

CHAPTER FIVE

The Paradox of Moral Education and Locke's Second Perfection

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*Writing about moral education in the 1970s, the British philosopher of education, R. S. Peters, presented a puzzle that has since been known as “the paradox of moral education.” The problem was to explain how children can “enter the palace of Reason through the courtyard of Habit and Tradition.” Although this is not a paradox in the logical sense, it is a dilemma for any broadly Aristotelian account of moral education. Aristotle described the ability to be guided by reason as extrinsically habituated, but he did not explain in detail how habituation can lead to autonomy; and modern virtue ethicists have not added much to his scanty account. In the seventeenth century, John Locke (1632–1702) proposed a sophisticated theory of how autonomy develops through habituation. His account of autonomy-friendly habits is, arguably, one of the most elaborate attempts ever made to solve the puzzle presented by Peters. To understand Locke’s explanation of how children become autonomous through habituation, we need to read his theory of education, presented in *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, in the light of what he said about rational self-control in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. In the *Essay*, he drew a distinction between the liberty people enjoy when what they do is determined by their own will, on the one hand, and a second perfection one that consists in their will being determined by rational argument or deliberation, on the other. Locke’s analyses and arguments support the conclusion that this second perfection requires autonomy-friendly habits that are instilled through up-bringing and adult guidance. The gist of his argument is as follows:*

- *Without the second perfection our will is subject to irrational whims and impulses.*
- *Without habituation we cannot acquire the second perfection.*
- *Therefore: Without habituation our will is subject to irrational whims and impulses.*

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Introduction

In the early months of the year 1693, John Locke completed his *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, a work based on the advice and direction on the upbringing of a young gentleman that he had sent to his friend Edward Clarke over the years, beginning in 1684. According to Woolhouse's (2007, p. 325) biography, Locke was working on the second edition of his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* at the same time. (The first edition was printed in 1689.) For this second edition, he made some radical changes to his account of freedom in chapter xxi of the 2nd book, entitled "Of the idea of power." This chapter, the longest of the *Essay*, changed more between the five different editions published during Locke's lifetime than any other chapter. Yaffe (2000) has written a comprehensive account of these changes and thoroughgoing interpretations of Locke's conception of free agency. My understanding of this chapter is mostly based on his exegesis.

In 1697, four years after the second edition of the *Essay*, Locke was working on an addition to it containing advice on "how a healthy well-being of the understanding is to be developed and maintained" (Woolhouse, 2007, p. 387). This addition was never incorporated into the *Essay*. It was published posthumously, in 1706, as a separate book entitled *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*.

The account of freedom Locke presents in the chapter "Of the idea of power" in the second edition of the *Essay*, and elaborates in the *Conduct*, is not merely a definition. It is also an explanation of how people can learn rational self-control, which, according to Locke, makes freedom worth the name. Locke argues that no one can be truly free without such learning, and "to break loose from the conduct of reason, and to want that restraint of examination and judgment which keeps us from choosing or doing the worse" is not true liberty but madness (*Essay*, II:xxi: §51).¹

In what follows, I argue that the philosophy of education laid out in *Some Thoughts* is supported by Locke's account of freedom in the second (and subsequent) editions of the *Essay* and his advice in the *Conduct*. By reading these three works together, we can see how Locke's account of education is consistent with his ideals of a liberal society and religious freedom outlined in the *Two Treatises of Government* and *A Letter concerning Toleration*. Read in isolation, *Some Thoughts* may, however, appear much less liberal. One commentator, Carrig, has even argued that in this work "Locke's concern is not for liberty as such" (Carrig, 2001, p. 55), that he wanted to control young people and condition them to behave properly rather than make them free. Likewise, Spring (2008, pp. 161–168) argues that Locke's concept of education and his attitude towards children are authoritarian. A number of other commentators support the same conclusion and argue that Locke was not concerned with freedom at all. (For a review of the literature see Kogazon, 2016). What makes such interpretations of *Some Thoughts*

¹All references to Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* are marked with book, chapter and section numbers. Quotations are from Fraser's edition (Locke, 1959). Other works by Locke that I quote are: *The Conduct of the Understanding* (Locke, 1993), *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (Locke, 1989) and the second of the *Two Treatises of Government* (Locke, 1960).

appear plausible is Locke's emphasis on habituation to virtue and his advice on how best to manipulate the will and desires of children. If that work is read in isolation it is far from clear how the course of education Locke recommended is conducive to autonomy. His explanation of how control and habituation are compatible with freedom is not to be found in *Some Thoughts*, but in, rather, the *Essay* and the *Conduct*.

