

Reflections on John Locke's Thought and the Impact of His Ideas

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Abstract: This paper explores the enduring influence of John Locke, one of the best-known and most influential thinkers in European history. He is widely regarded as a man ahead of his time, whose ideas remain highly relevant in our world today. Locke's ideas about politics, knowledge, religion, and education helped shape the way we live in free societies today, where we value things like the equality of all people before the law, the right to own property, personal freedom, and the ability to believe and speak as we choose. He is considered one of the architects of modern culture and the Enlightenment, and his reflections and philosophical work were the result of the social, critical, and philosophical upheavals of his time.

Keywords: John Locke, Philosophical Thought, Ideas, Philosophical Work

Introduction

John Locke is one of the best-known and most famous men in Europe. It makes us reflect on why we so easily accept certain ideas, even when those beliefs were once so important that our forefathers would have risked everything for them. We sometimes have the impression that certain ideas, as if they have always been our prerogative, we have always enjoyed freedom, we have a great deal of information from the field of education to help us know how to educate our children, we have a great deal of literature, we are equal before the law, without often realizing where these ideas come from. We benefit from significant concepts that shape our society today, perhaps without being able to understand the effort that brought them to the surface, and how difficult it was born and in what difficult contexts.

If we are talking about John Locke, we should acknowledge his significant contributions to the concepts of equality before the law and the education of children (Locke, 1968, p.421). His work, particularly in pedagogy, is encapsulated in one of the most important books in the field (Schultz, 2008, pp. 47–48). It seems normal to us today to defend our private property and to have a right to our private property, a notion that Locke introduced. (Vasile, 2016, pp. 258–262). Religious liberty, a concept so valuable and cherished by us today, the freedom to think and think as you wish, can also be traced back to Locke (Hoppit, 2000, p. 195). To us, it seems normal that the state should not be oppressive, that it should not subjugate its citizens, but this idea also comes from John Locke. In many ways, Locke was a man ahead of his time, offering ideas that remain remarkably relevant in our world today (Farr, 2008, pp. 495–522).

Context of the appearance and development of John Locke

John Locke was born on August 29, 1632, in Wrington, a small village in England, in the family of a relatively influential lawyer, also named John Locke. During the conflict between Parliament and the absolutist monarchy, Locke's father served as a captain in the parliamentary army. This position enabled him to establish relationships that helped him to provide the best quality education for his son. As a result, the young John Locke attended Westminster School, where he studied Latin, Greek, the Classics, Philosophy and Theology. He went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Theology, Philosophy and Natural Sciences, a Master of Arts in Philosophy, and later, in 1675, a Bachelor of Medicine (Woolhouse 2007, p. 116; Simon, 1951, pp. 386–399).

Historical, Religious, and Scientific Context of Locke's Time

If we are to talk about the religious context in which it develops, we must remember that, some time earlier, King Henry VIII (1491-1547) will make the rupture in the Church (Davies, 2005, pp.11–29), splitting the Anglican Church from the Catholic Church (Betteridge, 2005, pp. 91-109; 1993; Rex, 1996, pp. 863–894; Williams, 2005, pp. 41–59), This separation led to the persecution of Catholics in England. John Locke would intervene in this equation by coming up with the idea of religious freedom, arguing that the state should not impose a particular religion. This period also coincided with the scientific revolution, during which significant advancements were made in various fields. John Locke engaged in discussions with Robert Boyle (Stewart, 1991; More, 1941, pp.61–76; Hunter, 2003, p. xvii), the founder of modern chemistry, whom he will also help in the laboratory, and he will correspond with Isaac Newton (Keynes, 1972 [1946], pp. 363–364; Richard, 1980, pp. 103, 25), who proposes the theory of gravity. Also in the same period, describing the context of the scientific revolution, without necessarily being a direct contact between him and other great scientists, William Harvey, discovered blood circulation (Harvey, 1993; Rapson, 1982; Wright, 2012; Izquierdo, 1937, pp. 914–932), while Kepler formulated the laws of motion of the planets (Kepler, 1977, p. 187; Lombardi, 2000), and was born only a few months before Galileo Galilei (Zik, 2001, pp.259-284) whose theory of heliocentrism led to his condemnation. So, the context in which John Locke was born, the scientific revolution of his time, obviously changed something, namely the paradigm of a time dominated by religion, by a certain view of the Bible and of science, seen through the very narrow glasses of the then theology. In the same period, Giordano Bruno (Cosma, 1982; Bernal, 1964; Shackelford, 2009, p. 66; Gatti, 2012, pp. 116–118; Farinella, 2002, pp. 596–624) and Copernicus (Koyré, 1973, p.17) had a tragic end due to the affirmation of scientific ideas, thus John Locke had to be very careful with his own ideas, as had Leibnitz (Weischedel, 2012, pp. 168-180) and Descartes with his overwhelming influence in the century (Bostock, 2009, p. 43; Gillespie, 2006, p. 16, 761–781; Gottlieb, 2016, p. 301; Simuț, 2011, p. 4). That is why we have to note that Locke wrote more while in exile, taking into account all the contextual aspects of his time, as he could very easily have lost his life because of the ideas he expounded (Zuckert, 1996, pp. 73–85).

