in Inghilterra, della teoria innatistica del senso morale. Il saggio di Gay era diretto *anche* contro la teoria morale di Hutcheson e proponeva, in luogo dell'innatismo, una geneologia del sentimento morale basata su un'analisi lockiana della motivazione umana. Hutcheson attribuiva il comportamento morale al rapporto tra due istinti, il senso morale (che fa sì che la nostra mente approvi alcune azioni e non altre) e l'affezione disinteressata (da cui scaturisce l'agire morale). Entrambi questi istinti operano senza alcun riferimento all'interesse egoistico dell'agente, ma le azioni che approvano o determinano sono comunque intese al bene generale (cfr. F. Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, London 1725, pp. 158-59). La purezza dell'utilitarismo di Gay consiste nel far riferimento direttamente al bene generale come criterio per valutare virtuosa un'azione, senza introdurre nel discorso istinti innati, o principi plurimi che portano comunque allo stesso esito: l'approvazione dell'azione intesa al bene generale.

³⁶ Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation”, cit., p. xxxiv.

di Dio (*obbligazione religiosa*). In questo modo Gay giungeva a distinguere tra ciò che è *giusto* fare (ciò che conduce alla felicità di tutti) e ciò che è *obbligatorio* fare (ciò che conduce alla nostra felicità): i due campi, peraltro, convergono l'uno nell'altro.

In tutti questi casi l'obbligazione deriva dal fatto che se agiamo contro le indicazioni che ci vengono da queste quattro forme di autorità, la conseguenza sarà che saremo infelici, se invece agiremo in accordo con esse saremo felici: lo saremo perché eviteremo le conseguenze naturali delle azioni malvagie, perché non andremo incontro alla condanna del magistrato e nemmeno in quella dei nostri simili (in quest'ultimo caso anzi dovremmo ottenere il loro plauso), e soprattutto non ci metteremo contro la volontà di Dio. Ma questo significa che l'obbligazione fondamentale è quella che viene dalla volontà di Dio: "se esaminiamo queste quattro forme di obbligazione ... sarà per noi evidente che un'obbligazione piena e completa, che si estenda a tutti i casi, può essere solo quella che deriva dall'autorità di Dio; perché solo Dio può rendere un uomo felice o infelice in tutte le circostanze: perciò, dal momento che siamo sempre obbligati a quel tipo di conformità che chiamiamo *virtù* è evidente che la regola o criterio immediati della virtù è la volontà di Dio"³⁷.

L'analisi delle caratteristiche dell'obbligazione proposta da Gay avrà molto seguito nella storia dell'utilitarismo: Bentham in particolare la riprenderà quasi con le stesse parole (pur senza riconoscere il debito che aveva nei confronti di Gay). La differenza fra i due sta nella valutazione della quarta forma di obbligazione: Bentham la riferirà ai sentimenti religiosi che senz'altro esistono, e al potere delle varie istituzioni religiose, indipendentemente dall'esistenza o meno di una divinità provvidente, benevola e giudicante; Gay si riferiva invece ad una volontà attiva e operante, il cui disegno è essenziale comprendere, per ciascuno di noi, in modo da poter adeguare a esso il nostro comportamento.

Non basta infatti limitarsi a dire che il criterio della virtù è agire in accordo alla volontà di Dio. Questo sarebbe, secondo Gay, un criterio meramente *nominale*. Il problema è quello di sapere in cosa questa volontà consista esattamente, in modo da consentirmi di metterla in pratica. Quello che mi serve, insomma, è un criterio *reale*, operativo. E posso ricavare questo criterio – sostiene Gay – a partire da uno dei più evidenti attributi di Dio, ovvero la sua *benevolenza*: Dio vuole la felicità delle sue creature, ed è ragionevole pensare che la voglia ad opera di quelle stesse creature, che sono state create come agenti razionali, capaci

³⁷ Ivi., p. xxviii.

di essere artefici della propria felicità³⁸. Dio, potremmo dire, vuole il maggior bene per il maggior numero degli esseri umani, anzi, a dire il vero, vuole il maggior bene per tutte le creature viventi³⁹: partecipare a questo progetto di Dio significa fare il bene, opporsi ad esso ed ostacolarlo significa fare il male.

6. *Il problema della teodicea nell'utilitarismo anglicano*

Una parte importante della riflessione dei primi utilitaristi prese spunto, nell'Inghilterra della prima metà del '700, dal rinnovato interesse per il problema della teodicea. Tutti gli utilitaristi anglicani avevano infatti in comune – necessariamente – l'idea di un Dio anzitutto benevolo: in base alla natura della propria posizione, essi non potevano non sostenere che è proprio la benevolenza di Dio a rendere comprensibile, per la mente umana (indipendentemente dalla rivelazione) il progetto di Dio, il cui intento è – secondo tutti gli utilitaristi religiosi – quello di comunicare la propria Felicità al maggior numero di esseri possibile, nelle condizioni migliori possibili⁴⁰. Il Dio degli utilitaristi ha, come primo suo attributo, quello della bontà (o benevolenza), che precede anche la sua saggezza e la sua giustizia. Comprendere questo implica che partecipare a questo progetto con le proprie azioni è l'intelligibile dovere di ogni creatura razionale.

Da tutto ciò deriva l'inevitabile interesse degli utilitaristi religiosi per il problema della teodicea: *si Deus est, unde malum?* Non a caso i primi scritti propriamente utilitaristi, quello di John Gay, ed i saggi di Edmund Law "On Morality and Religion" e "The Nature and Obligation of Man, as a sensible and Rational Being" furono inseriti, nel 1732, come introduzione, in *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, la traduzione che lo stesso Law aveva fatto del trattato di teodicea filosofica del vescovo William King, il *De origine mali* (un testo la cui prima edizione risaliva al 1702). La traduzione del *De origine mali* diventava a quel punto – trenta anni dopo la prima pubblicazione dell'opera – una sorta di palinsesto della riflessione utilitarista, sempre nel contesto anglicano e canta-

³⁸ Ivi, pp. xxviii-xxix.

³⁹ In questo Gay era d'accordo pienamente col vescovo King, di cui scriveva la prefazione. Anche per King, infatti, la Terra non è fatta solo per l'uomo, ma per tutte le creature viventi, e pensare diversamente è stupida arroganza (King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, cit., IV.ii.5, pp. 145-46). Una iniziale comprensione del piano benevolo di Dio si può avere solo a partire dall'idea che tutti gli esseri viventi sono sotto la cura del loro Creatore (Ivi, IV.vii.8, p. 184).

⁴⁰ E. Law, "The Translator Preface", in King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, cit., p. xi.

brigense in cui essa era nata⁴¹. A questi testi dobbiamo aggiungere l'importante "Prefazione del traduttore", che lo stesso Law antepose alla propria edizione dell'opera di King, il commento critico – opera dello stesso Law – ed anche una sorta di saggio epistolare di teodicea, opera di Soame Jenyns, un altro utilitarista di Cambridge: *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (1757). Quest'ultimo saggio non si trova nel testo collettivo che l'*Essay* di King era diventato nel corso del tempo, ma ne è una sorta di interpretazione divulgativa (a tratti un po' stravagante), un tentativo di esporre in modo accessibile le idee esposte in modo più austero da King e Law.

King da parte sua non era un utilitarista, in nessuno dei sensi possibili della parola. Egli nella sua opera di teodicea sviluppa un'idea che si trova già nella filosofia neoplatonica, nel pensiero di Agostino d'Ippona e nella filosofia scolastica, ovvero l'idea che il male – soprattutto il male naturale – sia più una privazione ed una deficienza d'essere che non una realtà ontologica vera e propria. Nessun essere creato, infatti, potrebbe condividere la perfezione del suo creatore; pertanto, deve avere un grado più o meno elevato di imperfezione⁴². Questa imperfezione è all'origine di tutti i mali – morali e materiali – che ogni creatura soffre e causa nel corso della sua vita⁴³. Peraltro, l'impianto stesso del

⁴¹ Poco dopo, a testimonianza del crescente interesse per il tema della teodicea, e per l'opera di King, usciva anche il poema di Alexander Pope intitolato *An Essay on Man* (1733-34), che consisteva in una sorta di traduzione in versi delle idee di King.

⁴² Secondo King, erede in questo di un'antica tradizione teologica, tutte le cose create sono imperfette, in quanto non esistono da se stesse (King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, cit., III.2, p. 103).

⁴³ Jenyns elabora questo passaggio della teodicea di King, sostenendo che i mali che esistono nel mondo derivano dalla subordinazione necessaria all'esistenza di qualunque essere creato. La subordinazione, infatti, implica imperfezione, e l'imperfezione comporta una qualche forma di male. I mali esistenti, pertanto, non possono essere prevenuti senza introdurre mali ancora maggiori, o magari evitando di creare del tutto una creatura quale è l'uomo. Jenyns peraltro utilizza questa teoria della subordinazione necessaria per trarne una conseguenza ideologica immediata e troppo scoperta, sostenendo (a titolo di esempio) che il mondo non potrebbe esistere senza povertà: senza di essa, infatti, nessuno vorrebbe fare i lavori più umili, i quali sono d'altronde indispensabili al funzionamento della società (Jenyns, *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*, cit., pp. 47-50). E più avanti, riprendendo questo tema, Jenyns spiega che il buon ordine del tutto e la sua felicità derivano da una corretta subordinazione delle creature, e questa può benissimo spiegare la sofferenza, che può essere concepita come una forma di "tassa" da pagare per la cittadinanza in questa "grande Repubblica dell'Universo" (ivi, pp. 71-72, e p. 118). Gli utilitaristi religiosi erano per lo più decisamente conservatori in campo politico, e il tipo di compiacimento acritico per l'ordine sociale esistente – manifestato qui da Jenyns – sarà poco tempo dopo anatema per l'utilitarismo secolare (e politicamente radicale) di Bentham. Molto prima di Bentham, in ogni caso, il saggio di Jenyns si era attirata la devastante recensione di Samuel Johnson, che a proposito della compiaciuta rassegnazione di Jenyns (e Pope) riguardo alle sofferenze umane, e in particolare riguardo a quelle dei poveri, scrisse in questi termini: "This author and Pope perhaps never saw the miseries which they imagine thus easy to be borne. The poor indeed are insen-

libro di King mira a dimostrare che l'esistenza del male non è in contraddizione con la benevolenza di Dio, il quale lo permette solo per evitare mali più grandi.

Si può comprendere allora che i primi utilitaristi ambientassero le prime caute formulazioni delle loro dottrine nel contesto del commento e dello sviluppo delle idee esposte di King. Per questi scrittori, infatti, la religione provvedeva una soluzione al problema che uno dei maggiori storici dell'utilitarismo – Elie Halévy – definiva “il problema dell'armonizzazione degli interessi”: in un mondo popolato da agenti tutti alla ricerca della *propria* felicità, e motivati soltanto dal desiderio del piacere e dalla paura del dolore, non è affatto scontato che l'esito di questa ricerca sia quello, ottimale, della felicità collettiva, nemmeno nella forma sottilmente moderata del maggior bene per il maggior numero. Questo esito non è scontato, secondo Halévy, né dal punto di vista delle conseguenze *naturali* delle azioni (non è il prodotto inevitabile della ricerca che ogni individuo fa del proprio personale vantaggio), né dal punto di vista delle conseguenze *artificiali* delle azioni (non è il risultato necessario della legislazione umana, che annette pene e ricompense ai comportamenti di individui auto-centrati, se non altro perché il giudizio degli uomini, e delle leggi, è imperfetto e fallace). Il principio teologico è quel fondamentale elemento teorico e pratico che permette a questi scrittori di costruire un ponte fra l'interesse auto-centrato degli individui e l'interesse della società nel suo insieme, e di risolvere in questo modo il problema fondamentale dell'etica utilitaristica. Tutti loro, infatti, pensavano quello che Gay – riprendendo Locke – aveva scritto con brutale chiarezza: “un'obbligazione piena e completa, che si estenda a tutti i casi, può venire solo dall'autorità di Dio, poiché solo Dio può rendere un uomo felice o infelice, in tutti i casi possibili”⁴⁴.

Peraltro, questo modo di ragionare implica un grave problema: in questo benevolo progetto di Dio per l'uomo e per il mondo, perché l'uomo è non solo capace di malvagità, non solo è capace di rendere infelice sé stesso e le altre creature viventi, ma è anche con tutta evidenza molto incline in questa direzione?

La risposta di King, e del suo principale interprete utilitarista, Edmund Law,

sible of many little vexations which sometimes embitter the possessions and pollute the enjoyments of the rich. They are not pained by casual incivility, or mortified by the mutilation of a compliment; but this happiness is like that of a malefactor who ceases to feel the cords that bind him when the pincers are tearing his flesh” (S. Johnson, “Review of Soame Jenyns, *A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*”, in *The works of Samuel Johnson: L.L.D. A new edition in twelve volumes*, London 1823, XI, p. 286).

⁴⁴ Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation”, cit., p. xxviii: “a full and complete Obligation which will extend to all Cases, can only be that arising from the Authority of God; because God only can in all Cases make a Man happy or Miserable”.

è che la volontà dell'uomo non è necessariamente malvagia: se lo fosse, allora davvero Dio avrebbe creato, con l'uomo, qualcosa di perverso, e la sua stessa bontà e benevolenza diverrebbe quanto meno di problematica comprensione. Ma l'uomo è una creatura capace sia di felicità e di bontà che dei loro contrari: l'uomo può essere felice, e può rendere felici, nella misura del possibile, le creature che vivono con lui, se solo fa un uso appropriato della sua volontà. Inoltre, nell'interpretazione che Law fa del piano di Dio, la scelta che produce più felicità per l'agente è proprio quella che coincide con la volontà di Dio. Ed è appunto questa la scelta che l'agente farebbe, anche senza essere guidato da una conoscenza esplicita di quella volontà, se si lasciasse guidare semplicemente dalla sua ricerca di felicità. Nell'ottimistico impianto teologico di questo proto-utilitarismo, infatti, la benevolenza di Dio verso le sue creature è tale che, se esse semplicemente seguono la loro natura, vivono nel modo migliore e più felice che sia compatibile con i loro limiti e le loro imperfezioni.

Ma le imperfezioni della natura umana possono offuscare il giudizio: la conoscenza degli elementi di fatto della situazione può essere incompleta, o anche il nostro intelletto può essere incapace di comprendere la situazione in cui dobbiamo operare; possiamo agire con superficialità o con precipitazione, possiamo avere cattive abitudini che non ci permettono di servirci al meglio dei lumi della nostra ragione, possiamo avere tendenze antisociali o auto-distruttive, generate da un ambiente e da un'educazione distorti. A causa di tutti questi difetti, gli individui sono spesso condotti a fare scelte erranee, auto-lesioniste, o almeno non tali da condurre ad una felicità che per loro sarebbe possibile.

Il compito della ragione è pertanto quello di dare agli uomini i lumi adeguati per scegliere il proprio bene, e anche le capacità di utilizzare quegli stessi lumi. È su questo punto decisivo che Law spinge la teodicea di King un passo oltre il suo intento originario, e ne enfatizza gli elementi funzionali al suo progetto utilitarista. Il Dio di King, infatti, permette l'esistenza del male nel suo universo – che è il migliore degli universi possibili – solo se quel male è funzionale ad un bene più grande. Law, dunque, può sostenere che l'unica ragione per l'esistenza del male – morale o naturale che esso sia – è appunto quella di creare la maggiore felicità per il maggior numero possibile di creature: Dio opera una sorta di rigoroso calcolo utilitarista, ed i mali, che certamente sono presenti nell'universo, sono una sorta di rischio calcolato, funzionale a beni più certi e più grandi⁴⁵. In particolare, i mali morali, che derivano dal libero arbitrio

⁴⁵ “An Intention in the Creator of communicating Happiness to as many Beings as could be made

dell'uomo, sono una condizione per l'esistenza di quello stesso libero arbitrio: senza il quale, l'universo sarebbe qualcosa di inesprimibilmente diverso, e di molto più povero, ovvero non il migliore dei mondi possibili.

Naturalmente il calcolo utilitarista di Dio, che mira al maggior bene possibile per la totalità delle creature, è diverso dal calcolo che sarebbe possibile per un essere finito. Un essere finito deve riferirsi inevitabilmente agli esiti probabili di una data azione, sulla base delle esperienze precedenti, sue e della comunità di cui fa parte. Ma un essere infinito conosce con certezza i risultati dei mezzi con cui intende realizzare le proprie intenzioni. Da questo punto di vista, Dio è l'unico vero utilitarista, l'unico che può calcolare accuratamente le remote conseguenze di ogni azione, e l'unico autenticamente e coerentemente motivato a realizzare il maggior bene possibile per l'insieme delle creature.

7. *William Paley*

Il principale espositore e divulgatore dell'utilitarismo nella sua prima versione teologica fu un altro cantabrigense, anch'egli impegnato (con alterno successo) nella carriera ecclesiastica e nella carriera accademica: William Paley, membro dell'Heyson Club, un gruppo di latitudinari dell'università di Cambridge, accomunati da sentimenti e idee proto-utilitaristi. Fu attraverso le numerose opere di Paley che l'utilitarismo divenne per la prima volta, verso la fine del diciottesimo secolo, una dottrina conosciuta e influente⁴⁶, tanto che alcuni dei suoi testi divennero parte del canone manualistico in uso per decenni a Cambridge.

Le opere più importanti di Paley furono i *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), improntati a una concezione del principio di utilità che tenesse conto dell'importanza della motivazione religiosa nelle scelte degli uomini; *Horae Paulinae: or, The Truth of the Scripture History of St. Paul evinced by a comparison of the epistles which bear his name with The Acts of the Apostles and with one another* (1790), un tentativo di dimostrare l'autenticità delle epistole di san Paolo a partire non dalle testimonianze esterne, ma dalle evidenze interne dei testi tramandati come ispirati (un'applicazione originale,

capable of it, on the very best Terms; or a Resolution not to omit the least Degree of pure Good on account of such Evils, as did not counterbalance it: Or ... an Intention always to choose the least of two Evils, when both cannot be avoided" (Law, in King, *An Essay on the origin of Evil*, cit., pp. xi).

⁴⁶ J.B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1977, p. 122. Cfr. anche N. O'Flaherty, *Utilitarianism in the Age of Enlightenment: The Moral and Political Thought of William Paley*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2018, pp. 306-13.

questa, dell'ermeneutica di Locke, che attirò, in seguito, l'attenzione critica di Bentham); *A View of the Evidence of Christianity* (1794), che fu una lettura obbligatoria per entrare a Cambridge fino al ventesimo secolo; ed infine *Natural Theology* (1802), un lavoro popolare che mirava a dimostrare l'esistenza e la benevolenza di Dio a partire dall'ordine visibile del mondo naturale.

È in *Natural Theology* che si trova l'esposizione standard – in ambito inglese – dell'argomento teleologico per provare l'esistenza di Dio, il cosiddetto argomento dell'orologio. Paley ricavò la propria argomentazione dall'adattamento di tutte le creature all'ambiente in cui vivono, e dalla congruenza delle loro parti, che gli appare inspiegabile se non con l'opera di un agente saggio e ingegnoso, proprio come sarebbe inspiegabile l'apparizione improvvisa di un orologio, in una solitaria brughiera, se non supponessimo l'esistenza di un orologiaio⁴⁷. Questo libro – l'ultimo scritto da Paley – era da lui considerato estremamente importante, tanto che egli raccomandava di leggerlo per primo, a chi studiasse le sue opere, come chiave di volta del suo intero sistema. E in effetti c'è al suo centro l'idea di un Dio benevolo e provvidente, che ha come sua cura principale la felicità delle sue creature, che abbiamo già visto essere il presupposto teologico essenziale della filosofia morale proto-utilitarista⁴⁸. L'argomentazione della *Natural Theology* – che prosegue per tutto il libro con una serie di esempi di finalità nella natura, intesa sempre al benessere delle creature – suscitò, molti anni dopo, l'attenzione critica di Darwin, la cui teoria dell'evoluzione può essere letta anche come una spiegazione del problema posto da Paley: come spiegare la struttura finalistica delle creature viventi senza presupporre una causa intelligente alla loro origine?⁴⁹.

In ogni caso, per la storia generale dell'utilitarismo la più importante opera di Paley sono i *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, il testo che formula nel modo più completo i principi dell'utilitarismo religioso, a partire da un impianto di fondo edonistico. È con quest'opera che l'autore descrive la virtù come adesione, con tutte le proprie azioni e con i principi di fondo del-

⁴⁷ W. Paley, *Natural Theology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, pp. 7-15.

⁴⁸ L'intento dell'esperimento mentale di Paley, infatti, è sì quello di dimostrare l'esistenza di Dio a partire dai molti esempi di finalità presenti nel mondo delle creature viventi, ma è anche mostrare che il fine immanente al progetto di Dio è la felicità di tutte le creature (cfr. V. Nuovo, "Rethinking Paley", in *Synthese* 91 (1992), 1/2, pp. 32-34, e p. 38).

⁴⁹ Un chiaro precedente di questo genere di argomentazione si ha nel sermone di Tillotson, "The Wisdom of being Religious", cit., p. 15, quando sostiene che affermare che il mondo si sia formato a partire dall'incontro fortuito degli atomi è come dire che ci si può aspettare che un uomo mischi delle lettere a caso, e ne venga fuori un bel poema, o un buon discorso in prosa. O anche che è come pensare che pietre, legno, vetro, etc. si siano riuniti insieme a formare la cappella di Enrico VII a Westminster.

la propria vita, al progetto divino per il mondo: “La virtù consiste nel fare il bene dell’umanità, in obbedienza alla volontà di Dio, e in vista della felicità eterna”⁵⁰. Solo collaborando alla felicità dell’insieme, infatti, l’agente può ottenere la propria felicità.

Paley nella sua opera accetta senza riserve la tesi di Locke, Law e Tucker, secondo cui sia la ragione che la rivelazione concordano nell’indicare all’uomo la strada della felicità come il fine sensato della vita, e sviluppa questa tesi molto più sistematicamente di Law, e senza le numerose divagazioni di Tucker. La *pietas*, l’adesione senza riserve ad una vita ispirata ai principi della religione e della carità, è la chiave del sistema di Paley, secondo cui gli uomini autenticamente religiosi hanno più possibilità degli altri di essere contenti già nel corso dell’esistenza terrena, poiché hanno un principio generale che può ispirare le loro azioni e le loro valutazioni (qui Paley riprende le tesi dei latitudinari e in particolare quelle di Isaac Barrow), ed hanno sempre davanti agli occhi un fine di suprema importanza, che produce sempre nuove attività, la cui ricerca, sottolinea Paley (in accordo qui con Tucker), dura fino alla fine della vita.

Paley fa suo anche l’associazionismo degli altri utilitaristi di Cambridge, sostenendo che la pratica della felicità dipende soprattutto dal prudente stabilirsi di abitudini sagge: l’uomo infatti è “un fascio di abitudini”, ed “agisce più per abitudine che per riflessione”. Nella maggior parte dei casi gli uomini non riflettono per nulla su ciò che devono fare, il che non solo non è un male, ma è addirittura un bene, in quanto, quando gli uomini sono costretti a riflettere sotto la pressione di una tentazione, fanno quasi sempre la scelta sbagliata⁵¹: essi, infatti, come pensava Locke, sono determinati dalla pressione esercitata su di loro dal piacere momentaneo che è a portata di mano, e non riescono a prendere in considerazione il proprio interesse a lungo termine. La loro ragione servirà per lo più a trovare argomentazioni speciose per tranquillizzare la propria coscienza, ma difficilmente sarà in grado di distoglierli da quello che vogliono, a meno che la tentazione non sia, in realtà, particolarmente forte.

Naturalmente, perché il nostro interesse a lungo termine possa entrare con pieno diritto nel calcolo utilitarista delle conseguenze delle azioni, un’adeguata enfasi va posta, nella prospettiva di Paley, come e più che in quella di tutti gli utilitaristi, sull’efficacia deterrente delle pene annesse ai comportamenti immorali. Paley in proposito afferma che l’esistenza di premi e punizioni nell’aldilà

⁵⁰ “Virtue is the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness” (W. Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, London 1817, p. 35).

⁵¹ Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, cit., pp. 30-33.

è congruente sia con le nostre idee naturali di giustizia, sia con le parole della Scrittura. Egli si riferisce in proposito a molte fonti neotestamentarie, in particolare alle lettere di Paolo, al vangelo di Luca e a quello di Marco. L'esempio di Marco è per lui particolarmente importante. Paley si riferisce infatti a un suo passaggio che riferisce di Gesù, nel momento in cui dice agli apostoli che chiunque darà loro una tazza d'acqua da bere, in nome della carità cristiana, riceverà la sua ricompensa in Paradiso (Mc 9:41). Paley usa questo passaggio per sostenere la proporzionalità dei premi e delle punizioni che sono connesse – per giustizia divina – con ogni più piccola azione umana⁵².

Da queste considerazioni deriva la teoria dell'obbligazione proposta da Paley, secondo la quale si è obbligati solo rispetto al comando di qualcuno, che è in grado di premiarci per la nostra obbedienza, e di punirci per le nostre trasgressioni:

Un uomo si dice *obbligato* quando è indotto da un motivo violento, che risulta dal comando di un altro ... Come non saremmo obbligati ad obbedire alle leggi ed ai magistrati, a meno che premi e punizioni, ovvero piaceri e dolori, non dipendessero dalla nostra obbedienza, allo stesso modo e per la stessa ragione non saremmo obbligati a praticare la virtù, a fare ciò che è giusto, o ad obbedire ai comandamenti di Dio⁵³.

Anche Locke, si ricorderà, aveva riportato l'idea di legge e di obbligo al comando di qualcuno in grado di premiare e punire, sia esso l'opinione pubblica, il magistrato civile o l'autorità di Dio. Paley aggiunge alla considerazione lockiana il concetto di "motivo violento", ovvero l'idea di una pressione decisiva, sul libero comportamento dell'agente, che lo possa indurre, per il proprio interesse individuale, a preferire un dato corso di azione.

L'obbligazione avviene, secondo Paley, annettendo conseguenze precise e rilevanti (piaceri o dolori) alle mie azioni, a titolo di remunerazione. Questa descrizione dell'obbligazione era, da parte di Paley, una riformulazione delle tesi dei suoi predecessori, ma la sua brutale chiarezza era parte del progetto educativo e divulgativo che egli aveva in mente: essa era posta in termini tali da massimizzarne l'efficacia per il pubblico cui la sua opera era destinata (soprattutto studenti e fedeli): "rendendo sostanzialmente uguali i comandi di Dio alle ingiunzioni del padrone di un castello, egli presentava il regno di Dio come

⁵² Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, cit., p. 41, n.

⁵³ Ivi, pp. 49-50.

un'estensione della familiare gerarchia della umana dipendenza"⁵⁴.

Paley è consapevole che questa sua descrizione dell'agire morale possa apparire come un suo svuotamento, facendolo identificare con una mera scelta prudenziale. Ma sostiene – coerentemente con le sue premesse – che l'obbligazione morale è come tutte le altre obbligazioni: consiste nell'agire in un certo modo, perché indotti da una forza sufficiente. Infatti, sia nel caso di atti di dovere che di atti di prudenza, noi consideriamo solo quello che guadagniamo o perdiamo da un certo atto. L'unica differenza è questa: in un caso noi consideriamo solo quello che guadagniamo in questo mondo, nell'altro anche ciò che guadagniamo nel mondo a venire. Paley sostiene che coloro che vogliono stabilire un sistema di morale differente, indipendente da uno stato futuro, devono guardare a una forma diversa di obbligazione morale; a meno che essi non possano dimostrare che la virtù conduce chi la esercita a una felicità certa in questa vita, o almeno a una sua quota molto maggiore di quella che sarebbe ottenibile con un comportamento diverso⁵⁵.

Conclusione – I lockiani di Cambridge

Locke non è mai stato un utilitarista. Forse è stato sul punto di diventarlo, come si può supporre da un suo manoscritto incompiuto, che nessuno dei primi filosofi utilitaristi ha avuto modo di leggere: *Of Ethics in general* (ovvero il maggior tentativo, da parte di Locke, di costruire un'organica teoria della morale). In quel manoscritto si sostiene la conoscibilità, da parte della ragione, di una legge di natura universale, fondata sulla volontà di Dio, che ha come caratteristica evidente la sua utilità per le popolazioni che la fanno propria:

[...] la regola generale più costante che riesco a trovare è che le azioni che giudichiamo virtuose sono quelle che riteniamo assolutamente necessarie per preservare la società, mentre quelle che giudichiamo malvage sono quelle che disturbano o dissolvono i legami della comunità⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ O'Flaherty, *Utilitarianism in the Age of Enlightenment*, cit., p. 95.

⁵⁵ Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, cit., p. 53.

⁵⁶ "...the general rule whereof & the most constant that I can finde is that those actions are esteemed virtuous which are thought absolutely necessary to the preservation of society & those that disturbe or dissolve the bonds of community are every esteemed ill", 'Of Ethick in General', MS Locke c. 28, in V. Nuovo, a c. di, *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2002, p. 10.

Questo però vale, secondo Locke, solo per l'esclusione dei vizi più grossolani e ovviamente dannosi per la società, che ovviamente ogni società biasima e condanna per pura autodifesa. Non è però questo, afferma Locke nel suo manoscritto incompiuto, un fondamento sufficiente per la morale nel suo insieme: troppi dei basilari doveri morali restano esclusi, in questo modo.

Il punto è che l'importanza di Locke nella protostoria dell'utilitarismo non è quella di aver costruito lui stesso una teoria utilitarista. Questo non è mai accaduto, intanto perché Locke non ha mai costruito un discorso morale organico, e poi anche perché dalle sue premesse filosofiche non poteva scaturire una posizione utilitarista vera e propria. Il punto è che gli utilitaristi, a partire da Gay, hanno trovato in Locke un insieme di motivi psicologici e un progetto filosofico – quello della costruzione di un'etica basata sulla ricerca della felicità – che hanno sviluppato e integrato nei loro sistemi, in alcuni punti semplificandola, ma anche trasformandola in un corpo dottrinale adatto a fare da orientamento morale nella mutata società in cui si collocava la loro opera.

Gli utilitaristi, infatti, a partire da John Gay, hanno fatto gran conto della lezione di Locke. Edmund Law, una delle figure più influenti fra gli utilitaristi di Cambridge, riteneva addirittura che se il piano di Locke venisse compreso adeguatamente, noi potremmo capire che tutta la giusta filosofia morale va costruita per intero sull'associazionismo e sulla filosofia naturale, come appunto riteneva avesse fatto anche Locke, sia pure con alcune esitazioni e ripensamenti. Ma, sempre secondo Law, il problema del pensiero morale del suo tempo era che non era ancora recepita compiutamente la portata morale delle idee filosofiche di Locke, nonostante l'ammirazione che gli veniva giustamente tributata. E Law presentava il proprio progetto filosofico come il compimento e l'autentica recezione – in campo morale – di quel pensiero⁵⁷.

Riassumendo qui i molti temi che gli utilitaristi anglicani hanno consapevolmente e dichiaratamente tratto dall'opera di Locke, il primo è la teoria dell'obbligazione, ovvero l'interpretazione cristiana della morale edonistica, basata sulla ricerca della felicità e sugli incentivi religiosi al comportamento morale, nozioni espresse dagli utilitaristi impiegando spesso il linguaggio tecnico dell'etica di Locke (quello delle idee e dei modi misti). Il secondo tema lockiano fatto proprio da questi primi filosofi utilitaristi è stato poi l'associazionismo dell'*Essay*. Terzo tema, presente soprattutto in Paley, è la consapevolezza che la motivazione ad agire scaturisce molto più spesso da un disagio presente

⁵⁷ E. Law, "The Nature and Obligation of Man, As a sensible and Rational Being", in King, *Essay on the Origin of Evil*, cit., p. xlii.

che dal timore di un dolore futuro. Infine, il quarto e decisivo tema è proprio quello, incompiuto in Locke, della costruzione di una morale fondata sull'utilità sociale, nel costruire la quale questi autori ritengono di aver superato le riserve ed esitazioni dello stesso Locke.

Si può far credito agli utilitaristi anglicani di Cambridge di essere sinceri quando presentavano il loro progetto filosofico come una prosecuzione e compimento di quello di Locke in campo morale. Senza la strumentazione psicologica ed etica che essi traggono dal *Saggio sull'intelletto umano* non si può nemmeno concepire il loro intero progetto filosofico. In questo senso, non è esagerato circoscrivere questo gruppo di filosofi cantabrigensi a partire del loro grande e comune autore di riferimento, definendoli dunque "i lockiani di Cambridge".

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Locke in Göttingen

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Abstract: This paper focuses on Locke's place in positions developed by three of the most important Göttingen philosophers of the 1770s and 1780s - Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, Christoph Meiners, and Michael Hißmann. The first section after the introduction looks at their endorsement of what Meiners calls "Locke's method" and comments in general terms on their relation to Locke. Section 3 argues that their accounts of some central aspects of Locke's philosophy are problematic. In order to account for the complexity of the Göttingen philosophers' relation to Locke, sections 4 to 6 examine in more detail their views and arguments on two central issues in the philosophy of mind, the nature of the human soul and personal identity.

Keywords: Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, Christoph Meiners, Michael Hißmann, Soul, Personal Identity.

1. Introduction

The University of Göttingen, founded in 1734 and officially inaugurated in 1737, was named after the Elector George Augustus of Hanover who was also King of Great Britain. The King's local minister, Gerlach Adolph von Münchhausen, was responsible for establishing a modern university, based on the model of Halle¹. In the decades that followed, the *Georgia Augusta* developed into Germany's most advanced university, became one of the centres of the

¹ For details on the early history of the University of Göttingen and its status as a modern place of learning, see H.-G. Schlotter (ed.), *Die Geschichte der Verfassung und der Fachbereiche der Universität Göttingen*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1994; J. v. Stackelberg (ed.), *Zur geistigen Situation der Zeit der Göttinger Universitätsgründung 1737*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Göttingen, 1988; L. Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae. Göttingen 1770-1820*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1995. See also the succinct account in F. Wunderlich, "Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta – Radikalaufklärung im Hörsaal?", in *Aufklärung* 24 (2012), pp. 65-90, at pp. 79-84.

Enlightenment in Germany, highly respected internationally, and a home to leading scholars in a variety of disciplines. These included, to name just a few, the physiologist Albrecht von Haller, the historian August von Schlözer and the physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg. Leading Enlightenment thinkers from other parts of Germany, such as Christian Garve, made a point of paying visits to Göttingen. By the early 1780s contemporaries referred to the University of Göttingen as “one of the most famous ... [universities] in Europe” where “the most select men” had been appointed².

Possibly due to the affiliation with Britain there was, as visitors noted, a certain “bias in favour of the English” among the professors in Göttingen³. It is not clear, however, that the political link with Britain had much to do with the role that Locke played in the philosophical thought developed in Göttingen, as British philosophy and Locke in particular were also very much present elsewhere in Germany⁴. In any case, this paper is not concerned with the way in which British thought was transmitted or with Locke’s presence in the Göttingen Enlightenment in general. Rather, the paper focuses on Locke’s place in positions developed by three of the most important Göttingen philosophers of the 1770s and 1780s - Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, Christoph Meiners, and Michael Hifßmann. Of the three Feder is not only the most senior but also the most influential philosopher. Coming from a position at a gymnasium in Coburg, Feder arrived in Göttingen in 1768 where he stayed for thirty years and became a famous, highly respected and very productive scholar⁵. In 1769 he published an extremely influential textbook, *Logik und Metaphysik*,

² J.K. Riesbeck, *Briefe eines reisenden Franzosen ueber Deutschland*, 2 vols., [n.p., no publisher, printer] 1784², vol. 2, pp. 249, 246. For more context, see H.-P. Nowitzky, U. Roth, G. Stiening and F. Wunderlich, “Zur Einführung” in their edition of Michael Hifßmann, *Briefwechsel*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2016, pp. 1-2.

³ Riesbeck, *Briefe*, cit., vol. 2, p. 243 (“Partheylichkeit für die Engländer”).

⁴ For an overview of the presence of British philosophers in eighteenth-century German philosophy, see G. Zart, *Einfluss der englischen Philosophen seit Bacon auf die deutsche Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Dümmler, Berlin 1881. For an account that focuses on Locke, see K. Pollok, “Die Locke-Rezeption in der deutschen Aufklärung: frühe lateinische und deutsche Übersetzungen von Lockes Werken (1701-61)”, in *Id.* (ed.), *Locke in Germany. Early German Translations of John Locke, 1709-61*, Thoemmes Continuum, Bristol 2004, vol. 1, pp. v-xxxiii. See also P. Rumore, “Locke in Halle: A Chapter of the 18th-Century German Reception of John Locke”, in *Studi Lockiani* 2020, pp. 163-94.

⁵ For general information on Feder, see U. Thiel, “Johann Georg Heinrich Feder”, in H.F. Klemme and M. Kuehn (eds.), *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*, vol. 1, Continuum, London-New York 2010, pp. 308-15. For a brief account of the circumstances of Feder’s appointment at Göttingen, see Wunderlich, “Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta”, cit., pp. 82-83.

of which a seventh edition was published in 1790. Meiners was a student of Feder's and later a close personal friend. He became an extraordinary professor of philosophy in Göttingen in 1772, a full professor in 1775⁶. Hißmann studied philosophy with both Feder and Meiners⁷. He began teaching philosophy in 1776 and became an extraordinary professor at Göttingen in 1782. All three were strongly influenced by the philosophy of John Locke. Feder has even been dubbed a "Lockean Ringleader"⁸. It is obvious, however, as we shall see in our overview in section 2, regarding "Locke's method", that the three are not straightforward 'Lockeans'. In section 3 we shall see that, in some cases at least, their accounts even of Lockean views they approve of are problematic. The Göttingen philosophers' relation to Locke's thought is complex, and to better understand this complexity, an analysis of the way in which they deal with specific topics is required. Therefore, in sections 4 to 6, we shall look in more detail at their views and arguments on two central issues in the philosophy of mind, the nature of the human soul and personal identity.

2. Feder-Meiners-Hißmann – and "Locke's Method"

Even the first professor of philosophy at Göttingen, Samuel Christian Hollmann, although educated in the then dominant philosophy of Christian Wolff, knew his Locke and adopted aspects of his thought⁹. Feder, too, was

⁶ For general information on Meiners, see F. Wunderlich, "Christoph Meiners", in H.F. Klemme and M. Kuehn (eds.), *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*, vol. 2, Continuum, London-New York 2010, pp. 773-81.

⁷ For general information on Hißmann, see F. Wunderlich, "Michael Hißmann", in H.F. Klemme and M. Kuehn (eds.), *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*, vol. 1, Continuum, London-New York 2010, pp. 515-22. For an account of Hißmann's conception of philosophy, see P. Rumore, "Im Kampf gegen die Metaphysik. Michael Hißmanns Verständnis der Philosophie", in H.F. Klemme, G. Stiening and F. Wunderlich (eds.), *Michael Hißmann (1752-1784). Ein materialistischer Philosoph der deutschen Aufklärung*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2013, pp. 43-62.

⁸ F.C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason. German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., London 1987, p. 180. The importance of Locke to the Göttingen philosophers is not universally acknowledged, however. W. Ch. Zimmerli, for example, manages to write on the philosophy of Feder and Meiners without even mentioning Locke. See W. Ch. Zimmerli, "'Schwere Rüstung' des Dogmatismus und 'anwendbare Eklektik'. J. G. H. Feder und die Göttinger Philosophie des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts", in *Studia Leibnitiana* 15 (1983), pp. 58-71.

⁹ For Hollmann's general philosophical outlook, see K. Cramer, "Die Stunde der Philosophie. Über Göttingens ersten Philosophen und die philosophische Theorielage der Gründerzeit", in J. v. Stackelberg (ed.) *Zur geistigen Situation der Zeit der Göttinger Universitätsgründung 1737*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1988, pp. 101-143. See also U. Thiel, "Samuel Christian Hollmann", in

educated in the Wolffian tradition, but in Feder Lockean thought takes on a more central role than in Hollmann. He refers and appeals to Locke in several of his writings and on a wide range of topics¹⁰, but central to his own outlook is his endorsement of what he takes to be the essential points in Books I and II of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Feder also appeals to Locke's distinction between real and nominal essences, sharing on the whole Locke's moderate skepticism relating to knowledge-claims about the real essence of substances¹¹.

Feder's account of logic in *Logik und Metaphysik* covers traditional parts such as the syllogism, but is based on, if not entirely reduced to an empirical or cognitive psychology, and this corresponds to his reading of Locke's *Essay*. Regarding Book I, Feder focuses on innate ideas and emphasizes that there are indeed no good reasons to believe that any of our ideas, including abstract ideas, are innate and have any other source than sensations¹². In more general terms, and referring mostly to Book II, he sums up Locke's achievement by saying that his *Essay* "constituted without doubt the most remarkable epoch in the history of logic since Aristotle". By explaining the genesis of the most important of our general concepts, Locke had brought "new light" into logic. "The theory of the origin of our general concepts, and of the laws of their connection", the accounts of "the sources of error" and of "the limits of human knowledge and the grounds of its reliability became more complete and correct thereby"¹³. Feder does not mention Locke in his sketch of the history of metaphysics, but he argues that metaphysics is useful only if it "discovers the origin of our general concepts in sensation, and the origin of scientific concepts in common knowledge", and if it "examines the grounds of our opinions in relation to important

H.F. Klemme and M. Kuehn (eds.), *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*, vol. 2, Continuum, London-New York 2010, pp. 542-44.

¹⁰ G. Zart provides a summary of such references, with some commentary, in Zart, *Einfluss der englischen Philosophen*, cit., pp. 130-39, 145-46.

¹¹ For Feder's distinction between the "Nominal-Wesen der Dinge" and the "absolute Grundwesen eines Dinges", see J.G.H. Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik*, Dieterich, Göttingen 1790, p. 245.

¹² See, for example, Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., pp. 48-49.

¹³ Here is the relevant passage in full: Locke's "*Versuch über den menschlichen Verstand* machte in der Geschichte der Logik ohne Zweifel die merkwürdigste Epoche, die seit dem Aristoteles gemacht worden war. Durch die Entwicklung der vornehmsten von unsern allgemeinen Begriffen zündete er ein neues Licht auch in der Logik an. Die Theorie von dem Ursprunge der Begriffe, und von dem Gesetze ihres Zusammenhanges, von der symbolischen Erkenntnis, und den darinne gegründeten Quellen der Irrthümer, von den Grenzen der menschlichen Erkenntniß, und den Gründen ihrer Zuverlässigkeit, wurde dadurch vollständiger und richtiger" (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., pp. 220-21).

matters and in doing so recognizes the limits of our knowledge”¹⁴. Clearly, Feder’s description of a useful metaphysics coincides at least in part with what he says Locke has done in the area of logic. It seems that for Feder, both logic and metaphysics ought to concern themselves with the origin of ideas in experience and the related epistemological issue of determining the limits of human knowledge, which is a central concern also of Locke’s *Essay*.

And yet, as Feder himself remarks, he is not a Lockean. He emphasizes that he does not belong to any one school of philosophy, that he is just as little a Lockean as a he is Wolffian or a Kantian¹⁵. Rather, he attempts to develop his own philosophy by way of critically examining other systems and retaining what is valuable from each. Obviously, such eclecticism precludes any unmitigated allegiance to Locke. Locke played only one if a very important part in the development of his philosophy. Indeed, while critical of Wolff in many respects, several ideas including the very structure of Feder’s philosophy, even the basic distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy, are retained from Wolffian thought. Moreover, even considering only British philosophy there is more than just Locke in Feder. As Manfred Kuehn has shown, Scottish Common Sense philosophy, with thinkers such as Thomas Reid and James Beattie, was particularly influential in both Feder and Meiners¹⁶. We shall see below in sections 4 and 5 that the Scots are relevant to Feder’s philosophy of mind.

Christoph Meiners even edited a German translation of Beattie’s *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*¹⁷, and his own *Grundriß der Seelenlehre* of 1786 was apparently influenced by Beattie¹⁸. By 1786 Meiners had abandoned his earlier, materialist view of the mind. In 1772 he had published a programme for developing a new kind of philosophy, titled *Revision der Phi-*

¹⁴ “[...] wenn dabey der Ursprung unserer allgemeinen Begriffe aus der Empfindung, und der Ursprung der wissenschaftlichen Begriffe aus der gemeinen Erkenntniß, fleißig entdeckt; wenn endlich die Gründe unserer Meynungen in Ansehung der wichtigen Gegenstände geprüft, und die Grenzen unserer Erkenntniß dabey bemerkt werden” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., p. 227).

¹⁵ K.A.L. Feder (ed.), *J.G.H Feder’s Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, Schwickert, Leipzig - Hahn, Hannover - Leske, Darmstadt 1825, p. 88.

¹⁶ M. Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768-1800. A Contribution to the History of Critical Philosophy*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Kingston and Montreal 1987, pp. 70-85. For Feder and Reid on psychology, see P. Rumore, “Feder und die Psychologie seiner Zeit”, in H.-P. Nowitzki, U. Roth and G. Stiening (eds.), *Johann Georg Heinrich Feder (1740-1821). Empirismus und Popularphilosophie zwischen Wolff und Kant*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2018, pp. 39-54, at pp. 49-50. See also U. Thiel “Feder und der Innere Sinn”, *ibid.*, pp. 55-86, at pp. 76-77.

¹⁷ J. Beattie, *Neue Philosophische Versuche*, 2 vols., Weygand, Leipzig 1779-80.

¹⁸ Ch. Meiners, *Grundriß der Seelenlehre*, Meyer, Lemgo [1786]. Compare Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany*, cit., p. 71.

*losophie*¹⁹. Philosophy as a whole, Meiners argues there, should be ‘revised’ in the sense that it be based on empirical psychology, rather than on arbitrary concepts and principles²⁰. As will be discussed below in section 6, their materialist outlook clearly distinguishes both Meiners and Hißmann from Locke. Yet more so than Feder, they see themselves as working within the Lockean tradition, and *Revision* is obviously inspired by Locke. Meiners makes a point of expressing thanks to the “wise Locke” for enabling him to rise above the “chaos” of scholastic quibbling into the “bright region of distinct concepts”²¹, emphasizing that he “always likes Locke’s method better than Wolffian constraint”²². He even divides the proposed empirical psychology into four parts that correspond, roughly, to the four books of Locke’s *Essay*: 1) Of ideas 2) Of the forces or faculties of the mind 3) Of language 4) Of truth and the limits of human knowledge²³.

Like Feder, Meiners emphasizes the importance of Books I and II of the *Essay*, appealing to Book II when he speaks of “Locke’s method” and arguing that metaphysical issues should be dealt with by examining the origin and genesis of our general ideas or concepts. Locke, Meiners says, does not

begin with arbitrary principles and definitions, he never says what something is, but explains by which impressions and intermediate concepts we come to have this or that general idea. For him metaphysics does not consist of a collection of demonstrations of real things, but of conjectures about the way in which our concepts have developed from certain appearances. He does not say that the world is what metaphysics teaches, but points to the various ways in which we come to have representations of its parts²⁴.

¹⁹ [Ch. Meiners], *Revision der Philosophie*, Dieterich, Göttingen-Gotha 1772.

²⁰ For a brief account of the work, see F. Wunderlich, “Christoph Meiners’s Empiricist ‘Revision’ of Philosophy and Michael Hißmann’s Anti-Speculative Materialism”, in K. de Boer and T. Pruncea-Bretonnet (eds.), *The Experiential Turn in Eighteenth-Century German Philosophy*, Routledge, New York-London 2021, pp. 119-37, at pp. 120-21.

²¹ Meiners, *Revision*, cit., p. 161. (“Dir, weiser Locke, habe ich es zu danken, daß ich mich aus dem wüsten Chaos scholastischer Zeichendeutereien in die helle Region der deutlichen Begriffe emporgehoben habe”).

²² “Mir gefällt die Lockische Methode immer besser, als der Wolfische Zwang” (Meiners, *Revision*, cit. p. 54).

²³ Meiners, *Revision*, cit., pp. 54, 162-163.

²⁴ “Er [Locke] fängt nirgends mit willkürlichen Grundsätzen und Definitionen an, sagt niemals, was eine Sache sey, sondern durch was für Eindrücke und Zwischen-Begriffe wir endlich zu dieser oder jener allgemeinen Idee gelangen. Bei ihm ist die Metaphysik nicht eine Sammlung von Demonstrationen wirklicher Dinge, sondern Vermuthungen über die Entstehungsart unserer Begriffe von gewissen Erscheinungen. Er sagt nicht, daß die Welt das sey, was die Metaphysik lehrt: sondern zeigt

For Locke, Meiners believes, the analysis of how our ideas develop is the basis for determining the limits of human knowledge²⁵.

Like Meiners, Michael Hißmann notes the significance of Locke's philosophy to his own work. In his *Psychologische Versuche* Hißmann writes that in all areas of logic, "or which is the same thing, in all areas of psychology, Locke has enlightened me more than any other writer"²⁶. And Hißmann, too, highlights the centrality of Locke's rejection of innatism and his account of the origin of our ideas. "Since the age of Locke", he remarks, "the doctrine of ideas and their origin has become a main area of investigation for philosophers"²⁷. He argues, as does Meiners, that most of the themes that traditional metaphysics deals with should be moved to other disciplines. For example, natural theology should be moved to ethics and cosmology to physics²⁸. Any topics that remain in metaphysics should be dealt with in the way Locke did, namely by searching for the origin of our general ideas in experience.

But if one wants to have a science called *metaphysics*, one should deal with it according to *Locke's* example. One should turn it into a compendium of important general ideas and the first judgements that are derived from the exploration of the way in which they have developed²⁹.

