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## The Reception of John Locke's Writings at Christ Church, Oxford, c. 1690–1800

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### *Abstract:*

This article presents some overlooked evidence on the reception of John Locke's writings at Christ Church, Oxford. It is intended to supplement a new article in the *History of Universities* on the surprisingly positive response to Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) at that bastion of late seventeenth-century high churchmanship. This evidence sheds new light on: the reception of Epicureanism at that college in the 1650s; Locke's personal connections at Christ Church; book-holdings of Locke's writings at the early eighteenth-century college; some unnoticed uses of Locke's writings by members of Christ Church; the European and North American reception of one Christ Church Lockean; and, the changing trajectory of the later eighteenth-century reception of Locke at that college.

*Keywords:* John Locke, Francis Gastrell, Francis Atterbury, Epicureanism, Humphrey Prideaux, Pierre Gassendi, moral theology, Christ Church, Oxford

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## 1. Introduction

In a new article in the *History of Universities*, I have argued that John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) generated a neglected positive reception amongst numerous members of his old Oxford college: Christ Church. Even though Locke had been expelled from his studentship in 1684 and Christ Church was dominated by high church political and ecclesiological ideals, several members of that college remained friendly with him. These personal relationships, combined with an intellectual sympathy for some aspects of his philosophy and ethics, ensured that many Christ Church men admired the *Essay*. Such high church Lockeans indicated their approval of his philosophy by securing copies of his writings for personal and college libraries, corresponding with him, and teaching the *Essay* to pupils. Some prominent figures at that college, such as Francis Gastrell and Francis Atterbury, even published reworkings of Locke's philosophical thought, which were widely acknowledged to be indebted to the *Essay*. The ways in which these Christ Church men reinterpreted the *Essay*, moreover, influenced how Locke's moral theology was read later in the eighteenth century within French Huguenot circles, Cambridge, and the Dissenting academies.<sup>1</sup> Since finishing the final proofs of this article, however, I have come across some significant further evidence on the reception of Locke's writings at his old *alma mater*. As much of this material has not received any modern analysis, this article seeks to highlight these discoveries for Locke scholars, and set them within the context of wider intellectual developments at that college.

## 2. New Evidence of the Intellectual and Cultural Context for the *Essay's* Reception at Christ Church

The aforementioned *History of Universities* article provided two explanations for why the *Essay* was so popular amongst writers and clergyman who had been educated at Christ Church and who espoused very different political ideals from Locke.<sup>2</sup> The first explanation was that Locke

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Donald Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford, Anglican Moral Theology, and the Reception of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, c. 1690–1725," in "The Mind is its Own Place? Early Modern Intellectual History in an Institutional Context," edited by Alex Beeton, Eli Philip Bernstein, Emily Kent and René Winkler, special issue, *History of Universities*, 36, no. 2 (2023): 98–136, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198901730.003.0006>. Another article in this issue presents a fascinating discussion of how a mid-eighteenth-century Oxford undergraduate engaged with Lockean ideas about the soul: Natasha Bailey, "The Fate of the Soul in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Oxford: An Undergraduate's Conjectures," in "The Mind is its Own Place? Early Modern Intellectual History in an Institutional Context," edited by Alex Beeton, Eli Philip Bernstein, Emily Kent and René Winkler, special issue, *History of Universities*, 36, no. 2 (2023): 205–22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198901730.003.0010>.

<sup>2</sup> In a similar manner to how Tory politics did not preclude an interest in Newtonian ideas: Anita Guerrini, "The Tory Newtonians: Gregory, Pitcairne, and Their Circle," *The Journal of British Studies*, 25, no. 3 (1986): 288–311, <https://doi.org/10.1086/385866>.

retained many of his personal relationships with members of that college even after his expulsion in 1684. It was suggested that John Fell, the Dean of Christ Church, was indeed reluctant to accede to Charles II's request that Locke be expelled in November 1684. The letters of Humphrey Prideaux, one of Fell's scholarly assistants in the 1680s and a college associate of Locke, were highlighted as revealing how a personal liking for Locke could persist even as he reported on his potentially subversive political activities to John Ellis, a government official who was closely connected to leading figures in James II's court. The article did not note, however, that Prideaux explicitly utilised Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) in the early eighteenth century. Indeed, there does not appear to have been any scholarly discussion of Prideaux's engagement with Locke's political thought.<sup>3</sup>