At the time of John Locke's birth in England, Charles I was the King, reigning from 1600 to 1649 (Carlton, 1995, pp. 101-143; Cust, 2007, pp.75-77, 96-103, 148-150). When John Locke was 16 years old and still in school, London was confronted with civil war. The forces of Parliament, along with the Puritans, defeated King Charles I, captured him, and ultimately executed him by beheading on January 30, 1649. As a child, John Locke was deeply affected by the cries of the mob calling for the beheading of the King, an event that left a lasting impression on him, especially following the death of his mother. John Locke was born (Farr, Robers, 1985, pp. 395–398) during a time marked by a struggle against absolutism, following the period of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) (Sharp, 2003, p. 60; Hutton, 2021; Worden, 2000, pp. 131–170; Trevor-Roper, 1967), also inclined to rule with an iron fist, eventually bringing in his brother Charles I, Charles II (Fraser, 1979), followed by King James II (1633-1701), the last Catholic monarch of the three kingdoms: England, Scotland and Ireland (Miller, 2000; Callow, 2000). The glorious revolution (Tim, 2006), ultimately led to the defeat of absolutism, a struggle between the people and the idea of absolutism, i.e., the divine monarch.

When talking about John Locke, one can legitimately ask how the context in which he grew up influenced him, as he is known for his theories of liberty and education. John Locke is one of the architects of modern culture, of the Enlightenment, and his reflections and philosophical work (Tully, 2007, p. 128) are the result of these critical social and philosophical upheavals and convulsions of his time. The question of political philosophy (Russell, 1994, pp. 224–265), ethics and religion are rather applications of his epistemology and metaphysics. In other words, they reflect his approach to understanding reality, engaging with the dominant ideas of his time, particularly in relation to the mechanistic scientific

revolution influenced by Robert Boyle (Boas, 1967, 96–102; Wragge-Morley, 2018), pp. 1–24), and Isaac Newton (Keynes, 1972, pp. 363–364; Simmons, 1996; Allaci, 1938; Westfall, 2015, p. 124). The individual in question, similar to his predecessors such as Descartes (Romo, Carlos, 2007; Grayling, A. C. 2005; Gaukroger, 1995; Rusu, 1967, pp. 108-138; Nordin, 2024), is attempting to integrate the understanding of religious vision into a scientific dialogue. (Marshall, 1994, p. 426). On one hand, he was influenced by the scientific revolution, while on the other hand, his interactions with various types of literature during his exile in Paris played a significant role. In Paris, he engaged with a group of French rationalist philosophers who argued that all of reality is governed by reason. He receives these influences (Bor, Petersma, Kingma, 1996, p. 260) and tries, in turn, to formulate theories about the world, human intellect, and the individual person. He also explores concepts about society and government (Kraynak, 1980, pp. 53–69), theories that are in line with this type of rationalist thinking, in which thought is a kind of queen that must reign over all of reality.