3. "Lacking Precise Knowledge of Locke's Essay"

All three Göttingen philosophers bemoan the (alleged) fact that Locke's writings, and his *Essay* in particular, have not been read carefully enough and have been misread and misunderstood. Feder maintains that both "dogmatists" and skeptics seem to be positively disposed towards Locke's thought, adding,

die verschiedenen Wege an, wodurch wir zu Vorstellungen von ihren Theilen gelangen" (Meiners, *Revision*, cit., p. 208).

²⁵ Meiners, *Revision*, cit., p. 208.

²⁶ "Mir hat Locke [...] in der ganzen Logik, oder welches einerley ist, in der ganzen Psychologie, mehr Licht gegeben, als irgendein Schriftsteller" (M. Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche, ein Beytrag zur esoterischen Logik*, [no publisher, printer], Frankfurt-Leipzig 1777, p. 96 fn.).

²⁷ "Seit Locke's Zeitalter ist die Lehre von den Ideen und ihrem Ursprung eine Hauptuntersuchung der Philosophen geworden" (M. Hißmann, *Anleitung zur Kenntniß der auserlesenen Literatur in allen Theilen der Philosophie*, Meyer, Göttingen-Lemgo 1790². (First edition 1778). p. 164.

²⁸ Hißmann, *Anleitung*, cit., pp. 19-20.

²⁹ "Will man aber [...] eine Wissenschaft haben, die *Metaphysik* heißen soll; so bearbeite man sie nach *Locke's* Beyspiel. Man mache sie zu einem Magazin wichtiger allgemeiner Ideen, und der nächsten Sätze, die aus der Aufsuchung ihrer Entstehungsart fließen" (Hißmann, *Anleitung*, cit., p. 19).

however, that many of the former praise Locke without knowing what actually can be inferred from his statements, while the latter infer more from his statements than what Locke himself would condone³⁰. Meiners states that, unfortunately, only little use has been made of “this excellent man’s” teachings. Locke is cited often enough, he complains, but one knows his work mainly from the index or the titles of chapters in his *Essay*. He points out that this lack of attention to Lockean method has inspired him to write *Revision der Philosophie*³¹. And Hißmann claims that a “lack of precise knowledge of Locke’s *Essay*” is probably responsible for the fact that one cannot find a plausible account of inner sensations and inner feelings in the current textbooks on logic³². Feder, Meiners and Hißmann clearly think that they understand Locke’s philosophy better than most of their philosophical contemporaries. One does not have to dig deep, however, to see that their own accounts of Locke raise questions.

As we saw, the three Göttingen philosophers focus, for the most part, on Locke’s critique of the theory of innate ideas in Book I and his account of ideas as originating in sensation and reflection in Book II. Hißmann even believed that Locke built his philosophy “wholly” on his critique of innate ideas³³. It is obvious even from a cursory reading of Book I, however, that for Locke the main target of his critique does not concern innate ideas, but the view that certain theoretical and practical *principles* are innate. Innate ideas are relevant indirectly, as ideas feature in principles and would have to be innate, Locke argues, if principles were innate³⁴. This is not a minor point of detail but affects the Göttingen philosophers’ understanding of Locke’s *Essay* as a whole. They

³⁰ “Er [Locke] hat das Glück den Dogmatikern zu gefallen, und er ist der Liebling der Skeptiker. Aber es ist zu vermuthen, daß viele von jenen nachloben, ohne zu wissen, was man aus Lockens Sätzen folgern kann; so wie gewiß ist, daß diese mehr daraus folgern, als er selbst billigen würde” (J.G.H. Feder, *Grundriß der Philosophischen Wissenschaften*, Findeisen, Coburg 1767, pp. 78-79).

³¹ Meiners, *Revision*, cit., pp. 153-54.

³² “Ohne Locken gelesen zu haben, wird man sich daher den bestimmten Begriff vom inneren Sinn, den inneren Gefühlen und Empfindungen, nicht machen, den man sich zu machen hat. Und diesem Mangel genauer Bekanntschaft mit dem Lockischen Versuch ist es wohl zuzuschreiben, daß man in den meisten Logischen Schriften die Veranlassung zu dieser Entdeckung und ihren wahren Gehalt vergeblich sucht” (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 95).

³³ “Darinnen hatte Locke immer den großen Vorzug vor Leibniz, daß er seinem System getreu blieb, das er eigentlich ganz auf seinen sinreichen Angriff der angebohrnen Begriffe bauete” (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 172).

³⁴ J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, Liv.1, pp. 84-85. Hißmann mentions innate principles at one point, but says merely that some philosophers at Locke’s time claimed that not only ideas but also principles are innate (Hißmann, *Anleitung*, cit., p. 164).

seem to neglect or reject crucial views and arguments in other parts of the *Essay*, such as Locke's view, central to his moral philosophy, that principles of morality, while not innate, are, like mathematics, "capable of Demonstration"³⁵. Take, for example, Feder's four-volume *Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Willen*³⁶, valued highly by himself as one of his most important works. In his autobiography he suggests that the work is modelled on Locke's *Essay*. Feder writes:

The first idea of this undertaking developed, apart from my preference for Practical Philosophy, from my respect for *Locke's* work on the human understanding. A similar work on the will seemed to me to be lacking, and I had courage enough to devote myself to it³⁷.

Feder notes the "empirical" nature of this work³⁸, and he summarizes its content as follows.

The principles of virtue and happiness established therein are those according to which I have lived, so far as human weakness permitted. I have tested their truth and usability on myself and others³⁹.

It is doubtful that a work of this kind can be said to be modelled on Locke or to be "similar" to what Locke argues about the understanding in the *Essay*. At the very least one would have to reduce Locke's *Essay* to a project in some way reminiscent of Book II in order to claim any kind of similarity. Regarding principles of morality and virtue at least, Locke argues that they are precisely not to be based on experience and "tested" against practice to determine their truth. Rather, he holds that principles of morality can be shown to be valid and universally binding on the basis of reason alone, independently of whether anyone actually lives by them. "The Truth and Certainty of *moral Discourses*", Locke says, "abstracts from the Lives of Men, and the Existence of those Ver-

³⁵ Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.xii.8, p.643.

³⁶ J.G.H. Feder, *Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Willen*, 4 vols., Meyer, Göttingen-Lemgo 1779-93.

³⁷ "Der erste Gedanke zu diesem Unternehmen entstand, außer meiner Vorliebe für die Practische Philosophie, durch meine Achtung für *Locke's* Werk über den menschlichen Verstand. Ein ähnliches über den Willen schien mir zu fehlen; und ich hatte Muth genug, mich ihm zu widmen" (Feder, *J.G.H Feder's Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, cit., p. 94).

³⁸ Feder, *J.G.H Feder's Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, cit., p. 95.

³⁹ "Die darin aufgestellten Grundsätze von Tugend und Glückseligkeit sind diejenigen, nach welchen ich, so weit es die menschliche Schwachheit vermochte, gelebt habe. Ihre Wahrheit und Brauchbarkeit habe ich an mir und andern erprobt" (Feder, *J.G.H Feder's Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, p. 94).

tues in the World, whereof they treat"⁴⁰. Thus, although Feder occasionally cites Locke, for example on his view that feelings of uneasiness drive the will⁴¹, and contrary to Feder's comments on his own work, the general idea behind *Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Willen* is distinctly un-Lockean.

Another example of a problematic appeal to Locke concerns Hißmann's comments on Locke's notion of inner sense. Hißmann claims that it is Locke's account of inner sense in particular that constitutes his response to the theory of innate ideas⁴². According to Hißmann, the doctrine of innate ideas was meant to explain the origin of "those concepts that could not be derived from sensuous impressions of the outer senses"⁴³. Locke has shown, however, Hißmann writes, that there is no reason to resort to innatism and that instead "one has to assume a second source of our ideas, an inner sense", or, in Locke's terminology, "reflection"⁴⁴. Hißmann criticizes Leibniz in this context but he does not mention the latter's quite different evaluation of Lockean reflection. In stark contrast to Hißmann, Leibniz argues that, as "reflection is nothing but attention to what is within us", Locke's theory of reflection actually amounts to a *concession* to innatism⁴⁵. Instead of considering this reading of Lockean reflection, Hißmann argues it follows from the principles which "after Locke have been universally adopted in psychology" that there must be a physical base for inner sense, *i. e.* that there must be "in the most inner parts of our brain certain organs to the vibrations of which one must ascribe those modifications of the soul that are not caused by the impact of external objects on the outer organs"⁴⁶. This as-

⁴⁰ Ibid., IV.iv.8, p. 566.

⁴¹ Feder, *Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Willen*, cit., vol. 1, p.67.

⁴² Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., pp.93-97, 171-74.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 94.

⁴⁴ "Der englische Weltweise aber bewies aus Gründen, die fast allen Philosophen des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts ueberzeugend waren, daß man gar nicht Ursache habe, um der Seelenveränderungen Willen, die man nicht ohne Mühe aus den Eindrücken auf die äußeren Sinnen erklären könne, zur Gottheit seine Zuflucht zu nehmen. Für diese [...] Seelenmodifikationen, müsse man eine zwote Quelle unsrer Ideen, einen inneren Sinn annehmen" (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 94). See Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.i.4, p. 105.

⁴⁵ G.W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, trans. and ed. by P. Remnant and J. Bennett, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981, p. 51.

⁴⁶ "Nothwendig müssen daher, nach der Sprache und den Grundsätzen, die nach Locke allgemein in der Psychologie aufgenommen worden sind, in dem Innersten unsers Gehirns gewisse Organen vorhanden seyn, deren Erschütterung man die verschiedenen Modifikationen der Seele zuschreiben muß, die nicht durch die Einwirkung äußerer Gegenstände auf die äußern Organe verursacht werden. Diese innern Organen des Gehirns, die der Grund und die Werkstätte von den *ideas of reflexion* sind, heißen der innere Sin, und die verschiedenen Veränderungen dieser innern Organen heißen innere Gefühle und innere Empfindungen" (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., pp. 97-98).

assessment of Locke's role in subsequent thought seems to be based on Hißmann's essentially materialist reading of Locke (see below section 6). He simply ignores Locke's comment that he does not wish "to meddle with the Physical Consideration of the Mind", as this would involve "Speculations" that may be "curious and entertaining", but are to be declined as "lying out of my Way, in the Design I am now upon"⁴⁷.

Apart from misguided appeals to Locke, the three Göttingen 'Lockeans' are explicitly critical of some of Locke's positions that are central to his philosophy. We shall now turn in more detail to two central issues in the philosophy of mind in order to evaluate their assessments of Locke's account.

4. Feder and Locke on the Nature of the Soul

The importance the Göttingen philosophers ascribe to inner sense and to Locke's account thereof relates to their views on the nature of the human mind and personal identity. Feder argues that inner sense, providing us with the consciousness of our inner states, is the reason why we are able to ascribe a soul or mind to ourselves.

A large part of our concepts is derived from sensations that we have due to inner sense. That is how the soul has the concept of itself, and of its properties. And through this basic mental representation we form other concepts of mental natures and properties⁴⁸.

Thus, inner sense is the basis, according to Feder, on which we can build a general theory of the mind⁴⁹. What is the soul or mind, according to Feder? He considers a variety of views, including the Humean view that we know no more of the soul than its various states or perceptions and that, to us, the soul is nothing but a bundle or collection of those perceptions. Feder writes: "At least

⁴⁷ Locke, *Essay*, cit. I.i.2, p. 43.

⁴⁸ „Ein grosser Theil unserer Begriffe rühret aus den Empfindungen her, die wir vermöge des innern Sinnes haben. Daher hat die Seele den Begriff von ihr selbst, und von ihren Eigenschaften. Und vermittelst dieser geistlichen Grundvorstellung bilden wir uns unsere übrigen Begriffe von geistlichen Naturen und Eigenschaften“ (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., p. 50).

⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis of Feder's account of inner sense, see U. Thiel, "Feder und der Innere Sinn", cit. See also the relevant sections in U. Thiel, "Experience and Inner Sense: Feder – Lossius – Kant", in K. de Boer and T. Prunea-Bretonnet (eds.), *The Experiential Turn in Eighteenth-Century German Philosophy*, Routledge, New York-London 2021, pp. 98-118.

what we know of our soul is nothing but a collection of modifications of its power and capacity, as they express themselves in their effects and sensations⁵⁰.

Elsewhere Feder questions that inner sense can provide us with knowledge of “the absolute essence soul”, suggesting that through inner sense we perceive “merely our present state, this current thinking, willing, feeling”⁵¹. It is plain, however, that Feder does not endorse a bundle view of the mind or soul. His reference to the soul’s “power and capacity” suggests an entity beyond mere perceptions. Indeed, he holds that inner sense does not only provide us with a consciousness of inner states but also with that of the soul as a “subject of our consciousness”⁵², or that part of us “in which we are conscious of the present and the past, of pleasure and pain”⁵³. What is the nature, however, of this subject called ‘the soul’? In several places Feder emphasizes that inner sense and consciousness of self are likely to have a physical base. For example, he says it is “very probable that our self-consciousness” has some organic base. He appeals to the fact that physical illness can weaken self-consciousness and lead us to think we are a person that we are not and never have been⁵⁴. Unlike his pupil Hißmann, however, Feder does not think that such phenomena should lead us to a materialist view of the mind.

While Feder holds we cannot know with absolute certainty what the nature of the mind or soul is, he argues it is highly probable that the subject of consciousness, or the soul, is (1) a substance and (2) an immaterial substance. Although these beliefs are not the content of inner sensations, Feder claims that they originate in the latter. As regards (1), Feder claims that the understanding forces us to go beyond the “concepts of properties, states and relations” and to add the concept of substance⁵⁵. He makes use of an old argument, also present

⁵⁰ “Wenigstens ist das, was wir von unserer Seele wissen, nichts als eine Sammlung von Modificationen ihrer Kraft und Fähigkeit, wie diese sich in ihren Wirkungen und Empfindungen äussern” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik*, Dieterich, Göttingen-Gotha 1769, p. 109).

⁵¹ “Giebt sich etwa dem Selbstgefühl das absolute Wesen der Seele zu erkennen? Ist es nicht vielmehr immer nur unser gegenwärtiger Zustand, dieses gegenwärtige Denken, Wollen, Fühlen, was wir mittels des innern Sinnes wahrnehmen?” (J.G.H. Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, in *Philosophische Bibliothek* 2 (1789), pp. 1–40, at pp. 24–25).

⁵² “Subject unsers Bewußtseyns” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1769, cit., p. 108).

⁵³ “[...] in welchem wir uns des Gegenwärtigen und Vergangenen, der Lust und der Unlust bewußt sind” (J.G.H. Feder, *Grundsätze der Logik und Metaphysik*, Dieterich, Göttingen 1794, p. 21).

⁵⁴ “So halte ich es doch für sehr wahrscheinlich, daß auch unser Selbstbewußtseyn [...] mit auf organischen Gründen beruhe. Denn man hat Beyspiele, daß in Krankheiten auch dieß Selbstbewußtseyn geschwächt und in unnatürliche Zerrüttung gebracht werden kann” (Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., p. 38 fn.).

⁵⁵ Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., p. 25.

in Locke, according to which ideas of qualities and states bring along the notion of a something to which these qualities and states belong⁵⁶. Feder's version of the argument says that there is a sense in which the concept of a substance is even "contained" in the "concepts of properties, states and relations" themselves or "essentially connected" with the latter⁵⁷. In short, when we have ideas of "properties, states and relations" we also have the notion of a substance on which they depend. It follows, Feder believes, that by making us aware of our states and properties, inner sense makes us aware of ourselves as substantial beings. Even the most extreme skeptic, Feder maintains, cannot avoid assuming a substance, as the concept of states demands that of a substance.

As regards (2), Feder claims that although we may not be able to know with absolute certainty what the inner nature of the soul is, inner sense or "the feeling of self and reflection on the latter [...] acquaints us with something about the nature of our soul"⁵⁸. Feder proceeds to argue that inner sense points to the soul's most fundamental features, namely, its simplicity and immateriality. He holds that while our inner sense does not prove that the soul has these features, it certainly *suggests* that the soul is simple and immaterial.

In particular with regard to our soul, the feeling of self certainly supports the simplicity of the thinking substance rather than the contrary. At least, it seems to me that one can sufficiently distinguish – by means of the same – the soul from the entire mass of organized matter of which its body is constituted⁵⁹.

Feder was not the first to argue in this way. Of particular importance is Thomas Reid, the leading philosopher of the Scottish School of Common Sense to whose *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* of 1764 Feder refers several times in the early editions of *Logik und Metaphysik*⁶⁰. Reid argues that "our sensations suggest to us a sentient being or mind to which they belong: a being which hath a per-

⁵⁶ Compare Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xxiii.1-2, pp. 295-96.

⁵⁷ Feder, "Ueber den Begriff von Substanz", cit., p. 26.

⁵⁸ "durch das Selbstgefühl und die Reflexion über dasselbe ... [ist uns] einiges von der Natur unserer Seele bekannt" (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1769, cit., p. 400).

⁵⁹ "Insbesondere in Ansehung unserer Seele ist das Selbstgefühl gewiß mehr für die Einfachheit der denkenden Substanz als wider dieselbe. Wenigstens, dünket mich, unterscheidet sich, vermöge desselben, die Seele genugsam von der ganzen Masse organisirter Materie, die ihren Körper ausmachtet" (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1769, cit., p. 403).

⁶⁰ See, for example, Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik*, Dieterich, Göttingen-Gotha 1771, p. 171, where Feder recommends Reid's *Inquiry*.

manent existence, although the sensations are transient and of short duration”⁶¹. Our belief in the permanent existence of a thinking substance or mind, Reid thinks, is not based on inferences of reason but on judgements that derive immediately from our sensations⁶². Feder, however, also appeals to reason in his case for the simplicity of the soul, making use of standard anti-materialist arguments. He states, for example, that we can infer the simplicity and indivisibility of the thinking subject from the obvious unity or rather simplicity of consciousness. Because consciousness is something quite simple and indivisible, it “can exist only in a subject which is itself indivisible, exactly one, simple”⁶³. According to Feder, the “concept of One sensing, thinking, willing subject precludes the idea of that multiplicity which is assumed in the concept of matter”⁶⁴. There is no reason, he holds, why we should assume a multiplicity in what functions as a basis for consciousness, as the latter appears to us as an “indivisible unity”⁶⁵.

Feder continues to maintain that the “absolute essence of things” cannot be known, and yet in spite of this and all remaining doubts⁶⁶, he argues that the notion of the soul as developed from inner sense, is the notion of a subject that is simple and immaterial. He emphasizes that “Locke’s well-known skepticism on this matter really goes too far”⁶⁷. Is the reading of Locke assumed here an adequate gloss of Locke’s position? It might be argued that Feder’s position is not as different from Locke’s as he suggests. Like Feder, Locke holds that we cannot know the real essence of the soul but that it is the “more probable Opin-

⁶¹ Th. Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, ed. by D.R. Brookes, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1997, Chapt. 5, Sect. iii, p. 60. Re “natural suggestion”, see *ibid.* Chapt. 2, Sect. vii, p. 38.

⁶² “This sensation suggests to us both a faculty and a mind; and not only suggests the notion of them, but creates a belief of their existence; although it is impossible to discover, by reason, any tie or connection between one and the other [...] they are judgments of nature, judgments not got by comparing ideas, and perceiving agreements and disagreements, but immediately inspired by our constitution” (Reid, *Inquiry*, cit., Chapt 2, Sect. vii, p. 37).

⁶³ “Denn, können wir uns die Gewahrnehmung oder das *Bewußtseyn* wohl gedenken, als etwas, welches, wo es nur einmal vorhanden, dennoch vertheilt und ausgebreitet wäre? Ist es nicht vielmehr etwas ganz einfaches und untheilbares? Also kann es ja auch nicht anders vorhanden seyn, als in einem Subjecte welches selbst untheilbar, genau eins, einfach ist” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., p. 325).

⁶⁴ Feder, *Grundsätze*, cit., p. 240.

⁶⁵ “Warum sollten wir Vielheit voraussetzen im Grunde dessen, was sich uns als untheilbare Einheit zu erkennen giebt; und wo die Voraussetzung der Vielheit die Erscheinungen unbegreiflich macht?” (Feder, *Grundsätze*, cit., pp. 242-43).

⁶⁶ “diese Eigenschaft der denkenden Substanz ... [kann] nicht mit völliger Evidenz dargethan werden” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., pp. 325-26).

⁶⁷ “Locke’s bekannter Skepticismus in dieser Sache geht doch wirklich zu weit” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., pp. 326-27). See also Feder *Logik und Metaphysik* 1769, cit., p. 404.

ion” that the soul is an immaterial substance⁶⁸. However, unlike Feder, Locke thinks that the notion of thinking matter does not involve a contradiction and that it is at least possible God may “superadd” the power of thought to suitable systems of matter⁶⁹. And as Locke does not elaborate on why he nevertheless thinks “the more probable Opinion” is that the soul is an immaterial substance, it appears that his “skepticism” or agnosticism regarding the nature of the soul is indeed different from Feder’s version. In the last analysis, then, Feder’s assessment of the difference between himself and Locke seems correct. Moreover, Locke’s suggestion about ‘superaddition’ seemed to many to open the door to materialism, a door that Feder wanted to keep firmly shut, siding more with philosophers such as Reid than with Locke on this matter.

5. Feder and Locke on the “Favourite Topic of the English Metaphysicians”

If the thinking subject is a simple substance, as Feder assumes, it would not be subject to change, and hence there would be no problem accounting for its diachronic identity. This is what many (but certainly not all) eighteenth-century philosophers believed⁷⁰. Feder is aware, however, of the debates about individuation and identity from medieval times to his present, conceding that one can get confused about the matter “because of the incompleteness of our concepts of individuals and also of kinds”⁷¹. This is evidenced, he says, “by the disputes of the scholastics over the *principium individuationis* and the almost more pedantic disputes about personal identity which, since Locke’s time, seem to be a favourite topic (*Lieblingsmaterie*) of the English metaphysicians”⁷². Feder is confident, however, that the doubts that have been raised about diachronic identity can be removed⁷³. As we shall see, he is not critical of Locke here, but attempts to include Lockean ideas in his account.

⁶⁸ Locke, *Essay*, cit., II. xxvii.25, p. 345.

⁶⁹ “God can, if he pleases, superadd to Matter a Faculty of Thinking” (Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.iii.6, p. 541).

⁷⁰ For an analysis of the various accounts of personal identity by philosophers who adopt an immaterialist view of the human mind, see U. Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject. Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014², pp. 224-276.

⁷¹ Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1771, cit., p. 310; 1790 p. 287.

⁷² “[...] der Streit der Scholastiker über das *principium individuationis*, und der beynahe noch spitzfindigere Streit über die *personelle Identität*, der seit *Lockens* Zeit eine Lieblingmaterie der englischen Metaphysiker zu seyn scheint” (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1771, cit., p. 310; 1790, p. 287).

⁷³ Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., p. 35.

Feder's comments on this "favourite topic of the English metaphysicians" are scattered over several of his writings. It may seem, moreover, that no consistent position emerges. Feder seems both (1) to appeal to a natural "feeling" of identity, following perhaps Scottish Common Sense philosophers, such as James Beattie and Henry Home, Lord Kames⁷⁴; and (2) to endorse a Lockean approach to the issue. Feder himself does not separate these two approaches. He seems to make use of both in his response to a view he ascribes to the skeptic. The skeptic may question our belief in our diachronic identity and suppose, Feder notes, that "several souls could follow one another" in one body, without the man or human being noticing this⁷⁵.

In terms of (1) Feder concedes that one cannot prove "the impossibility of such unnoticeable changes of souls"⁷⁶. He holds, however, that an "inner feeling" tells me that I "always am and remain the same feeling and thinking subject, in spite of all the changes in my body and my relations, of my representations and feelings. Nature drives me constantly, and as far as I can tell every other healthy human being, to believe in this persistence and unity of our souls"⁷⁷. It is not clear, he claims, that I could even have this feeling of identity "if several thinking subjects followed one another in my human body"⁷⁸. In any case, Feder argues the fact that the skeptic's scenario is not disprovable should not lead us to give up our natural belief in our personal identity⁷⁹. The skeptic's scenario may in principle be possible, but so is the scenario that our souls remain numerically the same through time⁸⁰. And since our natural feeling suggests the latter, it is most reasonable to adopt this belief.

Regarding (2) Feder recognizes that the issue of diachronic identity is rel-

⁷⁴ According to Kames, my personal identity is known to me by a "feeling of identity, which accompanies me through all my changes" (H. Home, Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, ed. by M.C. Moran, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 2005, pp. 233-34). Beattie speaks of personal identity as one of the "dictates of internal sensation natural to man and universally acknowledged" (J. Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth; in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism*, Kincaid & Bell, Edinburgh – Dilly, London 1771², p. 76).

⁷⁵ Feder, "Ueber den Begriff von Substanz", cit., pp. 37-38.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁷⁷ "Nach meinem innersten Gefühl [...] scheint es mir [...], daß ich immer dasselbe fühlende und denkende Subject bin und bleibe, bey allen Veränderungen meines Körpers und meiner Verhältnisse, allem Wechsel meiner Vorstellungen und Gefühle. Die Natur treibt mich anhaltend und dringend dazu an, und so viel ich bemerke, auch jeden andern gesunden Menschen, an diese Fortdauer und Einheit unserer Seelen zu glauben (Feder, "Ueber den Begriff von Substanz", cit., p. 39).

⁷⁸ Feder, "Ueber den Begriff von Substanz", cit., p. 40.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

evant to moral and legal issues, and in this context, he applies a broader notion of personhood that includes the body⁸¹. Here, instead of appealing to an “inner feeling” of identity, Feder proposes a distinction between a complete or absolute identity and a relative identity (*gewisse Identität*)⁸². The latter notion of identity is ‘relative’ in the sense that here the “relation to our concepts and intentions” is relevant to determining identity⁸³. This distinction applies to external objects and other persons as well as to one’s own self. If no parts of the newborn body are retained in the body of the old man, Feder argues, we do not have a complete or absolute identity, but we may still have a relative identity⁸⁴. For the latter it is sufficient that “it is the same man for us and our aims and purposes; to us in all respects the son, the brother, the father”⁸⁵. And so, Feder argues, even if we were to accept what the skeptic supposes, this would be irrelevant to relative identity which is what matters in the moral or practical sphere⁸⁶. Here it is sufficient that “our soul for us and for other human beings, and in general for all the purposes that it is made for, always is and remains the same”. Even “rewards and punishments in the other life”, Feder thinks, do not require an “absolute identity of the thinking subject”⁸⁷.

Feder’s account of absolute and relative identity corresponds to an old distinction between identity in a strict sense and in a loose or ‘popular’ sense⁸⁸, but he links it to Locke’s distinction between substantial identity and personal identity, according to which the latter is constituted by the “unity of consciousness”⁸⁹. Feder argues that “the concept of moral unity (moral per-

⁸¹ Feder, *Grundsätze*, cit., p. 9.

⁸² “zwischen einer völligen und einer gewissen Identität“ (Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* 1790, cit., p. 287.)

⁸³ “Beziehung auf unsere Begriffe und Absichten“ (Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., pp. 36, 39.)

⁸⁴ By translating Feder’s “gewisse Identität” as “relative identity” I do not mean to suggest that he is arguing for the idea of relative identity as discussed in present-day accounts of the topic. While Feder’s notion may be compatible with the present-day notion of relativity, he does not explicitly endorse or even spell out this idea.

⁸⁵ Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., p. 37.

⁸⁶ In a theological context, to do with an explanation of the trinity, Feder comments on the concept of a person in general and as applied to humans. He says that ‘person’ serves to distinguish the various relations into which one and the same “Grundsubjekt” can enter and that in the case of humans this involves rights and duties. Feder, *J.H.G. Feder’s Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, cit., p. 335.

⁸⁷ Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., pp. 38-39.

⁸⁸ See U. Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, cit., p. 267-68.

⁸⁹ “Locke unterscheidet [...] *substantial* und *personal* identity; zu letzterer ist die Einheit des Bewußseyns genug” (Feder, “Ueber den Begriff von Substanz”, cit., p. 39, fn.). See Locke, *Essay*, cit. II.xxvii.7, p. 332 and II.xxvii.15, p. 340.

sonality) relates to the moral predicates of right and duty” and that “a subject who has certain rights and duties is called a person”. This “personal unity”, he holds, consists in the “unity of consciousness”⁹⁰. However, Feder does not simply equate his ‘relative’ identity with a Lockean personal identity based on consciousness. Rather, as his example cited above indicates, he allows for several different respects in relation to which a human being can be the same or different across time. Nor does he say that a memory of the past is always required for just rewards or punishments. This is evident from the following passage.

If in some respects it can be said that a human being is no longer the same because his way of thinking has changed so much, because he seems to have forgotten everything that used to occupy him and what distinguished him: he can still in some respects be considered the same [...] and may count sufficiently as the same for a just judge to punish or reward him for his past⁹¹.

For Feder, then, the unity of consciousness or memory is only one possible respect that is relevant to relative identity.

Feder does not elaborate on this, however. Moreover, the question remains if his (1) account of diachronic identity in terms of an “inner feeling” is even compatible with his (2) Lockean analysis, appealing to a distinction between absolute and relative identity. Of course, both (1) and (2) share the view that no proof or argument for absolute identity is required. And so, if one is skeptical about the possibility of such a proof, this does not really matter, according to Feder. Further, the two accounts can be said to be compatible in the sense that (1) relates to the metaphysics of the soul and (2) to the embodied self and practical matters in moral and legal contexts. There is, then, no inconsistency between (1) and (2) in Feder. Locke, however, would have rejected (1) and the very notion of a feeling of ourselves as persisting thinking substances, partly on the grounds that there seems to be no experiential evidence for such a feeling and partly because, unlike Feder, he is agnostic about the nature of the human soul.

⁹⁰ Feder, *Grundsätze*, cit., p. 68.

⁹¹ “Wenn immerhin in gewisser Rücksicht gesagt werden kann, daß ein Mensch nicht mehr derselbe sey, weil sich seine Denkart so sehr geändert, weil er alles scheint vergessen zu haben, was ihn sonst beschäftigte, was ihn auszeichnete: so kann er doch in mancher Absicht als derselbe angesehen werden, und [...] noch genugsam derselbe seyn, um von einem gerechten Richter fürs Vergangene gestraft oder belohnt zu werden“ (J.G.H. Feder, “Ob zum Begriffe der Unsterblichkeit die Erinnerung an dieses Leben erforderlich; und aus was für Gründen dieselbe geschlossen werden könne?“, in *Hannoversches Magazin* 11 (1773), pp. 641-54, at pp. 645-46).

6. Meiners, Hißmann and Locke on the Mind and Personal Identity

As indicated, Locke's suggestion cited above that "God can, if he pleases, superadd to Matter a Faculty of Thinking" inspired eighteenth-century materialists in both Britain and Germany⁹². In Göttingen, Hißmann is the most radical in this regard. Meiners shared Hißmann's materialism, but his formulations are more moderate, and, as noted above, he later abandoned this view about the nature of the mind⁹³. Hißmann follows to a large extent, if not in all details, Joseph Priestley's version of materialism⁹⁴. Like Priestley, Hißmann does not attempt to prove the truth of the materialist thesis about the human mind, arguing merely for its high probability⁹⁵. For example, both the early Meiners and Hißmann argue against the traditional view, present in Feder, that the notion of a simple substance which holds our various perceptions together can be derived from a feeling of unity. They concede that we feel that our various perceptions occur not in several substances, but in one unitary substance. However, simplicity, they argue, cannot be inferred from unity. Indeed, like Priestley, they hold that it is more plausible to assume that this substance is complex (*i. e.* material), rather than simple, indivisible and immaterial. A simple being, they argue, could have only one perception at a time, but experience shows that we have several ideas simultaneously⁹⁶. Further, like Priestley, Hißmann believes

⁹² See J.W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter. Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Blackwell, Oxford 1982; P. Rumore, *Materia cogitans. L'Aufklärung di fronte al materialismo*, Olms, Hildesheim 2013.

⁹³ Meiners's change of mind, abandoning materialism, is evident in his *Grundriß der Seelenlehre* of 1786, cit. pp. 25, 65. See the account in Wunderlich, "Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta", cit., p. 74. Note that 'materialism' in this context refers to a thesis about the nature of the human mind. It leaves open the question of whether there are other beings (*e. g.* God) that are immaterial.

⁹⁴ For details on Hißmann's version of materialism and its relation to Priestley, see U. Thiel, "Hißmann und der Materialismus", in H. F. Klemme, G. Stiening and F. Wunderlich (eds.), *Michael Hißmann (1752-1784). Ein materialistischer Philosoph der deutschen Aufklärung*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2013, pp. 25-41. See also F. Wunderlich, "Christoph Meiners's Empiricist 'Revision' of Philosophy and Michael Hißmann's Anti-Speculative Materialism", cit., and F. Wunderlich, "Materialism at the University of Göttingen: between Moderate and Radical Enlightenment", in S. Ducheyne (ed.), *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment*, Routledge, New York-London 2017, pp. 223-39. For Priestley's materialism, see U. Thiel, "Priestley and Kant on Materialism", in *Intellectual History Review* 30 (2020), pp. 129-43.

⁹⁵ Hißmann *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 252.

⁹⁶ Ch. Meiners, "Psychologisches Fragment über die Verschiedenheiten des innern Bewußtseyns", in Ch. Meiners, *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften*, vol. 2, Weygand, Leipzig 1776, pp. 3-44, at pp. 24-27; Hißmann *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 259. Compare J. Priestley, *A Free Discussion of the Doctrine of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity, in a Correspondence between Dr. Price and Dr.*

that materialism about the mind is compatible with the Christian religion, including the belief in immortality and an afterlife⁹⁷. This was obviously considered compatible with Locke's well-known statement that "all the great Ends of Morality and Religion, are well enough secured, without philosophical Proofs of the Soul's Immateriality"⁹⁸.

Hißmann appeals several times to Locke's suggestion about 'superaddition'. He states that he believes that matter can think if it is organized in a certain way, adding that "Locke saw this clearly"⁹⁹. Hißmann's formulation seems to suggest, however, that he thinks Locke positively affirmed that matter has the faculty of thought - which is of course not the case. In short, Hißmann appears to misread Locke's suggestion as an endorsement of materialism¹⁰⁰. This is somewhat surprising, as Priestley, on whose account Hißmann models his materialism, remarked correctly that Locke did not endorse materialism, adding of course that he should have done so. "It is still more unaccountable in Mr. Locke, to suppose, as he did, and as he largely contends, that, for any thing that we know to the contrary, the faculty of thinking may be a property of the body, and yet to think it more probable that this faculty inhered in a different substance, viz. an immaterial soul"¹⁰¹.

Meiners's and Hißmann's materialist view of the mind informs their position on the related issue of personal identity which is part of their account of inner sense and of a variety of inner "feelings"¹⁰². Here, they emphasize the importance of a "feeling of personality", noting its direct practical importance¹⁰³. They occasionally use the term "self-consciousness" for this feeling, but argue

Priestley, J. Johnson and Cadell, London 1778, p. 283; and *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit*, J. Johnson, London 1777, pp. 86-87.

⁹⁷ They differ, however, in the way in which they account for the afterlife. See P. Rumore, "Priestley in Germany", in *Intellectual History Review* 30 (2020), pp. 145-166, at p. 152.

⁹⁸ Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.iii.6, p. 542.

⁹⁹ "Ich glaube, die Materie könne, den strengsten Raisonnements zufolge, allerdings denken, wenn sie auf eine gewisse Weise organisiert ist, die ich näher nicht bestimmen will, weil ich das Gehirn nur sehr unvollständig kenne. Locke sahe dieses deutlich ein, und unstreitig hat er hier, wie in andern Stücken, besser gesehen, als diejenigen, die ihn dieser Behauptung wegen für schwach gehalten haben" (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 270). See also Hißmann, *Anleitung*, cit., p. 253.

¹⁰⁰ Falk Wunderlich, too, points this out, in Wunderlich, "Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta", cit., p. 88.

¹⁰¹ Priestley, *Disquisitions*, cit., p. 31. See also pp. 32, 218-219.

¹⁰² For a detailed analysis, see U. Thiel, "Varieties of Inner Sense. Two Pre-Kantian Theories", in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 79 (1997), pp. 58-79.

¹⁰³ Meiners, *Psychologisches Fragment*, cit., pp. 22-4; 27-37; Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., pp. 144-48.

that it must be distinguished from self-consciousness understood as the feeling of one's own existence¹⁰⁴. Like Locke, they link personality to issues such as responsibility and rewards and punishments, and this connection to moral and legal issues indicates that the feeling of personality involves a relating to one's own past and thus includes memory¹⁰⁵. The feeling of existence, by contrast, does not necessarily involve a relating to the past, according to Meiners and Hißmann. Hißmann states that we have the feeling of personality "when we feel not only that we exist now, but also that we existed previously at earlier times of our life"¹⁰⁶. Therefore, he also describes the feeling of personality as the feeling of the unity of the self: "We always feel the unity [...] of our person when, during a certain period in our lives, we are conscious of certain sensations, representations and actions, and are conscious at the same time that we perceived those impressions, had those representations and performed those actions"¹⁰⁷. In other words, the feeling of personality is the feeling of the diachronic *unity* of the self.

Meiners insists that "this unity of the person must not be confused with sameness or unchangeability: the former occurs in a substance that constantly changes and whose successive modifications combine with one another and so form a connected chain"¹⁰⁸. Similarly, Hißmann says that unity, but not identity, is compatible with changeability¹⁰⁹. It is for this reason that both Hißmann and Meiners reject the idea that we have a feeling of our own identity or a "consciousness that we who exist now are still the very same persons who existed formerly"¹¹⁰. They ascribe the view that we do have such a feeling of diachronic

¹⁰⁴ Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 148.

¹⁰⁵ "Das Gefühl der Person hängt gänzlich vom Gedächtnisse ab, hat mit ihm einerley Gränzen, Schicksale und Veränderungen" (Meiners, *Psychologisches Fragment*, cit., p. 39. See also pp. 27-28). For Hißmann, see *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., pp. 145-6.

¹⁰⁶ "[...] wenn wir nicht blos fühlen, daß wir jetzt sind, sondern auch, daß wir ehemals in den vorigen Zeitpunkten unsers Lebens existirten" (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 145).

¹⁰⁷ "Wir fühlen die Einheit [...] unsrer Person immer, wenn wir während eines gewissen Zeitraums unsers Lebens uns gewisser Empfindungen, Vorstellungen und Handlungen bewusst sind, und dabey uns bewusst sind, daß wir die Eindrücke empfunden, die Vorstellungen gehabt, und die Handlungen ausgeübt haben" (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 151).

¹⁰⁸ "Diese Einheit der Person muß man nicht mit Einerleyheit, oder Unveränderlichkeit verwechseln: jene findet in einer sich stets verändernden Substanz statt, deren auf einander folgende Veränderungen aber sich mit einander verbinden, und eine zusammenhängende Kette ausmachen" (Meiners, *Psychologisches Fragment*, cit., p. 40).

¹⁰⁹ Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 151.

¹¹⁰ Meiners, *Psychologisches Fragment*, cit., p. 38.

identity to Locke and some eighteenth-century philosophers¹¹¹. In fact, as we saw above, it is a view that their teacher Feder holds.

Their argument against this view is that a feeling of personal identity is simply “physically impossible”. According to Hißmann,

We cannot at all feel that we who exist now are still the same persons who existed formerly. Such a feeling is physically impossible and whoever believes he has it is deceived. The feeling of sameness is impossible mainly because our soul is not the unchanging being that it is held to be in today’s common psychological systems. As soon as experience destroys this presupposition, however, the soul simply cannot have a feeling of identity¹¹².

Experience shows that the being we call the soul is subject to constant change; it follows (or so Meiners and Hißmann suggest) that we cannot have a feeling of the diachronic identity of our soul. There is no identity on the physical side, and “thus the feeling of identity must necessarily vanish with the flux of these organs”¹¹³.

This account calls for several comments. First, the ascription of the criticized view to Locke is highly implausible, to say the least. For Locke does not say that we have a feeling or consciousness of diachronic personal identity; rather, he argues that we have a consciousness of past actions and thoughts, and that these past actions and thoughts belong to the same person that exists now precisely because of the consciousness we have of them at present¹¹⁴. This account is closer to (if not identical with) Meiners’ and Hißmann’s notion of a diachronic *unity* of the self than to the view they ascribe to Locke.

Second, their distinction between diachronic unity and identity seems to relate to Feder’s distinction between absolute identity and relative identity. Like

¹¹¹ Ibid.; Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 150.

¹¹² “Wir können gar nicht fühlen, daß wir, die wir jezt sind, noch gerade dieselbige Personen seyn, die wir ehemem waren. Ein solches Gefühl ist physisch unmöglich, und wer es zu haben glaubt, wird getäuscht. Gefühl der Einerleyheit ist hauptsächlich aus dem Grunde unmöglich, weil unsre Seele das unwandelbare und unveränderliche Wesen nicht ist, wofür man es in den heutigen gangbaren psychologischen Systemen zu halten pflegt. So bald aber die Voraussetzung durch die Erfahrung umgestoßen ist: so kan die Seele schlechterdings kein Gefühl der Identität haben” (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., pp. 148–49).

¹¹³ “[...] so muß nothwendig mit dem Fluß dieser Organen das Gefühl der Einerleyheit schwinden” (Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche*, cit., p. 150).

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xxvii.16, p. 340: “Whatever has the consciousness of present and past Actions, is the same Person to whom they both belong”; and II.xxvii.17, p. 341: “That with which the *consciousness* of this present thinking thing can join it self, makes the same *Person*”.

Meiners's and Hißmann's diachronic unity, the latter allows for partial change, but their 'identity' and Feder's absolute identity exclude change. Meiners's expression in the quote above, "sameness, or unchangeability", is telling: to him, identity is the same as unchangeability. It is, however, problematic to define diachronic identity in terms of excluding change. The question of diachronic identity, as discussed by Locke and others, concerns the requirements for there to be identity through partial change. If we define identity in such a way as to exclude any change whatsoever then of course we have made it impossible to deal with the issue. On the Meiners/Hißmann account of identity, objects and embodied selves cannot be identical through time, as they are subject to change. Philosophers who believed in an immaterial mind or soul thought that strict identity, without change, does indeed exist in immaterial substances such as human souls. Meiners and Hißmann, who reject the notion of an immaterial soul but take over the account of identity as excluding change have no option but to deny the existence of diachronic personal identity altogether.

7. Conclusion: Locke between Feder and Meiners/Hißmann

It is plain that more needs to be said about 'Locke in Göttingen'. Only some aspects of this part of Enlightenment philosophy in Göttingen could be dealt with here. It has become clear, however, that the Göttingen philosophers' relationship to Locke is more complex than is sometimes assumed. Obviously, the simple label 'Lockean' is inadequate. While all three philosophers we have considered approve of what they take to be Locke's critique of innatism, his account of the origin of ideas in sensation and reflection and his skepticism about our ability to obtain knowledge of the real nature of substances, they hold several decidedly un-Lockean views on central philosophical issues. Regarding some topics they are explicitly critical of Locke's views and arguments. Moreover, some of their readings of aspects of his philosophy they approve of are problematic (*e. g.* innatism).

In terms of locating Locke in the Göttingen context, we saw that, while Feder is more conservative than Locke, committing himself to an immaterialist view of the mind, Hißmann and the early Meiners are more radical than Locke, committing themselves to psychological materialism. Locke, by contrast, is genuinely neutral about the nature of the mind. His statement that the "more probable Opinion" is that the mind is an immaterial substance is not argued

for in any detail and does not amount to a commitment to this position. For both the conservative and the radical strands of Göttingen philosophy Locke's appeal to experience is only a starting-point. Both go beyond Locke in their own different, even opposite ways. While Feder has links to Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, adopting the notion of natural "inner feelings" and substance-dualism, Hißmann takes up positions present in the English materialist Joseph Priestley. After Feder, Meiners and Hißmann had left Göttingen or died, British philosophy continued to be an important player in Göttingen. In 1810, Gottlob Ernst Schulze, Feder's son in law, was appointed to a professorship in Göttingen. Coming from Helmstedt, Schulze was not so much impressed by Locke, however, as by Hume, attempting, if unsuccessfully, to take philosophy back to a Hume-inspired skepticism.

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Francesco Soave critic of John Locke's *Essay*

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Abstract: In 1775, Francesco Soave published his voluminous abridgement of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, incorporating notes and appendices aimed at discussing and updating the content of the *Essay*. The paper highlights Soave's debt to Condillac, but also his originality. Like Condillac, Soave rejected Locke's opinion that reflection is a source of ideas, yet he kept his distance from the abbot on a number of issues such as the way of explaining how mental operations originate from sensation and the roles played by reflection and consciousness in the construction of the idea of personal identity. The paper also points out that Soave was quite averse to Locke's moral theory and regarded him as a moral relativist. Finally, the criticism that Soave moved against Le Clerc regarding the unorthodox implications of Locke's theory of personal identity is taken into consideration.

Keywords: Condillac, sensation, consciousness, mixed modes, resurrection of the same body.

When Francesco Soave published his abridgment of Locke's *Essay* in 1775¹, the full version of the book had not yet appeared in Italian. Fifty years would pass before this would happen². This considerable delay was due to the charge of atheism brought against Locke by many Italian scholars³, in keeping with the condemnation expressed by the Roman Church in 1734. However, other

¹ J. Locke, *Saggio filosofico di Giovanni Locke su l'umano intelletto compendiato dal dott. Winne. Tradotto e Commentato da Francesco Soave*, 3 vols., Gaetano Motta, Milano 1775. Here I shall refer to the 1819 edition in three tomes printed by Baglioni in Venice. As for the *Essay*, I shall refer to the Clarendon edition: J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975. Regarding the life and works of Francesco Soave, see E. Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by G. Pinton, vol. 2, Rodopi, Amsterdam 2008, pp. 783-87.

² Locke, *Saggio sull'umano intelletto*, 8 vols., Pietro Bizzoni, Pavia 1819-26.

³ Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy*, cit., p. 717.

works by the English philosopher were beginning to be translated into Italian, starting with *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, published in 1735⁴, then *Several Papers Relating to Money, Interest and Trade*⁵ and the second *Treatise on Government* followed in 1751 and 1773 respectively⁶. As for the *Essay*, it is likely that the favourable opinion expressed by the abbot Condillac, a great admirer of the work, contributed to increasing the interest of the Italian public towards it⁷. This was the case for Soave, whose abridgement mentions Condillac frequently.

Soave's compendium is a comparison between different texts. He carefully examined the *abrégé* of the *Essay* published in 1720 by Jean Paul Bosset, a French scholar whose biography is almost unknown⁸, but he also kept an eye on the abridgment that John Wynne had made with Locke's consent in 1696, while he was *Magister artium* at Jesus College, Oxford⁹. Wynne had managed to reduce the *Essay* to one third of its total length by skipping the content of the first book almost entirely¹⁰ and cutting out other parts – such as a large portion of II.xxi, devoted to the freedom of will. Nevertheless, his abridgement was extremely faithful to the vocabulary of the original, a quality lauded by Locke in a letter he addressed to his friend William Molyneux in 1697¹¹.

Bosset followed Wynne in selecting the contents to be included in his

⁴ In 1735, two Italian editions of Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, originally published in 1694, came to light: J. Locke, *L'educazione de' figliuoli. Tradotta già dall'inglese del Sig. Locke in linguaggio francese e da questo trasportata nell'italiano*, S. and G. Marescandoli, Lucca 1735, and *Della educazione dei fanciulli. Scritto in lingua inglese dal Signor Locke, indi tradotto in lingua francese dal Signor Coste, e finalmente tradotta in lingua italiana dall'edizione francese fatta in Amsterdam l'anno 1733*, 2 vols., Francesco Pitteri, Venezia 1735. An abridged version of *Some Thoughts* was published the following year: see J. Locke, *Arte dell'educare i fanciulli di Giovanni Loche inglese ridotta ad aforismi con alcune giunte*, D. Ramanzini, Verona 1736.

⁵ J. Locke, *Ragionamenti sopra la moneta, l'interesse del danaro, le finanze e il commercio*, A. Bonducci, Firenze 1751. The original work had been published in 1696.

⁶ J. Locke, *Il governo civile. Tradotto nell'italiano idioma e dedicato a sua eccellenza il Sig. Girolamo Durazzo*, Amsterdam, 1773.

⁷ Yolton highlighted this regarding Europe. See J. W. Yolton, *Locke and French Materialism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1991.

⁸ J. Locke, *Abrégé de l'Essai de Monsieur Locke, sur l'entendement humain. Traduit de l'Anglois, par Monsieur Bosset*, Jean Watts, Londres 1720.

⁹ J. Locke, *An Abridgment of Mr. Locke's Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, ed. by J. Wynne, A. and J. Churchill, London 1696.

¹⁰ In the Introduction, Wynne offered a synthesis of *Essay* I.i.1-3, whereas he reproduced I.i.4-7 entirely and part of I.i. 8. Moreover, he abridged a short portion of I.ii.1. See Wynne, *An Abridgment*, cit., pp. 7-11.

¹¹ See Locke to William Molyneux, 2 July 1695, in J. Locke, *Correspondence*, ed. by E. S. de Beer, vol. 2, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1976, p. 406.

abrégé, but added the *extrait* of the first book of the *Essay* that Jean Le Clerc had published in the *Bibliothèque universelle* in 1690¹². Moreover, he expanded Wynne's synthesis of II.xxi. Finally, Bosset substituted the dedication to Locke in Wynne's abridgement with a dedication to Wynne, who had become bishop of Saint Asaph in the meantime, and reproduced part of Locke's letter to Molyneux in the Preface. The *abrégé* terminates with a short work entitled *Nouveau système sur les idées*, probably authored by Bosset, containing a criticism of Locke's system influenced by Leibniz's nativism and the vocabulary of Malebranche¹³.

