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# TO “CLEAR THE MIND OF ALL PERTURBATION”: THE DISCIPLINE OF JUDGMENT IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Is not knowledge a true and only natural pleasure, whereof there is no satiety? Is it not knowledge that doth alone clear the mind of all perturbation? (...) Is there any such happiness as for a man's mind to be raised above the confusion of things, where he may have the prospect of the order of nature and the error of men?

(Francis Bacon, *In Praise of Knowledge*,  
Works VIII, 123)

## Introduction

In one of the most eloquent moments of his relentless attack on “dogmatism”, Joseph Glanvill, the Anglican divine and energetic apologist of the “new experimental philosophy” of the Royal Society, decried the moral and intellectual disaster produced in an ungoverned mind by passions and erroneous judgment:

Confidence in Opinions evermore dwells with untamed passions, and is maintained upon the depraved obstinacy of an ungovern'd spirit. He's but a novice in the Art of Autocracy, that cannot castigate his passions in reference to those presumptions, and will come as far short of wisdom as of science: for the Judgment being the Hegemonical power, and director of action, if It be swaid by the over-bearings of passion, and stor'd with lubricous opinions in stead of clearly conceived truths, and be peremptorily resolved in them, the practice will be as irregular, as the conceptions erroneous. Opinions hold the stirrup, while vice mounts into the saddle. (*Vanity of Dogmatizing*, 1661, 227-8)

Glanvill's immediate target in this text is Scholastic philosophy, but his attack, thrice renewed<sup>1</sup>, is built on an exploration of the vices and errors of the mind so detailed and of so general reach that it acquires a value on its own. The quoted fragment is only a portion of a relatively extensive inquiry into the "disease of our Intellectuals" (62), but is apt in itself to give a fair idea of the tenor of Glanvill's argument. The spirit or mind of man is easily devastated by its own passions and inconsiderate opinions, while passions and opinions set off and reinforce one another, to the vicious ruin of both action and knowledge. Yet there is such a thing as an art of self-government or mastery of oneself that is meant to tame the beasts of the mind and cure its diseases, an art whose main instrument is right judgment. Glanvill's vocabulary here is a significant reference to an idea about self-government inherited by the 17<sup>th</sup> century from Hellenistic and Roman, mostly Stoic, thought: "autocracy" and "hegemonical power" are obvious echoes of a therapeutic philosophy that seems to inform Glanvill's thoughts on the life of the mind.<sup>2</sup>

Glanvill was neither alone nor original in treating about "errors and ignorance" together with the passions and inclinations of the mind under the category of "diseases" or "imperfections". It is indeed noteworthy that in so doing he places "wisdom" and "science" in close vicinity in a work meant to disparage the Schools and advocate the new philosophy. But similar enquiries were frequent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in a number of various types of texts. My intention in this paper is to highlight several such texts, from some "moralist", "scientific" and philosophical quarters of 17<sup>th</sup>-century thought, in order to offer some elements towards an argument about the shaping of an early modern concept of knowledge in the context of moral concerns about the health of the mind. In Bacon's words, quoted in the motto, this is a view of knowledge as that which alone can "clear the mind of all perturbation". In addition, I want to suggest that the notion of what we would call "rational belief" was formed, at least in some areas of the English scene of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as part of a therapeutic search for the health, and virtue of the mind.

My choice of texts is in itself a plea for the importance of reading together authors that would normally be treated by different historians. I look at some writings on the passions, at several authors associated with the experimental philosophy, and at some elements of the theory of knowledge and the reflections on the conduct of the understanding in the work of John Locke. At a general level it is perhaps interesting enough to see that there are striking similarities between the analyses of the defects

of the mind and their remedies in, say, Reynolds, Glanvill and Locke. But similarities apart, it is more important to notice that such a cross-reading can reveal important features of all these categories of texts. On the one hand, the treatises of the passions can be recognized as proposing tentative steps towards an account of knowledge as part of their moral and therapeutic aims. On the other, the reader may be made alive to the moral and therapeutic underpinnings of the theories of rational belief in authors credited with the birth of modern epistemology or scientific method.

In looking at the relationship between passions and errors, and between the moral and the epistemological, I tread in the steps of Susan James's important contribution to this issue.<sup>3</sup> I hope to add to that path of inquiry by focusing more on the English scene, and by proposing the therapeutic scenario of knowledge. The central operators in this scenario are a rich notion of "examination" (of opinions and of self), the curious but central notion of the "regulation of assent", and an idea about the virtue of the mind, with both moral and cognitive aspects, that may be to a large extent indebted to the Stoic philosophical tradition.

This study is equally indebted to the work Peter Harrison has devoted to highlighting the importance of theological anthropology for the problem of knowledge in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> The story of the Fall and the quest for a restoration of the human being is indeed the background against which the elements of an account of knowledge I am concerned with are developed. Yet I tend to emphasize a more optimistic view of man than the Augustinian perspective which is Harrison's focus, one that finds room, in keeping with a Christian humanist reworking of the ancient traditions, for both virtue and wisdom.

It has been my intention to isolate in the texts I deal with the cartographies of the ills of the mind together with the proposed remedies, as well as the significance of such endeavors for the purposes of the respective authors. There seems to be continuity here between the Renaissance genre of the "anatomies" of the mind and the late 17<sup>th</sup>-century "histories" of the mind. The treatises of the passions are species of the former which draw on both the *de anima* and the rhetorical traditions, and thus combine maps of the faculties of the soul with analyses of its passions and errors. But there is an experimental bend of these texts, due to their exercise in autoscopy and search for remedies, that makes them close relatives of the more markedly experimental, ultimately Baconian, endeavor of the "histories" to be found both in the experimental

philosophical tracts and in John Locke. These “histories”, or thorough experimental investigations, of the mind will become in their case the constant counterpart of the “histories” of natural phenomena. In a way, the search for truth about nature in these 17<sup>th</sup>-century authors is at the same time a search for truth about the self, together with a search for ways of rectifying and improving the mind.

## 1. Treatises of the passions

The cartographies of the mind to be found in these treatises are basically “therapeutic psychologies”<sup>5</sup>, i.e. psychologies of action and knowledge meant to found a therapeutic philosophy, or what Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* called a “culture of the mind” (Works III, 419). The interest of the treatises I look at is that, as a complement to the usual investigations of the passions, they also look specifically at the “understanding” or “wit” of man, at its healthy state as well as at the malfunctioning of the belief-forming processes, and in so doing give an interesting formulation of the problem of error. Unlike the treatment of the problem in the tracts of Aristotelian logic usual at the time, their analysis of error involves a “psychological” investigation of the cognitive faculties rather than an analysis of the formal features of incorrect syllogisms.<sup>6</sup>

The sometimes baffling characteristic of these writings on the passions is their eclectic usage of theoretical elements belonging to originally opposing traditions. For instance, the Thomistic “sensitive appetite” as well as the Platonic-Aristotelian parts of the soul stand together with terms and conceptions about the health of the mind due mainly to the Stoic tradition.<sup>7</sup> There are some features of this conception of a healthy mind that are worth emphasizing, as they seem to form a general orientation of these, as well as of the other texts we will look at. All three authors I will deal with in this section speak one way or another about virtue as health and describe it in terms of “constancy”, “temperance”, or “prudence”. With various emphases due to the recuperation of this or that Stoic author, these are all meant to stand for a disposition of the mind characterized by “firmness, order, endurance, equilibrium and permanence” rather than for particular virtues.<sup>8</sup>

Such a disposition of mind is the fruit, crucially, of an assiduously practiced discipline of judgment, which is at the same time a discipline



of emotions and of the self. This discipline involves an attentive examination of one's opinions, or rather belief-forming processes: both errors and wrong actions are ultimately due to bad dispositions of the mind in assessing the truth of representations, the value of things to which one relates, as well as, more generally, to a bad conformation of a narrow, self-loving self. I will just note here (and say more about it later) that the notion of self-love employed in these texts is interestingly not primarily the Augustinian one, but a close companion of the intemperate, inconstant mind.

The examination of opinions is principally, in Stoic terms, a discipline of "assent". The term surfaces here and there in the treatises of the passions, but will become central in a Glanvill or Locke. Assent is the voluntary operation by which the mind accepts or gives its accord to "representations", or "impressions".<sup>9</sup> It is also, importantly, a notion that unifies the theoretical and practical sides of reason.<sup>10</sup> In so doing, it allows an identification of the vicious state of mind that stands behind both errors and passions as the intemperance of an inconstant, precipitate mind: a precipitate or rash, or a changeable and weak assent to unclear or false impressions is the behavior of the inconstant "fool". Conversely, it permits the unification of moral and intellectual virtues around the firm constancy of a tempered mind: a firm and orderly assent to true impressions is the sign of the wise.<sup>11</sup> Crucially, the regulation of assent is meant as a cure of the intemperance of the mind: it is not just a momentary decision, but a constant exercise (a discipline) meant to develop a virtuous habit. A disciplined assent counters both errors and passions, and makes possible both science and the moral life.