John Locke's Epistemology and Its Influence on Modern Thought

John Locke's philosophical thinking is an atomistic type of thinking (Anstey, 2011), in the sense that he has a very interesting and elaborate theory of ideas. This theory underpins his epistemology, or theory of knowledge, explaining how we come to understand reality. Additionally, it encompasses concepts related to natural and civil rights. Essentially, what John Locke is trying to do here is distance himself from Descartes. While he acknowledges, like René Descartes, that reason—wherever there is a thinking being—is always the premise from which to start, considering man with his mind that utters ideas (Cottingham, Williams, 1996, pp. 50-62) and that thinks about his own person first, without seeing reality in its two dimensions or entities (*res cogitans* and *res extensa*) as Descartes saw them: the thing or substance, the thinking entity and the corporeal, extended, material entity. Locke, on the other hand, tries to bring and subdue within this mechanistic perimeter his whole philosophical construct, emphasizing the importance of reason and its capacity to organize both individual lives and societal structures.

Locke's contributions, although remarkable especially in the field of political philosophy (Dunn, 1969, p. 99), are remarkable and have influenced various modern movements, such as the emancipation from monarchy in France. However, despite its many great achievements (McGrath, 1998, pp. 214–215), this reductionism diminishes the reality and complexity of human existence and its relationships with God and other people, stripping away various elements of its inherent beauty. Locke distanced himself from metaphysics as perceived by the religious world, and with this from its spiritual component, including aspects pertaining to revelation and to the divinity of Christ, if we are to take into account Locke's direct influence on the development of deism as a movement and his indirect contribution towards a utilitarian type of ethics. All these elements show us that we have to keep things in balance, and Locke's merit remains unquestionable with regard to theories on the right to life, liberty, property, religious freedom, religious tolerance, fundamental natural rights. As admirable as these theories are, he nevertheless has some problems that have remained to this day, in this sphere of a theological orthodoxy, so that it is no accident that there is the neo-orthodox revolutionary current as represented by Emil Bruner (Jehle, 2006; McGrath, 2014), Karl Barth (Bowden, 2005, p. 701; Tietz, 2021, pp. 62-66; Barth, 2011, pp. 4-11; Oakes, 2011, p. 27; Garrett, 2006, p. 3; Hennecke, 2016, pp.324-336) and other thinkers who attempt to revive elements developed by John Locke.

In the realm of epistemology, John Locke (Nuovo, 2002) opposes the fact that ideas are innate *a priori* and comes up with the *tabula rasa* theory, considering that when a man is born, he comes into the world as a blank sheet on which nothing is written (Popovici, n.d.) and everything that man knows or comes to know is a process that is reached through the five senses through which we discover reality, by coming into contact with various things and then reflecting and making a connection between ideas. We come to know reality only gradually, and our experience with the world grows side by side with this “second way of knowing the

world along reason” (Simuț 2018a: 17). He said that all ideas come from sensation or reflection. We can say that the foundation of knowledge is empirical experience, which involves knowing, analyzing, and drawing conclusions based on our sensory perceptions. From this analysis, we use our thinking to construct more complex ideas.

John Locke has this understanding of how we know, either by intuition, and here he understands matters of logic. He considered that we can know by demonstration, that is, the syllogisms we make, and by senses, that is, by sensations, by sensory action with reality, but for him this question is very delicate because although he speaks of these three ways of knowing, the main gate is the five senses with which we react with the physical world and from this interaction we arrive at a representational type of knowledge. So we mentally represent to ourselves the things that we know through experience, through interaction, and he gives a lot of credit to experience and the senses, because he says that God created us with very good senses, so we can know reality in an adequate way.

What he brings very interesting here is the way he talks about how knowledge develops and really has a reaction to the theory of innate ideas, arguing for the image of the blank sheet or *tabula rasa*, perhaps also as a result of a movement that took place, what's called the Cambridge Platonist movement, a movement that started during the Florentine renaissance, and it was a kind of revival of Platonic philosophy after it had been in the shadows for a long time, because Aristotle's philosophy, especially in the scholastic period when it had gained ground. It was a revival in which they were going back to the conception that ideas would be innate with the two planes that Plato held, the world of ideas and the world of becoming, and then John Locke reacts somewhat to this view, precisely because he wants to remain within the spectrum of reason, because according to his thinking reason must control everything and explain everything. However, the problem arises in the way he discusses ideas and he finds that there are two categories of ideas: primary ideas and secondary ideas. Primary qualities of ideas are those that refer to the quantifiable, measurable elements that we find in the physical world, such as form, size, weight, while secondary ideas are those that refer to the way we represent ourselves, through the gate of the senses, in our minds.

