

SERIES
OF
LECTURES
UPON
LOCKE'S ESSAY.

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PREFACE.

THE following Work has been undertaken with considerable reluctance. I have been repeatedly applied to by Dublin publishers to furnish them with a contraction of Locke's Essay, and have received liberal offers of pecuniary remuneration. Hitherto I have uniformly declined the undertaking, and have been only induced to enter upon the present work, by having ascertained that a spurious contraction, in a catechetical form, is in circulation under my name, sold by the booksellers as mine, and bought as such by the students. Finding the defects of my own works sufficiently numerous, without being stigmatised with the errors of others, I have, in self defence, attempted these Lectures upon the Essay.

To execute what the publishers first proposed, a mere contraction of Locke's Essay, was a task to which I could not prevail upon myself to stoop. If this be considered arrogance, it is a charge to which I must honestly plead guilty. I have, however, attempted a work which I hope will be found more useful than any contraction could be.

To illustrate and explain Locke's Essay on the Understanding in a series of Lectures, to compare his opinions on disputed points with those of other modern philosophers, to show where Locke disagrees with himself, and maintains contradictions, and to embody in the same work all the parts of the Essay, which were necessary and useful, by introducing them either in substance or in the very words of the author, where these are material, appeared to me a work likely to be more beneficial than the contraction required. Such has been my design in the present lectures; how far I have succeeded, must be determined by the opinions of others.

The manner in which Locke's works are too often studied, appears to be attended with less benefit to the student than could be desired. It is the practise to "get by heart" the doctrines and sometimes little more than the words of this philosopher. Having no other works on the same subject in his hands, the student, when his academical studies are completed, frequently goes forth into the world, fully persuaded that the opinions which he has thus "committed to memory" are infallibly right, and the only doctrines, on these subjects, held by rational creatures of this age. Absurd as this may appear, I have known many examples of it. One of the great benefits to be derived from this department of science seems to be the exercise which the understanding receives in the investigations which it involves. What strength can the intellect derive from "getting by heart" the opinions of Locke? As well might we expect, by reading

a description of riding or walking, to acquire the vigour derivable from those healthful exercises.

My object therefore has been, on disputable points, to give the reader, in some degree, a view of both sides of the question, and to enable him to judge and reason for himself. Where, therefore, I have ventured to differ from Locke, it is of little moment whether I am right or wrong; it will, in either case, contribute to disenthral the mind of the student from the bondage of a particular system, in matters on which mankind is never likely to agree.

My publishers finding me determined against writing a catechetical contraction of Locke, have made a special request that I should annex a collection of questions upon the lectures. Such students as think any advantage is derivable from this, will find them in the Appendix. The questions which may be considered indispensable, and which even the most indolent student should be able to answer, are distinguished by the mark (§). Those who aspire to a more accurate knowledge of the Essay, should attend to those marked thus (+). Those who look for honors should be generally prepared in all the questions.

The answers to the questions will be readily found, by referring to the corresponding section of the Lecture. This arrangement will, I trust, accommodate all classes of readers.

LECTURES

UPON

LOCKE'S ESSAY.

LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTION.

1. **LOCKE** introduces the subject of his *Essay* by enumerating the motives which urged him, and which may therefore also be supposed to incite others to prosecute an inquiry into the nature and extent of the intellectual operations. These inducements he states to be three fold: 1^o the nobleness of the subject, 2^o the usefulness of the results, 3^o the pleasure derived from the pursuit. When we consider that the understanding is the great power by which man is elevated above other animals, or in the words of our author, that which “sets him above the rest of sensible beings, and gives him all the advantage and dominion which he has over them,” it cannot but be considered one of the noblest objects of investigation. This being the power which “directs our thoughts in the search of other

things," and by the operations of which we are enabled to view the recesses of nature, which, but for its improvement, must for ever have been concealed: and what is of still greater moment, that by which a knowledge of ourselves, and of those rules by which as beings accountable to a moral governor we should regulate our actions, its extensive utility must be most striking. That a pursuit having such an object,* and such ends, should be pleasurable, is a question only to be resolved by an appeal to experience. The pleasure derived from it is illustrated by Locke, by comparing it to the pleasure which light gives to the eye.