The early Stoic notion of assent (*sunkatathesis*) informs the terms of the later Stoics' accounts of the discipline of the mind as well. As Brad Inwood has suggested, Epictetus's *prohairesis* or Seneca's *iudicium* are both "a form of assent and a stable disposition that constitutes the locus of happiness".<sup>12</sup> Right judgment, then, as a firm and unchangeable disposition to assent to the truth and right value of things, is the very instrument of the art of self-government; it is also the locus of our freedom and happiness.

### **Thomas Wright**

Thomas Wright's *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1604) starts out with a definition of the passions that insists on their inordinate effects

on the soul of man. Among other things, they are, importantly, “perturbations”, which is what Zeno the Stoic called them, as reported in Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*. The name is fit as “they trouble wonderfully the soule, corrupting the iudgement, & seducing the will, inducing (for the most part) to vice and commonly withdrawing from vertue, and therefore some call them maladies, or sores of the soul”. (8) The understanding is blinded by the conjoined action of passions, imagination and a seduced, or else wicked, will. Both the imagination and the will work together to find out, and present the understanding with, reasons for passions, thus placing “green spectacles before the eyes of our wit”. (51)

As remedy to the passions, Wright insists on a discipline of judgment (rather than on grace, say).<sup>13</sup> In the middle of his discussion of the effects of the passions on the understanding, Wright offers an example of remedy that has all the colors of the Stoic genre of advice: if we are to console a “bereft woman”, we should offer her all sorts of “perswasions which tend to rectify her judgment”. (53)<sup>14</sup> Similar advice, including the exercise of judgment, constant examination of the work of one’s passions, as well as the practice of a knowledge of when and how to “refrain consent” to the immediate representations offered by the passions, is the matter of Book III, devoted to remedies and means of fighting the passions.

An interesting moment of Wright’s treatise is his account of the “defects of our understandings” in Book VI. Faithful to his general aim of pursuing a “*nosce teipsum*” investigation in the manner of the ancients (6),<sup>15</sup> Wright concludes his analysis of the passions with some forays into the territories of the will and the wit for a better understanding, he says, of the “universall causes, from whence inordinate passions proceede”. (295) As far as the wit is concerned, the discussion is most interesting for the problem of knowledge we are concerned with here. Wright proposes two sorts of defects: ignorance, from which “floweth vice”, and error, responsible for “heresie” (*idem*). Yet his development of the chart of defects is hardly as neat as that. Explicitly under error, Wright places errors regarding “the last end” and the “means”; presumably, these are heresies against the revealed truth of the Scripture. I will say a few words about his treatment of “ignorance” in a moment; for now, I will note that there is actually a third category of defects in Wright’s list – a sort of corrupt tendencies of the intellect, not easily amenable under the categories of “ignorance” or “error” in his strict sense.

One such defect or “imperfection” is “curiositie in knowing things not necessarie”. (312) The interesting thing here is that, beside the more

familiar injunction against prying into “mysteries”, Wright also speaks of curiosity as inquiring into other men’s actions at the expense of self-examination. Such blindness to one’s self is actually a form of self-love; yet Wright’s reference here is not Augustine, but Galen’s *Of the Affections and Errors of the Soul*, a work in which the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century medical doctor is mostly concerned with the therapy of the soul. There, the beginning of therapy is conditioned on one’s realization of one’s folly – a difficult task, since everyone loves themselves to the point of resisting even the beginning of examination.<sup>16</sup> Self-love appears here in the context of a cognitive cure of the mind.

The second defect in the nameless third category is practically a continuation of the first: people (and especially “the wisest”) are not only in love with themselves, but idolatrously so, and it is this self-admiration that accounts for a particular vice that we will see emerging again and again in other analyses: the obstinacy in opinions, or the “paynes many men bestowe, in confirming their preconceived errors”. (317)

The third defect here is also worth a notice: “distraction” is the name of the vice against mental concentration and perseverance: in the middle of the most serious meditations, in prayer or in study, men’s minds “wander in foreign countries”, and one is hardly master of one’s own thoughts, but rather at the mercy either of the Devil, or of his passions and imagination, or else of a general bad disposition of an “inconstant mind desirous of variety and alteration”. (318)

As for ignorance, Wright actually speaks of “ignorance and errors” at once, and in doing so rings a powerful skeptical note as to the extent of our knowledge, while, even more spectacularly, performing a *mise-en-abîme* of his own treatise. We are in the dark concerning not only God and, at the bottom level of creation, the “base creatures”, but also concerning our own souls and bodies. We are therefore ignorant of most of the things that a theory of the passions (like Wright’s own) is supposed to build on. Equally, we are ignorant of the important elements of a theory of knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

Why this ignorance is a source of passions and vice Wright does not spell out explicitly, but there is an indication in his notes on the general “difficultie in understanding” that this is a cause for the “dissenting and contradicting Sects” of philosophers. (298) Moreover, self-love and idolatrous vanity, as well as lack of mastery of our own thoughts may be meant partly as a further explanation why ignorance breeds vice. Thus

the limits (as yet) of our knowledge are treated together with the mismanagement of the conduct of our intellects.

### **Edward Reynolds**

Edward Reynolds's *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man* (1640) is a blend of Aristotle (via Aquinas) and Seneca, but with correctives for both, including an extensive treatment of the ways in which the mind of man can go astray, but also of its "dignities" and "perfections"; it is not strong on lists of particular remedies, but speaks with warmth of the power knowledge has to guide the soul to God (449-59), and of the possibility to advance in what he calls, as Bacon did, the "culture of the mind". (11)

In treating of the "corrupt effects of the passions" on the understanding and the will, Reynolds pays close attention to the way passions mix with the process of judgment and of the formation of beliefs. In so doing, he also uses the language of assent. One such effect he dubs "imposture or seduction" and is very close to Wright's analysis: under the thrall of impatient passion, man "laboureth next to incline and prepare his Mind for assent, and to get Reason on the same side with Passion". (64) Such impatient assent to false representations is coupled with a series of moral failings, themselves due to other passions or inclinations of the mind: we are inclined to give reasons for passions and maintain them because of "love of our ease" (65); and generally men (especially the simple people), driven by "those two Credulous Qualities, of Ignorance and Fear", are ready to receive all sorts of doctrines, "not onely willingly, but with greediness also" – a sign of a strange species of "Voluntary Humilitie". (66-7) A second effect is to "alienate" or "withdraw" reason from an impartial examination of the objects of its desires. If generally the truth is masked by passions, it is also the case that passion makes one unwilling to search for it: Reynolds calls this "Voluntarie Ignorance" and adds that it is mixed with "fear of being deterred from the vice". (68)

In a further analysis of the defects of our knowledge, Reynolds includes the work of the passions in a more comprehensive analysis of "corruptions". There are, according to Reynolds, four ways in which knowledge is corrupted. The first is ignorance, both natural and voluntary, and we have seen the role of the passions in voluntary ignorance. The second is curiosity: the problem here is again not with the (forbidden) objects of curiosity, but with the inclination to "conjectures" or "speculations" of a

spirit neither patient enough nor disciplined enough to rest in solid demonstration. (463).

The third class is of “uncertainty of opinions”. “Opinion” is actually by definition uncertain: it is identified with “the Fluctuation, wavering and uncertainty of Assents, when the Understanding is left floating, and as it were in *Aequilibrio*” (463), and is also “with fear lest the contrary should be true”. (464) Be it the effect of the disproportion between the understanding and its object, or of skeptical “subtlety of wit”, opinion is a corruption. But there is a sense in which “irresolution” may be commendable. Here, interestingly, Reynolds sketches a recommendation for the health of the mind by discipline of judgment: what is praiseworthy is

...the softness of judgment, which will not suffer itself to be captivated, either to its own conceits, or unto such unforcible reasons, in the which it is able to descry weakness. And this is that which Pliny commends in his friend Titus Ariston (...) a learned cautelousness of judgment, which made him so long suspend his Assent, till he had weighed the severall repugnancies of reasons, and by that means found out some truth whereon to settle his conceit. (481)

Reynolds’s fourth class is “error”, which he defines as “a peremptory and habituall assent, firmly and without wavering fixed upon some falsehood under the shew of truth.” (483) While the first cause of error is briefly identified as sin, it is the “secondary causes” that are treated in detail and are worth our attention. The first is “abuse of principles”. This has to do with two inclinations of the mind, one natural, the other vicious: on the one hand, the mind needs to have “something to rest itself upon” and build from there (484), but on the other it tends to use these principles as “a coloured Glass” for every belief it forms; and most of the times, these principles are false. (489) The second and third causes are an “affectation of singularity” in a vain mind which will form beliefs so as to stand out from the crowd (490) and “a too credulous prejudice and opinion of Authority” (493). The fourth is the passions attached to the object of knowledge. Here Reynolds resumes the discussion mentioned above and insists on the effect of “imposture”: passions “win over the Iudgement on their side”. He adds that this is a pervasive miscarriage of our inquiries: “what was at first but a wish, is at last become an Opinion: *Quod nimis volumus facile credimus*, we easily believe what we will willingly desire.” (495)

