THE EDUCATIONAL WRITINGS OF JOHN LOCKE

A CRITICAL EDITION
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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APPENDIX IV

OF STUDY

(MS Locke f. 2, fols. 86–140)

The following essay was written from 26 March to the early part of May 1677 while Locke was travelling through France. In the Lovelace collection of Locke manuscripts there is evidence which at first sight seems to suggest that it was written for Denis Grenville, a rich, unbeneficed Anglican clergyman travelling in France and, at forty, just five years Locke's junior. During the years 1677–9 Grenville repeatedly importuned Locke to come live with him as a 'man-Midwife' to his 'confused head very full of thoughts and notions', and, when Locke politically declined, to answer his various enquiries and essays with more reasoned analyses of his own. One of these essays was on study, but, from both internal and external evidence, it is clear that it was not in response to this essay that Locke's essay on 'Study' was written.

In March 1677 Grenville sent Locke a short discourse on recreation (MS Locke c. 10, fols. 66–7), complaining that ever since he became a clergyman he had been torn between excesses of work and recreation, and asking for Locke's solution to his dilemma. In addition, he listed four other subjects upon which he would eventually write and to which he expected Locke's replies: temporal business, conversation, study and the exercise of devotion. Locke may have replied to this essay in the same month, as a draft entitled 'An essay concerning Recreation in answer to D G's desire Mar 77' and signed 'Mar 77 JL' may indicate; but, since this draft is found under an entry for 2 December in Locke's notebook for 1678 (MS Locke f. 3, fols. 351–7), the possibility that it was not prepared until that later date must not be excluded. Because Locke was travelling from place to place from February to June 1677 before settling in Paris, Grenville seems not to have written him again until September (MS Locke c. 10, fols. 68–9, 19 November 1677). But Locke did not receive this letter, so that Grenville and he were not in contact until November 1677.

On 12 March 1678 Grenville made good his threat to send Locke a 'lusty pacquet' of papers concerning three of the topics of his proposed book (published in 1685 as *Counsel and Directions*): temporal business, conversation and study (MS Locke c. 10, fols. 72–9). Locke replied to all three at once on Sunday, 20 March (MS Locke f. 3, pp. 69–79),

adding to his thoughts the following November (MS Locke f. 3, pp. 358–78). All of Locke's replies were relatively short and certainly not the products of much consideration. They were personal and loosely organized, befitting the occasion. The nature and importunity of Grenville's requests necessitated this, as they did the frequent long silences between the correspondents; Grenville's was clearly not an appealing character, and Locke took no special pains to play 'man-Midwife' to him.

Locke's long essay on 'Study', however, written long before Grenville had ever broached the subject, has the appearance and structure of a formal essay, an impersonal attempt to organize a great deal of thought on a subject very much germane to Locke's thinking of the past few years. Since 1670 he had been devoting considerable attention to the human understanding, and just the previous month, February 1677, had written a long entry in his journal on 'how far and by what means the will works upon the understanding and assent' (MS Locke f. 2, fols. 42–57; Aaron and Gibb, 1936, pp. 84–91). An equally long essay on the rules and right conduct of study has a marked compatibility with such an interest at this particular time.

The essay on 'Study', then, was not written for Denis Grenville: it was written much before Grenville had even asked for Locke's thoughts on the subject, and when he did ask, Locke sent him a satisfactory reply. Whatever its design, it shows clearly Locke the doctor, philosopher, and educator at work in close harmony. A careful comparison may show that it contributed substantially to Locke's later thoughts on 'The Conduct of the Understanding'.

King, 1830, I, 171–203, was the first and only of Locke's biographers to publish the essay. But his transcription is inaccurate and in some places incomplete. The following transcription is taken from Locke's journal for 1677 in the Bodleian Library.

Friday, 26 March [1677].

The end of study is knowledge, and the end of knowledge practice or communication. 'Tis true delight is commonly joined with all improvements of knowledge; but when we study only for that end, it is to be considered rather as diversion than business, and so is to be reckoned amongst our recreations.

The extent of knowledge or things knowable is so vast, our duration here so short, and the entrance by which the knowledge of things gets into our understandings so narrow, that the time of our whole life

would be found too short without the necessary allowances for childhood and old age (which are not capable of much improvement) for the refreshment of our bodies and unavoidable avocations [fol. 87] and in most conditions for the ordinary employments of their callings, which if they neglect they cannot eat or live. I say that the whole time of our life without these necessary defalcations is not enough to acquaint us with all those things. I will not say which we are capable of knowing, but which it would not be only convenient, but very advantageous for us to know. He that will consider how many doubts and difficulties have remained in the minds of most knowing men after long and studious enquiry, how much in those several provinces of knowledge they have surveyed they have left undiscovered, and how many other provinces of the *mundus intelligibilis*, as I may call it, they never once touched on, will easily consent to the disproportionateness of our time and strength to the greatness of this business of knowledge taken in its full latitude, and which if it be not our main business here, yet it is so necessary to it, and so interwoven with it, that we can make little farther [fol. 88] progress in doing then we do in knowing—or at least to little purpose; acting without understanding being usually at best but lost labour.

