



HAL
open science

Locke's Ethics of Virtuous Thinking

Angélique Thébert

► **To cite this version:**

Angélique Thébert. Locke's Ethics of Virtuous Thinking. Locke Studies, 2022, 22, 10.5206/lis.2022.14153 . hal-04265462

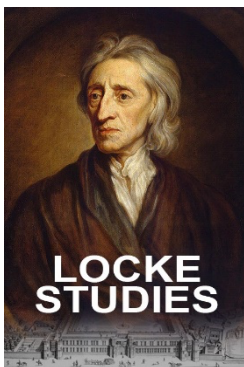
HAL Id: hal-04265462

<https://hal.science/hal-04265462>

Submitted on 2 Nov 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



LOCKE STUDIES

Vol. 22

<https://doi.org/10.5206/ls.2022.14153> | ISSN: 2561-925X

Submitted: 31 OCTOBER 2021

Revised: 08 SEPTEMBER 2022

Published online: 3 DECEMBER 2022

For more information, [see this article's homepage.](#)

© 2022. Angélique Thibert

Locke's Ethics of Virtuous Thinking

ANGÉLIQUE THÉBERT (UNIVERSITY OF NANTES)

Abstract:

Locke is generally taken as promoting an ethics of belief. For him, we must apply a doxastic norm so that we properly conduct our understanding. Thus, he forcefully highlights one key epistemic norm, the norm of evidence, that prescribes that we adjust the strength of our assent to the available evidence. I shall argue that *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* constitutes the framework within which Locke's remarks in the *Essay* must be inserted. Far from promoting a mere ethics of belief, Locke actually promotes a virtue epistemology, or an ethics of virtuous thinking. Contrary to doxastic anti-voluntarism, this new way of apprehending Locke's remarks does not downplay the role of the will. But compared to doxastic voluntarism, it gives its due role to the will (it is not devoted to the control of our assent, but to the ordering the consideration of an idea, or the forbearing to consider it, which is at the bottom of the acquisition of intellectual habits). Moreover, it takes into account important aspects of our intellectual life, namely diachronic and social aspects.

Keywords: John Locke, doxastic anti-voluntarism, doxastic voluntarism, epistemic norms, epistemic responsibility, ethics of belief, virtue epistemology

Locke Studies is published by [Western Libraries at The University of Western Ontario](#).

This is an open access article published under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International](#) license, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and shared under the original license.

Introduction

John Locke is generally taken as promoting an ethics of belief. For him, we must apply a doxastic norm so that we properly conduct our understanding.¹ Thus, he forcefully highlights one key epistemic norm, the norm of evidence, that prescribes that we adjust the strength of our assent to the available evidence. According to such a view (doxastic voluntarism), the will is in charge of the balance of our assent. The problem is that Locke also regularly stresses that our mind, so to speak, cannot but hug the curves of the perceived evidence (doxastic anti-voluntarism). But if the implementation of the evidentialist norm does not come within our competency, then we cannot be deemed as responsible for our beliefs. Still, Locke keeps praising or blaming human beings for the beliefs they have. If so, where does our epistemic responsibility really lie?

To elucidate this point, I think we must give due weight to Locke's posthumous text *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*. Initially designed to be published as a distinct chapter in the fourth edition of the *Essay*, Locke abandoned this project, professing he had no time to work on his text.² Actually, Locke foresaw that his subject matter led him much further than he thought at the beginning and that it was not a mere outgrowth of the *Essay*. In the *Conduct*, Locke describes the way men tend to conduct their understanding from infancy to maturity. This conduct is generally riddled with imperfections. He also gives some advice on the proper conduct of our understanding.

I shall argue that the *Conduct* constitutes the framework within which Locke's remarks in the *Essay* must be inserted. Indeed, his recommendation of the norm of evidence is but the acme of a system of recommendations that enjoin us to more deeply reform our minds. Locke is aware that we must take things at their roots and work on the way we deal with the ideas that pass in our minds. He invites us to embrace the life of the mind in a more global manner. In contemporary words, I think that far from promoting a mere ethics of belief, Locke actually promotes a virtue epistemology, or an ethics of virtuous thinking. Contrary to doxastic anti-voluntarism, this new way of apprehending Locke's remarks does not downplay the role of the will. But compared to doxastic voluntarism, it gives its due role to the will; it is not devoted to the control of our assent, but to the ordering the consideration of an idea, or the forbearing to consider it, which is at the bottom of the acquisition of intellectual habits. Moreover, it takes into account important aspects of our intellectual life, namely, diachronic and social aspects.

¹ See, for instance, Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), chap. 1; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Passmore, "Locke and the Ethics of Belief," in *Rationalism, Empiricism, and Idealism*, ed. Anthony Kenny, 23–46 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Michael Losonsky, "John Locke on Passion, Will and Belief," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 4, no. 2 (1996): 267–83.

² Locke to William Molyneux, 10 April 1697, in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E. S. de Beer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 6: 87.

1. The Orthodox Reading: Our Duty Is to Proportion Our Assent According to the Available Evidence

Let us start with the classical idea, according to which Locke's ethics of belief is rooted in a golden epistemic rule, which prescribes us to believe as the evidence we have dictates.

1.1. Locke's Evidentialist Rule

The evidentialist rule is famously propounded in this passage:

Probability wanting that intuitive Evidence, which infallibly determines the Understanding, and produces certain Knowledge, *the Mind if it will proceed rationally, ought to examine all the grounds of Probability*, and see how they make more or less, *for or against* any probable Proposition, before it assents to or dissents from it, and upon a due ballancing the whole, reject, or receive it, with a more or less firm assent, proportionably to the preponderancy of the greater grounds of Probability on one side or the other. (*Essay IV.xv.5, 656*)³

In other words, to think properly, we must proportion the strength of our assent according to the amount and quality of the available evidence. This rule presupposes a form of doxastic gradualism, according to which our assent, far from being categorical, is a matter of degree. It also seems to imply that we can control the strength of our assent and adjust it, depending on whether we have more or less relevant evidence in favour of the proposition we are considering. For instance, if our evidence is strong, our assent should approach "full Assurance and Confidence," whereas if it is poor, our assent should be confined to "Conjecture, Doubt, and Distrust" (IV.xv.2, 655). As Nicholas Wolterstorff puts it, "Locke's principle of proportionality is a principle specifying the proper relation of these two phenomena": the probability of one's evidence and our level of confidence in a proposition.⁴

Putting so much stress on the principle of proportionality has led many interpreters to underline the role of the will in Locke's ethics of belief. The will would be implicated at two stages. Firstly, to apply this principle, we must want to do our epistemic duty. This deontological aspect has been highlighted by Plantinga and Wolterstorff.⁵ According to them, Locke presents a "regulative epistemology" and states different rules

³ All references throughout to the *Essay* are to John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). They are given in text in the standard form of book, chapter, and section, along with page number where relevant. For similar texts in the *Conduct*, see John Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), §7, 180; §33, 210; §34, 210.