In such an enquiry there are necessarily considerable difficulties to be overcome. The difficulties arise from the circumstance, that the objects and instruments of investigation are the same, namely, the operations of the mind. The enquiry is into the nature of these, and the only instruments by which the enquiry can be conducted, are these very operations. This difficulty Locke illustrates by the eye, which, though it is the mean whereby we see other things, can never behold itself; thus the mind finds a similar difficulty in setting itself before its own view, and making itself "its own object."

2. Having introduced the subject of his work, or as he modestly terms "his essay," our Author proceeds to develop the views he designs to take of the human mind and its capacities. His object he states to be "human knowledge" rather than the human mind, and "human knowledge" as far only as respects its "original certainty, extent and degrees." The word "original" here must be

* The object and the end in popular works are frequently confounded. The object is the subject matter of a treatise; the end, the purpose to be attained by treating of the object. Thus the objects of this essay are the operations of the mind. The end is to teach proper methods of searching after truth.

taken in a limited sense. In its most extended acceptation it might be understood to apply to an investigation which would trace our knowledge and its elements, our ideas, as far back as their "first cause." To guard against this misconception, Locke distinctly declines the "physical consideration of the mind." Under the "physical consideration of the mind" is embraced 1^o all enquiry into its essence. 2^o The peculiar organic modifications and motions by which sensation is effected. 3^o Whether ideas in their original formation depend upon matter? These he declines, not from their inutility, but as not forming a part of his design, which, as has been observed, is strictly confined to what respects human knowledge, its original (*i. e.* elements,) certainty and extent.

The necessity of fixing the limits of knowledge, and of settling distinctly the measures of its certainty must be strongly impressed upon us, when we observe the discordancy and even contradiction which exists in the opinions of mankind on various subjects. This discrepancy in judgment can only arise from men adopting wrong measures of probability, and false criterions of certainty, but is nevertheless frequently attended with the mischievous consequence of driving unreflecting minds into positive scepticism.

3. The method which our Author proposes to pursue in his inquiry is as follows:

1^o To enquire into the original of our ideas, or the ways whereby they come into the mind.

2^o To determine the knowledge derived from them, its 1^o evidence, 2^o certainty, and 3^o extent.

3^o To inquire into the nature and grounds of faith or opinion.

By faith or opinion is meant "that assent which is given to a proposition, of whose truth there is no certain knowledge."

4. An ignorance of the extent of our intellectual fa-

culties, and of the investigations to which they are proportionate, is productive of two opposite errors, scil. dogmatism and scepticism. The dogmatist overrates, the sceptic underrates our faculties. The one ascribes greater, and the other less validity to the conclusion of our reason than the grounds on which those conclusions are built would justly warrant. Of these intellectual maladies (for so we must call them) there are various degrees, and there is probably no finite being who is perfectly free from any degree of either. From the sceptic who rejects the conclusions of abstruse metaphysics, to the sceptic who will not venture to affirm his own existence, we meet in common life with all the intermediate shades of error.

Extreme begets extreme. Scepticism is the child of dogmatism. The dogmatist, confident in the fancied extent of his faculties, plunges into speculations, beyond the range of human intellect. He flounders in an ocean of error. Baffled and disgusted at his failure, and confounded with the contradictions and embarrassments in which he has involved himself, in a sort of intellectual sulkiness, he wilfully abandons all proper use of his mental energies, and concluding that, because he failed in his search into what was removed beyond the wit of man, he cannot depend with certainty on any thing, he gives himself up to absolute scepticism. The folly of this degree of scepticism is compared by Locke to that of one who would reject the use of his legs, and "sit still and perish, because he has not wings to fly." He also illustrates the folly of that indolence which is the consequence of scepticism, by one who would refuse the use of candle-light, because he had not broad sunshine, although the former were sufficient for his purposes. He that "entertains all objects in that way and proportion in which they are suited to his faculties, and capable of being presented to him," uses his understanding as he should. If probability is all that

can be attained, he rests content with it, gives the proposition its proportionate degree of assent, and governs his conduct conformably to it. He does not, like the dogmatist, attempt to reduce it to positive demonstration, nor like the sceptic, reject it altogether, because he cannot attain that demonstration.