Reynolds does not say explicitly that the discipline of judgment I mentioned above needs to be seen as the general cure of the ills of the mind; but the suggestion is there, and it is consonant with his portrait of the wise man as characterized by “severe and unmovable constancie of Minde in Vertue”. (50)

### **Peter du Moulin**

In the Preface to his *Peace and Contentment of Minde* (1657), Peter du Moulin announces his purpose to be to correct the “book” of man’s spirit upon the books of nature, Scripture, and God’s providence. He is less interested in “anatomizing” the soul and speculating about its structure; the task is actually close to impossible, since the spirit of man, like the eye, cannot see itself. More profitable then, and easier, is “to learne the right government” of the soul. (170) It is enough to know for this purpose that our postlapsarian souls are reigned by discord and confusion, and to acknowledge “the blind and rash nature of the spirit of man”. To do so is already to prove humble and ready for an education in moderation and wisdom. (171) Du Moulin seems to be referring here to the same therapeutic topos we have noticed in Wright, one indebted to the ancient tradition of the cure of the soul: the cure begins once you become ready for the cure, which is first and foremost to curb your self-love and acknowledge your folly and need of repair.

Du Moulin’s treatment of passions and opinions bears the stamp of Epictetus: the Stoic philosopher is invoked explicitly several times and is behind Du Moulin’s insistence that the key to the peace of mind is the rectification of our opinions.<sup>18</sup> Passions are occasioned by opinions, and right opinion is their moderator. (209) The only way to free oneself of them is to “heale the understanding of erroneous opinions” (207), which comes with a constant exercise in the right valuing of all things (85-7).

Most interesting is what Du Moulin has to say about virtue. In dealing with the “ornaments of the understanding”, he works with the Aristotelian distinction between “sciences” that “consider universals”, and “prudence”, whose objects are “particular things, casual and uncertaine”. (184) But in a reversal of the Aristotelian hierarchy, Du Moulin places prudence above science: if science is the “husbandry of the soul” and comes first in order, prudence is “above Science in dignity” (177), since it teaches men “to live well and dye well” (178). Prudence is thus recast in the role of guide to all the virtues; more than that, it is said to comprehend them

all, and is defined as being “religious, just, constant, and temperate”. (181) It is true, it deals with particulars and uncertainties, and thus is often conquered by our “folly and precipitate rashnesse” (184), but it is the aim, precisely, of the constant examination of opinions to form such a “golden temper” in our minds (78). The value of prudence as a virtue of the mind, then, seems to lie in the disposition of mind it engenders rather than in the presence or lack of universality and certainty. The invocation of Epictetus in this respect seems to underlie this revaluation of Aristotelian values. Du Moulin’s definition of virtue (in the singular) bears unmistakable Stoic echoes: it is a “clame state of the soul, firme, equall, magnanimous, meeke, religious and beneficiall to a mans selfe and to others” (332) and it is the fruit of right opinion and well governed passion.

Du Moulin all but erases the borderline between moral and intellectual virtues. If prudence is said to be an intellectual virtue, justice is given as the moral virtue. But “just”, we have seen, is part of the definition of “prudence”, while justice is described, echoing a long, Platonic, tradition, as “the equal temper and just proportion of all the faculties and motions of the soul” (332). In addition, the two “vertues of Justice”, meekness (or docility, or humility) and magnanimity (or generosity) are essential ingredients in the “prudent” state of mind. Magnanimity makes the mind constant (342), while humility is crucial to the work of examination of opinions and a defense against obstinacy and arrogance: under its guidance, man “will labour to heale himself of all arrogant opinions and obstinate prejudices, being alwayes ready to receive better information and submit himself to reason” (341). The discipline of judgment, then, is given here a prominent role in the work towards the virtues of the mind, which is also a work on the self. Generosity and humility together are the best defense against pride, or “presumption, and a blinde immoderate love of a mans selfe”, which is responsible for his “perpetuall unquietness and vacillation” (268-9).<sup>19</sup>

Also noteworthy is Du Moulin’s treatment of the particular passions. Obstinacy is an interesting case, since it is the odd item here, and not a usual candidate of the tables of passions. But in light of the above, it is indeed one of the miscarriages of the mind, and an important one given Du Moulin’s insistence on the rectification of opinions. The man obstinate in his opinions is eloquently portrayed as a spirit inhabiting a narrow, stuffed room (a “small cabine”), afraid of changing views. By contrast, the “great spirits” are like dwellers of large houses, with many chambers and “severall apartements for several Offices”, and are thus accustomed

to change vistas. (276) The obstinate man is doubly vicious, morally and intellectually at once and by the same token: his pride, narrowness and “timorousness” and his mismanagement of the faculty of judgment are sides of the same coin.

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These authors’ cartographies of the mind make therefore the important connection between errors and passions, between the discipline of judgment and the virtues (at once moral and intellectual) of the mind. All of this, together with their concern with the vices of credulity and obstinacy, with the inconstancy and rashness of the mind, as well as with the specific notion of self-love we have analyzed will be present in our other texts as well.

## 2. Experimental natural philosophy

The subtitle of Part I of Robert Boyle’s *Considerations Touching the Usefulness of Experimentall Philosophy* (1664) promises to speak of its “Usefulness in reference to the Minde of Man”. Such concern with the improvement of the mind (which to Boyle meant curing its errors and enlarging its capacities) may strike an odd note to a modern scientific ear, but it was a pervasive feature of many English “scientific” writings in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. To a large extent, this is a Baconian inheritance: Bacon’s doctrine of the “idols of the mind” in the first book of his *New Organon* (Works IV) is most of the time in the background of later 17<sup>th</sup>-century treatments of the imperfections of the mind, as are the methodological prescriptions presented as a proper cure.

We are faced here with a curious and yet to be fully explored phenomenon of the intellectual history of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in England: the explorations of the life of the mind in “moralist” literature are absorbed into a natural philosophy which thereby (or because it, too) assumes a moral purpose. As instruments to that end, the experimental philosophers I will present here work with a psychology of knowledge that is part and parcel of their epistemology, and aim to elaborate a “history” of the defects of the mind which is impressive in its scope and an immediate companion of their methodological interests.<sup>20</sup>

It is my suggestion that the regulation of assent and examination of opinions (a language which becomes pervasive in these texts) is crucial



to these moral-methodological leanings. It seems that these notions are transferred from the domain of practical life into that of natural philosophy together with the psychology of knowledge. It could be so since the experimental natural philosophy proposed itself as an exploration of the contingent rather than the universal and as a practical “science” (some said “art”), where “practical” covers not just a strict utilitarian aim, but also, in Boyle’s words, a “usefulness in reference to the mind of man”.

### Joseph Glanvill

The question of the governance of assent figures prominently in Joseph Glanvill’s *Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661). In his review of the “causes of our Ignorance and Intellectual weakness” (61), he makes the errors of the senses and of the imagination boil down to the same “rashness” of the understanding that makes easy game of the information presented to the mind by the two faculties. What Glanvill says specifically about imagination is actually an account of obstinacy and credulity, when an ungrounded opinion is taken as first principle. But “praecipitancy” is indeed the malady proper to the intellect: Glanvill insists on

the *forwardness* of our *Understandings assent*, to slightly examin’d *conclusions*, contracting many times a firm and obstinate belief from weak inducements; and that not only in such things, as immediately concern the sense, but in almost every thing that falls within the scope of our enquiry. (106-7)

For Glanvill, the maladies of assent are maladies of “our so easily seducible Understandings” (117). He adds that this is a malfunction of an originally healthy condition of the human mind. In traditional terms, Glanvill says that since the “perfection of a Faculty is Union with its Object”, and since therefore the intellect is “perfected by Truth”, it will “with all the impatience, which accompanies strong desire, breath after its enjoyment”. (107) But ours is a fallen mind, which can no longer discern truth and “our impatient minds” are prone to entertain or give assent to any false notion without taking the time to question it: our understandings, divorced from their “dearest object, are as forward to defile themselves with every meretricious semblance, that the variety of opinion presents them with. Thus we see the inconsiderate vulgar, prostrating their assent to every shallow appearance.” (113)

The impatience, the forwardness, the desire, and even the greed of the mind in its present state is therefore the fallen or distorted image of an originally or perhaps ideally well-functioning mechanism of epistemic and moral flourishing. To counter this fallen rashness is, says Glanvill, to learn how to regulate your assent; nevertheless, the task is dauntingly difficult. (109)