Soave's compendium shows some similarities to Bosset's *abrégé*. Soave eliminated the dedication to Wynne, but in the Preface he reproduced that part of Locke's letter to Molyneux that was in the *abrégé*. Again following Bosset, he included the *extrait* of the first book written by Le Clerc, but added some notes to it. Most importantly, Soave incorporated many appendices in his compendium, increasing its length considerably. The result was a work in three volumes, to which a fourth would be added in the following editions containing the translation of another work by Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*¹⁴. This posthumous text had been originally thought up of as a chapter to be added to the *Essay*, which explained Soave's intention to include it in his compendium.

As for the translation, Soave based himself on Bosset's *abrégé* though not exclusively. In the Preface, he declared that he had consulted "the great work of Locke himself"¹⁵ in order to "better illustrate some passages in the compendium that seemed to me not to be expressed with the clarity and precision that are necessary in works of this kind and to add some details that seemed to me of the utmost importance"¹⁶. Thus, Soave was not fully satisfied with the French translation carried out by Bosset, who in turn had expressed some res-

¹² The *extrait* appeared anonymously and untitled in Le Clerc's *Bibliothèque universelle et historique* 17 (1690), pp. 399-427. I would like to thank Davide Poggi for bringing this and other information on Bosset to my attention. Le Clerc's *extrait* was intended to complete the one he had published in the *Bibliothèque* in 1688, which skipped the first book.

¹³ Regarding the content of the *Nouveau système*, see J. Schösler, "L'Essai sur l'entendement de Locke et la lutte philosophique en France au XVIIIe siècle: l'histoire des éditions, des traductions et de la diffusion journalistique (1688-1742)", in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 4 (2001), esp. pp. 126-38, 161-3 e 225-7.

¹⁴ Soave translated the title as *Guida dell'intelletto nella ricerca della verità*; in the 1819 edition, this work appears in the third tome on pp. 1-122.

¹⁵ F. Soave, "Prefazione", in Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., t. 1, p. vi.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

ervations concerning that done by Pierre Coste in 1700¹⁷. On some occasions, Soave modified the structure of propositions preferring that of the English original, whereas elsewhere he introduced more drastic changes¹⁸. However, Soave's originality is more evident as far as the contents of his compendium are concerned. The appendices interspersed amongst the pages of his *Saggio filosofico* are numerous, and are often meant to elaborate on some themes that Locke had mentioned (such as somnambulism and the idea of a universal language). In the Preface, Soave explained that his aim was to update, develop and discuss Locke's ideas in the light of recent studies (those of Condillac, Charles Bonnet, Jean Baptiste René Robinet, as well as those of Andrea Draghetti, professor of Metaphysics at Brera college, and many others), so as to offer "a complete system of metaphysics" to the public¹⁹.

However, Soave did not merely mean to update the *Essay*. He found some important defects in Locke's work, beside its being too long (a judgment already expressed by Le Clerc). In the Preface, he remarked that there were some "mistakes" in it and some propositions contrary to the Catholic religion, which should be confuted. Here I shall examine these criticisms expressed by Soave, which sometimes do not concur with those moved by Condillac against the *Essay*.

1. *Soave against Locke. The Analisi dell'intelletto*

In the Preface, Soave manifested his great admiration for the contents of the *Essay*, first of all the struggle against nativism, then the enquiry into the origin of ideas, the discovery of how much language influences human cognition and

¹⁷ See J. Locke, *Essai philosophique concernant l'entendement humain, où l'on montre quelle est l'étendue de nos connoissances certaines, et la manière dont nous y parvenons. Traduit de l'anglois de Mr. Locke, par Pierre Coste, sur la quatrième édition, revüé, corrigée, & augmentée par l'auteur*, H. Schelte, Amsterdam 1700. A comparison between Bosset's and Coste's translations is to be found in G. Rooryck, L. Jookens, "Locke ou la traduction de l'entendement", in T. Naaijken (ed.), *Event or Incident. On the Role of Translations in the Dynamics of Cultural Exchange*, Peter Lang, Bern 2010, pp. 211-46; D. Poggi, *Lost and Found in Translation? La gnoseologia dell'Essay lockiano nella traduzione francese di Pierre Coste*, Olschki, Firenze 2012, p. 17, in note; p. 71, n. 141; *passim*.

¹⁸ This happens especially when Soave translated *Essay* III.vi.1, devoted to the names of substances. Bosset had modified Coste's translation of this paragraph, lamenting its imprecision in the Preface; Soave changed Bosset's translation completely. See Locke, *Abrégé*, cit., p. 137; Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., t. 2, p. 34.

¹⁹ Soave, "Prefazione", in Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., t. 1, p. 8.

finally the examination of the extent and limits of human knowledge. To Soave, Locke would be “the first and most important amongst the metaphysicians”²⁰, an opinion that recalled that expressed by Condillac in his *Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines*. In the Introduction, Condillac lauded the superiority of Locke's metaphysics, “as simple as truth itself”²¹, contrasting it with that of Descartes and Malebranche. He criticised the inadequacy of Descartes' method, which failed to examine the origin of ideas, whereas he charged Malebranche with losing himself in the intelligible world in an attempt to investigate it. He also attacked Leibniz's monadology and all those philosophical systems that, unlike Locke's, pretended to explain the essence, nature and all the properties of reality. Soave agreed with Condillac and seemed even more enthusiastic about Locke's system, which he regarded as complete in itself. In the Preface, he insisted that the criticism that Condillac and Charles Bonnet had levelled at Locke only concerned the way the development of the faculties of the soul and the origin of language were treated in the *Essay*²²; however, no one could add anything of significance to the *Essay* as far as the limits of human knowledge and the criticism of nativism and linguistic abuses are concerned, according to Soave.

Elsewhere in the compendium Soave lauded the *Essay* even at Condillac's expenses. If the French abbot had deemed the treatment of innate ideas in the first book too long, Soave maintained that this overabundance was necessary to uproot such a common prejudice. However, he took another criticism made by Condillac very seriously, namely the lack of an analysis of understanding, and tried to remedy it in a long work, *Analisi dell'intelletto* (analysis of the intellect), prefixing it to the second book. The *Analisi* set out by recalling Condillac's example of the animated statue in his *Traité des sensations*, yet Soave abandoned it immediately, considering it too long and likely to arouse misunderstandings. He was evidently aware of the number of criticisms addressed to Condillac on this account, yet he had another more important reason for keeping his distance from him. The abbot imagined a statue organized inwardly like a man, animated

²⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

²¹ E. B. de Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, ed. and transl. by H. Aarsleff, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, p. 4.

²² This second criticism was only moved by Condillac. Soave mentioned two works by the entomologist Charles Bonnet (1720-93), namely his *Essay de psychologie* (1755) and the two volumes of *Essai analytique sur les facultés de l'âme* (1760), whereas he cited four works by Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines* (1746), *Traité des systèmes* (1749), *Traité des sensations* (1754) and *Traité des animaux* (1755).

by a soul that had never received an idea, into which no sense-impression had ever penetrated. He unlocked its senses one by one, beginning with smell. The statue's smell-experience produced pleasure or pain, that is to say the master-principle which, determining all the operations of its mind, raised it by degrees to all the knowledge of which it was capable. Soave believed that sight, not smell was to be credited with this role. In his example, the visit to a garden, sight is the first sense to be awakened, followed by touch and the other senses. Why this disagreement with Condillac? The answer is to be found in the first appendix, centring around Molyneux's problem. Molyneux had asked Locke a question in their correspondence that reappeared in *Essay* II.ix.8²³. Although this paragraph is not in Soave's compendium (nor was it in Wynne's abridgement or in Bosset's *abrégé*), he must have been aware of the controversies it had stirred up in Europe²⁴. Molyneux had asked Locke whether a man born blind who had recovered his sight would be able to distinguish between two objects, a globe and a prism, which he had formerly learned to distinguish through touch. In the *Essay*, Locke agreed with Molyneux that this was impossible. He explained that our sight provides us not only with the ideas of light and colour, which only it perceives, but also with those of space, figure and motion, which it perceives together with the other senses. This second group of ideas modifies those of light and colour, that is to say the way objects appear to us, so that our senses get used to deciphering those modifications. They become able to perceive, for instance, that a change in the colour of the face of a cube corresponds to a certain depth or motion. However, the blind would not have enough time to develop this habit soon after recovering sight, so he would be unable to distinguish between the two objects. In the first Appendix, Soave tried to elaborate upon Locke's explanation. What would the blind have to learn to do to become able to differentiate between the globe and the prism? His answer revolves around the three-dimensionality of space. Only after having learned to put a distance between himself and the objects by determining their limits through sight would the blind be able to distinguish one from the other, wrote Soave²⁵. Thus he agreed with Condillac that the blind would be incapable of discerning any figure soon after recovering sight, but he rejected the paramount role that the latter con-

²³ Locke, *Essay*, cit., II. ix.8, p. 146.

²⁴ This controversy is usefully summarised in P. Omodeo, "L'abate Condillac e la finzione della statua", in *Belfagor* 47 (1992), 2, pp. 133-52.

²⁵ See Soave, "Appendice I. Problema di Molyneux ed esame del modo, con cui arriviamo a conoscere l'esistenza degli Obbietti esterni" (Molyneux's problem and an examination of the way we come to know about the existence of external objects), in Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., t.1, p. 103.

ferred on touch when explaining how this would happen²⁶. According to Condillac, it is touch that allows us to discover the reality of the external world by supplying us with different sensations depending on whether we touch our body or external objects. Soave criticised this opinion. The two types of sensation, he remarked, would be indistinguishable for the statue, because while touching itself it would not be aware of touching an object endowed with extension and parts. As a result, it could not appropriate this sensation. Only the involvement of all the senses, especially touch and sight, would provide the statue with this ability, according to Soave²⁷.

If we now return to the *Analisi dell'intelletto*, Soave's agreement with the solution that Locke had offered to Molyneux's problem becomes evident. In his example, everything begins with the "confused apprehension of a bundle of things"²⁸, that is to say with visual sensation followed by the tactile sensation produced by handling a fruit. Soave wrote, "with my hand I perceive its extension, figure and solidity; with my eyes I see its extension, figure, colour"²⁹. Again following Locke, he distinguished between the real qualities of external objects, namely extension, figure and solidity, and their apparent qualities, such as colour, coldness, warmth, etc., and insisted that the nature of the substance that constitutes the foundation of these qualities is unknown, though it certainly exists. Soave also mentioned that sensations are transmitted to the brain through "the movement of very minute parts"³⁰ exciting nerves, a statement that recalled what Locke had affirmed in the *Essay*³¹.

Moving forward in his analysis, Soave became more critical of Locke. Regarding the terms "sensation" and "perception", he informed the reader that he would use the first to signify those impressions that cause an "internal modification of pleasure or pain"³² that is not accompanied by a mental representation, whereas he would name those impressions that produce this representation as perception. By contrast, he would use the term "apprehension" whenever there was no need to distinguish between sensation and perception, so that either a representation or a modification or both of them might occur. This clarifica-

²⁶ E.B. de Condillac, *A Treatise on the Sensations*, in *Id., Philosophical Writings*, trans. by F. Philip, vol. I, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale NJ 1982, pp. 234 and 289-90. Condillac's answer to Molyneux's problem was different in the *Essai*, as Soave remarked. In this, Condillac had answered positively.

²⁷ Soave, "Appendice I", cit., pp. 107-9.

²⁸ Soave, "Analisi dell'intelletto", cit., p. 35.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³¹ Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.viii.21, p. 139.

³² Soave, "Analisi dell'intelletto", cit., p. 48.

tion was meant to correct the language of the *Essay*, where apprehension is a generic term whereas “perception” is employed both as being synonymous with having an idea, and to individuate a variety of mental acts such as perceiving the agreement or disagreement between ideas and the meaning of signs³³. As for “sensation”, sometimes it refers to the bodily cause of perception, sometimes to a kind of perception “which actually accompanies, and is annexed to any impression on the Body”³⁴.

Soave disliked this broader use of the two terms, which in his opinion prevented the reader from grasping the distinction between those impressions that produce a mental representation and those that do not. This ambiguity was the cause of a more serious mistake in the *Essay*, according to Soave. In the Introduction, Locke had affirmed that he would use the term “idea” “whatever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks”, that is to say as synonymous with “phantasm, notion, species or whatever it is that the mind can be employed about in thinking”³⁵. However, Soave remarked that the proper meaning of idea, i.e. “image”, could not be attributed to a simple modification. In accordance with Condillac, he defined the representation or image stored in the memory as an idea so as to keep it distinct from simple modifications, which would not involve any representation though they might be stored in the memory in the form of notions³⁶.

Soave’s agreement with Locke is more substantial as far as the faculty of memory is concerned³⁷. In keeping with the *Essay*, he argued that attention awakens the ideas and notions stored in our memory and that this awakening is always accompanied by an “additional perception”, that is to say the perception of having already had a certain impression³⁸. He named this act of the mind as “riconoscimento” (recognition) so as to distinguish it from simple recollection, investigating the underlying physiological mechanism in one of the Appendices³⁹.

³³ See Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.i.9, p. 108, and II.xxi.5, p. 236.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, II.i.23, p. 117; II.xix.1, p. 226. See M. Jacovides, “Locke on Perception”, in M. Stuart (ed.), *A Companion to Locke*, Blackwell, London 2016, pp. 175-92.

³⁵ Locke, *Essay*, cit., I.i.8, p. 47.

³⁶ Condillac, *A Treatise on the Sensations*, cit., p. 167. This passage appears in the “Extrait raisonné du Traité des sensations”: see E.B. de Condillac, *Oeuvres complètes, revues, corrigées par l’auteur*, vol. 4, Paris, Dufart 1803, pp. 39-40. See Soave, “Analisi dell’intelletto”, cit., pp. 64-65.

³⁷ Locke, *Essay*, op. cit., II.x.3, p. 150.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II.x.2, p. 150. Soave, “Analisi dell’intelletto”, cit., p. 69. Regarding this important aspect of Locke’s thought, see V. Lähteenmäki, “Locke on Memory”, in J. Gordon-Roth, S. Weinberg (eds.), *The Lockean Mind*, Routledge, Oxford-New York 2022, pp. 138-48.

³⁹ Soave, “Appendice. Riflessioni intorno alla memoria” (Reflections on memory), in Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., t. 1, pp. 122-32.

After having examined and rejected Condillac's opinion that memory could be assimilated to imagination, an idea the abbé probably inherited from Gas-sendi⁴⁰, Soave set out to consider reflection. Here, the influence of Condillac's sensism is much more evident, though not decisive. Whereas Locke described reflection as one of the two sources of ideas along with sensation, Condillac insisted that "it would be more precise to recognize only a single one, either because reflection is in its very essence only sensation in itself, or because it is less the source of ideas than the channel by which they are derived from the senses"⁴¹. Thus, Condillac did not consider reflection as a source of ideas. Following Condillac, Soave described reflection as the operating of the mind on the manifold contents that are in the intellect, not as a source of new ideas. By reflection, he wrote, Locke would mean "that act through which the soul directs the attention on itself and on its operations"⁴², a definition that he believed should be expanded. Properly understood, reflection would be for Soave the deliberate application of attention to whatever content, either the impressions caused by an external object or the ideas in the mind. He preferred this definition to that of Condillac, which he complained was not always the same. While in the *Essai* Condillac described reflection as the shifting of attention from external objects to the ideas that they produce in virtue of their being signs, in the *Traité des sensations* he assimilated it to transferring attention from one impression to another⁴³. To Soave, the first definition was too limited, because it concerned solely one type of reflection, whereas the second was appropriate only if the act of diverting attention was intended as deliberate, not as mechanically produced by the strength of the ensuing impressions⁴⁴. Concisely, Soave criticised Condillac for neglecting the fundamental distinction between reflection and attention, namely that the first is deliberate, whereas the second is fortuitous⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ See Condillac, *A Treatise on the Sensations*, cit., p. 184: "Memory is the beginning of an imagination that has as yet but little force; imagination is memory itself invested with all possible vividness". Soave considers the term 'imagination' as inadequate. In common usage, he says, the term signifies not only our power to recall ideas, but also that of linking them. See Soave, "Analisi dell'intelletto", cit., p. 68.

⁴¹ Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.i.4, p. 105; Condillac, *A Treatise on the Sensations*, cit., p. 158 ("Extrait raisonné du Traité des sensations", cit., p. 13).

⁴² Soave, "Analisi dell'intelletto", cit., p. 69. Soave might refer to what Locke had stated in *Essay*, II.i.4, p.105: "By REFLECTION then, in the following part of this Discourse, I would be understood to mean, that notice which the mind takes of its own Operations".

⁴³ Soave refers to what Condillac affirmed in *A Treatise on Sensations*, cit., p. 160 ("Extrait raisonné", cit., pp. 18-19): "Attention thus guided is like a light that reflects from one body to another to illuminate both, and I call it reflection". See Soave, "Analisi dell'intelletto", cit., p. 69.

⁴⁴ Soave, "Analisi dell'intelletto", cit., p. 70.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

Unlike Condillac, Soave described reflection as a set of higher-order mental operations emerging from perception, attention, contemplation and the retention of ideas, yet he agreed with him that reflection is never a source of simple ideas. Only abstraction, a type of operation deriving from reflection⁴⁶, would produce ideas according to Soave, yet these would be general ideas, not simple ideas⁴⁷.

The reflection of the soul upon itself, Soave continued, produces the “consciousness (*coscienza*) of our operations and *modifications*, of our *personality* and of all the other internal cognitions”⁴⁸. What Soave named here as “personality” corresponds to personal identity, a concept that is examined in *Essay* II. xxvii. To Locke, the foundation of personal identity lies in consciousness, which constantly accompanies our thoughts being the “perception of what passes in a man’s own mind”⁴⁹. Thanks to memory, he asserted, consciousness assures us that our self that now perceives, judges, and so on, is the same self that perceived yesterday, the day before and so on, so far back as our memories extend. This persistence of the self through recollection corresponds to our idea of personal identity in the *Essay*. Soave seemed to have fully understood that what Locke called consciousness was not reflection⁵⁰. He insisted that “sensitive consciousness”, that is to say Locke’s “consciousness”, should be distinguished from “reflective consciousness”, or the act through which the mind detaches itself from its present operations and comes to consider itself as the self that perceives, judges, reminisces, and so on⁵¹. Moreover, Soave argued that it is “reflective consciousness”, a type of reflection, that allows us to conclude that this self that now exists is the same self that existed yesterday, or a year ago. I can come to the conclusion that those sensations I had in the past belong to me just as those I have at present, he wrote, only by reflecting on them. Thus, reflection would play a fundamental role in forming the idea of personal identity⁵². I think that Locke would agree on this, because he described a person as

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 72. Soave lists three operations that originate from reflection, namely comparison, abstraction and the reflection of the soul upon itself.

⁴⁷ Soave, “Analisi dell’intelletto”, cit., p. 81.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 72. The italics are in the original text.

⁴⁹ Locke, *Essay*, cit, II.i.19, p. 115.

⁵⁰ This is a crucial point in the interpretation of Locke. Regarding this distinction, see V. Lähteenmäki, “The Sphere of Experience in Locke: Relations between Reflection, Consciousness, and Ideas”, in *Locke Studies* 8 (2008), pp. 59-100.

⁵¹ Soave, “Analisi dell’intelletto”, cit., p. 78.

⁵² Ibid., p. 79.

“a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection”⁵³, moreover he did not attribute the ability to operate on ideas to consciousness. To Locke, reflection is a mental operation, whereas consciousness is a perception. He would not agree with Condillac, who equated a lively consciousness of what is perceived with attention⁵⁴.

Moving forward to examine the different kinds of ideas, Soave detected another mistake in the *Essay* concerning the relevance conferred on the names of mixed modes⁵⁵. These sort of ideas, as Locke explained, are forged by the intellect without any model in nature, thus their content heavily depends upon the name associated with them:

it is the Name that seems to preserve those *Essences*, and give them their lasting duration. For the connexion between the loose parts of those complex *Ideas*, being made by the Mind, this union, which has no particular foundation in Nature, would cease again, were there not something that did, as it were, hold it together, and keep the parts from scattering (*Essay*, III.v.10, p. 434).

Moral ideas are mixed modes, according to Locke. Here Soave perceived a great difficulty. He wrote, “by representing in my mind those acts that are typical of a *proud man*, a *mean man*, a *drunkard*, a *vengeful man*, I find no difficulty in reiterating the general notion of *vice* on whatever occasion, without thinking of this name at all”⁵⁶. Locke would be therefore wrong in regarding names as necessary to preserve the essence of mixed modes, for Soave. He was evidently concerned about the difficulty of reconciling Locke's opinions on moral qualities with moral realism. This concern reappeared when Soave considered *Essay* II.xx and xxi, which focus on the idea of good and on the freedom of will respectively.

2. *Locke's moral relativism*

In *Essay* II.xx.2, Locke stated that what we mean by “good” is being “*apt to cause or increase Pleasure*”, a definition that Soave remarked should be modi-

⁵³ Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xxvii.9, p. 335.

⁵⁴ See Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, cit., p. 21. Soave, “Analisi dell'intelletto”, cit., p. 79.

⁵⁵ Regarding mixed modes see Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xii.5, p. 165.

⁵⁶ Soave, “Analisi dell'intelletto”, cit., p. 76. The italics are in the text.

fied⁵⁷. In an Appendix added to this chapter, he argued that good signifies first of all the object that is apt to “preserve and perfect us”, then the impression that it produces in us and finally the pleasurable sensation that we get from it⁵⁸. More substantial is Soave’s disagreement with Locke when it comes to *Essay* II.xxi.55, where a parallel between human opinions on good and personal tastes is drawn. Here Locke wrote that ancient philosophers would have vainly enquired into the nature of *summum bonum*, because

as pleasant Tastes depend not on the things themselves, but their agreeableness to this or that particular Palate, wherein there is great variety: So the greatest Happiness consists, in the having those things, which produce the greatest Pleasure; and in the absence of those, which cause any disturbance, any pain. Now these, to different Men, are very different things. (*Essay* II. xxi. 55, p. 269)

Before revelation, which grounds the hope of eternal life, this divergence of opinions could be said “reasonable”, according to Locke⁵⁹. Here Soave highlighted a contradiction. Even those who lived before revelation were guilty, he claimed, when they acted against the law of nature, because they let themselves be “blindly determined, without doing in advance a mature exam that would disclose what they should love or reject”⁶⁰. They did not act freely as they should, being endowed with the power to suspend their desires. In the *Essay*, this power is said to be “the source of all liberty”⁶¹, because it allows us to refrain from doing what our present uneasiness, or desire, determines our will to do, so that “we have opportunity to examine, view and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do”⁶². Locke emphasised that we have this freedom, as Soave had evidently noticed. In *Essay* II.xxi.51, he affirmed that true happiness only derives from pursuing “the true intrinsic good”⁶³, and in II.xxi.56 he claimed that the law of nature allows us to distinguish between true and seem-

⁵⁷ Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xx.2, p. 229. Soave likewise criticised Locke’s definition of beauty, for its being not universal: see Locke, *Essay*, cit., II. xii.5, p. 165; Soave, “Appendice al capo xii. Analisi del bello”, in Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., t. 1, pp. 138-42.

⁵⁸ Soave, “Appendice. Analisi delle Passioni”, in Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., t. 1, p. 177. Condillac’s opinion was quite different. See G. Paganini, “Un’etica per i lumi. Condillac dalla psicologia alla morale”, in *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 47, (1992), 4, pp. 647-88.

⁵⁹ Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xxi.55, p. 270.

⁶⁰ Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., t. 1, p. 195, in note. The contradiction, says Soave, can be dispelled if we assume that the pleasures Locke has in mind are not dishonest or against reason.

⁶¹ Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xxi.47, p. 263.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, II. xxi. 51, p. 267.

ing goods: "The eternal Law and Nature of things must not be alter'd to comply with his[man's] ill-order'd choice. If the neglect or abuse of the Liberty he had, to examine what would really and truly make for his Happiness, misleads him, the miscarriages that follow on it, must be imputed to his own election"⁶⁴. Thus, Soave concluded that what Locke stated in *Essay* II.xxi.55 contradicted what he had written elsewhere about human freedom, on which he agreed.

However, Soave encountered another more serious problem in the way the *Essay* defined virtue, namely as the content of the law of reputation. In the *Appendice al metodo* that concludes the compendium⁶⁵ he referred to what is written in *Essay* II.xxviii.11, "*Virtue* is every-where that, which is thought Praiseworthy, and nothing else but that, which has the allowance of publick Esteem, is called *Virtue*"⁶⁶. To Soave, this statement mixed virtue up with opinion promoting moral relativism, an objection that had already been raised by one of Locke's contemporaries, James Lowde, in 1694. Locke had replied to Lowde that what was written in the *Essay* about the law of reputation was meant to demonstrate that human opinions on virtue are not too far from what is commanded by the law of nature, in spite of their being distinct from it⁶⁷. Soave might have read Locke's reply, which was added to the second edition of the *Essay*; however, it is likely that the obscurities that he found in his views on mixed modes, the notion of good and the freedom of will inclined him towards Lowde's opinion⁶⁸.

While Soave seemed quite outspoken when criticising Locke's moral thought, he appeared much more cautious as far as his religious opinions are concerned, as we shall see in the next paragraph.

⁶⁴ Ibid., II. xxi. 56, p. 271.

⁶⁵ See Soave, "Appendice al Metodo" (Appendix to the Method) in Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., t. 3, p. 127.

⁶⁶ Locke, *Essay*, cit., p. 354.

⁶⁷ J. Lowde, *A discourse concerning the nature of man, both in his natural and political capacity: both as he is a rational creature, and member of a civil society. With an examination of some of Mr. Hobbs's opinions relating hereunto*, T. Warren, London 1694. Locke's reply was added to the "Epistle to the reader" in the second edition of the *Essay*. See Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xxviii.11, pp. 354-5.

⁶⁸ An in-depth analysis of the problems engendered by Locke's theory of mixed modes is to be found in S. Forde, "Mixed Modes' in John Locke's Moral and Political Philosophy", in *The Review of Politics* 73 (2011), 4, pp. 581-608. A different interpretation of Locke's moral thought is to be found in N. Wolterstorff, *John Locke and The Ethics Of Belief*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996.

3. *The “statements that Catholic religion must not tolerate”. The question of the resurrection of the same body and the thinking matter hypothesis*

One of the notes that Soave added to his compendium defended the Catholic belief in the resurrection of the same body. In this regard, Locke had been attacked by the Anglican Bishop Edward Stillingfleet, who accused the *Essay* of supporting the opinion that the *post-mortem* body was different to the *pre-mortem* body by denying that sameness of body was relevant to personal identity. In answering to Stillingfleet⁶⁹, Locke had confirmed that this was his conviction. Although he agreed on regarding resurrection as an article of faith, he did not deem it necessary for Christians to believe in the identity between the *pre-mortem* and the resurrected body⁷⁰.

In this regard, Soave did not comment anything when abridging *Essay* II.xxvii, where Locke expounded his views on personal identity. However, he added a note to I.iv.5, where the issue of resurrection emerged in connection with the denial that our idea of identity is innate. Locke wrote,

He, that shall, with a little Attention, reflect on the Resurrection, and consider, that Divine Justice shall bring to Judgment, at the last Day, the very same Persons, to be happy or miserable in the other, who did well or ill in this Life, will find it, perhaps, not easy to resolve with himself, what makes the same Man, or wherein *Identity* consists (*Essay* I.iv.5, p. 86).

In his *extrait* of the first book, Le Clerc had added an example to clarify Locke's opinion: if a bell broke and the metal of which it was made was melted to make another bell, nobody would say that the new bell is identical to the first. Thus he concluded that “unless one wants to depart from common usage, it should be said that those that will raise will not be the same men, and will not have the same bodies”⁷¹. In his note, Soave remarked that the example was wrong, because the new bell would be really different, both because some parts of the old one would get lost while it was melted, and because the disposition of the remaining ones would be different. Therefore, unlike the case of the res-

⁶⁹ The controversy between Locke and Stillingfleet (1697-99) is in Locke, *Works*, vol.4, J. Johnson et al., London 1801 (10th ed.).

⁷⁰ Locke, “Reply to the Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Second Letter”, in *Works*, cit., pp. 314, 324.

⁷¹ [Le Clerc], *Bibliothèque universelle et historique*, cit., p. 426; the translation is mine. Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., p. 31.

urrection of bodies, there would be no identity either of substance or form. To clarify his opinion, Soave put forward another example, that of a machine that is dissembled and reassembled in the same way as before, without any loss of parts, but he also added that, if the new bell in Le Clerc's example had the same form as the old one, everyone would say, mistakenly, that it is identical to the first. Locke was therefore right, concluded Soave, when he stated that we do not possess a distinct idea of identity and that, therefore, this idea is not innate. Notably, Soave seemed to be willing to clear Locke from the suspicion of supporting an opinion contrary to Catholicism, a suspicion that Le Clerc seemed instead willing to fuel.

When it comes to the hypothesis of thinking matter in *Essay* IV.iii.6, which had brought the charge of materialism against Locke, Soave behaved differently. He let Condillac speak, reproducing in a long note what he had affirmed in his *Essai*. Locke was wrong, so Condillac's argument ran, to believe that we cannot know whether God has provided some parts of matter with the faculty of thinking, because we do not need to know the essence of matter to be assured that this is impossible. We only need to remember that while matter is an aggregate of parts, the thinking subject is one⁷².

In the last Appendix, Soave again referred to Condillac to counter Leibniz's criticism of the *Essay*, which addressed thorny questions such as the difficulty of guaranteeing the immortality of the soul in Locke's system. He abridged what Condillac had written in his *Traité des systèmes* about the difficulties intrinsic in Leibniz's monadology and the greater intelligibility of Locke's system, without adding any comment⁷³. Once again, Soave appeared unwilling to enter into a debate upon Locke's orthodoxy, despite what he had affirmed in the Preface about the presence of "statements contrary to the Catholic faith" in the *Essay*. In this regard, he found it preferable to rely on Condillac's authority.

Conclusion

There are many other objections that Soave raised to the *Essay*. For instance, he criticised Locke for having mistakenly described what animals learn by experience as instinct⁷⁴, and for failing to clarify the mechanism through which

⁷² Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, cit., p. 13.

⁷³ Condillac, *A Treatise on Systems*, in Id., *Philosophical Writings*, cit., esp. pp. 50-80.

⁷⁴ Soave, "Appendice II. Riflessioni sopra l'istinto" (Reflections on instinct), in Locke, *Saggio filoso-*

some perceptions appear familiar to us⁷⁵. On several occasions he censured the *Essay* for the absence of a physiology of sensation, an absence that he regretted especially when he considered behavioural disorders such as somnambulism⁷⁶. It would be wrong therefore to affirm, as Garin did, that Soave confined himself to correcting Locke's religious convictions⁷⁷. On the contrary, he generally refrained from expressing his opinion on this subject, entrusting Condillac with the role of censor. Things are different as far as Locke's ideas on ethics are concerned, for Soave is quite outspoken in criticising the *Essay* in this regard.

Another of Garin's observations needs perhaps to be reconsidered. He stated that Soave increased the halo of mystery hiding the structure of reality in the *Essay*, with the aim of "taking advantage of those motives in Locke that responded to the needs of his moderate and timid empiricism"⁷⁸. On the contrary, Soave seemed eager to show how much progress scientific knowledge had made since the writing of the *Essay*. Despite agreeing with Locke on the unknowable nature of substances, his opinions were much more optimistic regarding our understanding of the mechanism of sensation.

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fico, cit., t. 1 pp. 115-21. Regarding the passivity Locke attributed to the mind of animals see J. Rickless, "Locke on the Probability of the mind's immateriality", in *Locke Studies* 20 (2020), p. 13n.

⁷⁵ Soave, "Appendice. Riflessioni intorno alla memoria", cit., pp. 122-37.

⁷⁶ Soave does the same in "Appendice al capo xix. Riflessioni intorno ai Sogni, ai fenomeni de' Sonniloqui e dei Sonnanboli, e al Delirio, e alla Pazzia" (Reflections on dreams, phenomena of Soliloquies and Sleepwalkers, and on Delirium, and Madness), in Locke, *Saggio filosofico*, cit., t. 1, pp. 156-71.

⁷⁷ See Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy*, cit., 1, p. 786.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

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The Lockean Heritage in Jan Śniadecki's Experimental Philosophy and its Reception

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Abstract: This essay focuses on the reception of Locke in both published and unpublished writings by Jan Śniadecki (1756-1830), the prominent experimental philosopher and mathematician of the Polish Enlightenment. Śniadecki, who spent half a year in London in 1787, was familiar with the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Remarkably, in his *Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego* [*The Philosophy of Human Mind*] (Vilnius, 1822), he identified himself as a confirmed, though critical, Lockean and claimed originality in developing the master's experimental psychology. Also, as a rector of Vilnius University, he propagated Lockeanism. The basic structure of this essay is as follows: First, it analyses Lockean concepts as interpreted by Śniadecki and puts them into the context of his criticism of two extremities: Kant's obscure transcendentalism and Condillac's idolatry of sensation. Secondly, it shows how, during the nineteenth century, these concepts were appropriated into the post-Kantian framework. More specifically, the essay discusses "Comments on the 'Addendum to the Essay about Philosophy'" by Vasilij P. Androsov, Russian Kantian and economist, and *An Introduction to and an Overview of Positive Philosophy* by Julian Ochorowicz, experimental psychologist and collaborator of Wilhelm Wundt. Finally, it portrays Śniadecki as an experimental philosopher that, like Locke, was in line with the early modern *cultura animi*, the conception of cultivating the mind. Thus, it highlights how digging into the past enriches recent Śniadecki scholarship by solving some interpretative inconsistencies, e.g., taking at face value Śniadecki's mockery confession of empiricism as defined by Kant.

Keywords: Jan Śniadecki, Condillac, Kant, experimental philosophy, empiricism.

1. Jan Śniadecki, “Lithuanian Jupiter” of sound philosophy¹

Lockeanism pervaded the Polish Enlightenment, and one of its most prominent figures was Jan Śniadecki (1756-1830), “Lithuanian Jupiter”, as, not without a touch of irony, his contemporaries called him². What showed him well deserving of this sobriquet was his rhetorical verve combined with a rather cavalier attitude, with which he combatted metaphysical romances, for example, the transcendental philosophy of Kant together with Romantic literature. Remarkably, Śniadecki earned the epithet “orator egregius” very early³ and lived up to it throughout his career. Nevertheless, he was, par excellence, a fine mathematician and experimental philosopher, well travelled and familiar with discoveries of his time.

What matters for the present essay is that Śniadecki possessed first-hand knowledge of sound philosophy, as he calls it, *i.e.*, the philosophy of Locke and his followers, among others, Scottish commonsense philosophers.

Let us flesh this out with some biographical information. In the spring of 1787, Śniadecki went on a six-month journey to England to immerse himself in its scientific culture, buy instruments, and meet with prominent English scholars. During his stay, he paid a visit to Nevil Maskelyne in the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, and William Herschel in Slough to exchange ideas and conduct astronomical observations. It was with regret that Śniadecki left

¹ I wish to thank Peter Anstey, Tomasz Kupś, Dalius Viliūnas, and the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their insightful comments and criticisms. I am particularly thankful to Witold Więśław for sharing the results of his archival research on Jan Śniadecki. Last but not least, I thank my good friend and excellent translator, Małgorzata Buchalik, for helping me with my rusty Russian.

² “Fulminating of Mr Śniadecki”, as Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski put it in a letter to Szymon Malewski, rector of Vilnius University (Letter of 8/20 July, 1818 (Biblioteka Czartoryskich, MS 2993, pp. 459-60)), cited after:

T. Kupś, “Konkurs wileński. Fakty i hipotezy”, in T. Kupś, D. Viliūnas and J. Usakiewicz (eds.), *Recepcja filozofii Immanuela Kanta w filozofii polskiej w początkach XIX wieku*, part 4: *Konkurs na Katedrę Filozofii w Uniwersytecie Wileńskim w 1820 roku*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2017, p. 26.

J. Słowacki, *Listy do krewnych, przyjaciół i znajomych: 1820-1849*, ed. by J. Pelc, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1959, p. 265.

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³ Joannis Toryani *Catalogus Magistrorum in Universitate Cracoviensi promotorum ab a. 1562 - ad a. 1777*, MS 2674, Jagiellonian Library. Cit. after: W. Więśław, “Jan Śniadecki (1756-1830) - uczoney, mąż stanu, patriota”, in *Roczniki Polskiego Towarzystwa Matematycznego*. Seria VI: *Antiquitates mathematicae* 1 (2007), p. 175.

England. However, while English philosophy was sound, English climate, in particular in autumn, was not⁴.

By contrast, Śniadecki did not honour German scholarship with a prolonged sojourn on his way back. The anonymous author of a review published in *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung vom Jahre 1815* reproachfully suggests that he feared exposing himself to demonised poisonous Kantian air⁵. There may be a grain of metaphorical truth in it. However, the fact is that Śniadecki studied in Göttingen in his earlier years, mastered German in three months, well enough to read Kant afterwards, and took private mathematics lessons with Abraham Kästner, the doctoral advisor of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg⁶. Later, he moved to France to meet Jean le Rond d'Alembert.

The excellent command of English that Śniadecki acquired during his stay in Germany and England transpires in his studious manuscript notes taken from books by English and Scottish philosophers (David Hume, Dugald Stewart, etc.) and interspersed with remarks that allow one to deepen insight into his published works⁷.

Another important fact is that Śniadecki's engagement with the sound philosophy of a Lockean bent had a considerable institutional impact. In 1803, under the liberal reign of Tsar Alexander I, the Schola Princeps Vilnensis became Vilnius Imperial University (Imperatoria Universitas Vilnensis). As Tomas Venclova, a Lithuanian dissident and poet, himself a graduate of Vilnius

⁴ Z. Libiszowska, *Życie polskie w Londynie w XVIII wieku*, Instytut Wydawniczy "Pax", Warszawa 1972, pp. 248-50.

⁵ [Review of] "Vermischte Schriften" by Jan Śniadecki (J. Zawadzki, Wilno 1814), in *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung vom Jahre 1815*, vol. 2, no. 162, col. 517-18.

⁶ For Śniadecki's letters in French to Abraham Kästner, see: J. Śniadecki, *Korespondencja: Listy z Krakowa*, vol. 1: 1780-1787, ed. L. Kamykowski, Gebethner i Wolf, Kraków 1932.

Śniadecki about Lichtenberg: G.Ch. Lichtenberg, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by die Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen und die Technische Universität Darmstadt, vol. 2: *Vorlesungen zur Naturlehre*, ed. by A. Kraye and K.-P. Lieb, Wallstein, Göttingen 2008, 2014 (online edition), p. XLIX. [www.lichtenberg.uni-goettingen.de/seiten/open/2/XLIX]

Cf. J. Śniadecki, *Pisma pedagogiczne*, ed. by J. Hulewicz, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1961, pp. 6-7.

⁷ J. Śniadecki, The collection of manuscript lectures, works, notes, reviews about philosophy, logic, mathematics and metaphysics: 1809-28, 1511/1/26, vol. 4, Lithuanian State Historical Archives in Vilnius.

For the description of Śniadecki's manuscripts and notes preserved in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives in Vilnius, see: W. Więśław, "Nieznane rękopisy i notatki Jana Śniadeckiego w Archiwum Historycznym Wilna", in *Roczniki Biblioteczne* 50 (2006), pp. 167-77.

Śniadecki took English lessons in Göttingen to read Maclaurin and Simpson. Cf. Śniadecki, *Pisma pedagogiczne*, cit., p. 7.

University, points out, this was part of the empire-wide educational reforms aimed at the Europeanization of Russia⁸. That Vilnius University dominated in this project and eclipsed in numbers other universities of the Russian empire, e.g., in Moscow, Dorpat, or Petersburg, has been shown in a detailed study by a French historian, Daniel Beauvois⁹. Noteworthy, Jan Śniadecki served as the second rector of this influential institution (from 1807 until 1815). Also afterwards, his authority remained substantial and, in a sense, much-dreaded, as is mirrored in his above-mentioned sobriquet “Lithuanian Jupiter”. As Dalius Viliūnas remarks, under Śniadecki’s direction, the Vilnius school turned back from Condillac’s one-sided sensualism to Locke while saving the latter’s nuanced distinctions, like that between sense experience and interior reflection¹⁰. As a result, Śniadecki’s attitude elicited some, finally unfounded, concern that he would prove a biased judge of treatises sent by applicants for the chair of philosophy at Vilnius University in 1820¹¹.

The above historical contextualization gives us a tool for examining and understanding Śniadecki’s Lockean concepts in their own terms, *i.e.*, with their oddities and incongruencies.

2. Śniadecki’s “Locke”, experimental psychologist and metaphysician

In his *Filozofia umyśtu ludzkiego* [*The Philosophy of Human Mind*] (Vilnius, 1822), Śniadecki identifies himself as a confirmed Lockean, but he also claims originality in developing the master’s experimental psychology. It is a crucial methodological manifesto and, therefore, I will cite it at length:

⁸ T. Venclova, “Four Centuries of Enlightenment: A Historic View of the University of Vilnius, 1579-1979”, in *Lituanus. Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences* 27 (1981), 2. http://www.lituanus.org/1981_2/81_2_01.htm

⁹ D. Beauvois, *Wilno: polska stolica kulturalna zaboru rosyjskiego 1803-1832*, trans. by I. Kania, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2010, p. 271.

¹⁰ D. Viliūnas, “O stanie zdrowia filozofii wileńskiej w pierwszej połowie wieku XIX”, in T. Kupś, D. Viliūnas and J. Usakiewicz (eds.), *Recepcja filozofii Immanuela Kanta w filozofii polskiej w początkach XIX wieku*, part 4, cit., p. 177.

¹¹ Kupś, “Konkurs wileński. Fakty i hipotezy”, in T. Kupś, D. Viliūnas and J. Usakiewicz (eds.), *Recepcja filozofii Immanuela Kanta w filozofii polskiej w początkach XIX wieku*, part 4, cit., p. 46.

The competition winner was Józef Gołuchowski, a Romantic philosopher who wrote a treatise in a Kantian spirit.

For the philosophy of Gołuchowski, see e.g. K. Filutowska, “German Philosophy in Vilnius in the Years 1803-1832 and the Origins of Polish Romanticism”, in *Studies in East European Thought* 72 (2020), pp. 19-30. doi.org/10.1007/s11212-019-09340-7

And just as this [English] nation laid the first foundations for sound philosophy in the works of Bacon, Boyle, Newton, and Locke, so now, while bringing it to perfection, it keeps its rightness and glory in the works of Hume, Reid, Dugald Stewart, Campbell, and others. The principle of this philosophy is: neither to add too much importance to sensations nor to build the glory of reason upon illusions and exaggerated abstractions; furthermore, to extract intellectual cognition not from opinions and speculations but from certain and commonly acknowledged phenomena; likewise, to avoid words and expressions, whose significations would not be neat and exact. In this work, I have assumed both these principles and the project of the English school. However, I have tried to present them in my way to redress their deficiencies [...] There are also two principles in which, in this work, I contradict both the French school and the English school. The first is to carefully distinguish a proposition and a statement requiring proof from a phenomenon that should remain unproven, and in this way, to avoid the false arguments abounding in philosophical writings that struggle to prove the being of bodies. The second is to abstract the activities and products of the higher powers of the soul not from common and vulgar thoughts but from sciences and skills, where intellectual forces are at their peak¹².

This balanced path of sound philosophy runs between two extremities: the obscure German school (Kant), which falls into legerdemain philosophy and scientific deception, and the French school (Condillac), which tends, partly due to misinterpretations, towards degenerating into materialism and thus towards undermining religion and social order¹³. These extremities, however, surprisingly meet on the common ground of the reductionist approach to the creativity of the human mind. In his "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'". *Rzecz czytana na sesji literackiej Cesarskiego Wileńskiego Uniwersytetu dnia 15 maja 1820* ["Addendum to the Essay about Philosophy". Read at the literary session at Vilnius Imperial University on 15. May 1820], Śniadecki shows this in a parallel that is as lucid as may be outrageous for the historians of philosophy¹⁴. Here is the gist of his argument:

While Locke claims that innate ideas are superfluous since the mind arrives

¹² If not stated otherwise, all translations are mine. J. Śniadecki, "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, PWN, Warszawa 1958, pp. 249-50.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 248-49.

¹⁴ J. Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma Jana Śniadeckiego o filozofii Kanta*, ed. by T. Szopowicz, Drukarnia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 1821, pp. 84-85.

For a modern edition, see: J. Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, *cit.*, p. 217.

from sense impressions to generalisations without them, Plato's position is the opposite.

Condillac adopts Locke's philosophy but reduces all the powers of the soul to sensations. Thus the soul as a craftsman merges with both its materials and art. Remarkably, a similar comparison is to be found in *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie* by Joseph-Marie Degérando¹⁵.

Kant, by contrast, adopts the philosophy of Plato. Nevertheless, he distorts it by introducing synthetic a priori judgements. According to Śniadecki, Kant's reasoning runs like this: Experience shows us how things are but not that they could not be otherwise. Still, certainty constructs itself upon necessity and universality and, therefore, requires synthetic a priori judgements that rest on the a priori representations of space and time of supposedly Pythagorean origin¹⁶. However much Kant may deny this, these a priori representations are innate notions infused into the soul by God, and Kant himself is an innatist in disguise¹⁷.

The above juxtaposition is mutually illuminating. Misled by speculations, Condillac and Kant are metaphysicians in the pejorative sense as defined by Śniadecki¹⁸. Both depart from their masters by believing that all people reason in the same and thus mechanical way. In their view, one can equal Newton, Euler, or Raphael simply by following the established rules of a given discipline, and this makes the concepts of genius and creativity redundant¹⁹. Here, it bears noting that, for Condillac, these set rules work like automatic mathematical substitution²⁰.

This course was unacceptable for Śniadecki as a mathematician and a rector

¹⁵ Cf. J.-M. Degérando, *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie, relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines*, Henrichs, Paris 1804, vol. 3, p. 501.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Woroniecki, "Zależność Jana Śniadeckiego od J.-M. Degérando (Przyczynek do poznania stosunku Jana Śniadeckiego do Kanta)", in *Przegląd filozoficzny* 7 (1904), 4, p. 416.

¹⁷ As Woroniecki rightly observes, this argument is similar to that of Degérando. Woroniecki, "Zależność Jana Śniadeckiego...", cit., pp. 415-16. Cf. Degérando, *Histoire comparée*, cit., vol. 3, p. 549, n. I.

¹⁸ Śniadecki's distinction between general (speculative) and particular metaphysics is similar to d'Alembert's. However, for Śniadecki, particular metaphysics is not only the experimental natural philosophy of the soul but expands to the collections of principles of other disciplines. Cf. P.R. Anstey, "Locke and French Enlightenment Histories of Philosophy", in *Studi Lockiani. Ricerche sull'età moderna* 3 (2022), p. 18.

¹⁹ Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 216.

²⁰ Cf. Śniadecki, *The collection of manuscript lectures...*, 1511/1/26, vol. 4, cit., p. 34: "All mathematicians know the language of algebra, as used by Euler and de Lagrange, but they are not Eulers or de Lagranges".

responsible for the civic and moral education of the youth²¹. Consequently, as already indicated, he steered Vilnius academic philosophy away from Condillac in the direction of Locke. His policy is all the more remarkable considering that Condillac had authored a textbook on logic, written at the request of the Commission for National Education²² and used at schools in the whole Vilnius district²³.

The big picture just presented is clear-cut. However, it does not exhaust the complexity of Śniadecki's approach. I will, therefore, go into further detail.

To start with, Śniadecki's criticism of Condillac runs throughout his works while forming a consistent whole. Most importantly, Condillac infringes the second principle postulated by Śniadecki in the above passage, and out of this arise his other erroneous arguments. In an extensive note about the term 'analytical method' and its translation into Polish, included in a treatise *O języku narodowym w matematyce* [*About the Choice of Vernacular Language in Mathematics*] (Vilnius 1813)²⁴, Śniadecki expands on this as follows.

First, he observes that the fundamental principles Condillac gives us in *La langue des calculs* are much too generalised to be efficient. In this respect, as

²¹ Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 189.

²² É.B. de Condillac, *La Logique ou les premiers développements de l'art de penser: ouvrage élémentaire, que le conseil préposé aux Écoles Palatines avoit demandé, & qu'il a honoré de son approbation*, Paris 1780; Polish translation by Jan Znoska:

First edition: Condillac, *Logika czyli pierwsze zasady sztuki myślenia*, dzieło elementarne... na żądanie bywszej Komisji Edukacyjnej Narodowej dla szkół publicznych napisane i od niej aprobowane, a teraz z przydatkiem niektórych objaśnień i przypisów przez Jana Znoskę z francuskiego na polski język przełożone, w Drukarni Akademickiej, Wilno 1802. Dolnośląska Biblioteka Cyfrowa, <https://www.dbc.wroc.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=7966>

Second edition: W Drukarni Diecezjalnej XX. Misyonarzów, Wilno 1808. Śląska Biblioteka Cyfrowa. <https://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication/3760/edition/3702/content>

Third edition: W drukarni A. Marciniowskiego, Wilno 1819.

The Commission for National Education (Komisja Edukacji Narodowej) was established on 14. October 1773. For more information, see e.g.: J. A Račkauskas, "The First National System of Education in Europe: The Commission for National Education of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1773-1794)", in *Lituanus. Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences* 14 (1968), 4. http://www.lituanus.org/1968/68_4_01Rackauskas.html

In his "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", Śniadecki gives a historical example of the association of ideas: the design of King Stanisław August to enlighten the nation immediately evokes, among other things, the establishment of KEN.

Śniadecki, "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 327.