These are manifest abuses of our finest faculty. Were it possible to do that perfectly which Locke proposes; to ascertain with distinctness the limits of our knowledge, the boundary between what may be, and what cannot be comprehended by the human mind, "the horizon which defines the enlightened and dark parts of things," these two abuses would be avoided. But though it be not possible to effect this purpose, however desirable, it is yet possible to do much towards approximating to those limits, though it be not possible, perfectly to cure the diseases, their intensity may be very much mitigated. This Locke proposed to effect by his inquiry into the human mind, and has certainly to a great degree succeeded in his design. He revolutionized the science of the mind, dashed to pieces speculations which had commanded the reverence and admiration of ages, and fixed that science upon more rational and firm foundations than the united talents of the sages who preceded him had by their continued efforts been able to effect.

5. Our faculties have limits. The knowledge therefore to be attained by those faculties has corresponding limits. But this is a predicament in which we stand in common with all finite created beings. The difference between man and the highest created being lies only in the *place* of the limit. On this score we have then no cause of complaint or discontent, unless one would aspire to one of the incommunicable attributes of divinity, infinite comprehension. As to the the limitations which

have been set to our intellectual capacity, Locke contends that we should rest satisfied with them for these reasons :

1^o. When we compare our own powers with those of the other occupants of the globe, we must at once perceive the immense superiority which is given to us; so great, that although far from being the first in physical power, yet such is the dominion given us by the intellect, we maintain a sway over even the strongest and most ferocious.

2^o. Although the powers of mind given to us fall infinitely short of comprehending the vast extent of being floating in the universe, and even probably shrink into nothing before the comprehensions of other and superior created beings, yet we have all that is necessary for the conveniencies, comforts, and even luxuries and elegancies of this life, and what is of infinitely more consequence, we have powers fully adequate to point out the rules of conduct which will ensure a permanent felicity in the next; we have, as St. Paul says, *παντα προς ζωνη και ευσηβειαν*, every thing conducive to the convenience of life, and the cultivation of virtue.

3^o. We have that degree of comprehension which is suited to our state. Had we more, the circumstances in which we are placed might become intolerable, and the extension of our intellect produce only an extension of misery. Had we less, our quantity of happiness would be proportionably less than our situation and circumstances would admit of.

In a word, whatever may be the limits of our faculties, they are sufficiently and more than sufficiently wide for all our purposes here, and it is perfect folly to reject the use of them because they are not more extended. The sounding line of the mariner, as our author observes, is of considerable use to him, although it be not capable of fathoming all the depths of the ocean. It is sufficient for him if it measure those parts through which his voyage

lies, and it is his own fault if he wander into regions which lie out of his way. Our faculties are perfectly adequate to investigate "all that concerns and conduct," and this is all that is absolutely necessary to be known here.

