

“This Great and Dangerous Impostor”: Locke on Prejudice

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Abstract: “Prejudice” is an understudied chapter in the history of early modern conceptions of epistemic error. It is also a core, albeit largely neglected, notion in John Locke’s normative and practical account of reasoning. In this paper, I aim to analyse the Lockean contours of this notion by highlighting its relations with the idea of unexamined principles and with two of the most dangerous miscarriages of the Lockean mind: the association of ideas and enthusiasm. I also discuss three explanatory contexts that are variously related with medicine: the methodology of medical inquiry in its relation with the natural history of the erring intellect; the medical model of the prevention and cure of disease behind regulative logic; and the analysis of the epistemic role of the imagination in medico-logical literature. Finally, I comment briefly on Locke’s views on the prevention and cure of prejudice.

Keywords: Locke, prejudice, principles, medicine, logic

1. *Prejudice and the medical history of error*

The aim of this essay is to reconstruct the portrait of prejudice as it emerges from Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and the posthumous *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (1706) – a text Locke worked on between 1697 and 1704 and saw as an extension of the *Essay* discussions of epistemic error.¹ “Prejudice” is an understudied chapter in the history of early modern conceptions of epistemic error. It is also a core, albeit largely neglected, element of Locke’s normative and practical account of reasoning. In this introductory section I will comment on the double logico-medical background to

* Work for this paper was supported by UEFISCDI research grant no. 116/2022. I thank the two anonymous reviewers for their bibliographical, historical and conceptual suggestions.

¹ Schuurman, “General Introduction”, p. 109.

Locke's analysis of prejudice as a key element of his natural history of the erring intellect, while the subsequent sections will deal with the reconstruction of its portrait.

1.1. *Logic and medicine*

Locke's *Conduct* has a double disciplinary background, logical and medical. The logical background is clear in the opening paragraphs: at issue in this text is the best manner of guiding the understanding in its pursuit of truth. The rest of the text makes clear that this aim presupposes a good knowledge of how the understanding works naturally, and of the many ways in which its functioning is impaired by internal and external factors. The only art available in the intellectual space of the late seventeenth century that set itself this task – Locke goes on – was logic. But in its scholastic format, logic was “not sufficiente”.² Even worse, Locke thinks, with Francis Bacon in the *Novum organum*, “the remedy reachd not the evil but became part of it”.³ In other words, instead of fulfilling the role of a regulative, remedial art for the intellect, the practice of scholastic logic had become a source of obstacles to knowledge and of bad intellectual habits that would need to be addressed by a truer art of guiding the mind. Locke refrained from openly identifying his own *Essay* and *Conduct* as contributions to such an art, but his admirers were quick to do it for him.⁴

The medical background is twofold. On the one hand, the construal of logic as a regulative, remedial art is obviously indebted to a medical model of approaching the intellect as in need of care, cure and diet. Indeed, on several occasions in the early modern period logic was explicitly dubbed a “medicine for the mind”, including by Bacon in the *Novum organum*.⁵ On the other hand, as Locke explained in his late correspondence, the writing of the *Conduct* was indebted to the methodology of compiling medical natural histories. That is to say, he amassed observations on the distempers of the mind and their cures as he came across them, without digesting them in any systematic way. The hope was that others would continue his work of observation, both for the sake of

² Locke, *Conduct*, par. 2, p. 154.

³ Ibid., par 3, p. 155; Bacon, “Preface to the Great Instauration”, in OFB XI, pp. 18-19.

⁴ See Buickerood, “Natural History of the Understanding”, pp. 163-69; Schuurman, “General Introduction”, pp. 88-95; Winkler, “Lockean Logic”, pp. 155-56.

⁵ Bacon, *Novum organum*, l.xxx, l.lix, l.cix, l.xxviii, in OFB XI, pp. 75, 93, 172, 296. See also Clauberg; *Logica vetus et nova*, in *Opera omnia*, I, p. 770; Tschirnhaus, *Medicina mentis*; Lange, *Medicina mentis*.

better understanding the human mind in general, and in view of everyone's personal effort of self-understanding and self-regulation.⁶ Indeed, this aim is openly expressed in the *Conduct* as well:

There are several weaknesses or defects in the understanding either from the natural temper of the minde or ill habits taken up which hinder it in its progresse to knowledg. Of these there are as many possibly to be found if the minde were throughly studyd as there are diseases of the body, each whereof clogs and disables the understanding to some degree and therefor deserve to be looked after and cured. I shall set down some few to excite men espetially those who make knowledg their businesse to looke into them selves and observe whether they doe not indulge some weaknesse allow some miscariage in the management of their intellectuall faculty which is prejudicial to them in the search of truth.⁷

Locke's general debt to the medical historical approach of Thomas Sydenham is now well understood.⁸ As far as the *Conduct* is concerned, it is worth noting that the natural history of the “weaknesses and defects” of the intellect overlaps with the logical project. The overlap comes in three layers.

The first layer is constituted by the interest in “natural logic” that Locke shared with the early modern logics that saw themselves as alternative to the scholastic. The distinction between *logica naturalis* and *logica artificialis* was a commonplace in scholastic logic. In the scholastic context, “nature” connoted chance, or mere experience, while “art” connoted a mastery through theoretical grasp of the general rules of the thing in question (here, reasoning), as well as the capacity to apply them to particulars. The anti-scholastic philosophers, starting with the humanists, turned this distinction upside down. “Art” was re-interpreted as a systematization of natural operations in a given field, directed towards a useful end. For example, the art of logic was a systematization of the natural operations of the human mind (with the useful end of regulating it), therefore it must be governed by, rather than govern, natural logic.⁹ Thus, for Ramus, Bacon or Descartes, the logical acts of the intellect

⁶ Locke, “Letter to Peter King”, 4 and 25 October 1704, in Schuurman, “General Introduction”, p. 109.

⁷ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 38, p. 180.

⁸ Romanell, *John Locke and Medicine*; Meynell, “John Locke and the Preface to Thomas Sydenham”; Anstey and Burrows, “John Locke, Thomas Sydenham”; Walmsley, “Sydenham”.

⁹ Jardine, *Francis Bacon*, p. 41; Lu-Adler, *Kant and the Science of Logic*, pp. 48-64; Corneanu and Vermeir, “Art of Thinking”, pp. 156-57.

(whether invention and judgment, induction, or intuition and deduction) were acts of a natural logic representing the workings of the natural mind.¹⁰ There was certainly a polemical edge to this reversal, whereby “artificial” started to connote “unnatural” – a weapon in the battle against the scholastics.

Similarly, in the fourth book of the *Essay* Locke highlights repeatedly the natural powers of the mind which, according to him, are involved in correct reasoning, against the artificial logical rules of the Schools. The mind, he thinks, has “a native Faculty to perceive the Coherence, or Incoherence of its *Ideas*”; as well as a power to range ideas in a “simple and natural Disposition” that helps us better see their connections.¹¹ Perception of connections among ideas, together with ranging ideas in order and inference of conclusions, he attributes to “illation”; the prior discovery of intermediate ideas, he calls “sagacity”. Both illation and sagacity are natural faculties.¹² They constitute the natural mechanism of the mind, against the artificial, i.e., “unnatural”, and hence encumbering logical rules, especially those of syllogistic reasoning. While seemingly refuting the whole art of logic in the name of the need to look at how the mind works naturally, it seems to me that Locke’s observations are in fact in line with the early modern attitude to natural vs. artificial logic.

The second layer, building on the first, is represented by the interpretation of natural logic as a natural history of the understanding. Locke’s identification of the method of inquiry he adopted in the *Essay* as “this Historical, plain Method”¹³ is at least partly indebted, I believe, to the revised conception of natural logic among the early moderns.¹⁴ It is true, however, that none of the previous non-scholastic logicians had presented their natural logics as natural histories of the mind. The idea of a natural history of the intellect is announced by Bacon’s inclusion of a “history of the intellectual faculties: thinking, fantasy, discourse, memory, etc.” in his “Catalogue of Particular Histories” appended to the *Parasceve*. Yet Locke is the first to explicitly undertake the task *and* indicate

¹⁰ Ramus, *La dialectique*, p. 2; Bacon, *De Augmentis scientiarum*, in *Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. IV, p. 410; Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, in *Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. I, pp. 14, 16, 22.