It therefore much behoves us to improve the best we can our time and talent in this respect, and since we have a long journey to go, and the days are but short, to take the straightest and most direct way we can. To this purpose it may not perhaps be amiss to decline some things that are likely to bewilder us, or at least lie out of our way, as:

1. All that maze of words and phrases which have been invented and employed only to instruct and amuse people in the art of disputing, and will be found perhaps, when looked into, to have little or no meaning; and with this kind of stuff the logic, physics, ethics, metaphysics, and divinity of the schools are thought by some to be too much filled. This I'm sure, that where we learn distinctions without finding a difference in things, where we make variety [fol. 89] of phrases, or think we furnish ourselves with arguments without a progress in the real knowledge of things, we only fill our heads with empty sounds, which, however thought to belong to learning and knowledge, will no more improve our understandings or strengthen our reason than the noise of a jack will fill our bellies or strengthen our bodies. And the art to fence with them which is called subtlety is of no more use than it would be to be dexterous in tying and untying knots in cobwebs. Words are of no value or use but as they are the signs of things; when they stand for

nothing they are less than ciphers, for instead of augmenting the value of those they are joined with, they lessen it and make it nothing; and where they have not a clear distinct signification they are like unusual or ill-made figures that confound our reckoning.

2. An aim and desire to know what hath been other men's opinions. Truth needs no recommendation, and error is not mended by it; and in our enquiry after knowledge it as little concerns us what other men have [fol. 90] [Saturday, 27 March] thought as it does one who is to go from Oxford to London to know what scholars walked gently on foot, enquiring the way and surveying the country as they went, who rode post after their guide without minding which way he led, who were carried along muffled up in a coach with their company, or where one Doctor lost or went out of his way, or where a Master [of Arts] stuck in the mire. If a traveller gets a knowledge of the right way, 'tis no matter whether he knows the infinite windings, by-ways, and turnings where others have been misled; the knowledge of the right secures him from the wrong, and that is his great business; and so methinks it is in our pilgrimage through this world. Men's phansies have been infinite, even of the learned, and the history of them endless; and some not knowing whither they would [fol. 91] go, have kept going though they have only roved; others have followed only their own imaginations, though they meant right, which is an arrant will-o'-the-wisp, and leads one through strange mazes. Interest hath blinded some, and prejudice others, who have yet marched confidently on; and however out of the way, they have thought themselves most in the right. I do not say this to undervalue the light we receive from others, or to think there are not those who assist us mightily in our endeavours after knowledge; perhaps without books we should be as ignorant as the Indians whose minds are as ill-clad as their bodies. But I think it is an idle and useless thing to make it one's business to study what have been other men's sentiments in things where reason is only to be judge, on purpose to be furnished with them, and to be able to cite them on all occasions. However it be esteemed a great part of learning, yet to a man that considers how little time he has, and how much work to do, how many things he is to learn, how many doubts to clear in religion, how many rules to establish to himself in morality, how much pain to be taken with himself to master his unruly desires and [fol. 92] passions, how to provide himself against a thousand cases and accidents that will happen, and an infinite deal more both in his general and particular calling; I say to a man that considers this well, it will not seem much his business to

acquaint himself designedly with the various conceits of men that are to be found in books, even upon subjects of moment. I deny not but the knowing of those opinions in all their variety, contradiction, and extravagancy may serve well to instruct us in the vanity and ignorance of mankind, and both to humble and caution us upon that consideration; but this seems not reason enough to me to engage purposely in this study, and in our enquiries after more material points we shall meet with enough of this medley to acquaint us with the weakness of man's understanding.

3. Purity of language, a polished style, or exact criticism in foreign languages—thus I think Greek and Latin may be called, as well as French and Italian—and to spend much time [fol. 93] in these may perhaps serve to set one off in the world, and give one the reputation of a scholar; but if that be all, methinks his labouring for an outside is at best but a handsome dress of truth or falsehood that one busies oneself about, and makes most men that lay out their time that way rather fashionable gents than wise or useful men.