²³ Kupś, "Konkurs wileński. Fakty i hipotezy", in T. Kupś, D. Viliūnas and J. Usakiewicz (eds.), *Recepcja filozofii Immanuela Kanta w filozofii polskiej w początkach XIX wieku*, part 4, cit., p. 97.

²⁴ J. Śniadecki, "O języku narodowym w matematyce", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, PWN, Warszawa 1958, pp. 48-52.

already noted, Condillac resembles metaphysicians, Jacks of all trades, masters of none, who, deficient in specialised mathematical or other knowledge, base their speculations ('exaggerations') on superficial common opinions.

Secondly, Śniadecki briefly examines these principles.

His point of departure is the statement: "All languages are analytical methods, and all analytical methods are languages"²⁵. It follows from this that mathematics is nothing but language, language is nothing but an analytical method, and the analytical method is the fount of all knowledge and inventions²⁶. However, Śniadecki denies it to be true, as there exist hidden algebraic pitfalls alien to assumed transparency, and not every problem is solvable by the analytical method.

In the same manner, Śniadecki dismantles three other rules²⁷.

The first says that simple things are the easiest to perceive and invent. More specifically, the association of ten fingers with ten numerical units makes it evident that every finger can signify a different unit digit. Supposing this rule holds, everybody should be capable of discovering all mathematical truths and writing the same way as Condillac in *La langue des calculs*. However, this is not the case. Thus, the argument lapses into absurdity.

The second: invention is the perception of what we already knew but did not understand. According to Śniadecki, no mathematician would dare to claim that simply-worded explanations suffice to discover things.

The third: our reasoning proceeds from identity to identity, and the art of invention functions like a simple mechanism, e.g., that of the above-mentioned mathematical substitution.

Departing from Condillac, Śniadecki gives his own definition of analysis in the treatise "O rozumowaniu rachunkowym" ["On Calculus Reasoning"] (Vilnius 1818)²⁸.

It bears noting that he attached much importance to this work. In manuscript excerpts from *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* by Stewart, written in Polish, Śniadecki insists several times that his critical dissection of arguments adduced by Condillac precedes and surpasses Stewart²⁹. Equally

²⁵ É.B. de Condillac, *La Langue des calculs*, ed. by S. Auroux, A.-M. Chouillet, Presses universitaires de Lille, Lille 1981, p. 1.

²⁶ Śniadecki, "O języku narodowym w matematyce", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, cit., p. 49.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

²⁸ Śniadecki, "O rozumowaniu rachunkowym", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 133-37.

²⁹ Śniadecki, *The collection of manuscript lectures...*, 1511/1/26, vol. 4, cit., p. 15: about Condillac's second exaggeration, *i.e.*, the claim that the mathematical sciences own everything to their

remarkable is the chapter "Nauki matematyczne" ["Mathematical Sciences"] from "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego". Here, Śniadecki considers geometrical drawings and algebraic symbols as iconic aids that allow one to achieve the rigorosity of generalised reasoning and refers the reader to "O rozumowaniu rachunkowym" for details³⁰.

The core of the analysis is, for Śniadecki, symbolic notation, *i.e.*, the analytical language unknown to the ancients, and its algorithms³¹. Remarkably, analytical language shines through its generality and brevity. Quantities and numbers abstracted from things disburden and speed up memory while garrulous common languages overload and slow it down³². Another crucial point is that,

phraseology and about Leibniz's *ars combinatoria*: "The author [Stewart] is deliberating about this visionary thought, makes objections and remarks, which are not as well presented as that what I said in my "Rozumowaniu rachunkowym". I have better explained all this. Syllogistic form possibly inspired Kant to introduce into thoughts form, upon which he erroneously built everything. That is why he did not connect the force of reasoning to the interior power and the fundamental reason but attached it to the superficial figure." Cf. D. Stewart, "Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind", vol. 2, ed. by Sir W. Hamilton, in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, vol. 3, Constable, Edinburgh 1854, pp. 104 ff.: "[SUBSECTION] 111. [...] Visionary Theories of some Logicians, occasioned by their inattention to the Essential Distinction between Mathematics and other Sciences. In a passage already quoted from Degérando, he takes notice of what he justly calls a rash assertion of Condillac, "That mathematics possess no advantage over other sciences but what they derive from a better phraseology, and that all of them might attain to the same characters of simplicity and of certainty, if we knew how to give them signs equally perfect." Śniadecki, *The collection of manuscript lectures...*, 1511/1/26, vol. 4, cit., p. 17: "Finally, he [Stewart] analyses, refutes, and criticises Condillac's [concept] of analysis and is nearly in agreement with what I have already written about Condillac. I should work on this material according to the principles I outlined in 'O rozumowaniu rachunkowym'". Cf. Stewart, "Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind", vol. 2, cit., p. 272: "[SUBSECTION] 11. - Critical Remarks on the vague Use, among Modern Writers, of the Terms Analysis and Synthesis".

³⁰ Śniadecki, "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 340. Cf. Śniadecki about *demonstratio ocularis*, *ibid.*, pp. 339-40: "These first principles and foundations of geometry and calculus are simple and so evident that it is enough to know the significations of words to see their certainty and clarity that nearly glares on the eyes. There are no intricacies, no doubts in their concepts or language. It explains why proofs and conclusions drawn thence through a logical process are called *demonstration*, *i.e.*, exposing the truth to the eye."

³¹ About Vieta's achievements as a turning point in the development of mathematics, see Śniadecki, *The collection of manuscript lectures...*, 1511/1/26, vol. 4, cit., p. 11. Cf. D. Stewart, "Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind", vol. 1, ed. by Sir W. Hamilton, in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, vol. 2, Constable, Edinburgh 1854, p. 204:

"The difference between the intellectual processes of the vulgar and of the philosopher, is perfectly analogous to that between the two states of the algebraical art before and after the time of Vieta; the general terms which are used in the various sciences, giving to those who can employ them with correctness and dexterity, the same sort of advantage over the uncultivated sagacity of the bulk of mankind, which the expert algebraist possesses over the arithmetical accountant."

³² Śniadecki, "O rozumowaniu rachunkowym", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 120-21.

while, e.g., in chemistry, it is correct to say that analysis is decomposition, in mathematics, it is not. Mathematical analysis usually begins with composition and ends with decomposition. To put it more precisely, it composes knowns with unknowns to express them in analytical language, and by distinguishing between knowns and unknowns, it decomposes compound expressions³³.

It is, of course, the point on which Śniadecki disagrees with Condillac. The latter understands analysis generally, but the former does not. Nonetheless, Śniadecki has a broader target in view: Condillac's reduction of thought to mere sensation. His reason is that this reductionist approach involves destructive consequences for dreamy young minds and algebra as a discipline. Here appears David Hume – an ally nearly absent in the big picture that focuses on the opposition between the French and the German school.

The gist of Hume's position, to which Śniadecki refers, is that "[t]he most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation"³⁴, *i.e.*, vagueness increases with generality. It reinforces Śniadecki's claim that the more abstract metaphysics becomes, the more it slips into obscurity and insanity³⁵. In his refutation of Condillac, Śniadecki assumes that it would be extremely difficult or impossible to construct a tenable proof for the identity of thought with sensation and, consequently, confines himself to a probabilistic argument. However, he takes for granted that the sense perceptions of things are more vivid and clear than their ideas. Therefore, our blurred thoughts can regain their lucidity only by being brought back to sense perceptions. And this precisely is what algebraic symbols do. Thus, contrary to Condillac's opinion, they turn out to be the brilliant invention of man and a work of art rather than nature.

While both Condillac and Śniadecki describe the clarity of algebraic notation in visual terms, only the latter considers it the mathematical counterpart of rhetorical *enargeia*, whose goal was, as Travis D. Williams puts it, to activate creative imagination or thinking³⁶. According to Śniadecki, symbolic notation demands intense attention and constant reasoning from its readers. If not sufficiently engaged, they degrade themselves to common reckoners that do calculations mechanically, *i.e.*, without understanding the underlying mathematics.

In this, there is a crucial epistemic difference. While Condillac's peasant,

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-39.

³⁴ D. Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P. Millican, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, p. 17.

³⁵ Śniadecki, "O rozumowaniu rachunkowym", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 118-19.

³⁶ T.D. Williams, "Mathematical *Enargeia*: The Rhetoric of Early Modern Mathematical Notation", in *Rhetorica* 34 (2016), 2, pp. 163-211. <https://doi.org/10.1525/rh.2016.34.2.163>

guided by analogy, counts more naturally than cultivated mathematicians, forgetful of their origins, Śniadecki's illiterate rustic may have the talent of a Copernicus or an Ignacy Krasicki, the "Prince of Poets", and never discover it³⁷. The reason is that while both Condillac and Śniadecki reject innate ideas, just as Locke does, Śniadecki is closer to Locke by granting the mind natural abilities³⁸. Condillac, by contrast, replaces them with mere analogical thinking but has to pay the price for it. Namely, he vacillates between the conception of metaphysics as the foundation of a specific discipline (e.g., mathematical metaphysics) and the above concept of metaphysics as the vague and elusive foundation of everything³⁹.

At this point, the question arises of what epistemically intrinsic motives lay at the root of Śniadecki's speculation-hostile approach. To shed light upon it, let us analyse a passage from *Filozofia umyśtu ludzkiego*, partly dependent on Chapter VII of *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* by Thomas Reid⁴⁰. Here Śniadecki discusses the problem of the interaction between the body and the soul.

While calling the first concepts of sense impressions forms or shadows, Aristotle resorted to metaphorical language, and so did metaphysicians after him. More precisely, they imagined the soul as closed in a cave, seeing mere shadows of things, or compared it to a man in a darkroom with a small hole resembling a camera obscura. It is worth noting that, in the manuscript, Śniadecki adds

³⁷ Condillac, *La Langue des calculs*, cit., p. 38.

³⁸ See, e.g.: E. McNiven Hine, *A Critical Study of Condillac's "Traité des Systèmes"*, Springer, Dordrecht 1979, p. 184.

³⁹ For Śniadecki's definition of mathematical metaphysics, see: "O rozumowaniu rachunkowym", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 127-28: "What, in my opinion, usually bears the name of mathematical metaphysics, i.e., a broad and general view of the whole discipline, consists of tracing such fundamental truths in all the branches of pure mathematics, putting them together, and connecting to the one truth, which rules over the whole realm of this knowledge. Nevertheless, it [mathematical metaphysics] should involve nothing except what calculus contains or what finds its foundation in it. To mix our phantasms or the vague principles of supposed philosophical metaphysics into this exact outlook is to fake science and turn this haughty capital of truth and evidence into a den of ignorance and dreams." Among these fundamental truths, Śniadecki enumerates, e.g., the principle of de Lagrange: 'new functions can be derived from each function', the algebraic principle: 'treating unknown quantities as known ones and connecting them'.

⁴⁰ For the manuscript draft of this passage, see: Śniadecki, The collection of manuscript lectures..., 1511/1/26, vol. 4, cit., p. 120. Th. Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man: A Critical Edition*, ed. by D.R. Brookes, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2002, pp. 104-12. In the manuscript notes, Śniadecki also refers to Stewart's comments on Chapter VII of *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* by Reid. Śniadecki, The collection of manuscript lectures..., 1511/1/26, vol. 4, cit., p. 10. Cf. Stewart, "Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind", vol. 1, cit., pp. 93-96.

more detail: “Later metaphysicians, among them Locke”, which refers to the well-known passage of the *Essay* cited by Reid: “For, methinks, the Understanding is not much unlike a Closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible Resemblances, or Ideas of things without;”⁴¹.

For the present, it is crucial to observe shifts in Śniadecki’s argument when compared to Reid’s. In Reid, it is Plato and not Aristotle who uses metaphors. In search of precision, Reid puts Plato’s thoughts about the relationship between the ‘thinking principle’ and the external world into Aristotle’s non-figurative terms and thus explains away the former’s ‘allegorical genius’. Śniadecki, by contrast, insists on Aristotle and his followers not being literal. In Śniadecki’s view, Aristotle’s and Locke’s hypothesis on the mechanism of understanding cannot aspire to be a philosophical, *i.e.*, rigorous argument (‘tłumaczenie filozoficzne’). It is beyond us to grasp how the soul conceives things that trigger the senses, and the concept of images as intermediaries between sense organs and the soul does not help much. Nonetheless, visual language, by being more compatible with the capacities of the human mind, may serve as a sensual explanatory tool (‘zmysłowe objaśnienie’) for intellectual phenomena. This line of thought justifies why we can count Śniadecki among the people about whom Reid writes:

I have met with persons professing no slight acquaintance with the *Essay* on human understanding, who maintained, that the word *idea*, wherever it occurs, means nothing more than thought; and that where he speaks of ideas as images in the mind, and as objects of thought, he is not to be understood as speaking properly, but figuratively or analogically⁴².

Despite their deficient rigorosity, such terms as imaginations remind us of algebraic symbols that visualise abstract proofs and thus make them lucid. (as spelt out in “O rozumowaniu rachunkowym”). This notwithstanding, the sense in which Śniadecki calls Locke a metaphysician here is pejorative. Since the activities of the soul are incommensurable with the activities of the body, the latter cannot explain the former. Locke, however, neglects this epistemic gap, and it is why Śniadecki plays Hume against him.

Śniadecki substantiates this by pointing out that the powers and operations of the human mind are accessible only through external or internal experience a

⁴¹ J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P. H. Nidditch, Clarendon, Oxford 1975, II.xi.17, p. 163. Cf. Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, cit., p. 105.

⁴² Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, cit., p. 136.

posteriori. External experience means the observation that focuses on external things, in this case, the products of the mind. By contrast, interior experience, in other words, reflection, focuses on what is happening inside the mind⁴³.

This concept of experience a posteriori is part of a larger project: experimental philosophy founded on the laws of nature.

The first causes are beyond our reach, so claims Śniadecki. Therefore, principles based on speculation, such as the Cartesian immutability of God, turn out useless in search of the second causes, *i.e.*, the laws of nature⁴⁴. The only safe way for the human mind is to proceed by observations, experiments, and reasoning armed with mathematics⁴⁵. This fundamental gulf between the first and the second causes explains why it is only the conditions of sensation and thought (e.g., neither sense perception nor thought is possible without senses) and not their nature that we can subject to investigation. What arises from the above theory of causation is Śniadecki's criticism of Hume, which is also crucial for complementing the big picture.

More specifically, Śniadecki finds fault with Hume from the angle of vision

⁴³ Śniadecki, "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 277.

Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 238-39.

⁴⁴ P.R. Anstey, "Descartes on Laws of Nature as Principles", forthcoming. Cf. Descartes, "Principia philosophiae", in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. by Ch. Adam & P. Tannery, vol. VIII, L. Cerf, Paris 1905, p. 62: "Atque ex hac eadem immutabilitate Dei, regulae quaedam five leges naturae cognosci possunt, quae sunt causae secundariae ac particulares diversorum motuum, quos in singulis corporibus advertimus". Śniadecki, "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 263-64. J. Śniadecki, "O filozofii", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 167: "The first principle of sound philosophy is not to search for things forbidden to human understanding and what has to remain an eternal mystery to it. Such is the status of the first causes, the first and most remote foundation of our knowledge." Subtle metaphysicians unproductively brooded over the ultimate causes of things because, as Śniadecki observes ("Rozprawa o nauk matematycznych początku, znaczeniu i wpływie na oświecenie publiczne", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 15-16): "What we call 'give reason to' for a case or an experiment means only deriving one effect from the other more general effect. The more the connection of one effect extends, the better and more fundamental *physical* cause it is". About Descartes, as seduced by fierce imagination, see: *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Śniadecki, "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 350-51: "[...] with the aid of experiments, we can explain and extend natural phenomena perceived through observation or by chance. We can even derive and show their laws. However, we cannot reach their deep and mysterious cause as embodied in primary forces except by the power of reason." Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 190: "Every power of the soul and the body has its principles of action. But discovering these principles is the work and invention of man that considers the course, the activity, and the ways of a given power. These principles are certain and eternal not because they are infused by nature but because they are grounded on truths discovered by man. In the physical world, everything happens according to infallible laws, at which man arrives through observation and experience while reflecting upon them and applying them, *i.e.*, making use of his intellectual powers."

of the mathematician by selectively referring to some arguments from *Über die Wahrscheinlichkeit* [*On Probability*] by Moses Mendelssohn⁴⁶. In the latter's view, Hume's doubts about the principle that there is no effect without cause find no justification. Given two phenomena so connected that one follows another, we reason that the latter is the cause of the former. If the same experience or experiment repeatedly gives the same result, probability increases. Consequently, the infinite number of experiments guarantees certainty⁴⁷. It bears highlighting that the high degree of probability confirmed by specific cases is what English philosophers call 'faith'⁴⁸.

What matters here is that Śniadecki, too, has written a treatise on probability ("O rachunku losów", Vilnius 1817)⁴⁹, and its content suggests that he must have been aware of differences between himself and Mendelssohn but downplayed them in his critique of Hume. Let us flesh this out.

While Mendelssohn underlines "the uncommon fruitfulness of Wolffian definitions" contrasted to Bernoulli's⁵⁰, Śniadecki omits Christian Wolff. The possible reason is that, as Edith Dudley Sylla shows, "Wolff's definition may put a greater emphasis on the ties between subject and predicate in a proposition to be known, in the sense of real-world causality, than do the definitions of 's Gravesande and Bernoulli'"⁵¹. In other words, Wolff focused more on the epistemological aspects of probability, and so did Mendelssohn lacking confidence in his mathematical skills. For example, he made unfounded but, in his view, rational choices, *i.e.*, ascribed a probability of one-half to the causal and one-half to the non-causal connection between two given events after the first observation⁵². Moreover, in his argument against Hume's scepticism, Mendelssohn passed in silence over Bernoulli's weak law of large numbers. Śniadecki, by contrast, explains its utility at least in qualitative terms⁵³.

To sum up, Śniadecki was too fine a mathematician to overlook these weak-

⁴⁶ M. Mendelssohn, "Über die Wahrscheinlichkeit", in *Philosophische Schriften*, Ch.F. Voß, Berlin 1771, part 2, pp. 260 ff.; M. Mendelssohn, "On Probability", in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. by D.O. Dahlstrom, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, pp. 241 ff.

⁴⁷ Śniadecki, "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 365.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 266-67.

⁴⁹ Śniadecki, "O rachunku losów", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 99-116.

⁵⁰ Mendelssohn, "On Probability", cit., p. 235. Cf. Ch. Wolff, *Philosophia rationalis sive logica*, Renger, Frankfurt 1828, Pars II, sectio I, caput III: De certo, incerto atque probabili, pp. 578-93.

⁵¹ E.D. Sylla, "Mendelssohn, Wolff, and Bernoulli on Probability", in *Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysics and Aesthetics*, ed. by R. Munk, Springer, Dordrecht 2011, p. 46.

⁵² Sylla, "Mendelssohn, Wolff, and Bernoulli on Probability", cit., p. 52.

⁵³ Śniadecki, "O rachunku losów", cit., pp. 112-14.

nesses. Nevertheless, he takes them in his stride to undermine Hume's argument on causation.

In this respect, Hume seems to be an unconvincing sceptic, and Śniadecki classifies him accordingly in the manuscript notes that show a more nuanced picture of the English Lockeanism:

The English school abided and still abides by the principles of Bacon and Newton. Locke described the powers and activities of the soul, overturned Platonists' false opinions about innate notions, and showed us how the human mind arrives at general concepts. Furthermore, he pointed out the necessity of language and its power taken together with both merits and flaws, put into order the sciences and human knowledge, and, finally, he taught us what is going on in the world of the mind and the realm of thinking.

Some followers of Locke, such as Hartley, Berkeley, and Hume, seduced by abstractions, went beyond the limits of human apprehension, and wishing to explain what is unexplainable have fallen into the reveries and weirdness of ancient idealists and sceptics.

Others, being more reasonable, stuck to the teachings of Locke, corrected and rectified his thoughts in some places, more orderly classified the intellectual powers, and endeavoured to describe the advantages and drawbacks of each while holding to the principle that just as the material world is to be known only through facts and sense phenomena, so too is the realm of the mind⁵⁴.

All their deficiencies notwithstanding, Locke, Hume, and Condillac were appropriate figures of reference for Śniadecki in his battle against Kant's transcendentalism, *i.e.*, in the conflict between generally non-speculative and speculative approaches. Accordingly, the picture complicates even more.

As stated above, Kant and Condillac made a similar assumption that the human mind lacks creativity. However, this is just one part of the story. Another is confusing as it tells us that the symmetry: Locke-Condillac versus Plato-Kant only works because, in this particular argument, Śniadecki confines himself to a priori synthetic judgements. Remarkably, Śniadecki was well aware of this. In his manuscript notes, we find a contrastive comparison between Locke's and Kant's concepts of imagination⁵⁵. In Locke, imagination builds its images, ideals, and plans directly upon data acquired by the senses or imitates them. Kant, on the contrary, separates imagination from sense images conceived as mere appearances and restricts it to the domain of pure reason,

⁵⁴ Śniadecki, The collection of manuscript lectures..., 1511/1/26, vol. 4, cit., p. 181.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

which Śniadecki considers a strange and risky move. The questions on the margin, e.g., “How has Kant arrived at this?”, with excerpts from *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in German, reveal Śniadecki’s thought process: hesitations and struggles that have finally prompted him to strike through the above comparison. As a result, in a printed response to the critical review in *Pamiętnik Lwowski [Lviv Journal]*⁵⁶, Śniadecki carries out his critique against the fragmentation of imagination. ‘Imaginatio’ that, as the most forceful and vivid power of the human mind, produces works of art feeds itself on all the products of the soul⁵⁷. Kant, however, artificially splits it into the empirical part conceived as a passive receptacle and the pure one confined to understanding.

To put it in a broader context, not only imagination but Kant’s entire system of thought is on the verge of collapse when confronted with the objections of experimental psychologists:

Do not the powers of the soul, taken from Plato and enumerated by Kant together with the latter’s intuitions, concepts, and ideas, need proof if Locke, Condillac, and all so-called *experimental psychologists* deny them?⁵⁸

It is worth noting that Śniadecki intentionally uses the term ‘experimental’ and not ‘empirical’. The reason is that, for Śniadecki, ‘empirical’ is unequivocally negative in two senses: as a traditional term for a ‘bad physician’ that entirely relies on experience and as a Kantian term.

As for the first sense, in the manuscript excerpts from Stewart concerning d’Alembert, we find the remark that experience in medicine differs from experiments in physics. This art cannot belong to experimental physics. Therefore, it yields the classes of empirics, theoreticians, and prudent doctors, but not experimentalists⁵⁹.

As for the second sense, in the manuscript version of “O filozofii”, Śniadecki sends packing the a priori foundations of knowledge and, at a stroke, dismisses the term: ‘empirical’, as borrowed by Kant from Wolff. More specifically, he stigmatises it as “humiliating, inappropriate and nonsensical since it refers to

⁵⁶ Cf. “Uwagi nad pismem Jana Śniadeckiego ‘O filozofii’”, in *Pamiętnik Lwowski* 2 (1819), 10, pp. 296-309.

⁵⁷ Śniadecki, “Przydatek do ‘Pisma o filozofii’”, in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 213.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁵⁹ Śniadecki, *The collection of manuscript lectures...*, 1511/1/26, vol. 4, cit., p. 18. Cf. Stewart, “Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind”, vol. 2, cit., pp. 326-27. Cf. J. Le Rond d’Alembert, *Essai sur les éléments de philosophie*, ed. by R.N. Schwab, 2nd reprint of the edition of 1805 (Paris), G. Olms, Hildesheim 2003, p. 95.

a mountebank who does not stick to the customary rules of his art⁶⁰. This word follows the false opinion that only a priori reasoning counts as genuine inference⁶¹. But to deprive reason of knowledge, as gained through experience, or question this knowledge as empiricism means demolishing all the foundations of commonsense⁶².

These expressive connotations of the word 'empirical' reveal deep sarcasm behind the confession of metaphysical sins Śniadecki addresses to the readers of "Przydatek do pisma 'O filozofii'"⁶³. The transgressions are three: "First, I confess that I am searching for". Here, Śniadecki contrasts Kantian obscurity with carefully examined objects and precise thinking.

"Secondly, I confess that, from Kant's point of view, I am a materialist, my faith in immaterial beings notwithstanding". Śniadecki heaps this calumny on himself by claiming that sense data, and not pure reason, stand at the origin of the most abstract thoughts.

The climax of irony comes with the third trespass: "I am an empiricist since I neither know nor can I notice any thoughts, concepts or truths inborn in the human mind". And this is so despite Śniadecki's reservation that sense impressions, observations, and experiments are only the raw material of science and not science itself, which resorts to the mind to find connections between them and formulate general thoughts.

Here, Śniadecki dismantles Kant's distortive conceptual framework: it works like a hair-splitting machine that grinds out a long procession of dazzling new words for old things. It is in this context that he cites Degérando: "Frappé de la richesse de la broderie, on n'aperçoit pas les défauts du fond"⁶⁴. This curiously reminds one of Degérando's defence of Locke, on whom the Kantian school unjustly laid blame for the empiricist fixation on single sense impressions⁶⁵. Degérando points out that some German writers used to confuse 'empiricism' with 'experimental philosophy' ('la philosophie d'expérience') while "l'empirisme ne voit que l'extérieur du temple de la na-

⁶⁰ Cf. M.A. Katritzky, "Marketing Medicine: The Image of the Early Modern Mountebank", in *Renaissance Studies* 15 (2001), 2, pp. 121-53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24438804>.

⁶¹ Śniadecki, The collection of manuscript lectures..., 1511/1/26, vol. 4, cit., p. 60.

⁶² J. Śniadecki, "O metafizyce", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 162.

⁶³ Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 188-89.

⁶⁴ J.M. Degérando, *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie, relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines*, Henrichs, Paris 1804, vol. 3, p. 546.

Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 218.

⁶⁵ Degérando, *Histoire comparée*, cit., vol. 3, p. 544.

ture; l'expérience pénètre dans son sanctuaire"⁶⁶.

However close this resemblance may appear, it hides crucial dissimilarities between Śniadecki's and Degerando's lines of thought.

First, Degérando tells a long story about empiricism as undermining 'philosophie d'expérience' since antiquity while writing into it Hume and, with some qualification, Condillac⁶⁷. In addition, he views Hume's relative scepticism, as he calls it, as the most elaborated form of empiricism⁶⁸. Śniadecki, on the contrary, labels Hume neither an empiricist nor a sceptic in a Kantian sense⁶⁹.

Secondly, they differ in the assessment of Kant's transcendentalism. As Sylvia Manzo shows, Degérando appreciates that Kant sheds light on the genuine needs of philosophy and, to meet them, seeks an eclectic middle way between extremities: dogmatism and scepticism, rationalism and empiricism, idealism and materialism⁷⁰. Śniadecki, on the contrary, dismisses Kant's speculations as mere prolegomena to psychology and ethics⁷¹.

Although the Kantian spirit of reconciliation animates Degérando, it is modern experimental philosophy and not transcendentalism he chooses as a remedy to sectarianism. In his view, Locke's arguments are not strong enough to counter empiricism, and this task falls on the shoulders of the improved post-Kantian 'philosophie d'expérience'.

Śniadecki respects Kant as an exemplary virtuous sage but mistrusts his philosophy⁷². Consequently, he dismisses Kantian intermediaries and adopts Lockeanism enriched in method due to scientific discoveries.

Degérando and Śniadecki consider their choices as the route to progress in philosophy.

Albeit the two men have taken different paths, they meet again at the point where they question the Kantian search for the justification of knowledge.

According to Degérando, modern German philosophers that, dismissive of all their predecessors, endeavour to provide the first and last word for the foundation of knowledge end up in infinite foundational regress. It is precisely

⁶⁶ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 359-60, n. I.

⁶⁷ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 444.

⁶⁸ S. Manzo, "Historiographical Approaches on Experience and Empiricism in the Early Nineteenth-Century: Degérando and Tennemann", in *Perspectives on Science* 27 (2019), 5, p. 662.

⁶⁹ Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 231.

⁷⁰ Manzo, "Historiographical Approaches on Experience and Empiricism...", cit., pp. 668-72.

Degérando, *Histoire comparée*, cit., vol. 3, pp. 550-51.

⁷¹ Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 238.

⁷² Ibid., p. 242.

this pitfall that Kant falls in. Supposing that the sense data are not primitive facts and lack foundation, their justification by a priori principles must be either dogmatic or hypothetical. If the first is the case, Kant commits the fault he reprehends. If the second, the abyss of regress opens up again. The solution Degérando offers consists of accepting some undemonstrable truths⁷³.

In a similar, though more picturesque way, Śniadecki compares Kant's faulty argumentation to a bridge built above the impassable gulf between the primary and second causes. Curiously, it resembles Tasso's architecture of Armida, worthy of an eleventh-century witch and not an eighteenth-century philosopher. The one end of the bridge are appearances, and the other is absolutum, *i.e.*, zero, as Śniadecki puts it with the disgust of a mathematician⁷⁴.

The complex interplay between the terms 'experimental' and 'empiricist' in Śniadecki's writings shows that his dependence on Degérando was more nuanced than Śniadecki scholars, among others, Adam Woroniecki and Dalius Viliūnas thought⁷⁵. At the same time, it takes us to the next part of the essay: Śniadecki's afterlife as a Lockean empiricist.

3. *Reception of Śniadecki's experimental philosophy: Vasilij Petrovich Androsov (1803-1841) and Julian Ochorowicz (1850-1917)*

The reception of the writings by the influential rector of Vilnius University is a vast subject. Thus, I will confine myself to two cases: one contemporary to Śniadecki and one positivist. My goal is to illustrate the terminological comedy of errors where Śniadecki's experimental philosophy plays a leading role.

Let us set the scene. In 1823, Mikhail T. Kachenovskij, professor of Moscow University and the editor-in-chief of *Vestnik Evropy* [*The Messenger of Europe*], published very critical "Замечания на прибавление к статье о Философии" ["Comments on the 'Addendum to the Essay about Philosophy'"] by Vasilij P. Androsov, a student at his university at the time and a future economist and

⁷³ Degérando, *Histoire comparée*, cit., vol. 3, pp. 406-7, note I.

⁷⁴ Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 214.

⁷⁵ D. Viliūnas refers to A. Woroniecki's essay here: Viliūnas, "O stanie zdrowia filozofii wileńskiej w pierwszej połowie wieku XIX", in T. Kupś, D. Viliūnas and J. Usakiewicz (eds.), *Recepcja filozofii Immanuela Kanta w filozofii polskiej w początkach XIX wieku*, part 4, cit., pp. 179-80. Woroniecki, "Zależność Jana Śniadeckiego od J.-M. Degérando", cit., *passim*.

statistician⁷⁶. Remarkably, he did so despite his sympathy with Śniadecki⁷⁷.

Modern scholars, such as Thomas Nemeth and Alexei Krouglov, agree that Androsov possessed an excellent command of Kantian philosophy, unusual for Russian intellectuals of that time⁷⁸. Therefore, not surprisingly, he could not stand either the tone of Śniadecki's reprimand or his arguments, in particular, because Śniadecki reduced transcendentalism to subtle but imitative patchwork philosophy. However, the picture is more complicated than this suggests since, in a way, Śniadecki and Androsov talk past each other.

To begin with, Androsov rightly observes that Śniadecki has misinterpreted the Kantian concepts of time and space as innate. In addition, he argues that it would suffice to read "Transcendental Aesthetics" to understand them correctly⁷⁹. Here, however, Androsov misses his target. Contrary to his opinion, Śniadecki did read it carefully, which notwithstanding, he saw eye-to-eye with Degérando on Kant's having just disowned his latent innatism. Importantly, in Degérando's and Śniadecki's approach, innate ideas (Śniadecki's *cognitiones virtuales*) conceived, like in Descartes, as the modes of thinking bore some resemblance to Kantian a priori intuitions⁸⁰. All this proves that Androsov did not become familiar with Degérando's interpretation. Nevertheless, this is not the end of the story.

Since a priori forms are one head of the bridge, and its construction is, in Śniadecki's view, epistemologically shaky, it does not surprise that the differences between the two men go deeper beyond specific concepts to the

⁷⁶ В. Андросов, "Замечания на прибавление к статье о Философии", в Вестник Европы [*Vestnik Evropy*] 128 (1823), 3-4, pp. 171-92. <https://viewer.rusneb.ru/ru/rsl60000084977?page=171&rotate=0&theme=white>

For the modern edition of Androsov's article, see: В. Андросов, "Замечания на прибавление к статье о философии" ["Zamechanija na pribavlenie k stat'e o filosoфи"], in Кантовский сборник 4 (1979), 1, pp. 121-39. https://journals.kantiana.ru/kant_collection/3839/10555/. For the Polish translation, see: W.P. Androsow, "Przydatek do pisma o filozofii", trans. by A. Kondrat, in A.N. Krouglov, T. Kupś, A. Kondrat, R. Specht (eds.), *Recepcja filozofii Immanuela Kanta w filozofii polskiej w początkach XIX wieku*, part 3: *Polemiki z Janem Śniadeckim*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2016, pp. 109-34.

⁷⁷ Th. Nemeth, *Kant in Imperial Russia*, Springer, Cham, Switzerland 2017, p. 35.

⁷⁸ A.N. Krouglov, "Jan Śniadecki i polemika wokół Kanta w rosyjskiej prasie początku XIX wieku", in A.N. Krouglov, T. Kupś, A. Kondrat, R. Specht (eds.), *Recepcja filozofii Immanuela Kanta w filozofii polskiej w początkach XIX wieku*, part 3: *Polemiki z Janem Śniadeckim*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2016, pp. 32-36. Nemeth, *Kant in Imperial Russia*, cit., p. 36.

⁷⁹ Андросов, "Замечания на прибавление к статье о философии" ["Zamechanija na pribavlenie k stat'e o filosoфи"], in Кантовский сборник 4 (1979), 1, p. 127.

⁸⁰ Cf. Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 198: "Neither Plato nor Descartes assumed innate ideas themselves but only their seeds".

fundamental question about the justification of knowledge.

At the same time, Mr Śniadecki praises so-called experimental knowledge (опытные знания). This effort is in vain. Neither Kant nor the greatest castle-builders of rationalists have ever had doubts that sensations are the first means (первые средства) of our knowledge, with the only difference that empiricists (Эмпиристы) consider means to be a cause. All that really exists, so they claim, appears in a certain way and, consequently, affects the senses. Shut them, and we will have no knowledge about objects. But, so idealists argue, give a man the most perfect sense organs and take away his mind, and he, too, will know nothing. Nowadays, involvement in such petty disputes is useless and completely unnecessary. The last two centuries have shown how important it is for the sciences and man to combine speculation with experiments. In this consists the main thought of Bacon, and not in acknowledging the shackles of nature and giving up speculative thought altogether⁸¹.

Since Śniadecki lauds not the narrow empiricism but experimental philosophy that holds off from posing questions about primary causes, the above passage reads like a dialogue of the deaf. More precisely, while experimental philosophy does not confuse 'means' with 'causes', empiricism, as defined by Kant, does. Furthermore, a bridge that attests to progress in philosophy, is, in Androsov's view, already built there, where Śniadecki still sees an impassable abyss. To highlight this, Androsov weaves dead philosophers, like Bacon, into the history of empiricism as enmeshed in a dichotomy: empiricism-rationalism and overcome by criticism. Noteworthy, Androsov's historical approach to empiricism resembles Degérando's, with the crucial difference that the fear of the infinite regress deters the latter from inquiring into the foundation of knowledge.

Thus, as we have seen, the old concept of the experimental philosophy of Lockean bent was gradually fading in the post-Kantian frameworks, and eventually, Śniadecki became an empiricist forerunner of nineteenth-century positivism.

This change finds its exemplification in the writings by Julian Ochorowicz,

⁸¹ Андросов, "Замечания на прибавление к статье о философии" ["Zamechanija na pribavlenie k stat'e o filozofii"], in Кантовский сборник 4 (1979), 1, p. 133.

Sadly, in the Polish translation by Aleksandra Kondrat, there are mistakes that distort Androsov's text, e.g., she translates "является в известном образе" ["it appears in a certain way"] as "jawi się nam w znany sposób" ["it appears to us in a known way"], furthermore, she renders 'средства' ['means'] as 'źródła' ['sources']. Cf. W.P. Androsow, "Przydatek do pisma o filozofii", trans. by A. Kondrat, in A.N. Krouglov, T. Kupś, A. Kondrat, R. Specht (eds.), *Recepcja filozofii Immanuela Kanta w filozofii polskiej w początkach XIX wieku*, part 3: *Polemiki z Janem Śniadeckim*, cit., p. 128.

a student of Wilhelm Wundt, a positivist psychologist, scientist, and inventor interested in occultism. In his novel *Lalka* [*The Doll*], Ochorowicz's schoolmate, distinguished writer Bolesław Prus (1847-1912), portrayed him as a young enthusiast of flying machines, Julian Ochocki, who, as the embodiment of positivist admiration for science, had "the features of Napoleon veiled by clouds of dreaminess"⁸². Importantly, Ochocki's vision is one of the conflicting choices encountered by the main character, a Siberian exile Stanisław Wokulski, and as such, it counterweights the latter's destructive romanticist love for the title doll, an aristocrat Izabela Łęcka.

Here, it bears noting that Śniadecki considered the eccentricities of romanticism as the offsprings of Kant's transcendental philosophy⁸³. Therefore, should he have had the chance to read *The Doll*, his sympathies would have probably laid on Ochocki's/Ochorowicz's side, though not without some qualifications that I will go into below.

In his *Wstęp i pogląd ogólny na filozofię pozytywną* [*An Introduction to and an Overview of Positive Philosophy*], Ochorowicz sets up Śniadecki's position as proto-positivist by enlarging the historiographical story of Lockean and Humean empiricism. Empiricism, so claims Ochorowicz, disavows reason in favour of senses and, consequently, is at the other extremity of rationalism⁸⁴. To reconcile this and other antinomies, Kant navigated towards eclecticism but failed:

Thus empiricists showed that rationalism was good for nothing, rationalists: that empiricism was good for nothing, and mystics: that both rationalism and empiricism were good for nothing. This situation was embarrassing for everybody except for dialectical philosophers since they are above every difficulty. [...] And there arises the great Koenigsberg thinker Kant who takes up the challenge of reconciling everybody. [...] To combat empiricism, he borrows weapons from idealism. Against idealism, he brings empiricism. And finally, he brings mysticism against them both. They all are beaten, but everyone takes consolation in that the others are too⁸⁵.

⁸² B. Prus, *The Doll*, trans. by D. Welsh, introduction by S. Barańczak, New York Review Books, New York 1996, p. 158.

⁸³ Śniadecki, "Przydatek do 'Pisma o filozofii'", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 237.

⁸⁴ J. Ochorowicz, *Wstęp i pogląd ogólny na filozofię pozytywną*, W drukarni J. Noskowskiego, Warszawa 1872, p. 35. <https://rcin.org.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=6803>

⁸⁵ Ochorowicz, *Wstęp i pogląd ogólny na filozofię pozytywną*, cit., p. 19. Ochorowicz's narration strikingly resembles the mocking parody of the myth of empiricism by David Fate Norton. Cf. D.-F. Norton, "The Myth of 'British Empiricism'", in *History of European Ideas* 1 (1981), 4, p. 331.

In Ochorowicz's view, very similar to Śniadecki's, Kant arranged somebody else's flowers into an artificial bouquet and mislabelled his eclectic work as criticism. Nonetheless, a lesson Kant drew from Hume's scepticism somewhat softens this lack of originality⁸⁶.

As the story continued, the pieces of this artificial patchwork, *i.e.*, in Ochorowicz's terminology, 'Kantian dualism' inherent in the Janus concept of reason (pure and practical), fell apart, which gave rise to post-Kantian empiricism also fuelled by the progress of natural sciences. In this development, Śniadecki represents a higher stage than Locke and is an intermediary between Johann Friedrich Herbart, an empiricist of a rather suspicious bent (*i.e.*, too much involved in speculations, like monads), and Auguste Comte. Most importantly, Śniadecki's contribution showed originality consisting of the two principles adduced in Section 2. Śniadecki was the first to identify concepts fundamental for the relationship between philosophy and exact sciences and thus provided a basis for later positive philosophy.

However, Śniadecki's empiricism was not impeccable. In support of this, Ochorowicz cites Polish philosopher and psychologist Henryk Struve (1840-1912). As Struve puts it, it is easy to be an empiricist and pretend that all knowledge derives from sense data if one takes general concepts for general phenomena⁸⁷.

In this way, anti-Kantian positivist Ochorowicz subsumes Śniadecki's experimental philosophy under the narrow Kantian conception of empiricism, and thus his historiographical narration takes an unintentionally ironic turn.

Noteworthy, Ochorowicz associates the term 'experimental' with the laboratory psychology of Wilhelm Wundt, under whom he studied in Leipzig, and not with the treatises by John Locke or Śniadecki. Since some details of his critical assessment of Wundt are crucial here, I will briefly discuss them.

In his *Pierwsze zasady psychologii* [*The First Principles of Psychology*], Ochorowicz appreciates that experimental psychology has fostered international collaboration and focused on phenomena and not on the illusory nature of things⁸⁸. However, a method needs to be commensurable with its subject matter, and that of Wundt is not. More specifically, experiments conducted

⁸⁶ Ochorowicz, *Wstęp i pogląd ogólny na filozofię pozytywną*, cit., p. 20.

⁸⁷ Cf. H. Struve, *Wykład systematyczny logiki, czyli nauka dochodzenia i poznania prawdy*, vol. I, W drukarni K. Kowalewskiego, Warszawa 1870, pp. 189-90.

⁸⁸ J. Ochorowicz, "Pierwsze zasady psychologii", in *Pierwsze zasady psychologii i inne prace*, PWN, Warszawa 1996, pp. 62-65.

with the aid of instruments conform with very few disciplines of psychology. Consequently, striving for precision that meets the standards of sciences ends up in imprecision, a stumbling block being the elusiveness of the soul and its activities.

This methodological dilemma emerges, for example, in the discussion about unaided direct self-observation.

Just like Śniadecki, Ochorowicz acknowledges its legitimacy, but Wundt does not, a demarcation line between these two approaches being Kant's criticism of psychology.

To cite Wundt, "Kant once declared that psychology was incapable of ever raising itself to the rank of an exact natural science"⁸⁹. However, it is possible to find a way out of the impasse: "the experimental modification of consciousness by external stimuli" is what one needs to make "the indeterminate magnitudes of our psychical experiences" more precise⁹⁰. By contrast, Ochorowicz's approach departs from this. In his view, no method of earlier philosophers, like Kant or Hegel, squares well with psychology because they cannot guarantee the status of science⁹¹. Therefore, Wundt and his student Ochorowicz differ in that the former is a moderate post-Kantian while the latter is a confirmed anti-Kantian⁹². In this sense, Ochorowicz is much closer to Locke and Śniadecki than Wundt. Still, in his eyes, both Locke and Śniadecki are not experimental psychologists but empiricists at different stages of progress towards positivism.

⁸⁹ W. Wundt, *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, vol. 1, trans. from the Fifth German Edition (1902) by E.B. Titchener, S. Sonneschein, London 1910; Macmillan, New York 1910; Kraus Reprint, 1969, p. 6.

Cf. I. Kant, "Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft", in *Akademieausgabe von Immanuel Kants Gesammelten Werken*, elektronische Edition: Korpora.org, vol. 4, p. 471. <https://korpora.zim.uni-duisburg-essen.de/kant/aa04/471.html>. Cf. e.g. P. Kitcher, *Kant's Transcendental Psychology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990, pp. 11-12.

⁹⁰ Wundt, *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, cit., p. 7.

Cf. e.g. A.L. Blumenthal, "A Wundt Primer: The Operating Characteristics of Consciousness", in R.W. Rieber, D.K. Robinson (eds.), *Wilhelm Wundt in History: The Making of a Scientific Psychology*, Kluwer/ Plenum Publishers, New York 2001, p. 125.

⁹¹ Ochorowicz, "Pierwsze zasady psychologii", in *Pierwsze zasady psychologii i inne prace*, cit., p. 69.

⁹² About Wundt's critical continuation of Kant, see: W. Wundt, "Was soll uns Kant nicht sein?", in *Philosophische Studien* 7 (1892), pp. 1-49.

4. "Riddling confession finds but riddling shrift": modern scholars about Śniadecki's avowal of sins

The positivist transmission of Śniadecki's Lockeanism has induced modern scholars to stick on him the preassigned labels: 'consistent', 'partly inconsistent', or 'genetic empiricist'. I will, therefore, present a sampling of each classification and then confront them with the reconstruction of Śniadecki's experimental philosophy from Sections 2 and 3.

In his book *Jan Śniadecki: Polak i Europejczyk* [*Jan Śniadecki: Polish and European*], Józef Żuraw takes a broad view of Śniadecki's empiricist epistemology while referring to both the latter's confession and manifesto of the middle way between the French school and the German (Kantian) school, as quoted above⁹³.

Specifically, Żuraw argues that Śniadecki declared himself an empiricist in good faith, and, in addition, not only was his empiricism original but also more consistent than the approaches of Condillac or Stewart. While both invented thought experiments with an imagined human being that experiences only a limited number of senses, neither convinced Śniadecki and, therefore, he sought a better solution⁹⁴.

Since Śniadecki focuses on Stewart's argument, let us give some details about it. To start with, such a being would possess the same knowledge about the mind as we have but no information about matter, and its language "would be appropriated to mind solely and not borrowed by analogy from material phenomena"⁹⁵. Consequently, Stewart concludes:

From these observations it sufficiently appears what is the real amount of the celebrated doctrine, which refers the origin of all our knowledge to our sensations; and that, even granting it to be true, (which for my own part I am disposed to do, in the sense in which I have now explained it,) it would by no means follow from it, that our notions of the operations of mind, nor even many of those notions which are commonly suggested to us, *in the first instance*, by the perception of external objects, are *necessarily subsequent* to our knowledge of the qualities, or even of the existence of matter⁹⁶.

⁹³ J. Żuraw, *Jan Śniadecki: Polak i Europejczyk*, Wydawnictwo WSP, Częstochowa 1996, pp. 52-53.

⁹⁴ Żuraw, *Jan Śniadecki: Polak i Europejczyk*, cit., pp. 46-47.

Cf. Śniadecki, "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 271-72.

⁹⁵ Stewart, "Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind", vol. 1, cit., p. 119.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

First of all, Śniadecki denies this while pointing out that albeit the higher faculties of the mind, as triggered by only two senses, would be severely handicapped, they would still convey knowledge about the existence of external things as causing sensations. In addition, he argues that scientific metaphysics, in this case, the metaphysics of psychology, builds itself on the generalisations that *necessarily follow* from specific effects⁹⁷. But Stewart's conclusion is contingent and, consequently, not foundational.

This criticism notwithstanding, Stewart and Śniadecki are not in substantial disagreement, and Śniadecki's comment on Stewart's note about the stability of the Solar System, as demonstrated by Lagrange, brings evidence to it.

In note I, Stewart underlines that Lagrange's demonstration merely shows that the Solar System does not contain the elements of its decay. Consequently, it cannot mathematically prove that the Solar System, as dependent on the will of God, will last forever. And this weighs in on Stewart's concept of the fundamental laws of belief, which Śniadecki, on the whole, shares:

That this stability is a *necessary* consequence of the general laws by which we find the system to be governed, may, indeed, be assumed as a demonstrated proposition; but it must always be remembered, that *this necessity is only hypothetical or conditional*, being itself dependent on the continuance of laws, which may at pleasure be altered or suspended. The whole of the argument in the text, on the permanence or stability of the order of nature, [...] relates not to necessary but to probable truths; not to conclusions syllogistically deduced from abstract principles, but to *future contingencies*, which we are determined to *expect* by a fundamental Law of Belief, adapted to the present scene of our speculations and actions⁹⁸.

In "Wstęp do *Filozofii umysłu ludzkiego*", Śniadecki similarly argues that we assume as principles statements and propositions for which rigorous proofs are not constructible⁹⁹. For example, it is not possible to demonstrate that laws discovered in nature will continue unaltered in the future. Nonetheless, in

⁹⁷ Śniadecki, "O metafizyce", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 150.

⁹⁸ D. Stewart, "Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind", vol. 2, cit., p. 381.

For Stewart's fundamental laws of belief, see: D. McDermid, *The Rise and Fall of Scottish Common Sense Realism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 113-20. About the instability of the Solar System, as demonstrated by rigorous reasoning, see: J. Laskar, "Is the Solar System Stable?", in B. Duplantier, S. Nonnenmacher, V. Rivasseau (eds.), *Chaos: Poincaré Seminar 2010*, Birkhäuser, Basel 2013, pp. 239-70.

⁹⁹ Śniadecki, "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 265-66.

their observations and predictions, astronomers do assume they will. In this context, Śniadecki remarks that de Lagrange's demonstration as strictly mathematical does not refer to God's general designs, and, therefore, Stewart's alleged critique is out of place.

To sum up, Śniadecki and Stewart agree that all knowledge originates from the senses, and we resort to philosophical belief when carrying out research, e.g., in astronomy or physics. Still, they disagree about a particular point, *i.e.*, whether Stewart's thought experiment successfully shows that the operations of the mind do not become necessarily cognizant through the knowledge about matter.

Regretfully, Żuraw does not analyse Śniadecki's criticism of Stewart's imagined human being but confines himself to an extensive quote from *Filozofia umyśłu ludzkiego*. Therefore, assuming that Śniadecki was a consistent empiricist, we are left with the question of what kind of empiricist Stewart was. In this impasse, it seems that idealist or romantic empiricism is THE term, and research literature does include it. For example, Gavin Budge argues that philosophical idealism grew out of "non-positivist classical empiricism deriving from eighteenth-century thought" and, consequently, cannot be opposed to it¹⁰⁰. Hence, the critical tradition that "has defined British 'empiricism' in opposition to a philosophical idealism assumed to originate in Germany" needs revision¹⁰¹. The mental operations of Stewart's hypothetical human being that could only hear and smell are indeed half empiricist and half idealist. Half empiricist since it has two senses at its disposal. Half idealist since its language is fit for pneumatology but not for the description of matter.