¹¹ Locke, *Essay*, IV.xvii.4, pp. 671, 673.

¹² *Ibid.*, IV.xvii.2, pp. 668-69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I.i.2, p. 44.

¹⁴ For various positions on the relation between logic and the natural history of the understanding in Locke, see Buickerood, “Natural History of the Understanding”; Hamou, “Locke and the Experimental Philosophy”; Lu-Adler, “Logical Normativity”. This is a conversation worth pursuing further.

its relevance to logic – an approach with echoes in eighteenth-century Scottish conceptions of logic as rooted in, or even identical with, a natural history of the mind.¹⁵

The third layer has to do with the place of error in this mix. In the *Conduct* Locke seems to explicitly propose a natural history of error (or of the erring intellect), which is also novel. Bacon’s “Catalogue” includes “medical histories” of the illnesses and cures of the body, but not of the soul. In exchange, while Bacon’s doctrine of the idols of the mind is one of the obvious sources of the accounts of error in the new logics, it is never presented by Bacon as a natural history. Rather, it appears as the counterpart of the doctrine of “Sophistical Refutations” in the old logics.¹⁶ The Baconian idols together with the Cartesian “childhood prejudices” were the two great models behind the new accounts of error, and featured together in such regulative logical accounts as those of Clauberg or Malebranche. Locke may well have drawn on these sources, as well as on the catalogues of ways in which the human mind can err in other types of work, such as Bishop Reynolds’ treatise of the faculties and passions of the soul, or Thomas Browne’s overview of errors in medicine. While comparable to these works, Locke’s own account presents itself as a natural history, which had not been the case before.¹⁷ And yet, the regulative role of Locke’s natural history of error is the same as that of all these accounts, one indebted to the medical model behind the new logics: the description of the disease in relation to which the art proposed will function as either a preventive or a therapeutic instrument. Locke, therefore, makes the step of allowing the medical analogy inform his methodological approach: his account of error will be indeed a medical history of illnesses of the mind relevant not to mental pathology, but to a normative account of reasoning – in other words, to a logic understood as an art of guiding and regulating the operations of the mind in its search for truth.

In this essay, I aim to take up the “defect” of the mind that Locke places at the top of his medical historical investigation in the *Conduct*: prejudice. In the next subsection, I introduce the Lockean definition of this notion, while in the

¹⁵ Bacon, *Parasceve*, in OFB XI, p. 481; Wood, “Natural History of Man”.

¹⁶ Bacon, *Novum organum*, I: 40, in OFB XI, p. 79.

¹⁷ Clauberg, *Logica vetus et nova*, in *Opera omnia*; Malebranche, *Search after Truth*; Reynolds, *Treatise*, chap. 38; Browne, *Pseudodoxia epidemica*, bk. 1. (Among these works, Malebranche’s is notable for subsuming its entire discussion of error under the notion of “prejudice”: see “Elucidations”, in *Search after Truth*, pp. 539–43.) The natural historical character of Locke’s account of the erring intellect has at least two notable consequences: its open-ended, rather than systematic, nature, and its role as the experimental ground for the formulation of rules.

rest of the paper I will describe its full portrait, and comment on the further debts it owes to the logical and medical backgrounds.

1.2. *Prejudice and unexamined principles*

In the *Conduct*, Locke introduces prejudice as a “great cause of ignorance and error” and the removal of it as one of the first tasks of the conduct of the understanding.¹⁸ It has thus pride of place in Locke’s list of errors, and it comes as a culmination of his discussion of (unexamined) “principles”: paragraphs 11-38 constitute a coherent treatment of the most problematic type of erroneous behavior of the intellect, which starts with “principles” and ends with “prejudice”.¹⁹ There are also important continuities with the *Essay*. Although “prejudice” is not very prominent in the *Essay*, I take Locke’s discussions of unexamined principles in Books I and IV as preparative for the *Conduct* sections. His chapters on the association of ideas and enthusiasm, which were added to the fourth edition of the *Essay* (1700) and on which he was working at the time he was composing the *Conduct*, are also directly relevant to the topic.²⁰

Locke explains the nature and importance of prejudice in a couple of passages that I will use as the starting point of my analysis:

False or doubtfull positions relyd upon as unquestionable maximes keep those in the darke from truth, who build on them. Such are usually the prejudices imbibed from education party reverence Fashion Interest etc: This is the mote which every one sees in his brothers eye, but never regards the beame in his owne. For who is there almost that is ever brought fairly to examin his owne principles, and see whether they are such as will beare the triall. But yet this should be one of the first things every one should set about and be scrupulous in, who would rightly conduct his understanding in the search for Truth and knowledg.²¹

[Prejudice is] this great and dangerous impostor [...] who dresses up falsehood in the likeness of Truth and soe dexterously hoodwinks mens minds as to keep

¹⁸ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 31, p. 175.

¹⁹ There has been less commentary on “prejudice” and “principles” in Locke than these notions deserve. But see, for “prejudice”, Schouls, *Reasoned Freedom*, chap. 4; Wright, “Association, Madness”; Tabb, “Locke on Enthusiasm”; Dromelet and Piazza, “Habit and Custom”. And for “principles”, Schuurman, “General Introduction”, pp. 27, 30; Anstey, *John Locke*, pp. 148-52; Atherton, “Locke against the Nativists”; Stoneham and Thorson, “Locke on Cognitive Bias”, pp. 97-99.

²⁰ A first articulated account of these ideas is in Locke’s 1677 essay “Of Study”, in Axtell, *Educational Writings*, pp. 405-22, at 415-17.

²¹ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 31, p. 175.

them in the darke with a belief that they are more in the light than any that doe not see with their eys.²²

I take these passages to give us the general definition of prejudice, three of its defining features, and the remedial task meant to remove it, thus:

General definition: Prejudice is a belief or proposition that is neither true nor certain but is relied upon as an unquestionable maxim or principle.

What it means for a proposition to be relied upon as a principle or maxim, Locke spells out in the *Essay*: the proposition is taken as a measure of the truth of other propositions and/or as the starting point (the foundation) in a chain of reasoning.²³ Thus, at issue is not any type of proposition, but the kind of proposition that receives a special, albeit unmerited status in the economy of one's epistemic life. The status is unmerited because it is grounded in anything but fair examination. It seems to me that the focus in this definition – and the reason prejudice needs to be addressed via a natural historical approach – is the “relying upon”: the question is, how does the mind come to behave in this way. The full portrait of prejudice which I will try to reconstruct in this essay is pieced together by way of an answer to this question.

Defining features:

- 1) Enabling factors for the “relying upon” include the work of teachers upon young minds (education), reverence towards an authority (e.g., a party.), the pressure of what others around think (e.g., fashion), one's own interest, etc.
- 2) While prejudice is easily recognizable in others, one is usually blind to its existence in oneself.
- 3) Prejudice is a form of epistemic imposture.

The problem of recognition or diagnosis (the second feature in this list) is key to the preventive and curative scenarios. The problem is indeed momentous, as signaled by the biblical reference to the lack of transparency to self of the obstacle to knowledge and the ensuing hypocrisy of complaining of

²² Ibid., par. 32, pp. 175-76.