There are so many advantages of speaking one's own language well and being a master of it that let a man's calling be what it will, it cannot but be worth our taking some pains in it; but it is by no means to have the first place in our studies. But he that makes good language subservient to a good life and an instrument of virtue is doubly enabled to do good to others.

When I speak against the laying out our time and study on criticisms, I mean such as may serve to make us great masters in Pindar and Persius, Herodotus and Tacitus; and I must always be understood to except all study of languages and critical learning that may aid us in understanding the scriptures, for they being an eternal foundation of truth as immediately coming from the fountain of it and of truths, too, of great importance, whatsoever doth [fol. 95] help us to understand their true sense doth well deserve our pains and study.

4. Antiquity and history, as far as it is designed only to furnish us with story and talk. For the stories of Alexander and Caesar, no farther than as they instruct us in the art of living well, and furnish us with observations of wisdom and prudence, are not one jot to be preferred to the history of Robin Hood or the seven wise masters. [fol. 96] [Monday, 29 March] I do not deny but history is very useful and very instructive of human life; but if it be studied only for the reputation of being an historian, it is a very empty thing, and he that can tell all the particularities of Herodotus and Plutarch, Curtius and Livy, without making other use of them may be an ignorant man with a good memory,

and with all his pains hath only filled his head with Christmas tales. And which is worse, the greatest part of history being made up of wars and conquest, and their style, especially the Romans, speaking of valour as the chief if not almost the only virtue, we are in danger to be misled by the general current [fol. 97] and business of history; and looking on Alexander and Caesar and such like heroes as the highest instances of human greatness because they each of them caused the death of several 100,000 men, and the ruin of much a greater number, overran great parts of the earth, and killed their inhabitants to possess themselves of their countries, we are apt to make butchery and rapine the chief marks and very essence of human greatness. And if civil history be a great dealer of it, and to many readers thus useless, curious and difficult enquiries in antiquity are much more so, as the exact dimensions of the Collossus, or figure of the Capitol, the ceremonies of the Greek and Roman marriages, or who it was that first coined money. These I confess set a man well off in the world, especially amongst the learned, but set him very little on in his way.

5. Nice questions and remote useless speculations, as where the earthly paradise was, or what fruit it was that was forbidden, where Lazarus's soul was whilst his body lay dead, or what kind of bodies we shall have at the Resurrection, etc.[1]

These things well-regulated will cut off at once a great deal of business from one who [fol. 98] is setting out into a course of study; not that all those are to be counted utterly useless, and time cast away on them. The four last may be each of them the full and laudable employment of several persons who may with great advantage make languages, history, or antiquity their study. For as for words without meaning, which is the first head I mention, I cannot imagine them any way worth hearing or reading, much less studying. But there is such a harmony in all sorts of truth and real knowledge—they do all support and give light so to one another—that one cannot deny but languages and criticisms, history and antiquity, strange opinions and odd speculations, serve often to clear and confirm very material and useful doctrines. My meaning, therefore, is not that they are not to be looked into by a studious man at any time. All that I intend is that they are not to be made our chief aim or first business, and that they are always to be handled with some caution and subordination to our great end. For since having but a little time, we have need of much care in the husbanding of it. Those parts of knowledge ought not to have either the first or greatest part of our studies, and we have the more need of this caution because they are much in vogue amongst men of letters [fol. 99], and carry with them a great esteem of learning, and so are a glittering temptation in a studious man's way, and such as is very likely to mislead him. But if it were fit for me to marshal the parts of knowledge, and allot to everyone its place and precedency thereby to direct our studies, I should think it were natural to set them in this order:

1. Heaven being our great business and interest, the knowledge which may direct us thither is certainly so, too; so that this is without peradventure the study which ought to take up the first and chiefest place in our thoughts. But wherein it consists, its parts, method, and application, will deserve a chapter by itself.

2. The next thing to happiness in the other world is a quiet, prosperous passage through this, which requires a discreet conduct and management of ourselves in [fol. 100] the several occurrences of our lives. The study of prudence, then, seems to me to deserve the second place in our thoughts and studies. A man may be perhaps a good man (which lives in truth and sincerity of heart towards God) with a small proportion of prudence, but he will never be very happy in himself, nor useful to others without. These two are every man's business.

3. If those who are left by their predecessors in a plentiful fortune are excused from having a particular calling in order to their subsistence in this life, 'tis yet certain by the law of God they are under an [fol. 101] obligation of doing something; which, having been judiciously treated by an able pen,[1] I shall not here meddle with, but pass to those who have made letters their business; and on these I think it is incumbent to make the proper business of their calling the third place in their study.