From his point of view, these secondary ideas are subjective because we can each represent these things in a different way. For example, if I say “coat,” that's a simple idea, if I say “black coat,” that's a compound idea, so I have added something to my knowledge. However, the idea of “coat” that I can reflect on is a primary idea because it can be weighed and measured. But when I say “black coat,” “black” is no longer a primary idea; rather, it is a secondary idea because it is subjective, and we don't know what black is. Everyone can present it differently, just like taste or smell. This is why John Locke argues that objective reality is the reality of the physical world, which is made up of simple and clear ideas, whereas compound ideas, which come from the joining of these simple ideas, from the correlations we make from simple ideas, and from the extrapolations we make from simple ideas, all of this is subjective. There are implications for the way in which he conceives of questions of ethics and revelation. John Locke speaks of a propositional revelation in the sense that for him, knowledge means propositions made up of subjects and predicates, which are formed by the chaining together of simple ideas that become compound ideas, which, in turn, are primary and secondary.

John Locke’s Rational Approach to Revelation and the Knowledge of God

What is crucial to understand in John Locke's thought is that revelation refers to ideas that come through a different means than those acquired through reason. The challenge arises because he says so: Ideas that come by way other than the way of reason, namely, revelation in Scripture (Wainwright, 1987, p. 806), are acceptable insofar as they do not contradict reason. If they contradict reason, then they are no longer acceptable. For example, the claim that God is One, manifested in three persons, or that Jesus Christ is preexistent, for that matter, when writing about

Christ, he emphasized that Christ is the Messiah, focusing more on his earthly ministry and less on his preexistence.

At first sight, when we hear of propositional revelation, we tend to appreciate it, being on the conservative line. However, with John Locke, our understanding of propositional revelation takes on a different nuance; specifically, we view revelation as being entirely subject to reason. In this view, revelation can only be accepted through reason. Thus, John Locke is a forerunner of deism, reviving natural theology (Strauss, 1958, pp. 490–501), which brings other arguments, claiming that we can construct a theology and know God strictly on natural grounds, without needing anything more, a position that also affects the doctrine of a bodily resurrection, redirecting attention from the church's clear teachings on these doctrines to mere political implication of these doctrines today (see Simuț 2017, pp. 16-30, esp. p. 17). We believe that revelation does not mean that it is irrational or to believe something irrational, but it is suprarational, that is, there is a sufficient rational basis to help you as a human to trust what you cannot fully comprehend rationally, but still it does not mean that what you cannot rationally comprehend with your reason should be removed.

In John Locke's philosophy, he reduces revelation to the limits of reason, while we add revelation above reason, having a rational basis for revelation. This is why John Locke says that the subjective part is hardly something we can rationally control or measure (and the same applies to all post-Aristotelian ideas of "divine disclosures", see Simuț, 2018b, pp. 139-155, esp. p. 140). The theory in which John Locke understands ideas leads him to have a certain outlook on revelation but also on man and human freedom (Locke, 1999, p.65; Iliescu, 1999, p.45), namely the political theory he develops. This explains why he places the demonstration of God's existence, or the knowledge of God's existence, in the area of demonstrative knowledge.

The three levels of knowledge (Popovici, n.d.) are intuitive, demonstrative and sensible (i.e., knowledge through the senses). When talking about the knowledge of God, John Locke places it at the second level of knowledge, which is the area of demonstrative knowledge. There are two ideas about whose existence can be asserted with absolute certainty: firstly, the existence of myself, in intuitive form, and secondly, the existence of God, which he places in the zone of certainty but in a demonstrative way. In examining John Locke's political thought, we should begin with the contradictory dialogue with Thomas Hobbes, who reinforced the idea of absolutism by trying to explain why an absolute monarch who succeeds in bringing order is necessary. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (Socaciu, 2001, pp. 39-42) explained the expression *Homo homini lupus est* (in translation "Man is wolf to man") (Strachey, 1961, pp. 58-63; de Waal, 2006, p. 3), taking a very negative view of human nature and in order to succeed in creating order in this area people need a king, as the one placed by God, with power of divine right over the people, who can use violence to bring order. It is in this context of these ideas that John Locke intervenes, who rejects the idea of absolutism, saying that in order to enjoy real liberty, we must surrender some of our privileges, but not to an absolute monarch, but we must see to it that the laws we pass do not come from the authority of an absolute monarch, but come from all of us or from our representatives, through a system similar to the democratic system we have today (Touchard, 1981, p.376).

