



# LOCKE STUDIES

Vol. 2020

<https://doi.org/10.5206/ls.2020.8537> | ISSN: 2561-925X

Submitted: 15 NOVEMBER 2019

Revised: 15 JUNE 2020

Published online: 30 JULY 2020

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## **Review of *John Locke: Les idées et les choses. Avec les manuscrit inédit “Notes upon Mr. John Lock’s Essay concerning Human Understanding” de William Whiston fils* by Luisa Simonutti (ed.)**

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### *Abstract:*

A review of Luisa Simonutti’s (ed.) recent book *John Locke: Les idées et les choses. Avec les manuscrit inédit “Notes upon Mr. John Lock’s Essay concerning Human Understanding” de William Whiston fils* (Milan: Edition Mimésis, 2019).

*Keywords:* John Locke, ideas, physical objects, signs, truth, Walter Whiter, association

*Locke Studies* is published by [The John Locke Society](#).

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**Luisa Simonutti, ed. *John Locke: Les idées et les choses. Avec le manuscrit inédit "Notes upon Mr. John Lock's Essay Concerning Human Understanding" de William Whiston fils. Milan: Edition Mimésis, 2019. 184 pp. €18.00 (pbk). ISBN 9788869761867.***

**Reviewed by GIULIANA DI BIASE**

A cursory look at the title of this book may arouse a variety of expectations, which Luisa Simonutti intends to shape in the Introduction: she writes, "Un regard sur la profusion d'études critiques dédiées à la philosophie et à la pensée de Locke, au siècle dernier et dans les années les plus récentes, permet de relievier certains aspects, parfois délassés, qui méritent une plus grande attention, comme le thème de la sémiotique dans l'oeuvre de Locke, le rapport entre les noms et les choses dans la pensée du Philosophe, son experience de traducteur de certaines oeuvres de Pierre Nicole, et la fortune de sa particulière thèorie sémiotique au cours du dix-huitième siècle" (7). The main topic of the book therefore seems to be Locke's semiotics. Simonutti enlarges on this picture: the purpose of the essays collected in this volume is to offer "une nouvelle approche de la pensée du philosophe anglais et de sa fortune dans la philosophie et la littérature du dix-huitième siècle. . . . Elles constituent une étape pour la compréhension historique et critique de la sémiotique lockéenne, de la reconsideration du problem métaphysique et des themes historiques, philosophiques et scientifiques qui y sont liées" (8). Here the purpose of the book becomes somewhat confusing, considering its length, 135 pages, plus an Appendix containing the 1723 reading notes on the *Essay* by the English editor William Whiston, written while he was a student in Cambridge. The "new approach" perhaps needs some clarification. No doubt, the volume provides some very illuminating insights, for instance into semiotics, which may contribute to an advancement in Locke's studies; however, its content does not seem to constitute an organic whole. In the opening essay, Jean-Pierre Cléro insists on the ideality which Locke attributed to mathematical objects; his views appear to be in contrast with those expressed by Paul Schuurman, which in turn are at odds with those of Jean-Michelle Vienne and Geneviève Bryckman in some regards. It is unclear how the text in the Appendix can be related to the others, or how it could contribute to developing a "new approach." The idea-thing relation, which should be the thread of the essays in this book, is sometimes not clearly brought into focus: Peter Alexander defends his view of Locke as an adherent to corpuscularianism, Simonutti focuses on Locke's translation of Nicole's *Essais*, and Gabriela Horvath focuses on an original eighteenth-century interpretation of Locke's theory of the association of ideas. Although it may be very interesting to read all these essays separately, their collocation in a single book does not seem fully convincing.