In his book, *Locke's Education for Liberty*, Tarcov (1999) presents a sympathetic interpretation of *Some Thoughts*. He points out that controlling the child the way Locke proposed can "in the best case, prepare for autonomous rational self-control" (Tarcov, 1999, p. 93). In the final pages of his book, Tarcov (1999, pp. 210–211) grants that liberty, whether from political tyranny or from superstition and intellectual authority requires the self-control and rationality Locke wanted to instil through his program of education. Tarcov does not, however, use the account of liberty in the second edition of the *Essay* to explain Locke's contention that formative education can make people free. The same is true of a more recent text Tarcov has written in cooperation with two other scholars (Schmitter, Tarcov and Donner, 2003).

Other authorities on Locke's philosophy of education, such as Bantock (1980a, 1980b), Yolton (1985, 1998), Yolton and Yolton (1989), Aarsleff (1994), LoLordo (2012), Moseley (2014), Kogazon (2016) and Nazar (2017) realise, like Tarcov, that autonomy was the primary aim of his program of education. Most commentators, however, do not connect his theory of education and the account of freedom in the *Essay*. This is true, for instance, of the authors of papers on various aspects of Locke's work published in Chappell (1994) and Newman (2007). Yolton (1985), however, comes close to making such a connection when he describes the account of freedom in the *Essay* right before turning to the philosophy of education, where he points out that, according to Locke "[l]earning to submit their desires to the parent's and tutor's reason is good and essential training for children" (Yolton, 1985, p. 22). It seems implicit in this that the training in question is a training that aims at rational self-control, i.e. the perfection that Locke described as necessary for fully-fledged autonomy or free agency. Likewise, LoLordo explains succinctly the connection between Locke's account of freedom and his philosophy of education. She argues that in Locke's view self-control relies on training and education (LoLordo, 2012, p. 123). The connection between Locke's philosophy of education and his account of freedom in the *Essay* is explained in more detail by Kogazon (2016) and Nazar (2017) who both argue that Locke had a much more sophisticated notion of free agency than most of his critics. On Locke's account, habituation does not exclude freedom and autonomy. On the contrary, young people cannot become free unless their elders help them to cultivate autonomy-friendly habits.

In what follows I draw upon the work of Yaffe (2000) and explain, in a more analytical fashion than the authors mentioned above, how the habituation recommended in *Some Thoughts* is compatible with autonomy. After that I will also explain how Locke's account of the development of free agency can be seen as a solution to the problem that R. S. Peters (1974), the British philosopher of education, called the paradox of moral education.

Rational Self-Control – 2nd Edition of the *Essay*

The main subject of the chapter entitled “Of the idea of power” in the second book of Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding* is what nowadays is called autonomy (Yaffe, 2000, p. 119). In the second edition, Locke distinguished between the liberty man enjoys provided that what he does is determined by his own will, and a second perfection, one that consists in his own will being determined by rational argument or deliberation. In the beginning of the chapter Locke defines liberty, saying that man is free so far as he “has power to think or not to think, to move or not to move, according to the preference or direction of his own mind” (*Essay*, II:xxi:§8). Later in the same section, he adds “that the idea of *liberty* is, the idea of a power in any agent to do or forbear any particular action, according to the determination or thought of the mind” (*Essay*, II:xxi:§8). In the sections that follow, Locke repeats, explains, and defends this definition of liberty and concludes that we “can scarce tell how to imagine any being freer, than to be able to do what he wills” (*Essay*, II:xxi:§21).

In the following section, Locke questions whether freedom so defined suffices to make man truly free “if he be not as *free to will* as he is to *act what he wills*” (*Essay*, II:xxi:§22). He finds the notion of a free will perplexing for two reasons. In the first place, he points out, since both will and freedom are abilities that people have, to ask if the will has freedom is to ask if one ability has another ability. And in the second place, he argues, if a choice is not free unless we first choose freely what to choose, then freedom involves an infinite regress (*Essay*, II:xxi:§23). From this Locke concludes that the notion of a free will is paradoxical, and the will of man cannot be free in a literal sense, “liberty consisting in a power to act or to forbear acting, and in that only” (*Essay*, II:xxi:§24). Chappell’s apt description of Locke’s position is “that freedom extends only to actions that are consequent upon volition, not to volitions themselves” (Chappell, 2007, p. 148).