In these circumstances, Locke (1947) reinforces the idea of a law-giver who makes laws to represent us all and to be for the good of all. He considered that anyone, including the king, fell into the category of robber and persecutor, insofar as he would use violence to establish order and peace. In his political vision, John Locke rejects the idea of absolutism, the use of violence by the king, and proposes a system in which the laws come from the people (directly or indirectly through representatives), siding with the side of parliament in the battle between king and parliament. It is John Locke who introduces the idea that all of us, including the king if there is to be a king, cannot make laws, but can only be the enforcer of laws, so he proposes the idea of equality before the law, which applies to the king, all parliamentarians and all the

people. It is important to note that the Second Amendment to the American Constitution, which addresses the right to bear arms, is also influenced by the ideas of John Locke. Locke argues for the right to revolt, stating that when those in power no longer represent the people, fail to ensure equality before the law, or create abuses, the public has the right to overthrow them, including a king.

John Locke's ideas were capitalized later (Harrison & Laslett, 1971, pp. 57–61). The arrival of Wilhelm of Orania in 1688 (Stan, 2018, p. 68), for example, meant that the idea of absolutism in England was diminished or almost excluded, and the role of the monarch was thus very limited. John Locke is recognized as one of the few philosophers who has had a profound influence on the political landscape (Simon, 1951, pp. 386–399).

Conclusions

John Locke, in the last part of his life, brings some ideas on pedagogy, starting from the premise that the child is also a rational being and that when we begin the educational approach, we must take this into account by explaining to the child why we do what we do. One of Locke's key pedagogical principles is the rejection of physical punishment, which highlights the significant influence his philosophy has had on modern education. He further argues that as the educational journey progresses, the parent should gradually lessen strictness, and when the child reaches adolescence, there should be a friendship between parent and child, with the parent only influencing the child's decisions for the better. In early childhood, children are primarily directed by their parents, who make most of the decisions, but as children grow older, the relationship evolves into one of friendship. He believes that special educational effort should be made in the first years of life, which will serve as the child's educational foundation for life.

John Locke supports the idea of resisting cruelty to animals of any kind, and that parents should intervene when they observe cruelty to animals by their children, and explains that if a parent allows cruelty to animals by their children, it will develop over time into inappropriate attitudes towards their neighbors' children.

John Locke asserts that through our reason, we can decide what is good and what is bad for us, highlighting that pain and pleasure are the best pedagogues. We know that something is good by whether it does us good or harm, which highlights the correlation between morality and happiness; they are intertwined. While John Locke articulates this view, a Christian will always refer to divine command rather than to utilitarian ethics, that is, to what pleases him or her as a human being. John Locke's understanding of ideas and human freedom is reflected in his political philosophy. He understands this knowledge through ideas and representation, particularly through the idea of cause and effect. In other words, he believes that, in the world of objective reality, there are causes that have effects on our minds and help us understand those things. When he comes to discuss human freedom, he brings up a very interesting question where he distances himself from Descartes. Both he and Descartes are against the idea of determinism, taking the view that man should not be regarded as a robot, forced to do certain things mechanically or programmed to behave in specific ways. John Locke is not concerned with freedom of the will because he thinks of everything in terms of the concept of cause and effect, that is, in terms of interaction with the world. He asserts that true freedom is freedom of action; the question is not whether man is free to choose one thing or another, but whether he is free to act in one way or another. Thus, he contends that the discussion of the freedom of the will is meaningless because the will itself is influenced by other causes, and therefore it is not wholly free. The true essence of freedom, according to him, is the freedom to act, not the freedom of will. John Locke argues that true freedom is the freedom to act. He states that individuals are entitled to fundamental natural rights, which include the right to life, the right to liberty, and the right to property. To protect these rights, individuals must have the freedom to act. Therefore, it is essential to develop a theory that guarantees the preservation, emancipation, and growth of these naturally occurring rights.

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