Another problem is the content of some contributions, which may be controversial. In his essay, entitled "Intuition, deduction et connaissance sensible," Jean-Pierre Cléro concentrates on Locke's way of conceiving mathematical objects and the great problem faced by empiricism when the nature of mathematical knowledge is considered: how could its certainty, on which Locke agreed, be reconciled with its empirical origin, strongly asserted in the *Drafts for the Essay*? Was Kant right when, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he charged Locke with inconsistency in this regard? Cléro thinks that Kant was wrong. In his opinion, Kant misunderstood Locke's concept of experience, reducing it to sensation and dismissing the power of reflection. In the *Essay*, external senses and reflection would cooperate in producing the ideas of number and infinity; the certainty of geometrical measurements would have a very feeble sensory foundation in the sight, isolated from

all the other senses. According to Cléro, Locke believed that mathematical objects derive their certainty from the sensory world, re-elaborated by intuition through the mediation of concepts; thanks to reflection, the mind had at its own disposal “what it has produced by itself, under the form of an external object” (19). The ideality of mathematical objects was an intellectual construction: in Cléro’s terms, “Mathematics does not adapt itself to heterogeneous objects; it produces their transcendence” (20). The conformity between mathematical ideas and the external world was ensured by the relative independence which Locke attributed to knowledge, grounding it in the perception of the agreement or disagreement between ideas rather than in the intellect’s ability to investigate bodies’ intrinsic nature. Although mathematical objects were purely fictitious in nature, and could therefore only be defined nominally, the propositions concerning them were perfectly true and ontologically strong for Locke, being based on the clear perception of the agreement or disagreement between the corresponding ideas. The obscurity of these ideas in themselves did not affect the truth of these propositions, which were eternal though their eternity was within time: the linguistic use—and hence the persistence of the link between the name and the idea—ensured that they would continue to be true, once constructed on the basis of abstract ideas in such a way as to be true. Cléro’s intent is to eliminate any tension in Locke’s doctrine of mathematical knowledge originating from a distinction between empirical and transcendental attitudes; he believes that Locke was not so distant from Berkeley in this regard. This, however, seems to be problematic. The tension between the ideality and reality of mathematical objects is perceptible in Locke’s empiricism: although he frequently emphasized that the truths of geometry are indifferent to whether their objects exist in nature or not,<sup>1</sup> he believed that the certainty of mathematical truths arose from the nature of things in the world. Real knowledge in mathematics was constrained by “the Real existence of Things” in the *Essay*; this suggests that mathematical objects were bound to conform to the nature of the Euclidean space.<sup>2</sup> Cléro, however, seems to believe that Locke did not conceive of the Euclidean space as an effective constraint: in his view, “one could imagine another geometry which would isolate the ear or the touch; clearly it would not have the same objects” (14). It seems hard to believe that Locke could agree on this: his view of space was Euclidean in all respects. The relative independence which, according to Cléro, he attributed to knowledge is questionable: as Schuurman highlights in one of the essays in this book, Locke did not consider the existence of things outside us as a belief which might be put into question. His empiricism did not contemplate this possibility.

The content of the second essay, by Peter Alexander, is equally open to discussion, although its author’s merits as an outstanding Locke scholar are beyond question. The contribution is entitled “How could a Respectable Seventeenth Century Empiricist be Influenced by Robert Boyle?” Alexander’s focus is on a passage in *Essay*, II.8, where primary and secondary qualities are distinguished. His aim is to defend the interpretation of this chapter given in his book *Ideas, Qualities and*

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1 John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975), IV.iv.8, 566.

2 Locke, *Essay*, IV.iv.9, 567. Regarding this point, see Peter R. Anstey, *John Locke and Natural Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132.