⁴ Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, 79.

⁵ Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, 11–14; Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, xvi.

of belief formation we should strive to apply in order to believe properly. This deontological tone favours the idea according to which these norms are *extrinsic* doxastic norms, that is to say doxastic prescriptions we can decide to apply or not to apply. Thus, if Locke cares to prescribe the evidentialist rule, it is because we do not inevitably apply it and can even refuse to abide by it.

Secondly, the focus on the principle of proportionality fosters the idea according to which we could choose to apply this principle in a more personal and idiosyncratic manner. Presupposing that “ought implies can,” we consider that we have the power to coordinate the level of our confidence with the available evidence *as we please*. Even if it goes against our duty, we would be psychologically capable of controlling the degree of our assent and giving a level of confidence that is not exactly proportioned to the probability we have for a given proposition. For instance, as Locke notices, we can sometimes “resist the force of manifest Probabilities” (IV.xx.12, 715) so that our level of confidence is below what would be required by an exact application of the rule. More radically, we may refuse assent when we are suspicious of the evidence. In this case, we are not deprived of evidence, but instead of giving a weak assent to the proposition (considering the poor evidence we have), we decide to go one step further and suspend our judgment. There are also cases where we give a degree of assent that exceeds what is required by the corresponding probabilities. Locke describes this “surplusage of assurance” as blameworthy (IV.xix.1, 697).

All this speaks in favour of the idea that Locke sustains a form of direct (and unsubtle) doxastic voluntarism, for he is ready to admit that, *in some cases*, the will may exert a direct control over our assent. More radically, one may conclude that, for Locke, our belief is an act of the will.

1.2. Problem: Beliefs Are Not Within Our Control

However, this picture is far from adequate. On the one hand, we may be suspicious of the idea that norms of belief are extrinsic doxastic norms, mere recommendations we would be free to apply or not to apply. On the other hand, it appears that we are often simply unable to proportion our assent as we will. Indeed, this correlation—far from hanging on us—is *in many cases* inevitable. Locke keeps repeating that generally our assent cannot but stick to the perceived evidence. As a matter of fact, he distinguishes between different kinds of epistemic situations: there are “clear” cases and “less clear” cases. In the former, where the evidence is crystal-clear and the thinker is sincerely motivated by the search of truth, “it is not in any rational Man’s Power to refuse his Assent”; the assent “necessarily follows” from the perceived evidence and “closes with such Probabilities.” But in the latter, where the evidence is ambiguous or, at any rate, not satisfactory to command a specific degree of assent, choosing to lean the scale of our assent on one side rather than on the other is a matter of the will (IV.xx.15–16). It is in these specific cases that assent, suspense, or dissent are “voluntary actions.” Therefore, when interpreters insist on the voluntary aspect of belief, they manifestly dwell on texts in which Locke speaks of “less clear” cases, or non-ideal epistemic situations. They also point out how he concedes that, even if we are not sure to have all the evidence before

us, “we are forced to determine our selves on the one side or other,” because “the conduct of our Lives, and the management of our great Concerns, will not bear delay” (IV.xvi.3, 659).

But in epistemic situations where the probabilities are manifest and where we do our best to look for all the relevant evidence, once the evidence is perceived, it is compulsive rather than justificatory. Our judgmental response is automatically proportioned to the perceived evidence. In these cases, far from being voluntary, belief is a purely intellectual affair.⁶

If so, the question is still pending: where does our epistemic responsibility really lie? An answer consists in focusing on passages in which Locke explains to what extent our belief is open to choice. For, even if the nature of the understanding is “constantly to close with the more probable side,” he admits that a man has “a Power to suspend and restrain its Enquiries, and not permit a full and satisfactory Examination” (IV.xx.12, 715).

[T]hough we cannot hinder our Knowledge, where the Agreement is once perceived; nor our Assent, where the Probability manifestly appears upon due Consideration of all the Measures of it: Yet *we can hinder both Knowledge and Assent, by stopping our Enquiry*, and not imploying our Faculties in the search of any Truth. (IV.xx.16, 717)

Here, the suspension of judgment does not result from a direct act of the will. It results from a negative action: our stopping an inquiry and our forbearing from employing our faculties.⁷ It is our decision to withhold them, or to employ them with more or less earnestness (IV.xiii.2), that hinders our assent. So, it appears that in the time-interstice

⁶ For this intellectualist (anti-voluntarist) reading, see Michael Ayers, *Locke* (London: Routledge, 1991), 1: 106–12; Mark Boespflug, “Locke’s Principle of Proportionality,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 101, no. 2 (2019): 238; and Nicholas Jolley, *Toleration and Understanding in Locke*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) who insists on the political aspect of the question. Moreover, the supposition that our assent is under the command of the will leads to many difficulties. Firstly, how do we assess the probabilities? Do we have precise rules to weigh up the pros and cons? More critically, given the evidence, how do we know how much confidence we ought to place in a proposition? Do we have an internal measuring tool that indicates to us, for each degree of probability, the fitting degree of assent? As Locke says, “’tis impossible to reduce to precise Rules, the various degrees wherein Men give their Assent” (IV.xvi.9). Last, but not least, are we able to adjust our assent according to the perceived probabilities? As Boespflug notes in his criticism of the so-called Lockean principle of proportionality, we are not “able to voluntarily cause our assent to match our evidence.” “Locke’s Principle of Proportionality,” 242. We can neither modify the intensity of our assent at will, nor regulate it as a “potentiometer.”

⁷ Locke defends a robust view of negative action, according to which “forborne actions are as much determined by the will as ordinary, positive actions are,” Matthew Stuart, *Locke’s Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), 451. As Locke says: “mere forbearances, requiring as much the determination of the *Will*, and being often as weighty in their consequences, as the contrary Actions, may, on that consideration, well enough pass for Actions too.” *Essay*, II.xxi.28, 248.

of the search for evidence, we have a bit of leeway. According to such a reading,⁸ what we master is not the very strength of our assent, but the way we gather evidence. Our will intervenes when we decide to continue or stop the quest for evidence, and when we decide to conduct such a quest in a more or less meticulous manner. The will does not exert itself when assenting, but on the preparatory inquiries we make before giving or refusing our assent. All things considered, it appears that if there is a form of decision-making in doxastic matters, it is circumscribed to the way we proceed in our quest for evidence. Thus, the will has only a minor role in belief formation. As Boespflug notices:

We possess control not only over the quantity of reasons we have, but also over the degree to which we examine, or weigh, them. And it is these activities that constitute the portion of the doxastic process wherein, according to Locke, our responsibility lies.⁹

In any case, the only thing we may control is the way we investigate. This leads Boespflug to the conclusion that one must not overestimate the role of the will in Locke's ethics of belief, for the kind of control we have over our assent is merely indirect. As he puts it, "that we have this kind of control . . . is a far cry from the sort of direct control associated with doxastic voluntarism."¹⁰

On the contrary, I think that one must not underestimate the role of the will. In the *Conduct*, Locke shows that our will intervenes at a deeper level than (1) *the level of the belief formation* (when we give or withhold our assent) and (2) *the level of the quest for evidence* (when we pursue our investigation or stop it, when we collect evidence in a more or less conscientious way). For Locke, it is the very nature of (3) our *intellectual character* that lies under our control. He shows that, up to a certain point, we have the power to work on ourselves and shape our intellectual character. In this respect, what we can act to bring about is not *this* or *that* belief, but this epistemic trait rather than another one. According to this bottom-up view, the good starting point is not our beliefs, but our intellectual habits. It is according to the type of intellectual habits that we cultivate (3) that we will then be induced to make a thorough examination of the question or not (2) and that we will finally gain such and such beliefs (1). In other words, depending on the type of believer we are (3), we will drive our inquiry with more or less diligence (2), which will result in the acquisition of more or less well-grounded beliefs (1). As a consequence, to believe properly, we had better be a careful person, in other words we had better be intellectually virtuous.

⁸ See Passmore, "Locke and the Ethics of Belief," 190–91, and Boespflug, "Locke's Principle of Proportionality." This is what Ayers calls the "two stage-model for judgment," which he criticizes. *Locke*, 1: 107–9, 149.

⁹ Boespflug, "Locke's Principle of Proportionality," 255.

¹⁰ Mark Boespflug, *Locke's Twilight of Probability: An Epistemology of Rational Assent* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2023).

2. The Intellectually Virtuous Agent

The question is then to know in what sense it is up to us to become virtuous believers. In order to grasp Locke's view, it is instructive to start from the description of the virtuous thinker: what are their intellectual habits? Correlatively, what is the turn of mind of the vicious believer? The way Locke portrays the latter gives us indications as to what is reprehensible in them and, consequently, as to what lies under our control in doxastic matters.

2.1. Epistemic Indifferency: The Utmost Epistemic Virtue

In the *Essay*, Locke famously states that “[h]e that would seriously set upon the search of Truth, ought in the first Place to prepare his Mind with a Love of it. For he that Loves it not, will not take much Pains to get it; nor be much concerned when he misses it” (IV.xix.1, 697). But we must be careful with this recommendation: Locke does not ask us to love one truth in particular, but to love truth in general. These attitudes have no common denominator.

Loving truth in general comes to loving it for its own sake. It corresponds to a specific intellectual attitude, that Locke calls “indifferency” in the *Conduct* (§11, §§34–35).¹¹ This naming may seem surprising at first sight, for we spontaneously link indifference with a sort of “couldn't-give-a-damn” attitude. But in Locke's view, epistemic indifference must not be confounded with an indifference to truth, nor with a kind of epistemic insouciance. The epistemic insouciant does not pay attention to truth at all; their indifference is manifested by the fact that they do not feel concerned with the question to know whether their claims are grounded on evidence or not. Their embracing truth is motivated by non-epistemic considerations. On the contrary, what Locke calls “indifferency” in intellectual matters refers to one's readiness to accept any opinion *if and only if* it is true. In Locke's terms, it comes to “receiv[ing] and embrac[ing]” opinions “according as evidence, and that alone, gives the attestation of truth” (*Conduct*, §34, 211). In other words, our assent to an opinion is determined by its sole truth value, and not by an external motive, like our own interests, our inclinations, or “respect and custom” (*Conduct*, §11). Such an indifference is the mark of a genuine love of truth.

Now, the more we are lovers of truth for truth's sake, the more we will develop open-mindedness, for in our reviewing opinions, we will be guided by their sole truth value, whatever their content and their consequences for ourselves. Therefore, intellectually virtuous agents are open-minded persons, meaning that they are ready to direct their minds towards new opinions as long as they are true. As they stand firm against contrary inducements (like prejudices, non-alethic passions or obsessive ideas), their minds are disposed to explore doxastic territories that are different from the ones they

¹¹ All references throughout to the *Conduct* are given in text and refer to John Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996). Citations are given in the form of title (when required), section number(s), and the edition's page number where relevant.

are used to inhabiting and are furnished with new and varied ideas and observations.¹² Not that the resistance to non-cognitive interests is a separate act of the mind, but it is expressed through the informed assent to a belief.

That is why Locke insists so much on the necessity to be a genuine lover of truth. He is eager to ensure that our minds are not enslaved to opinions. Whereas at the beginning of the *Essay* he keeps reminding us of the necessity to stay within the narrow bounds of our minds and not to venture on “that boundless extent” which is “the vast Ocean of *Being*” (I.i.7, 47), in the *Conduct* he constantly repeats that we must not stay within “the narrow bounds” of our sacred opinions and that, doing so, our intellectual attitude will get better: indeed, our “mind will be strengthened,” our “capacity enlarged,” and our “faculties improved” (§3, 173). The cultivation of epistemic indifference has a real positive cascading effect.

2.2. Epistemic Insouciance: The Utmost Epistemic Vice

In contrast, the intellectual life of the vicious thinker is not devoted to the love of truth for its own sake. The doxastic practices of the epistemic insouciant (the ways they acquire, maintain or revise their beliefs) are not truth-oriented, but are guided by another inclination (the love of fancies or the love of truth for its social repercussions). That is why we are prone to blame them. We blame them not so much for the beliefs they have, but for the sort of believer they are. Their intellectual life is not inspired by the proper purpose.

Anticipating contemporary developments in vice epistemology,¹³ Locke shows that epistemic insouciance can lead to two extremes: epistemic nonchalance or apathy on one side, narrow-mindedness on the other. Firstly, the fact that some people do not care for truth may lead them to accept whatever opinion, provided that in doing so, they are released from the duty to enquire and examine. According to Locke, this is the defect “of those who seldom reason at all, but do and think according to the example of others, whether parents, neighbors, ministers, or who else they are pleased to make choice of to

¹² We may be surprised that open-mindedness is qualified as an intellectual virtue. After all, being open-minded can lead us to be easily misled by other opinions. To a certain point, close-mindedness protects us from the danger of epistemic heteronomy. But requiring open-mindedness does not come to demanding that we accept any belief we might come across, independently of its truth-value. We must strike a balance between dogmatism and epistemic closure on the one hand, and epistemic alienation on the other hand.