²³ Locke, *Essay*, Liii.24, p. 82: “some revered Propositions, which are to him the Principles on which he bottoms his Reasonings; and by which he judgeth of Truth and Falshood, Right and Wrong”.

the same in others.²⁴ The problem of imposture (the third feature) also carries biblical echoes: a mind that acts in such a way that it dresses up falsehood in the garment of truth fails in its metaphysical role (“we fight against god who is the god of truth, and doe the work of the Devill who is the father and propagator of lies”).²⁵ This is to remind us that, for Locke, the medico-logical care of the intellect has what could be called theological amplitude, as it is directly pertinent to the fate of our souls. The same applies to the central task of the conduct of the understanding:

The task: the examination of the propositions relied upon as principles – a task to which we should devote ourselves “scrupulously”.²⁶

The examination, as we will see, is to be understood as a long-term practice, and as one member of a set of practices meant to build good epistemic habits of inquiry and reasoning, and to achieve epistemic freedom. At times Locke calls this a duty following from God’s gift to us, the faculties of our minds, which we should strive to use well.²⁷

In the next section I will examine each of the defining features in turn (in inverse order), as “the imposture”, “blindness to self”, and “the social setting”, in order to reconstruct the full Lockean portrait of the “disease” of prejudice. Doing so will hopefully further illuminate the overlap of regulative logic with the natural history of the intellect, including of the erring intellect, and will also bring to light other ways in which the latter is indebted to the intersection between medicine and logic. The final section will be devoted, briefly, to the task, in other words, to the regulative practices.

Before I proceed, I would like to already note the roots of all of this in Locke’s discussion of “innate principles” in the first book of the *Essay*. Here is a passage from the close of the discussion of innate practical principles:

Whoever shall receive any of these [borrowed Principles] into his Mind, and entertain them there, with the reverence usually paid to Principles, never venturing to examine them; but accustoming himself to believe them, because they are to be believed, may take up from his Education, and the fashions of his

²⁴ Matt. 7:3, commenting on hypocrisy in judgment.

²⁵ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 34, p. 177, referencing Deut. 32:4 and John 8:44 (as noted by Schuurman in the footnotes).

²⁶ The term bears echoes of Protestant devotional practices.

²⁷ E.g., Locke, *Essay*, I.iv.22, p. 99; IV.xvii.24, p. 687; *Conduct*, par. 77, p. 229.

Country, any absurdity for innate Principles; and by long poring on the same Objects, so dim his sight, as to make Monsters lodged in his own brain, for the Images of the Deity, and the Workmanship of his Hands.²⁸

The Baconian ring of this passage is confirmed by the opening sentence of the section, speaking of the fact that “*Men* worship the Idols that have been set up in their Minds”: the absurd errors of the human mind are embraced and revered as if they were “*Characters of Divinity*.”²⁹ Locke uses this eloquent imagery (idols, monsters) to reinforce his discussion of the dangers of the doctrine of innate principles, following his assessment of what he takes to be its implausibility and uselessness. According to him, the very notion that there are such things as innate principles, whether speculative or practical, suggests to the mind – especially to young minds in educational settings – that there are propositions which cannot be questioned, which indeed must not be questioned. These propositions become thus “sacred” to them, which creates a species of epistemic behavior that is at the same time slavish, timorous and peremptory: enslaved to another’s “dictates”, afraid to look into them, but maintaining them with “zeal” and “obstinacy.”³⁰ The principles wrongly taken to be innate are in fact either self-evident propositions (such as mathematical axioms or the logical principle “it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be”) or conclusions of deductive reasoning (such as the moral principle “one should do as he would be done unto”).³¹ But the “principles” at the core of prejudice are neither self-evident propositions nor certain demonstrative conclusions. They are uncertain, unexamined, potentially false propositions only taken as (or relied upon) as principles. Locke concludes that the supposition of innateness is not only false, but has a perverse effect on the process of the acquisition of knowledge. It encourages the notion that our minds are sometimes required to “take upon trust” propositions that will subsequently act as touchstones of our judgments and reasonings.³²

²⁸ Locke, *Essay*, I.iv.26, pp. 83-84.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 83. See Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* II, in *Major Works*, p. 228 (*de idolis animis*); Locke seems to have read the *Novum organum* only around 1690 (Schuurman, “General Introduction”, p. 31).

³⁰ Locke, *Essay*, IV.vii.11, pp. 599, 601 (continuing the discussion of innate speculative principles in I.ii); I.iii.21-25, pp. 81-83 (on innate practical principles). Both sets of passages refer to educational contexts: the School method of disputation and its effects on “civil conversation” in the first case; the moral “principling” of children in the second.

³¹ Locke, *Essay*, I.ii.10, p. 52; I.ii.18, pp. 57-58; I.iii.4, p. 68.

³² “Taking upon trust” and “implicit faith” are two of the most frequently recurring phrases in Locke’s discussions of epistemic slavery to unexamined principles. See further Atherton, “Locke Against the Nativists”.

2. *Prejudice: A Lockean Portrait*

In this section I would like to reconstruct the portrait of prejudice as it emerges from the *Essay* and *Conduct*. As mentioned above, I take the development of Locke's thinking about unexamined principles as feeding into his late notion of prejudice. I will look in turn at what I called its three defining features: the imposture, the blindness to self and the social setting.

2.1. *The Imposture*

After its first occurrence in Book I of the *Essay*, noted above, the taking up of unexamined principles appears again in Book IV as one of the wrong measures of probability. The discussion there rehearses the idea of the perverse effects of the doctrine of innate principles, as well as the identification of the authority of others, custom and education as enabling factors,³³ but also signals the relevance to this topic of the association of ideas and of enthusiasm. Locke gives two examples of "received traditional Principles" that play the role of wrong measures of assent. One is "that the Pope is Infallible", which, long "inculcated" into the young mind, will be the reason why the mature man "will believe that to be Flesh, which he sees to be Bread" (the doctrine of transubstantiation). The other is that "he or his Teacher is inspired, and acted by an immediate Communication of the Divine Spirit", which will ground all sorts of absurd notions in a "principled" mind.³⁴ The two examples point to the material Locke will elaborate in the chapters on the association of ideas and on enthusiasm added to the fourth edition.

"The Pope is infallible" is the more transparent formulation of one of the examples of the association of ideas in II.xxxiii: the inseparable joining together of the idea of "a Person" with the idea of "Infallibility" while no natural connection can be detected between the two, is such that "these two constantly together possess the Mind" and act as ground for further preposterous beliefs: "and then one Body in two Places at once, shall unexamined be swallowed for a certain Truth, by an implicit Faith, when ever that imagin'd infallible Person dictates and demands assent without enquiry".³⁵ By the time Locke conceived this chapter, the notion of "prejudice" seems to have acquired the weight he was going to give it in the *Conduct*. In the *Essay* he identifies the association of ideas

³³ Locke, *Essay*, IV.xx.8-10, pp. 711-12.

³⁴ Ibid., IV.xx.10, p. 713.

³⁵ Ibid., II.xxxiii.17, p. 400.

as a species of prejudice,³⁶ and in the *Conduct* he makes explicit the connection with unexamined principles suggested in the *Essay*: in the association of ideas, “sandie and loose foundations | become infallible principles and will not suffer them selves to be touched or questiond”.³⁷ I will come back to the further significance of the association of ideas and of enthusiasm for the problem of prejudice. For now, I am interested in the mechanism of the imposture.

The *Essay* discussion of error subsumes the problem of unexamined principles under the topic of the wrong measures of assent, i.e., of that which substitutes itself to the two correct grounds of assent in erroneous judgment. The two correct grounds of assent are one’s own knowledge, observation and experience rightly pursued, and the testimony of others rightly assessed.³⁸ What the mechanism of the substitution might be is spelled out in the *Conduct*: it takes the form of justificatory enthymemes, implicit in the act of taking up an unexamined principle. An example is, “The founders or leaders of my party are good men and therefor their tenets are true”.³⁹ The scenario is something like this. Take tenet T, embraced as a principle by a member M of a religious, political or academic group. T is neither self-evident (arrived at through intuition) nor certain (the result of demonstrative knowledge), but should be backed up by good evidence (the correct grounds of assent) and take the form of a probable judgment. Instead, M does not bother to search for evidence, or else rejects the evidence another offers, and tacitly backs up T with the abbreviated syllogism, “The leaders of my party who have voiced T are good men, therefore T is solid, certain truth”. This is in fact arguing from authority, a type of fallacious argument which, when used to convince another, is called by Locke “*Argumentum ad Verecundiam*”.⁴⁰ But for the discussion of the wrong measures of assent and unexamined principles, Locke is concerned with what could be called a species of internal tacit arguing, which substitutes itself to the search for evidence.⁴¹ Thus the argument (the

³⁶ Ibid., II.xxxiii.3, p. 395: “Prejudice is a good general name for the thing it self”.