*Corpuscles* from the criticism that Margaret Atherton levelled at it in 1991.<sup>3</sup> Alexander read *Essay* II.8 as a clue to Locke's strict adherence to Boyle's corpuscularism; Atherton contended that Locke's main interest was not to show his agreement with Boyle, but rather to develop his own theory of human understanding. Locke highlighted the sensory origin of the ideas of primary qualities in order to disprove Descartes's representational theory, which did not conceive them as sensible; this topic was not in Boyle's agenda.<sup>4</sup> *Essay* II.8 should be read therefore more as a sign of Locke's disagreement with Descartes than as a clue to his commitment to Boyle's theory of matter. Atherton did not assert that Locke rejected corpuscularianism, even though in another contribution of the same year, she questioned Locke's full adherence to mechanism, since mechanism was not a necessary presupposition to the corpuscularian explanation of the qualities of bodies.<sup>5</sup> However, Alexander reads her as "taking Locke to be rejecting Boyle's corpuscularianism out of hand" (38). In his criticism of Atherton, he maintains that Locke's interest in the origin and development of our ideas was bound up with the knowledge of physical reality, despite his epistemological scepticism. Locke would have recognised the potential of the corpuscular theory for the advancement of knowledge, hence his adherence to Boyle's thought. This would be proven, in Alexander's view, by several clues in the *Essay*, including Locke's criticism of Descartes regarding the possibility of a vacuum, which was "essential to Boyle's corpuscular hypothesis" (41). The eloquent eulogy of Boyle as one of the "Master Builders" in the *Essay*, and the "language and form" of the paragraphs after II.viii.3, which contain explanations of natural phenomena, would confirm Locke's adherence to corpuscularianism in Alexander's view; he also refers to *Essay* IV.iii, 16, where he affirmed that "which ever Hypothesis be clearest and truest . . . our Knowledge concerning corporeal Substances, will be very little advanced by any of them, till we are made see, what Qualities and Powers of Bodies have a *necessary Connection or Repugnancy* one with another."<sup>6</sup> Against Atherton, Alexander contends that if Locke had intended to reject corpuscularianism in *Essay* II.8, he would not have left this passage as it stands; he also mentions Locke's appraisal of the corpuscular hypothesis in the *Elements of Natural Philosophy*, which appeared posthumously in 1720. These arguments however appear to be insufficient when weighted against Locke's pessimism about the explicative power of corpuscularianism concerning the production of sensation, the communication of motion and cohesion, not to mention the doubts expressed in 2012 by John Milton about Locke's authorship of the *Elements*.<sup>7</sup> A few years after Atherton, both Lisa Dawning and Matthew Stuart

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3 Peter Alexander, *Ideas, Qualities and Corpuscles. Locke and Boyle on the External World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Margaret Atherton, "Ideas in the Mind, Qualities in Bodies': Some Distinctive Features of Locke's Account of Primary and Secondary Qualities," in *Minds, Ideas, and Objects: Essays in the Theory of Representation in Modern Philosophy*, ed. P. D. Cummins and G. Zoeller (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Press, 1992), 113–24.

4 Atherton, "Ideas in the Mind, Qualities in Bodies," 122.

5 Atherton, "Corpuscles, Mechanism, and Essentialism in Berkeley and Locke," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 29 (1991), 48n6.

6 Locke, *Essay*, IV.iii.16, 548.

7 John R. Milton, "Locke and the *Elements of Natural Philosophy*: Some Problems of Attribution," *Intellectual History Review* 22 (2019): 199–219.

questioned Locke's commitment to corpuscularianism with compelling arguments,<sup>8</sup> which do not find an adequate answer in Alexander's essay.

