



Johannes Locke.

A N  
E S S A Y  
C O N C E R N I N G  
Human Understanding.

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I N F O U R B O O K S .

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Written by J O H N L O C K E , Gent.

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The T W E L F T H E D I T I O N .

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V O L U M E I .

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E C C L E S . X I . 5 .

*As thou knowest not what is the Way of the Spirit, nor how the Bones do grow in the Womb of her that is with Child : Even so thou knowest not the Works of God who maketh all Things.*

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*Quam bellum est velle confiteri potius nescire quod nescias, quam ista effutientem nauseare, atque ipsum sibi displicere!*

Cic. de Natur. Deor. l. 1.

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L O N D O N :

Printed for C. HITCH in *Pater-noster-Row* ;  
J. PEMBERTON in *Flsetstreet* ; J. BEECROFT in  
*Lombard-Street* ; and S. SYMON in *Cornbill*.

M D C C X L I .

## The Epistle to the Reader.

Foundational decision  
to relocate analysis to  
the mental.

*I should tell thee, that five or six Friends meeting at my Chamber, and discoursing on a Subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a Stand, by the Difficulties that rose on every Side. After we had a while puzzled ourselves, without coming any nearer a Resolution of those Doubts which perplexed us, it came into my Thoughts, that we took a wrong Course; and that, before we set ourselves upon Enquiries of that Nature, it was necessary to examine our own Abilities, and see what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with. This I proposed to the Company, who all readily assented; and thereupon it was agreed, that this should be our first Enquiry. Some hasty, and undigested Thoughts on a Subject I had never before considered, which I set down against our next Meeting, gave the first Entrance into this Discourse, which having been thus begun by Chance, was continued by Intreaty; written by incoherent Parcels; and, after long Intervals of Neglect, resum'd again, as my Humour or Occasions permitted; and at last, in a Retirement, where an Attendance on my Health gave me Leisure, it was brought into that Order thou now seest it.*

*This discontinued Way of Writing may have occasioned, besides others, two contrary Faults, viz. that too little and too much may be said in it. If thou findest any Thing wanting, I shall be glad, that what I have writ gives thee any Desire, that I should have gone farther: If it seems too much to thee, thou mayst blame the Subject; for when I first put Pen to Paper, I thought all I should have to say on this Matter, would have been contained in one Sheet of Paper; but the farther I went, the larger Prospect I had: New Discoveries led me still on, and so it grew insensibly to the Bulk it now appears in. I will not deny, but possibly it might be reduced to a narrower Compass than it is; and that some Parts of it might be contracted; the Way it has been writ in, by Catches, and many long Intervals of Interruption, being apt to cause some Repetitions. But to confess the Truth, I am now too lazy, or too busy to make it shorter.*

*I am*

## The Epistle to the Reader.

self the Trouble to consider them so far as to know what he himself or others precisely mean by them: I have therefore in most Places chose to put determinate or determined, instead of clear and distinct, as more likely to direct Men's Thoughts to my Meaning in this Matter. By those Denominations, I mean some Object in the Mind, and consequently determined, i. e. such as it is there seen and perceived to be. This, I think, may fitly be called a determinate or determined Idea, when such as it is at any Time objectively in the Mind, and so determined there, it is annex'd, and without Variation determined to a Name or articulate Sound, which is to be steddily the Sign of that very same Object of the Mind, or determinate Idea.

Simple and complex ideas.

To explain this a little more particularly. By determinate, when applied to a simple Idea, I mean that simple Appearance which the Mind has in its View, or perceives in itself, when that Idea is said to be in it: By determinate, when applied to a complex Idea, I mean such an one as consists of a determinate Number of certain simple or less complex Ideas, join'd in such a Proportion and Situation, as the Mind has before its View, and sees in it self when that Idea is present in it, or should be present in it, when a Man gives a Name to it: I say should be; because it is not every one, nor perhaps any one, who is so careful of his Language, as to use no Word, till he views in his Mind the precise determined Idea, which he resolves to make it the Sign of. The Want of this, is the Cause of no small Obscurity and Confusion in Men's Thoughts and Discourses.

I know there are not Words enough in any Language, to answer all the Variety of Ideas that enter into Men's Discourses and Reasonings. But this hinders not, but that when any one uses any Term, he may have in his Mind a determined Idea, which he makes it the Sign of, and to which he should keep it steddily annex'd, during that present Discourse. Where he does not, or cannot do this,

§. 7. Though our *Idea* of Infinity arise from the Contemplation of Quantity, and the endless Increase the Mind is able to make in Quantity, by the repeated Additions of what Portions thereof it pleases; yet I guess we cause great Confusion in our Thoughts, when we join Infinity to any supposed *Idea* of Quantity the Mind can be thought to have, and so discourse or reason about an infinite Quantity, (*viz.*) an infinite Space, or an infinite Duration: For our *Idea of Infinity* being, as I think, an *endless growing Idea*, but the *Idea* of any Quantity the Mind has, being at that Time terminated in that *Idea*, (for be it as great as it will, it can be no greater than it is) to join Infinity to it, is to adjust a standing Measure to a growing Bulk; and therefore I think it is not an insignificant Subtilty, if I say, that we are carefully to distinguish between the *Idea* of the Infinity of Space, and the *Idea* of a Space infinite: The first is nothing but a supposed endless Progression of the Mind, over what repeated *Ideas* of Space it pleases; but to have actually in the Mind the *Idea* of a Space infinite, is to suppose the Mind already passed over, and actually to have a View of all those repeated *Ideas* of Space, which an endless Repetition can never totally represent to it: Which carries in it a plain Contradiction.

*Difference between Infinity of Space, and Space Infinite.*

Idea of infinity from mental processes.

§. 8. This, perhaps, will be a little plainer, if we consider it in Numbers. The Infinity of Numbers, to the End of whose Addition every one perceives there is no Approach, easily appears to any one that reflects on it: But how clear soever this *Idea* of the Infinity of Number be, there is nothing yet more evident, than the absurdity of the actual *Idea* of an infinite Number. Whatsoever positive *Ideas* we have in our Minds of any Space, Duration, or Number, let them be ever so great, they are still finite; but when we suppose an inexhaustible Remainder, from which we remove all Bounds, and wherein we allow the Mind an endless Progression of Thoughts, without ever completing the *Idea*, there we have our *Idea* of Infinity; which though it seems to be pretty clear, when we consider nothing else in it but the Negation of an End, yet when we would frame in our Minds the *Idea* of an infinite Space or Duration, that *Idea* is very obscure, and confused, because it is made up of two Parts, very different, if not inconsistent. For let a Man frame in his Mind an *Idea* of any Space or Number, as great as he will; 'tis plain, the Mind rests and terminates in that *Idea*; which is contrary to the *Idea of Infinity*,

*We have no Idea of infinite Space.*

Objection to infinity is that mental processes cannot form it.