Locke concedes, nevertheless, that there is an element of truth behind talk about free will. To extract this element of truth he inquires what determines the will and answers: “some (and for the most part the most pressing) *uneasiness* a man is at present under” (*Essay*, II:xxi:§31). In what follows, Locke explains this notion of uneasiness as including pain of the body, disquiet of the mind, and all desires, “desire being nothing but an uneasiness in the want of an absent good” (*Essay*, II:xxi:§31). Thus, according to his account, reason can only guide our actions by modifying our desires.

In the first edition of the *Essay* Locke gave a different account of what determines the will, but in the second edition he says:

It seems so established and settled a maxim, by the general consent of all mankind, that good, the greater good, determines the will, that I do not at all wonder that, when I first published my thoughts on this subject I took it for granted; and I imagine that, by a great many, I shall be thought more excusable for having then done so, than that now I have ventured to recede from so received an opinion. But yet, upon a stricter inquiry, I am forced to conclude that *good*, the *greater good*, though apprehended

and acknowledged to be so, does not determine the will, until our desire, raised proportionately to it, makes us uneasy in the want of it. [...] let a drunkard see that his health decays, his estate wastes; discredit and diseases, and the want of all things, even of his beloved drink, attends him in the course he follows: yet the returns of uneasiness to miss his companions, the habitual thirst after his cups at the usual time, drives him to the tavern (*Essay*, II:xxi:§35).

Locke's contemporary, the Irish philosopher William Molyneux, read his account in the first edition as implying Socrates' paradoxical contention that those who know what is good, cannot fail to do what is good (Chappell, 2007). The changes Locke made in the second edition enabled him to avoid this Socratic paradox and accommodate weakness of will, i.e. acting against one's better judgment (Magri, 2000).

In the following sections, Locke argues for the possibility of rational control of what makes us uneasy. He focuses mainly on the power of the mind to suspend the satisfaction of its desires and says:

[I]n this seems to consist that which is (as I think improperly) called *free-will*. For, during this suspension of any desire, before the will be determined to action, and the action (which follows the determination) done, we have opportunity to examine, view, and judge of the good or evil of what we are going to do; [...] and it is not a fault, but a perfection of our nature, to desire, will, and act according to the last result of a fair examination (*Essay*, II:xxi:§48).

In the next section, Locke concludes:

This is so far from being a restraint or diminution of freedom, that it is the very improvement and benefit of it; it is not an abridgement, it is the end and use of our liberty; and the further we are removed from such a determination, the nearer we are to misery and slavery. [...] it is as much a perfection, that desire, or the power of preferring, should be determined by good, as that the power of acting should be determined by the will; and the certainer such determination is, the greater is the perfection. Nay, were we determined by anything but the last result of our own minds, judging of the good or evil of any action, we were not free (*Essay*, II:xxi:§49).

Although Locke does not think that the will can, literally speaking, be free, he defends a notion of rational self-control, arguing that it contains the element of truth hidden behind talk about free will. It is not clear from Locke's text what exactly happens when people postpone the satisfaction of a desire or the alleviation of some other uneasiness. Possibly he took each instance of suspension to be a voluntary mental act determined by some uneasiness as Rickless (2013) argues. If we consider what he says in *Some Thoughts* about the importance of habituation then Lolordo's (2013) interpretation seems, however, more plausible. According to her Locke took suspension to be primarily habitual and not caused by volition (LoLordo, 2013). Whatever the exact nature of the power to suspend the satisfaction of a desire, it is clear that on Locke's account a man cannot be truly free without it. In light of this, he modifies his definition of freedom towards the

end of the chapter where it says that man “could not be *free* if his will were determined by anything but his own desire, guided by his own judgment” (*Essay*, II:xxi:§73). His view seems to be, in short, that the perfection of human nature he has described as an ability to be guided by one’s own judgement is possible, because:

- a) When some uneasiness presses on my will I can suspend or postpone acting on it and use the interval to deliberate on what I am about to do.
- b) Deliberation can create a new and more pressing uneasiness.
- c) Provided I have the right habits, deliberation normally creates an uneasiness that guides me to do what is good and thus saves me from the condition described as “misery and slavery” in the quotation above.

The third condition, c, is not stated explicitly in the *Essay*. It is, however, consistent with Locke’s text and supported by what he says in two of his other works, i.e. in the *Conduct* and in *Some Thoughts*.