In the rest of his contribution, Alexander moves to defend Boyle's empiricism from the charge of being aprioristically founded which he attributes, perhaps unjustly, to Lisa Downing.<sup>9</sup> He contends that, in Boyle's view, "physical phenomena should be capable of being mechanically explained"; the essential properties Boyle attributed to corpuscles were those "we are familiar with from our everyday experiences of observable physical objects but, in corpuscles, on a much smaller scale" (46). Alexander maintains that Boyle repeatedly stressed that he was proposing an explanatory theory, not a fact, and that his hypothesis on the nature of matter was supported by the search for a suitable method for testing it, the hypothetico-deductive method theorized in *Certain Physiological Essays* (1661). This method, affirms Alexander, was not taken for granted but rather "open to testing by experiment" (46), as Boyle clarified in the Proemial Essay: testing the consequences of new doctrines permitted one to ascertain their agreement with experiments and assess their reliability. Alexander's emphasis on Boyle's empirical *bona fides* is no doubt worth attention, although he leaves a number of problems unsolved (those highlighted by Joseph Agassi,<sup>10</sup> for instance: Boyle did not seem to believe the mechanical theory was refutable). Most importantly, Alexander's arguments do not support his conclusions. He contends that Locke had fully understood the potential of Boyle's hypothetical-deductive method, which would confirm his adherence to corpuscularianism; however, the cautious attitude towards hypotheses manifest in the *Essay* should not be overlooked. Unlike Boyle, Locke did not seem to consider the elaboration of hypotheses as an essential component in the compilation of natural histories, the fundamental tool for the advancement of natural philosophy;<sup>11</sup> the distance between Boyle and Locke was considerable in this regard. Alexander is certainly right when he remarks that Locke conceived of the corpuscularian hypothesis as being uniquely explicative and intelligible; his views on natural phenomena owed much to Boyle. However, medical practice seems to have had a stronger influence on him and his way of conceiving the limits of scientific research.

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<sup>8</sup> Lisa Downing, "The Status of Mechanism in Locke's *Essay*," *Philosophical Review* 107 (1998): 381–414; Matthew Stuart, "Locke on Superaddition and Mechanism," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6 (1998): 351–79.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander refers to Lisa Downing, "Are Corpuscles Unobservable in Principle for Locke?" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30 (1992): 33–52. Downing was not questioning Boyle's empirical *bona fides* but rather Alexander's interpretation of Boyle's and Locke's views of corpuscles. Alexander identified secondary qualities with textures; he denied that corpuscles could be observed in principle in Locke's opinion, because of their having no texture. Downing contended that Alexander's argument amounted to ruling out "a priori the possibility of a corpuscle (or small clump of corpuscles, not sufficiently complex to constitute a texture or pattern) having a power . . . under certain circumstances, to give rise to an idea of colour, for example." Such a claim, in Downing's view, could be made "a posteriori, on scientific grounds, given a well-developed corpuscularianism, but neither Boyle nor Locke makes any such empirical claim. In fact, this sort of a priori legislation is completely antithetical to the corpuscularianism of Boyle and Locke" (49–50).

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Agassi, "Blame not the Laws of Nature," in *Topics in the Foundation of Statistics*, edited by B. C. van Fraassen (Dordrecht: Springer 2013), 147–48.

<sup>11</sup> Anstey highlighted this in *John Locke*, 78–84.

The third essay, entitled “Le nom, obstacle ou condition d'accès aux choses?” shifts the focus onto Locke’s semiotics. Its author, Jean-Michel Vienne, investigates the role of names in Locke’s thought making an exemplary clarification of the innovations detectable in the *Essay* with respect to *Draft A*. Vienne begins by considering *Essay* III.ix.21, where Locke declared that he had not treated names when he had begun enquiring into the human intellect: this seems to be in contrast with the content of *Draft A*, where several passages are devoted to names. However, the views Locke expressed here were markedly different from those in the *Essay*. In *Draft A* § 2,<sup>12</sup> he espoused the Hobbesian conception of names which linked them to universal knowledge: the real object of our intellect when it focuses on universal substantial concepts or species would be general words, since “we have noe notion of generall things” (54). Reasoning of species and substances in general would amount to “thinking reasoning or disputing about words & not things;”<sup>13</sup> species would not be something really existing, therefore the corresponding ideas would not represent anything in the world. Only their names would exist; their generality would depend on the constant association of qualities, not on the intuition of their essence. Names therefore could not be defined as universal. Locke agreed with Hobbes in this regard; he disagreed with him, however, on making names the object of the intellect and equating knowledge with reasoning about names. In Locke’s view, knowledge concerned the relationship between things, which are all singular and not general. Another passage in *Draft A* § 33 centred on this point but from a different perspective: Locke claimed that while probability was a secondary form of knowledge because it depended on a proposition’s truth, which needed the intermediation of signs, authentic knowledge immediately depended upon things. Faith was a belief supported by a certain degree of probability and was to be distinguished from knowledge: “to Faith there is always a necessity of words or signes equivalent to words,” Locke wrote. By contrast, “to Knowledge there is noe need at all of words but the bare proposeing of the thing” (57). Probability was linked to the exteriority of the name, knowledge to the immediate presence of the thing; the name, or sign, introduced heteronomy and opacity into the relationship with things. Perception, or the idea, was not the intermediary but the presence itself of the thing in us; it did not represent the object, being not a sign. Knowledge consisted in perceiving the relations between objects; names were excluded from knowledge.