Now, when we have derived all the consequences from Żuraw's argument, it is clear that his line of interpretation clashes with Śniadecki's concept of sound philosophy, as represented by Stewart. Not only does it lead to the overrefined division of the Kantian narrow understanding of empiricism into principled empiricism and idealist empiricism, but it also nearly pushes Stewart to the opposite idealist, *i.e.*, speculative camp.

It brings us to another example from the history of mathematics.

In his essay "Jana Śniadeckiego filozofia matematyki", Zenon Roskal, similarly to Żuraw, takes Śniadecki's confession at face value. However, he limits himself to Śniadecki's philosophy of mathematics as instantiating genetic em-

¹⁰⁰ G. Budge, "Introduction: Empiricism, Romanticism, and the Politics of Common Sense", in G. Budge (ed.), *Romantic Empiricism: Poetics and the Philosophy of Common Sense, 1780-1830*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, Penns. 2007, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

piricism¹⁰². To flesh this out, mathematical concepts as abstracted from things in the real world exemplify the accommodation of a subject to an object in conformity with the general principles of empiricism. In other words, the mind creates them but not independently from sense data. In that, Śniadecki follows the empiricism of Locke and Hume: at the stage of *tabula rasa*, the human mind does not possess any mathematical beings. The problem with this approach is that it tacitly merges the concept of empiricism as collecting single sense impressions with the much more general conception of ‘genetic empiricism’ that does not do justice to Śniadecki’s understanding of mathematics. I will return to this shortly.

The label ‘empiricism’ also complicates the argument of Bożena Kuśnierz, which is susceptible to many interpretations and, as such, warrants quotation at length:

Jan Śniadecki is regarded as one of the most brilliant, and typical, representatives of the Polish Enlightenment. He was the first to introduce into Polish philosophy issues of modern epistemology, in which we can detect the influence of Hume’s theory of association. Śniadecki, while combating Kant’s philosophy, became aware of the fact that its ‘dogmatic’ character is a response to Hume’s radical empiricism. But Śniadecki for some reason preferred to avoid direct attacks on British philosophers; his criticism was directed mostly against Condillac and the French sensualists and ‘materialists’, even though it should have been directed mainly against Hume. He held that Hume’s ‘error’ had been corrected by the Scottish philosophers of common sense. This error, however, had negative consequences for French materialist philosophy. On the other hand, Kant could only be criticized for accepting as true Hume’s analysis of sensory experience. It is interesting to note that, in his refutation of Kantianism, Śniadecki refers to Hume’s criticism of metaphysics and furthermore argues that Kant was wrong to call Hume a sceptic. According to Śniadecki, Hume only derided metaphysicians who attempted to solve philosophical problems without appeal to experience. Śniadecki even echoed Hume’s words from the first Enquiry (*Enquiries*, 11) – a rare thing

¹⁰² Z.E. Roskal, “Jana Śniadeckiego filozofia matematyki”, in *Roczniki Filozoficzne/ Annales de Philosophie/ Annals of Philosophy* 42 (1994), 3, pp. 23-34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43409629>

Cf. Roman Murawski’s more general classification of Śniadecki as an empiricist: “he was an advocate of Empiricism. He claimed that mathematics was a science about the reality surrounding us, and that the source of this science was experiment”. However, Murawski does not mention Śniadecki’s confession of sins.

R. Murawski, *The Philosophy of Mathematics and Logic in the 1920s and 1930s in Poland*, trans. by M. Kantor, Birkhäuser, Basel 2014, pp. 1-5.

among Polish Enlightenment thinkers – although he did not quote Hume exactly¹⁰³.

Kuśnierz alludes to the big picture (Section 2) by showing Śniadecki as an adherent of sound Lockean philosophy, *i.e.*, as a 'moderate empiricist', who navigates between the French school and the German school. Still, she omits quite a few details, which renders Śniadecki's approach fragmented and incomplete.

First, Śniadecki criticised Locke, Hume, and Stewart directly, so it is unnecessary to search for some hidden reason why he avoided it.

Secondly, Śniadecki did not consider Hume an 'empiricist' and still less a 'radical empiricist'. Accordingly, he could not interpret the dogmatic character of Kantianism as a response to Hume's radical empiricism.

Thirdly, it is not clear what error Hume committed. Probably, it is his radical empiricism that Kuśnierz identifies as an error from Śniadecki's point of view. If so, it was not more urgent to correct it in Condillac than in Hume. The reason is that, according to Śniadecki, only misinterpreted Condillac could pass as a materialist. And one could argue that e.g. Degérando counterbalanced Condillac in his 'philosophie d'expérience'.

Kuśnierz's argument resembles Degérando's line of thought in that the latter, tracing the historical origins of empiricism, classified Hume as a more radical empiricist than Condillac. However, this is not enough to save her from the charge of inconsistency. For, she seems to juggle with the labels attached to Śniadecki and other sources during the twists and turns of their reception. Śniadecki, reduced to a cog in the historiographical machine, should have chosen as the main target of his criticism the icon of British empiricism, *i.e.*, Hume. However, he did not.

Now the question arises whether it is possible to find the same reasons in Hume, for which Śniadecki levelled his criticism against Condillac. To attack this problem, we should bear in mind that, a creative mathematician as he was, Śniadecki gives vent to his irritation since Condillac's substitution damped down the pleasure of mathematical invention, sagacity as Locke calls it in the *Essay*¹⁰⁴.

An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding provides some textual evi-

¹⁰³ B. Kuśnierz, "David Hume and Polish Philosophical and Social Thought", in P. Jones (ed.), *The Reception of David Hume in Europe*, Thoemmes Continuum, London 2005, p. 237.

¹⁰⁴ Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.xvii.11, p. 682: "Till Algebra, that great Instrument and Instance of Humane Sagacity, was discovered, Men, with Amazement, looked on several of the Demonstrations of ancient Mathematicians, and could scarce forbear to think the finding several of those Proofs to be something more than humane."

dence that supports Kuśnierz's interpretation, namely a passage about the limited creativity of the mind, which, widely known as the copy principle, reminds us of dialectic manuals of an Aristotelian bent. It bears mentioning, however, that Śniadecki does not refer to it but, in "O rozumowaniu rachunkowym", plays out Hume against Condillac:

But though our thought seems to possess this unbounded liberty, we shall find, upon a nearer examination, that it is really confined within very narrow limits, and that all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience¹⁰⁵.

Paradoxically, while Śniadecki follows in the footsteps of Mendelssohn and rejects uncertainty about the relationship between cause and effect, it is this very uncertainty that qualifies the above claim and makes room for creativity:

But do we pretend to be acquainted with the nature of the human soul and the nature of an idea, or the aptitude of the one to produce the other? This is a real creation; a production of something out of nothing: Which implies a power so great, that it may seem, at first sight, beyond the reach of any being, less than infinite. At least it must be owned, that such a power is not felt, nor known, nor even conceivable by the mind¹⁰⁶.

Noteworthy, this explains why Kenneth R. Westphal portrays Hume as a philosopher who, at the same time, adheres to the so-called official empiricist approach and comes to grips with its insufficiency. According to Westphal, official empiricism extends to the copy theory of sense impressions and ideas and concept empiricism, the latter being "the thesis that every (legitimate, genuine, significant) concept is either a logical term, a name for a simple perceptual quality, or can be defined solely and exhaustively by combinations of these two kinds of terms"¹⁰⁷. Nonetheless, neither copy theory nor concept empiricism is up to the mark. The point at issue is how, with general ideas and terms, our imagination and understanding can identify perceptually unspecific classifications¹⁰⁸.

However, as we have seen, Śniadecki found no tension here. For him, al-

¹⁰⁵ D. Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.J.R. Millican, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, section II.5, p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, cit., section VII.17, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰⁷ K. Westphal, "Hume, Empiricism and the Generality of Thought", in *Dialogue* 52 (2013), 2, p. 236.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

gebraic symbols could make such operations perceptually specific again and foster invention. Generally speaking, Śniadecki's concept of invention in mathematics was close to Hume's views, as expressed in *A Treatise of Human Nature*:

Truth is of two kinds, consisting either in the discovery of the proportions of ideas, consider'd as such, or in the conformity of our ideas of objects to their real existence. 'Tis certain, that the former species of truth, is not desir'd merely as truth, and that 'tis not the justness of our conclusions, which alone gives the pleasure. [...] in an arithmetical operation, where both the truth and the assurance are of the same nature, as in the most profound algebraical problem, the pleasure is very inconsiderable, if rather it does not degenerate into pain: Which is an evident proof, that the satisfaction, which we sometimes receive from the discovery of truth, proceeds not from it, merely as such, but only as endow'd with certain qualities.
The first and most considerable circumstance requisite to render truth agreeable, is the genius and capacity, which is employ'd in its invention and discovery¹⁰⁹.

Of course, this conflicts with Condillac's blasphemy that the leaps of inventory and philosophical genius are mere illusions, and, consequently, we do not need Locke for philosophising:

Elle [la métaphysique des inventeurs] était simple [...] ; et elle ne demandait point d'efforts, parce que la bonne métaphysique n'en demande pas. Elle ne vous apprend que ce que vous faites naturellement, et vous la sauriez mieux que Locke, si vous saviez vous observer¹¹⁰.

Among the final lessons to be drawn from this is the inadequacy of both Roskal's and Kuśnierz's approaches to Śniadecki.

Genetic empiricism, as defined by Roskal, covers only the conformity of mathematical concepts to objects in the real world but disregards the other genre of truth mentioned by Hume: the one that requires genius and capacity. This omission is the more striking that Roskal underscores the algebraic character of mathematics in Śniadecki and goes into the characteristics of the symbolic language of algebra. It should also be clear that only grossly misconstrued Hume could be an equally good target for Śniadecki as Condillac.

¹⁰⁹ D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature. A Critical Edition*, vol. 1: *Texts*, ed. by D.F. Norton, M.J. Norton, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2007, 2.3.10, p. 287.

¹¹⁰ Condillac, *La Langue des calculs*, cit., pp. 211-12.

5. Concluding remarks

In concluding, let me briefly return to Śniadecki's concept of mathematics and highlight that he was a critical and institutionally influential Lockean but did not have full command of the master's experimental *cultura animi*.

In *Filozofia umyśtu ludzkiego*, Śniadecki opposes attention to distraction and shows the harmful effects of the latter¹¹¹. He calls inattention a mental handicap and finds it curious that Locke hardly mentioned such a crucial intellectual power. Of course, inattention is not a power but rather the defect of one. Therefore, again, Śniadecki betrays his characteristic imprecision. The context, however, makes his thought clear enough. And it is here where a gap in Śniadecki's knowledge of Locke transpires. For, he probably did not read *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (1706), in particular, the chapter about the wandering of thoughts, where Locke acknowledges the severe impact of this weakness but offers only a general cure: building up the habit of attention:

A proper and effectual remedie for this wandering of thought I would be glad to finde. He that shall propose such an one would doe great service to the studious and contemplative part of man kinde and perhaps help unthinkeing men to become thinkeing¹¹².

In this respect, Śniadecki is more precise than Locke by prescribing young minds exercises in Euclidean geometry. Considering his views on the superiority of algebra, it looks like a paradox, at least at first glance. Contrary to Descartes, Śniadecki supposes that ancient geometers did not hide their knowledge of analysis by design but could not express their intuition of algebra by lacking, as already stated, symbolic language¹¹³. As a result, their proofs placed

¹¹¹ Śniadecki, "Filozofia umyśtu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 280-83.

¹¹² J. Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. by P. Schuurman, PhD thesis, University of Keele, 2000, par. 64, p. 210.

¹¹³ J. Śniadecki, "O Józefie Ludwiku de Lagrange, pierwszym geometrze naszego wieku", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, cit., p. 82: "...ancient geometers did not have algebraic language at their disposal but explained their reasonings through the common one, and, therefore, they did not need to take vanishing quantities into account. For, what algebraic language shows us was naturally beyond the reach of the common language. However, while they avoided expressing this not to obscure their speech, could they not think the same in their proofs as we do?" Descartes, "Secondes Réponses", in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, cit., vol. IX, L. Cerf, Paris 1904, p. 122. Cf. L. Newman, "Descartes on the Method of Analysis", in S. Nadler, T. M. Schmalz, and D. Antoine-Mahut (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Descartes and Cartesianism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019, pp. 64-88.

a heavy burden upon memory¹¹⁴. Nevertheless, what is vice, can transform itself into virtue, in this case, a pedagogical one. Following geometrical drawings engages attention, and thus it strengthens the habit of this power. Consequently, diligent pupils can turn it into a weapon against Kantian hair-splitting (Śniadecki does not mention Kant by name this time) and Condillac's idolatry of sensation, both inflicting attention¹¹⁵. Noteworthy, these pedagogical instructions complement Locke's reflections on diagrams as a method of fixing ideas (the *Essay*) and a propaedeutic role of mathematics (*Of the Conduct of the Understanding*)¹¹⁶.

To sum up, the differences between Śniadecki and Locke are substantial. For example, Śniadecki did not consider moral philosophy capable of equaling mathematics and attaining the status of demonstrative science as Locke did¹¹⁷. Nonetheless, similarly to Locke, he was in line with *cultura animi*, the dynamic "conception that takes the human mind as an object of cure, train-

¹¹⁴ Śniadecki, "O rozumowaniu rachunkowym", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, cit., p. 132: "For us, all truths become visible in symbolic expression and do not burden memory, while, for ancient geometers, they depended on volatile words and, consequently, required memory and attention. The longer the series of truths memory and attention ran through, the more loaded both were. For ancient geometers, it was necessary to remember all thoughts and concentrate on their usage while expressing them in language. For us, it suffices to understand language, and these thoughts come into sight. The mere resorting to symbolic characters allows one to use and compare concepts without new intellectual effort."

¹¹⁵ Śniadecki, "Filozofia umysłu ludzkiego", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., p. 282: "The excessive divisions, in particular, of terms and detached thoughts, and, again, the further subdivisions of these divisions exhaust and perplex attention. That is why it is correct to say that overnice order causes disorder and confusion. But on the other hand, the excessive simplification of matter by inventing unity, where there is none, is the second fault that either preys on the strength of attention or makes it crazy by conjectures." Here, Śniadecki resorts to a comparison: "Condillac calls all the powers of the soul sensation because all thoughts and intellectual activities begin from it. It is as if we would like to call all things exposed to the eye the light just because the light stands at the origin of sight."

¹¹⁶ Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.iii.19, p. 550: "Diagrams drawn on Paper are Copies of the Ideas in the Mind, and not liable to the Uncertainty that Words carry in their Signification. An Angle, Circle, or Square, drawn in Lines, lies open to the view, and cannot be mistaken: It remains unchangeable, and may at leisure be considered, and examined, and the Demonstration be revised, and all the parts of it may be gone over more than once, without any danger of the least change in the Ideas." Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, cit., § 17, p. 164: "...would you have a man reason well you must use him to it betimes exercise his minde in observeing the connection of Ideas and following them in train. Noe thing does this better than Mathematicks which therefor I thinke should be taught all those who have the time and oportunity, not soe much to make them mathematicians as to make them reasonable creatures".

¹¹⁷ Śniadecki, "O rozumowaniu rachunkowym", in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 1, cit., p. 137. Cf. Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.iii.18, p. 549. Cf. P.R. Anstey, *John Locke and Natural Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, p. 125.

ing, and cultivation”¹¹⁸. It explains why, for Śniadecki, the inaccessibility of the first causes infused with pessimism squares well with epistemic optimism, e.g., the possibility of extracting the experimental laws of nature and progressing towards a moral or rational society.

Unfortunately for Śniadecki, the civic side of his experimental philosophy has become smothered under the increasingly domineering paradigm of “systematic, timeless, and context-free search for truth”¹¹⁹. As Knud Haakonssen rightly observes, the history of philosophy as reduced by Kant to an epistemological clash between rationalism and empiricism was a significant step in this direction¹²⁰. Although Śniadecki ridiculed Kant, a historiographical machine well-oiled by the latter has not spared him. Remarkably, Śniadecki’s colourful language hits the essence of this process in a puckish way. In his manuscript notes, the biting criticism of transcendentalism shares the page with ‘cella kuchenna’ (a kitchen storeroom), *i.e.*, the list of courses, such as French soup and asparagus¹²¹. Curiously, Śniadecki did compare Kant’s project to cuisine, though to the bad and by no means French. To get rid of empiricism, so he claims, the Königsberg sage peeled reason of all bodily movements and bonds indispensable for society and served us metaphysical cured bacon¹²².

Ironically, as already indicated, Śniadecki’s vivid metaphor also applies to himself as labelled with the etiquette ‘empiricist’ in modern scholarship. The reason is that Śniadecki’s experimental philosophy has become, in a sense, smoked along as the nuances of his approach to Locke, Degérando, or Mendelssohn have been flattening through the change of the philosophical paradigm. However, looking at Śniadecki through his lens, we discover that his thunderous rhetoric with all its contradictions (e.g., Hume being both a sceptic and a non-sceptic) is, at the same time, more complex and consistent than scholars have generally recognised.

¹¹⁸ S. Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind: Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern ‘cultura animi’ Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2011, p. 146.

¹¹⁹ K. Haakonssen, “The History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy: History or Philosophy?”, in K. Haakonssen (ed.), in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, p. 18.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20. Cf. Anstey, “Locke and French Enlightenment Histories of Philosophy”, cit.

¹²¹ Śniadecki, The collection of manuscript lectures..., 1511/1/26, vol. 4, cit., p. 75.

¹²² Śniadecki, “Przydatek do ‘Pisma o filozofii’”, in *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 240-41.

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Pétrir les hommes des Lumières: un siècle de traductions de *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*

Elena Muceni

Abstract: Philosophical historiography traditionally considers *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as Locke's crucial contribution to the development of early modern Western philosophy. However, despite its notoriety and the profound influence it exerted on the contemporary philosophical scene, this pivotal essay was not – from the point of view of book history – the best seller among the works by the English philosopher. It proved to be less commercially successful and had lower circulation than another treatise, which served as a “laboratory” for Locke's philosophy: *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. The article aims at presenting an original overview of the main French, Dutch, German, Italian and Spanish translations of the text, produced during the 18th century, highlighting their peculiarities, and investigating their publishing history – exploiting paratextual elements and clues from secondary sources. Based on the analysis of translators' remarks and printers' editorial strategies, the article puts forward hypotheses on the European reception of Locke's essay on education within different cultural contexts, at different times.

Keywords: Some Thoughts Concerning Education, 18th century, pedagogy, translations, reception.

Figure prééminente de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne, Locke a aussi inscrit son nom dans l'histoire de la pédagogie, grâce notamment à la publication de ce petit traité – se présentant souvent, matériellement, sous forme d'un in-12° – qui porte le titre, quelque peu vague et modeste, de *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*¹ (dorénavant *Thoughts Concerning Education*)². C'est à

¹ L'autre écrit de Locke sur l'éducation, *On the Conduct of Understanding*, publié posthume, a eu un retentissement et un impact nettement plus modestes, comme on peut l'apprécier en parcourant la bibliographie établie par Paul Schuurman et annexée à son édition du manuscrit du texte, disponible en ligne : https://repub.eur.nl/pub/11839/Locke_-_Of_the_Conduct_of_the_Understanding.pdf.

² Nous allons utiliser cette abréviation dans le corps de l'article, car elle permet une meilleure fruição de la lecture. Dans les notes, en revanche, nous allons nous référer au texte avec l'acronyme *STCE*.

ce texte, qui a vu le jour à la faveur d'un heureux concours de circonstances, que l'histoire du livre doit adjoindre le label de bestseller parmi les ouvrages de l'auteur, en raison d'un succès commercial prodigieux et persistant. Laboratoire de certaines réflexions détaillées dans l'*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, abordées ici sous un angle pratique, les *Thoughts Concerning Education*, qui inspectaient un sujet du plus grand intérêt, mais peu exploré par la littérature scientifique de l'époque, étaient évidemment destinés à recevoir un accueil enthousiaste; mais ce destin ne se serait pas accompli pleinement sans le concours d'une traduction – la traduction en français réalisée par Pierre Coste – qui a amplifié énormément le retentissement de l'ouvrage, et qui a offert des clés d'accès au texte que les traductions ultérieures ont exploitées systématiquement pour le réactualiser. Cette traduction, qui a été perçue par les contemporains presque comme une deuxième version originale, et dont la diffusion a été promue par des rééditions régulières, a assuré aux *Thoughts Concerning Education* une immense et durable fortune. À partir de l'examen d'éléments bibliographiques, notre recherche offre un aperçu des vicissitudes de l'ouvrage au XVIII^e siècle, à travers l'étude de ses traductions. En creusant l'histoire éditoriale de celles-ci et en examinant l'approche au texte adoptée, au cas par cas, par les éditeurs, nous allons aussi esquisser des hypothèses concernant la réception de l'ouvrage dans différents contextes culturels et linguistiques, à différents moments du siècle des Lumières.

1. Some Thoughts Concerning Education et l'enfant de Locke

Sans prétendre avancer des interprétations substantielles des *Thoughts Concerning Education* – qui ont été amplement commentés et étudiés³ – nous voudrions évoquer ici quelques éléments concernant leur genèse et leur architecture, qui permettent de mieux comprendre les raisons de leur fortune et de l'intérêt qu'ils ont suscité chez les contemporains.

Il est notoire que les *Thoughts Concerning Education* résultent de la réorganisation et de l'élaboration des réflexions que Locke avait ébauchées dans

³ Plusieurs éditions critiques de l'ouvrage ont paru: James L. Axtell (éd.), *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1968; Ruth W. Grant et Nathan Tarcov (éds.), *Some Thoughts concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1996; J. Yolton, *John Locke: Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2000. Pour les études consacrées à l'ouvrage, nous renvoyons le lecteur à la bibliographie offerte par John C. Attig dans le site *John Locke resources* (<https://openpublishing.psu.edu/locke/bib/early-wk.html>).

sa correspondance avec les époux Clarke. À partir du mois de juillet 1684, pendant qu'il séjournait aux Pays-Bas, Locke a envoyé à Edward Clarke, qui lui avait demandé des conseils pour l'éducation de son fils, une série de lettres contenant des recommandations particulières et des considérations générales sur les méthodes pour éduquer un jeune "gentleman". Au début des années 1690, après avoir achevé la rédaction des *Deux traités du gouvernement* et de l'*Essai sur l'entendement humain*, Locke se repencha sur cette matière, qu'il fit confluer dans un ouvrage mieux structuré. En dépit des hésitations initiales, l'auteur se laissa finalement persuader par ses amis à publier ce travail: la première édition de l'ouvrage, anonymisée, parut à Londres en 1693. Aux trois autres éditions (1695, 1699, 1705) préparées par Locke avant sa mort, suivirent (au moins) vingt réimpressions anglaises au cours du XVIII^e siècle.

Dans leur première version, les *Thoughts Concerning Education* se présentent comme une simple succession de paragraphes numérotés (202), accompagnée d'une table des matières et précédée d'une lettre-dédicace à Edward Clarke⁴, qui tient lieu de préface. Dans ces pages, l'auteur évoque les circonstances de la genèse de l'ouvrage et formule une *captatio benevolentiae* où, après avoir souligné l'importance du thème, il minimise la valeur de sa contribution: le sujet exigerait un traité exhaustif, de la plume d'un spécialiste plus compétent en la matière. Venant de Locke, la sincérité de cet aveu n'est pas à questionner, mais un aperçu de l'articulation des *Thoughts Concerning Education*, en comparaison avec les traités contemporains portant sur le même sujet⁵, démentit d'emblée la présumée médiocrité de l'ouvrage. Dans le texte, convergent en effet des réflexions de nature hétérogène, qui relevaient à l'époque de domaines et genres de littérature différents – tel que la littérature morale, la littérature médicale et la littérature philosophique proprement dite –, qui sont enchâssées dans l'ouvrage de manière équilibrée. Les sections consacrées aux différents aspects de l'éducation des enfants fournissent, outre des recommandations pratiques, des explications sur leurs fondements qui renvoient à des éléments d'une théorie du fonctionnement de la psychologie infantine, et, en

⁴ Non signée dans l'édition de 1693.

⁵ On a questionné l'originalité de *STCE* et désigné un ensemble de sources dont Locke se serait inspiré, de Montaigne à Walker, de Gailhard, à Fleury et à Rivet (voir J. Yolton, *John Locke: Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, pp. 8-14 et, sur Rivet, B. Rang, "An unidentified source of John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*", in *Pedagogy Culture and Society* 9 (2001), pp. 249-78); il nous semble cependant que *STCE* propose une vision plus complète et plus équilibrée du sujet par rapport à ces sources. Dans l'économie de *Of Education* de Walker, et de *The Compleat Gentleman* de Gailhard, par exemple, les sections sur la santé des enfants et sur les matières que le précepteur doit enseigner sont très modestes.

général, humaine. “*A sound mind in a sound body*” est la devise de cet ouvrage, où l’auteur entend accorder suffisamment d’attention à ces deux aspects complémentaires de la vie heureuse, que l’éducation doit viser: l’équilibre du corps et de l’esprit. Le texte s’ouvre ainsi sur des considérations détaillées concernant l’hygiène de vie des enfants et les mesures efficaces pour préserver leur santé et pour favoriser le développement d’une bonne complexion⁶. Vient ensuite l’examen de l’esprit: comment transmettre aux enfants les principes moraux, comment dompter leurs émotions et leur apprendre à se comporter correctement dans chaque circonstance, grâce aussi à l’aide d’un bon précepteur – allié indispensable de l’éducation des enfants, qu’il faut sélectionner soigneusement⁷. L’auteur affronte, en dernier, le problème de l’instruction proprement dite: les sujets qu’il faut apprendre prioritairement et les méthodes les plus efficaces pour les enseigner⁸. Un aspect de l’éducation, et pas des moindres, demeure toutefois marginal dans son traité: la religion – qui paraît préoccuper Locke moins que les méthodes erronées qui torpillent l’acquisition du latin.

Les *Thoughts Concerning Education* affirment l’idée que l’enfant est une créature (déjà) rationnelle, que l’on doit chercher à comprendre et que l’on peut guider et persuader par voie de raisonnement; chaque enfant serait d’ailleurs un individu particulier avec un tempérament et des talents propres. La vision anthropologique véhiculée par l’ouvrage est foncièrement positive et optimiste; la nature, matérielle et spirituelle, de l’enfant est “bonne”: son corps est programmé pour être sain et les inclinations naturelles de son esprit et de son tempérament ne doivent pas être supprimées, mais accueillies et adroitement orientées vers les objectifs souhaités.

Ce programme éducatif “accommodant”, où les peines corporelles ne sont autorisées que comme dernier recours, où l’on apprend à lire et à écrire à l’aide de jeux didactiques, et où les notions de bien et mal sont transmises à travers la persuasion rationnelle et l’exemple, a une affiliation philosophique bien définie – même si l’expression *empirisme* n’avait pas encore été forgée à l’époque. Une conception forte de la volonté, d’inspiration stoïcienne, domine toute la réflexion sur la vertu, identifiée avec la capacité de maîtriser ses impulsions. L’objectif poursuivi par ce projet éducatif est la formation d’un jeune homme

⁶ *STCE* §1-30. Nous avons travaillé sur l’édition J. Yolton, *John Locke: Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, cit. Puisque de nombreuses éditions numériques de l’ouvrage sont aujourd’hui accessibles, nous allons le citer simplement comme *STCE*, en indiquant le numéro de paragraphe (§) auquel nous voulons faire référence.

⁷ *STCE* § 30-146.

⁸ *STCE* § 147-216.

raisonnable, vertueux, cultivé mais pas érudit, bienveillant envers les autres, confiant et libre; il est chrétien, certes, mais son identité intellectuelle et les principes moraux qui structurent son jugement ne découlent pas d'une certaine interprétation positive de la foi. Celui que Locke forme avec ses préceptes, sur la fin du XVII^e siècle, est véritablement un homme des Lumières.

2. Les réseaux huguenots et la genèse de la première traduction de STCE

L'histoire éditoriale de la première traduction des *Thoughts Concerning Education – De l'éducation des enfants* (1695)⁹ – se présente comme un cas d'étude exemplaire des mécanismes et des pratiques à l'œuvre dans l'"importation" et la diffusion des ouvrages de genre philosophique et scientifique à la fin du XVII^e siècle¹⁰. Le premier aspect de cette traduction qui exige d'être problématisé, ayant certainement entraîné des conséquences sur sa circulation, est qu'il s'agit bien d'un texte en français, préparé par un traducteur d'origine et de culture françaises, mais d'une impression néerlandaise. Cette configuration d'ingrédients s'observe fréquemment dans les traductions publiées à l'époque, étant le résultat d'une conjoncture particulière entre la "géographie" du marché du livre et la situation politique internationale. En effet, la plupart des traductions produites en Europe entre 1650 et 1750 ont été imprimées aux Provinces-Unies, alors l'un des pays les plus prospères du monde, et certainement celui avec la plus haute concentration d'imprimeurs¹¹. Comme c'est bien connu, l'essor de la librairie aux Pays-Bas septentrionaux a été favorisé par les persécutions, en France, contre les huguenots, qui ont provoqué un exode massif de capital humain et, notamment de "gens du livre" – tels que des imprimeurs et des graveurs – et de "gens de lettres", vers cette république

⁹ Nous normalisons. Titre original: *De l'éducation des enfants. Traduit de l'anglois. Par P** C*****, Antoine Schelte, Amsterdam 1695.

¹⁰ Nos recherches sur la publication des traductions philosophiques à l'époque moderne nous ont permis d'identifier trois modalités principales de production: à l'initiative d'un imprimeur (avec une finalité commerciale), à l'initiative d'un groupe de professeurs (finalité didactique), à l'initiative d'un réseau intellectuel (pour promouvoir un auteur dans un certain milieu culturel). Voir notre étude "Lost in translation? New insights into Émilie Du Châtelet's *La Fable des abeilles*", in A. Brown et U. Kölvig (éds.), *Émilie du Chatelet, son monde, ses travaux*, Centre international d'étude du XVIII^e siècle, Ferney-Voltaire 2022, pp. 301-15, p. 314.

¹¹ Voir sur cela C. Berkvens-Stevelinck, H. Bots, Paul G. Hoftijzer, O.S. Lankhorst (éds.), *Le Magasin de l'univers - The Dutch Republic as the Centre of the European Book Trade*, Brill, Leiden 1992.

proto-libérale et tolérante. Ici, comme en Angleterre¹², les réfugiés huguenots, qui maîtrisaient une langue alors dominante dans la culture européenne, ont souvent saisi, ou créée, des opportunités de s'affirmer professionnellement dans l'univers de l'édition et ont constitué des réseaux intellectuels et éditoriaux capables d'influencer, avec la contribution de la presse savante, les tendances du marché du livre contemporain¹³ et orienter les goûts dans la République des lettres.

La genèse du *De l'éducation des enfants* doit être replacée dans ce contexte, car cette traduction, qui a inauguré la fortune internationale des *Thoughts Concerning Education* est issue de l'initiative et du travail d'un de ces réseaux d'intellectuels huguenots actifs aux Provinces-Unies¹⁴: celui, anglophile, dirigé par Jean Le Clerc¹⁵. Les documents qui permettent de reconstituer l'histoire de cette entreprise éditoriale révèlent que ce n'est pas par "vocation", c'est-à-dire en raison d'un enthousiasme authentique pour l'ouvrage, que Pierre Coste (1668-1747)¹⁶ se pencha sur ce travail. Rien, dans le profil intellectuel du traducteur, ne laissait d'ailleurs présager le développement spontané chez lui d'un intérêt pour ce texte, car ni le genre, ni l'identité de l'auteur n'étaient susceptibles de captiver son attention au début des années 1690. Issu d'une famille de religion réformée, Coste avait étudié à l'Académie de Genève; n'ayant pas pu rentrer en France à cause de la révocation de l'édit de Nantes, il avait poursuivi sa formation à Lausanne et, ensuite, à Leyde et à Amsterdam, où il s'était consacré à l'étude de la théologie. Avant la publication de sa traduction des

¹² Nous pensons en particulier au réseau dirigé par Pierre des Maizeaux, auquel on doit l'initiative des deux traductions anglaises du *Dictionnaire* de Bayle. Voir J. Almagor, *Pierre des Maizeaux (1673-1745), Journalist and English Correspondent for Franco-Dutch Periodicals*, Holland University Press, Amsterdam & Maarsen 1989.

¹³ Nous avons étudié ce phénomène, en particulier, à travers le cas de la publication des ouvrages de controverse de Malebranche, voir : E. Muceni, "Le grand marionnettiste et son apprenti. Leers et Bayle, les premières années", *Libertinage et philosophie à l'époque classique* 15 (2018), pp. 167-84.

¹⁴ Nos recherches en histoire du livre nous ont permis d'identifier trois réseaux actifs dans la dernière décennie du XVII^e siècle : celui de Rotterdam, autour de Pierre Bayle, qui a contribué à la diffusion aux (et grâce aux) Pays-Bas d'auteurs de langue française et qui a promu, en particulier, à la fortune des philosophies postcartésiennes; le réseau d'Henri Basnage de Beauval, entre Rotterdam et La Haye, qui a contribué à la fortune de Leibniz; en troisième lieu, le réseau de Jean Le Clerc, acteur de la réception de la philosophie britannique et de Locke en particulier.

¹⁵ Sur Jean Le Clerc voir les études de M.-C. Pitassi, *Entre croire et savoir: Le problème de la méthode critique chez Jean Le Clerc*, Brill, Leiden 1987 et "Le Clerc, Jean (1657-1736), Genevan multilingual author and biblical scholar", in A.C. Kors (éd.), *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2002.

¹⁶ Sur Coste voir la biographie de M. Rumbold, *Traducteur Huguenot : Pierre Coste*, Peter Lang, New York, San Francisco, Bern 1991.

Thoughts Concerning Education, il n'avait eu aucun contact direct avec Locke, et il est exclu qu'il ait été parmi les premiers lecteurs de l'*ECHU*, car à son arrivée à Amsterdam il ne maîtrisait pas l'anglais. Ce fut précisément l'intention de s'initier à cette langue – la traduction étant à l'époque une pratique communément utilisée pour l'apprentissage des idiomes étrangers¹⁷ – qui le conduisit, indirectement, à l'ouvrage sur l'éducation du philosophe anglais. Comme le rappelle Charles de La Motte, Coste:

[...] vouloit apprendre l'Anglois dans le tems qu'il demouroit ici [à Amsterdam]. Je lui conseillai pour en venir à bout de s'engager à traduire un Livre de l'Anglois, et que M. le Clerc, que nous fréquentions presque tous les jours, lui expliqueroit ce qu'il ne pourroit découvrir par son Dictionnaire. Une Demoiselle François qui avoit demeuré à Dublin lui donna une quinzaine de Leçons. Il choisit le Traité de l'Éducation des Enfans de M. Locke que l'auteur avoit envoyé à M. Le Clerc et que celui-ci prêta à M. Coste, qui entreprit de le traduire¹⁸.

Le véritable instigateur de l'initiative fut donc l'ami et correspondant de Locke, le Genevois Jean Le Clerc¹⁹; théologien, professeur de philosophie au séminaire remontant d'Amsterdam²⁰ et journaliste (auteur de la *Bibliothèque universelle et historique* et, ensuite, de la *Bibliothèque choisie* et de la *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne*), celui-ci était à la tête d'un de ces réseaux intellectuels/éditoriaux que nous avons évoqués et collaborait régulièrement avec les imprimeurs Henri Wetstein et Henri et Antoine Schelte. Promoteur, à travers ses révisions, de la diffusion de la philosophie anglaise sur le continent, Le Clerc a entrepris plusieurs initiatives visant à favoriser l'accueil et l'irradiation de la pensée de Locke dans le milieu francophone, comme la publication, dans les pages de la *Bibliothèque universelle*, d'extraits de l'*ECHU*²¹, avant sa parution en Angleterre. C'est toujours Le Clerc, comme on le sait, qui agira en maître d'ouvrage pour la publication de l'*Essai philosophique concernant l'entendement humain*, traduction de l'*ECHU*²². On peut donc avancer l'hypothèse que Le

¹⁷ Rappelons que Locke avait entrepris la traduction des *Essais de morale* de Pierre Nicole pour la même raison ; voir L. Simonutti, "Locke : tradurre e abusare", *Chromos* 12 (2007), pp. 1-15.

¹⁸ C. de la Motte, *La Vie de Coste et anecdotes sur ses ouvrages*, M.-C. Pitassi (éd.), Voltaire Foundation, Oxford 1999, pp. 235-36.

¹⁹ Les deux se sont connus à Amsterdam, pendant le séjour de Locke aux Pays-Bas.

²⁰ De 1683 à 1712, ensuite professeur d'histoire ecclésiastique.

²¹ « Extrait d'un livre Anglois qui n'a pas encore paru, intitulé *Essai philosophique concernant l'entendement* », *Bibliothèque universelle*, 1688, pp. 49-142. Le Clerc avait aussi publié dans ce périodique la *Méthode nouvelle de dresser des recueils* (*Bibliothèque universelle*, 1686, pp. 315-40).

²² Schelte, Amsterdam 1700.

Clerc a entrevu dans l'interrogation innocente de Coste concernant un ouvrage anglais à traduire, une opportunité pour impliquer cet étudiant prometteur dans son projet intellectuel d'importation de la philosophie lockéenne. Mais puisque Coste n'était pas (encore) un traducteur, et ce travail représentait pour lui, avant tout, un exercice, son pigmalyon a fait preuve de prudence en lui confiant un ouvrage "secondaire" et non pas un texte de nature proprement philosophique. Jugeant le résultat satisfaisant, Le Clerc fit imprimer cette traduction, à l'insu de Locke qui en ignorait encore l'existence, par Antoine Schelte – décision téméraire de l'imprimeur, car il était de coutume, à l'époque, d'attendre de trois à cinq ans avant de publier la traduction d'un texte d'un auteur vivant²³.

À propos du rôle assigné à cette traduction dans la campagne, menée par Le Clerc, de diffusion de la pensée de Locke et d'affirmation de son autorité philosophique, il est intéressant de noter que cette version dévoile, dans la préface, le nom de l'auteur. S'il ne s'agit pas véritablement d'une révélation – puisque dans l'édition anglaise de 1695 l'identité de l'auteur n'est plus cachée – ce choix confirme l'impression que, par le biais de ce travail, les éditeurs du *De l'éducation des enfants* poursuivaient aussi le but d'amplifier la renommée de Locke auprès du public francophone. Ce public, il faut bien le préciser, était un public international, en raison du statut privilégié dont jouissait alors le français, nouvelle *lingua franca*²⁴ de la culture, du savoir scientifique et de la diplomatie²⁵; mais ce public n'était pas, ou alors dans une mesure très limitée, français, car les livres imprimés aux Provinces-Unies n'étaient pas les bienvenus en France, pour des raisons relevant de la politique, de la religion et de la jurisprudence réglant le fonctionnement de la librairie: un livre dépourvu de privilège, dont

²³ Cela pour éviter de devoir adapter la traduction à des éditions successives – ce qui arriva en effet avec *STCE*. Les ouvrages des auteurs vivants confrontaient les imprimeurs qui voulaient en commercialiser les traductions à véritable dilemme, car il fallait s'assurer de travailler sur une version définitive du texte, qui n'aurait pas été rendue obsolète entretemps par d'autres éditions originales, sans pouvoir attendre le décès de l'auteur. Schelte opta pour une stratégie plus prudente avec l'*Essai*, comme en témoigne la lettre Pierre Coste to Locke, c. 23 June/ 3 July 1696 in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, éd. E. S. De Beer, vol. 5, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, pp. 660-62. Nous allons donner comme référence, pour les autres lettres que nous citerons, le numéro avec lequel elles sont cataloguées dans cette édition, qui existe aujourd'hui en ressource numérique.

²⁴ Le français a supplanté le latin dans le rôle de langue universelle en Europe sur la fin du XVII^e siècle : voir F. Waquet, *Le Latin ou l'empire d'un signe*, Albin Michel, Paris 1998 et Tom Deneire (éd.), *Dynamics of Neo-Latin and the Vernacular*, Brill, Leyden - Boston 2014.

²⁵ En particulier, après le traité de Nimègue : voir F. Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française, des origines à 1900*, Colin, Paris 1927 et "Les débuts du français dans la diplomatie", *Revue de Paris*, 15 décembre 1913, pp. 699-728.

la page de titre affichait l'indication "Amsterdam" n'avait aucune chance, à la fin du XVII^e siècle, de comparaître dans le catalogue d'un imprimeur-libraire parisien ou lyonnais²⁶. C'est pourquoi nous avons attiré l'attention sur le fait que la "traduction en français" des *Thoughts Concerning Education* de Coste n'est pas, à proprement parler, une "traduction française", avec les conséquences qui en découlent pour la diffusion de l'ouvrage; avant 1747, d'ailleurs, il n'y eut qu'une seule édition française, en 1711²⁷, de cette "traduction en français", contre onze éditions néerlandaises.

Locke apprit de Le Clerc, au mois de juillet 1695, l'existence et la publication de cette traduction, dont il se déclara satisfait²⁸. Il est notoire que ce travail marqua le début de la correspondance et, ensuite, du rapport d'amitié et de collaboration entre Locke et Coste, qui devint, depuis, le traducteur "attitré" du philosophe, et acquit une réputation et une notoriété extraordinaires pour un traducteur. Au lendemain de la mort de Locke, Coste mis au point plusieurs autres éditions de sa traduction des *Thoughts Concerning Education*, à partir de celle de 1708, qui représente un véritable tournant dans l'histoire de la postérité éditoriale et de la réception de l'ouvrage. Dans cette édition, inspirée par l'exigence d'aligner la version en français sur la dernière édition préparée par Locke (1705)²⁹, on assiste à un phénomène d'"appropriation" du texte de la part du traducteur, selon des modalités qui seront imitées par ses confrères étrangers. À l'occasion de cette édition, Coste apporta des changements non seulement au corps de sa traduction – en ajoutant les nouvelles réflexions de Locke et en peaufinant l'expression pour éviter les répétitions – mais aussi à la structure de l'ouvrage. Les paragraphes numérotés de Locke, évocateurs des recueils de "pensées libres"³⁰, se présentent, dans cette édition, regroupés en sections, ce

²⁶ Ces livres étaient saisis en France par la police (voir A. Sauvy et M. Ninomiya, *Livres Saisis à Paris Entre 1678 and 1701*, Martinus Nijhoff, La Haye 1972). Nos études sur la réception en France des textes de Malebranche imprimés aux Pays-Bas confirment que ces mesures étaient efficaces (voir E. Muceni, "La réception du *Traité de morale*", in *Malebranche et les équilibres de la morale*, Garnier, Paris 2020, pp. 167-91).

²⁷ *De l'éducation des enfants* [...], Jean Musier, Paris 1711.

²⁸ Sur les caractéristiques de cette traduction et de ses éditions successives voir S. Soccarr, "Le voyage des *Pensées sur l'éducation* de John Locke vers la France: De l'adaptation linguistique à la transmission culturelle", in Isabelle Trivisani-Moreau, Sandra Contamina, *Les Textes voyageurs des périodes médiévale et moderne*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, Rennes 2021, pp. 113-34 et D. Soulard, "L'œuvre des premiers traducteurs français de John Locke: Jean Le Clerc, Pierre Coste et David Mazel", in *XVII^e siècle* 253 (2011), pp. 739-62.

²⁹ Churchill, London 1705.

³⁰ *Les Essais* de Nicole, les *Pensées* de Pascal, ou les *Maximes* de La Rochefoucauld se présentaient aux lecteurs sous la même forme.

qui confère au texte un aspect plus systématique et plus proche, aux yeux du lecteur, à celui d'un traité. À ce texte mieux arrangé, Coste associe une préface augmentée et un volumineux paratexte, composé de notes en bas de page, qui, par leur longueur, se configurent plutôt comme des commentaires. Ces notes contiennent essentiellement des citations – qui confortent les propos de Locke – tirées d'auteurs anciens, tels Horace, Plutarque et Suétone, ou d'autorités modernes, comme La Rochefoucauld, la Bruyère et, surtout, Montaigne. C'est dans les *Essais*, en effet, que Coste puise la plupart de ses notes, qui créent un effet miroir avec les réflexions de Locke; le décalage chronologique joue toutefois en faveur du Français, le faisant apparaître, sinon comme une source, tout de moins comme un précurseur du philosophe anglais en matière de pédagogie, car "il n'y a guère de choses concernant l'éducation des enfants, que Montaigne n'ait touchées dans ses *Essais*"³¹. La hiérarchie d'autorité entre l'auteur de l'ouvrage et celui qui fournit les citations de bas de page s'en trouve comme renversée: présentées ainsi, les notes suggèrent en effet l'impression que Locke n'a été, au fond, qu'un vulgarisateur des intuitions de Montaigne.

En vertu de toutes ces opérations, Coste, qui ajoutera encore, au fil des éditions, une lettre-dédicace à La Motte et un *Avertissement*, devient une espèce de coauteur. Or, cette manière manipuler le texte, à travers l'addition de commentaires, était assez typique des traductions de traités scientifiques³² – les notes permettant parfois de mettre à jour l'information offerte dans le texte par le biais de références plus récentes; elle était en revanche considérée inappropriée, à en croire les révisions dans les journaux savants de l'époque, dans les traductions de textes considérés comme philosophiques. Comment interpréter le choix de Coste de transformer sa traduction des *Thoughts Concerning Education* en un texte préfacé et amplement annoté avec des références non pas "scientifiques" – à d'autres textes contemporains de pédagogie – mais plutôt érudites et littéraires? Nos recherches en histoire du livre nous portent à considérer cette approche comme inhabituelle; mais cette démarche précisément paraît avoir amorcé et, en même temps, légitimé un processus d'autonomisation (dans la perception du public) des *Thoughts Concerning Education* de leur auteur et de leur identité philosophique, qui a rendu possible l'assimilation de l'ouvrage dans les horizons culturels les plus divers.

³¹ *De l'éducation des enfants*, Schelte, Amsterdam 1708, p. xxx (nous normalisons l'orthographe). Rappelons que Coste devait donner au public plusieurs éditions des *Essais*, à partir de 1723.

³² Voir par exemple la traduction du *Traité de physique* de Rohault par Samuel Clarke ou encore la traduction des *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* de Newton par Mme du Châtelet.

3. Deux versions originales ?

Les nombreuses traductions des *Thoughts Concerning Education* réalisées en Europe dans la période comprise entre la parution de l'ouvrage et la fin du XVIII^e siècle peuvent être réparties en deux groupes: d'un côté, les traductions basées sur les éditions anglaises du texte, et, de l'autre, celles préparées à partir des éditions françaises. C'est pour cette raison – ainsi qu'au vu des additions considérables que la version de Coste comporte par rapport à l'original – que nous nous hasardons à qualifier la traduction française de deuxième version originale, car elle a été approchée comme telle par les contemporains. Il faut rappeler que le français représentait, à l'époque, l'un des deux options possibles pour un imprimeur qui, ayant apprécié le potentiel commercial d'un livre, voulût en produire une traduction à vendre à l'étranger; le choix tombait naturellement sur le latin pour les textes de nature académique ou scientifique (histoire, médecine, mais aussi philosophie)³³, tandis que tous les autres pouvaient être aisément commercialisés partout en Europe en traduction française. L'existence de deux sillons dans la réception et la diffusion des *Thoughts Concerning Education* s'explique donc par le statut privilégié dont jouissait la langue française à la fin du XVII^e siècle.

Parmi les traductions de l'ouvrage que nous avons répertoriées sur la base des travaux de John Attig³⁴ et de nos propres recherches, appartiennent à la généalogie anglaise celles vers les langues vernaculaires des pays de l'Europe centrale et septentrionale, et notamment les éditions parues en Allemagne

³³ Traditionnellement, les imprimeurs-libraires choisissaient le latin comme langue cible pour les traductions d'ouvrages de nature scientifique ou philosophique. Le nombre des traductions vers le latin d'ouvrages rédigés en langue vernaculaire diminue progressivement déjà à partir de la deuxième moitié du XVII^e siècle et décroît ultérieurement au cours du siècle suivant. Mais encore à l'époque moderne des traductions (et parfois, bien que rares, des retraductions) latines d'ouvrages philosophiques majeures ont été produites. On peut mentionner à ce propos le cas de *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, traduit en latin en 1701 (Burridge Ezekiel trans.: *De intellectu humano in quatuor libris. Authore Johanne Lockio armigero. Editio quarta aucta & emendata, & nunc primum Latine red-dita*, Aunsham & Churchill, London) et retraduit en 1741 (Gotthelf Henricus Thiele trans.: *Johannis Lockii armigeri Libri IV. de intellectu humano, denuo ex novissima editione idiomatis Anglicani, longe acuratori in puriorem styulum Latinum translati* [...], Theophilum Georgi, Lipsiae). Nous avons consacré une étude aux mécanismes de production et commercialisation des traductions latines d'ouvrages philosophiques à la fin du XVII^e siècle: "Philosophies cartésiennes à l'usage des étrangers: les traductions latines du *Traité de physique* de Rohault et de *La Recherche de la vérité* de Malebranche", in *Rivista di Storia della filosofia* 4 (2017), pp. 641-64.

³⁴ J. Attig, *The Works of John Locke*, Greenwood Press, Westport 1985 et *John Locke resources* <https://openpublishing.psu.edu/locke/>.