The Cultivated Mind – The *Conduct*

In his posthumously published work *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, Locke has more to say about rational self-control. There he emphasises the need for training the mind and says that mental abilities which are “look'd on as natural Endowments, will be found when examined into more narrowly, to be the product of Exercise, and to be raised to that pitch only by repeated Actions” (*Conduct*, §4). A little later, he elaborates on this:

[W]ould you have a Man reason well, you must use him to it betimes, exercise his Mind in observing the Connection of Ideas and following them in train. Nothing does this better than Mathematics, which therefore I think should be taught all those who have the time and opportunity, not so much to make them Mathematicians, as to make them reasonable Creatures; for though we all call ourselves so, because we are born to it if we please, yet we may truly say Nature gives us but the Seeds of it; we are born to be, if we please, rational Creatures, but 'tis Use and Exercise only that makes us so, and we are indeed so no farther than industry and application has carried us (*Conduct*, §6).

Towards the end of the *Conduct*, Locke connects what he has said about the need for mental training and cultivation to his ideal of freedom and autonomy. He points out that even though men frequently say that nothing is so free as thought, our thoughts are often restive and ungovernable (*Conduct*, §43).

Men know the value of their corporal Liberty, and therefore suffer not willingly Fetters and Chains to be put upon them. To have the Mind captivated is, for the time, certainly the greater Evil of the two, and deserves our utmost care and Endeavours to preserve the freedom of our better part (*Conduct*, §43).

On Yaffe's interpretation Locke took full-fledged free agency to require actions to depend on the agent's choice, and his or her choice to depend on what is good (Yaffe, 2000, p. 118). Therefore, "the possibility of giving oneself over to forces external to and better than oneself is a crucial aspect of free agency" (Yaffe, 2000, p. 119). In other words, being autonomous involves the ability to be guided by sound knowledge and rational argument. And as the above quotations from the *Conduct* indicate, Locke took this perfection to require learning and training.

A Course of Education – *Some Thoughts*

In *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, Locke outlines a course of education focusing on moral education and rational self-control. He emphasises that the mind should be "made obedient to Discipline, and pliant to Reason" in early childhood, while it is still "easy to be bowed" (*Some Thoughts*, §33–34). The reason Locke gives for this is that someone who "is not used to submit his Will to the Reason of others, *when he is young*, will scarce hearken to submit to his own Reason, when he is of an Age to make use of it" (*Some Thoughts*, §36).

Although Locke does not use the word "suspend" in *Some Thoughts*, it is, as LoLordo (2012, p. 123) has pointed out, clear that he takes the capacity for suspension to be the principal aim of education. Consistent with this, he thinks the paramount aim of education is to accustom children to the rule of reason, and says:

He that has not a Mastery over his Inclinations, he that knows not how to *resist* the importunity of *present Pleasure or Pain*, for the sake of what Reason tells him is fit to be done, wants the true Principle of Vertue and Industry; and is in danger never to be good for anything (*Some Thoughts*, §45).

In light of his account of rational self-control in the *Essay*, it seems clear that Locke meant to control, form, and habituate children in order to enable them to be free in the sense defined in the *Essay*. He wanted the actions of children not only to be, eventually, determined by their own desires, but by desires guided by their own judgment (*Essay*, II:xxi:§73). According to Locke's account, this requires cultivation and habituation to be instilled in the child by parents or other adult educators.

As Passmore (1970, p. 162) has pointed out, most Christian philosophers had assumed that true virtue could not be founded on habit. Locke, in this regard, is closer to Aristotle who thought that true virtue was mostly a matter of habit. Locke also has a positive view on desire for reputation and concern for one's position or honour and emphasises that educators should make children love credit and avoid shame and disgrace (*Some Thoughts*, §56). This is repeated at the end of the second part of *Some Thoughts* where Locke sums up his conclusions about moral education:

Teach him to get a Mastery over his Inclinations, and *submit his Appetite to Reason*. This being obtained, and by constant practice settled into Habit, the hardest part of the Task is over. To bring a young Man to this, I know nothing which so much

contributes as the love of Praise and Commendation, which should therefore be instilled in him by all Arts imaginable. Make his Mind as sensible of Credit and Shame as may be: And when you have done that, you have put a Principle into him, which will influence his Actions, when you are not by, to which a fear of a little smart of a Rod is not comparable, and which will be the proper Stock, whereon afterwards to graft the true Principles of Morality and Religion (*Some Thoughts*, §200).