In the *Essay*, this picture changed. The name acquired a fundamental role in the process of knowledge, owing to a conception of the idea as a sign or the mediator between the name and the thing. The existence of general ideas was no longer called into doubt; as a consequence, the status of names as signs of these ideas changed. The function of the sign became duplex: it represented both a multitude of things, and what was absent. Names owed their generality to the mediation of ideas; Hobbes’s extreme nominalism was superseded by conceptual realism. While ideas were necessary to fix names to things, names were necessary to attribute the status of signs to ideas: this clarified how ideas could be both the singular effect of perception, and a sign of the general. In Hobbes’s view, only names could represent a plurality; in *Essay* III.i.3, Locke attributed this capacity to ideas. Both ideas and names played the

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12 John Locke, *Draft A*, in *Drafts for the “Essay concerning Human Understanding” and Other Philosophical Writings*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch and G. A. J. Rogers (Clarendon Press: Oxford 1990), 8.

13 Locke, *Draft A*, 9.

role of signs, since both could represent a plurality albeit in different ways. The *Logique of Port Royal* attributed this capacity to ideas by means of abstraction, interpreting general ideas in the Cartesian fashion as being able to express the form of a thing; Locke too referred to abstraction. However, he stripped the idea of its Cartesian status of form and followed Hobbes in introducing a causal connection: ideas, like names in Hobbes's account, could represent a plurality because they were necessarily associated to the presence of multiple causes. The originality of Locke's semiotics is to be found here, notes Vienne, in that he opened a path between Hobbes's nominalism and the new conception of the sign emerging in Port Royalism: Arnauld's interpretation of Aquinas's legacy might have influenced him to some degree. Aquinas attributed a priority to concepts over sounds or names, because names served to signify what the concepts in the intellect signified; concepts were signs because they were the mediators between names and things. Arnauld followed Aquinas only in part: in order to emphasise the value of the internal discourse with respect to oral language, he rejected Aquinas's view that the name-thing relation was due to a natural link and made it the effect of a human institution. Locke agreed with Arnauld; in the *Essay*, he attributed the role of mediators to ideas in the name-thing relation. Unlike Arnauld, he seemed to blur the distinction between sign and representation (Aquinas's distinction between sign and resemblance), giving the status of sign both to the name and the idea. Their difference was marked by the use of a different type of vocabulary: in the *Essay*, only names were said to *stand for* things or ideas, whereas ideas did not *stand for* things. The association of ideas to things was natural, the association of names to things or ideas was arbitrary; only ideas originated in sensation and were permanently linked to their causes, which they signified in their absence. But how could both names and ideas be called signs, given that they had such a different relation to reality? In order to clarify this, Vienne refers to Sextus Empiricus's distinction between memorial and indicative signs. Memorial signs would be the result of a habitual association between two entities, each of which recalls the other when absent: Locke's conception of the name as a sign was of this kind. The name is associated to an idea and attests to it in its absence. The indicative sign would owe its meaning not to habit but to supposition or induction, just as a cause may be signified by a certain state of affairs: Locke's concept of the idea was of this kind, although he did not conceive of ideas as the effect of a supposition but rather of perception.