This order being laid, it will be easy for everyone to determine with himself what tongues and histories are to be studied by him, and how far in subserviency to his general or particular calling.

Our business being thus parcelled out, and being in every part of it very large, it is certain we should set ourselves on work without ceasing, did not both the parts we are made up of bid us hold. Our bodies and our minds are neither of them capable of continual study, and if we [fol. 114] take not a just measure of our strength in endeavouring to do a great deal, we shall do nothing at all.

[1] Sir Thomas Browne expressed similar doubts about the usefulness of studying questions of this type in his *Religio Medici* (1642), part 1, §21.

[1] Probably Richard Allestree, D.D., one-time Censor of Locke's own Christ Church, Oxford, and Regius Professor of Divinity (1663–79), the author of the highly popular *The Gentleman's Calling* (1659).

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; but be that as it will, this I'm sure, the principal end why we are to get knowledge here is to make use of it for the benefit of ourselves and others in this world. But if by gaining it we destroy our health, we labour for a thing that will be useless in our hands. And if by harassing our bodies (though with a design to render ourselves more useful) we deprive ourselves of the abilities and opportunities of doing that good we might have done with meaner talent, which God thought sufficient for us, by having denied us the strength to improve it to that pitch which men of stronger constitutions can attain to, we rob God of so much service, and our neighbour of all that help which, in a state of health with moderate knowledge, we might have been able to perform. He that sinks his vessel by overloading it, though it be gold and silver and precious stones, will give his owner but an ill account of his voyage. [fol. 115]

It being past doubt, then, that allowance is to be made to the temper and strength of our bodies, and that our health is to regulate the measure of our studies, the great secret is to find out the proportion; the difficulty whereof lies in this, that it must not only be varied according to the constitution and strength of every individual man, but it must also change with the temper, vigor, and circumstances of health of every particular man, in the different varieties of health or indisposition of body, which everything our bodies have any commerce with is able to alter. So that it is as hard to say how many hours a day a man shall study constantly as to prescribe him how much meat he shall eat every day, wherein his own prudence governed by the present circumstances can only judge. Only I think there may be some few directions that may reach almost all cases, viz.

1. That one never study so soon after eating as to hinder digestion; two or three hours is the usual allowance for this, though in some it ought to be longer, and others shorter, whereof this may be a certain criterion, that if one find any flushing in the [fol. 116] face, or any heat in the head, any dullness or heaviness, or any disorder in the stomach, upon studying after repast, 'tis certain, though it be four or five hours after, that we have begun too soon; the regular proceeding of our watch not being here the fit measure of the time, but the secret motions of a much more curious engine, our bodies, being to limit out the portions of time in this occasion. However, it may be so continued that all this time may not be quite lost, for the conversation and discourse with an

ingenious friend upon what one hath read in the morning, or any other profitable subject, may perhaps let into the mind as much improvement of knowledge, though with less prejudice to the health, as settled, solemn poring on books, which we generally call study; which, though one necessary part, yet I'm sure is not the only, and perhaps not the best, way of improving the understanding; but of that in another place.[1]

2. Great care is to be taken that our studies encroach not upon our sleep. Most people apply this rule particularly to the night and late sitting up, and I more especially to the morning, [fol. 117] for which I think I could give reasons, though therein much is to be permitted to everyone's experience. This I'm sure, sleep is the great balsam of life, and restorative of nature; and studious, sedentary men have more need of it than the active and laborious, because these men's business, i.e. their bodily pains, though they waste the spirits, yet at the same time help transpiration and carry away the excrements which are the foundation of diseases; whereas the studious, sedentary [fol. 118] man, employing his spirits within, equally or more wastes them than the other, but without the benefit of carrying off the excrements which should be expelled by transpiration, which being by little and little collected becomes the matter of a disease; whereof the true cause which was insensible and by slow degrees is seldom taken notice of. The great remedy to repair this evil in studious men is sleep, which is the great promoter of transpiration, and the time nature gets to employ the spirits (which our waking thoughts turned aside from their natural business) in setting right the economy of the body. A studious man that is lean, I imagine, should sleep as much as he could; and when it is well cast up, it will be found, perhaps, that an hour's sleep extraordinary *does not amount* to so great a loss of time as those aching heads or a sick stomach, sore eyes, or catarrhs, fevers, and agues, which are often the effect of over-watching.

3. We are to lay by our books and meditations when we find either our heads or stomachs indisposed upon any occasion whatsoever; study at such time doing great harm to the body, and very little good to the mind.