³⁷ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 77, p. 229.

³⁸ Locke, *Essay*, IV.xvi.4, pp. 655-56.

³⁹ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 11, p. 160.

⁴⁰ Locke, *Essay*, IV.xvii.19, p. 686: “Whoever backs his Tenets with such Authorities, thinks he ought thereby to carry the Cause, and is ready to style it Impudence in any one, who shall stand out against them”.

⁴¹ Such internal tacit arguing is already exemplified in the *Essay* as part of the discussion of the fourth wrong measure of probability, authority or common received opinion. E.g., “other Men have been, and are, of the same Opinion [...] and therefore I am secure in the Reception I give it” (Locke, *Essay*, IV.xx.17, p. 718). The roots of this notion are probably in Arnauld and Nicole, *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, Part III, chap. 20, p. 203 (“there is almost always a hidden inference embedded in what appears to be a simple judgment”).

enthymeme) functions as a wrong measure of assent and at the same time engages the mind in a flawed chain of reasoning: it is a faulty foundation for a proposition that will itself be embraced as a foundation (the unexamined principle T) of subsequent judgments and reasonings.

Further, in the sections on prejudice that close his discussion of unexamined principles in the *Conduct*, Locke suggests that another type of justificatory reasoning is tacitly taking place:

He that is | strongly of any opinion must suppose (unless he be self condemned) that his persuasion is built upon good grounds; and that his assent is noe greater than what the evidence of the truth he holds forces him to and that they are arguments and not inclination or phansy that make him so confident and positive in his tenets.⁴²

At issue here is the whole process of giving assent based on correct grounds and of proportioning the degree of assent to the type of evidence – what Locke formulates as the rule of probable judgment in the *Essay*, and identifies as one of the most difficult tasks in the conduct of the understanding in the *Conduct*.⁴³ The suggestion seems to be that in forming prejudices, a person is not only giving assent in the wrong way, but persuades herself that she is doing it right via a form of meta-reasoning of the type, “I am giving assent in the right way, based on good evidence and proportionably to the force of it, therefore my confidence in the proposition I embrace is legitimate”. In fact, however, as will be detailed in the next subsection, the confidence is owing to the force of her imagination, passions and interests, compounded by habit, education and custom.

I believe that the two types of tacit reasoning taken together explain the imposture of prejudice: while deeply flawed as a process of belief-formation and reasoning, the mechanism of prejudice is a fraudulent impersonator of legitimate belief-formation and correct reasoning, since it involves the two types of tacit justificatory arguments: one that substitutes itself to legitimate evidence and another that assesses the manner of assent giving. They are both such that they look right while being in fact flawed.

But what is it that allows the mechanism behind prejudice to look right? I believe the answer lies in Locke’s notion that there are natural operations of the mind (the operations of natural logic the observation of which is the task of the

⁴² Locke, *Conduct*, par. 32, p. 176.

⁴³ Locke, *Essay*, IV.xvi.5, p. 656; Locke, *Conduct*, par. 67, pp. 216-17.

natural history of the understanding) which may however go wrong (hence the need of a natural history of the erring intellect). Here is what I mean.

What I called above the use of the justificatory enthymeme is the result, Locke suggests, of a natural tendency of the intellect to look for foundations of its beliefs and reasonings. He writes: “True or false solid or sandy the minde must have some foundation to rest it self upon and as I have remarkd in an other place it noe sooner enterteins any proposition but it presently hastens to some hypothesis to bottom it on` till then it is unquiet and unsettled”.⁴⁴ The “other place” is the *Essay* section on the use of hypotheses in natural investigation in Book IV. There, Locke had written: “the Mind, that would always penetrate into the Causes of Things, and have Principles to rest on, is very apt to” “*take up* [hypotheses] *too hastily*”.⁴⁵ But the thought was already present in Book I:

This will appear very likely, and almost unavoidable to come to pass, if we consider the Nature of Mankind: and the Constitution of Humane Affairs: Wherein *most Men cannot live, without employing their time in the daily Labours of their Callings; nor be at quiet in their Minds, without some Foundation or Principles to rest their Thoughts on.*⁴⁶

Thus, according to Locke, looking for foundations in reasoning is an operation of the mind based on a natural inclination which, unfortunately, is often satisfied in the wrong way: the mind settles on principles without the labor of search and examination, and ends up with the justificatory enthymemes. Yet, even the distortion of this natural tendency indirectly indicates the correct work of the understanding, which is indeed to identify true principles in reasoning: “soe much do our owne very tempers dispose us to a right use of our understandings if we would follow as we should the inclinations of our nature”.⁴⁷

Likewise, in reasoning, the mind naturally engages in a search for proofs, which are either intermediate ideas in demonstrative knowledge or grounds of belief in probable judgment. The proofs should be able to show or to suggest the agreement or disagreement of two ideas that are included in an initial question (say, “Is the Pope infallible?”). The mind also naturally engages in the ordering of all proofs in such a way that the agreement or disagreement can be perceived or entertained. Indeed, as we have seen, sagacity and illation, Locke’s names

⁴⁴ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 13, pp. 160-61.

⁴⁵ Locke, *Essay*, IV.xii.13, p. 648.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I.iii.24, p. 82 (italics in the original).

⁴⁷ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 13, p. 161.

for these operations of the mind, are natural faculties. Further, in judgment, the mind is naturally inclined to weigh the proofs and proportion the degree of assent to the evidence at hand. All of these are natural operations based on natural inclinations of the human mind. Yet, just like in the case of the search for foundations, all of these operations may go wrong. The way they go wrong is by following the same inclination, so engaging in the same mechanism, yet with key modifications. The modifications are a matter of tempo and degree, of too fast and too much – as will become apparent in what follows. The point for now is that this seems to be the reason why the mind may ape its own natural mechanisms and end up with the imposture of prejudice.

One final observation here. The result of the imposture is the blocking of two key capacities of the human mind which are also key norms of good thinking for Locke: asking questions in the right way and choosing the right method for finding the answer.⁴⁸ To return to our example: a person who takes up “The Pope is infallible” as a principle does not even realize that this should be formulated as a question, so as the starting point of an inquiry, rather than as an unquestionable tenet. Further, she does not realize that she should figure out whether the inquiry should seek probable arguments or a demonstration – or, if the question were about substances, natural historical examination. The person is incapable of engaging in inquiry in the right way, because she is blind to what is going on inside herself.

2.2. *Blindness to Self*

In the *Conduct*, Locke identifies two major sources of “defects” in the understanding: “the natural temper of the minde or ill habits taken up”.⁴⁹ Here I would like to show how tempers and habits are indeed responsible for the distortion of the natural mechanism of the mind in reasoning, hence for the imposture, as well as for the blindness to self of the prejudiced mind. Habits have been a generally neglected topic in the history of early modern philosophy, although they have recently received powerful advocates.⁵⁰ While I concur with the advocacy, I would like to make a case for the equal importance of tempers.

⁴⁸ These are the fruits of “indifferency” (Locke, *Conduct*, pars. 69-70, p. 223), so, by consequence, they are blocked by prejudice. On wrong methods as “improper ways of search”, see Locke, *Conduct*, par. 43, p. 185.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, par. 38, p. 180.

⁵⁰ Schuurman, “General Introduction”, pp. 29-31; Tabb, “Locke on Habituation”; Weinberg, “Locke on Intellectual and Moral Virtue”; Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind*, pp. 154-60. More generally, see Dunham and Romdenh-Romluc (eds.), *Habit*.