6. Previously to entering upon his proposed enquiry, Locke premises that he shall proceed upon a certain postulate. He states that he calls that thing about which the mind is occupied when the man thinks, an *idea*. His postulate is the assumption of the existence of ideas. It would appear from his definition that this is as evident as thinking itself. But from subsequent parts it appears that he means by the word *idea*, something more than is expressed in his definition. He speaks of *external things* as the exciting causes of *ideas*. He therefore evidently intends *ideas* and *external things* to be different beings. Suppose then it is asserted that the mind when it thinks is employed about external things, does Locke's postulate mean merely the existence of external things? Certainly not, for in one of the chapters of the fourth book, he occupies himself in the proof of this very proposition. Something more than is contained in this postulate than appears at the first view of it, and this is only to be collected from a consideration of other parts of the "essay." Locke's postulate is really this; that there exist in the minds of men certain effects produced there by certain things existing in what is called the material world. These effects are what the mind contemplates in thought, and they are the only indications or proofs which man possesses of the "existence of external objects," and they are what our author calls "ideas." The external exciting causes he denominates matter and its modifications. The existence of this latter he does not assume, but professes to prove from the former. The ideas and their exciting causes he takes to be things altogether heterogeneous, and admitting no comparison.

Locke thinks himself warranted in this assumption, as he declares that every man is conscious of the existence of ideas in his own mind, and other men's words and actions convince him that they exist in theirs.

We have dwelt at length upon the matter of the introduction, as it is of considerable consequence in forming a clear view of the subjects of investigation, as we proceed through the essay itself.

LECTURE II.



Outline of the Essay. Of sensation and reflection. The Cartesian doctrine; that of the soul combatted.

1. BEFORE we enter upon the details of the "Essay" it may be useful to take a general view of its subject, somewhat more developed than the short plan which our author has laid down in his "method" given in the introduction.

Conformably to this plan he devotes the first two books to an enquiry into the true source of our ideas. The main doctrine which he establishes is, that all our primitive ideas originate in sensation. After the mind becomes furnished with ideas by the senses, it begins to exercise its capacities of compounding, comparing, abstracting, &c. The mind contemplating these, its own operations, acquires ideas of them, which ideas form a new class wholly distinct from the former, and which he calls ideas of reflection. His principal argument to establish the doctrine that sensation and reflection are the original of all our ideas, is an induction completed *a fortiori*. As it would be impossible to enumerate *all* our ideas, and prove each separately to come from one or other of these sources, he shews, in a general way, that very comprehensive classes undoubtedly arise from them; the most obvious are the ideas peculiar to each of the five senses, the ideas of the different operations of the mind, &c.

This induction, which must, from its very nature be imperfect, he confirms, by shewing that those ideas which seem to be most abstruse in their origin, and most unlikely to proceed from the sources he assigns, do, nevertheless, actually proceed from them, and from no other. The ideas he selects for this purpose, are space, time, and infinity.

2. This inductive process, though it is the principal, is not the only argument on which he founds his theory of sensation and reflection. There are several subsidiary arguments confusedly scattered through his work, which we shall attempt to enumerate here :

1^o Those who denied sensation and reflection to be the only sources alleged many of our ideas to *innate*; that is, to be originally impressed upon the mind in the first moment of its creation, and to constitute an essential and inseparable part of the mind itself. They not only alleged that there were certain ideas thus impressed, but also maintained that there were actually some truths, the perception of which was simultaneous with the creation of the living principle. To state this more plainly; they maintained that at the moment that life is communicated to that portion of organised and hitherto inert matter designed to receive it in the womb, there are at the same time conveyed to it clear and distinct perceptions of certain ideas, and even of the truth of certain abstract propositions, and hence these ideas and propositions have been called *innate*. Locke devotes his first book to the refutation of this doctrine; and if this be the only source assigned for ideas, his own doctrine may be considered to be thus established, by reasoning from the removal of one part to the position of the others. No idea can be considered innate, the existence of which may be accounted for by any of the ordinary ways whereby we get other ideas. For it is unphilosophical to ascribe more causes than are sufficient to solve the phenomenon. It

is contrary to the economy of nature to do by two different causes that which might have been done by one and the same.