Another reason of our ignorance and error, and a most pernicious one, is for Glanvill the action of the affections. In particular, it is love and self-love that accompany the maladies of assent. The reason why the affections have such a powerful hold of our understandings is because we are caught in a circle of reflected self-love: since love unites the object of interest to the soul, we become amorously attached to our ideas and they become “but *our selves* in another *Name*”: “For every man is naturally a *Narcissus*, and each *passion* in us, no other but *self-love* sweetened by milder Epithets.” (119)

This is perhaps the most serious failing: what at one level is simply an error of judgment, is at bottom the grievous moral failure of remaining a prisoner to the perspective of one’s private self, and being unable to embrace the perspective of the whole. Glanvill says as much, quoting Bacon: “Our demonstrations are levied upon Principles of our own, not universal Nature: And, as my Lord *Bacon* notes, we judge from the *Analogy* of our selves, not the *Universe*.” (193-4)<sup>21</sup> Glanvill quotes the same phrase we’ve seen in Reynolds, *facile credimus quod volumus*, and enlarges upon the effect of love on the understanding: as forms of self-love, he enumerates the fact that we owe many of our opinions to our natural constitutions<sup>22</sup>, custom and education, interest, and our affection for our own inventions (“we love the issues of our Brains”, 135); as forms of love for others, there is mainly our reverence of antiquity and of authority (a “pedantick Adoration”, 136).

Glanvill’s main target for attack is of course “dogmatism”. Among other features, dogmatism is for Glanvill an effect of ignorance, where ignorance is the result of “shallow passive intellects” assenting to “every slight appearance” (225). It is also married to “untamed passions” and reinforced by the “obstinacy of an ungovern’d spirit” (227). Again, as he puts it in “Against Confidence in Philosophy” (1676), this is both an intellectual and a moral vice: “’Tis Pride, and Presumption of ones self that causeth such forwardness and assurance”. Above all, it is a failure of self-government: “For one of the first Rules in the Art of Self-Government is, to be modest in Opinions: And this Wisdom makes Men considerate

and wary, distrustful of their own Powers, and jealous of their Thoughts". (30)

In describing the "generous soul" or the "nobler spirit" as the one who manages to rise above the Narcissus point of view and embrace the perspective of the universe, Glanvill explicitly invokes the Stoic ideal of stability and constancy. (*Vanity*, 229) A mind governed by right judgment is also, for Glanvill, the bottom rock of both "felicity" and "liberty of judgment": for "there is no greater Vassalage than that of being enslaved to Opinions" ("Against Confidence", 32).

The regulation of assent is the main rule that Philosophy (Glanvill means of course experimental philosophy) teaches man; it thus fulfills her principal office, which is "to teach Men the right use of their Faculties, in order to the extending and enlarging of their Reasons": this rule is "to be wary and diffident, not to be hasty in our Conclusions, or over-confident in Opinions; but to be sparing of our assent, and not to afford it but to things clearly and distinctly perceiv'd." ("Of Scepticism and Certainty", 51)

### **Robert Boyle**

Robert Boyle also insists on the careful management of assent and on the moral and intellectual virtues that are to be acquired in the process. In *Things Above Reason* (1681), he writes that "a sincere understanding is to give, or refuse its assent to propositions according as they are or are not true, not according as we could or could not wish they were so" (23) and calls this virtue "impartiality".

The condition of the mind that makes rational belief such a difficult and serious matter is the one rehearsed in all the natural philosophical writings as well as in the treatises on the passions that we have investigated. Here is his description of the corrupt mind in *Reconcilableness of Reason and Religion* (1675):

Our Intellectual Weaknesses, or our Prejudices, or Prepossessions by Custom, Education, &c. our Interest, Passions, Vices, and I know not how many other things, have so great and swaying an Influence on them, that there are very few Conclusions that we make, or Opinions that we espouse, that are so much the pure Results of our Reason, that no personal Disability, Prejudice, or Fault, has any Interest in them. (27-8)

This is part of Boyle's argument that there is an important distinction between "reason" or "right reason" and each and every person's reasoning: right reason is to be trusted above all in things accessible to it, but the individual's reasoning is most of the times a slave to passions and "prepossessions". To strive to reach and proportion oneself to right reason is the great work that man needs to undertake.

It hasn't perhaps been stressed enough how important it is for Boyle to say in, after all, Baconian fashion, that in order to do experimental philosophy one needs at least to have begun to purge his mind of errors and passions; and that at the same time, experimental philosophy is one privileged way to help with this cure of the mind. In the *Christian Virtuoso*, Part I (1690), Boyle makes such a virtuous circle revolve around what he calls a "well-disposed mind", the qualities of which are to be "both docile and inclin'd to make pious applications of the Truths he discovers". (3) Such a quality of mind is both requisite for engaging in the experimental study of nature and, in a perfected form, one of the fruits of it, which is one of the arguments Boyle gives in support of the idea that experimental philosophy is an excellent way to "the reception of a Reveal'd Religion" (103).

"Docility" in the sense Boyle uses it is a discerning quality of a mind devoted to truth, and is remarkably close to Du Moulin's "humility". A "docile" man "will easily discern that he needs further information" when his evidence is not clear, and has a "habit of discerning the cogency of an Argument or way of probation". (46) It is opposed both to credulity (109) and to the usual suspect for the new philosophy, the disputing way of the Schools, which encourages vanity and the appraisal of wit above "sincere love of truth" (46). Experimental enquiry, Boyle claims, is apt to cultivate just this quality of mind in its adepts:

An Accustomance of endeavouring to give Clear Explications of the Phaenomena of Nature and discover the weakness of those solutions that Superficial Wits are wont to make and acquiesce in does insensibly work in him a great and ingenuous Modesty of Mind. (103)

Boyle calls this "modesty of mind" (or "docility") an intellectual *and* a moral virtue and describes it in the same terms, familiar by now, of the regulation of assent: to be wary of giving assent too hastily, to form always tentative conclusions, but to remain always open to new information and to be ready to change or discard your own opinions on

the basis of new “proofs” even if your opinions are agreeable to you. (105-6)

Interestingly, on the subject of the best direction to the mind, Boyle contrasts experimental enquiry not only with the scholastic way, but also with mathematics “and other Demonstrative parts of Philosophy”. Demonstrations, he says, may have the advantage of strict examination, but they deal with “Truths a Man knows”. The superiority of experimental enquiry lies in its “Fitting him [the enquirer] to Discern the force of a good Argument, and Submit willingly to Truths clearly evinc’d, how little soever he may have expected to find such Conclusions true.” (107) There are several ideas involved here: one is that experimental philosophy leads to true discoveries, i.e. discoveries of truths about nature that one couldn’t just find in one’s own head; secondly, to accustom yourself to such a mode of discovery is to learn to see unexpected truths (in Boyle’s words, “improbable truths”); thirdly, in learning that, one also learns that the stock of what he knows already is very small and that there is more to find out (108); lastly, learning to open up to the world is learning to downplay your private perspective and vanity: it is to learn docility and modesty of mind.

The question of demonstration is also important to Boyle when he deals with the subject of “kinds or degrees of demonstration”, or else degrees of certainty.<sup>23</sup> Absolute certainty (of things “that can never be other than true”) is called “metaphysical certainty”; but no such thing can ever be achieved in natural philosophy. “Physical certainty” shares with “moral certainty” the inferior level on the scale of degrees of certainty. “Moral certainty” in its strict sense is used in the domain of practical philosophy, but the model of inquiry it provides (a judicial model of comparing a sufficient number of testimonies, or “concurrence of probabilities”, which together “may well amount to a Moral certainty”, cf. *Reconcilableness*, 94-5) proved so powerful and cogent for the situation in natural philosophy that Boyle often uses the term instead of “physical certainty”.

The comparison with mathematics referred to above is also indicative, therefore, of the link between the “moral certainty” involved in the study of nature and the discipline of the mind made possible by it. I will try to explore this connection in the next section.

### Probability and attention

In section xiii of Book II of his *History of the Royal Society of London* (1667), Thomas Sprat describes the Royal Society's "way of inquiry" or experimental method in terms that emphasize its free and tentative manner: the utmost care is taken that the mind remains free from any imposition so it can be alert to circumstances and follow the indications of the observed things themselves, even if, or especially when, they indicate a course different to the one already engaged in:

They are careful... to keep themselves free, and change their course, according to the different circumstances, that occur to them in their operations; and the several alterations of the Bodies, on which they work. The true Experimenting, has this one thing inseparable from it, never to be a fix'd and settled Art, and never be limited by constant Rules. (89)

The comparison Sprat makes to reinforce his point is surprising, but significant: the art of experimenting is "like that which is call'd Decence in human life", which, though of great importance, "is never wholly to be reduced to standing Precepts; and may almost as easily be obtain'd, as defin'd." (90) Sprat is proud to announce that the experimental philosophy is an art (rather than a demonstrative science) with no fixed rules and precepts. The comparison with "decence" places experimental philosophy in the company of practical arts or low sciences, with their conjectural methodological procedures.