The context for this Lockean encounter was Prideaux's appointment as the Dean of Norwich Cathedral in 1702. In an effort to improve the financial situation of the clergy in that city, Prideaux published a 1707 treatise, which argued for the revival of Charles I's grant of two shillings per pound of rent in Norwich to the parish clergy. Within the course of his argument, Prideaux responded to the objection that Levitical law had only commanded the tithing of the goods of the field. The purported reason for this distinction was that such agricultural produce directly reflected God's bounty in contrast to the goods created by the hard work of tradesmen and artisans living in cities. Prideaux contended that this was a false dichotomy. For "Mr. Lock's Computation" in the *Two Treatises* revealed that "of all the Products of the Field ninety nine parts in a hundred are owing to the Labour of Men," so that "the Country-man's Gains are as much from Personal Pains and Labour as others."<sup>4</sup> That he could in an occasional and unsystematic manner extract such a specific argument from the *Two Treatises* indicates a broad familiarity with at least one of Locke's writings. Clearly, Prideaux's earlier discomfort with Locke's connection to Shaftesbury did not prevent him from later adapting his most politically radical work to the rather conservative end of securing better funding for the clergy. Locke's *Two Treatises* had clearly become a part of the scholar's polemical repertoire.

The second explanation for the popularity of Locke's *Essay* at Christ Church was the surprising conceptual similarities between his philosophy and emerging intellectual tendencies at that college. For instance, the rejection of innate ideas was accepted as a relatively uncontroversial view

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<sup>3</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 100–2.

<sup>4</sup> Humphrey Prideaux, *An Award of King Charles the First, Under his Broad-Seal, Settling Two Shillings of the Pound out of the Rents of the Houses in Norwich, for the Maintenance of the Parochial Clergy of that City* (London, 1707), 36. Another work that made reference to Locke's *Essay* and *Reasonableness of Christianity* is also often attributed to Prideaux: *A Letter to the Deists* (London, 1696), 136–7, 148–51. However, there does not appear to be any conclusive evidence for this attribution, which seems to partly stem from the similarity in title between this work and the very different "A Letter to the Deists" appended to: Humphrey Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet* (London, 1697).

in the 1660s. Some of the central notions of Locke's moral theology were also prefigured by ethical developments at the college. In the 1690s and the early eighteenth century, Locke was interpreted as abandoning Scholastic theories of ethics by making two related claims. First, he argued that happiness and natural good consists in pleasure, rather than the perfection of human capacities. Secondly, he contended that the obligation of natural law derives from God's power of imposing rewards and punishments, rather than His authority and right. Although this ostensibly radical ethical position provoked frequent accusations of moral Hobbism against Locke in 1690s, it, in fact, mirrored philosophical and religious ideas, which were influential at Christ Church and Oxford more generally between 1650 and 1690.<sup>5</sup>

This conceptual alignment was a product of two interrelated discourses: the emergence of a new style of religious moralising in royalist circles and the rise of a Christianised Epicureanism. First, Christ Church was a particularly important institution in the development of a distinctive royalist persuasive strategy, which focused on delineating the pleasures of the religious life. Royalist-episcopalian divines had explained the English Civil War as a result of puritans' unruly passions overruling their reason. In response, they declaimed on goods suited to those base appetites: the delights of virtue and peace. An increasingly radical anti-Calvinism supported this apologetic strategy by foregrounding the importance of natural motivations, such as the joys of virtue, co-operating with the supernatural assistance of divine grace. Christ Church men published many of the central texts in this moral discourse, from Henry Hammond's *Practicall Catechisme* (1645) to Richard Allestree's *Whole Duty of Man* (1658). Such works were also prominent in the college library and used to teach students until the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Some further evidence of the transmission of these texts at the college is provided by the autobiography of William Taswell, a dedicated tutor who matriculated at Christ Church in 1670. For Taswell comforted himself amidst the poverty

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<sup>5</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 108–9. For accusations of moral Hobbism against Locke see, for instance, John Edwards, *The Eternal and Intrinsic Reasons of Good and Evil A Sermon Preach'd at the Commencement at Cambridge, on Sunday the 2d Day of July, 1699* (Cambridge, 1699), 23–6; James Buerdsell, *Discourses and Essays on Several Subjects* (Oxford, 1699), 125.