¹³ See Quassim Cassam, *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). There are innumerable parallels between Cassam’s and Locke’s analyses. As Cassam’s analysis is triggered by the disastrous political consequences of some epistemic vices, Locke’s incursion in philosophy was his dramatic experience of the political consequences of bigotry and partisanship. For both of them, to move “from the intellectual to the political” just takes a few steps. So, notwithstanding Cassam’s statement that “in comparison to the vast literature on epistemic virtue the philosophical literature on epistemic vice is minuscule” (*Vices of the Mind*, ix), I suggest that Locke was already aware of the importance of the subject and that the *Conduct* is a major contribution to vice epistemology.

have an implicit faith in, for the saving of themselves the pains and trouble of thinking and examining for themselves (*Conduct*, §3, 169).

Epistemic insouciance comes to delegating the conduct of our mind to someone else. Locke has harsh words for those who give themselves up to this “downright prostituting of the mind” (*Conduct*, §26, 203). This epistemic vice is acquired through desultoriness (§17), haste (§ 16), smattering (§18), resignation (§27), wandering (§30), presumption (§38) and despondency (§39). On the whole, it is a form of intellectual laziness.

Secondly, at the other end of the spectrum of the epistemic vices, epistemic insouciance favours the development of heated, stiff, and opinionated minds. The problem is that the vigour with which these persons take on intellectual affairs is not the expression of a love of truth for itself, but manifests an excessive attachment to an opinion. It leads to the development of specific intellectual traits, like prejudices (*Conduct*, §10), bias (§14), partiality (§22) and anticipation (§26). Persons who are in the grip of such ways of thinking remain confined to their “doxastic bubbles” and are unreceptive to any evidence that is inconsistent with their prior conceptions. As Locke says, they “see but one side of a matter” (§3, 169) and are similar to someone who has put “coloured spectacles” before his eyes (§34, 211). Worst, this vice of the mind is the sign of a deregulated will, for close-minded persons (like enthusiasts) *refuse* to follow the evidence at all costs. Not that their refusal is a separate act of their mind, but it is expressed through their dogmatic assent to a belief.

At first sight, this description seems to contradict Locke’s intellectualist view of belief (the view according to which belief is not a voluntary matter). Indeed, as Passmore has noted, the case of the enthusiast shows that beliefs could be driven by will and desire after all, and more precisely by some other affection than the love of truth.¹⁴ My contention is that, far from being an infringement of Locke’s theory of belief, which leads him to introduce an emotivist element in a globally intellectualist approach, the enthusiast is not a special case at all. They rather exemplify a certain way of being, over which they have a kind of control. The enthusiast and the zealot do not believe as they please, but they are responsible for the acquisition of a bad turn of the mind or, at the very least, for not correcting it: they put the love of their interests in the place of their “natural relish for real solid truth” (*Conduct*, §33, 211).

Such a remark implies two things: firstly, it implies that we consider the love of truth as intrinsically linked to our intellectual nature, as if our mind were naturally polarised towards truth; secondly, it implies that we have the power to more or less fully accomplish our epistemic end point. This is precisely where our epistemic responsibility lies. If we blame the enthusiast, it is because we consider that, to some extent, they are responsible for being the type of believer they turn out to be, and for deviating from their natural end point.¹⁵ To some extent, the enthusiast is responsible for their

¹⁴ Passmore, “Locke and the Ethics of Belief,” 204.

¹⁵ Thus, one cannot totally exonerate them by referring to the physiological causes of their exalted imagination.

epistemic personality. The challenge is to specify *to what extent*. Indeed, if their epistemic deviation is related to deep-seated epistemic defects, we may fear that it is not really open to them to get rid of it.¹⁶ Locke shows to what extent humans are not definitively fastened to such epistemic vices, and how far they have the power to reduce them so as to become intellectually virtuous agents.

3. A New Reading: Our Duty is to Strive to Become Intellectually Virtuous

Locke enjoins us to become virtuous epistemic agents. But in order to do so, tremendous effort is required. As Locke concedes, it “is no easy thing to do” (*Conduct*, §35). It requires “time and pains,” “use and exercise,” “industry and application” (*Conduct*, §6).

3.1. The High (and Hard) Road to Intellectual Virtues

Indeed, the development of open-mindedness requires that we extricate ourselves from our natural inclinations, and from our tendency to overvalue our beloved opinions. To do so, we must find some tricks so as to force our mind to take into account unusual opinions. This is achieved through the repetition of some specific mental acts that will progressively favour the development of a new way of conducting our minds. In other words, to become intellectually virtuous, we must actively cultivate an epistemic trait. This is precisely where the will comes into the picture.

The acquisition of virtuous intellectual dispositions implies an initial decision: the decision to improve oneself and do whatever is necessary to this intellectual self-improvement. Once the decision is made, its implementation is an “active” matter, for it issues in actual attempts to do specific things, for instance to scrupulously look for further evidence and to set aside some opinions. The repetition of these acts will progressively entrench an intellectual habit. Hence, it is by showing open-mindedness on several occasions that we become open-minded. The change of one’s epistemic nature implies a change of mental behaviour. In this respect, as Locke observes, “as it is in the body, so it is in the mind; practices makes it what it is” (*Conduct*, §4, 174). Our intellectual character traits, far from being “natural endowments,” are for the most part “the product of exercise” and “repeated actions” (*Conduct*, §4). They are acquired intellectual traits, and their acquisition is gradual. For Locke, even if we are born to be “rational creatures,” “it is use and exercise only that makes us so, and we are indeed so no farther than industry and application has carried us” (*Conduct*, §6).

What then, can grown men never be improved or enlarged in their understandings? I say not so, but this I think I may say, that it will not be done without industry and application, which will require more time and pains than grown men, settled in their course of life, will allow to it, and therefore very seldom is done. And this very capacity of attaining it by use and exercise only brings us back to that which I laid down before, that it is only practice that

¹⁶ Locke admits that we are also constrained by our natural dispositions, see *Conduct*, §§100–102.

improves our minds as well as bodies, and we must expect nothing from our understandings any farther than they are perfected by habits. (*Conduct*, §6, 179)

It is therefore our job to acquire the right intellectual dispositions. And since we are personally committed to their acquisition, we can be deemed responsible for them, or at least responsible for the revision of our epistemic vices.

So far so good. But how should we concretely proceed? For Locke, the development of epistemic virtues is made possible thanks to the control we have over the way we order and select our ideas. For we have the power to control the comings and goings of our ideas. This is one of the “prerogatives” of the will.