These are those several rules of forbearances [fol. 119] which the body sets before the student on its part, or at least as many of them as I at present can call to mind. Other more particular rules must be left to everyone to be made by his own private observation of himself and particular constitution.

[1] See below, p. 422.

1. As the body so the mind also gives laws to our studies; I mean to the duration and continuance of it. Let it be never so capacious, never so active, it is not capable of constant labour or total rest. The labour of the mind is study or intention of thought; and when we find it is weary either in pursuing other men's thoughts, as in reading, or tumbling and tossing its own as in meditation, 'tis time to give off and let it recover itself. Sometimes meditation proves a refreshment to the weariness of reading, et vice versa; sometimes the change of game, i.e. going from one subject or science to another, rouses the mind and fills it with fresh vigor; oftentimes discourse enlivens it when it flags, and puts an end to the weariness without stopping it one jot, but rather forwarding it in its journey; and sometimes it is so perfectly tired that nothing [fol. 120] but a total relaxation will serve the turn. All these are to be made use of according as everyone finds most successful in himself to the best husbanding of his time and thoughts.

2. The mind has sympathies and antipathies as well as the body; it has a natural preference often of one study before another. 'Twould be well if one had a perfect command of these, and sometimes one is to try for the mastery to bring the mind into order and a pliant obedience; but generally it is better to follow the bent and tendency of the mind itself, so long as it keeps within the bounds of our proper business, wherein here is generally latitude enough. By this means we shall go not only a great deal faster, and hold out a great deal longer, but the discoveries we shall make will be a great deal clearer, and make deeper impressions in our minds. The inclination to the mind is as the palate to the stomach; that seldom digests well in the stomach, or adds much strength to the body, that nauseates the palate, and is not recommended by that. 'Tis true 'tis not so in physic, but that hath a different end, [fol. 121] and is not as food for nourishment.

There is a kind of restiness in almost everyone's mind; sometimes without perceiving the cause, it will boggle and stand still, and one cannot get it a step forward; and at another time it will press forward, and there is no holding it in. It is always good to take it when it is willing, and keep on whilst it goes at ease, though it be to the breach of some of the other rules concerning the body. But one must take care of trespassing on that side too often, for one that takes pleasure in study, flattering himself that a little now and a little tomorrow does no harm, that he feels no ill effects of an hour's sitting up, or a quick retirement to his study after eating, insensibly undermines his health; and when the disease breaks out, it is seldom charged upon these past miscarriages

that laid in the provision for it, but the next sensible accident, that, as it were, have fire to the train, bears all the blame of it. But to return to the business in hand. These two I have here set down are, I suppose, the principal indications to be taken immediately from the mind, where by that at any time invites or dissuades study. [fol. 122]

The subject being chosen, the body and mind being both in a temper fit for study, what remains but that a man betake himself to it? These certainly are good preparatories, and yet if there be not something else done, perhaps we were better sit still, or at best shall not make all the profit we may.

1. 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 is, so is the difference and value of one man above another. He that fills his head with vain notions and false opinions may have his mind perhaps puffed up and seemingly much enlarged, but in truth it is narrow and empty; for all that [fol. 124] it comprehends, all that it contains, amounts to nothing, or less than nothing; for falsehood is below ignorance, and a lie worse than nothing.

Our first and great duty, then, is to bring to our studies, to our enquiries after knowledge, a mind covetous of truth, that seeks after nothing else, and after that impartially, and embraces it how poor, how contemptible, how unfashionable soever it may seem. This is that which all studious men profess to do, and yet it is that where I think very many miscarry. Who is there almost that hath not opinions planted in him by education time out of mind, which by that means come to be as the municipal laws of the country which must not be questioned, but are here looked on with reverence as the standards of right and wrong, truth and falsehood; when perhaps these so sacred opinions were but the oracles of the nursery, or the traditional grave talk of those who pretend to inform our childhood, who received them from hand to hand without ever examining them? This is the fate of our tender age, which being thus seasoned early, it grows by continuation of time, as it were, into the very constitution of the mind, which afterwards very difficultly receives a different tincture. When we are grown up, we find the world divided into bands and companies, not only as congregated

under several politics and governments, but united only upon account of opinions, [fol. 125] and in that respect combined strictly one with another, and distinguished from others, especially in matters of religion. If birth or chance hath not thrown a man young into any of these, (which yet seldom fails to happen,) choice, when he is grown up, certainly puts him into some or other of them, often out of an opinion that that party is in the right, and sometimes because he finds it is not safe to stand alone, and therefore thinks it convenient to herd somewhere.