<sup>6</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 102–8. For further discussion see: Jacob Donald Chatterjee, "Celestial Epicurisme": John Locke and the Anglican Language of Pleasure, 1650–1697," *The Seventeenth Century*, 37, no. 2 (2021): 303–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2021.1904275>; Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, 2 vols. Cambridge Studies in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991–2000), 1:25–89.

his hard-hearted father had imposed on him by reading Allestree's *Art of Contentment* (1675).<sup>7</sup>

At a formal, theoretical level, Hammond and Allestree did not completely repudiate the Scholastic perspective on ethics. They retained the view that happiness consists of three main goods: virtuous activity, pleasure, and external goods. Yet, whilst most Scholastic writers had believed that virtuous activity is the main part of earthly happiness, Hammond and Allestree shifted their primary rhetorical emphasis to rational delights in order to persuade the passionate. This persuasive orientation also facilitated the acceptance of Christianised versions of the ethic of Epicurus, the ancient Greek philosopher who was notorious for arguing that pleasure is the sole good. The most influential expositor of Epicureanism in the seventeenth century was the French philosopher Pierre Gassendi. In the *Animadversiones* (1649), Gassendi had defended Epicurus's ethics by arguing that he had believed that the highest pleasure—mental tranquillity and bodily health—could only be secured by virtue. Gassendi and his followers were unusually influential at Christ Church. Not only were his writings widely available at Christ Church library, but several students of Christ Church, such as Robert South and Francis Vernon, alluded to the popularity of Gassendi at the university. Crucially, two Oxford-educated clergymen—Samuel Parker and Daniel Whitby—explicitly followed Gassendi and prefigured Locke by publishing ethical treatises, which defined the good as pleasure and obligation as being produced by the power to reward and punish.<sup>8</sup> The influence of Gassendi's writings at Christ Church is further indicated by an unexplored oration that the Independent divine Edward Bagshaw gave at that college on 13 January 1658. Bagshaw made a forceful argument for the superiority of Aristotle to the other ancient philosophers. Bagshaw was expected to flatter his audience. He did so by claiming that although Aristotle was even read alongside Epicurus elsewhere, Christ Church had avoided this fashion. Students of that college had become skilled disputers precisely because they relied upon Aristotle. Yet, Bagshaw's argument belied this rosy picture of Aristotelian dominance. He felt compelled to defend Aristotle's superiority to the other ancient philosophers, such as Epicurus, in everything from natural philosophy to ethics.<sup>9</sup> This argument would have been superfluous if Christ Church had

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<sup>7</sup> George Percy Elliot, "Autobiography and Anecdotes by William Taswell," *The Camden Miscellany*, 2 (1852): 1–37, at 27–9. For the persuasive use of pleasure in Allestree's *Art of Contentment* see, for instance: [Richard Allestree], *The Art of Contentment* (Oxford, 1675), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 104–8; Chatterjee, "Celestial Epicurisme," 315.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Bagshaw, "Oratio de Philosophia Peripatetica Habita in Aedes Christi," in *Exercitationes Duae: Altera Theologica, De Presbyteris & Episcopis: Altera Academica, de Philosophiâ Veterum, Ejusque Usu; Una Cum Duabus Orationibus Ejusdem Argumenti*, by Edward Bagshaw (London, 1661), 29, 32. It is, of course, well-known that Locke's college contemporary Henry Stubbe satirised the popularity of Gassendi's philosophy at Oxford in: [Henry Stubbe], *Sundry Things from Severall Hands Concerning the University of Oxford* (London, 1659), 6. Stubbe was, in fact, knowledgeable about Gassendi's writings. See,

really preserved itself from the corruptions of the other pagan philosophers. Evidently, this was a calculated attempt to stem the rising tide of Epicureanism at the college.