This at least I think evident, That we find in our selves a *Power* to begin or forbear, continue or end several actions of our minds, and motions of our Bodies, barely by a thought or preference of the mind ordering, or as it were commanding the doing or not doing such or such a particular action. This *Power* which the mind has, thus to order the consideration of any *Idea*, or the forbearing to consider it; or to prefer the motion of any part of the body to its rest, and *vice versâ* in any particular instance is that which we call the *Will*. (II.xxi.5, 236)

Willing is an action of the mind by which it commands or orders the performance or non-performance of an action (an episode of thinking or a bodily movement). The activation of such a power is the remedy for the wandering of our thoughts (what I have called “epistemic nonchalance”). It enables us to “direct [the] train of ideas” (that “constant succession and flux of ideas in our minds”), so that we may be able to choose which ones “are pertinent to our present enquiry” and to reject those we consider as foreign and liable to make our mind run away from the subject at hand (*Conduct*, §30). The appeal to the will is the only way we can “keep our thoughts close to their business.”

Thanks to this power, we can exercise specific modes of thinking, like contemplation (the power to hold an idea “under attentive consideration”), attention, and study.

When the *Ideas* that offer themselves, (for, as I have observed in another place, whilst we are awake, there will always be a train of *Ideas* succeeding one another in our minds,) are taken notice of, and, as it were, registered in the Memory, it is *Attention*: When the mind with great earnestness, and of choice, fixes its view on any *Idea*, considers it on all sides, and will not be called off by the ordinary sollicitation of other *Ideas*, it is that we call *Intention*, or *Study*. (II.xix.1, 227)

Even if it is not mentioned, the will is implied in these modes of thinking: they require that we voluntarily focus on specific ideas instead of letting them go. Without the will, we would be “a very idle unactive Creature,” condemned to lethargy (II.vii.3, 129). But our creator has “given a power to our Minds, in several Instances, to chuse, amongst its *Ideas*, which it will think on, and to pursue the enquiry of this or that Subject with consideration and attention,” so that we do not always “let our Thoughts . . . run a drift, without any direction or design; and suffer the *Ideas* of our Minds, like unregarded shadows, to make their appearances there, as it happen’d, without attending to them”

(II.vii.3, 129). Even if we cannot hinder the constant succession of fresh ideas in our minds, we can voluntarily direct the “train of ideas” that constantly succeed one another, while we are awake, by choosing to “heedfully observe and consider” some ideas to the detriment of others (II.xiv.15, 186).

This remedy to the wandering of our thoughts can also cure us from close-mindedness and attachment to opinions independently of their truth value. This is achieved through a kind of *destabilisation of the mind* so as to keep it away from its mental beaten tracks. More precisely, Locke recommends that we “counterbalance” obsessive ideas by opposing them to new ideas (*Conduct*, §45). This is where “intention, or study” is useful. For in this mode of thinking, the mind “fixes its view on *any idea*, considers it on all sides,” and is not “called off by the ordinary solicitation of other ideas” (my emphasis). In other words, the mind may choose to consider different ideas than the ones that currently keep it occupied. Likewise, in the *Conduct*, Locke recommends that we introduce a new idea, so that the mind does not indulge in the same ideas and is free to prosecute whatever thoughts the agent chooses:

[A]s soon as we find the mind makes itself a business of nothing, we should immediately disturb and check it, introduce new and more serious considerations, and not leave till we have beaten it off from the pursuit it was upon. This at first, if we have let the contrary practice grow to a habit, will perhaps be difficult; but constant endeavors will by degrees prevail and at last make it easy. And when a man is pretty well advanced and can command his mind off at pleasure from incidental and undesigned pursuits, it may not be amiss for him to go on further and make attempts upon meditations of greater moment, that at the last he may have a full power over his own mind, and be so fully master of his own thoughts as to be able to transfer them from one subject to another with the same ease that he can lay by anything he has in his hand and take something else that he has a mind to in the room of it. (*Conduct*, §45, 227)¹⁷

The power to order the introduction of an idea according to the preference of our mind is the will. And if we are able to continue to consider an idea, or to stop to consider it and consider a new idea, according to our choice, then we are free.

[W]hether he will remove his Contemplation from one *Idea* to another, is many times in his choice; and then he is in respect of his *Ideas*, as much at *liberty*, as he is in respect of Bodies he rests on; He can at pleasure remove himself from one to another. But yet some *Ideas* to the Mind, like some Motions to the Body, are such, as in certain circumstances it cannot avoid, nor obtain their absence by the utmost effort it can use. A Man on the Rack, is not at *liberty* to lay by the *Idea* of

¹⁷ See also *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), §167, 124) and §176, 134–5). For a comment on §45 of the *Conduct*, see Philippe Hamou, *Dans la chambre obscure de l'esprit. John Locke et l'invention du mind* (Paris: Ithaque, 2018), 246–52.

pain, and divert himself with other Contemplations: and sometimes a boisterous Passion hurries our Thoughts, as a Hurricane does our Bodies, without leaving us the liberty of thinking on other things, which we would rather chuse. But as soon as the Mind regains the power to stop or continue, begin or forbear any of these Motions of the Body without, or Thoughts within, according as it thinks fit to prefer either to the other, we then consider the Man as a *free Agent* again. (II.xxi.12, 239–40)

So then, we have the power to forbear from thinking of an object. This power is similar to our power to suspend desire. Just as we have the power to suspend the execution and satisfaction of an actual and pressing desire and to duly consider different objects of desire, “examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others” (II.xxi.47, 263), so we have the power to suspend the consideration of a present idea, to fix our view on any other idea and consider it on all sides. The isolation of obsessive thoughts is similar to the suspension of desire insofar as in the meantime, the agent is not deprived of any idea (or of any desire), but is free to consider other objects of thought (or other objects of desire), instead of prosecuting the same thought (or executing a pressing desire). According to Locke, it is this power of suspension that consists in (what is improperly called) *free-will*. While we use this power, we counter haste in our actions and precipitancy in our thoughts.

Thanks to this power to choose to renew the consideration of an idea (“each of which Considerations is a new *Idea*”; II.xiv.14, 186) or to choose to dismiss an idea, we can guide our thoughts. For sure, it is no easy thing to do; it requires much vigour, for we must constantly try to break the habit of considering the same thoughts and fight against a kind of inertia of the mind. Each time our mind drifts and tends to be captivated by some “insignificant [mental] buzz[es]” (*Conduct*, §45), we must change tack and submit it to the consideration of a new idea, so that it is disturbed and disentangled from its beaten path. It comes to making it deviate from its silly course and to opening a new way of thinking. Doing so, our mind will progressively become more and more governable and we will foster open-mindedness.