Now in every one of these parties of men there are a certain number of opinions which are received and owned as the doctrine and tenets of that society, into the profession and practise whereof all who are of their communion ought to give up themselves, or else they will be scarce looked on as of that society, or at least be thought but lukewarm brothers, or in danger to apostatize. 'Tis plain in the great difference and contrariety of opinions that are amongst these several parties that there is much falsehood and abundance of mistakes in most of them. Cunning in some and ignorance in others first made them [...] keep them up. And yet how seldom is it that implicit faith, fear of loosing credit with the party, or interest (for all these operate in their turns) suffers anyone to question any of the tenets of his party; but altogether in a bundle he receives, [fol. 126] embraces, and without examining professes and sticks to them, and measures all other opinions by them. Worldly interest also insinuates into several men's minds diverse opinions which, suiting with their temporal advantage, are kindly received and in time so riveted there that it is not easy to remove them.

By these and perhaps other means, opinions come to be settled and fixed in men's minds, which, whether true or false, there they remain in reputation as substantial material truths, and so are seldom questioned or examined by those who entertain them; and if they happen to be false, as in most men the greatest part must necessarily be, they put a man quite out of the way in the whole course of his studies; and though in his reading and enquiries he flatter himself that his design is to inform his understanding in the real knowledge of truth, yet in effect it tends and reaches to nothing but the confirming of his already received opinions, the things he meets with in other men's writings or discourses being received or rejected as they hold proportion with those anticipations which before have taken possession of his mind. This will plainly appear if we look but on an instance or two of [fol. 127] it.

'Tis a principal doctrine of the Roman party to believe that their church is infallible. This is received as the mark of a good Catholic, and

implicit faith or fear or interest keeps all men from questioning it. This being entertained as an undoubted principle, see what work it makes with scripture and reason; neither of them will be heard—though speaking with never so much clearness and demonstration—when they contradict any of her doctrines or institutions; and though it is not grown to that height barefaced to deny the scripture, yet interpretations and distinctions evidently contrary to the plain sense and to the common apprehensions of men are made use of to elude its meaning, and preserve entire the authority of this their principle, that the church is infallible. On the other side, make the light within our guide and see also what will become of reason and scripture. A Hobbist[1] with his principle of self-preservation, whereof himself is to be judge, will not easily admit a great many plain duties of morality. The same must necessarily be found in all men who have taken up principles without examining the truth of them. [fol. 128]

It being here, then, that men take up prejudice to truth without being aware of it, and afterwards, like men of corrupted appetites, when they think to nourish themselves, generally feed only on those things that suit with and increase the vicious humour—this part is carefully to be looked after. These ancient preoccupations of our minds, these revered and almost sacred opinions, are to be examined if we will make way for truth, and put our minds in that freedom which belongs and is necessary to them. A mistake is not the less so, nor will ever grow into a truth, because we have believed it a long time, though perhaps it be the harder to part with. And an error is not the less dangerous, nor the less contrary to truth, because it is cried up and had in veneration by my party, though 'tis likely we shall be the less disposed to think it so. Here, therefore, we had need of all our force and all our sincerity; and here 'tis we have use of the assistance of a serious and sober friend who may help us sedately to examine these our received and beloved opinions.[2] For they are those that the mind, by itself being prepossessed with them, cannot so easily question, look round, and argue against. They are the darlings of our minds, and 'tis as hard to find fault with them as for a man in love to dislike his mistress. There is need, therefore, of the assistance of another; at least it is very useful impartially to show us their defects, and help [fol. 129] us to try them by the plain and evident principles of reason and religion.

[1] A disciple of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), the philosopher of Malmesbury.
[2] William Molyneux of Dublin, whom Locke met through correspondence in 1692, was such a friend to Locke. See also Coste, 1705, p. 170.