In light of what Locke says about liberty in the *Essay*, what he says about love of credit and apprehension of shame in *Some Thoughts* seems to be supported by reasons somewhat along these lines:

- a) If some uneasiness presses on my will and inclines me to choose a wrong action then
- b) deliberation will create a new uneasiness, more pressing, that inclines me to choose to do what is right
- c) provided I have enough knowledge to understand what is right, and therefore also honourable, and am sufficiently well habituated to seek credit and avoid shame and disgrace.

Locke does not say that this per se suffices to make people autonomous rational agents. Neither does he describe it as fully developed moral virtue. In his own words at the end of the above quotation it is a stock whereon to graft the true principle of morality. On his account those who are guided by shame are on the right path towards becoming fully rational agents. Here Locke agrees with Aristotle if Jimenez's (2011) interpretation of the role of shame in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is right. We can accept this Aristotelian-Lockean view on the role of credit and shame and still hold that some of those who are driven by desire for honour merely adjust their conduct to social norms that they have accepted or internalised without thought or reflection. The crucial role of credit and shame is to accustom people to stop and think before they are driven headlong by some uneasiness. Autonomy-friendly habits thus provide opportunities for rationality that go beyond mere subservience to social norms.

In *Some Thoughts* Locke recommended not only moral habituation, but also a course of study made up of subjects similar to those taught in most modern primary and secondary schools. The main subjects he listed were reading, writing, mathematics, natural- and social sciences, bookkeeping, geography, history, a modern foreign language, Latin, ethics and religion, dance, agriculture, carpentry, and drawing. Locke recommended some of these subjects primarily for their practical value. Some, especially mathematics, he saw as useful for training the mind and facilitating rational deliberation. Others, he probably saw as aids to the overarching purpose of instilling proper pride in children and making them seek honour and avoid disgrace. Maybe the following remark should be read in light of this:

It will perhaps be wondered, that I mention *Reasoning* with Children: And yet I cannot but think that the true Way of Dealing with them. They understand it as early as they do Language; and, if I misobserve not, they love to be treated as Rational Creatures sooner than is imagined. 'Tis a Pride should be cherished in them, and, as much as can be, made the great Instrument to turn them by (*Some Thoughts*, §81).

The curriculum Locke recommended was primarily meant to be a course of moral education. In his view, such education required that children be treated as rational creatures, and he suggested we could do this by teaching subjects that engage their reasoning abilities and accustom them to rational discourse.

Locke's account of why habituation is needed to make people virtuous harks back to what Aristotle (1941, 1103b–1104b) said about moral education in the first two chapters of the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is also a precursor of some modern views laid out by philosophers of education as different as Dewey and Peters.

Chapter five of Dewey's *Experience and Education* is entitled "The Nature of Freedom." On the last pages of this short chapter Dewey (1963, p. 64) describes self-control as the "ideal aim of education." Although he does not mention Locke his brief remarks are strikingly similar to the conclusions Locke defended in the three works I have discussed. Dewey thought, like Locke did, that education enables people to postpone immediate action. Without that ability they "are at the mercy of impulses into whose formation intelligent judgement has not entered" and therefore have "at most only the illusion of freedom" (Dewey, 1963, p. 65). This rings true: If people can be enmeshed because of over-hasty acts and responses the habit of stopping and thinking can enhance their freedom.

The Paradox of Moral Education

The problem Locke tried to solve, by explaining how education creates a capacity for suspension, has much in common with what R. S. Peters (1974) called "the paradox of moral education." This problem is, as Graham Haydon (2009) has argued, not a paradox in the logical sense. It is more of a quandary because it is puzzling how habituation can lead to autonomy, or as Peters put it, how children can "enter the palace of Reason through the courtyard of Habit and Tradition" (Peters, 1974, p. 272). Kristjánsson (2007, pp. 31–47) concurs with Peters and argues that this is a problem for any broadly Aristotelian account of moral education. Although Aristotle described the ability to be guided by one's own reason as extrinsically habituated he did not really explain how heteronomously formed autonomy comes about. In a more recent publication Kristjánsson (2013) says that although we know that this happens, moral educators since Aristotle's time have added little to his scanty account of how it happens.

Neither Peters nor Kristjánsson mention Locke in this connection. Nevertheless, he tackled this very enigma and presented a sophisticated account of how rational self-control develops through habituation. His account of autonomy-friendly habits is, arguably, one of the best attempts ever made to solve the problem and explain how children become autonomous through supervision,

control, and guidance. This account has, in my view, not received the attention it deserves.