As we see, in the end, it is up to us to decide to attentively consider some ideas and to neglect other ones. It is up to us to take the appropriate steps that will issue in the acquisition of a virtuous intellectual trait. This way of consciously directing the flow of our ideas is a kind of mental technique that enables us to have control over our mind. Following Pamela Hieronymi, we can characterise this mental technique as a way to have a “managerial” or “manipulative control” over our own mind.¹⁸ We manipulate our ideas so that our minds follow the paths we want them to follow.¹⁹ This sort of mastery

¹⁸ Pamela Hieronymi, “Controlling Attitudes,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 87 (2006): 53, quoted in Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 126.

¹⁹ This kind of control does not succumb to the objections that Bernard Williams raises against direct doxastic voluntarism, because it does not aim for the acquisition of a specific belief, but for the acquisition of intellectual dispositions. See Bernard Williams, “Deciding to Believe,” chap. 9 in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956–1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

consists in controlling something by taking advantage of its limitations. For instance, we know that our ideas observe certain regularities and tend to associate in certain ways. We may get a managerial control over them in making use of these limitations. The knowledge of these features makes possible our control over our ideas, for in “navigating” within the bounds of these limitations, we can create new regularities.

Thus, we have the power to develop new ways of thinking and to correct vicious doxastic practices. This sort of intellectual self-control makes us capable of actively reconfiguring our character traits. Thanks to this “self-improvement strategy,” we can take control of our epistemic vices, regulate them, and, more generally, “reshape our mental lives.”²⁰ This implies that we consider our epistemic vices as “malleable,” that is to say as liable to be controlled or reconfigured, and also that we envision our mental life in a “goal-directed way” (as a ship we can learn to sail).²¹ Thus, even though he is fully aware of the difficulties we encounter when we endeavour to remodel our intellectual character, Locke is fundamentally optimistic about the prospects of such a reshaping and epistemic vice reduction.

We can now get the measure of the role of the will. If it is possible to govern our mind and to give it a new direction, this self-government does not consist in *believing* at will. The will is involved at another stage: when we decide to consider a specific idea, instead of another one. The voluntary conduct of our mind takes place at this deeper stage. As a consequence, what is similar to an action and is the product of the will is not a belief, but the voluntary thought directed at the doing or not-doing of an action (the consideration of an idea or the abstaining from it). In some respects, very little is under our voluntary control. (The formation of our beliefs is not under our voluntary control.) But in other respects, it is no less than the whole conduct of our understanding that is under our voluntary control. Indeed, thanks to the power we have to choose the ideas we think on, we can open a new shipping route for our mind and acquire new intellectual habits. More precisely, by the repeated determinations of our will (which orders the consideration of an idea or the forbearing from the consideration of it), we can develop specific doxastic practices so that in the end the will need not be employed any more. In Boespflug’s picture, the will intervenes just once, in a kind of sovereign manner, when the agent decides to employ their faculties or to refrain from employing them, when they choose to look for further evidence or to forbear from doing so. In the picture that I am putting forward, the power we have in intellectual matters is also indirect, but it does not reduce to this. The will is called upon many times at the beginning, for the agent must *repeatedly* choose to consider, or not to consider, some ideas, so as to develop a specific doxastic disposition. Until the disposition is acquired, the will comes into play each time some ideas offer themselves: it orders or forbids their consideration. But in the end—once the disposition is acquired—the will is not needed any more.

²⁰ Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 129.

²¹ Dorothea Debus, “Shaping Our Mental Lives: On the Possibility of Mental Self-Regulation,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 116, no. 3 (2015–2016): 7, quoted in Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 169.

So, like the intellectualist reading, the reading that I promote considers that when probabilities are perceived, beliefs are not under the control of the will. The will does not have a direct role to play in belief formation. But compared to the intellectualist reading, there is a far less deflationary role for the will. The main difference lies in the fact that, according to the new picture, the will does not merely come in when we decide to employ or not to employ our faculties; it takes place from the very formation of an intellectual disposition. Whereas for Boespflug “the will’s role in the process of belief formation is ... substantially more marginal than has been thought,” I think it is decisive.²² However, for Locke, what is a matter of the will is not the proportion of our assent (doxastic voluntarism). Moreover, it goes beyond the mere decision to employ or not to employ some faculties (doxastic anti-voluntarism). What is the product of the will is our ordering to consider an idea or to refrain from considering it. This is where the will steps in. This repeated ordering may lead to the development of an intellectual habit. That is why the reshaping of our intellectual life goes through the regular exercise of our will. It requires a firmness of the mind, “constance and assiduity” (*Conduct*, §17), “vigour” and “industry” (§39). And like hard labour in goldmines (§3, 171), things become far easier once the way is flattened and good intellectual habits are settled.

As a consequence, to correct our epistemic vices, we need to be resolutely motivated to do so, for we will involve ourselves all the more easily in our intellectual reshaping if we are genuinely motivated by the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But how can such a self-reformation be driven by the love of truth when this appetite is not more vigorous? What should we do so that our will is only motivated by the desire for truth?

3.2. The Taming of the Will: The Role of Education

For it appears that our will is often perverted. It deviates from the pursuit of truth for its own sake by the presence of stranger interests and non-alethic passions. According to Locke, it is because our love of truth is dulled: our “mind by degrees loses its natural relish of real solid truth” (*Conduct*, §33, 211). As a consequence, to be likely to want our intellectual improvement, our love of truth must first of all be revitalised. How can it be reanimated? If we are discouraged by the difficulties raised by the challenge, how do we begin to set to work?

Locke concedes that, at this stage, we need a strong inducement, and that it can only come from our educators. They are the ones who, when for the first time we correctly come at truth, encourage us to go on the same way.

[I]t is true that at first some lucky hit, which took with somebody and gained him commendation, encouraged him to try again, inclined his thoughts and endeavours that way, till at last he insensibly got a facility in it without perceiving how. (*Conduct*, §4, 174)

²² Boespflug, “Only Light and Evidence: Locke on the will to believe,” 1.

Far from assuming that we always naturally desire to change our intellectual character,²³ Locke is aware that we sometimes lack the motivation to reduce our epistemic vices. In such a case, the remedy comes from outside. We need to be repeatedly stimulated and put to the test by our educators. As a consequence, the cultivation of intellectual virtues presupposes an unescapable part of epistemic luck. It stumbles on what Locke calls “the lucky chance of education and getting into the world” (*Conduct*, §6, 179). What leads us to want to change our intellectual nature—in Lockean terms, what stimulates our love of truth—actually depends on our social environment. We need to be supported by a virtuous epistemic community. The incitements from our educators act like a trigger that stimulates our love of truth and encourages us to initiate the first steps that lead to the road of self-improvement.