There is much similarity, I think, between this "art of decence" and Boyle's notion, repeated several times in his writings, that much discovery in experimental activity is due to hints rather than to some rigorously followed method. As he puts it towards the end of the first part of *Usefulness*, it is one of the signs of God's favor and of his management of the mysteries of nature that those secrets of it that have been discovered "have been attain'd rather ... by accidental Hints, then accurate Enquiries ... As if God design'd to keep Philosophers humble, and (though he allow regular Industry, sufficient encouragement, yet) to remain Himself dispenser of the chief Mysteries of Nature." (110-1) God's benevolence is in direct relation with the study of nature understood as an unveiling of "secrets" or "treasures" and with the conduct of the mind so that it becomes capable of seeing those secrets. The discipline of assent, in this case, is the exercise of keeping the mind open to grasp God's hints.

Rose-Marie Sargent has given an illuminating account of Boyle's experimental philosophical program for the interpretation of nature, premised, she argues, on a theological view of creation and on a related ontology of the "cosmic mechanism". Nature, for Boyle, is a divinely complex and teleological text and, as a hermeneutic procedure, his corpuscular philosophy aimed to discover the hidden mechanisms beyond "the determination of regularities".<sup>24</sup> But the complex interrelations that hold among the qualities of bodies are not of the order of absolute, self-evident principles, that the mind might grasp immediately by the light of reason, but are only known in relation to each other, as parts of the system, and therefore subject to "conditional propositions". The search into nature therefore can only deal in probabilities, or moral certainties, and as such requires a "diligent and devout reader", as opposed to a superficial one<sup>25</sup>, who can remain flexible and open enough (a sign of the virtue of modesty) in order to grasp the shapes of the "concurrences of probabilities" and follow their lead (or hints). Thus, the attentive and pious inquiry into nature is an open-ended process of understanding. It is also a way to transform one's own moral being: "an experimental approach to nature can help eradicate (...) prejudices because it is the way by which one's vision of the world can be expanded".<sup>26</sup>

Probability, therefore, is in a sense tightly linked to the important notion of "attention" (which, like "docility", is one of the qualities of a "well-disposed mind"). In this sense, there is an interesting distribution of the terms "probability" and "opinion", sometimes thought to cover the same epistemological area, but which from the point of view of the quality of the mind engaged in inquiry may be placed in opposite categories. In his *Vanity*, Glanvill warns that the "treasures" of nature cannot become available to the "careless Inquirer". He extends the simile along the lines of a depth-surface dichotomy, but interestingly associates it with a dichotomy of "truth" and "verisimilitude":

*Verisimilitude* and *Opinion* are an easie purchase; and these counterfeits are all the Vulgars treasure: But true Knowledge is as dear in acquisition, as rare in possession. Truth, like a *point* or *line*, requires an acuteness and intention to its discovery; while verisimilitude, like the expanded *superficies*, is an obvious sensible on either hand, and affords a large and easie field for loose enquiry. (64)

“Opinion”, then, is an easy, superficial gain, as opposed to the effort required for attaining truth; its opposite is not “science”, but “true knowledge” or “truth”. But truth in natural philosophy, Glanvill emphasizes, with Boyle, is only (highly) probable. Yet the “probability” in question, he implies here, should be one dearly purchased, and is rather a token of truth than of mere opinion: truth (even if in the guise of what is probable) can only come with an intent and acute mind, while opinion is the harvest of the superficial mind that can hardly qualify for the task of experimental work.

References to “attention” in the context of the idea of the search for truth are also conspicuous in Boyle’s *Usefulness* and *Christian Virtuoso*. True penetration of the grand Architecture (or the grand Book) of the world is the work of the “Intelligent Spectator, who is able both to understand and to relish” it. (*Usefulness* I, 4) There seems to be a hierarchy of observers of nature, depending on the degree of attention, which is at the same time a degree of freedom from the passions and prepossessions of the mind:

For some Men, that have but superficial, tho’ conspicuous, Wits, are not fitted to penetrate such Truths, as require a lasting and attentive Speculation; and divers, that want not the Abilities, are so taken up by their Secular Affairs, and their Sensual Pleasures, that they neither have Disposition, nor will have Leisure, to discover those Truths, that require both an Attentive and Penetrating Mind. And more than either of these sorts of Men there are, whom their Prejudices do so forestall, or their Interest byas, or their Appetites blind, or their Passions discompose, too much, to allow them a clear Discernment, and right Judgment, of Divine Things. (*Christian Virtuoso*, Sig. A3)

Glanvill seems to say much the same when he warns that philosophy is “not the only Catholick way of Cure”, but “’tis a Remedy for those that are strong enough to take it.” (*Philosophia Pia*, 48)

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The problem of knowledge in these Royal Society philosophers’ texts takes the form of questions about obstacles to, the way towards, and the fruit of, a search for truth. The picture of the maladies of assent, together with the idea of self-love as partial view is quite consonant with the



moralists' anatomies, as is the characterization of the virtuous mind as modest, generous, noble. Novel here is the idea that probability itself is to be subsumed to the search for truth and to the aimed growth of the mind. Moreover, nature understood as "God's works" is not only an object of investigation, but also, in Boyle's words, a "School of Virtue" (*Usefulness* I, 50) that selects its best inquirers.

### 3. John Locke

John Locke's account of knowledge and judgment, the two "understanding faculties" as he calls them, has been the subject of extensive analysis. What is less emphasized in commentary that takes these topics as strictly epistemological matters is the way in which Locke saw the management of these faculties as part of a story about man's relationship with his Creator. In a somewhat surprising passage in his chapter "On Judgment" in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke says that the little certain knowledge we have (and Locke notoriously restricts the extent of certain knowledge to very few things) may have been given us "as a Taste of what intellectual Creatures [Locke means angels] are capable of" in order to "excite in us a Desire and Endeavour after a better State". (E IV.xiv.2, 652)<sup>27</sup> Certainty, then, is not only a quality of knowledge, or a state of mind, but an image of the perfection we've fallen from, and an incentive to seek that perfection again. Neighboring the tiny area of certainty we do have is the vast territory of "probability", the province of judgment and belief, as opposed to knowledge and *scientia*. Again, this is not only an epistemological division, but also a field of struggle for a creature fallen in a state of "mediocrity": the struggle with the "twilight" of probability is meant to test us (we are in a state of "probationership"), to curb our presumption (by making us "sensible of our short-sightedness and liableness to Error"), but also to prompt us to seek "with Industry and Care" the way back to "a state of greater perfection". (*idem*)

Locke's treatment of error, then, is embedded in an account of the corruption and possible (partial) recovery of the "perfection" of the human being. The good use and mastery of our cognitive faculties is credited with an essential role in that recovery. But the task is difficult, and Locke's description of the miscarriages of our understanding in the *Essay* and much more extensively in *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (1697,

published 1706)<sup>28</sup> gives a measure of that difficulty. As we will see, Locke comes very close here to the similar treatments in a Reynolds or Glanvill. I suggest that the aim of Locke's analysis is as therapeutic as it appeared to be in these authors. And that the remedy which Reynolds and the other treatises of the passions intimated, and Glanvill saw as the main rule of experimental philosophy, is given by Locke the role of a fundamental guide to the conduct of our minds: the exercise of the examination of opinions and regulation of assent is for Locke not only the crucial cure of our intellectual weaknesses and defects, but also the bedrock of our inner freedom, the route to a virtuous mind and to personal value, as well as that by which we fulfill a fundamental duty towards our Creator.