Recall Locke's conclusion to the passage describing the distortion of the mind's need of foundations: “soe much do our owne very tempers dispose us to a right use of our understandings if we would follow as we should the inclinations of our nature”. So “tempers” name natural “inclinations”, which may be generally applicable to humans (a Lockean variant of Bacon's idols of the tribe) or indicative of particular constitutions (recalling the idols of the cave). The impatient search for foundations clearly belongs to the former category. The distortion, Locke suggests, is a matter of tempo: it is with “haste” or “precipitancy” that the mind embraces unexamined principles, eager to find its “rest” or “peace”. This is already announced in the *Essay*⁵¹ and becomes thematized in the *Conduct*, as we will see below. The *Conduct* adds that the hasty embracing of unexamined principles imprints a quality of excess – a matter of degree – to the manner in which the mind adheres to those principles, resulting in what Locke calls “obstinacy” or “stiffness”. It also suggests that the excessive adherence is transmitted to the reasoning built on those foundations, as indicated by the metaphors of “tincturing” and “infection”. Moreover, operative in both the haste and the obstinacy are the imagination and the passions of the mind. This will bring us back to the medico-logical territory, this time with respect to the analysis of the erring mind. Let us look at the relevant passages.

One area in which haste operates is in natural historical inquiry, and has to do, first, with the extracting of general axioms without careful investigation of particulars,⁵² and subsequently with the taking up of those axioms as principles for deductions, which further estrange the mind from the investigation of particulars, while arming it for disputes. Locke gives the example of medical histories:

For example, were it my business to understand physick would not the safer and readier way be to consult nature her self | and informe my self in the history of diseases and their cures than espousing the principles of the Dogmatists, Methodists or Chymists engage in all the disputes concerning either of those systems and suppose it true till I have tried what they can say to beat me out of it.⁵³

⁵¹ “Precipitancy” at Locke, *Essay*, I.iii.24, p. 82; “haste” at IV.xii.13, p. 648.

⁵² Locke, *Conduct*, pars. 39, 59, pp. 181, 203-4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, par. 68, p. 222.

This recalls the defense of natural history as the correct method in the medical investigation of diseases and their cures in Locke's early *De arte medica* (1669), against the practice of "lay[ing] downe [...] fundamentall maximes & from thence drawing consequence & raising dispute", as well as the observation in the same text that the need of foundations is "agreeable to the nature of [h] mans understanding". Locke also proposes there that the taking up of principles is associated with the work of the imagination: "man still affecting some thing of a deity labourd to make his imagina<ti>on supply what his observa<ti>on failed him in".⁵⁴ The thought is also present in the *Conduct*, where the haste of assent is concurrent with the dissembling work of "this Court dresser the phansy".⁵⁵ Sydenham's methodological tenets are clearly behind *De arte medica*, but so is, it seems to me, the association with the imagination and its tincturing effect. Sydenham writes: "Writers, whose minds have taken a false colour under their influence [the influence of hypotheses], have saddled diseases with phenomena which existed in their own brains only".⁵⁶ In the same spirit, in the *Conduct*, Locke writes of how the imagination imprints "colours appearances resemblances" to the mind's thoughts,⁵⁷ or of how the mind imbibes the "tincture" of an authoritarian doctrine.⁵⁸

The joined effort of imagination and "hasty determinations" is also at work in what Locke calls "anticipation", which may be a nod to Bacon in the *Novum organum*, so pertinent again to natural historical investigation, but may also be more generally applicable to any premature conclusion in reasoning. Here Locke stresses the resulting stiffness and obstinacy of the mind: "many men give them selves up to the first anticipations of their mindes and are very tenacious of the opinions that first possess them", but "this firmness or rather stiffness of the minde is not from an adherence to truth but a submission to prejudice".⁵⁹

Indeed, in the opening sections on principles and prejudice, Locke writes of the same stiffness, a result of an excess of strength with which the mind adheres to a proposition, and the obstinacy in the face of opposition. The imagination is singled out again: "inclination or phansy" are responsible for the fact that a person may become "soe confident and positive in his tenets" and will hold

⁵⁴ Walmsley, "John Locke's 'Anatomia' and 'De Arte Medica'".

⁵⁵ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 67, pp. 218-19.

⁵⁶ Meynell, "John Locke and the Preface to Thomas Sydenham".

⁵⁷ Locke, *Conduct*, par 67, p. 218.

⁵⁸ Ibid., par. 68, p. 222.

⁵⁹ Ibid., par. 60, pp. 204-5.

those tenets with an “excess [...] of adherence”. The passions are also attendant on the making of prejudice. The refusal to confront diverging arguments is the sure mark of a prejudiced mind, Locke tells us. And that is because “tis not the evidence of truth but some lazy anticipation some beloved presumption that he desires to rest undisturbed in”; “tis not evidence he seeks but the quiet enjoyment of the opinion he is fond of”.⁶⁰ Desire and love (with some admixture of self-love)⁶¹ are ingredients in the distortion of the natural mechanisms of the mind, as is fear,⁶² alongside the imagination. Passions and imagination are involved in the haste of the intellect in looking for and embracing foundations, general rules and conclusions, as well as in the resulting excess in the strength of its adherence to tenets, accounting for its stiffness and obstinacy. In other words, the too soon and too much in the distorted mechanism of the mind owe a lot to the passions and the imagination.

I have suggested that intimations of this picture of the mind are already in Sydenham and Locke’s own texts on the methodology of medical histories of diseases and cures. I would like to further suggest now that the picture is itself indebted to early modern investigations of the epistemic role of the imagination and the passions that were carried out in medico-logical contexts. Here are a few examples.

The idea of the intellect’s natural need to seek and find its rest in principles is not a Lockean novelty. Bacon had described the “unaided intellect” (*Intellectus sibi permissus*) in the same way in the *Novum organum*: “the mind longs to leap up to higher generalities to find its rest there”. According to Bacon, Aristotelian logic encourages the mind to hasten to embrace those generalities, which are the principles of demonstration, or the major premises of a syllogism. In contrast, Bacon’s own way respects the natural tendency of the intellect but tempers it by offering it the help of a gradually ascending path from particulars to axioms.⁶³ The mind’s natural propensity to abstraction with the attendant settling on poorly defined abstract words is also mentioned during the discussion of the idols of the tribe and of the marketplace.⁶⁴ The same holds for the idols of the theatre, with reference to the “empirical philosophers”: the hasty conclusions on the basis of only a few experiments are an expression of the “premature and precipitate onrush of the intellect [...] towards the generalities

⁶⁰ Ibid., par. 32, p. 176.

⁶¹ See the association of obstinacy and self-love at Locke, *Essay*, II.xxxiii.2-3, pp. 394-95.

⁶² Locke, *Conduct*, par. 32, p. 176: the “fear to put it to the proof”.

⁶³ Bacon, *Novum organum*, I.19-20, in OFB XI, pp. 70-71.

⁶⁴ Ibid., I.51, in OFB XI, p. 89; I.60, in OFB XI, pp. 93, 95.

and principles of things". The explanation here also involves the imagination, which, Bacon says, becomes "infected" with the handful of experiments and the conclusion they seem to suggest.⁶⁵

In the earlier *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon had an interesting comment on the mind's natural need of principles, seen there in terms of the relation between rest and motion, with a nod to Aristotle in *De motu animalium*: for there to be motion, there has to be a place of rest from where that motion can be initiated – in the behavior of animals, as well as in that of the cosmos (the latter nicely illustrated in the fable of Atlas). In the same way, Bacon suggests, principles afford the mind the place of rest from where the movement of reasoning can be initiated.⁶⁶ A similar idea is put forward in a rather unexpected place: the *Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man* (1640) by Bishop Edward Reynolds, Locke's tutor during his years at Christ Church. In that treatise, Reynolds devotes several chapters to an analysis of epistemic error and its causes. First on his list of causes is the "Abuse of Principles". Reynolds explains: "For the Understanding must have ever something to rest it selfe upon: and from the conformity of other things, thereunto to gather the certainty and evidence of its Assents". For an explanation of "rest" Reynolds also invokes Aristotle, but this time on the resolution of the complex into the simple (e.g., species into genus, effects into causes) in the *Physics*.⁶⁷

Reynolds adds that the natural inclination makes the intellect impatient and thus prone to abuse: it may well land on "a private conceipt" rather than on a true principle, which will "mishape all Conclusions". As "*Error Consequentia*, or *Illationis*", error passes itself off as truth by making its "fancies more plausible, to fasten them upon undeniable grounds".⁶⁸ Reynolds goes on to expatiate on the idea of imposture, with examples from artistic, moral, political and biblical quarters.⁶⁹ As "*Error Dependientia*, or *Subordinationis*", in which principles from one science are transferred to another, error assumes the face of truth by acting as a "coloured Glasse": all conclusions will be "dyed in

⁶⁵ Ibid., I.64, in OFB XI, p. 101.