2. This grand miscarriage in our studies draws after it another of less consequence, which yet is very natural for bookish men to run into, and that is in the reading of authors very intently and diligently to mind the arguments pro and con they use, and endeavour to lodge them safe in their memories to serve them upon occasion; this, where it succeeds to the purpose designed (which it only does in very good memories, and indeed as rather a business of the memory than judgement), sets a man off before the world as a very knowing, learned man, but upon trial will not [be] found to be so indeed. It may make a man a ready talker and disputant, but not an able man. It teaches a man to be a fencer; but in the irreconciliable war between truth and falsehood, it seldom or never enables him to choose the right side, or to defend it well being got of it. He that desires to be knowing indeed, that covets rather the possession of truth than the show of learning, that designs to improve himself in the solid, substantial knowledge of things, ought I think to take another course, i.e. to endeavour to get a true and clear notion of things as they [fol. 130] are in themselves; this being fixed in the mind will (without trusting to or troubling the memory which often fails us) always naturally suggest arguments upon all occasions, either to defend the truth, or confound error. This seems to me to be that which makes some men's discourse so clear, evident, and demonstrative, even in a few words. For 'tis but laying before us the true nature of anything we would discourse of; and our faculty of reasoning is so natural to us that the clear inferences do, as it were, make themselves: we have, as it were, an intuitive knowledge of the truth which is always most acceptable to the mind, and the mind embraces it in its native and naked beauty. This way also of knowledge, as it is in less danger to be lost because it burdens not the memory, but is placed in the judgement; so it makes a man talk always coherently and consistently to himself, on which side soever he is attacked, or with whatsoever arguments; the same truth, by its natural light and contrariety to falsehood, still shows without much ado or any great and long deduction of words the weakness and absurdity of the opposition. Whereas the topical man, with his great stock of borrowed and collected arguments, will be found often to contradict himself; for the arguments of divers men being often founded upon different notions, and deduced from contrary [fol. 131] principles, though they may be all directed to the support or confutation of some one opinion, do notwithstanding often really clash one with another.

3. Another thing that is of great use for the clear perception of truth is if we can bring ourselves to it to think upon things abstracted and

separate from words.[1] Words without doubt are the great and almost only way of conveyance of one man's thoughts to another man's understanding; but when a man thinks, reasons, and discourses within himself, I see not what need he has of them. I'm sure 'tis better to lay them aside and have an immediate converse with the Ideas[2] of the things. For words are in their own nature so doubtful and obscure, their signification for the most part uncertain and undetermined, which men even designedly have in their use of them increased, that if in our meditations our thoughts busy themselves about words, and stick at the names of things, 'tis odds but they are misled or confounded. This perhaps at first sight may seem but a useless nicety, and in the practise perhaps it will be found more difficult than one would imagine; but yet upon trial I dare say [fol. 132] anyone's experience will tell him it was worthwhile to endeavour it. He that would call to mind his absent friend, or preserve his memory, does it best and most effectually by reviving in his mind the Idea of him, and contemplating that; and 'tis but a faint, imperfect way of thinking on one's friend barely to remember his name, and think upon the sound he is usually called by.

4. 'Tis of great use in the pursuit of knowledge not to be too confident nor too distrustful of our own judgement, not to believe we can comprehend all things or nothing. He that distrusts his own judgement in everything, and thinks his understanding not to be relied on in the search of truth, cuts off his own legs that he may be carried up and down by others, and makes himself a ridiculous dependence upon the knowledge of others, which can be possibly of no use to him; for I can no more know anything by another man's understanding than I can see by another man's eyes. So much I know, so much truth I have got, so far I am in the right, as I do really know myself; whatever other men have, 'tis their possession; it belongs not to me nor can be communicated to me but by making me alike knowing. 'Tis a treasure that cannot be lent or made over. On the other side, he that thinks his understanding capable of all things mounts upon wings of his own phansy, though indeed nature [fol. 133] never meant him any, and so venturing into the vast *expansum* of incomprehensible verities only makes good the fable of Icarus, and looses himself in abyss.

We are here in the state of mediocrity—finite creatures, furnished with powers and faculties very well fitted to some purposes, but very disproportionate to the vast and unlimited extent of things.

5. It would therefore be of great service to us to know how far our

[1] See the *Essay*, Book III, 'of Words'. [2] See above, p. 398, n. 1.

faculties can reach, that so we might not go about to fathom where our line is too short, to know what things are the proper objects of our enquiries and understanding, and when it is we ought to stop and launch out no farther for fear of loosing ourselves or our labour. This perhaps is an enquiry of as much difficulty as any we shall find in our way of knowledge, and fit to be resolved by a man when he is come to the end of his study, and not to be proposed to one at his setting out; it being properly the result to be expected after a long and diligent research to determine what is knowable and what not, and not a question to be resolved by the guesses of one who has scarce yet acquainted himself with obvious truths. I shall therefore at present suspend the [fol. 134] thoughts I have had upon this subject which ought maturely to be considered of. [Memorandum: that things infinite are too large for our capacity; we can have no comprehensive knowledge of them, and our thoughts are at a loss, and confounded, when they pry too curiously into them. The essences also of substantial beings are beyond our ken. The manner also how nature in this great machine of the world produces the several phenomena, and continues the species of things in a successive generation, etc., is what I think lies also out of the reach of our understandings. That which seems to me to be suited to the end of man, and lie level to his understanding, is the improvement of natural experiments for the conveniencies of this life, and the way of ordering himself so as to attain happiness in the other, i.e. moral philosophy, which in my sense comprehends religion too, or a man's whole duty; but *vide* this alibi.]