### 3.1. Weaknesses and defects

Locke's division of the "understanding faculties" between knowledge and judgment is paralleled by a division between "proofs" in enquiry: where the agreement or disagreement of ideas is "seen", the proofs are certain and the result is demonstrative reasoning; but where "presumed", the proofs are "taken" to be so and the reasoning probable.<sup>29</sup> One important failure of the intellect is to use the one where the other is in order. Importantly, this is usually due to the laziness or otherwise haste and impatience of the mind. (C15, 55) Also important is the mismanagement of arguments in disputes<sup>30</sup>: when arguments are sought in order to prove one side of the matter, or when someone is used to "talk copiously on either side" of a question, arguments "float" in the memory, and the mind is only "amused", or "hovering", incapable of "possessing" itself of the truth. This is, again, the effect of presumption, laziness, precipitancy. (C7, 32) Another failure has to do with the manipulation of "facts": some people amass "undigested particulars", others draw axioms from every particular, incapable of detecting the "useful hints" and of using "weary induction". Both come short of the right method in all manner of enquiry<sup>31</sup>, but this is at bottom due to an ill-regulated rhythm of the mind: they are either "slow and sluggish" or "busy" men. (C13, 49)

One defect of enquiry Locke repeatedly comes back to is the "not tracing the Arguments to their true Foundation" (C15, 55), a sure path to "opiniatry". But the mind needs some foundation, so principles are embraced anyhow; it's just that most of the time, because of a lack of examination of the "true foundations", these principles are not self-evident,

and even false. (C6, 20) Locke here is of a mind with Reynolds and Glanvill on the “abuse of principles”. In the treatment of error in the *Essay*, this taking up of unexamined principles is one of the eminent examples of “wrong measures of assent”:<sup>32</sup> doubtful and false propositions embraced as principles, and received hypotheses are Locke’s instantiations of this fault. (E IV.xx.8-11, 711-14) To some extent, this category overlaps with that of errors due to “authority”: one believes what the authoritative figures around him believe (friends, parties, sects, leaders). (E IV.xx.17, 718-19) But the “authority” case is also largely one of “no opinion at all” (E IV.xx.18, 719) or what in *Conduct* he calls “implicit Faith” (C3, 7): the case of people who cannot even be said to reason at all, who hold opinions without really understanding what they hold or why. The fourth wrong measure of assent in the *Essay* list (besides false principles, received hypotheses, and authority) is the case of passions and inclinations meddling with one’s judgment. (E IV.xx.12-16, 715-18) The detailing of the role of the passions includes the invocation of the short-circuit between wish and opinion, together with the Latin tag we’ve met twice before: “*quod volumus facile credemus*, what suits our wishes is forwardly believed” (E IV.xx12, 715).

Wish transformed into belief was involved in Glanvill’s instance of self-love whereby we “love the issue of our Brains”. Locke encases the same idea in a picture of the maladies of assent. He is here in one of his more eloquent moments, with imagery recalling Glanvill’s metaphors. One such malady is “stiffness”: “men give themselves to the first Anticipations of their Minds”, either because they naturally fall in love with their “first born” (idea), or because of “want of Vigour and Industry to enquire”, or else because they rest content with appearances rather than with truth. But whatever the cause, this is simply enslaving your mind: it is “a downright prostituting of the Mind to resign it thus, and put it under the power of the first Comer”. (C25, 81-2) The other malady is “resignation”: one gives in to the latest opinion, which is as degrading and as subject to chance as the first case: “Truth never sinks into these Mens Minds, nor gives any Tincture to them, but Camelion like, they take the Colour of what is laid before them, and as soon lose and resign it to the next that happens to come in their way.” (C26, 82)

Assent and its regulation is a crucial issue for Locke. In the *Essay* he gives a theory of the degrees of assent and the nature of this operation, but in the *Conduct* he emphasizes the practical difficulty involved in its management:

In the whole Conduct of the Understanding, there is nothing of more moment than to know when and where, and how far to give Assent, and possibly there is nothing harder. 'Tis very easily said, and no body questions it, That giving and withholding our Assent, and the Degrees of it, should be regulated by the Evidence which things carry with them; and yet we see Men are not the better for this Rule; some firmly imbrace Doctrines upon slight grounds, some upon no grounds, and some contrary to appearance. Some admit of Certainty, and are not to be mov'd in what they hold: Others waver in every thing, and there want not those that reject all as uncertain. (C32, 99)

Abuse of principles, passions, prejudices, implicit faith and credulity, resulting in dogmatism, skepticism or uncertainty of opinions – all these are, ultimately, diseases and vices of the mind due to ill-regulated assent. The rule that Locke alludes to in the fragment above (and which is so rarely observed in practice) is spelled out in the *Essay* thus:

...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 balancing 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. (E IV.xv.5, 656)

To regulate assent means, then, to examine the grounds of your judgment, and proportion the degree of your assent to the degree of probability found in the evidence. There are two sorts of grounds: matters of fact about some particular existence, which are capable of human testimony, and things beyond our senses, not capable of testimony (E IV.xvi.5, 661). And the degrees of assent, conforming to the degrees of probability, go from full assurance and confidence (these two bordering on certainty) all the way down to “conjecture”, “doubt”, or “distrust”. (IV.xv.2, 655)

I would like to suggest that this notion of the regulation of assent points to an understanding of the life of the mind that is not usually associated with Locke: one that is close to the “culture of the mind” texts investigated so far. The regulation of assent seems not to be merely a normative epistemological procedure; it looks rather like an exercise prescribed for repairing all sorts of failings of the mind, and more than that, for aiding with a sort of increase of the mind’s powers and orientation of its activity. Ultimately, it is also seen as a means towards improving

the self, or the moral person. I turn to a more detailed analysis of this notion in the next section.

### 3.2. Examination, love of truth, and freedom

In the *Conduct* Locke makes examination a crucial element of his rule for dealing with the impostures of the mind and acquiring freedom of the understanding. There is a double thrust to this term: it seems to encompass at once the “examination of principles” (so that none but those that are proven solid may be embraced) (C12, 45) and the examination of oneself (of one’s own process of belief-formation, including motives and reasons, possibly also the state of firmness or weakness, constancy or laziness/precipitancy of one’s mind) (C10, 39). Examination is no natural skill, though. Most people settle with false or non-evident principles simply because of a lack of use and exercise of their faculties. It is only with constant practice that the mind is gradually fortified, made attentive and capable of “close reasoning”; practice can settle a habit (a second nature), but Locke claims even more than that: the practice of examination will ultimately improve our faculties, enlarge our capacities (C3, 15) and “lead us towards Perfection” (C4, 16).<sup>33</sup>

The other element of the same rule is what Locke calls “indifferency”, which adds a particular shape to the picture of examination. Here is the quotation in full:

In these two things, viz. an equal Indifferency for all Truth; I mean the receiving of it in the Love of it as Truth, but not loving it for any other reason before we know it to be true; and in the Examination of our Principles, and not receiving any for such, nor building on them ’till we are fully convinced, as rational Creatures, of their Solidity, Truth and Certainty, consists that Freedom of the Understanding which is necessary to a rational Creature, and without which it is not truly an Understanding. (C12, 44-5)

Examination is an exercise countering “childish, shameful, senseless credulity” (C12, 44) and the propensity to “cheat ourselves”, and in a sense the whole analysis of error is an analysis of the ways in which man is a credulous, self-cheating animal. “Indifferency”, too, is most effective in fighting prejudice. But what exactly is this indifference? Locke has chosen a curious name, easy to mistake for “indifference” as total lack of commitment. “Indifferency” here rather means a mental state of fair impartiality – one

manifestation of justice in judgment; in addition, it is more of an activity rather than a state: it is to seek and receive truth in love of truth (rather than for some other love).<sup>34</sup> As an activity, it ensures both a motivation and a direction. It motivates one in the first place to pursue truth: if lazy, but not desperately so, or unskilled, it may cause one to start enquiry<sup>35</sup>; if easily seduced by apparent proofs, or “lazy anticipations”, it may prompt one not to stop enquiry but search further. The hardest case is, of course, when errors are embraced obstinately, and the mind is resistant both to the effort of examination and to the beauty of truth for truth’s sake.<sup>36</sup> The crucial point here is early and constant practice – an education of the mind.

“Indifferency” seems also to be the guarantee of direction or orientation: all the miscarriages of the understanding, passions, inclinations, or weaknesses, are as many seductions to the mind (recall Reynolds’ “imposture and seduction”, and Glanvill’s and Locke’s own “prostitution” of assent), continuously alluring the mind to rest its course and take refuge in the “quiet Enjoyment of the Opinion he is fond of” (C10, 42). To be indifferent to their song is to steer your quest for truth until it reaches truth rather than your own self. Locke’s notion of “indifferency”, then, is close to Glanvill’s “noble soul”, one who is at once capable of right judgment and a “large spirit”, free from the Narcissus perspective. But the important notion, in Locke as in Glanvill, is that this direction of the mind is one with the careful examination of opinions and of self; or else that there is a mutual enabling of the two: “indifferency” makes examination possible, and examination reinforces “indifferency”. Both are made possible by a “love of truth” that is a natural endowment of man, and both strengthen the love of truth as a guide to man’s life of the mind.