### 3. New Evidence of the Reception of Locke's Writings at Christ Church, 1690–1720

This intellectual context, combined with Locke's personal connections at Christ Church, ensured that his *Essay* was widely admired at the college in the 1690s and the early 1700s. Even though the emerging public controversy around Lockean philosophy did not prevent the *Essay* from being broadly popular at Oxford, the members of Christ Church were unusual in the breadth and depth of their engagement with Locke's thought. This interest was reflected in college and personal libraries. Not only did Locke donate the *Essay* to the college, but Christ Church's interleaved copy of the 1674 Bodleian library catalogue revealed that the college library held the majority of Locke's published writings in the eighteenth century. Several prominent figures connected to Christ Church acquired a wide range of Locke's writings. These figures included Atterbury; Henry Aldrich, the Dean of Christ Church; Thomas Pococke, the brother of Locke's tutee Edward Pococke; John Keill, the Scottish promoter of Newtonian physics; John Freind, a well-known physician who had been educated at Christ Church; Charles Boyle, Atterbury's tutee and the fourth earl of Orrey; and William Wake, a Canon of Christ Church who later became the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>10</sup>

The family of Nicholas Stratford, the Bishop of Chester, was particularly well-versed in Locke's writings. He had himself acquired most of Locke's writings before his death in 1707, and these works were passed on to his son William Stratford, a Canon of Christ Church. Similarly, Bishop Stratford's nephew (also named William Stratford) acquired during his time as the Commissary for the Archdeaconry of Richmond a reputation for being knowledgeable about Locke's philosophy. It was not, however, noted that Locke had been acquainted with Nicholas Stratford during their time together at Oxford in the 1650s. In early August 1666, Robert Hammond, a member of the first earl of Shaftesbury's household, wrote to Locke. He passed on that "my Lord desires you to tell mr Stratford he hath been soe Hurried aboute he could not possibly answer his Letter and that he would know John Elfords tutors name."<sup>11</sup> The request presumed that Locke knew Stratford and was regularly in contact with him. As with many of his

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for instance, Henry Stubbe, *The Indian Nectar, Or, A Discourse Concerning Chocolata the Nature of Cacao-Nut and the Other Ingredients of that Composition is Examined* (London, 1662), 121–2.

<sup>10</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 110–13.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Hammond to John Locke, early August 1666, in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. Esmond S. de Beer, The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke. 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975–89), no. 205, 1:288.

contemporaries, therefore, Stratford's interest in Locke's writings appears to have been mediated by his acquaintance with him.

Four more Christ Church owners of Locke's writings can also be added to those who have already been discussed. Charles Aldrich, the nephew of Dean Aldrich, used his own collection of books to found a parochial library in his parish of Henley-on-Thames. The extant library catalogue lists Locke's *Essay*.<sup>12</sup> Robert Hooke, who had joined Christ Church as a chorister in the early 1650s and was acquainted with Locke, owned the first editions of Locke's *Essay* and *Letter Concerning Toleration*.<sup>13</sup> The 1723 joint library catalogue of Jonathan Trelawney, the Bishop of Winchester who had entered into Christ Church in 1668, and the gentleman Charles Hatton also contained a large number of Lockean writings. The works sold included: the first edition of Locke's *Essay*; his work on the interest rate; the second edition of the *Two Treatises of Government*; and the second edition of the *Reasonableness*.<sup>14</sup> Trelawney's brother Edward paid Locke money in 1678 and 1679, so it seems probable that this engagement was once again facilitated by personal connections.<sup>15</sup> A 1718 sale catalogue that included the library of Benjamin Woodroffe, a Canon of Christ Church who had been acquainted with Locke since the early 1660s, also lists the fifth edition of the *Essay* as well as his *Education* and *Reasonableness*.<sup>16</sup>

These patterns of book ownership at Christ Church reflected a much deeper interest in Locke's writings. Members of the college declared their admiration for the *Essay* in both private and public. Private letters show that George Walls, Richard Old, Robert South, Francis Atterbury, Francis Gastrell, Charles Boyle, William Percivall, and Christopher Codrington all displayed some sympathy for the *Essay*'s ideas. Almost all of these individuals were personally acquainted with Locke, and these friendships softened any political differences. Two of these figures—Atterbury and Percivall—set Locke's *Essay* as reading for undergraduates. This practice was continued by other tutors at early eighteenth-century Christ Church, despite the attempt by some of the heads of house at Oxford to ban the teaching of the *Essay* in 1703. Even more striking is the fact that three of these writers published works that were indebted to Lockean ideas, even

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<sup>12</sup> *The Catalogue of the Old Library, at Henley-on-Thames* (London, 1852), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Millington, *Bibliotheca Hookiana* (London, 1703), 41, 51. For Hooke's acquaintance with Locke see: John Locke to Robert Hooke, 19/29 October 1678, in *Correspondence*, no. 413, 1:621–2.