⁶⁶ Bacon, *Advancement of Learning II*, in *Major Works*, p. 225; Aristotle, *Movement of animals*, 2-3, in *Complete Works I*, pp. 1087-88.

⁶⁷ Reynolds, *Treatise*, pp. 484-85; Aristotle, *Physics*, I.7, in *Complete Works I*, pp. 324-25.

⁶⁸ Reynolds, *Treatise*, p. 486.

⁶⁹ "Imposture" is indeed often associated in this moral-psychological literature with the work of the imagination and the passions. Bacon's use of the term surely preserves these connotations: Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, in *Major Works*, pp. 142-43 ("imposture and credulity" among the "peccant humours" of learning), 227 (the mind of man is "like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture").

the colour of their own concepts”.⁷⁰ The phenomenon is compounded by the passions.⁷¹ Besides the passions, the imagination is one of the prime corrupters of the understanding. One of the ways in which it blocks the latter’s access to truth is by its capacity to create “fixedness” of the mind, which Reynolds describes as a “peremptory adhesion and too violent intension of the Fancie on some particular objects”.⁷² In its extreme forms, he adds, this is an ingredient in madness.

This approach to the imagination is largely indebted to a medical understanding of the epistemic effects of this faculty. At issue is the “strength” or “violence” of an impression, which accounts for the mind’s strength of adherence to a notion, and which is explained in terms of the materiality of the imagination. Reynolds and Burton use it to explain “melancholy”, while More and Casaubon involve it in their accounts of “enthusiasm”.⁷³ Very likely drawing on this literature, Joseph Glanvill in his *Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661) attributes credulity and obstinacy to “a tenacious *Imagination*” which acts by “impressing a strong perswasion of the Truth of an Opinion, where there is no evidence to support it”, as is seen in cases of enthusiasm or hypochondria.⁷⁴ At the same time, the roving nature of the imagination, together with the volatile spirits of our brains, contribute to the precipitancy of the understanding’s assent.⁷⁵ This medical analysis of the imagination is part of Glanvill’s account of this faculty as a source of epistemic error, an account which he organizes in terms of the three acts of the intellect (apprehension, judgment and reasoning) which was the typical organization scheme of logical tracts, both old and new.⁷⁶

In sum, it appears that the use of the imagination in medically inflected accounts of epistemic miscarriage was meant to account, among other things, for the way the mind hastens to conclusions, forms strong attachments to notions and beliefs and is, as it were, infected or tintured by them in its subsequent reasoning. Several writers deemed this analysis of the imagination pertinent to a logical account of the acts of the intellect. Locke was very

⁷⁰ Reynolds, *Treatise*, p. 489.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 497: “mens Minds prepossessed with any particular fancy [...] They cannot see it [the object of the mind’s sight] in its own proper colours, but according as their Concepts are any way distempered and transported by the violence of their Affection”.

⁷² Ibid., p. 29.

⁷³ Burton, *Anatomy*, I, 249; More, *Enthusiasmus*, p. 5; Casaubon, *Treatise*, pp. 88-89.

⁷⁴ Glanvill, *Vanity*, pp. 75-76.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

⁷⁶ Further on this material, see Corneanu, “Joseph Glanvill on Imagination”.

likely aware of this literature and my suggestion is that his account of the way the mind comes to rely upon unexamined principles preserves traces of this approach to the imagination.

Interestingly, Locke makes a brief remark at some point in the *Essay* whereby he explicitly includes the imagination in the mechanism of the taking up of unexamined principles – which serves there as an analogue to the functioning of the mind of a madman: “[Madmen] err as Men do, that argue right from wrong Principles. For by the violence of their Imaginations, having taken their Fancies for Realities, they make right deductions from them”.⁷⁷ This is not unlike Locke’s explanation of what is going on in the mind of an enthusiast, in the chapter added to the fourth edition of the *Essay*. The “strong though ungrounded persuasion” that one is in direct communication with God may be used as a ground for believing any sort of absurdity, which is “to set up phancy for our supreme and sole Guide”.⁷⁸ That persuasion is itself the product of the “Conceits of a warmed or over-weening Brain”. Mind and body are thus carried away forcefully, and imprint that force on everything that follows from the initial persuasion: “the whole Man is sure to act more vigorously, where the whole Man is carried by a natural Motion. For strong conceit like a new Principle carries all easily with it, when got above common Sense, and freed from all restraint of Reason, and check of Reflection”.⁷⁹

I have so far insisted on the role of “natural temper”, with contributions from the imagination and the passions, in distorting the natural operations of the intellect, in Locke’s account of prejudice. This is not, however, to downplay the other great source of error, “ill habits”. Indeed, the process of acquiring habits – habituation or “accustoming” – is a key member of Locke’s account of the relying upon unexamined principles already in the *Essay*. Education or fashion are apt to push an individual into receiving and entertaining “borrowed Principles”, but also, most importantly, into “accustoming himself to believe them, because they are to be believed”, and thus into gradually losing the habit of using their power of reason.⁸⁰ The idea is firmly in place in Locke’s discussion of “principles” in the *Conduct*: he describes the fault in the conduct of the understanding he is dealing with here as “the *custom* of taking up principles that are not self evident and very often not soe much as true”.⁸¹ The power of

⁷⁷ Locke, *Essay*, II.xi.13, p. 161.

⁷⁸ Ibid., IV.xix.11, pp. 703-4.

⁷⁹ Ibid., IV.xix.7, p. 699.

⁸⁰ Ibid., I.iv.26, pp. 83-84.

⁸¹ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 11, p. 159 (my emphasis).

accustoming is so great that it may prove impossible for a man to give his principles up, even after another has shown to him that they are fallible.⁸² Locke explains: "the reason why they do not make use of better and surer principles is because they can not: but this inability proceeds not from want of natural parts [...] but for want of use and exercise, Few men are from their youth accustomed to strict reasoning".⁸³

The power of accustoming is also one key ingredient in the explanation of the association of ideas, a form of madness,⁸⁴ and "the foundation of the greatest, I had almost said, of all the Errors in the World".⁸⁵ In the *Essay* Locke explains that the profound nature of this epistemic phenomenon has to do with the accustoming of the mind to working with two ideas "cemented" together, never suspecting that they were unnaturally connected. The accustoming is doubled by a specific channeling of the motions of the animal spirits. The unnatural connections become thus naturalized ("as if they were Natural").⁸⁶ Such is the case with many of our likes and dislikes, our disgusts, frights and hatreds, but also with propositions that glue together such ideas as "being" and "matter", "God" and "figure and shape", or "person" and "infallibility". By long use, such propositions turn into "intellectual Habits and Defects".⁸⁷

Accustoming is thus a key element of the association of ideas. The work of the imagination is possibly an ingredient, too, as suggested by Locke's language of "impression", "captivation" and "possession".⁸⁸ Indeed, in one place he refers to "phancy" as the operator of the association of ideas.⁸⁹ But both accustoming and the imagination-based epistemic behavior of the mind are marks of all varieties of prejudice. The association of ideas seems to be an extreme case, owing to the "cementing" of the ideas the mind puts together. It may be said that the accustoming in the association of ideas is complete, issuing in the thorough naturalization of the unnatural epistemic mechanism. This has obvious consequences for the problem of blindness to self.

In the previous subsection I described what seemed to me to be the mechanism of the imposture in the formation of prejudice, according to Locke.

⁸² Ibid., par. 13, p. 160.

⁸³ Ibid., par. 15, p. 162.