As far as I can see Locke's outlook is largely consistent with modern Aristotelianism of the type Kristjánsson has defended in a number of publications (e.g. Kristjánsson, 2007, 2013, 2015, 2018). As Locke's contemporary, Leibniz, pointed out soon after the *Essay* was first published Locke was in some respects close to Aristotle (Leibniz, 1981) and this has also been noted by modern commentators (e.g. Moseley, 2014). Like Aristotle before him, Locke conceived of fully-fledged moral agency, befitting free individuals, as an ability to be guided by what is true and what is good rather than by whimsical personal preferences.

Concluding Remarks

Some years before Locke completed the three works from which I have quoted in this paper, i.e. the second edition of the *Essay*, *Some Thoughts*, and the *Conduct*, he wrote his *Two Treatises on Government*. In that work, he had much to say about "The *Natural Liberty* of Man to be free from any Superior Power on Earth" (*Second Treatise*, §22). He assumes, however, that children are subject to their parents who "have a sort of Rule and Jurisdiction over them when they come into the World, and for some time after" (*Second Treatise*, §55).

Thus we are *born Free*, as we are born Rational; not that we have actually the Exercise of either: Age, that brings one, brings with it the other too. And thus we see how *natural Freedom and Subjection to Parents* may consist together (*Second Treatise*, §61).

There is no reason to think Locke changed his mind on this. His program of education was meant to prepare children for freedom while they were still subject to the rule of their parents. He recommended respect for children and spoke against harsh discipline, not because he thought children could be fully free and responsible but because "*slavish Discipline* makes a *slavish Temper*" (*Some Thoughts*, §50) and thus destroys the proper pride that makes children seek what is honourable.

In the *Two Treatises*, as in the three later works listed above, Locke speaks for an ideal of rational self-control of free men. This ideal gives a unity to his work and connects his writings on education, politics, epistemology, and metaphysics.

In his *Letter concerning Toleration*, Locke (1983) defends the right of each individual to search for truth by his or her own lights. Granting people this right allows them to make mistakes and come to false conclusions. It does not follow from Locke's defence of religious freedom, however, that he thought false beliefs as good as true ones. He wanted belief formation to track what is objectively true. His ideal believer is an autonomous seeker of truth. Likewise, his ideal agent is an autonomous seeker of what is good. Locke was, nevertheless, liberal rather than authoritarian since he did not think that anyone could choose for other grown up people what to believe or what to do. Opposition to such authoritarianism is

integral to his philosophical outlook. It is supported by his account of moral rights in the second of the *Two Treatises on Government* and by the sceptical leanings of his epistemology. The central thesis of the *Essay* is that human knowledge is limited and most of it uncertain. Towards the end of the *Essay*, Locke connects this epistemological modesty and his liberal outlook when he concludes that it is not realistic to think that some select few can rationally guide others:

The necessity of believing without knowledge, nay often upon very slight grounds, in this fleeting state of action and blindness we are in, should make us more busy and careful to inform ourselves than constrain others. At least, those who have not thoroughly examined to the bottom all their own tenets, must confess they are unfit to prescribe to others; and are unreasonable in imposing that as truth on other men's belief, which they themselves have not searched into, nor weighed the arguments of probability, on which they should receive or reject it. Those who have fairly and truly examined, and thereby got past doubt in all the doctrines they profess and govern themselves by, would have a juster pretence to require others to follow them: but these are so few in number, and find so little reason to be magisterial in their opinions, that nothing insolent and imperious is to be expected from them: and there is reason to think, that, if men were better instructed themselves, they would be less imposing on others (*Essay*, IV:xvi:§4).

In this passage Locke implies that those with enough wisdom to lead are too mindful of their own human limitations to force their views on others. He seems to suggest that those most eager to rule over others are least able to provide rational guidance. Taking into account his frequent use of understatement, it seems plausible that when he said that those who have “got past doubt in all the doctrines they profess” are “few in number” he meant that such persons are nowhere to be found.

The liberty Locke advocated in his political writings allows people to be guided by their own opinions. Locke was, however, not content with any idiosyncratic outlook. The course of education outlined in *Some Thoughts* was, first and foremost, meant to give students what he called “the very improvement and benefit” of freedom by enabling their actions and beliefs to be determined, as far as humanly possible, by what is good and what is true (*Essay*, II:xxi:§49). His ideal of autonomy was, as Yaffe (2000) has argued, an ideal of self-transcendence rather than self-expression. On Locke's conception of freedom, those who are most truly free do what is objectively good rather than what is expressive of their individual peculiarities. His theory of self-government is, thus, also a theory of self-transcendence.

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