The requirement of “proportioning” the degree of assent to the degree of evidence, although distinct, actually follows from what has been said so far. For Locke, when the mind is in thrall to its partial loves, the degree of assent will go beyond evidence because the mind will embrace its “darlings” with an “Excess of Adherence” (C10, 42). But if the mind is free of imposture, the force of well-gathered and well-examined evidence will weigh naturally on the mind in the due degree. Here it is persuaded, there it is seduced. Locke is not interested to make this more formal or rule-bound than this. Force of evidence or degrees of assent are not a matter of calculation, but of the good or bad functioning of our faculties and of their being free from, or enslaved to, the distempers of the mind.<sup>37</sup>

It is the health of the mind that is Locke’s main concern. And part of the idea of a healthy mind is an interesting notion about the relation

between mind and truth. Locke's vocabulary for describing the process of judgment includes such terms as the mind's receiving "inducements" to receive a proposition as probable, "yielding" to the evidence, being "persuaded" by the perceived truth, or "adhering" to truth<sup>38</sup>. On the other hand, the mind has "a natural Relish for real solid Truth". (C32, 100) That there is a connection between this relish for truth and the mind's "yielding" in the right way to it becomes apparent in Locke's comments on the pernicious effects of what he takes to be scholastic disputation. Obstinate maintaining "that side of the Question they have chosen, whether true or false, to the last extremity; even after Conviction" (E IV.vii.11, 601) baffles the mind. More explicitly, in the *Conduct*: the custom of arguing on any side of a question, "even against our Persuasion" makes the mind lose its "natural Relish for real solid Truth". There is, then, a delicate moment of the meeting of mind and truth, and Locke warns against tinkering with it: "'Tis not safe to play with error". (C32, 99-100)

Equally eloquent is Locke's use of the "tincture" metaphor, which had a large currency in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Both errors or partial views and truth are said to give a tincture to the mind, as if changing the color of a substance.<sup>39</sup> The metaphor is eloquent, as it suggests a conception of the fruits of the work of the understanding not in terms of pieces of belief, but in terms of habits of thinking and of a quality of the mind that, I suggest, comes under a triple description: either in touch with the truth of things or divorced from it; either oriented towards truth or distracted from this "natural" course; and either calm, constant, generous and universal, or precipitate, inconstant, narrow and partial. The remarkable thing is that Locke founds his notion of the "freedom of the understanding" precisely on the positive side of this description.

It needs to be emphasized that underlying Locke's discussion of knowledge and judgment is a commitment to the value of truth. In a passage of the *Conduct* that reminds one of Glanvill's or Reynolds's remarks on "opinion" as opposed to "truth", Locke attaches to the term "opinion" the same tag of result of superficial inquiry and sign of a weak mind, and places the same weight on the effort of a search that is ultimately a "perfecting" work. In commenting on the difficulty of the task of examination and "indifferency", Locke warns: "This I own is no easy thing to do, but I am not enquiring the easy way to Opinion, but the right way to Truth; which they must follow who will deal fairly with their own Understandings and their own Souls." (C34, 107)

### 3.3. Virtue and the beatific vision

I've suggested that there is a case to be made for Locke's commitment to the tight relationship between the value of truth and the virtue of the mind in his reflections on the right conduct of the understanding. It is significant in this sense that the motto attached to the *Conduct* is a fragment from the opening section of Cicero's *De natura deorum* (I.1) that highlights the constancy of the wise as opposed to the vices of the mind: the main vice is rashness (*temeritate*), which is "either to hold a false opinion or to defend without hesitation propositions inadequately examined and grasped". And this is most "unworthy of the gravity and constancy of the wise (*sapientis gravitate atque constantia*)".<sup>40</sup>

I would also like to claim that to Locke the value of truth and the virtue of the mind are indicators of the value of a person. This needs some qualification though: it is always important for Locke to place the fate of man in a theological scenario that exceeds the boundaries of this life. In an early essay that formed an entry in his Commonplace Book ("Of Study"), Locke says: "The knowledge we acquire in this world I am apt to think extends not beyond the limits of this life. The beatific vision of the other life needs not the help of this dim twilight" (412). But in the same place he also says:

It is a duty we owe to God as the fountain and author of all truth, who is truth itself, and 'tis a duty also we owe our own selves if we will deal candidly and sincerely with our own souls, to have our minds constantly disposed to entertain and receive truth wheresoever we meet with it, or under whatsoever appearance of plain or ordinary, strange, new, or perhaps displeasing, it may come in our way. Truth is the proper object, the proper riches and furniture of the mind, and according as his stock of this, so is the difference and value of one man above another. (415)

Whatever our epistemic acquisitions in this life, they are dust from the perspective of the other world. But at the same time, not only is the pursuit of truth not amiss here, in this life, but it is our duty to engage in it: besides being a duty to God, it is a duty to our souls. The difference between the two quotes is I think due to their different drift: while the first may refer to epistemic *content*, the second seems to point to the value of the *practice* of understanding (which is to have a mind "constantly disposed to receive truth") and to the fact that this proper practice is important for the preparation of the life to come.



I have argued that Locke's concern with the "weaknesses", "defects" and "diseases" of the understanding and with the remedial powers of examination and the regulation of assent was the important practical side of his theory of knowledge and judgment. It seems, in addition, that for him the education of the mind is the acquiring of that disposition and those habits whereby it can exercise its powers to the full, in (ideally) perfect "love of truth" and "indifferency" – a rare disposition among the majority, and one that bespeaks indeed the "excellence" or, as he puts it, "value" of each person.

The "beatific vision" may be an event of the most radical transcendence; but there is also a sense of transcendence that makes life on earth a way towards it. The care of one's soul is also a "cure": a preparation and a transformation, placed now in the horizon of the world to come.

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Locke's "history" of the weaknesses and defects of the understanding is the close relative of Bacon's idols, Reynolds's "defects and imperfections", or Glanvill's "diseases of our Intellectuals". But Locke integrates his analysis of error with his doctrine of knowledge and judgment, of the certain and the probable, in a way that is only adumbrated in the moral or experimental philosophical writings; yet he also echoes the moral interest in the cure of the mind as we have seen it in all the preceding texts, and preserves a commitment to the value of truth and the virtue of the mind.

## Conclusions

There is a remarkable convergence of format, terminology, and general aims in the three categories of texts I have analyzed. To signal these common elements is not to downplay the differences in perspective or philosophical weight, but rather to indicate dimensions of these texts, especially of the canonical ones, which may help with a richer understanding of them as well as of the pool of thought out of which they were born. My concluding remarks will underline several aspects of this 17<sup>th</sup>-century pool of thought.

In the first place, a common aspect is the pervasiveness of a therapeutic vocabulary in dealing with the life of the mind, and of references to a

tradition of philosophy understood as an art of healing the mind. The “diseases” to be cured are the passions, errors and inclinations of the intellect, while the cure is conceived primarily in terms of a discipline of judgment, one that is, importantly, also a way to a moral transformation of the person. There are several features of these ills of the mind worth emphasizing.

One is the general description of an ungoverned mind as “inconstant”, “impatient”, “intemperate”: the reference is to a chaotic mental disposition, incapable of true adherence to the world and to itself. Another is the more technical characterization of the work of the understanding as “precipitate”, “weak or “lazy” – all indicators of an ill-regulated rhythm of the mind, which is responsible for the miscarriages of assent and for missing contact with the truth of things. A third feature is the emphasis on a sort of passions or vices of the mind which seem to refer specifically to the relationship the knower establishes with his own act of knowing: “obstinacy” or “credulity” are examples of such failures of harmonizing self and knowledge. There is also a moral dimension here, which is in direct relation with the fourth feature I want to underline: a moral conception of the self described by the notion of “self-love”, which carries the connotation of private perspective and resistance to cure, rather than the Augustinian load of a theological sin.<sup>41</sup>

Conversely, a healthy mind is constant, patient, and temperate; it works with an equal and firm process of assent-giving; it is “docile” and “generous” and creates a proper encounter between self and knowledge; and it forms a “noble” spirit that is in love with truth rather than with itself. And here is the second aspect I want to emphasize: crucial to the growth of the mind is the value of the object of knowledge, i.e. the value of truth, which is, for the authors presented here, a divine expression. For these 17<sup>th</sup>-century authors, truth is still the orienting target of the search, and the search for truth is still a perfecting work, able to transform the self.<sup>42</sup>

The powerful emergence of an epistemological space for the “probable”, I have argued, is no derogation from this ideal. Probable truths are still truths, to be embraced by a fortified mind that is capable of adhering to them in the right/natural way. When the mind is weak, it can only form “opinions”. This is also to say that the “skeptical crisis” is not the main actor here; actually, for Reynolds, Glanvill or Locke, skepticism, by the side of dogmatism, are two of the vices of the mind.

The third aspect has to do with the lists of passions and other causes of errors. I've tried to emphasize the fact that, despite some otherwise noncommittal attempts at systematicity, they are far from systematic, and their categories overlap most of the time. Already in the treatises of the passions presented here, the conventional lists of the passions are overwhelmed by a much more multifaceted cartography of the defects of the mind, which is what surfaces in both Glanvill and Locke. This is to say they are more and more alive to the subtle and complex possibilities in the life of the mind. As such, they seem to be offered less as a theoretical doctrine, but rather as general instruments for a (life-long) practice of self-scrutiny and self-regulation. Locke, for instance, offers what he says are only the first steps towards a "history" of the distempers of the mind in the *Conduct* in order to "excite Men, especially those who make Knowledge their business, to look into themselves". (C12, 47)

The regulation of assent and the examination of both self and opinions are, more or less markedly for all these authors, the main instruments of an assiduous and careful discipline of the mind. And it is on such a discipline, or what some authors call a "culture of the mind", that true freedom is made to depend. Echoing again the ancient schools of thought, a Locke or Glanvill will say that one is not free unless he is so in his mind. It's just that such freedom is never an easy purchase.