⁸⁴ Locke, *Essay*, II.xxxiii.3-4, p. 395.

⁸⁵ Ibid., II.xxxiii.18, p. 401.

⁸⁶ Ibid., II.xxxiii.6-7, pp. 395-97; the "cementing" metaphor is in section 11, p. 398.

⁸⁷ Ibid., II.xxxiii.17, p. 400.

⁸⁸ Ibid., II.xxxiii.7-8, 17-18, pp. 396-97, 400.

⁸⁹ Ibid., II.xxxiii.7, p. 397.

What I called the two types of tacit reasoning involved in that mechanism include, as it were, the promise of an incipient level of transparency to self, once the mind decides to look into itself and reflect on its own processes of belief-formation and reasoning. Yet, Locke seems to suggest that in the association of ideas, the mechanism of the imposture has become completely opaque to the mind: the mind does not suspect and lacks even the resources to ever start suspecting that something has gone amiss. The two ideas (say, “person” and “infallibility”) cease even to form a proposition, since a proposition presupposes that the discrete identity of the two terms remains intact, while the associated ideas seem to exist in an indiscrete continuum.⁹⁰ As a result, the thought, however inchoate, can never occur that one should account for the proposition in terms of the quality of its grounds and the legitimacy of the process of assent-giving. The occurrence of such a thought, even if initially used to justify the imposture, might open up the possibility of self-reflection and subsequent reformation. But in the case of the association of ideas, the thought is unavailable. That is why, in this case, “it is not in the power of Reason to help us”: time alone may assist, with its universal dissolution of all ties.⁹¹

I have argued that the distortion of the natural mechanisms of the mind which makes possible the imposture of prejudice is owing to alterations in their tempo and degree – the mind’s haste in settling on principles and on concluding from them, and the excess with which the mind adheres to principles and conclusions. Together with the power of habituation, this temper of the mind is responsible for the imposture of prejudice and for the mind’s inability to recognize its own imposture. This inability comes in degrees, however. The association of ideas is an extreme case of blindness to self. In less severe cases, there may be hope for the beginning of self-reflection. I will briefly address Locke’s positive scenario of reforming practices in the last section. Before that, I turn now to the third and final defining feature of prejudice, the social setting.

2.3. *The Social Setting*

The right method of inquiry in the case of probabilities, we have seen, is to look for grounds – one’s own knowledge, observation and experience rightly pursued and the testimony of others rightly assessed. But taking up unexamined principles, Locke tells us in the *Essay*, makes you reject all of these: the “Romanist” will not trust his own eyes (“will believe that to be Flesh, which

⁹⁰ See Tabb, “Locke on Habituation”, p. 391.

⁹¹ Locke, *Essay*, II.xxxiii.13, p. 398.

he sees to be Bread”), while the enthusiast will refuse another’s testimony and arguments (“you in vain bring the Evidence of clear Reasons against his Doctrines”).⁹² The *Conduct* enlarges the latter case: the mechanism of the fixation of prejudice is so powerful – involving as it does the natural temper of the intellect, the imagination, passions, tacit justificatory reasonings and long accustoming – that once confronted with a diverging opinion, the mind will either look but not see, or simply look away.

These are the two scenarios of testing “principles” and “prejudice” in the *Conduct*. The first is an akratic scenario that gives us a possibly sincere person who is simply accustomed to holding a false principle: another persuades her that the principle is false, yet she continues to use it, even if she initially seems convinced.⁹³ In other words, she looks but does not see – in the sense that the understanding of the falseness of the principle does not sink into her mind, i.e., does not reorganize her epistemic perspective and does not become habitual. The second scenario is about an obstinate, zealous believer: another brings arguments against what he believes, but he refuses to even hear what the other has to say, let alone examine, weigh and reflect on the arguments.⁹⁴ Our believer simply looks away. In different ways, both cases are ultimately cases of refusing the testimony of another. To this is added the suggestion in the *Essay* that the prejudiced mind may even refuse its own testimony (the testimony of its own senses). The other side of the blindness to self is the rejection of and insulation from the other, where the other includes both other human beings and the world around as available through the senses.

The prejudiced mind, Locke suggests, is an isolated mind – rarely individually isolated, though, more usually isolated within a partisan group. This, it seems to me, is one of the foremost worries that he expresses in both *Conduct* and *Essay* and that elicits from him a generally uncharacteristic wealth of eloquence. For example, the *Conduct* gives us the memorable line, “all the world are borne to orthodoxy” – in other words, we are socialized into biased groups from birth;⁹⁵ or the portrait of “one muffled up in the zeale and infallibility of his own sect” who refuses to read anything or talk to anyone that may raise doubts about his “sacred” beliefs.⁹⁶ The concern with the phenomenon of partisan, divisive epistemic-social isolation – what in the language of

⁹² Locke, *Essay*, IV.xx.10, p. 713.

⁹³ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 13, p. 160.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, par. 32, p. 176.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 67, p. 219.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, par. 98, p. 250.

the time was called the divisiveness of “sects” – is visible in the *Essay* as well. Locke believes that one key enabling factor behind it is education, both formal and informal. Both are guilty of inculcating in the young minds the notion that “principles” – whether speculative or moral – are not to be questioned.⁹⁷ The former is also guilty of corrupting children via the method of disputation, which has consequences for “civil conversation”. Locke sees disputation as a training in contentiousness and obstinacy.⁹⁸

Education is a key enabling factor of prejudice because it can instill wrong habits of thinking. Another problem with education, according to Locke, is that it can instill wrong habits of study, in particular what he calls “partiality”. We can start to appreciate this understudied Lockean theme from the perspective of the social setting of prejudice. A good portion of the *Conduct* is devoted to partiality in study and knowledge gathering. Inquiry and right reasoning are enhanced, Locke thinks, by an accustoming of the mind to all sorts of ideas, from all quarters of the ocean of knowledge. Partial familiarity with only one sort of ideas, one sort of knowledge, or one method of inquiry makes the mind fall in love with its “dareling”, grow “stif in it”, acquire “a tincture” from it and become “possessed” with it.⁹⁹ The language describing the effects of partiality in study is similar to the language Locke used to depict the prejudiced mind. This is not by chance, I think, as Locke suggests that prejudice and partiality are closely related, as forms of epistemic isolation:

[T]he principles from which we conclude the grounds upon which we bottom our reasoning are but a part some thing is left out which should goe into the reconding to make it just and exact. [...] [Even sincere intellects are prone to erring owing to partiality:] They converse but with one sort of men they read but one sort of books’ They will not come in the hearing but of one sort of notions. The truth is They canton out to them selves a little Goshen in the intellectual world [...].¹⁰⁰

The mind becomes stiff not only because of lack of exercise in right reasoning, but also because of lack of exercise in consulting the diversity of notions and perspectives the vast world of knowledge offers. Both lacks have a hand in the making of the prejudiced mind, as does the epistemic vice of pride or “pre-

⁹⁷ Locke, *Essay*, IV.vii.11, p. 599; Liv.24, p. 101.

⁹⁸ Ibid., IV.vii.11, p. 601; Locke, *Conduct*, par. 23, p. 168.

⁹⁹ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 44, pp. 187-88.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., par. 98, pp. 246-47.

sumption”, with its echoes of the first act of self-isolation in sacred history – the divisive act of the first man.¹⁰¹

Epistemic isolation goes hand in hand, Locke argues, with epistemic slavery. Prejudice presupposes a type of relation of self to itself and to others of the order of “imposition”.¹⁰² Succumbing to the imposture of prejudice is a form of self-imposition, aided by the often unacknowledged imposition on our minds that the authority of others exert, and issuing most of the time in an imposition we ourselves come to exert on the minds of others.¹⁰³ There is a chain of transmission of prejudice within the biased (divisively isolated) group and at every step of the transfer, “blind Credulity” is born at the crossroads of the weakness of one and the love of power of another.¹⁰⁴ The result of this power game within the isolated epistemic-social group is, we have seen, the rejection of the testimony and dialogue of an outsider other.