(1708a³⁵, 1708b³⁶, 1729³⁷, 1761³⁸, 1787a³⁹, 1787b⁴⁰) et aux Provinces-Unies (1698⁴¹ et 1753⁴²), la traduction suédoise (1709)⁴³ et une version espagnole inédite⁴⁴. Sont en revanche basées sur les éditions de Coste toutes les traductions et les rééditions réalisées dans les pays de l'Europe du Sud – en particulier celles italiennes (1735a⁴⁵, 1735b⁴⁶, 1736⁴⁷, 1750⁴⁸, 1751⁴⁹, 1764⁵⁰, 1775⁵¹,

³⁵ *Des Herrn John Locke Gedanken von Erziehung junger Edelleute. Aus dem Englischen und zwar der vollständigsten Edition übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen zugleich auch durchaus mit Titulen derer Materien versehen von Seb. Gottfr. Starck, Johann Wolfgang Fickweiler, Greifswald 1708.*

³⁶ *Herrn Johann Locks Unterricht von Erziehung der Kinder aus dem Englischen; nebst Herrn von Fenelon Ertz Bischoffs von Cammerich Gedancken von Erziehung der Töchter aus den Französischen übersezt. Mit einigen anmerkungen und einer vorrede, Thomas Fritschen, Leipzig 1708.*

³⁷ *Herrn Johann Locks Unterricht von Erziehung der Kinder, aus dem Englischen [...] (réimpression de Leipzig, 1708), Nicolaus Förster und Sohn, Hannover 1729.*

³⁸ *Herrn Johann Lockens Gedanken von Erziehung der Kinder, von neuem aus dem Englischen übersetzt, gegen des Herrn Costens französische Uebersetzung, nach der neuesten pariser Ausgabe von 1747, verglichen, und mit diesen Anmerkungen begleitet, Johann Paul Krauß, Leipzig et Wien 1761.*

³⁹ *John Locke, Esq. über die Erziehung der Jugend under den höheren Volksklassen. Aus dem englischen übersetzt und mit Zusätzen und Anmerkungen versehen von Carl Siegmund Ouvrier, Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, Leipzig 1787.*

⁴⁰ *Handbuch der Erziehung Aus dem Englischen des John Locke Übersetzt von Rudolphi, in Joachim Heinrich Campe et al., Allgemeine Revision des gesammten Schul- und Erziehungswesens, t. 9, Rudolph Gräffer und Compagnie und in der Schulbuchhandlung, Wien et Wolfenbüttel 1787.*

⁴¹ *Verhandeling over de opvoeding der kinderen, bebelzende verscheidene nutte Aenmerkingen die de ouders ten opzigt von 't Lichaam, doch voornamentlijk van de Ziel humer Kinderen in de Opvoeding hebben waar te nemen. Door Dr. Johannes Lock. Na den derden engelsen druk vertaalt, Barend Bos, Rotterdam 1698 [1697].*

⁴² *Over de opvoeding der kinderen. Van nieuws uit het Engelsch vertaelt, naer den elfden druk, door Pieter Adriaen Verwer: vermeerdert met eenige aenteekeningen en het leven van den schryver, K. van Tongerlo en F. Houttuin, Amsterdam 1753.*

⁴³ *Herr Johan Lockes Tankar och Anmärkningar angående Ungdomens Uppfostring Först skrefne uti Engelskan men nu för deras serdeles värde och nyttighet uppå Svenska öfversatte, Julius G. Mathia: Åhr, Stockholm 1709.*

⁴⁴ *Pensamientos sobre la educación, MSS/11194, Biblioteca Nacional de España.*

⁴⁵ *L'educazione de' figliuoli. Tradotta già dall'inglese del Signor Locke in linguaggio francese e da questo trasportata nell'italiano, Salvatore e Giandomenico Marescandoli, Lucca 1735.*

⁴⁶ *Della educazione dei fanciulli. Scritto in lingua inglese dal signor Locke, indi tradotto in lingua francese dal signor Coste e finalmente tradotto in lingua italiana dall'edizione francese fatta in Amsterdam l'anno 1733, Pitteri, Venezia 1735.*

⁴⁷ *Arte dell'educare i fanciulli di Giovanni Loche inglese ridotta ad aforismi con alcune giunte, Dionigi Ramanzini, Verona 1736.*

⁴⁸ Réimpression de Marescandoli 1735 (même titre).

⁴⁹ Réimpression de Pitteri 1735 (même titre).

⁵⁰ Réimpression de Pitteri 1735 (même titre).

⁵¹ *Educazione dei fanciulli del signor Locke quarta edizione. Aggiunto l'Istruzione de' fanciulli, e giovanette del sig. Carlo Rollin, Pitteri, Venezia [i. e.: ?], 1775 (réimpression de Pitteri 1735, augmentée).*

1781⁵², 1782⁵³, 1792⁵⁴ et 1799⁵⁵) et espagnoles (mss vers 1750⁵⁶ et 1797⁵⁷) – ainsi que celles publiées, au cours de la seconde moitié du siècle, dans les pays d’Europe orientale, à savoir les traductions russe (1759)⁵⁸, polonaise (1781)⁵⁹ et hongroise (1771)⁶⁰.

Cette multiplicité de versions, que la présence de nombreuses éditions en français rendait “superflues” pour le public cultivé des milieux aisés – qui partout en Europe pratiquaient la langue de Molière – témoigne implicitement d’une réception des *Thoughts Concerning Education* auprès d’un public qui n’était pas nécessairement celui des estimateurs de la philosophie lockéenne, ni celui des érudits ou des curieux; ces traductions s’adressent à un auditoire bien plus large, celui des gens alphabétisés. La matière s’y prête certainement, et les traducteurs se montrent sensibles aux exigences de ce genre de public, qui préfère un style familier et une information directe; parallèlement à la traduction, c’est un effort d’adaptation qui est mis en œuvre afin que les références à la culture et aux habitudes anglaises, qui apportent une précieuse touche de pragmatisme au discours, ne demeurent pas cryptées. Celui des recommandations pratiques – concernant par exemple le régime ou l’habillement – est naturellement l’aspect de l’ouvrage où cette tentative d’adéquation se manifeste de manière plus évidente dans les traductions; mais les références à des traditions

⁵² *Educazione de’ fanciulli del Signor Locke. Prima edizione napoletana. Aggiuntavi al tomo terzo L’istruzione per la educazione de’ fanciulli, e delle giovanette del Sig. Carlo Rollin*, Giuseppe Dominici, Napoli 1781.

⁵³ Réimpression de Pitteri 1775 (même titre).

⁵⁴ *Educazione dei fanciulli del signor Locke, sesta edizione aggiuntovi l’istruzione dei fanciulli, e Giovannette del sig. Carlo Rollin*, Giuseppe Rossi qu: Bortolo, Venezia 1792.

⁵⁵ Réimpression de Bortolo 1792 (même titre).

⁵⁶ *La educación de los hijos, escrita por Mr. L.; traducida del inglés al francés por Mr. Le Coste [...]; y del francés al español por D. Domingo Santos y Laureles, abogado de los Reales Consejos*, MSS, Fundación Penzol, 491, Biblioteca dixital de Galicia.

⁵⁷ *Educación de los niños. Obra escrita en inglés por Mr. Loke, traducida al francés por Mr. Coste y de este al castellano por F. A. C. P.*, Manuel Alvarez, Madrid 1797.

⁵⁸ *O vospitanii diētīēi, Gospodina Lokka. Perevedeno s’ frantsūsskago na rossiiskii iazyk Imperatorskago Moskovskago Univertiteta Professorom’ Nikolaem’ Popovskim’*, Pechatovo pri Imperatorskom’ Moskovskom’ Universitet’ , Moscou 1759. Réimpression en 1788. L’édition de 1760, qui est répertoriée dans la base de données *John Locke resources* (<https://openpublishing.psu.edu/locke/>) serait en réalité l’impression de 1759 avec une nouvelle page de titre; voir M. Levitt, *Early Modern Russian Letters*, Academic Studies Press, Boston 2017, p. 158, n.1.

⁵⁹ *Xiązka o edukacyi dzieci z francuskiego na polski język przelożona*, Drukarni J. K. Mci y Rzeczypospolitey u XX. Scholarum Piarum, Warszawa 1781.

⁶⁰ *Lock János, A’ gyermekek neveléséről, Coste nevű tudós Frantzia Nyelven adott-ki. Most pedig [...] Frantzia nyelvből magyarra fordított B[oros] J[enői] G[róf] Sz[éke]ly] A[dam] MDCCLXIX esztendőben*, Reform Coll., Kolosvárt 1771.

et des croyances populaires propres à la culture orale font remonter à la surface un paysage encore plus intéressant, à nos yeux, car plus énigmatique et difficile à décoder pour un observateur du XXI^e siècle⁶¹.

4. *Instructions pour un eugénisme des sentiments moraux*

La première traduction en néerlandais des *Thoughts Concerning Education* parut à Rotterdam en 1698 (ou 1697)⁶², sous un titre un peu plus ambitieux que celui choisi par Locke: *Verhandeling over de opvoeding der kinderen*, “Traité” sur l’éducation des enfants⁶³. Cette édition se présente, à tous égards, comme une traduction concurrente de celle de Coste (parue à Amsterdam trois ans plus tôt) que la préface qualifie de moins exacte et défectueuse⁶⁴. L’intention de l’éditeur et de l’imprimeur roterodamois de proposer au public (vraisemblablement le même)⁶⁵ un produit plus attrayant que son homologue en français est attestée par le fait que cette édition est agrémentée d’un frontispice⁶⁶ – un élément décoratif commun à plusieurs traductions néerlandaises de l’époque⁶⁷, qui devaient rivaliser sur le marché des Pays-Bas avec les traductions en français.

On peut relever plusieurs analogies entre les histoires éditoriales de ces deux traductions concurrentes, car le projet du *Verhandeling over de opvoeding der kinderen* a pris forme dans un contexte similaire à celui qui a produit le *De l’éducation des enfants*. *Mutatis mutandis*, on a l’impression de voir se déployer le même scénario, car cette traduction se doit, encore une fois, à l’initiative d’un intellectuel-journaliste associé avec un imprimeur. C’est en effet Barent

⁶¹ Les *goblins* de Locke, par exemple, que les mauvais parents invoquent pour faire peur à leurs enfants sont remplacés en France par le moine bourru, en Italie par les *fantasime*, en Espagne par le *duende*, en Allemagne par les *Nachtgeistern*, etc.

⁶² Le catalogue de la bibliothèque de Leyde atteste l’existence d’un exemplaire dépourvu d’indication de lieu, mais affichant le nom Barent Bos et l’année 1697.

⁶³ *Verhandeling over de opvoeding der kinderen*, cit.

⁶⁴ Le préfacier (vraisemblablement Peter Rabus) souligne que cette version est basée sur la troisième édition anglaise, tandis que celle de Coste est une traduction de la deuxième édition originale.

⁶⁵ Celui des Pays-Bas. Nous avons déjà souligné que le premier destinataire de la traduction de Coste (qui, étant en français, visait également un public étranger) était le public néerlandais, d’origine ou d’adoption, car les impressions réalisées aux Provinces-Unies atteignaient difficilement la France.

⁶⁶ Que nous allons décrire par la suite.

⁶⁷ Nous avons consacré une étude à ce phénomène, et en particulier à la création des frontispices pour les traductions en néerlandais d’ouvrages philosophiques: *Le commerce des idées philosophiques au XVIII^e siècle: le cas des traductions illustrées néerlandaises*, journée d’étude *La matérialité de la transmission des savoirs, XV^e-XVII^e*, Université de Lyon, 29 janvier 2021.

(ou Barend) Bos de Rotterdam – chez qui avait déjà paru la traduction de l'*Epistola de Tolerantia*⁶⁸ – qui imprima cette version de l'ouvrage, préparée, de toute vraisemblance⁶⁹, par son "directeur éditorial"⁷⁰, le rédacteur du premier périodique savant en langue néerlandaise (*De Boekzaal van Europe*), Pieter Rabus (1660-1702)⁷¹. Dans les révisions qu'il a publiées dans ce journal, Rabus manifeste une attitude à l'égard des idées et des ouvrages de Locke qui autorisent à le considérer, à l'instar de Jean Le Clerc, comme un partisan de la philosophie de l'auteur anglais: sa traduction des *Thoughts Concerning Education* peut donc être envisagée, elle aussi, comme une initiative vouée à promouvoir la diffusion de la pensée de Locke, notamment auprès du public néerlandais proprement dit (le français étant une langue internationale). Cette interprétation est d'ailleurs appuyée par le constat que, au lendemain de la publication de l'*Essai sur l'entendement humain* à l'initiative de Coste/Le Clerc/Schelte, Rabus et Bos conçurent le projet éditorial du *Proeve Rakende het Menschlyk Verstand*, à savoir d'une traduction en néerlandais de l'*ECHU*, qui ne vit cependant jamais le jour⁷². À la différence de Coste, qui avait découvert les *Thoughts Concerning Education* de manière fortuite et en avait entrepris la traduction encouragé par Le Clerc, Rabus, qui était professeur à l'école érasmiennne de Rotterdam, paraît animé par un intérêt authentique pour l'ouvrage et par une convergence de vues avec l'auteur – qui se manifeste aussi dans le choix de ne pas retoucher le texte avec des notes originales. Le titre attire l'attention sur un atout fondamental du texte, à savoir la présence de conseils concernant la puériculture⁷³, mais la préface suggère que c'est avant tout la réflexion sur l'éducation morale des enfants, et sur les méthodes à adopter à cette fin – sujet qu'aucun traité du XVII^e siècle ne développait si en détail⁷⁴ – qui a suscité l'intérêt et l'enthousiasme de Rabus, comme en témoigne aussi le sonnet placé à la tête de la traduction⁷⁵:

⁶⁸ *Een brief aanaande de verdraagzaamheit* [...], Rotterdam, Barent Bos, 1689.

⁶⁹ La traduction n'est pas signée, mais la préface inclut des vers de Rabus. Étant donné que Rabus travaillait aussi comme traducteur pour Barent Bos, nous croyons probable qu'il soit l'auteur de la traduction et du paratexte.

⁷⁰ Rabus entretenait avec Bos un rapport de collaboration comparable à celui entre Le Clerc et les Schelte ou encore entre Leers et Bayle.

⁷¹ Sur Rabus et, en particulier, sur son activité de journaliste pour le *Boekzaal* voir P. Rietbergen, *Pieter Rabus en de Boekzaal van Europe*, Holland University Press, Amsterdam 1974.

⁷² La publication de cet ouvrage a été annoncée dans le *Boekzaal van Europa* pour l'année 1701; il n'apparaît cependant dans aucun catalogue néerlandais.

⁷³ Ce qui représente certainement un élément d'originalité par rapport aux autres traités sur l'éducation commercialisés à l'époque.

⁷⁴ J. Yolton, *John Locke, Some Thoughts*, cit., p. 19.

⁷⁵ Ce poème se trouve après la préface, qui contient une traduction de la lettre de Locke à Clarke.

Vous, qui portez le nom de parents/ qui ne désirez autre chose avec le cœur et l'esprit/ que de voir votre descendance préservée/ venez, je vous invite à entrer dans ce livre/ ici sont formé les cerveaux et les âmes/ ici sont punis (sans fouets ou verges) / les vices où sont tombés vos enfants/ ici l'on trouve le temple de la modération/ et chaque vertu principale prêche avec force sa raison aux jeunes/ ici l'on trouve l'école qui dans la morale surtout donnera ses meilleurs leçons⁷⁶.

D'après Rabus, l'enseignement le plus précieux est donc celui consigné à la deuxième partie de l'ouvrage, qui explique comment initier les enfants à la vertu à travers l'éveil des notions d'honneur et honte, ces "instincts sociaux" que d'autres auteurs exposés à l'influence de la culture néerlandaise avaient désignés comme des conditions indispensables à la survie de la société⁷⁷. Cette appréciation de l'ouvrage en tant que manuel pour l'éducation morale s'exprime également, de manière visuelle, dans le frontispice qui embellit l'édition, signé par un des plus grands graveurs de l'époque, l'Amstelodamois Adriaan Schoonebeek⁷⁸. Cette image [image 1] nous paraît représenter un épisode mythologique rapporté par Xénophon – et réinterprété par plusieurs maîtres néerlandais modernes –, le choix d'Hercule. Au milieu de la scène se trouve en effet la figure d'un enfant qui tient une massue et a une peau de lion posée sur les épaules – symboles traditionnellement associés à Hercule; sur la gauche, une imposante Minerve défend l'enfant: armée d'un bouclier et d'une lance, elle repousse cinq figures, situées dans la partie opposée de l'image, que l'on peut identifier comme des allégories de différents vices, tels que l'intempérance, la luxure, la lâcheté et la colère. À l'arrière-plan, on entrevoit un temple dont le linteau est couvert par l'inscription: *per aspera ad augusta* – au travers des difficultés vers la gloire. La composition évoque, comme un l'a dit, le récit d'Hercule entre le vice et la vertu, à un détail près: le héros ici représenté est un enfant, et non pas, comme dans les représentations classiques du sujet, un jeune homme; une réinterprétation qui rend l'image plus cohérente avec le sujet des *Thoughts Concerning Education*, et paraît aussi suggérer que le livre contient un antidote, grâce auquel le jeune homme ne sera pas confronté, à l'avenir, au dilemme entre le vice et la vertu.

⁷⁶ P. 12, non numérotée.

⁷⁷ La même emphase sur l'importance des notions d'honneur et de honte se retrouve dans le premier ouvrage de Bayle (publié à Rotterdam) les *Pensées diverses* (1682), mais aussi dans *The Fable of the Bees* de Mandeville.

⁷⁸ Auteur d'un manuel de gravure, Adriaan Schonebeek est l'artiste que Pierre le Grand invita à Moscou pour y fonder une école et apprendre les techniques de la gravure hollandaise aux artistes russes.



Image 1: *Verhandeling over de opvoeding der kinderen* [...] Barend Bos, Rotterdam 1698 [1697], page non numérotée. Source: Bibliothèque universitaire de Leyde.



Image 2: *Over de opvoeding der kinderen* [...], K. van Tongerlo and F. Houfftuin, Amsterdam 1753, non numérotée. Source: Koninklijke Bibliotheek, La Haye.

L'édition amstelodamoise de 1753, publiée sous le titre de *Over de opvoeding der kinderen* conserve tous les éléments décoratifs de cette première traduction en néerlandais: elle est également agrémentée d'un frontispice [image 2], signé par Jan Caspar Philips⁷⁹, qui réinterprète celui de Schoonebeek, et elle est aussi introduite par un poème, présenté ici comme une "explication du frontispice" (*Uitlegging der titelprint*). Composés vraisemblablement par Bernardus de Bosch I, ces vers sont aussi façonnés sur le modèle du sonnet de Rabus, bien qu'idéalement adressés non pas aux parents, mais aux jeunes gens, que le poète encourage à surmonter les obstacles avec confiance, à suivre la vérité et la morale la plus pure pour "parcourir joyeusement le chemin difficile vers l'autel surélevé de la gloire"⁸⁰. Comme l'annonce la page de titre, le *Over de opvoeding der kinderen* n'est pas une simple réimpression, mais une retraduction, réalisée par Pieter Adriaen Verwer⁸¹ sur la dernière édition anglaise. Cette version inclut une biographie de Locke (tirée de l'eulogie publiée par Le Clerc dans la *Bibliothèque choisie*)⁸², une préface, et des commentaires originaux qui remplacent les notes de Coste. Les réflexions formulées dans le paratexte indiquent qu'au jugement du traducteur un aspect de l'ouvrage, en particulier, exigerait d'être éméndé, à savoir la préférence accordée par Locke à l'éducation privée par rapport à la formation dans les écoles publiques. L'auteur avait déconseillé ces institutions non seulement en raison des méthodes d'enseignement appliquées⁸³, mais aussi parce que ces établissements, où convergent des individus issus de milieux divers, peuvent corrompre les principes et les mœurs des jeunes. Or, cette préférence pour l'éducation privée apparaît à Verwer injustifiée et aussi inadaptée au contexte des Provinces-Unies. Injustifiée, d'abord, en raison de la présence, dans la République, d'un dense réseau d'écoles érasmienne, collèges, universités et *athenaea illustria* très réputés et reconnus comme des établissements qui assurent une solide formation morale, outre que scientifique; inadaptée, car l'éducation privée ne conviendrait pas aux personnes destinées à exercer des métiers pratiques – tels que ceux liés au commerce – et ne conviendrait pas non plus aux familles aisées, puisque ce choix serait critiqué

⁷⁹ Graveur d'origine allemande (1690-1775), actif à Amsterdam, Philips est connu surtout pour les gravures qu'il prépara pour les imprimeurs Tirion J. de Groot et Kornelis de Wit.

⁸⁰ *Over de opvoeding der kinderen*, cit., p. 10 non numérotée.

⁸¹ Nous n'avons trouvé aucun renseignement concernant cette figure. On peut supposer que Pieter Adriaen Verwer était un traducteur professionnel, car il a réalisé plusieurs traductions depuis l'anglais aussi bien que depuis l'allemand.

⁸² J. Le Clerc, "éloge de feu Mr Locke", *Bibliothèque Choisie*, VI, 1705, pp. 342-411

⁸³ Il critique par exemple les modalités de l'enseignement du latin, et en particulier le recours à des exercices de thème et de composition de vers latins (*STCE*, § 170).

par la collectivité comme une tentative de s'élever au-dessus des autres. Il est inévitable que l'enfant éduqué comme un aristocrate développe une forme d'arrogance, découlant d'une perception de soi comme supérieur aux autres; or, cette attitude s'avère incompatible avec l'esprit de communauté et d'égalité qui doit régner dans une société libérale, dont la prospérité repose sur le commerce, l'artisanat et les manufactures⁸⁴.

5. Une éducation pour les élites?

Dans le travail de réorganisation de la matière consignée dans les lettres aux époux Clarke ayant abouti aux *Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke n'avait pas centré sa réflexion et son projet éducatif sur l'image abstraite de l'enfant en général; les destinataires de son traité sont précisément définis comme des représentants du rang des *gentlemen* – classe comparable à la petite noblesse terrienne (*landed gentry*)⁸⁵. Dans les lectures de l'ouvrage implicitement proposées par les traducteurs allemands, c'est précisément cette restriction qui est mise en exergue comme caractéristique essentielle des *Thoughts Concerning Education*; la portée que ce critère de démarcation a à leurs yeux n'est peut-être pas étrangère au fait que, en travaillant directement sur le texte anglais, ces traducteurs n'ont pas été exposés à l'opération d'"embourgeoisement" du traité mise en œuvre par Pierre Coste. Celui-ci avait en effet déclaré dans sa première préface (reprise dans les éditions ultérieures):

Il est certain que cet ouvrage a été particulièrement destiné à l'éducation des Gentilshommes: mais cela n'empêche pas qu'il ne puisse servir aussi à l'éducation de toute sorte d'enfants, de quelque condition qu'ils soient: car si vous exceptez ce que l'auteur dit des exercices que doit apprendre un jeune gentilhomme, presque toutes les règles qu'il donne, sont universelles. Je pourrais ajouter que le mot *Gentilhomme* signifie autre chose en français qu'en anglais [...] En Angleterre [...] l'on met dans le tiers État tous ceux qui sont au-dessous de la qualité de Baron, auxquels on donne le titre de *Gentilhomme* [en anglais *Gentlemen*, en note] quand ils ne sont ni fermiers ni artisans⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ *Over de opvoeding der kinderen*, cit., pp. v-vii.

⁸⁵ Parmi les *gentlemen*, certaines familles pouvaient recouvrer des charges militaires: il s'agit donc en réalité d'un groupe social entre la noblesse d'épée et la noblesse terrienne, située cependant au-dessous des *Knights* et des *Esquires*.

⁸⁶ *De l'éducation des enfans* (1695) cit., pp. xxii-xxiv (nous normalisons l'orthographe).

Cette précision n'ayant pas atteint les confrères allemands de Coste, la question de l'identité du destinataire s'avère central dans leurs traductions, parfois positivement, et parfois négativement, comme c'est le cas pour les éditeurs de la fin du siècle, qui essayeront d'abattre le critère du *gentleman*, à une époque où le terme avait d'ailleurs perdu, en anglais aussi, son acception discriminatoire sur le plan social.

Le succès des *Thoughts Concerning Education* auprès du public de langue allemande est attesté par l'existence de six éditions imprimées au cours du XVIII^e siècle. Il ne s'agit pas de simples réimpressions, car le texte a été complètement retraduit cinq fois: deux fois en 1708 (Greifswald et Leipzig), une fois en 1761 (Leipzig/Wien), et deux fois en 1787 (Leipzig et Wien/Wolfenbüttel). La parution concomitante des deux premières traductions mentionnées, peut être mise en relation avec la publication de la deuxième édition préparée par Coste. Le phénomène des traductions concurrentes n'était d'ailleurs pas rare à cette époque⁸⁷, car, au contraire, les échanges d'informations entre imprimeurs, à travers la presse savante et les foires, favorisaient ce genre d'incidents éditoriaux. Différemment de celles de Coste et Rabus, ces traductions – tout comme celles publiées ultérieurement en Allemagne et dans d'autres pays – ne sont pas issues de l'initiative d'un cercle d'intellectuels sympathisants de la philosophie de Locke, mais du travail de pédagogues, dans le sens large du terme: professeurs, instituteurs, précepteurs, enseignants et d'autres figures actives dans le domaine de l'éducation. Les traducteurs qui se sont penchés sur l'ouvrage au XVIII^e siècle présentent, en général, des profils intellectuels dissemblables à ceux de leurs prédécesseurs, ce qui n'est pas sans conséquences, il nous semble, sur l'image des *Thoughts Concerning Education* véhiculée par leurs traductions. En effet, au fur et à mesure que l'on s'éloigne du XVII^e siècle, la question de la paternité du texte et de son identité philosophique paraissent devenir accessoires, tandis que l'ouvrage acquiert de plus en plus le statut de manuel de pédagogie.

La première traduction de 1708, traduction "suédoise" en allemand⁸⁸ est signée par Sebastian Gottfried Starck (ou Starcke, 1668-1710)⁸⁹, qui avait été

⁸⁷ Nous pensons par exemple aux deux traductions anglaises de *La Recherche de la vérité* de Malebranche en 1694.

⁸⁸ *Gedanken von Erziehung junger Edelleute*, cit. (note 35). Nous qualifions cette traduction de suédoise car la ville de Greifswald, située sur la côte baltique était à l'époque sous la juridiction suédoise.

⁸⁹ Des renseignements sur cette figure, connue surtout grâce à ses traductions depuis l'arabe (il donna une édition du *Coran* et du *Kalila wa Dimna*) se trouvent dans A. Hamilton, "To rescue the honour of the Germans'. Qur'an translations by eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century German Protestants", in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 77 (2014), pp. 173-209.

directeur d'un *Gymnasium* évangélique à Berlin, avant d'obtenir la chaire de professeur de langues orientales à Greifswald. Celui-ci prépara ses *Gedanken von Erziehung junger Edelleute* pour les offrir en gage de remerciement au chapitre de la cathédrale de Brandebourg⁹⁰ pour son engagement comme recteur de la jeune Ritterschule (école de chevalerie)⁹¹. Œuvre d'"un grand philosophe anglais"⁹², les *Thoughts Concerning Education* contiennent, comme le traducteur le dit dans la préface, un ensemble de considérations et instructions rationnellement fondées et de bon sens, qui répondent à l'exigence de définir un ensemble de maximes fiables et autorisées pouvant servir de référence pour les éducateurs d'une école telle que la Ritterschule⁹³. Comme nous l'avons déjà suggéré, la transformation, sous la plume du traducteur, des *Pensées sur l'éducation des enfants* en *Pensées sur l'éducation de la jeune noblesse* n'est pas anodine; cette préférence pour un intitulé mieux caractérisé, qui désigne explicitement le destinataire "social" du traité, est également observable dans une des traductions postérieures (Leipzig, 1787), qui a pour titre *Über die Erziehung der Jugend unter den höheren Volksklassen (De l'éducation de la jeunesse chez les classes sociales supérieures)* et précise le nom de Locke avec l'indication *Esq.* [uire] (écuyer)⁹⁴, titre désignant à l'époque un rang supérieur à *gentleman*.

La question de la connotation sociale du modèle éducatif prôné par les *Thoughts Concerning Education* est évoquée aussi dans la préface⁹⁵ et dans les notes (rédigées par deux auteurs différents)⁹⁶ de la seconde traduction allemande de 1708 (Leipzig), le *Unterricht von Erziehung der Kinder (Cours sur l'éducation des enfants)*⁹⁷. Locke, souligne le préfacier, a focalisé son attention sur l'éducation des personnes de rang: si l'on peut considérer ses recommandations sur la formation morale de l'enfant comme universellement applicables, il n'en va pas

⁹⁰ *Gedanken von Erziehung junger Edelleute*, cit., pp. 3-4.

⁹¹ Sur cette institution voir A. von dem Bussche, *Die Ritterakademie zu Brandenburg*, Frankfurt am Main, Lang, 1989.

⁹² *Gedanken von Erziehung junger Edelleute*, cit., p. 2.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Titre de noblesse inférieur à celui de cavalier (*knight*), mais supérieur à celui de *gentleman*.

⁹⁵ Elle est composée d'une partie originale et d'une biographie de Locke tirée de "l'éloge de feu Mr Locke", cit. (*Unterricht von Erziehung der Kinder*, cit., pp. 9-62 de la préface).

⁹⁶ Voir *ibid.*, p. 68. Les notes sont insérées dans le corps du texte, mais distinguées de celui-ci grâce à des signes typographiques (manicules). La plupart des notes contiennent des développements des réflexions de Locke – citations érudites et exemples tirés de l'expérience qui confortent les propos de l'auteurs – mais des objections (concernant en particulier la manière de gérer les « caprices ») sont aussi présents. Ces contenus font supposer que l'auteur était une personne qui avait expérience comme éducateur et jouissait d'une solide culture classique.

⁹⁷ *Unterricht von Erziehung der Kinder*, cit.

de même pour ses conseils concernant l'instruction proprement dite, car le fils d'un commerçant, par exemple, n'a pas besoin d'être formé aux sciences et aux langues⁹⁸. Il faut donc prendre avec précaution certaines consignes de l'auteur, et garder toujours à l'esprit le but que l'on poursuit dans l'éducation des enfants, à savoir – de l'avis du préfacier allemand – la formation d'une nouvelle génération d'individus, non pas meilleurs que leurs progéniteurs, mais tout simplement capables d'assurer la relève dans les fonctions exercées au sein de la société⁹⁹.

Cette traduction commentée est la seule édition en allemand à avoir été réimprimée, notamment à Hannover, en 1729¹⁰⁰. L'édition de Leipzig/Wien de 1761 est en revanche encore une retraduction, comme on l'a dit, justifiée, selon les déclarations de l'éditeur, par la nécessité de mettre au goût du jour l'écriture et de rendre plus aisée la fruição de l'ouvrage. À cette fin, le corps du texte est ici isolé des commentaires, parmi lesquels sont reproduites les notes de Coste, bien que la traduction soit basée sur une édition anglaise¹⁰¹.

Le même agencement du texte se rencontre dans la traduction de Leipzig de 1787¹⁰², où les notes du collaborateur de Locke s'alternent à celles du traducteur – le journaliste et philosophe Karl Sigmund Ouvrier (1751-1819). Celui-ci loue particulièrement, dans sa préface, la réflexion sur la formation morale des enfants, qui représente pour lui la contribution fondamentale des *Thoughts Concerning Education* à la pédagogie. Dans les considérations sur le recours aux sentiments d'honneur et de honte pour orienter le comportement vers la vertu¹⁰³, Ouvrier reconnaît un sujet familier, creusé par des pédagogues allemands contemporains, tels que Resewitz¹⁰⁴ et Campe¹⁰⁵ (auteur de l'autre traduction de 1787)¹⁰⁶. Il souligne, toutefois, que la notion d'honneur devrait être ôtée

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

⁹⁹ Le préfacier cite, en début de son écrit, les célèbres vers d'Horace "Aetas parentum, pejor avis, tulit nos nequiores, mox daturos progeniem vitiofiorem" (Horace, *Odes*, III, 6), et il se montre surtout concerné par la décadence de l'éducation domestique dans les villes et dans les provinces et par l'impossibilité d'assurer la relève dans les fonctions publiques (ibid., pp. 3-7).

¹⁰⁰ *Unterricht von Erziehung der Kinder*, 1729, cit.

¹⁰¹ Tirées de l'édition de Paris de 1747. La répartition de l'ouvrage en sections établie par Coste est aussi conservée.

¹⁰² *Über die Erziehung der Jugend unter den höheren Volksklassen*, cit.

¹⁰³ Qu'il corrige partiellement dans ses commentaires. Ouvrier critique en particulier l'usage de la louange pour développer chez les enfants ce qu'il définit comme l'instinct de l'honneur.

¹⁰⁴ Pédagogue, Friedrich Gabriel Resewitz (1729-1806) est connu principalement en tant qu'auteur de l'essai *Die Erziehung des Bürgers* (1773) et des cinq volumes de *Gedanken, Vorschläge und Wünsche zur Verbesserung der öffentlichen Erziehung als Materialien zur Pädagogik* (1778-86).

¹⁰⁵ Nous revenons sur cette figure au moment de présenter la seconde traduction allemande de 1787.

¹⁰⁶ *Über die Erziehung der Jugend unter den höheren Volksklassen*, cit., p. xiii.

de sa connotation de classe, car cet instinct de “décence” et de recherche de l’approbation des autres est commun à tous les êtres humains et il est parfois plus développé chez les hommes ordinaires et les paysans que chez les “Seigneurs à la mode” ; il faudrait alors distinguer entre l’honneur mondain et celui fondé dans les vérités de la morale, qui est source de satisfaction intérieure et de bonheur authentique¹⁰⁷. Toujours dans la même perspective de prolongement de la réflexion lockéenne au-delà des *Höheren Volksklassen* mentionnées dans le titre de la traduction, Ouvrier se prononce en faveur de l’instruction publique. S’il adopte cette position, ce n’est pas parce qu’il estime qu’elle est en soi préférable à l’éducation privée, mais parce que si l’on veut atteindre les buts supérieurs de l’éducation, à savoir le progrès de l’humanité et l’avènement des Lumières [*Menschenbesserung und Aufklärung*], il faut prendre en charge les classes moyennes et réformer les écoles pour la bourgeoisie, surtout celles urbaines¹⁰⁸. La question de l’éducation exigerait d’être traitée comme une affaire d’État [*Angelegenheit des Staats*] et les autorités devraient s’activer pour rendre l’instruction accessible aux personnes issues de milieux modestes¹⁰⁹. Une dernière considération de cet éditeur/traducteur retient notre attention, car elle exalte un aspect des *Thoughts Concerning Education* qui a déçu certains interprètes, mais qui a contribué significativement, à notre avis, à leur diffusion, à savoir la “neutralité” des recommandations concernant l’enseignement de la religion. Craignant que cette absence ne soit perçue comme une lacune, Ouvrier se justifie de ne pas avoir développé davantage cette partie de l’ouvrage avec des commentaires qui auraient pu rebuter les lecteurs appartenant à d’autres confessions (il mentionne notamment catholiques et juifs). Ne serait-il pas préventif, d’ailleurs, de considérer son propre système de croyances comme le seul donnant accès au Salut?¹¹⁰

L’année de la publication de *Über die Erziehung der Jugend* parut aussi, comme nous l’avons dit, une autre traduction allemande, portant l’indication de lieu Wien/Wolfenbüttel¹¹¹. Il s’agit d’un travail collectif, auquel ont contribué

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. xiv.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. xv.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. xvi, xviii.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. xxiv.

¹¹¹ En dépit des apparences, on ne doit pas considérer ces traductions comme rivales. Comme on peut le lire dans les préfaces respectives, leur parution simultanée est le fruit d’une simple coïncidence : Ouvrier s’en excuse d’ailleurs auprès de Campe, qui avait publiquement annoncé son projet de traduire *STCE* quatre ans auparavant. L’accord survenu entre les éditeurs est témoigné par le fait que l’imprimeur Crusius de Leipzig n’exploita pas le privilège qu’il avait obtenu pour protéger son édition de la concurrence.

deux pédagogues en particulier: Ludwig Rudolphi (1751-1798)¹¹², qui s'occupa de la traduction, et Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746-1818), promoteur de l'initiative et éditeur de la collection dans laquelle le texte fut inséré, l'*Allgemeine Revision des gesammten Schul-und Erziehungswesens*¹¹³. Campe a été l'une des figures les plus influentes de la pédagogie allemande et européenne dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle; jadis précepteur des frères Humboldt, il fut appelé à diriger le *Philanthropinum* de Dessau, un institut de formation idéalement destiné à accueillir des enfants issus de tous les milieux sociaux – y compris des filles – et qui, inspiré des principes lockéens et rousseauistes d'écoute des inclinations des enfants, privilégiait une approche pratique à l'éducation, tant dans le choix des enseignements que dans les méthodes d'apprentissage¹¹⁴. Après l'expérience du *Philanthropinum*, il fonda lui-même à Hambourg une école qui appliquait ces mêmes principes; à cette époque remonte la rédaction de ses ouvrages les plus importants de littérature pour l'enfance¹¹⁵, ainsi que le monumental projet de l'*Allgemeine Revision*, que l'on peut considérer, avec ses 16 volumes, comme une véritable *summa* du savoir pédagogique de l'époque, ainsi que le manifeste d'un groupe de réformateurs dits *Praktischer Erzieher* (éducateurs pratiques/empiriques). L'*Allgemeine Revision*, dirigée par Campe, se présente comme une œuvre chorale, réunissant les essais de plusieurs auteurs allemands contemporains et des textes de référence étrangers, comme justement les *Thoughts Concerning Education*, mais aussi l'*Émile*. Dans ce contexte, l'ouvrage de Locke est exalté en tant qu'outil fonctionnel à former un "nouvel homme", un individu plus en harmonie avec son environnement, plus heureux, et moralement meilleur que ceux qui l'ont précédé: Campe et ses collaborateurs assignent donc à l'ouvrage un but différent de celui envisagé par l'éditeur de la traduction de Leipzig de 1708¹¹⁶. Du moment que l'ouvrage est intégré dans cette perspective, qui est celle de

¹¹² Connu surtout en tant qu'auteur du traité *Über die häusliche Erziehung*, Bieweg, Berlin 1789. Sa sœur Caroline Christiane Louise (1754-1811), autrice de poèmes et fables, fut également impliquée dans un projet pédagogique, le *Erziehungs-Institut für junge Demoiselles*.

¹¹³ Sur cet ambitieux projet éditorial et de réforme de l'éducation voir S. Austermann, *Die 'Allgemeine Revision': pädagogische Theorieentwicklung im 18. Jahrhundert*, Klinkhardt, Bad Heilbrunn 2010.

¹¹⁴ Voir R. B. Loudon, *Johann Bernhard Basedow and the Transformation of Modern Education*, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2020 et J. Garber (éd.), *'Die Stammutter aller guten Schulen': Das Dessauer Philanthropinum und der deutsche Philanthropismus 1774–1793*, Niemeyer Max Verlag, Tübingen 2008.

¹¹⁵ En particulier *Robinson der Jüngere* (1779) et *Die Entdeckung von Amerika* (1781).

¹¹⁶ Voir *supra*, note 94.

l'*Allgemeine Revision*, l'emphase sur son auteur, sa genèse et sa tradition devient totalement superflue: dans cette édition on fait l'économie de la biographie de Locke, de la lettre à Clarke et des préfaces de Coste; seules une dizaine de notes de l'illustre traducteur français sont conservées, tandis que le bas de pages se remplit des commentaires de Campe, Salzmann¹¹⁷, Resewitz, Struve¹¹⁸, Rudolphi et d'autres auteurs, qui discutent et contredisent parfois les réflexions de Locke en créant l'effet d'un dialogue dynamique. Les *Thoughts Concerning Education* sont ainsi actualisés dans cette édition, qui assigne à Locke le rôle de géant de la philosophie de l'éducation, prêtant ses épaules à des nains encore plus éclairés: "Ces hommes vénérables [Locke et Rousseau] étaient nos prédécesseurs, ils ont tracé la route et nous l'avons suivie [...] ils avaient de grands talents, mais ils étaient humains [...] et comme la postérité corrigera les erreurs présentes dans nos théories, ainsi nous pouvons dénoncer ouvertement les défauts et les inexactitudes chez nos prédécesseurs"¹¹⁹.

6. Et les filles?

Outre une identité de classe, le destinataire du projet éducatif exposé dans les *Thoughts Concerning Education* a une identité de genre bien définie: "I have said *He* here – précisait Locke – because the principal aim of my discourse is, how a young Gentleman should be brought up from his infancy, which in all things will not so perfectly suit the education of daughters; though where the difference of sex requires different treatment, 'twill be no hard matter to distinguish"¹²⁰.

L'absence d'une réflexion consacrée spécifiquement à l'éducation des filles – qui paraît être déléguée, en quelque sorte, au bon sens des précepteurs (de leurs frères) – trahit une approche étrangement traditionaliste de la part de Locke, qui avait adressé à Mme Clarke aussi des conseils sur l'éducation des filles¹²¹, et qui, depuis son retour en Angleterre, avait entretenu une relation

¹¹⁷ Christian Gotthilf Salzmann (1744-1811); voir: B. Reinhard, "Christian Gotthilf Salzmann, ein Pädagoge von Weltruf", in *Paedagogica Historica* 30 (1994), pp. 565-592.

¹¹⁸ Jacob Struve (1755-1841); voir: B. Elsner, "Jacob Struve, Direktor des Christianeums und Liebhaber der Mathematik", in G. Wolfschmidt (éd.), *Hamburgs Geschichte einmal anders. Entwicklung der Naturwissenschaften, Medizin und Technik*, Books on demand, Norderstedt 2009, pp. 55-69.

¹¹⁹ *Handbuch der Erziehung*, cit. (note 40), p. viii.

¹²⁰ *STCE*, § 6.

¹²¹ *Correspondence*, Lettre 809.

intellectuelle et amicale étroite avec Lady Cudworth¹²². Si l'on voulait définir la position du philosophe sur l'éducation des filles à partir des quelques références indirectes présentes dans le texte, on pourrait conclure qu'il envisage pour elles au moins l'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture de la langue d'usage, ainsi que de la lecture du latin, afin qu'elles puissent transmettre ces connaissances à leurs enfants à travers des activités ludiques¹²³; une perspective décidément moins progressiste que celle adoptée par Mary Astell dans sa *Serious Proposal to the Ladies*¹²⁴, imprimé un an seulement après la publication des *Thoughts Concerning Education*.

Quelques éditeurs de l'ouvrage à l'étranger paraissent avoir perçu l'absence d'une section sur l'éducation féminine comme une lacune, ce qui est attesté par le fait qu'ils ont créé des éditions «hybrides», associant les *Thoughts Concerning Education* avec d'autres textes, qui creusaient la question de l'instruction des filles. La traduction allemande de Leipzig de 1708 est la première version étrangère qui opère cette stratégie d'"intégration" de l'ouvrage, en réunissant dans un même volume le texte de Locke et celui du *Traité de l'éducation des filles* (1687) de Fénelon, référence incontournable dans ce domaine presque exploré. Cette démarche est également adoptée dans deux versions italiennes; tant l'adaptation de 1736, l'*Arte dell'educare i fanciulli* [...], que la traduction de 1775, *Della educazione dei fanciulli* [...] comportent en effet un supplément sur l'éducation des filles: la première puise ce matériel d'un classique italien de 1574, *La civil conversazione* de Stefano Guazzo, tandis que la seconde (et ses rééditions), proposent des extraits tirés d'un texte bien plus récent, le *Traité des études* de Charles Rollin (1726).

Des (au moins) onze éditions des *Thoughts Concerning Education* en italien publiées au cours du XVIII^e siècle, six comportent ce genre de complément: le premier livre du *Traité* de Rollin¹²⁵, en particulier, est présent dans toutes les éditions imprimées après 1775¹²⁶. Ce phénomène paraît particulier

¹²² Celle-ci publia d'ailleurs un ouvrage où elle dénonçait les vices et les défauts de l'éducation réservée aux filles: *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Virtuous or Christian Life*, Churchill, London 1705. Les arguments de l'autrice sont basés sur les principes de *STCE*, car elle part du constat que le projet de Locke sera inapplicable tant que les mères seront gardées dans un état de complète ignorance. Il est intéressant de noter que l'une des éditions successives du texte est faussement attribuée à Locke (Waller, London 1747).

¹²³ Par exemple la lecture des fables d'Esopé en latin (*STCE*, §167).

¹²⁴ [s. n.] *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest by a Lover of Her Sex*, Wilkin, London 1694. Deuxième partie 1697.

¹²⁵ Composé de deux chapitres, dont le deuxième entièrement consacré aux filles.

¹²⁶ *Educazione dei fanciulli del signor Locke*, 1775, cit. (note 51); *Educazione de' fanciulli del Signor*

à l'Italie, car l'exemple de la traduction allemande de Leipzig de 1708 n'a pas été suivi par les autres éditions allemandes. Comment expliquer cette singularité? Des éléments de réponse nous sont suggérés par nos recherches sur les femmes savantes à l'époque moderne, et notamment par le constat que, à partir des années 1720, sur la scène philosophique italienne, le voile avait été levé sur le problème de l'éducation des femmes et sur la possibilité de leur permettre l'accès aux études¹²⁷. Dans les premières décennies du siècle, plusieurs femmes italiennes avaient pu franchir les seuils des académies des sciences et, même, des universités, tandis qu'au Nord des Alpes ces lieux devaient rester strictement inaccessibles pour elles jusqu'à la fin du XIX^e siècle¹²⁸: c'est à Bologne que, pour la première fois, une femme, en la personne de Laura Bassi, put monter en chaire et enseigner à l'université. Exceptionnel, mais pas absolument unique¹²⁹, cet exploit est emblématique d'une culture de l'éducation féminine de plus en plus développée et répandue, à l'époque, en Italie: l'addition aux *Thoughts Concerning Education* du *Traité* de Rollin, qui contient des recommandations didactiques détaillées sur les sujets à enseigner aux jeunes filles et sur les méthodes et les livres à utiliser à cette fin, pourrait ainsi être interprétée comme la réponse à une exigence propre au contexte italien.

En élargissant l'objectif pour dresser un tableau des vicissitudes de l'ouvrage en Italie, on peut d'abord signaler que le nombre d'éditions en italien dépasse celui des éditions dans les autres langues cibles (en considérant la version française comme un "deuxième original"), même si la première version italienne parut relativement tard, à savoir en 1735, à Lucques. Ce retard pourrait étonner; mais il ne faut pas oublier que les élites italiennes lisaient couramment le français, ce qui porte à considérer cette traduction, certainement inspirée de la parution de l'édition d'Amsterdam de 1733¹³⁰, comme une démarche ultérieure dans la promotion de l'ouvrage, visant un public plus ample que celui

Locke, 1781, cit. (note 52); *Educazione dei fanciulli del signor Locke*, 1782 (note 53); *Educazione dei fanciulli del signor Locke*, 1792 (note 54); *Educazione dei fanciulli del signor Locke*, 1799 (note 55).

¹²⁷ Comme en témoignent les actes d'une dispute académique de 1723 (publiés en 1729): *Discorsi accademici di vari autori viventi intorno agli studi delle donne*, Giovanni Manfrè, Padova 1729. Nous rappe-lons également la parution en 1740 del *Trattato degli studi delle donne* (Pitteri, Venezia) de Giovanni Niccolò Bandiera.

¹²⁸ Avec la seule exception de Anna Maria Van Schurman, qui avait été autorisée à écouter les cours à l'Université de Utrecht à la fin des années 1630.

¹²⁹ Nous pensons par exemple à Maria Gaetana Agnesi, autrice d'un manuel d'analyse mathématique, qui fut elle aussi nommée professeure de Mathématique par l'université de Bologne (charge honoraire, pour ainsi dire, car elle ne s'y rendit pas pour enseigner), ou à Anna Morandi Manzolini, à qui fut attribuée, toujours à Bologne, la chaire d'Anatomie.

¹³⁰ Sur laquelle elle est basée.

des érudits et des intellectuels. Fruit du travail de Fabio Marchini, médecin de profession¹³¹, cette traduction fidèle et dépourvue de commentaires et préfaces originaux¹³², a traversé tout le siècle¹³³, et transité par les centres névralgiques de la typographie de la presqu'île – de Lucques à Venise et à Naples – en passant par les presses d'un des imprimeurs-libraires les plus célèbres et prolifiques de l'époque, Francesco Pitteri¹³⁴. Celui-ci réimprima les *Thoughts Concerning Education* l'année même de leur parution à Lucques chez Marescandoli (1735) et cette initiative ne fut pas sans conséquences sur ses choix éditoriaux, car son catalogue s'enrichit au même moment d'éditions de fables animalières¹³⁵, suivant les suggestions de Locke¹³⁶ et de Coste¹³⁷.

La parution des deux éditions (Marescandoli et Pitteri) italiennes de 1735 – témoignage tangible du potentiel commercial de l'ouvrage – est certainement à l'origine du projet de *L'Arte di educare i fanciulli*, l'adaptation préparée par Giulio Cesare Becelli (1686-1750), un essayiste et dramaturge, qui travaillait à l'époque comme précepteur. Du texte de Coste, Becelli tire une version qui – à l'opposé de celle de Marchini – s'avère extrêmement libre par rapport à l'original, tant du point de vue formel que du point de vue du contenu et, pour ainsi dire, de l'esprit. Une préface incluant une courte biographie de Locke introduit ici cent aphorismes, dont la plupart sont accompagnés par des longues commentaires (*giunte*), où le traducteur déploie toute son érudition

¹³¹ Il a aussi produit plusieurs traductions depuis le français, dont aussi une version, restée inédite, du *Discours sur la pluralité des mondes* de Fontenelle (voir [sn], *Memorie e documenti per servire alla storia di Lucca*, Bertini, Lucca 1831, X, pp. 233-34).