6. For the shortening of our pains, and keeping us from incurable doubt and perplexity of mind and an endless enquiry after greater certainty than is to be had, it would be very convenient, in the several points that are to be known and studied, to consider what proofs the matter in hand is capable of, [fol. 135] and not to expect other kinds of evidence than the nature of the thing will bear. Where it hath all the proofs that such a matter is capable of, there we ought to acquiesce and receive it as an established and demonstrated truth; for that which hath all the evidence it can have, all that belongs to it in the common state and order of things, and that supposing it to be as true as anything ever was, yet you cannot possibly contrive or imagine how to have better proofs of it than you have without a miracle. Whatsoever is so, though there may be some doubts, some obscurity, yet is clear enough to determine our thoughts and fix our assent. The want of this caution, I fear, has been the cause why some men have turned sceptics in points

of great importance, which yet have all the proofs that, considering the nature and circumstances of the things, any rational man can demand, or the most cautious phansy.

7. A great help to the memory and means to avoid confusion in our thoughts is to draw out and have frequently before us a scheme of those sciences we employ our studies in, a map, as it were, of the *mundus intelligibilis*. This perhaps will be best done by everyone himself for his own [fol. 136] use, as best agreeable to his own notions; though the nearer it comes to the nature and order of things, it is still the better. However, it cannot be decent for me to think my crude draught fit to regulate another's thoughts by, especially when perhaps our studies lie different ways; though I cannot but confess to have received this benefit by it, that though I have changed often the subject I have been studying, read books by patches and as they have accidentally come in my way, and observed no method or order in my studies, yet making now and then some little reflection upon the order of things as they are —or at least as I have phansied them to have in themselves—I have avoided confusion in my thoughts; the scheme I had made serving like a regular chest-of-drawers to lodge those things orderly and in their proper places which came to hand confusedly, and without any method at all.

8. It will be no hindrance at all to our studies if we sometimes study [fol. 138] ourselves, i.e. our own abilities and defects. There are peculiar endowments and natural fitnesses, as well as defects and weaknesses, almost in every man's mind. When we have considered and made ourselves acquainted with them, we shall not only be the better enabled to find out remedies for the infirmities, but we shall know the better how to turn ourselves to those things which we are best fitted to deal with, and so to apply ourselves in the course of our studies as we may be able to make the greatest advantage. He that has a bitle[1] and wedges put into his hand may easily conclude he is ordered to cleave knotty pieces, and a plane and carving tools designs handsome figures.

'Tis too obvious a thing to mention reading only the best authors on those subjects we would inform ourselves in. The reading of bad books is not only loss of time and standing still, but going backwards quite out of one's way. And he that hath his head filled with wrong notions is much more at a distance [fol. 137] from truth than he that is perfectly ignorant. I will only say this one thing concerning books, that however

[1] *Bittle* or *beetle* a heavy-headed mall used to crush stone or drive wedges. (*O.E.D.*)

it hath got the name, yet converse with books is not in my opinion the principal part of study. There are two others that ought to be joined with it, each whereof contributes their share to our improvement in knowledge: and those are meditation and discourse. Reading, methinks, is but collecting the rough materials, amongst which a great deal must be laid aside as useless. Meditation is, as it were, choosing and fitting the materials, framing the timber, squaring and laying the stones, and raising the building. And discourse with a friend (for wrangling in a dispute is of little use) is, as it were, surveying the structure, walking in the rooms, and observing the symmetry and agreement of the parts, taking notice of the solidity or defects of the work, and the best way to find out and correct what is amiss. Besides that, it often helps also to discover truths and fix them in our minds as much as either of the other two.

'Tis time to make an end of this long overgrown discourse. I shall only add one word and then conclude; and that is, that whereas in the beginning I cut off history from our study as a useless part, as certainly it is when it is read only as a tale that is told; here on the other side I recommended it to one who hath well settled in his mind the principles of morality, and knows how to make a judgement on the actions of men, as one of the most useful studies he can apply himself to. There he shall see a picture of the world and the nature of mankind, and so learn to think of men as they are. There he shall see the rise of opinions and find from what slight and sometimes shameful [fol. 139] occasions some of them have taken their rise, which yet afterwards have had great authority and passed almost for sacred in the world, and borne down all before them. There also one may learn great and useful instructions of prudence, and be warned against the cheats and rogueries of the world, with many more advantages which I shall not here enumerate.

And so much concerning study. J. L. [fol. 140]