2^o He draws an analogical argument from tracing back the state of the mind from the adult to the child, from the child to the infant, and so back to the moment of its birth, which is the first moment in which we can observe it. Through all these stages we find the stock of ideas diminishing rapidly, and find scarcely any in the newborn infant; whereas, had we proceeded in the other direction, we should have found the variety of ideas increasing in proportion to the variety of sensible objects which presented themselves, and to the attention with which they are contemplated. Arguing therefore, by analogy, we may infer, that were we able to carry our observation back from infancy to the moment of creation, we should find no ideas *then* actually existing, though probably they would immediately begin to exist.

3^o Locke frequently uses the *argumentum ad ignorantiam*. He appeals to his opponents to assign any idea not derived from these sources. Although this species of argumentation is in general not entitled to much weight, yet it is peculiarly fit in the case in which he applies it. It is on all hands admitted, that by far the greater number of our ideas arise from sensation and reflection. It is therefore much more easy to assign some of the few, which have been alleged not to arise from them, than to go through an inductive process to establish the contrary.

4^o He deduces an argument from etymology in support of this doctrine. He observes, that most of the words in use, even those expressing ideas of reflection, are derived from names expressive of sensible ideas. Such are, imagine, apprehend, adhere, conceive, instill, disgust, &c. spirit, angel, &c. And he conjectures that if we were able to trace all names back to their first origin, we should find them all ultimately implying sensible ideas.

3. In the course of his investigations respecting the original of our ideas, he enters into several inquiries which do not strictly come under that head. Thus he examines other qualities of ideas, as their clearness, distinctness, reality, adequacy, &c. These considerations conclude his second book.

According to the method laid down in the introduction he should next have proceeded to the consideration of knowledge and its attributes. In his progress, however, finding a more intimate connection between language and ideas than he at first had expected, he conceived it necessary to devote a part of his work to the consideration of language, and its influence upon our ideas and knowledge. This subject he has very fully treated in his third book. The fourth book is altogether devoted to investigations respecting knowledge and probability, and their attributes.

4. Having now stated more particularly the subjects to which we shall have to apply our attention in these lectures, we shall proceed to examine our author's reasonings respecting the original of our ideas. As the doctrine of innate ideas and principles is in a great degree exploded, we shall not at present enter into further particulars respecting the subject of the first book than those which have been already stated. Assuming then the existence of ideas in the mind, the question is, whence have they come? The mind, in the first moment of its creation, is compared by Locke to "white paper," capable of receiving various characters and impressions, but on which nothing is as yet written. "Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it, with almost endless variety?" He ascribes all this in one word to EXPERIENCE. This experience is two-fold; sensation and reflection. Locke seldom gives formal and settled definitions of his terms, the

circumstances under which he describes his "Essay" to have been written may possibly account for this. His meaning is frequently to be only collected from carefully observing the manner in which he uses and applies his terms. The term sensation, is an example of this. He seems to use this term and perception nearly synonymously. When examined, however, we shall find that perception is a more general term, as it is applicable to ideas of reflection as well as those of sensation. There are several different passages in the essay which are indifferently considered as definitions of sensation, and indeed seem to be given as such by the author. Such are the following:

"This great source of most of the ideas we have depending wholly upon our senses, and derived by them to the understanding, I call SENSATION. B. 2. Ch. I. § 3.

—— Sensation; *which is* such an impression or motion made in some part of the body, as produces some perception in the understanding. B. 2. Ch. I. § 23.

—— Sensation; *which is* the actual entrance of an idea into the understanding by the senses. B. 2. Ch. XIX. § 1."

From a comparison of the last two definitions, one might suppose that by the word perception, our author meant an idea. If he does not mean by the word perception, in the first of these definitions, an idea, the two definitions are not alike, and therefore he uses the word sensation unsteadily. If, on the other hand, perception means, as would appear from B. 2. Ch. IX. the *actual production* of an idea, the last definition applies to perception as well as to sensation; and in this case the second definition becomes absurd, only defining by a synonymous term. As to the first definition it is also objectionable, as we are ignorant (as far as respects any thing contained in it) what "that great source" is. These little inaccuracies are every where observable through our author,