¹³² Le traducteur reste ici entièrement caché derrière le texte, différemment de ce que l'on peut observer dans la plupart des traductions de l'ouvrage.

¹³³ À l'exception de Verone 1736, toutes les éditions italiennes sont des réimpressions de cette traduction.

¹³⁴ Spécialisé dans les traductions depuis le français. Il imprima, entre autres, des ouvrages de Montesquieu (*Considerazioni sopra le cagioni della grandezza de' Romani*), Nicole (*Continuazione dei saggi di morale*, 1740), Bossuet (*Seconda istruzione*, 1735), et le *Dictionnaire* de Moréri.

¹³⁵ Entre 1735 et 1736 Francesco Pitteri publia en effet trois volumes bilingues (latin/italien) de fables façonnées sur le modèle d'Ésope : les *Cento favole de Faerno* (1736), les *Favole di Fedro* (1735) et les *Favole d'Aviano* [...] *e di Gabria* [Avianus et Babrius] (1735).

¹³⁶ Qui prône l'usage de ces fables tant pour éduquer les enfants aux principes moraux qu'elles contiennent (§156), que pour l'apprentissage et l'exercice du latin (§ 167 et § 177). Notons que ces éditions de fables publiées par Pitteri sont bilingues (italien et latin) conformément aux suggestions de Locke.

¹³⁷ Rappelons que Coste avait dû modifier certaines de ces recommandations de lecture. En particulier, bien qu'il ait maintenu dans le corps du texte la référence à *Raynard the Fox*, classique de la littérature anglaise pour l'enfance, il signale dans une note que ce texte peut être remplacé par les *Fables* de La Fontaine.

en la matière¹³⁸. Becelli revendique l'adoption d'une attitude neutrale vis-à-vis de l'auteur, à mi-chemin entre la critique et l'adulation¹³⁹, ce qui aboutit à la formulation, dans les *giunte*, de certaines remarques plutôt étonnantes, qui défigurent partiellement l'ouvrage. Une des plus remarquables est, à notre avis, celle associée à l'aphorisme LXXV, qui résume les recommandations de Locke concernant l'enseignement de l'astronomie. Pour l'auteur anglais, il va de soi que le précepteur doit apprendre à son élève le système copernicien; or, il n'en est pas ainsi pour le traducteur italien, qui souligne que les conséquences de cette doctrine pour la religion devraient nous faire préférer le système ptolémaïque, à cette "hypothèse" qui contredit les écritures¹⁴⁰. Ces allégations trahissent, il nous semble, une intention d'attribuer une identité religieuse au traité de Locke, et au modèle éducatif qu'il véhicule; dessin qui se manifeste également dans le choix de remplacer les citations de Montaigne par celles d'auteurs religieux et de théologiens. *L'arte di educare i fanciulli* dévoie ainsi le projet éducatif moderne de Locke, en lui superposant une connotation religieuse et, spécifiquement, catholique, qui reconduit le texte à la fonction d'outil de reproduction d'une *forma mentis* désormais dépassée.

7. Jusqu'aux confins de l'Europe

Comme nous l'avons dit, les *Thoughts Concerning Education* sont, parmi les ouvrages de Locke, celui qui a été le plus réédité au cours du XVIII^e siècle, ainsi que celui qui a eu le plus grand nombre de traductions en langue étrangère¹⁴¹. Parmi ces traductions, il y en a plusieurs que nous n'avons pas pu analyser – étant dépourvue des compétences linguistiques nécessaires pour accéder à ces

¹³⁸ Il paraît d'ailleurs vouloir rivaliser avec Coste, "il quale contrappone i detti del Montagna pure Francese a quelli de Loche; quasi che tra questi due soli sia stata agitata così grande materia", *L'arte di educare i fanciulli*, cit., p. 68. Becelli cite en revanche, dans ses commentaires, plusieurs autres sources, comme Las Casas, Plutarque, Platon, Aristote, Silvio Antoniano, Jacques Sadolet et Pietro Paolo Vergerio.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 80-1.

¹⁴¹ La bibliographie publiée dans la base de données *John Locke resources* (<https://openpublishing.psu.edu/locke/bib/early-wk.html>), qui est constamment mise à jour, atteste notamment l'existence de 38 éditions en langue étrangère (y compris le latin) de *l'Essai* et de son *Abridgement* (globalement) et de 39 éditions étrangères de *STCE*. Les recherches que nous avons menées pour préparer la présente étude nous ont permis de repérer d'autres éditions de l'ouvrage, qui n'apparaissent pas dans cette bibliographie (et de révoquer en doute l'authenticité d'une réimpression répertoriée), ce qui porterait le bilan complexe à 43 éditions étrangères de *STCE*.

textes, dont certains sont aujourd'hui rares¹⁴². Il s'agit notamment des traductions en langue suédoise, russe, hongroise et polonaise; malgré l'impossibilité de détailler le contenu de ces traductions, nous voudrions offrir un aperçu de ces versions, à l'aide des quelques informations que nous avons pu repérer à leur sujet, pour comprendre comment elles s'insèrent dans le tableau du rayonnement européen des *Thoughts Concerning Education*. L'existence de ces traductions est en elle-même significative d'une large circulation du texte: elles témoignent en effet d'une tentative d'appropriation du modèle éducatif lockéen dans des régions alors aux confins de l'Europe et qui, comme dans le cas des pays de l'Est, entretenaient de faibles relations culturelles avec le monde anglais.

De ces traductions, seule la suédoise, publiée en 1709, est basée sur l'original anglais; son auteur, Mathias Riben ou Ribe (1676-1723) était issu d'une famille de médecins et il avait séjourné quelques temps en Angleterre, où il avait exercé comme chirurgien¹⁴³: il est donc fort possible qu'il ait découvert l'ouvrage par voie directe, alors qu'il été plongé dans cet environnement auquel Locke appartenait aussi, du moins formellement. À l'époque où il traduisit les *Thoughts Concerning Education* il était le médecin du roi de Suède, Charles XII. Riben ajoute à sa traduction de l'ouvrage une longue préface, qu'il enrichit avec les mêmes citations latines qui paraissent dans l'introduction de l'édition allemande de Leipzig (1708)¹⁴⁴: cela autorise l'hypothèse qu'il s'est appuyé sur cette version pour mener à bien son travail.

La traduction russe est, en revanche, basée sur la version de Coste, ce qui n'est nullement surprenant, compte tenu de la (longue) fortune du français, et des Français, auprès des milieux aristocratiques et intellectuels russes¹⁴⁵. Le livre parut à Moscou en 1759, au moment même où un mouvement de réforme de l'éducation était en train de prendre forme: l'université de Moscou – dont les cours étaient ouverts au public – venait d'être fondée (1755), et c'est à l'une des figures impliquées dans cette entreprise que l'on doit la traduction des *Thoughts*

¹⁴² En particulier la traduction hongroise. La traduction polonaise, en revanche, a été numérisée et est désormais disponible en ligne: <http://pbc.up.krakow.pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=429&from=publication>.

¹⁴³ Source: Svenskt biografiskt lexikon: <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/mobil/Artikel/6719#/sbl/Mobil/Artikel/6719>

¹⁴⁴ *Unterricht von Erziehung der Kinder*, cit. Il s'agit notamment d'une citation tirée des *Odes* d'Horace (III, 6): « aetas parentum, peior avis, tulit nos nequiores, mox daturos progeniem vitiosiorum ».

¹⁴⁵ Voir A. Mézin et V. Rjéoutski (éds.) *Les Français en Russie au siècle des Lumières. Dictionnaire des Français, Suisses, Wallons et autres francophones en Russie de Pierre le Grand à Paul Ier*, Centre International d'Étude du XVIII^e siècle, Ferney-Voltaire 2011.

Concerning Education en langue russe¹⁴⁶. Il s'agit notamment de Nikolaj Nikitič Popovskij (1730-1760), homme de lettres, traducteur¹⁴⁷, journaliste¹⁴⁸ et professeur de philosophie et d'éloquence¹⁴⁹. Popovskij, que le célèbre réformateur Mikhail Lomonosov mobilisa pour le projet de fondation de l'Université, se fit promoteur de l'enseignement des sciences et de l'usage du vernaculaire à la place du latin¹⁵⁰: deux principes promus aussi par Locke. La date et le contexte de publication de cette traduction suggèrent l'hypothèse que, dans ce cas aussi, l'existence de versions allemandes du texte a joué un rôle, bien qu'indirecte, dans la genèse de cette initiative. Le corps professoral de l'université naissante de Moscou comptait en effet un certain nombre de ressortissant allemands¹⁵¹, qui connaissaient certainement les *Thoughts Concerning Education*, désormais populaires en Allemagne, surtout dans le milieu des pédagogues.

Des traductions en hongrois et en polonais, nous pouvons uniquement désigner les titres, les lieux d'impression et, dans un cas, le nom du traducteur – la littérature secondaire sur ces textes étant absente ou inaccessible pour nous à cause de la barrière linguistique. La traduction hongroise des *Thoughts Concerning Education* (*A' gyermekek neveléséről*)¹⁵², non répertoriée dans les études bibliographiques sur Locke¹⁵³, serait l'œuvre d'un aristocrate transylvain de foi réformée, le comte Ádám Székely (1724-1789)¹⁵⁴. Elle fut publiée en

¹⁴⁶ Nous signalons l'existence d'une thèse de doctorat sur cette traduction, que nous n'avons pas pu consulter : Marianne Verena Hoffman, *Studien zur Syntax von N. N. Popovskijs Locke-Übersetzung*, Bonn 1982.

¹⁴⁷ Il fut auteur de plusieurs traductions du latin et d'une traduction (depuis la version française d'Étienne de Silhouette) de l'*Essay on man* de Pope. Voir : H. Keiper, *Pope, Popovskij und die Popen : zur Entstehungsgeschichte der russischen Übersetzung des 'Essay on man*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2001.

¹⁴⁸ Il fut rédacteur du *Moskovskije Vedomosti*, le premier journal non gouvernemental en langue russe, fondé en 1756.

¹⁴⁹ Sur le rôle de Popovskij dans le mouvement des lumières russes et le projet de réforme de l'éducation voir : Hilmar Preuß, *Vorläufer der Intelligencija?!: Bildungskonzepte und adliges Verhalten in der russischen Literatur und Kultur der Aufklärung*, Frank & Timme, Berlin 2013.

¹⁵⁰ Cette pratique sera ensuite adoptée dans cette université, dès 1767. Voir R. Comtet : "Mixail Vasil' evič Lomonosov (1711-1765) et le Latin", in *Revue des Études Slaves*, 83 (2012), pp. 691-707.

¹⁵¹ Alexey A. Romanov, Oleg Y. Yakhshiyani, Nikolay A. Omelchenko, "European experience and foreign professorship at the stage of establishing Moscow University", *SHS Web of Conferences 103, Russian and Foreign Experience in the System of Humanities Education 2020*, disponible en ligne: https://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2021/14/shsconf_shpr2021_01030.pdf.

¹⁵² *A' gyermekek neveléséről*, cit. (note 60).

¹⁵³ Nous n'avons pas pu analyser directement un exemplaire, mais nous en avons trouvé notice dans les catalogues des bibliothèques.

¹⁵⁴ Voir B. Mester, "Locke's theory of education as a philosophical anthropology", in *Metodicki Oglledi 21* (2014), pp. 71-84. Le chercheur signale l'existence d'une autre adaptation hongroise contemporaine, partielle, de l'ouvrage.

1771¹⁵⁵ à Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca aujourd'hui), alors capitale de la Transylvanie, par la typographie du Református kollégium, l'une des académies calvinistes établies dans la région¹⁵⁶. Cette traduction a donc pris forme, elle aussi, dans le contexte d'une institution d'enseignement, tout comme la *Xiązka [książka] o edukacyi dzieci* (*Livre sur l'éducation des enfants*), imprimée pour l'école piariste de Varsovie en 1781¹⁵⁷. La diversité des environnements culturels et, surtout, confessionnels comporte des différences visibles entre les éditions hongroise et polonaise: le nom de Locke, que le typographe de l'Académie réformée de Kolozsvár avait fait imprimer en rouge, disparaît complètement de la page de titre de la traduction polonaise; cette dernière version fait aussi l'économie de la lettre-dédicace à Clarke ainsi que des préfaces et des notes de Coste: le premier paragraphe de l'original¹⁵⁸ devient ici l'introduction au texte. Ces détails sont moins anodins qu'on ne le pense, car ils visent un but précis: celui d'effacer, tout en récupérant l'ouvrage, la figure de son auteur, conformément à une stratégie dont nous explorerons mieux les raisons en étudiant le cas des traductions espagnoles.

8. La réticence espagnole

Dans la cartographie de la réception des *Thoughts Concerning Education* – dont les traductions sont à la fois témoins et acteurs – il y a néanmoins une zone d'ombre, qui émane d'un des centres de la culture européenne moderne: l'Espagne. En effet, tandis que des traductions de l'ouvrage ont été produites, partout en Europe, déjà au cours de la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle¹⁵⁹, il a fallu attendre 1797 pour voir circuler une traduction espagnole. L'impression, à Madrid, de l'*Educación de los niños*¹⁶⁰ paraît énigmatique et révélatrice à la fois. Énigmatique du fait même de son existence: pourquoi imprimer, à la veille du XIX^e siècle, la traduction d'un texte de pédagogie enraciné dans une autre époque et qui avait été dépassé, entretemps, par d'autres ouvrages plus récents sur le sujet, comme l'*Émile*, par exemple? La supposition, possible,

¹⁵⁵ Une note sur la couverture indique cependant qu'elle aurait été achevée en 1769.

¹⁵⁶ Sur les académies calvinistes en Transylvanie voir, entre autres, K. Benda, "La Réforme en Hongrie", in *BSPH* 122 (Janvier-Février-Mars 1976), pp. 30-53 et L. Makkai, "Gábor Bethlen et la culture européenne", in *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 28 (1982), pp. 37-71.

¹⁵⁷ *Xiązka o edukacyi dzieci*, cit. (note 59).

¹⁵⁸ "A sound mind in a sound body[...]."

¹⁵⁹ À l'exception des traductions parues dans le pays d'Europe orientale.

¹⁶⁰ *Educación de los niños*, cit. (note 57).

que la présence sur le marché de plusieurs éditions en français (d'ailleurs comparativement rares dans les catalogues des bibliothèques ibériques) aurait rendu superflue la réalisation d'une traduction en langue espagnole est invalidée par deux constats: tout d'abord, le fait que des traductions ont été produites dans d'autres pays où la connaissance passive du français était assez répandue – comme l'Italie et l'Allemagne¹⁶¹; en deuxième lieu, le fait que le taux d'alphabétisation et d'instruction en Espagne était encore très faible au XVIII^e siècle, et même plus bas qu'au siècle précédent¹⁶². On peut donc légitimement présumer la présence de quelques raisons spécifiques de cette exception espagnole. Une traduction si tardive suggère, à notre avis, une forme tension entre une inclination à l'accueil de l'ouvrage, d'une part, et, de l'autre, la présence d'obstacles culturels persistants, qui ont entravé ce processus d'assimilation. Une découverte vient conforter cette interprétation: l'existence de deux traductions manuscrites réalisées avant l'impression de *l'Educación de los niños*. En effet, dans les catalogues de la bibliothèque nationale d'Espagne et de la bibliothèque numérique de Galice sont inventoriés respectivement un manuscrit intitulé *La educación de los hijos*¹⁶³, et des *Pensamientos sobre la educación*¹⁶⁴. Aucun des deux manuscrits n'est daté, mais des indices dans le corps du texte permettent de conclure que *La educación de los hijos* est le plus ancien des deux. Comme on peut le lire dans la préface, cette traduction est en effet basée sur l'édition de Paris de 1747, et sa réalisation peut être située, par conséquent, vers le milieu du XVIII^e siècle; la seconde, basée, en revanche, sur une édition anglaise, n'a certainement pas vu le jour avant les années 1770, car ce manuscrit comprend un résumé de la vie de Locke (de la même main que la traduction) tiré de *L'Encyclopédie Britannique*, dont la première édition originale est de 1768-1771. Les deux manuscrits s'avèrent incomplets: le plus récent (*Pensamientos sobre la educación*) après la courte bio-bibliographie de l'auteur, commence au *folio* 27, au milieu d'une phrase qui appartient au paragraphe § 94 de la dernière édition anglaise; par contre, *La educación de los hijos* s'interrompt peu avant la fin de la

¹⁶¹ Dans la préface de la traduction de 1761 on trouve d'ailleurs l'indication qu'en Allemagne l'ouvrage était lu en version française (*Herrn Johann Lockens Gedanken von Erziehung der Kinder*, cit., p. V).

¹⁶² Voir, par exemple: J. Saugnieux, *Les problèmes de l'alphabétisation dans l'Espagne du XVIII^e siècle*, in J.-R. Aymes, È.-M. Fell, J.-L. Guarena (éds.), *L'Enseignement primaire en Espagne et en Amérique latine du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours*, Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, Tours 1986, pp. 19-29 et J. Soubeyroux, "Enquête sur les niveaux de fortune et les niveaux de culture dans l'Espagne du XVIII^e siècle", in *Imprévue* 1 (1982), pp. 249-264.

¹⁶³ *La educación de los hijos*, cit. (note 56).

¹⁶⁴ *Pensamientos sobre la educación*, cit. (note 44).

section XXIII (donc vers la fin de l'ouvrage) au milieu du § 194.

Comment interpréter ces initiatives de traduction? Les deux manuscrits témoignent certainement, de par leur existence, d'un accueil positif des *Thoughts Concerning Education* de la part des traducteurs et d'une intention de préserver l'ouvrage: en ce qui concerne le contenu, et même l'expression, elles se présentent en effet comme des traductions assez fidèles. Sous le profil formel, les deux manuscrits exhibent des caractéristiques qui laissent présumer que les deux traductions ont été conçues et préparées dans des buts différents. Les spécificités de la traduction la plus récente induisent à la considérer comme un manuscrit de travail destiné à l'usage privé ou à une circulation limitée; il pourrait s'agir d'un exercice de traduction. Entièrement rédigé par une seule personne, le manuscrit présente de nombreuses corrections d'une autre main, celle d'un ami du rédacteur, qui aurait été chargé de la révision¹⁶⁵. Nous ignorons l'identité de l'auteur de cette traduction, qui n'est pas révélée explicitement; l'origine du manuscrit permet néanmoins de supposer qu'il peut s'agir d'une personne faisant partie de l'entourage du IX duc d'Osuna¹⁶⁶ et de sa femme María Josefa Pimentel y Téllez-Girón (ce qui expliquerait aussi le choix de l'anglais comme langue source)¹⁶⁷, que l'historiographie dépeint comme des mécènes¹⁶⁸ personnellement engagés dans des projets de réforme de l'éducation et de soutien pour la formation des classes défavorisées (tel que celui des *escuelas patrióticas*)¹⁶⁹.

La réalisation de *La educación de los hijos* paraît se situer dans un cas de figure complètement différent: la présence d'un paratexte, l'absence de corrections, l'alternance de plusieurs calligraphies, la division en deux tomes et l'indication de l'identité du traducteur portent à conclure qu'il s'agit d'une copie, et non pas d'une première ébauche, d'un travail conçu pour la publication. Nous

¹⁶⁵ Comme l'on déduit d'un billet relié avec le travail.

¹⁶⁶ Le manuscrit fait partie des documents issus de la bibliothèque des ducs d'Osuna, qui devint en 1786 la première bibliothèque ouverte au public de Madrid. Puisque la rédaction du manuscrit est certainement postérieure à 1770, on peut supposer qu'il a été réalisé lorsque le duché d'Osuna était sous le contrôle de Pedro de Alcántara Téllez-Girón y Pacheco IX.

¹⁶⁷ En Espagne, comme en Italie, la connaissance de l'anglais était peu commune, à l'époque, même dans les milieux aisés et parmi les intellectuels.

¹⁶⁸ Voir J. José Iglesias Rodríguez et M. García Fernández (éds.), *Osuna entre los tiempos medievales y modernos (siglos xiii-xviii)*, Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla 1995; "El IX Duque de Osuna: Político, militar y mecenas (1755-1807)", *Actas XI JJ. NN. de H^a Militar. (Sevilla 2002). Milicia y Sociedad Ilustrada en España y América (1750-1800)*, Editorial Deimos, Madrid 2003, I, pp. 103-120, en particulier pp. 115-17.

¹⁶⁹ Voir D. Palma García, "Las escuelas patrióticas creadas por la Sociedad Económica Matritense de Amigos del País en el siglo XVIII", in *Cuadernos de historia moderna y contemporánea* 5 (1984), pp. 37-56.

n'avons pas pu repérer des renseignements concernant la biographie de l'auteur qui signe cette traduction, Domingo Santos y Laureles, qui se déclare *abogado de los Reales consejos*, donc une personne exerçant, ou pouvant exercer, le droit. Nous l'avons dit, ce manuscrit paraît prêt pour la typographie: il comporte une préface du traducteur espagnol – qui englobe la dernière préface de Coste – la lettre-dédicace de Locke à Clarke, deux tables des matières (une pour chaque tome), et des notes en bas de pages, qui sont pour la plupart de Coste, mais où figurent aussi des commentaires originaux que le traducteur a le soin de signaler avec des manicules.

Ce manuscrit s'avère particulièrement intéressant, car ses pages recèlent des indications concernant les causes possibles de cette "réticence" de la culture espagnole à l'égard de la diffusion des *Thoughts Concerning Education*. Des indices en ce sens peuvent être détectés déjà dans la page de titre, où l'on lit, *in extenso*: *La educación de los Hijos, escrita por Mr. L., traducida del Ingles al Francés por Mr. Le Coste miembro de la sociedad regia de Londres, y del Francés al español por Dn. Domingo Santos y Laureles abogado de los Reales consejos*. Comme on le voit, de tous les acteurs impliqués dans l'histoire qui aboutit à l'existence de cet exemplaire espagnol des *Thoughts Concerning Education*, un seul n'est pas nommé dans le titre: c'est l'auteur lui-même. En parcourant la préface, on s'aperçoit que ce "Mr. L." dans le titre n'est pas une abréviation d'usage, mais correspond à une tentative d'anonymisation de l'ouvrage – tentative qui devient manifeste quand le traducteur écrit que le livre a été publié par "un celebre ingenio Ingles, cuyo nombre conviene pasar por alto sin que haga falta para aprovechamiento de lo que escribe"¹⁷⁰. Locke, sur lequel cette traduction, pourtant complète, n'offre aucun renseignement biographique, conserve ce pseudonyme aussi dans la préface de Coste, où le traducteur précise, à la première occurrence du nom de l'auteur dans l'original "Mr. L. (asi nombraremos siempre el Autor Ingles)"¹⁷¹; la promesse est en effet respectée scrupuleusement: le nom de "l'auteur anglais" n'est pas non plus explicité dans les notes de Coste traduites.

En Espagne, l'aspect le plus problématique des *Thoughts Concerning Education* n'est pas la préférence affichée dans l'ouvrage pour l'éducation à domicile, ou encore la connotation de classe et de genre des recommandations proposées; le véritable problème est l'identité de l'auteur. Par ailleurs, le traducteur

¹⁷⁰ On pourrait traduire: "un célèbre génie anglais, dont on peut (il faut) passer le nom sous silence, car ce n'est pas indispensable pour profiter de ses enseignements"; *La educación de los hijos*, cit., p. 12 non numérotée.

¹⁷¹ "Mr. L. (nous appellerons toujours comme ça l'auteur anglais)", *ibid.*, p. 16 non numérotée.

espagnol ose peut être déjà trop en révélant la nationalité de l'auteur, car "anglais" désigne une personne embrassant une foi non catholique, nourrie d'une culture plus libérale et ouverte que celle admise dans un pays où l'éducation était toujours profondément influencée par l'hégémonie des institutions religieuses¹⁷². Dans ce contexte, on comprend aisément l'hésitation du traducteur à proclamer que l'auteur de texte qu'il traduit est celui de la *Lettre sur la tolérance*, du *Christianisme raisonnable* et de l'hypothèse de "la matière pensante"¹⁷³.

L'identité de l'auteur est enfin révélée au grand public dans la traduction, déjà mentionnée, publiée en 1797, c'est-à-dire à un moment où la culture espagnole "haute", contaminée par les idées des Lumières françaises, avait donné lieu à sa propre *Ilustración*. Le livre, en deux tomes, est publié à Madrid, par l'imprimeur Manuel Álvarez¹⁷⁴, qui avait déjà imprimé des textes de pédagogie¹⁷⁵. Ces prémisses, et surtout les coordonnées temporelles de cette entreprise, font supposer l'abandon de toute mesure de censure, implicite ou explicite, de l'ouvrage; mais la préface du traducteur montre que des résistances et des hésitations à l'égard du contenu, cette fois, des *Thoughts Concerning Education* persistaient encore en Espagne à la fin du siècle. Le traité est présenté comme un texte de référence incontournable: il s'agit, d'après le traducteur – dont nous ignorons l'identité, de l'ouvrage qui a jeté les fondements sur lesquels la philosophie de l'éducation a germé. Il offrirait, de plus, un outil politique indispensable, proposant une "méthode"¹⁷⁶ universelle de l'éducation, suivant laquelle on pourrait former des citoyens partageant les mêmes valeurs¹⁷⁷. Pourtant, l'essai n'est pas exempt de défauts, car il ne prêterait pas assez d'attention à la manière dont il faut moduler l'éducation pour l'accommoder au système politique dans lequel on vit et, naturellement, à la religion, dont les principes doivent être inculqués aux enfants dès le plus jeune âge, afin qu'ils exercent

¹⁷² Voir par exemple R.L. Kagan, *Students and Society in Early Modern Spain*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1974.

¹⁷³ On connaît l'impression que cette hypothèse avait produit chez les auteurs du XVIII^e siècle: voir J. Yolton, *Thinking matter: materialism in Eighteenth-century Britain*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1984 and *id.*, *Locke and French Materialism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1991. Rappelons que l'*ECHU* et le *ROC* avaient été insérés, dans les années 1730, dans l'*Index librorum prohibitorum*.

¹⁷⁴ Qui réédite l'ouvrage en 1817.

¹⁷⁵ En particulier un *Tratado de educación para la nobleza, escrito por un eclesiástico de París* (1796), traduit, soi-disant, par la marquise de Tolosa.

¹⁷⁶ *Educación de los niños*, cit., p. xix.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xviii, xix.

toujours leur influence sur l'esprit "comme des principes innées"¹⁷⁸. Ces éléments, dit le traducteur, doivent être tenus également pour prioritaires dans un programme d'éducation¹⁷⁹, car ils sont nécessaires à la définition de l'identité de l'enfant. Or, il nous paraît que cet appel à assimiler les lois et la religion d'un pays "comme des principes innés" – expression bien emblématique – peut être lu comme un acte de sabotage de la pédagogie lockéenne (et des Lumières), qui poursuit le but de forger un individu qui ne jure que par la raison et qui n'est absolument loyal qu'à sa propre conscience. Ainsi, bien qu'il revendique la parité de Locke, l'*Educación de los niños* neutralise les intentions du philosophe, et dépouille le concept éducatif promu par les *Thoughts Concerning Education* d'une partie essentielle de son sens.

9. *Considérations conclusives*

Une anecdote raconte que Leibniz attachait plus d'importance aux *Thoughts Concerning Education* qu'à l'*Essai sur l'entendement humain*¹⁸⁰. Nous ne savons pas si l'information est authentique, mais elle est certainement plausible et bien fondée: les *Thoughts Concerning Education* ont effectivement été, du moins du point de vue de l'histoire du livre, le plus influent parmi les écrits du père de l'empirisme anglais. Les traductions, à partir de celle en français, témoignent, comme on l'a vu, d'un succès extraordinaire et durable de l'ouvrage et d'une diffusion vaste, voire « généralisée », des Provinces-Unies à l'Espagne, à la Russie et à la Roumanie. La convergence d'intérêts commerciaux et d'élans idéaux, qui est la *conditio sine qua non* pour la production des traductions à cette époque, s'opère encore et encore autour de ce livre portatif écrit avec un langage familier, qui affronte des questions très pratiques, mais qui plonge ses racines dans une réflexion philosophique complexe sur l'humain. L'auteur fait une promesse: fournir un instrument, quoi qu'imparfait et insuffisant – une "petite lumière" – pour ceux qui, dans l'éducation des enfants, veulent oser "s'aventurer à consulter leur propre raison [...] plutôt que de s'en remettre entièrement à l'ancienne coutume"¹⁸¹; c'est une promesse alléchante, que la litté-

¹⁷⁸ "para que siempre obren sobre su espíritu, como unos principios innatos", *ibid.*, p. xxxi.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

¹⁸⁰ M.J.M. Ezell, "John Locke's Images of Childhood: Early Eighteenth Century Response to *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*", in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17 (1983), p. 147.

¹⁸¹ *STCE*, § 216. Nous paraphrasons.

rature pédagogique existante à l'époque ne serait pas en mesure de tenir, et qui annonce la possibilité d'une humanité différente.

Comme on l'a vu, les *Thoughts Concerning Education* ont été traduits, au début, en tant qu'élément du corpus lockéen: Le Clerc/Coste et Rabus ont inséré la traduction de l'ouvrage dans leurs campagnes de promotion, aux Pays-Bas et à l'étranger, de la philosophie lockéenne. Mais, à partir de 1708, le projet éducatif du texte prend le dessus sur l'identité de son auteur: à ce moment, l'ouvrage passe des mains des intellectuels-philosophes à celles des pédagogues. Coste leur met le pied à l'étrier en éditant une traduction *sui generis*, avec un paratexte digne, pour les critères de l'époque, de l'édition d'un texte scientifique: c'est la clé qui permettra d'actualiser le texte, au fil du temps, et de le faire dialoguer avec des cultures et des interlocuteurs différents. Plusieurs traducteurs s'érigent ainsi en commentateurs; ils imitent la démarche de Coste, certes pour adapter le discours à la réalité sociale dans laquelle ils opèrent, mais parfois ils osent aller encore plus loin: ils vont jusqu'à soulever des objections au texte – une attitude à laquelle Locke aurait acquiescé, car il considérait son œuvre susceptible d'améliorations et de corrections. Ces objections anoblissent l'ouvrage dans les traductions en allemand de 1787, qui consacrent Locke comme un pédagogue des Lumières, en l'associant aux représentants les plus illustres de la pédagogie allemande; elles l'affaiblissent dans d'autres traductions, comme celle italienne de 1736, ou celle espagnole de 1797, qui semblent ôter le sens profond du projet éducatif de Locke, en prônant le modèle de "l'ancienne coutume" dans l'éducation. L'absence, dans l'ouvrage, d'une connotation religieuse forte et bien définie a certainement contribué à la fortune du texte, que l'on voit dépasser aisément des frontières normalement infranchissables pour des ouvrages affichant sur la page de titre des indications de lieu "hostiles": les *Thoughts Concerning Education* sont adaptés, presque au même moment, par les piaristes de Pologne et par les réformés de Transylvanie, imprimés par des typographies rattachées à des établissements d'enseignement. La présence de l'ouvrage dans ces écoles représente la preuve ultime que le défi de Locke de reformer et rationaliser l'éducation a été perçu, par les éducateurs du XVIII^e siècle, comme une véritable exigence, qui a abouti à la formulation de projets sociaux et politiques, à l'échelle européenne.

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Rethinking early modern empiricism: the case of Locke

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Abstract: There is an enduring and influential story about empiricism, which runs as follows: from Locke onwards to Carnap, empiricism is the doctrine in which raw sense-data are received through the passive mechanism of perception; experience is the effect produced by external reality on the mind or ‘receptors’. By extension, empiricism is the ‘handmaiden’ of experimental natural science, seeking to redefine philosophy and its methods in conformity with the results of modern science. In this essay I take up, piecemeal, some representative moments of what we think of as Locke’s empiricism, in order to present a different view. Not by suggesting, as has been done quite convincingly, that the canonical understanding of empiricism should be broadened or widened. But rather, by suggesting that the canonical figure of Locke did not quite think what we thought he did, or at least what we often hear he thought. Specifically, Lockean empiricism as a project is less about being the “servant” of the sciences and more about “matters concerning our conduct”. This relates to a theme I explore elsewhere, on how Lockean inquiry into the mind is not a proto-“science of the mind.” I focus here on revising our view of Lockean empiricism in favour of a less epistemological, more ethico-practical view.

Keywords: Empiricism, sensationism, science of the mind, Locke.

’Tis of great use to the Sailor to know the *length of his Line*, though he cannot with it fathom all the depths of the Ocean. ’Tis well he knows, that it is long enough to reach the bottom, at such Places, as are necessary to direct his Voyage ... Our Business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our Conduct. If we can find out the *Measures*, whereby a rational Creature put in that State, which Man is in, in this World, may, and ought to govern his Opinions, and Actions depending thereon, we need not be troubled, that some other things escape our Knowledge.

Locke, *Essay*, I.i.6

1. *The category of empiricism*

There is an enduring and influential story about empiricism, which runs as follows: from Locke onwards to Carnap, empiricism is the doctrine in which raw sense-data are received on a blank slate or *tabula rasa* through the passive mechanism of perception; experience is the effect produced by external reality on the mind or ‘receptors’¹. This view arguably can be traced back to Russell’s notion of sense-data, which he credited as an outgrowth of classic British empiricism, against neo-Hegelianism. The term ‘sense-data’ has its own history, which is quite independent of the writings of, e.g. Locke and Hume, in which the term is, of course, not found, and I shall not investigate that further². The extension of what one could call the ‘mainstream view’ of empiricism views it as the ‘handmaiden’ of experimental natural science, seeking to redefine philosophy and its methods in conformity with the results of modern science. Building on some recent scholarship, I aim to articulate the contrarian view according to which this story is false; to be precise, the problem is twofold: both the ‘empiricism-as-scientific-approach-to-the-mind’ story and its variant, ‘empiricism-as-epistemology’ are to be challenged.

This view may exist, e.g. in the 20th century, but Locke does not hold it (nor does Hume, which is a topic for another paper: suffice it to say that Hume rejects several standard tenets of the decontextualized version of empiricism: he holds that “all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv’d from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures” and that “there is nothing in any object, consider’d in itself, which can afford us a reason for drawing a conclusion beyond it”³). There is no passive mind in Locke, although that is not what

¹ C. Taylor, *The Explanation of Behavior*, Routledge Kegan Paul, London 1964, p. 92. See also J. Nagel, “Empiricism”, in S. Sarkar, J. Pfeifer (eds.), *The Philosophy of Science: An Encyclopedia*, Routledge, London 2006, pp. 235-43.

² See N. Milkov, “The History of Russell’s Concepts ‘Sense-Data’ and ‘Knowledge by Acquaintance’”, in *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 43 (2001), pp. 221-31.

³ D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), ed. D.F. Norton, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, Liv.1, p. 123, and *ibid.*, Liii.12, p. 95. Regarding Hume’s purported experimentalism (much like Locke’s purported “underlabourer” status as the proto-scientist of the mind), rather than stating laws of nature or inductive scientific observations, it is rather the case, as D. Perinetti puts it, that “empirical generalizations, or as Hume calls them, ‘general rules’ or ‘maxims’, are essentially guiding principles influencing our judgment after the model of maxims found in the writings of moralists and historians of the period” (“Humean Explanations: Sagacity and Prudence”, in *Cahiers d’épistémologie* (UQAM) 8 (2005), p. 16). For further criticism of the empiricist reading of Hume see T. Demeter, “Fodor’s guide to the Humean mind”, in *Synthese* 199 (2021), pp. 5355-75.

I object to here⁴. If the story is carefully revised, those figures that we take to be representatives of classic, or ‘canonical’ empiricism turn out to be less ‘science-friendly’ and more concerned with moral matters (in a case of rival canons, as it were: one more focused on the rise of a kind of scientific philosophy, the other on ethico-political motivations).

In recent years, several important scholars, including Michael Ayers and David Norton, have picked apart the label ‘British empiricism’. The only true empiricist, it seems (in the sense of a thinker who holds that *nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit in sensu*, ‘nothing is in the intellect which was not first in the senses’ or in Locke’s rendition, “There appear not to be any ideas in the mind before the senses have conveyed any in”⁵, a phrase one could treat as the empiricist minimal credo, to which I return below) is a Continental thinker, Gassendi, who was from Digne in the South of France; there is almost no continuity of ideas or reading between Locke, Berkeley and Hume (instead, they read Gassendi, Malebranche, and Bayle); this isn’t to say that Berkeley didn’t read Locke, but that it is misguided to restrict our comparisons and commentaries to an ‘Anglo’ context; and in the old tale of British empiricism as ‘Locke begat Berkeley, who begat Hume’, Locke is the only English thinker in that group: Berkeley is Irish, Hume Scottish). Locke read a lot of Malebranche (and Gassendi, or at least Bernier’s major 6-volume digest of Gassendi) and translated three of Pierre Nicole’s *Essais de morale*; Hume read a lot of Bayle (and Malebranche)⁶. Admittedly, this minimal empiricism is there in some of the early drafts of the *Essay*, but the question is whether it amounts to Locke’s long-term view or not. Jonathan Rée has suggested that the idea of British em-

⁴ For an excellent rebuttal of the ‘mind as passive’ reading of Locke, see M. Losonsky, *Enlightenment and action from Descartes to Kant: passionate thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, pp. 72-75, and more broadly A. Waldow, *Experience Embodied: Early Modern Accounts of the Human Place in Nature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2020, chp. 2, and M. Lenz, *Socializing Minds. Intersubjectivity in Early Modern Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2022, chp. 2.

⁵ J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, II.i.23, p. 117. See also in Locke’s summaries of sections 20 and 23 of chapter 1 of Book II, “No ideas but from sensation and reflection, evident, if we observe children” and “A man begins to have ideas when he first has sensation” (ibid., pp. 19, 117-118).

⁶ See D.F. Norton, “The Myth of British Empiricism”, *History of European Ideas* 1 (1981), 4, pp. 334, 341; M. Ayers, *Locke*, vol. 1: *Epistemology*, Routledge, London 1991, p. 15; Ayers, “Theories of knowledge and belief”, in D. Garber & M. Ayers (eds.), *Cambridge History of Seventeenth Century Philosophy*, vol. 2., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 1019. Ayers already challenges the idea of ‘the rationalist’ as opposed to ‘the empiricist’ in his *The Refutation of Determinism*, Methuen, London 1968, p. 56ff. No less than Gilbert Ryle rejected “the supposed two-party system of Rationalists versus Empiricists”: “John Locke”, in *Critica: Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofía* 1 (1967), 2, p. 6.

piricism, which goes back to Reid and Kant, became so popular because it was claimed to be a 'national' tradition for Britain; but if we think of the Cambridge Platonists, this tradition could just as well be idealism⁷. I am not claiming that the above are my discoveries, of course, and many or most of these points are known to Lockean scholars; but I am trying to bring them together in one place and make the case for this reading of Locke which is sometimes treated as ancillary to the author's main point, e.g. concerning theology or politics.

The inaccurate or dated character of the distinction between rationalism and empiricism leads to different responses. Some scholars, like Norton, challenge it simply on account of the figures who are said to belong to these respective 'schools', and their national identities. Others, like Peter Anstey, find fault with the distinction for not respecting 'actors' categories' and propose instead to speak of experimental versus speculative natural philosophy (instead of empiricism and rationalism), a category he legitimately can point to as operative in writers associated with the Royal Society, including Thomas Sprat, Henry Oldenburg, and Joseph Glanville⁸. In fact, experimental philosophy is not monolithic with respect to the question of accessing deep structure : here Locke et al. (like Sydenham) emphasize we can only know the surfaces of things, a point also made influentially in Baglivi's *De praxi medica*. Indeed, Anstey's proposed new distinction between experimental and speculative philosophy suffers from a feature already present in the empiricism-rationalism distinction, namely its antagonistic, oppositional quality. As Silvia Calvente and Silvia Manzo note, to replace the standard narrative by applying actors' categories like "experimental philosophy" and "speculative philosophy" may help us understand some discussions centering on certain figures in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly around the Royal Society; but if these categories are presented oppositional-

⁷ J. Rée, "La philosophie anglaise des années 50", in J.-M. Vienne (ed.), *Philosophie analytique et histoire de la philosophie*, Vrin, Paris 1997, p. 44. L. Loeb, in a suggestion that was not really taken up, urged us to abandon the label 'British Empiricism' altogether and introduced the category of 'Continental Metaphysics' which comprises Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Berkeley and Leibniz: *From Descartes to Hume. Continental Metaphysics and the Development of Modern Philosophy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1981. John Yolton and John Cottingham had already noted, something we now take for granted, namely Locke's embeddedness in Continental traditions. Some of this is reprised with a different emphasis in S. Gaukroger, *The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1680-1760*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010, pp. 155-57.

⁸ P. Anstey, "Experimental versus speculative natural philosophy", in P. Anstey & J. Schuster (eds.), *The Science of Nature in the Seventeenth Century: Patterns of Change in Early Modern Natural Philosophy*, Springer, Dordrecht 2005, pp. 215-42.

ly they run the risk of reproducing the drawbacks of the traditional account⁹.

Of course, there is plenty of material in the early modern period which appears to oppose rationalists to empiricists, sometimes using the language of ‘reason’ versus ‘mere experience’, as in Leibniz, who in the *New Essays* suggests a classic rationalist argument in favor of abstraction and against (naïve) empiricism, contrasting animals who are “empiriques” (like the empiricks) with humans whose capacity to reason and synthesize data means they learn, become wiser with the generations (hares and deer are no wiser now than centuries ago, Leibniz observes), and can take informed decisions in different situations. Such ‘rational’ behavior means not being wholly reactive to empirical facts, in order to be able to foresee when an exception from the rule of experience might occur¹⁰.

Those who hold the standard, non-revisionist view will stress that empiricism and rationalism are not just meaningful categories but proper ways of describing thinkers like Locke-Berkeley-Hume versus Descartes-Spinoza-Leibniz, proper ways of distinguishing between two epistemologies and two metaphysics, each with their weaknesses, which are ultimately resolved in a grand synthesis with Kant, who is a transcendental idealist and an empirical realist. This view goes back at least as far the early nineteenth century in a Kantian context; it is represented today), and still predominates in most early modern philosophy textbooks. As has been noted especially by Alberto Vanzo¹¹, the beginning of this development is marked by the writings of Carl Leonhard Reinhold (*Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens*, 1791) and Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (*Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1798-1819). Both subsumed

⁹ See their entry “Early Modern Empiricism”, in D. Jalobeanu and C.T. Wolfe (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences*, Springer, Cham 2020). Other challenges to Anstey’s programmatic suggestion lie outside of the scope of the present essay, e.g. the presence of a deep speculative vein in Lockean and experimentally nourished philosophies such as that of Diderot (C.T. Wolfe and J.B. Shank, “Diderot”, in E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/diderot/>), or complications surrounding the relation between ‘science’, notably Newtonian-style science, and empiricism (E. Schliesser, “Four Methods of Empirical Inquiry in the Aftermath of Newton’s Challenge”, in A.-L. Rey and S. Bodenmann (eds.), *What does it mean to be an empiricist? Empiricisms in Eighteenth Century Science*, Springer, Dordrecht 2018, pp. 15-30). The analysis of Locke in M. Ben-Chaim’s *Experimental Philosophy and the Birth of Experimental Science: Boyle, Locke and Newton*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2004, is unusual in that it rejects the standard empiricist-epistemological reading but adopts a modified version of what I shall call the underlabourer reading (with a behavioral twist, one might say, thinking of the difference between a foundationalist scientific approach and one interested in behavior).

¹⁰ Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais*, Avant-Propos, in Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. by Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR, vol. VI-6, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1990, p. 51.

¹¹ A. Vanzo, “Kant on empiricism and rationalism”, in *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 30 (2013), 1, pp. 53-74.

the philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries under the combined scheme of empiricism and rationalism, and thereby emphasized the one-sidedness of pre-Kantian accounts, in favour of Kant as the saviour of epistemology. Kant himself presents the fundamental opposition in the Transcendental Doctrine of Method:

With regard to the origin of pure cognitions of reason, the question is whether they are derived from experience, or independent of it, they have their origin in reason. *Aristotle* may be regarded as the head of the *empiricists*, and *Plato* as the head of the *noologists*. *Locke*, who in recent times followed Aristotle, and *Leibniz*, who followed Plato . . . have not been able to bring this conflict to any definitive conclusion¹².

This usage of the empiricist-rationalist distinction as a way to valorize Kantian thought continues (perhaps to the present day?) in Kantian and neo-Kantian thought (Kuno Fischer, Friedrich Lange, Wilhelm Windelband, Ernst Cassirer) and, stripped of its original context, in mainstream Anglophone introductions to modern philosophy¹³.

I will not enter into discussion here as to whether the term (and idea) of empiricism are genuinely and restrictively Kantian¹⁴ or can legitimately be traced back to medical sources, given that the claim that our knowledge comes through the senses was much older, often being stated in a vocabulary including ‘experience’, ‘experiment’, ‘empirical’¹⁵. It really seems non-trivial that in addition to the standard British-empiricism story of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, empiricism was more commonly understood, in the early modern context, as

¹² I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A854/B882, trans. by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 703.

¹³ E.g. R. Ariew and E. Watkins (eds.), *Readings in Modern Philosophy*, 2 vols., Hackett Books, Indianapolis 2000 and Jonathan Bennett’s *Learning from Six Philosophers*, Oxford 2001, which (among many other secondary sources, including P. Markie and M. Folescu’s “Rationalism vs. Empiricism” entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, revised 2021 – an entry in a major reference source) present the choice in early modern philosophy as being between rationalism and empiricism, each of which have their aporias, which will be resolved by Kant.

¹⁴ For this view, see A. Vanzo, “From empirics to empiricists”, in *Intellectual History Review* 24 (2014), 4, p. 529 (Vanzo made various versions of this point on the Early Modern Experimental Philosophy blog, notably <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/emxphi/kant-empiricism-and-historiographical-biases/> and <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/emxphi/prehistory-empiricism/>).

¹⁵ J.H. Zedler’s *Universal-Lexicon* from the 1730s explicitly discusses the relation between medical empiricism and philosophical empiricism in those terms: see s.v. “Empirici”, in Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, vol. 8, Halle-Leipzig 1734 (reprint Akademischen Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, Graz 1961, p. 1041); thanks to P. Rumore for this reference.

building on the ancient ‘empirics’, i.e., as Pearce explains, “a school of physicians who eschewed theorizing in favor of reliance on detailed case histories,” so that

“rather than trying to understand how the body functioned, these physicians were content to know that, in previous cases, when such-and-such treatment was given in such-and-such circumstance the patient recovered, but similar patients given an alternative treatment did not... The goal is to draw cautious generalizations about which similarities and differences are relevant to actual outcomes. No grand theories”¹⁶.

There are actually several issues bound up in one here, centering on what was empiricism and who was an empiricist. The ‘who?’ question contributes to de-centering the classic ‘British empiricist’ narrative; the ‘what?’ question looks at the content of empiricism, but also how it has been constructed (Locke’s project is quite different from what became known as empiricism in a Kantian context, and both of these are different from the logical-positivist, Russellian and epistemologically focused construction of empiricism that philosophers have often discussed and challenged since the early decades of the twentieth century).

2. *Empiricism as a theory of mind*

Leaving aside the question of who should be labelled an empiricist, where they were based, and the limits of the label (including in the sense of doctrines held by an author, say Locke or Hume, that seem to ‘exceed’ the perimeter of what is allowed under it), we can state in preliminary fashion that the minimal empiricist claim seems at first sight to be strictly a claim *about the mind* (I say ‘mind’ rather than ‘knowledge’ as it turns out that the specifically *epistemological* version of this is heavily overdetermined in the post-Kantian reading, and underdetermined textually, although Book IV of the *Essay* does show us a Locke concerned with the nature of knowledge). Namely, the claim that “there is no a priori metaphysical knowledge and all concepts are derived from

¹⁶ K. Pearce, “Two Definitions of ‘Empiricism’”, 2016 <https://philosophymodsquad.wordpress.com/2016/05/03/two-definitions-of-empiricism/>. As Anstey has noted in another influential article, this kind of empiricism is closer to Baconian natural histories as notably promoted by the Royal Society in the later seventeenth century, which work from ‘instances’ and limited generalizations, certainly not in order to promulgate an epistemology (P. Anstey, “Locke, Bacon and Natural History”, in *Early Science and Medicine* 7 (2002), 1, pp. 65-92).

experience¹⁷. In early modern vocabulary, this is the claim that ‘nothing is in the mind which was not first in the senses’. It is found in a variety of thinkers, including Hobbes, Montaigne, Locke of course and a variety of clandestine texts¹⁸. This was also a medical claim, or at least a claim found in a large number of Renaissance and early modern medical writings¹⁹: it moves between theoretical reflections inspired by empirical practice (recall that ‘empiricism’ itself is a term loaded with a medical background, from Galen’s *empirikoi* to early modern ‘empiricks’) and more properly philosophical reflections, whether Lockean or other. While various glosses on the phrase are found in philosophical texts, it is also frequently appealed to in medical texts, sometimes in tandem with more traditional appeals to experience and/or experiment.

The ‘*nihil est*’ is in fact an old claim – often attributed to Aristotle, who doesn’t say anything of the sort, but in Scholasticism it ‘settles’ as an established claim, perhaps inspired by passages in the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*²⁰. For almost all fourteenth – and fifteenth-century Aristotelians, sensation was the foundation of cognition, which they summarised in the *nihil est* formula; Pico uses it to sum up Aristotle’s position²¹. As late as

¹⁷ S. Priest, *The British Empiricists*, Routledge, London 2007, p. 5.