Vienne's conclusions are of extreme interest. Locke's semiotics was sensitive to the debates of his time, yet it tended to simplify the complex medieval legacy. His adherence to it was manifest in the role he attributed to names in generalization and in his endorsement of a dual theory of signs: names are signs to the extent that ideas are signs. Unlike Arnauld, Locke conceived of ideas as indicative signs of things, rather than as representations of their essence; only ideas were natural signs, names being memorial or artificial signs. Names, not ideas, could be abused; they introduced a human element in the sphere of signification. They were suited to communication and retention because of their universalizing capacity, but they could be reified and support arbitrary associations. Ideas were suited to regulating the function of names, since they might be general; being natural signs, they played a normative role. Nevertheless, they were closely related to names, which were suited to expressing the relation of signification at the basis of general ideas. Clearly the role of names in the *Essay* was very different from the one described in *Draft A*; their primary, social function combined with their crucial role in generalization and knowledge.

Vienne's views find support in another essay by Geneviève Brykman, entitled "Méthode descriptive et 'sémiotiké' dans l'*Essai* de Locke." Brykman investigates the premise of Locke's theory of signs, the dual descriptive and semiotic method employed in the *Essay*. The first was the "historical, plain method" inspired by the scientific practice of writing natural histories: the purpose of the *Essay* was to offer a "true History of the first beginnings of Human Knowledge"<sup>14</sup> centred on ideas, their origin, retention, and role as the source of all human knowledge. Ideas would provide us with a representation of their causes; the power of combining simple ideas would transform them into the signs of things. In order to be signs, ideas need a referent and cannot be considered as mere instantiations in the mind: they must have *minimal publicity*, as Alexander said.<sup>15</sup> Their objects would be perceived as a separate reality, independent from the mind. In the *Essay*, the possibility of sharing our perceptions rested both on the conformity of our ideas to sensory qualities and on the similarity of human organs of sense. Consensus over the nature of the objects of the external world seemed therefore to be granted; however, this was scarcely the case, lamented Locke. Language was the cause of this; the *Essay* highlighted the contrast between the limited capacities of human understanding and the almost unlimited semantic abilities of human beings, a disproportion which was at the root of confused notions. The aim of the descriptive method was to bring this problem to the fore along with the related ontological and epistemological illusions, such as those gravitating around the concept of substance; the conclusion of the natural history of understanding traced in the *Essay* condemned any attempt to piercing into the internal structure of bodies to failure, and emphasized the adequacy of our faculties for the fundamental purpose of human existence, the practice of morality. The semiotic method substantially contributed to our reaching this conclusion, though from a different perspective. It supported Locke's diagnosis of the disease afflicting human beings identifying its symptoms, the wide disagreement of human beings on both practical and theoretical questions and their inability to communicate; it appeared to be a mental therapy, aimed at curing this disease.

Brykman's conclusions recall Vienne's main thesis: ideas are natural signs of things in the *Essay*, names are artificial signs of ideas. Names play a crucial role in the retention and communication of our ideas. Paul Schuurman somehow dissolves this picture. In his contribution "Locke and Descartes on Truth," he points out how distant Locke was from Descartes in his way of conceiving the idea-thing relation, because of the overwhelming importance he attributed to the idea-name relation. Schuurman starts observing that the concept of a clear and distinct idea in Descartes had the function, not only of dissipating scepticism regarding the existence of external objects, but also of releasing knowledge from the fluctuating evidence of the senses and anchoring it to reason. Clearly, this held an anti-empiricist implication; Locke was undoubtedly influenced by Descartes's definition of a clear and distinct idea, but his purpose was decidedly different. He was interested not so much in dissipating scepticism, which he considered sufficiently belied by the natural correspondence between our faculties, senses included, and the things perceived, but rather in highlighting the risk of linguistic ambiguities. The distinction between ideas required that the name-idea relation should be such as to avoid ambiguity. While

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<sup>14</sup> Locke, *Essay*, II.xii.15, 162.