That is why Locke is ready to admit that we are not all on a par when it comes to the development of intellectual virtues. About the day labourers in England, he remarks that “the original make of their minds is like that of other men,” they do not “want understanding fit to receive knowledge . . . if they were a little encouraged and helped in it as they should be” (*Conduct*, §8, 182). This observation is of great moment. The possibility of intellectual self-improvement is far more gloomy if we are not educated among “those of a higher condition,” that is to say among “those of a freer fortune and education” which “allow them the opportunities and helps of improvements” (§8). Depending on the epistemic community we live in, it will favour or, on the contrary, hinder the development of our intellectual virtues.

Therefore, the conduct of the understanding is a real social undertaking. It qualifies a bit Locke’s supposed unconditional defence of epistemic autonomy and “epistemological individualism”.²⁴ We understand that we are not responsible for our epistemic character traits from beginning to end. An ethics of virtuous thinking is not purely a matter of individual effort. To think properly, we need time, motivation, and encouragement.

²³ This is contrary to Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 178, 181. Cassam admits that the limit of the self-improvement project is the lack of desire to improve oneself. For then, how will we take steps to break a bad habit? For Cassam, “the initial breakthrough is provided by the experience of failure,” *ibid.*, 184. Such an experience reveals to us to what extent we are in the grip of a very bad epistemic vice. But, as he admits, to be prepared to recognise that one of our character traits has very bad consequences for our intellectual life supposes that we are already on the road to self-improvement and that we are not completely under the thumb of this very epistemic vice. In other words, we stumble on a problem of circularity: “the project of undoing one’s character vices is virtue-dependent,” *ibid.*, 183. At the end of the day, for Cassam, “the onus is therefore on us *as individuals* to minimize the harms done by our epistemic vices,” *ibid.*, 187, my emphasis. To my mind (following Locke), the initial breakthrough is provided by the warnings of our educators and friends and by their encouragements to better ourselves. Locke shows that the prospect of intellectual self-improvement does not entirely lean on the individuals. But here again, we do not escape circularity: for our intellectual self-improvement is possible if and only if we belong to an intellectually virtuous community.

²⁴ Nicholas Jolley, *Locke: His Philosophical Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8–9.

Conclusion: From an Ethics of Belief to an Ethics of Virtuous Thinking

In conclusion, let me sketch some remarks that will help us to understand to what extent the insertion of Locke's remarks in an ethics of virtuous thinking²⁵ rather than in a mere ethics of belief conveys a very different approach to the life of the mind.

First of all, Locke rejects a particular kind of ethics of belief: the one that is associated with a crude sort of doxastic voluntarism, that is to say, with the idea according to which the will plays a direct role in the formation of *each belief*. For under such a view, in order to believe correctly, one should strive to apply the norm of evidence *each time* we are about to make a judgement. If so, our intellectual life would be similar to a chain of distinct acts of the mind and, in order to correctly accomplish each one of them, we should repeatedly apply the evidentialist rule. Such a conception favours the idea according to which our will would be called upon *each time* we would be about to make a judgement. So construed, our intellectual life is analogous to a series of mental decisions about distinct beliefs.²⁶ It is construed as fragmented and "time-sliced," and its proper conduct is thought to be a mere procedural matter.

Now, one may defend an ethics of belief that implies a subtler and indirect doxastic voluntarism. In many respects, this seems to be Locke's view: according to this view, the will does not intervene in the very proportion of our assent *each time* we are about to judge, but it intervenes in an indirect way (when we choose to gather new evidence or not, when we decide to make a more or less diligent enquiry, etc.). Still, if we leave it there, such an ethics of belief would come down to apprehending our intellectual life in "staccato," or in a sequenced way.

However, for Locke, we should not only aim at correctly regulating our assent, or correctly employing our faculties, each time we are on the point of judging, but we should also more fundamentally aim at being epistemically virtuous. When we have reached this epistemic peak, we do not spend our time applying general principles and considering instructions we should strive to follow in order to hit the required threshold of evidence.²⁷ In an ethics of virtuous thinking, our intellectual life is considered as a unified whole. Far from merely bringing our attention to the way we should engage in some procedures (such as "first, gather the evidence for a proposition; then, submit that evidence to a rational evaluation; and finally, proportion the strength of your assent according to the proposition's probability"), Locke encourages us to insert these activities into a more general framework. Instead of promoting a procedural conception of our intellectual life, which would basically consist for the agent in applying rules or

²⁵ Gilbert Ryle ascribes to Locke not an "ethics of belief" but an "ethics of thinking." Gilbert Ryle, "John Locke," in *Critical Essays: Collected Papers Volume 1*, ed. Gilbert Ryle (London: Routledge, 2009), 163. For him, we must not pay too much attention to the fact that Locke's lessons of intellectual self-control were couched in idioms, principles that look like "laboratory lessons."

²⁶ Roger Pouivet, *L'éthique intellectuelle: Une épistémologie des vertus* (Paris: Vrin, 2020), 127.

²⁷ For Locke's distrust on rules in educative matters, see *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, §§64–66.

methods of inquiry, Locke takes the proper intellectual life as one in which the agent aims at developing their entire intellectual potential. Thus, turning from an ethics of belief to an ethics of virtuous thinking leads us to a different approach towards our intellectual life: whereas the former puts much stress on the acme of our intellectual life (our beliefs) and on the punctual acts an agent must do so as to acquire true and well-grounded beliefs, an ethics of virtuous thinking considers it as a whole. It takes into account the fact that our beliefs depend on ways of believing that are fundamentally ways of *being*, which require time and investment to be developed. In other words, Locke does not promote a soilless epistemology, deprived of anthropological anchoring and of attention to the aetiology of belief. He considers diachronic aspects of our epistemic life, not mere punctual epistemic achievements.²⁸

Second, although Locke's recommendations fit the mould of a virtue ethics better than the mould of an ethics of belief, this should not lead us to consider that there is no place for an ethics of belief at all. As a matter of fact, an evidentialist ethics of belief and a virtue epistemology are not necessarily conflicting approaches. They can be made compatible if one conceives the evidentialist rule as a rule that is in fact naturally applied by an agent who has fully developed many intellectual virtues. In this respect, the evidentialist rule is not an extrinsic and abstract rule an epistemic agent should consciously strive to apply; it is rather a rule that they have absorbed, so to speak, a rule which is totally embedded in their mental behaviour. Thanks to their constant exercises, it has become an ingrained rule. In other words, it corresponds to an intellectual virtue developed to its utmost. As Locke observes:

Nobody is made anything by hearing of rules or laying them up in his memory; practice must settle the habit of doing without reflecting on the rule. (*Conduct*, §4, 175)

[H]e that is a good, a virtuous and able man must be made so within. (*Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, §42, 31)

As a consequence, our duty is not to apply the evidentialist rule *each time* we are about to make a judgment, it is rather to work to ensure that it is completely integrated with our intellectual practices. Indeed, once intellectual virtues are acquired and fully developed, this rule will naturally apply and act like second nature for the intellectually