¹⁸ Again, see Locke, *Essay*, II.i.23, p. 117. In Hobbes’ version, “*nihil esse in intellectu humano, quod non prius fuerit in sensu*” (“there is nothing in human intellect that was not previously in sense [for sensation takes place through the action of objects even [...] upon the sensoria or the organs of perception]”); T. Hobbes, *Thomas White’s ‘De Mundo’ Examined*, trans. by H.W. Jones, Bradford University Press, London 1976, chp. XXX, § 3, p. 364. A much more familiar and explicit version is in Leibniz, negatively put of course: *Discours de métaphysique* § 27, and *Nouveaux Essais* II.i.8. The phrase occurs in a variety of clandestine texts like the *Symbolum Sapientiae*, *L’Âme matérielle*, Fréret’s and Boyer d’Argens’ works, and in Bayle’s *Système de philosophie ou Abrégé de la métaphysique*, in which he credits it to the Epicureans (and calls it a “vulgar axiom”): P. Bayle, *Œuvres diverses*, ed. by P. Husson et al., The Hague 1731, vol. 4, p. 482.

¹⁹ P. Cranefield, “On the Origin of the Phrase *Nihil Est In Intellectu*”, in *Journal of The History of Medicine and the Allied Sciences* 25 (1970), pp. 77-80; on its reception including in the materialist readings of Locke, see C.T. Wolfe, “From Locke to Materialism: Empiricism, the Brain and the Stirrings of Ontology” in A.-L. Rey and S. Bodenmann (eds.), *What does it mean to be an empiricist? Empiricisms in Eighteenth Century Science*, Springer, Dordrecht 2018, pp. 235-63.

²⁰ *An. Post.* II, 19; *Eth. Nic.* VI, iii, 3. Hegel himself, in the Introduction to the *Encyclopedia*, notes that it is a mistake, originating in Scholasticism, e.g. Aquinas (or even earlier, Bonaventure; one could add Henry of Ghent) to attribute the ‘*nihil est*’ phrase to Aristotle, and suggests (à la Leibniz) that both this claim and the converse (“*nihil est in sensu quod non fuerit in intellectu*”) are true (*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), Vorrede, § 8, in *Werke in 20 Bänden*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer, K.M. Michel, Bd. 8, Erster Teil, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1979, p. 51).

²¹ K. Park, “The Organic Soul”, in C.B. Schmitt and Q. Skinner (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988, p. 470; C.B. Schmitt, quoted in Cranefield, “On the Origin of the Phrase *Nihil Est In Intellectu*”, p. 78.

the 1790s, Condorcet gives the *nihil est* ‘top billing’ (in capitals), and identifies its source as Aristotle: “our most abstract or intellectual ideas originate in our sensations”²². Diderot repeats different versions of it throughout his work, once crediting Hobbes with the idea²³.

That knowledge came from the senses was not viewed as an especially scandalous claim prior to the early modern era: Fontenelle suggests that “the ancient philosophy was not always mistaken”²⁴. Sometimes, the *nihil est* is presented as true because Aristotle himself held the view (even if that was not quite correct); sometimes, it is a radically *new* claim in the sense that a degree of antiquarianism either masks its novelty or is intended to combat a mainstream view of the time. Diderot describes Locke, in the *Encyclopédie* article of that title, as the thinker who “renewed the ancient axiom” of empiricism, and in the earlier *Suite de l’Apologie de l’Abbé de Prades*, he also calls it an axiom, but mentions the ‘antiquity’ of the idea to defend it against charges of impiety²⁵.

Locke does indeed defend a version of the ‘*nihil est*’ claim about the furniture of the mind, or more actively put, how the mind acquires its furnishings. It is undeniable that he states that the mind is originally “void of all Characters”²⁶. However, this claim needs to be understood in the context of his broader project. Not only does Locke also hold a raft of other views concerning truth, propositions, modes, and qualities which are not reducible to a kind of brute, atomistic, direct-realist version of this credo, as is rather well known at this point: brute atomism sits rather awkwardly with an author who declares that “’Tis evident, the Mind knows not Things immediately, but only by the intervention of the *Ideas* it has of them”²⁷. It seems odd for someone Russell or Charles Taylor would call an empiricist, to declare that we do not know things directly but only through the mediation (“intervention”) of ideas. Of course, if there is something essential in Locke which is alien to empiricism,

²² Condorcet, *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* (1795), 5th époque, in J.-A.-N. de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Œuvres de Condorcet*, eds. A. Condorcet-O’Connor & F. Arago, Firmin Didot, Paris 1847-1849, vol. 6, p. 88.

²³ For more on Diderot’s analysis of the phrase see Wolfe, “From Locke to Materialism”, cit.

²⁴ Fontenelle, *Fragments de la connaissance de l’esprit humain*, in *Id.*, *Œuvres complètes*, Belin, Paris 1818, vol. 2, p. 411. He is possibly glossing on P.-S. Régis’ “Let’s conclude that the ancient philosophers were right to say there is nothing in the understanding that did not pass through the senses” (*L’Usage de la raison et de la foi, ou l’accord de la foi et de la raison*, Jean Cusson, Paris 1704, p. 108).

²⁵ D. Diderot, “Locke”, in D. Diderot and J. le Rond D’Alembert (eds.), *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers...*, Briasson, Paris 1765, vol. 10, p. 626b; Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, eds. H. Dieckmann, J. Proust & J. Varloot, Hermann, Paris 1975-, vol. 4, §§ 12, 5.

²⁶ Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, II.i.1, p. 105.

²⁷ Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, IV.iv.3, p. 563.

and something in Hume which is also alien to (this picture of) empiricism, maybe it's our picture of empiricism that needs changing!

What happens to the empiricist claim if seen in context?

3. *Two mistaken readings: the epistemologist and the underlabourer*

3.1. The epistemological paradigm

My reasons for challenging the common view of 'British empiricism', here as regards Locke in particular, are not purely contextual ones involving affinity groups or chains of influence, but have more to do with the intertwining of the epistemological and the moral in texts of this period. As such, we need to remove ourselves from what Knud Haakonssen termed the 'epistemological paradigm', which

sees philosophy as essentially concerned with the justification of beliefs and judgements; it understands such justification in terms of events, whether perceptive or inferential, in the mind – or, as if in the mind – of the individual person; and it tends to apply this idea of epistemological justification as the criterion for what is properly included in the discipline of philosophy²⁸.

Contrast this with the more common view that "empiricism is a kind of epistemology"²⁹. That Locke held that knowledge comes from experience (in part, it turns out) is typically studied in terms of his theory of ideas (simple and complex) and the challenge of secondary qualities, which indicates that we don't have direct access to the (primary) qualities of things for Locke. As Haakonssen details above, a key problem therein is the development of epistemology as a 'genre' and the retroactive vision we can have, thinking that various thinkers had a self-contained, deliberately conceived epistemology (hence there is a Platonic epistemology, a Cartesian epistemology, a Lockean epistemology, etc.). In fact this is very much a later invention, both due to post-Kantian (particularly neo-Kantian) thinkers and to Reid, while Locke's 'epistemology' is much more motivated by political and ethical concerns. Differently put, we need to take a

²⁸ K. Haakonssen, "The concept of eighteenth-century philosophy," in *Id.* (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 7.

²⁹ Priest, *The British Empiricists*, cit, p. 6.

big step back from the common vision of empiricism (at least in the history of philosophy) which treats it as primarily an epistemology. The idea of studying the “understanding,” as Serjeantson showed³⁰ (and as Corneanu develops in a more novel direction), was a project of a different kind, which our ‘epistemology’ but also our sense of a ‘naturalization of the mind’ fail to grasp, even if both of these can also claim some Lockean sources. In fact, the more ethically focused reading must reject both (i) empiricism understood as a sense-data theory of passive perception, (ii) the epistemological reading, and (iii) the vision of Lockean empiricism as the handmaiden of science. It is to the latter that I now turn.

3.2. The underlabourer of science

Readers and scholars of Locke with an interest in his relation to the scientific ideas and revolutions of his time have always paid especial attention to a famous passage in the Epistle to the Reader that precedes the *Essay*:

I shall always have the satisfaction to have aimed sincerely at truth and usefulness, though in one of the meanest ways. The commonwealth of learning is not at this time without master-builders, whose mighty designs in advancing the sciences, will leave lasting monuments to the admiration of posterity; but every one must not hope to be a Boyle, or a Sydenham; and in an age that produces such masters, as the great – Huygenius, and the incomparable Mr. Newton, with some others of that strain; *it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge* (emphasis mine)³¹.

The ‘under-labourer’ passage has had an enormous impact on how Locke is viewed. For it seems to define the empiricist project as an adjacent, indeed sub-altern project to the early modern corpuscular reductive project (although the extent to which Boyle and Sydenham can be fit into the same programmatic box is a debated one). Locke will treat the world of ideas as these great men treated to the world of natural objects³².

³⁰ R. Serjeantson, “‘Human Understanding’ and the Genre of Locke’s *Essay*”, in *Intellectual History Review* 18 (2008), pp. 157-71.

³¹ J. Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, cit., p. 9.

³² S. Gaukroger notes that the underlabourer figure is almost a trope in the works of the period, and quotes Boyle, who is willing to “not only be an Underbuilder, but ev’n dig in the Quarries for Materials towards so useful a Structure, as a solid body of Natural Philosophy, than not to do something towards the erection of it.”: Boyle, *Certain physiological essays and other tracts*, p. 18 (Gaukroger, *The Collapse of Mechanism*, cit., p. 157). For a surprisingly similar passage in Hume, see the conclusion to the sixth

This view of Locke the proto-scientist is sometimes combined with evidence of his early medical career to produce a reading of his philosophical work as somehow medically inspired. This overlaps with but is not identical with the reading of Locke as a kind of rough and ready ‘scientist of the mind’, or as a philosopher explicitly seeking to provide an epistemology for the sciences of his time. Thus some interpreters, who take Locke’s self-description a bit too literally, describe the *Essay* as “the first attempt ever to apply scientific method to the systematic description of the cognitive operations and abilities of the mind,” or, hewing closer (but wrongly in my view) to the underlabourer image, they claim it alludes to “his role as a philosopher of science with the self-appointed task of providing epistemological foundations for the emerging empirical sciences,” or, in a more banal way, that it shows that Locke understood himself as a “popularizer of scientific theories”³³. S. Priest, deferring here to A.J. Ayer, equates Locke’s underlabourer project with that of the Vienna Circle’s logical positivism, asserting that “their conception of philosophy was the Lockean one of clearing intellectual obstacles from the path of scientific progress”³⁴.

Granted, it would be a mistake to downplay Locke’s engagement with corpuscularianism, his interest in issues such as natural kinds and his reference to e.g., microscopes, but often those references turn out to be deflationary, as in his discussion of the possibility of ‘microscopical eyes’, where his ultimate verdict is that if we did possess them, we “would not make any great advantage by the change,” if this enhanced capacity did not “serve to conduct [us] to the market and exchange,” and furthermore, the possession of such enhanced senses

volume of the *History of England*, regarding the experimental philosophy, which features a similar list of names, including Boyle, Sydenham and Newton, and explains how they “trod, with cautious, and therefore more secure steps, the only road, which leads to true philosophy” (Hume, *The History of England: from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, Liberty Classics, Indianapolis 1983, vol. 6, p. 541).

³³ E. McCann, “John Locke”, in S. Nadler (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, Blackwell, Oxford 2002, p. 356; D. Soles, “Locke’s Empiricism And The Postulation Of Unobservables”, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (1985), 3, p. 339; P. Alexander, *Ideas, Qualities and Corpuscles: Locke and Boyle on the External World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985, p. 6. L. Laudan had described Locke’s epistemology as that of a “life-long scientist” (“Locke on Hypotheses: Placing the *Essay* in the ‘Scientific Tradition,’” in Laudan, *Science and Hypothesis. Historical Essays on Scientific Methodology*, Reidel, Dordrecht 1981, p. 54). For more such references which read Locke, e.g. as part of the turn to the hypothetico-deductive method see S. Corneanu, “John Locke on the Study of Nature”, in V. Alexandrescu (ed.), *Branching Off: The Early Moderns in Quest for the Unity of Knowledge*, Zeta Books, Bucharest 2009, p. 18ff.

³⁴ Priest, *The British Empiricists*, cit., p. 236.

would locate us “in a quite different World from other People”³⁵.

If Locke really believed his mission in the *Essay* was to be the (positively construed) underlabourer of the great figures of the New Science, he would not declare (sounding like Sydenham but also like Pascal) that “The Workmanship of the All-wise, and Powerful God, in the great Fabrick of the Universe, and every part thereof, farther exceeds the Capacity and Comprehension of the most inquisitive and intelligent Man”³⁶. This testifies to what Catherine Wilson describes as a striking feature of the *Essay*, namely, “Locke’s pessimism about the human ability to understand and control nature”³⁷. Indeed, Locke also writes that “as to a perfect *science* of natural bodies ... we are, I think, so far from being capable of any such thing that I conclude it lost labour to seek after it”³⁸. This combination of a lack of experimental optimism and a rather Puritan ethical conviction, that, e.g., “We are furnished with faculties (dull and weak as they are) to discover enough in the creatures to lead us to the knowledge of the Creator, and the knowledge of our duty,” but not more³⁹, entails a very different picture of empiricism from that we have just seen, in which it either has a degree of autonomy as a philosophical project but is (both) responding to and aiming at the scientific upheavals of Locke’s time, or has no autonomy, being just an attempt to apply scientific method to questions concerning the mind. It is thus not that surprising, after all, that empiricism is “notoriously weak in its philosophy of experiment,” as Michael Ayers once quipped⁴⁰.

Furthermore, the ‘under-labourer’ picture suggests a kind of naturalization of the mind which isn’t really part of Locke’s program (even if he does not reject it out of hand), as is clear when he states early on in the *Essay* that “I shall not at present meddle with the Physical consideration of the Mind”⁴¹. The corpuscularian hypothesis about the nature of underlying reality is, Locke thinks, the best bet for a valid explanation, but it is not his business⁴²! One can

³⁵ Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, cit., II.xxiii.12, p. 303.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, III.vi.9, p. 444.

³⁷ C. Wilson, “Philosophical and Scientific Empiricism and Rationalism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, in A.L. Rey and S. Bodenmann (eds.), *What Does it Mean to be an Empiricist? Empiricisms in Eighteenth Century Science*, Springer, Dordrecht 2018, p. 127.

³⁸ Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.iii.29, p. 560.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II.xxiii.12, p. 303.

⁴⁰ Ayers, *Locke*, cit., vol. 2, p. 159.

⁴¹ Locke, *Essay*, cit., I.i.2, p. 43.

⁴² However, see *ibid.*, II.ii.2, vii.10, and viii.11 (bodies produce ideas in us by ‘impulses’). Metaphysically, corpuscularian explanations play a key role in Locke’s definition of qualities (i.e. solidity is a primary quality since it still exists at the corpuscular level); biologically, they play a key role in what he assumes would be a correct theory of generation, explaining both similarity of traits and the occasional

contrast Locke on this issue with later figures (who invoked Locke) such as Toland or Hartley, who are materialists⁴³. At the end of the eighteenth century, Joseph Priestley viewed Locke's project as tracing ideas back to their source in sensation, but he felt that Locke had not provided the actual 'neuropsychological' workings of this relation, something Priestley saw in David Hartley's 1749 *Observations on Man* (with the additional bonus in Priestley's eyes that this was a materialist account)⁴⁴.

In order to step back from the 'underlabourer' reading of Locke's project, we need to take a hint from a different passage *also* in the Epistle to the Reader, in which Locke discusses the circumstances in which he came to write his book.

4. *Locke, empiricist underlabourer or therapist?*

I turn now to this other passage in the Epistle to the Reader, which is less well-known to scientifically and/or experimentally inclined readers of Locke:

*Were it fit to trouble thee with the history of this Essay, I should tell thee, that five or six friends meeting at my chamber, and discoursing on a subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a stand, by the difficulties that rose on every side. After we had a while puzzled ourselves, without coming any nearer a resolution of those doubts which perplexed us, it came into my thoughts, that we took a wrong course; and that before we set ourselves upon inquiries of that nature, it was necessary to examine our own abilities, and see what objects our understandings were, or were not, fitted to deal with (emphasis mine)*⁴⁵.

What's the secret here – the "remote subject" on which "five or six friends meeting at [Locke's] chamber," discoursed? A copy of the *Essay* owned by one of these five or six friends, James Tyrrell, bears in the margin, at this spot, the words "*morality and revealed religion*"⁴⁶... In other words, the project of the

appearance of 'monsters'. For Locke, there is a necessary connection between a body's "real essence" (its corpuscular constitution) and its observed or manifest qualities.

⁴³ On this dimension of Toland, Hartley and other naturalistic/materialist readers of Locke on the mind, see C.T. Wolfe, "Locke and projects for naturalizing the mind in the eighteenth century," in J. Gordon-Roth and S. Weinberg (eds.), *The Lockean Mind*, Routledge, London 2021, pp. 152-63.

⁴⁴ Cf. C.T. Wolfe, "From the logic of ideas to active-matter materialism: Priestley's Lockean problem and early neurophilosophy," in *Intellectual History Review* 30 (2020), 1, pp. 31-47.

⁴⁵ Locke, *Essay*, cit., p. 7.

⁴⁶ M. Cranston, *Locke. A Biography*, Longman, London 1957; reprint, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Essay has very little to do with empiricist epistemology and a lot to do with practical matters. Nor is it an ontology, which is why Locke often says that the relevant area of inquiry for him is not the “depths of the ocean of Being” but rather “matters concerning our conduct”; “Our Business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our Conduct”⁴⁷. The idea that the *Essay* chiefly was motivated by practical concerns is not just to be found in a marginal comment in the Epistle to the Reader (for which we need to rely on annotations made by a friend). It is there throughout the book. As Locke writes in a draft of a letter to Tyrrell, “my business was only to show whence men had moral ideas, and what they were . . .”⁴⁸ – and their limits. The “Power” chapter closes similarly, with Locke explaining that his purpose was “only to enquire into the knowledge the Mind has of Things, by those *Ideas*, and Appearances, which *God* has fitted it to receive from them”⁴⁹.

I do not pretend here to present a detailed ‘moral’ or ‘practical’ reading of Locke, as it would require a separate treatment. Suffice it to say that in contrast to the ‘underlabourer’ reading, which treats Locke as somehow, however programmatically, laying out a project for a science of the mind, just as Newton, Huygens and other great natural philosophers had mapped out regions of the physical world, this reading takes Locke at his word when he insists that the *Essay* is primarily motivated by “practical” considerations. True, one should distinguish therein between two dimensions: one, proto-critical in the Kantian sense, which focuses on our need to take stock of our limits (perceptual, cognitive and other), and the other which focuses on the application of a “historical”, genetic approach to the origin of our ideas, in the hopes that this will resolve a variety of ethical, political and theological tensions. The latter overlaps with the dimension that Corneanu has most distinctly highlighted, on how a better understanding of the functioning of the mind implies a set of practices, a “conduct,” *in order to improve our moral, social, religious and political life*⁵⁰. Tying together these two dimensions, Locke writes:

1985, pp. 140-41; G.A.J. Rogers, “The Intellectual Setting and Aims of the *Essay*”, in L. Newman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Locke’s “Essay Concerning Human Understanding”*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 8. The manuscript of the *Essay* with Tyrrell’s marginal annotations is now in the British Museum.

⁴⁷ Locke, *Essay*, cit., I.i.6, p. 46.

⁴⁸ Locke to Tyrrell, 4 August 1690, in J. Locke, *Correspondence*, ed. by E.S. De Beer, vol. 4, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1979, p. 113.

⁴⁹ Locke, *Essay*, cit., II.xxi.73, p. 287.

⁵⁰ That Locke’s investigation of the logic of ideas and its implications for notions including substance, personal identity, free will, and the ‘furniture of the mind’ overall was determined by ethical,

Since our Faculties are not fitted to penetrate into the internal Fabrick and real Essences of Bodies...tis rational to conclude, that our proper Employment lies in those Enquiries, and in that sort of Knowledge, which is most suited to our natural Capacities, and carries in it our greatest interest....Hence I think I may conclude, that *Morality is the proper Science, and Business of Mankind in general*⁵¹...

The 'moral' Locke is also the proto-critical Locke, that is, the one who wants to restrict our investigation to what we can know, by "examin[ing] our own abilities, and see[ing] what objects our understandings were, or were not, fitted to deal with." This is not just a mapping out of the mind, but a taking stock of its abilities and limitations, so we do not seek to act beyond our capacities (*Essay*, I.i.6). This is not 'pre-critical' but 'proto-critical'! Indeed, when Kant distinguished between dogmatic and critical philosophy in the first of his lectures on logic in 1770, he named Locke as an example of the latter⁵². Locke's biographer Maurice Cranston comments that "there is something alien to empiricism in Locke's whole aim of determining *in advance* the limits of human knowledge"⁵³.

Given the choice between these two hints on how to interpret Locke's vast *Essay* – the 'under-labourer' and the 'remote subject' – this is a rare case where the 'hidden' hint is the one to pay close attention to. For Locke to say in print that he is just the under-labourer for giant figures like Boyle, Huygens and Newton makes good sense in terms of public relations; his hint, without naming the issue, that the whole book revolves around the problem of morality and religion, says something more. This sense of a proto-critical assessment of the

political and theological considerations is very apparent in the *Essay*, where we are even told that "all the great ends of morality and religion are well enough secured *without* philosophical proofs of the soul's immateriality, since it is evident that he who made us ... sensible intelligent beings . . . can and will restore us to the like state of sensibility in another world and make us capable there to receive the retribution he has designed to men, according to their doings in this life" (Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.iii.6, p. 542), but even more so in the later works such as the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, the commentary on Paul, and the *Conduct of the Understanding*. For a convincing analysis of Locke specifically along these lines see S. Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind. Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern 'Cultura Animi' Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2011.

⁵¹ Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.xii.11, p. 646.

⁵² See Haakonssen, "The concept of eighteenth-century philosophy", cit., p. 10 and n. 17.

⁵³ Cranston, *Locke*, cit., p. 265. For an interesting critique of the view that Locke was an 'empiricist' about ideas, see L. Krüger, "Was John Locke an empiricist?" (1970), in L. Krüger, *Why does history matter to philosophy and the sciences? Selected essays*, ed. by T. Sturm, W. Carl, and L. Daston, De Gruyter, Berlin/New York 2005.

extent and limits of our powers so that we can “prosecute” our duties as well as possible in our lifetime ties in smoothly with the fact that Locke has explicit ethico-political motivations for some of his most celebrated ‘epistemological’ positions, such as his anti-innatism.

When Locke explains that it was “no small advantage to those who affected to be Masters and Teachers to make this the Principle of *Principles*, that Principles must not be questioned,” since on this view they are innate⁵⁴, he is stating a position that plays out at length in his political philosophy (innate ideas are a cornerstone of authoritarianism) and in his important pedagogical work (anti-innatism is similarly a cornerstone of any liberal pedagogical project since it rests on the belief in the malleability of the human mind, which can evolve through learning). Locke is not interested in the theory of knowledge for its own sake, or in a disembodied mind; on ethical, political and theological grounds, his investigation into the ‘furniture of the mind’ is meant to “examine our own abilities, and see what objects our understandings were, or were not, fitted to deal with”⁵⁵.

Conclusion

Locke, or Locke as presented here, a philosopher of the primacy of “matters concerning our conduct”, would concur with Hume writing two generations later that “‘Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature... Even Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion, are in some measure dependent on the science of Man; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties”⁵⁶. For Locke, the emphasis on practical matters “reflected and addressed concerns of ameliorating civil life”; “rather than subordinating human behavior and industry to a method that promised the knowledge of absolute truths, he claimed that philosophers ought to model their learning on the mental dispositions and skills embedded in prudent actions of everyday life”⁵⁷. Themes such as anti-innatism (that is, the denial that there are innate ideas in the mind) are in fact not epistemological, that is, not primarily reducible to concerns about

⁵⁴ Locke, *Essay*, cit., I.iv.24, p. 101.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Hume, *Treatise*, cit., p. 4.

⁵⁷ Ben-Chaim, *Experimental Philosophy and the Birth of Experimental Science*, cit., pp. 113, 114.

the nature of knowledge or the cognitive states of the knower, but are rather motivated by embedded concerns such as anti-authoritarianism (as in Locke's rejection of an innate notion of 'patriarchal' authority) and the desire to articulate a notion of toleration. As Ryle put it nicely, "Locke's *Essay* is, in intention and effect, much less a theory of knowledge than it is a theory of opinion"⁵⁸.

I have strongly opposed a more positivistic, science-friendly reading (the "underlabourer" reading) to a more practical reading, in which the *Essay* is fundamentally motivated by questions of "morals and revealed religion." But it is possible to reconcile the two, at least in part, if we treat the underlabourer motif as a more deflationary assertion, in keeping with Locke's desire, stated elsewhere, to rid philosophy of useless words and otiose metaphysical entities. Certainly his rendition of the underlabourer motif is less of a 'positive' claim than, e.g. Boyle's desire to build "useful structures." And this vision of science is more in keeping with Locke's concern with a "historical, plain method"⁵⁹. In both cases (the epistemological and the moral), his "business" was to show "whence men had moral ideas, and what they were"⁶⁰. That Locke abandoned his project of a demonstrative science of morals⁶¹ does not mean that the *Essay* is not motivated by moral concerns.

I should note that Lockean empiricism as a moral project is indeed quite different from how Locke was taken up most influentially in the Enlightenment. Whether he was criticized for being a mere physiologist of the understanding, as Kant did, or praised for introducing the experimental method into 'metaphysics' (as D'Alembert, Diderot, Cabanis and others did), Locke's empiricism was understood more naturalistically in the Enlightenment. In fact, Locke was not interested in the physical basis of ideas; similarly, Hume's science of human nature is a *moral science* in which passions are the 'simples' or 'primitives', the building-blocks, which do not reduce to anything further (that would be the anatomist's job, Hume says), and his epistemology is significantly derived from his moral theory⁶².

⁵⁸ Ryle, "John Locke", cit., p. 10.

⁵⁹ Locke, *Essay*, cit., I.i.2, p. 44.

⁶⁰ Locke to Tyrrell, 4 August 1690, cit.

⁶¹ Stated e.g. at. *Essay* III.xi.16, IV.iii.18; Locke wrote to Molyneux that he "thought he saw" that "morality might be demonstratively made out," but admitted that "whether I am able so to make it out is another question" (Letter of 20 September 1692, in Locke, *Correspondence*, cit., vol. 4, p. 524).

⁶² In fact, Hume goes much further than this in developing a moral and political theory of human nature based on history, and thus leaves behind a 'building-block' model of science even if those building-blocks were passions rather than atoms or corpuscles: see C. Dromelet, "Dual Minds: Lessons from the French Context of Hume's Social Theory", in *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 19 (2021), 3, pp. 203-17.

This Locke is engaged in ethical reflection on ‘regimens of the mind’, as Corneanu would have it, in a re-reading of the empiricist project which is broadly consonant with the emphasis other scholars have placed on how the notion of scientific truth is a byproduct of the notion of civility, and how prior to the Kantian focus on objectivity, early modern thinkers would have spoken more about ‘impartiality’⁶³. In this version of the ‘philosophy-as-therapy’ view, epistemology becomes more a focus on the mind’s natural weaknesses and limits, that cultivates its strengths and cures its infirmities.

There is, as noted earlier, a pessimism here. Locke sometimes uses the language of our “weakness”: improving our knowledge by “experience and history” is “all that the weakness of our Faculties in this State of *Mediocrity*, which we are in this World, can attain to”⁶⁴. But as Corneanu stresses in her work, the “weaknesses and defects” of human nature for Locke, are not some kind of Puritan brute fact, but are open to emendation through education and the ‘therapeutic’ dimension of the “conduct of the understanding.” A point I have not stressed in this paper but which is key to Locke’s method thus understood, is that in the context of a dispute, the Lockean injunction to trace back your complex ideas to their origins in your mind, should not itself be taken as a partisan statement, and this peculiar accomplishment of Locke’s empiricist method is neither a piece of disembodied epistemology nor a sample of scientific vulgarization. This was nicely observed by Gilbert Ryle, to whom I leave the last word:

Suppose you hold some opinion passionately and are then advised to examine its credentials dispassionately and to examine the objections to it dispassionately, you, being human, will resent, passionately resent, the advice as partisan advice. It will feel like a traitor’s advice to sell your fortress to its besiegers. But if someone, John Locke say, advises you to trace to their origins the complex ideas

⁶³ S. Gaukroger, “The Autonomy of Natural Philosophy: From Truth to Impartiality”, in P. Anstey & J. Schuster (eds.), *The Science of Nature in the Seventeenth Century: Patterns of Change in Early Modern Natural Philosophy*, Springer, Dordrecht 2005, pp. 131-63; D. Perinetti, “The Nature of Virtue”, in H.S. Harris (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, pp. 333-68; S. Shapin, *A Social History of Truth. Civility and Science in 17th Century England*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994 (who, funnily enough, credits Richard Rorty amongst others for his notion of civility); Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind*, cit., p. 227ff.

⁶⁴ Locke, *Essay*, cit., IV.xii.19, p. 645. The language of “weakness” is there in the strong formulation from the *Conduct of the Understanding*: “[t]here are several weaknesses and defects in the understanding, either from the natural temper of the mind, or ill habits taken up, which hinder it in its progress to knowledge” (*Conduct*, § 12, in J. Locke, *The Works of John Locke*, ed. by Thomas Tegg et al., London 1823, vol. 3, p. 233).

that are the materials of your opinion, to test for their precision and unambiguousness the words in which your ideas are fixed, then the advice does not feel to be partisan advice. It now feels like neutral advice from the laboratory. You may take this advice without suspecting treachery⁶⁵.

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⁶⁵ Ryle, "John Locke", *cit.*, pp. 13-14.

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Reviews

Jessica Gordon-Roth, Shelley Weinberg (eds.), *The Lockean Mind*, Routledge, New York-London 2022, xix+620 pp.

The Lockean Mind, comparsa nella collana “Routledge Philosophical Minds”, è una notevole opera collettanea di riferimento e di consultazione per gli studi lockiani che si segnala sia per l’ampiezza dei contenuti, esaminati in 59 capitoli, sia per il coinvolgimento di 57 specialisti, dei quali ricordo soltanto, tra i più illustri, Margareth Atherton, Michael Ayers, Nicholas Jolley, Victor Nuovo e J.C. Walmsley. L’opera si articola in dodici parti, ciascuna delle quali include un numero variabile di capitoli: si inizia con l’unico contributo sulla vita e le opere di Locke, che esaurisce la parte prima, impropriamente intitolata “Historical background”, cui seguono i sette capitoli della parte seconda (“Gli interlocutori di Locke”) dedicata ai profili di contemporanei con i quali Locke ebbe rapporti diretti (William Molyneux, Damaris Cudworth Masham, Catharine Trotter Cockburn, Edward Stillingfleet, Anthony Collins, Jonas Proast e Philippus van Limborch). La parte terza sull’epistemologia contiene cinque lavori su innatismo, conoscenza e certezza, conoscenza e opinione, conoscenza del mondo esterno, errori e pregiudizi cognitivi. La parte quarta (filosofia della mente) comprende sei capitoli sulle idee come segni, la percezione sensibile, la coscienza e la riflessione, la memoria, la materia pensante, la ricezione di Locke nei progetti settecenteschi di naturalizzazione della mente. La parte quinta (filosofia del linguaggio e logica) ospita due capitoli sul linguaggio, i suoi usi e abusi, e un contributo su Locke e Sergeant in merito al ragionamento sillogistico. Nei sei capitoli della parte sesta (la metafisica) si esaminano i concetti di spazio e durata, di potere, libertà, sostanza, individuazione e identità, identità personale alla luce del dibattito contemporaneo. I sette studi sulla filosofia naturale (parte settima) riguardano la fisiologia e la medicina, la metodolo-

gia scientifica, il corpuscolarismo, la causalità e le leggi di natura, le essenze, le qualità primarie e secondarie, il rapporto di Locke con il pensiero di Newton con riguardo soprattutto ai concetti di spazio e tempo. La filosofia morale di Locke è esposta nella parte ottava in quattro capitoli concernenti la metaetica, la conoscenza della dimensione morale, la psicologia morale e l'azione morale. I tre capitoli della parte nona ("Locke sull'educazione") riguardano la formazione delle abitudini e l'associazione delle idee, la virtù intellettuale e morale, l'educazione alla libertà in raffronto con Rousseau. I sei contributi di filosofia politica (parte decima) esaminano lo stato di natura, la proprietà, il consenso, il potere esecutivo, la tolleranza, l'eredità repubblicana e liberale del pensiero lockiano. La parte undicesima ("La filosofia sociale di Locke") discute in cinque capitoli le idee di Locke in merito a istituti o pratiche sociali come la moneta, la schiavitù, il matrimonio, i rapporti tra genitori e figli, la gravidanza e il parto con riferimento sia alla pratica tradizionale delle levatrici sia all'ostetricia come nuova pratica medica. Chiude il volume la parte dodicesima sulla religione i cui saggi concernono l'idea e la conoscenza di Dio, la rivelazione e i miracoli, l'entusiasmo, il metodo biblico e l'interpretazione teologica, la resurrezione e la vita oltremondana, la presenza di Locke nell'odierna filosofia della religione angloamericana.

Nella breve introduzione generale le curatrici insistono a ragione sulla rilevanza filosofica, all'epoca e ancora oggi, del *Saggio sull'intelligenza umana* di Locke, caratterizzato dalla centralità della questione gnoseologica: Locke "vuole conoscere ciò che possiamo conoscere e se davvero conosciamo ciò che alcuni suoi predecessori avevano affermato che possiamo conoscere" (p. 1). Per quanto riguarda il Locke politico, altrettanto rilevante nella storia delle idee, le curatrici parlano di "anarchismo filosofico" lockiano, "che pervade la riflessione contemporanea sulla dimensione e la natura dello stato giusto" (p. 2); allo stesso tempo rilevano che "benché gli scritti politici teorici di Locke siano dalla parte dei diritti e delle libertà individuali, i suoi scritti più applicativi non sono coerenti con questa caratteristica" (ibid.). Le curatrici sottolineano di aver incluso quanti più temi possibili nella raccolta e rivendicano la creazione di sezioni innovative come quelle sugli interlocutori, sulla filosofia sociale e sulla religione. Oltre all'introduzione generale, le curatrici hanno steso anche brevi introduzioni a ciascuna parte per sintetizzare temi e tesi dei capitoli così da orientare il lettore. Inoltre, a Jessica Gordon-Roth si deve il capitolo su "Locke on midwifery and childbirth", mentre Shelley Weinberg è autrice dei contributi "Locke on consciousness and reflection" nella parte di filosofia della mente e "Locke on intellectual and moral virtue" in quella sul pensiero educativo.

Dedicherò qualche rilievo soltanto a due contributi, a titolo esemplificativo. Nella parte sulla metafisica segnalo il lavoro di Han-Kyul Kim, “Locke on substance”, che discute il concetto-chiave per comprendere la profonda critica epistemologica che Locke rivolge sia alle metafisiche tradizionali sia a quelle seicentesche. L’autore sostiene che Locke “nel *Saggio* sviluppa una teoria della sostanza che è meno metafisica e più naturalistica ed epistemicamente umile di quelle dei suoi contemporanei razionalisti” (p. 226). Kim, che riprende tesi esposte nella sua monografia *Locke’s Ideas of Mind and Body* (2019), ritiene che il dualismo mente-corpo di Locke sia ben diverso da quello cartesiano perché è nominalistico nel senso che la distinzione è tracciata in riferimento alle idee astratte di mentale e di fisico (p. 230). Le nozioni delle sostanze che chiamiamo ‘spirito’ e ‘corpo’ non implicano un dualismo metafisico perché sono ricavate dalle idee complesse che ci formiamo della mente e del corpo: queste idee complesse designano le essenze nominali, che sono entità semantiche, non fisiche né metafisiche (p. 229). Kim conclude: “La differenza fra le idee lockiane di mente e corpo non implica ipso facto una differenza nella realtà, poiché quelle idee sono ‘idee superficiali delle cose’ ([*Saggio*], II.xxiii.32)” (p. 231). Questa lettura merita attenzione, anche se non mi pare che l’autore riesca a spiegare efficacemente i passi lockiani che non collimano con la sua proposta (cfr. p. 231 s.). Peraltro, sono convinto che molte questioni interpretative siano radicate nella incertezza e oscillazione degli stessi testi di Locke.

È utile raffrontare le conclusioni di Kim con il saggio di Allison Kuklok su “Locke on essences”, incluso nella parte di filosofia naturale. La studiosa esamina se la classificazione secondo specie delle cose particolari sia per Locke soltanto un’operazione convenzionale dell’intelletto umano. Dopo una disamina delle interpretazioni in materia (P. Guyer, M. Ayers, M. Stuart, L. Shapiro e in particolare P. Anstey), Kuklok propende per una lettura realista secondo la quale le essenze nominali non sono costrutti convenzionali perché ogni specie è connotata da alcune ovvie qualità preminenti o salienti (*leading qualities*), percepite uniformemente dai soggetti che non fanno fatica a concordare nella classificazione delle cose particolari, come attestano gli usi linguistici. Facendo riferimento a numerosi passi di Locke (vedi p. 317 s.), Kuklok conclude che “anche se non si è disposti ad attribuire a Locke un realismo riguardo alle specie, non sembra più accettabile dire che le somiglianze e le differenze tra le cose lasciano indeterminato il modo in cui dobbiamo raggrupparle e distinguerle” (p. 318). Il saggio di Kuklok, nel rimarcare come le qualità salienti siano una base naturale di classificazione, ci ricorda che la dimensione fenomenica, descritta nelle variabili essenze nominali, non è però un confuso caleidoscopio

ordinato arbitrariamente dall'intelletto. Essa presenta tratti relativamente stabili, sia pure in trasformazione. La soggiacente ipotetica struttura corpuscolare è una spiegazione plausibile di quest'ordine dinamico.

I due capitoli di cui ho dato cenno sono esemplari del tipo di contributi raccolti nel volume: esposizioni dense e concise che non fungono da semplici introduzioni tematiche, ma espongono la tesi dell'autore in dibattito con altri interpreti. Per quanto utile e apprezzabile nei contenuti, il volume rivela però una scarsa cura redazionale, come risulta a colpo d'occhio dalla mancanza di uniformità. I riferimenti bibliografici al termine dei capitoli sono distinti in "Further Reading" e "References", ma quest'ultima denominazione non è costante, perché in quattro casi invece di "References" si usa il termine "Bibliography" e in nove casi la locuzione "Works cited". I testi della sezione "Further Reading" sono seguiti in 16 casi su 59 da stringate notazioni descrittive e/o valutative, mentre nei restanti capitoli i testi sono soltanto elencati. Le note in alcuni capitoli sono poche e scarse, mentre in altri sono assai più numerose e articolate. Il capitolo di Douglas Casson sulla tolleranza è privo sia di note sia della sezione "Further Reading". Il capitolo di Marya Schechtman sull'identità personale reca inspiegabilmente in grassetto tutti i nomi degli autori elencati in "Further Reading" e in "References". Su 59 capitoli, solo 12 contengono in chiusura il rimando ai "Related topics", che invece sarebbe stato utile inserire sempre, anche perché molti contributi collocati in una parte hanno rilevanza anche per altre parti. In chiusura c'è un unico indice che comprende sia i contenuti sia i nomi degli autori storici, ma esclude i nomi degli autori della letteratura secondaria. Tra le Abbreviazioni (p. xviii s.) ricorrono ben otto casi di parole o locuzioni che non sono abbreviazioni perché sono identiche al titolo originale. Per di più, alcuni scritti di cui si dà l'abbreviazione non vengono mai citati nel volume: ad esempio "Peccatum originale", "Ecclesia". Non mancano i refusi nelle parole latine: a p. xix nelle Abbreviazioni si legge "*Christianaea* Religionis synopsis" invece di "*Christianae* Religionis synopsis", come compare correttamente nell'abbreviazione a fianco; nella Introduzione, p. 2, "*solo scriptura*" va corretto in "*sola scriptura*"; a p. 150, nota 4, si legge "*Resurrection* et quae sequuntur", invece di *Resurrectio*; a p. 268, il titolo dell'opera di Spinoza *Renati des Cartes principorum philosophiae pars I. and II., more geometrico demonstratae* contiene due refusi (*principorum* e *demonstratae*: corr. in *principiorum* e *demonstratae*).

Infine, per quanto riguarda i rimandi bibliografici alla letteratura secondaria, spiace ma non sorprende constatare che sono pressoché assenti i riferimenti a testi che non siano in lingua inglese: in tutto il volume ho contato solo otto

riferimenti, di cui 6 a studi in lingua francese e 2 a studi in lingua tedesca. Di questi otto riferimenti ben tre, non a caso, sono offerti da un unico studioso di provata esperienza internazionale come Charles T. Wolfe. Si ha la conferma di un fatto ben noto (salvo apprezzabili eccezioni): la diffusissima ignoranza negli studiosi anglosassoni delle lingue e quindi delle culture straniere.

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Ruth Boeker, *Locke on Persons and Personal Identity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2021, 303 pp.

La questione della coscienza come auto-coscienza, quella caratteristica che Locke scriveva essere «inseparable from thinking, and [...] essential to it: It being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive» (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Nidditch, II, 27, 9), costituisce, per usare un'immagine di origine cosmologica, la “radiazione di fondo” dell'*Essay*. Se ne trovano infatti tracce in tutta l'opera, dal primo al quarto libro, in occasione delle più svariate tematiche, dalla memoria (nel contesto dell'esame dell'aporeticità della reminiscenza dei “platonici”, che richiede non solo il farsi nuovamente attuale di un contenuto, ma anche della consapevolezza di aver già percepito quel preciso contenuto), alla conoscenza intuitiva della propria esistenza e a quella sensitiva (in relazione all'interrogativo circa l'esistenza di realtà esterne al soggetto e al “mondo” delle idee come oggetti immediati del pensiero, un interrogativo che trova risposta solo tenendo conto della coscienza della specifica “forza” di un contenuto psichico rispetto agli altri e del grado di coinvolgimento emotivo-sentimentale del soggetto nello sperimentare tale contenuto). Nonostante ciò, sarà a partire dalla seconda edizione, quella del 1694, che l'autocoscienza riceverà un'esplicita tematizzazione (nonché precisazioni terminologico-concettuali da cui la filosofia occidentale non potrà più prescindere), nel contesto del ventisettesimo capitolo del secondo libro dell'*Essay*, dedicato alla questione dell'identità (*Of Identity and Diversity*), capitolo interamente aggiunto in risposta a una delle varie suggestioni ricevute dal preziosissimo amico, lo scienziato e filosofo irlandese William Molyneux.

Il testo di Ruth Boeker, *Locke on Persons and Personal Identity*, caratterizzato da chiarezza espositiva e rigore nell'analisi e nell'argomentazione, si con-

centra appunto sulle questioni della personalità e dell'identità personale, che non hanno mai cessato, dal XVIIIesimo secolo (si pensi a Leibniz, Butler, Shaftesbury, Hume e Reid) sino ai giorni nostri (vedasi, tra gli studi più recenti e significativi, quelli di Thiel, Balibar, Strawson, Lolordo, Stuart e Weinberg, che l'Autrice, sin dalla *Preface*, mostra di conoscere con estrema precisione e di aver affrontato con approccio critico), di suscitare profondo interesse e di fornire preziosi spunti di riflessione non solo dal punto di vista storico-filosofico, ma anche e soprattutto teoretico, etico e teologico.

Proprio questi due ultimi piani di indagine sono particolarmente utili, sottolinea l'Autrice, per comprendere la specificità e l'originalità della proposta lockiana, dato che non si deve mai perdere di vista il fatto che l'opera capitale del pensatore inglese è certamente di argomento gnoseologico, ma nasce con l'obiettivo di contribuire alla soluzione delle questioni morali e religiose, che sono il vero «Business of Mankind in general» (*Essay*, IV.12.11). In effetti, la soluzione della questione del *self*, di ciò che rende ciascuno di noi il medesimo io nel corso del tempo e nell'inarrestabile flusso di idee, consente di dare una risposta anche alla questione centrale della moralità, del diritto e della politica circa l'*ubi consistam* della responsabilità, della attribuzione di punizioni/ricompense (che non implicano solo la presenza di *standards of excellence* di riferimento per misurare la bontà di un'azione, ma anche l'oggettiva individuazione di un "agente", cui possa essere ricondotta l'azione in questione e che possa effettivamente rispondere – etimologicamente – di essa) e costituisce una sorta di *complementum* delle potenzialità racchiuse nelle teorie politiche di Hobbes (che, certo, non mancò di riflettere sul tema della persona, nella distinzione tra *natural* e *artificial persons*, ma non approfondì adeguatamente la differenza tra *author* e *actor*, cosa che appunto richiederebbe una riflessione sull'*accountability*, autocoscienza e identità del soggetto nel tempo).

Il primo passo, nelle analisi di Boeker (che, volendo seguire il filo argomentativo senza soluzione di continuità, si dispiegano nei capitoli secondo, quarto, quinto, sesto, settimo e nono, laddove i capitoli terzo, ottavo, decimo e undicesimo si concentrano, rispettivamente, sui dibattiti sorti in tempi recenti tra diverse interpretazioni del *principium individuationis* lockiano, sull'analisi delle interpretazioni del problema della transitività della coscienza/*accountability* nel corso del tempo date da Strawson e Stuart e, infine, sui primi critici di Locke e sulle ragioni del loro dissenso), è costituito dal richiamo al fatto che la questione dell'identità vada anteposta a quella sull'individuazione (come condizioni di persistenza, stando alla definizione lockiana di *principium individuationis*) affrontata in una prospettiva di *kind dependence*, ossia in relazione al

genere (*kind, sort*) dell'ente di riferimento e, quindi, si traduca in una domanda circa i caratteri (*nominal essence*) che possono definire, con una certa pretesa di validità intersoggettiva uno stesso genere, al di là cioè del fatto che un certo convenzionalismo è sempre presente nell'operazione del *sorting*.

Quali sono dunque le caratterizzazioni fornite da Locke nell'*Essay* circa il termine-concetto di *person*? L'acuta analisi dell'autrice mostra che le due definizioni proposte dal filosofo inglese, «thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing, in different times and places» (*Essay*, II,27.9) e «Forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit; and so belongs only to intelligent Agents capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery» (*Essay*, II, 27, 26), sono in realtà concettualmente equivalenti, cosa che consente di individuare, come si diceva, il genere della *personhood*. Il passo successivo è quello dell'individuazione delle condizioni di persistenza di tale genere: se Locke scrive che è la medesimezza della coscienza a consentire l'identità del soggetto nel tempo, come è da intendere tale *consciousness*? È qui che si mostra la preoccupazione morale che informa la concezione lockiana della personalità (ed è qui che le riflessioni di Boeker costituiscono un interessante nuovo capitolo nell'analisi della complessità del fenomeno della coscienza per Locke): Socrate sveglio non è punibile e quindi responsabile per ciò che Socrate dormiente ha compiuto, nella misura in cui l'uno non è cosciente delle azioni dell'altro, ossia nella misura in cui il primo è manchevole, non tanto della memoria di una azione (la memoria resta un fatto importante per l'identità nel tempo e la personalità, ma non certo l'unico aspetto e nemmeno quello decisivo), quanto piuttosto della memoria di aver compiuto le azioni del secondo (quindi non le sente/considera proprie). Manca cioè quell'*appropriation* che per l'Autrice non è solo quella basica *mineness* data dal fatto che ogni percezione è al contempo sia coscienza/consapevolezza di un contenuto presente e manifesto psichicamente, sia auto-coscienza (in quanto il soggetto sa di essere il *terminus ad quem* della percezione come relazione di presenza e manifestazione di quel contenuto), ma è anche e soprattutto quell'*appropriation* "forte" che conferisce un'unità più radicale al soggetto e ai contenuti psichici che dice "suoi" in quanto tale unità è legata all'essere questi oggetto di atti volontari (il riferimento agli scritti politici di Locke qui si rivela decisivo).

Si ha così una meità che è capace di estendersi continuativamente nel tempo (per quanto il pensatore inglese ammetta la possibilità di "salti" in questa continuità) e durare indipendentemente dalla più classica, cartesiana, ontologia della sostanza immateriale (anima; cosa che, anche in questo caso, si mostra

pienamente coerente con le teorie mortalistiche che Locke pare sostenere circa il rapporto tra l'esistenza dell'anima e la morte del corpo, con conseguente necessità di un intervento divino per la resurrezione degli uomini in vista del giudizio universale). Questo è a nostro avviso il guadagno maggiore del saggio di Boeker, l'aver aperto a una sorta di ontologia lockiana, dove la *person/il self* è centro stabile e permanente non solo di relazioni cognitive, ma di stati e atti (rapporti di inerenza, descritti come appropriazione causale).

Concludendo, cosa emersa in particolare in questi ultimi passaggi, Boeker conferma che l'interesse di Locke per le tematiche/problematiche teologiche e religiose (la condizione del "soggetto" *in the afterlife*, la resurrezione, il giudizio divino universale), lungi dall'essere marginale rispetto alle riflessioni compiute nell'*Essay* e maturato nella tarda maturità (quindi confinato per lo più o in contesti ben circoscritti o in pubblicazioni postume), è anzi profondamente intrecciato con le tesi gnoseologiche e politiche e permea la speculazione lockiana lungo tutta la sua parabola (per questo, *Locke on Persons and Personal Identity* andrebbe a mio avviso letto, come in una sorta di circolarità virtuosa, dati i vari punti di convergenza, con l'ottimo volume di Diego Lucci, *John Locke's Christianity*, edito nel 2021 per Cambridge University Press).

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