<sup>15</sup> Brykman refers to Alexander, *Ideas, Qualities and Corpuscles*, 104.



Descartes was concerned primarily with the relation between ideas and external objects, hence with the possible obscurity of the former, Locke's focus was on the distinction between ideas. In his view, this distinction was threatened by linguistic usage, namely the use of a unique name for different ideas.<sup>16</sup> Locke's philosophy, claims Schuurman, was centred on this problematic relation between words and ideas, not on the relation between ideas and things; his use of Descartes's distinction between true and false ideas highlighted this shift in focus from the second to the first. The truth of ideas would not always depend on their relationship to things: in the case of mixed modes, which do not have any model in the external world, the only way to be assured of their truth would be conformity in the use of their names. This, however, seems to be problematic. In *Essay* III.xi.15, Locke clarified that for mixed modes "there are not always standing Patterns to be found existing," which meant that they had models in the external world, though transient ones.<sup>17</sup> Most importantly, Schuurman seems to blur the relevance which, as Vienne pointed out, Locke attributed to names in the *Essay* as artificial signs of general ideas. The evolution of Locke's views on names from *Draft A* to the *Essay* was considerable, in this regard.

The subsequent contribution, by Luisa Simonutti, is entitled "As an Innocent Diversion'. Locke traducteur." It focuses on Locke's experience as a translator of three of Pierre Nicole's *Essais de morale*. Simonutti starts by reconstructing Locke's original project, which underwent several later alterations. The translation was initially conceived of as a "diversion" aimed at improving Locke's knowledge of French and was hence planned as a perfectly literal transcription. However, when Locke decided to publish the results of this exercise he opted instead for a more liberal translation, which would serve his country better and promote truth and virtue. The later downsizing of the project, restricted to three essays and no longer intended for short term publication, continued to be inspired by this criterion, faithfulness to the letter being replaced by faithfulness to the spirit of the author, which Locke was convinced he had preserved. The subjects of the essays selected for translation were, respectively, the existence of God, the weakness of man, and the way of preserving peace among human beings. Simonutti concentrates chiefly on the second essay, for important reasons: in the Introduction to *John Locke as Translator*, Jean Yolton had lamented the scarce attention devoted to his translation of Nicole by Locke scholarship, the only exceptions being Wolfgang von Leyden and, more recently, Ian Harris and John Marshall.<sup>18</sup> Harris and Marshall had concentrated on the first and third essay; by focusing on the second essay, "Traité de la faiblesse de l'homme," Simonutti intended to fill the gap. She highlights Locke's interest in the theme of this essay, confirmed by several notes he wrote in his journal in the late 1670s; she also dwells on Locke's decision to omit or rework certain passages, based partly on the rationale of religious divergence with their Catholic author, partly on the need to distance himself from certain of Nicole's stances. Thomas Hancock had already noticed the discrepancy between Locke's translation

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<sup>16</sup> Locke, *Essay*, II.xxix.6, 364.

<sup>17</sup> Locke, *Essay*, III.xi.15, 516.

<sup>18</sup> Jean S. Yolton, introduction to *John Locke as Translator: Three of the "Essais" of Pierre Nicole in French and English*, (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation 2000) viii–ix.