## NOTES

- 1 *Vanity of Dogmatizing*, 1661, *Scepsis Scientifica*, 1665, "Against Confidence in Philosophy" in *Essays*, 1676; see Glanvill (1970).
- 2 There is an excellent recent body of literature on the ancient therapy of the mind and the idea of philosophy as a way of life: see especially Hadot (1995, 2002), Foucault (2004).
- 3 James (1997), chapters 7-10. For recent work on emotions in ancient and medieval thought that may form an important background for the history of early modern passions, see Sorabji (2000), Knuutila (2004).
- 4 Harrison (2007)
- 5 I borrow the term from Box's discussion of Bacon's moral philosophy: Box (1996), p. 271.
- 6 In discussing the antecedents of Locke's theory of the understanding seen as a "new logic", Schuurman (2004) compares Locke's "logic of ideas" and its interest in psychological and epistemological questions, with the Aristotelian logics of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One thing this paper would suggest is that more germane antecedents to Locke may be found in the treatises of the passions rather than in the logical tracts.
- 7 On eclecticism in the early-modern writings on the passions see James (1998), Introduction.
- 8 I quoted Lagrée (2004) on "constancy" as recuperated by Justus Lipsius. But the same may be said of Cicero's *temperantia* (see *Tusc. Disp.* III.8). The case of "prudence" is most interesting: it is sometimes meant as an equivalent of the Stoic disposition of a healthy mind, but does not lose the Aristotelian-Thomistic echoes of *phronesis-prudentia*.
- 9 The term has a long history, and in one important development, following St. Augustine, assent becomes the operation of the (separate) faculty of the will. This leads to a medieval tradition of making degrees of sin dependent on degrees and stages of assent. See Knuutila (2006). Yet, in the texts I'm dealing with it is not primarily the will, but the wit that needs to be trained in the discipline of examination. A well-governed will is still important, but the weight of the discipline seems to be primarily cognitive.
- 10 Zagzebski (1996) mentions this briefly as part of her reinterpretation of Aristotelian *phronesis* so as to cover both the theoretical and the practical sides of the "continent".
- 11 On Stoic assent as part of a theory of knowledge and opinion, see Long & Sedley (1987), pp. 253-259, and as part of the psychology of action, see Sorabji (2000), pp. 61-72. On "precipitancy" as a technical term related to the notion of assent, see Hadot (2002), p. 265.
- 12 Inwood (2004), p. 90.
- 13 There are marked differences between the texts I deal with here and other treatises of the passions that place much more emphasis on grace in the cure of the passions, e.g. J.-Fr. Senault, *The Use of the Passions*, tr. Henry

- Earl of Monmouth, London, 1640, or W. Ayloffe, *The Government of the Passions According to the Rules of Reason and Religion*, London, 1700.
- 14 See the very similar episode in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (III.32-34), Loeb Classical Library, 1927, pp. 317-325.
- 15 On the English "*nosce teipsum*" tracts tradition, as descendants of the humanistic *de anima* treatises (e.g. J. Woolton, *A Treatise of the Immortality of the Soul*, 1576, Th. Rogers, *A Philosophical Discourse Entitled The Anatomy of the Mind*, 1675), see Soellner (1972), chapter I.
- 16 Galen's *Affections and errors of the soul*, a therapeutic treatise equally indebted to Platonic and Stoic thought, is a most interesting companion of the writings on the passions I'm analyzing. The errors are most of the times due to passions, and underlying them both is a certain disposition of the soul that Galen calls "insatiability", the root of "vanity", and "self-love". It is on account of such self-love that the mind behaves in a precipitant manner, giving hasty assent to non-evident phenomena. See Galen, *Selected Works*, ed. P.N. Singer, Oxford, 1997, pp. 125, 145-6. Despite Wright's reference to the Augustinian "infected love" elsewhere in the text, it seems that "Galenic self-love" has more weight with him in questions of therapy.
- 17 E.g. "What is evidence and certitude in Knowledge, and how they differ", "How Knowledge and perfit Science, differ from credulity and opinion, and whether feare be necessarily included in every opinion" (303)
- 18 On Epictetus and his exercises, including the "discipline of assent", see Hadot (1995), chapter 6.
- 19 Du Moulin also makes the fine psychological point that the two must work together, as humility is needed to keep generosity itself from degenerating into pride.
- 20 Gaukroger (2001) analyzes the importance of a psychology of knowledge for Bacon's epistemology and draws attention to the transference whereby a regimen of the mind becomes part of the province of natural philosophy. Gaukroger proposes that this is due to Bacon's indebtedness to a rhetorical-legal model of knowledge (pp. 45-53, 103-130). On Bacon's discipline as both moral and methodological, see also Box (1996). And on the shapes of the methodological thinking of later 17<sup>th</sup>-century experimental philosophy, see Anstey (2005).
- 21 The reference is to Bacon, *New Organon*, I:XLII (Works IV, 54).
- 22 Natural constitutions or tempers as important sources of particular beliefs is a (Galenic) idea that can be found among Bacon's idols as well as in Robert Hooke's cartography of the ills of the mind in *A General Scheme in The Posthumous Works of Robert Hooke*, ed. Richard Waller, London 1705, pp. 9-10.
- 23 On degrees of certainty, and the general problem of "certainty and probability" in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, see the classic Shapiro (1983).
- 24 Sargent (1995), p. 98.

- 25 Idem, pp. 119-120.
- 26 Idem, p 124.
- 27 References to Locke's texts will be by first letter (E or C) followed by indications of book/chapter/section for the *Essay* and of section for the *Conduct*, and by the page in the editions used.
- 28 The *Conduct* is one of the planned additions to the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Essay*, by the side of what would become the chapters "Of Enthusiasm" and "Of Association of Ideas" – all texts concerned with the problem of error; see Schuurman (2001).
- 29 Agreement or disagreement of ideas is Locke's basic object to which the activity of reasoning applies. It is introduced as an alternative to the Aristotelian logic of syllogism. There are some very instructive studies on Locke's theory of the understanding as a "new logic" that involves attention to the cognitive faculties: see Buickerood (1985), Schuurman (2004).
- 30 On scholastic disputation as one of the targets of Locke's "polite philosophy", see Yeo (2006).
- 31 There is of course here a transparent reference to Baconian induction (in *The New Organon*, Book II, Works IV). The curious thing is that Locke seems to be talking here of a method of reading or studying.
- 32 Categories of error other than wrong measures of assent include cases of what Reynolds had called ignorance, and voluntary ignorance. (E IV.xx.2-6, 706-11)
- 33 This also implies a mastery of thought (cf. C43) against "diversion" that echoes Wright on the same issue.
- 34 Contra Tully (1993) who interprets "indifferency" in terms of *not* being disposed to truth/the good, and makes it an argument of relativism (p. 192).
- 35 In an important fragment in the *Essay*, Locke makes the very activity of the mind dependent on a "perception of Delight" which can alone put it in motion and give it "Direction and Design" (E II.vii.3, 129). On the voluntary and directional element in Locke's notion of judgment, see Losonsky (1996).
- 36 "Nothing being as beautiful to the Eye, as Truth to the Mind" (E IV.iii.20, 552)
- 37 Cf. Owen (2006), Nuovo (2002)
- 38 The definition of right understanding in *Conduct* is "the discovery and adherence to truth" (C40, 120).
- 39 Glanvill, too, uses the metaphor, in a similar context: see *Philosophia Pia*, pp. 45-6.
- 40 Translation from Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, tr. P.G. Walsh, Oxford World's Classics, 1998, p. 3; on Locke's indebtedness to Cicero, see Marshall (1994).
- 41 Additionally, there seems to occur a transference of terms due to a modification of the model of mind: what used to be characteristics proper to the lower parts of the soul (the "concupiscible" and the "irascible" in the Platonic/Aristotelian model) become belief-forming features of a unified mind:

its “rashness” seems to be an echo of the irascible passions, its “lubricous” opinions, easy “prostitution” to, or “greedy” appetite for, undigested half-truths, an echo of the concupiscible.

<sup>42</sup> Pace Foucault, who sees no trace of the ancient idea of the transforming truth in early-modern philosophy. But Hadot does admit the possibility of echoes of the ancient and medieval “spiritual exercises” in 17<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy.

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