3. *Regulative Practices: A Sketch*

The main purpose of this essay has been to reconstruct the Lockean portrait of prejudice. Given the regulative scenario in which it is inscribed, however, a word on the preventive and curative practices is in order. In this final section, I will try to give only a rough sketch.

The key thing is Locke’s insistence on practices, in other words, on long-term exercise, which alone, he thinks, may set the mind right. The sections on “principles” and “prejudice” in the *Conduct* are interspersed with sections on “practise” and “habits”, introduced by the notion that “tis only the exercise of those powers [our natural powers] which gives us ability and skill in any thing and leads us towards perfection”.¹⁰⁵ The mind, just like the body, performs in the way it does only on account of the habits it has acquired, for better or

¹⁰¹ Ibid., par. 98, p. 249.

¹⁰² Alongside “taking upon trust”, “imposition” is one of the most frequently used terms in Locke’s discussion of unexamined principles and prejudice.

¹⁰³ Locke, *Essay*, I.iv.22, p. 99 (those who take things upon trust “misemploy their power of Assent, by lazily enlaving their Minds, to the Dictates and Dominion of others”); IV.xix.2, p. 698 (“For how almost can it be otherwise, but that he should be ready to impose on others Belief, who has already imposed on his own?”).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., I.iv.24, p. 102 (“Nor is it a small power it gives one Man over another, to have the Authority to be the Dictator of Principles, and Teacher of Unquestionable Truths”).

¹⁰⁵ Locke, *Conduct*, par. 6, p. 156.

worse.¹⁰⁶ Locke's view of reasoning is normative in the sense that the healthy activities of the understanding, as collected by its natural history, provide the norm against which the erring distortions of those activities, as collected by the natural history of error, can be measured. But it is also practical, in the sense that the activities, both healthy and erring, are performed by means of practices that are apt to either express, approach or abandon the norm. Prejudice is the result of faulty practices (such as scholastic disputation, moral "principling", or other forms of relying on unexamined principles) that create bad intellectual habits. Both the prevention and cure of prejudice can therefore only take the form of practices working towards the instilling of healthy habits – a diet and medicining of the intellect.¹⁰⁷

In the *Conduct*, Locke closes the discussion of unexamined principles and prejudice with a double-headed recommendation: to counter prejudice, we need to practice "examination" and "indifferency". Naturally, examination of principles (whether they are true, certain or solid) is the first requirement, seeing that the unexamined nature of the propositions relied upon as if they were unquestionable maxims was the issue to begin with. Whether Locke means here to point to preventive or curative practices is not clear. We can however corroborate this with what he offers as "cures" for the association of ideas in the same *Conduct*, where he does indeed distinguish between cure and prevention. By way of cure Locke mentions, first, a "vigor of mind" that might be able to confront the already entrenched habit and start examining the unexamined principles – an almost impossible task; second, the practice of self-study (observing the motions of one's own mind), which might be able to de-naturalize the habit. Compared to the *Essay*, he seems to be wondering here whether the mechanism of the imposture might after all become visible even in this extreme case of blindness to self, although he admits that there is a thin chance that this might happen. The real hope lies in the prevention, and that bears the name of education: only constant practice, starting with the youngest years, of examining the agreement of ideas will be able to prevent the formation of the disease.¹⁰⁸

The same, I believe, is Locke's meaning in his general recommendation of "examination". There is a chance, a better one than in the case of the association of ideas, that a person may be able to confront her epistemic demons

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., par. 7, p. 157.

¹⁰⁷ See Crignon, "Galenic Heritage"; Corneanu *Regimens*, chap. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Locke, *Conduct*, pars. 77-79, pp. 229-31.

and start taking apart the mechanism of the imposture. That task, however, would require a massive amount of courage, sincerity and force of will, which is probably quite rare. The promise of success lies more clearly in the prevention offered by education. Alongside examination, what Locke calls “indifferency” (another name for the love of truth) is also a matter of training and practice, since a sudden transfer of attachment from one’s party or sect to the truth itself is as rare as the decision to ask, all of a sudden, whether the Pope is indeed infallible or not, after years of having thought this was unquestionably the case. The regulative practices of education, together with the attendant growth of healthy intellectual habits, are of the essence in this case as well.¹⁰⁹

The practices of right reasoning Locke describes in both *Conduct* and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* are such that they regulate the too fast and too much that distort the natural operations of the human mind. In other words, they teach patience and measure. The key is that the child, and subsequently the young person, forms habits of distinguishing between distinct ideas, of searching for the ideas that may act as proofs apt to answer an initial question, of observing the connections of ideas in trains of deduction and tracing them to their true principle, and of calibrating her confidence in the result proportionally to the evidence at hand. Together with a general attitude of reflection and concern for truth, these habits are apt to prevent the haste in embracing principles and the excessive strength of adherence to tenets that make possible the imposture of prejudice. Locke includes among the practices conducive to this end the early conversations between tutor and child seeking to identify reasons for actions, encouraging curiosity, and training reflection on various topics; the practice of mathematics and the pursuit of study and reading with an eye to the mechanism of the connections of ideas and of the “bottoming” of chains of reasoning on true principles; and the general cultivation of a love of knowledge and truth, meant to counter the partial loves, desires and fears involved in the growth of obstinate beliefs.¹¹⁰

Besides practices of examination and inquiry, of reasoning and reflection, meant to develop healthy habits,¹¹¹ Locke seems to also recommend practic-

¹⁰⁹ Locke closes his discussion of “principles” and “prejudice” in the *Conduct* with a paragraph on the task of education, which is “to give [the learner’s] mind that freedom that disposition those habits that may enable him to attain | any part of knowledge he shall apply him self to or stand in need of in the future course of his life”: *Conduct*, par. 37, p. 179.

¹¹⁰ Locke, *Some Thoughts*, pars. 118, 166, 180, pp. 183-85, 219, 236; Locke, *Conduct*, pars. 17, 21, 25, 52-7, pp. 164, 167, 169-70, 198-201.

¹¹¹ See further Weinberg, “Locke on Intellectual and Moral Virtue”; Tabb, “Locke on Habituation”.

ing certain social-epistemic attitudes, for example epistemic humility towards oneself, and epistemic tolerance towards others.¹¹² Further, exposure to people thinking otherwise than oneself, to a diversity of methods of inquiry and reasoning and to provinces of knowledge one is not familiar with is apt to groom “universality” and “suppleness” of mind, and to give one the “large sound round about sense” that may prevent the stiffness of partiality.¹¹³ At the same time, the practice of self-knowledge via a natural history of the errors of the understanding for one’s own, self-regulating use is both explicit in the *Conduct* and suggested by the very nature of this text.¹¹⁴ All of these practices form the regulative regimen of Lockean education, which extends well beyond the early years of a child.

One upshot of this discussion is that, for Locke, the medico-logical training of the mind is at the same time a pedagogical project. Another is that there is an important social dimension to this project. Locke’s regulative practices are often communal (because pedagogical) while also requiring individual struggle. Their goal is what Locke calls “the freedom of the understanding”¹¹⁵ – in other words, epistemic freedom, as opposed to the epistemic slavery attached to the prejudiced mind. Locke worried about the blindness to self and rejection of others that were the marks of the latter and about the epistemic isolation of divisive groups that enabled it. This raises problems for a strict individualist reading of Locke’s epistemology: it seems to me that Locke’s education for freedom was what opened, rather than closed, the individual mind to others.¹¹⁶

Abbreviations

- OFB XI: Bacon, Francis, The *Instauratio Magna* Part II: *Novum organum* and Associated Texts, *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, vol. XI, eds. Graham Rees and Maria Wakely, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2004.

¹¹² Locke, *Conduct*, pars. 13, 25, pp. 160, 170; Locke, *Essay* IV.xvi.4, p. 659.

¹¹³ Locke, *Conduct*, pars. 44, 98, pp. 187, 246.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, par. 38, p. 180.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 36, p. 178.

¹¹⁶ On the social aspects of the Lockean mind, see Lenz, *Socializing Minds*, chap. 2; Waldow, *Experience Embodied*, chap. 2.

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