and the original in 1828;<sup>19</sup> Simonutti gives her interpretation of the discrepancy. She notes that the theme of human fallibility had been in Locke's agenda since the early 1660s, when he had written a journal note criticizing Catholic infallibility; an echo of this criticism might be found in his translation. Nicole's arguments against the "nouvelles heresies" were transformed by Locke into arguments against the Roman Church's presumption of infallibility; he also modified other passages, in which Nicole had strongly emphasized the weakness of human reason. Locke profoundly disagreed with Nicole in this regard: reason was an adequate instrument for guiding man in his moral and social life, in his view. The source of human frailty was to be found in will, not in reason. In a journal note of 8 February 1677,<sup>20</sup> Locke insisted on our faculties being perfectly adequate for the purpose of human life: our ignorance of the innermost secrets of nature was not such as to prevent us from acting morally and procuring ourselves conveniences for this life. The intellectual presumption that Nicole attributed to human beings was not an argument on which Locke could agree. Simonutti certainly has the merit of drawing attention to a theme of the utmost importance in Locke's scholarship: Nicole's ideas played a crucial role in shaping Locke's moral and political ideas, as Marshall emphasized. Probably a closer look at the many echoes of "De la faiblesse de l'homme" in "Study," a journal note which Locke penned in 1677, would have given added substance to her discourse: several arguments in "Study," including the distinction between the knowledge of words, things, and actions, and the "instinctive" knowledge of the truth attributed to human beings, had their source in Nicole's essay.

In the last contribution, "Walter Whiter et la doctrine de Locke sur l'association des idées," Gabriela Dragnea Horvath considers the original use which the eighteenth-century philologist and editor of Shakespeare's works Walter Whiter made of Locke's theory of the association of ideas. Whiter's views of the idea-name relation were inspired by Locke; he conceived of names as expressing ideas deriving from experience. Like Locke, Whiter showed considerable concern for linguistic abuses, which distorted the content of ideas; in his *Specimen of Commentary on Shakespeare* (1794), he dwelled on the abuses perpetrated by interpreters, which obfuscated the sense given by authors to words in their works. Whiter applied Locke's teachings in the *Essay* to his analysis of Shakespeare's works, expressly declaring that they were the bedrock of his method; he did so not without some stretching of the point. Locke's doctrine of the association of ideas was employed by Whiter to explain Shakespeare's ingenious creativity; it is hard to believe that the author of the *Essay* could have agreed on this. He described the association as a species of madness, responsible for grave errors in the process of thought; the combination of some ideas might be strengthened by custom, despite its having no foundation in nature, and could hardly be eradicated by education from that point on.<sup>21</sup> Whiter thought otherwise: the association of ideas acquired a new, positive meaning in his work with reference to Shakespeare's prolific mind. For Whiter, the power of association on the

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19 John Locke, *Discourses translated from Nicole's "Essays"*, ed. T. Hancock (London: Harvey and Darton, 1828).

20 I think this is the note Simonutti refers to, not the one she mentions ("Essais de morale", 29 July 1676), given the description she gives of its topic (human inability to understand whether matter is infinitely divisible, and ability to judge morally and act accordingly).

21 Locke, *Essay*, II.xxxiii.7–15, 396–99.

poet's genius furnished him with uncommon inventiveness, and gave him the ability to combine ideas, images and words in an unexpected, extraordinary way. Without mentioning Locke's opinion on this subject, he suggested re-evaluating the association of ideas as a kind of mental conditioning which worked on the poet's mind without him being aware of it. It was this unawareness that shielded Shakespeare's prolific imagination from Locke's criticism, in Whiter's opinion.

The book ends with William Whiston's *Notes upon Mr. Lock's Essay concerning Human understanding*, which are published here for the first time. The author was one of the children of the theologian and mathematician William Whiston; information on his life is scant, though he is known to have translated into Latin and edited *The History of Armenia* by Mosis Khorenaci along with his brother. The notes were written in 1723, while William was studying at Cambridge; some of them are critical. Whiston harbours certain reservations, for instance regarding the use of the term "idea" for the quality producing it in *Essay* II.viii.8, or the way in which Locke explains why we cannot have an idea of the infinite. The distinction between simple and complex ideas is not clear, for Whiston; regarding names, he observes that Locke would believe that "men generally give names to things only upon account of their Specific Essence" (164). The notes cover almost all the content of the *Essay*; it is unclear to me why they have been included in the book. They are but a minor episode in the history of the eighteenth-century reception of Locke's *Essay*, and might have some relevance in other contexts, yet it is difficult to appreciate them in this book.

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