²⁸ About the advantages of virtue epistemology over evidentialism, see Guy Axtell, "From Internalist Evidentialism to Virtue Responsibility," in *Evidentialism and Its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty, 71–87 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Axtell distinguishes the "synchronic rationality" (typical of evidentialism) from the "diachronic or longitudinal reasonableness," typical of virtue epistemology. According to him, we should not simply look for an "accommodation" of these two approaches. He takes as his point of departure "Jason Baehr's claim that internalist evidentialism only needs mending with a 'virtue patch,'" *ibid.*, 73.

virtuous agent. So, at the end of the day, virtue epistemology is the garden within which evidentialism best flourishes.²⁹

But at the same time, the will is essential for developing virtuous intellectual habits; while we train so as to develop intellectual virtues, we must be actively involved in the consideration of the ideas that pass in our minds. We must engage in specific individual acts of training that involve the training of the will.³⁰ The will must be present so that we develop intellectual virtues; but once the latter are entrenched in our mind, there is no need for the will each time we are about to make a judgment (except perhaps in case we face competing and complex evidence). Our will is now replaced by good habit. We have worked so that we do not need any more to systematically rely on it. Locke does not consider that the will must intervene in the process of belief formation from beginning to end, but he acknowledges its key role in the acquisition of virtuous intellectual habits. On the whole, it appears that there is a reflective equilibrium between a virtue epistemology and an evidentialist ethics of belief: the will is necessary to acquire good intellectual dispositions, and the latter are the proper frame for the implementation of the evidentialist doxastic policy.

By way of a third and last remark, it appears that understanding Locke as promoting an ethics of virtuous thinking does justice to his anthropology. Indeed, his remarks on the conduct of our understanding should not be viewed as mere epistemic recommendations agents should apply *whoever they are*, whatever creatures they are. They must be integrated to Locke's remarks on peoples' "duty" and "business" in this world. They presuppose a specific anthropology, according to which God has implanted the love of truth in our minds. In this context, epistemic insouciance is not a mere act of disobedience against the evidentialist rule. It corresponds to a genuine deviance from human nature. It also amounts to disobeying Him who made us as we are. For Locke, if we have to care for the knowledge of truth, it is because our duty is to take care of the faculties God has given us (IV.xvii.24, 687–88).

In the end, we are really responsible for the way we realise our alethic destination. In this, we cannot underestimate the role of our epistemic community. Our educators are the ones who induce the first moves that will result in the development of intellectual virtues. They are responsible for the activation of our passion for truth. Nevertheless, I

²⁹ For the claim that evidentialism and virtue epistemology may be connected, see Angélique Thébert, "Locke et la discipline de l'entendement," *Philosophical Enquiries: Revue des philosophies anglophones*, no. 3 (2014): 58–86 and Jason Baehr, "Evidentialism, Vice and Virtue," in *Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty, 88–102 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For Baehr, "evidentialists and virtue epistemologists are concerned with some common conceptual territory," *ibid.*, 101. "*S* is justified in believing *p* at *t* if and only if *S*'s evidence at *t* appears to *S* to support *p*, provided that, if *S*'s agency makes a salient contribution to *S*'s evidential situation with respect to *p*, *S* functions, qua agent and relative to that contribution, in a manner consistent with intellectual virtue," *ibid.*, 100. I slightly depart from him when he states that "the notion of virtue is intended to play a *mere background or constraining role*," *ibid.*, 101; my emphasis. To my mind, this role is really structuring. Intellectual virtues are the framework within which the search for evidence must necessarily take place.

³⁰ I thank an anonymous referee for this remark.

do not think that this social aspect of Locke's ethics of the mind challenges his exhortation to epistemic autonomy.³¹ For once it is on track, our intellectual self-reformation entirely depends on us.

³¹ On this point, I agree with Alex Neill: "For Locke . . . the individual's autonomy involves at a fundamental level his mastery of his own desires and inclinations; for all but a very few, he says, this self-mastery, a precondition of epistemic autonomy, can be achieved only with the help of others. . . . Habituation, the central business of education, is thus not in conflict with epistemic autonomy, but is for nine out of ten people, at least, a necessary precondition of that autonomy," "Locke on Habituation, Autonomy and Education," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (1989): 244. Neill refers to *Some Thoughts*, §1.

Bibliography

- Axtell, Guy. "From Internalist Evidentialism to Virtue Responsibilism." In *Evidentialism and Its Discontents*. Edited by Trent Dougherty, 71–87. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Ayers, Michael. *Locke*, 2 vols. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Baehr, Jason. "Evidentialism, Vice and Virtue." In *Evidentialism and Its Discontents*. Edited by Trent Dougherty, 88–102. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Boespflug, Mark. "Locke's Principle of Proportionality." *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 101, no. 2 (2019): 237–57.
- . "Only Light and Evidence: Locke on the will to believe." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2021): 1–21.
- . *Locke's Twilight of Probability: An Epistemology of Rational Assent*, New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2023.
- Cassam, Quassim. *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Debus, Dorothea. "Shaping Our Mental Lives: On the Possibility of Mental Self-Regulation." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 116, no. 3 (2015–2016): 341–65.
- Hamou, Philippe. *Dans la chambre obscure de l'esprit. John Locke et l'invention du mind*. Paris: Ithaque, 2018.
- Hieronymi, Pamela. "Controlling Attitudes." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 87 (2006): 45–74.
- Jolley, Nicholas. *Locke: His Philosophical Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . *Toleration and Understanding in Locke*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Locke, John. *The Correspondence of John Locke*. Edited by E. S. de Beer. 8 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976–89.
- . *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- . *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*. Edited by Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996.

- Losonsky, Michael. "John Locke on Passion, Will and Belief." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 4, no. 2 (1996): 267–83.
- Neill, Alex. "Locke on Habituation, Autonomy and Education." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (1989): 225–45.
- Passmore, John. "Locke and the Ethics of Belief." In *Rationalism, Empiricism, and Idealism*. Edited by Anthony Kenny, 23–46. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.
- Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Pouivet, Roger. *L'éthique intellectuelle: Une épistémologie des vertus*. Paris: Vrin, 2020.
- Ryle, Gilbert. "John Locke." In *Critical Essays: Collected Papers Volume 1*, edited by Gilbert Ryle, 154–64. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Stuart, Matthew. *Locke's Metaphysics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013.
- Thébert, Angélique. "Locke et la discipline de l'entendement." *Philosophical Enquiries: Revue des philosophies anglophones*, no. 3 (2014): 58–86.
- Williams, Bernard. "Deciding to Believe." Chap. 9 in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956–1972*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.