<sup>14</sup> Fletcher Giles, *A Catalogue of the Libraries of the Right Reverend and Honourable Sir Jonathan Trelawney, Bart. late Lord Bishop of Winchester; and of the Honourable Charles Hatton, Esq; Lately deceased* (London, 1723), 43, 70, 71, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Thomas: Money received for Locke, 1675–9, in *Correspondence*, no. 523, 2:145.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Browne, *A Catalogue of Part of the Library of that Learned and Reverend Divine Dr. Woodroffe, Late Principal of Gloucester Hall; Of a Barrister at Law; and Mr. Robinson, Attorney, of New-Inn* (London, 1718), 1, 21.

though they were prominent high church Tories. Gastrell was the most important of these individuals. In his letters to Locke in the later 1690s, he frequently suggested that his works were intended to promote Locke's philosophy and that he hoped that others would come to realise that the *Essay* provided powerful support for religion and morality. Other contemporaries recognised that Gastrell's works were shaped by his *Essay*. Gastrell's first exposition of Lockean notions was the *Considerations on the Trinity* (1696), which used the language of clear, distinct ideas to defend the rationality of believing in mysteries that could not be adequately comprehended. In response, William Sherlock, the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, promptly condemned Gastrell in the 1698 *Present State of the Socinian Controversy* for "trading" with "the Ingenious Author of *Human Understanding*."<sup>17</sup>

Gastrell also remarked to Locke that his 1697 Boyle Lectures were intended to be a public defence of the *Essay*'s ideas. Indeed, this work presented a sophisticated exposition of the prevalent interpretation of Locke's moral theology. Gastrell reduced good and evil to pleasure and pain; collapsed obligation into the power of imposing rewards and punishments; and prioritised the sanctions of the next life over malleable natural consequences. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Thomas Beconsall, a Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford, lambasted both Locke and Gastrell for resolving morality entirely into the arbitrary will and power of God in his account of *Natural Religion* (1698). Gastrell also sent his defence of the *Christian Revelation* (1698) to Locke, and this work adopted the *Essay*'s epistemology in arguing for the credibility of Scripture. Furthermore, Gastrell adapted Lockean ideas on morality and the methods of attaining knowledge in two of his later anti-Deist works: *The Principles of Deism Truly Represented* (1708), and the *Moral Proof of the Certainty of a Future State* (1725).<sup>18</sup>

Gastrell was certainly not alone in using Lockean ideas at Christ Church. When Atterbury preached a 1706 funeral sermon about the miseries of earthly life, he provoked an overlooked debate with the Whig clerics Benjamin Hoadly and Richard West by repurposing some aspects of Locke's ethics. In his 1707 *Large Vindication* of his funeral sermon, Atterbury explicitly appealed to Locke's *Essay* in defence of his view that happiness can be defined in terms of pleasure. He adopted this Lockean conclusion to argue that humanity is more miserable than beasts in this life and the best men are the most miserable. The aim of this exposition was to exalt the necessity of the divine Revelation of eschatological sanctions to support virtue on earth. Another younger Christ Church man—Benjamin Carter—

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<sup>17</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 109, 120–21, 116.

<sup>18</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 115–27. Gastrell's *Considerations* were also accused of theological unorthodoxy in: *Eye-Salve Recommended to the World in a Short Essay, Occasion'd by the Sight of a Discourse Set Forth Since the Kings Injunctions, Call'd, Some Considerations Concerning the Trinity* (London, 1696), 6 and *passim*.



combined an admiration for Atterbury, Gastrell, and Locke. Carter was a largely unknown high church clergyman who attained his BA at that college in 1690. Yet, his published sermons referenced all three of these writers to support arguments about the limitations of the human understanding, the possibility of God creating thinking matter, the non-existence of innate ideas, and the hedonistic foundations of morality. On the whole, these high church Lockeans sought to avoid the public debates around Locke's irreligion. Instead, they quietly adopted his philosophy to demonstrate that man's limited reasoning capacities and hedonistic desires made divine Revelation essential for promoting the moral life. In the course of this account, it was noted that Thomas Milles, the vice-principal of St. Edmund's Hall and a chaplain of Christ Church, had given lectures on Lockean philosophy in the later 1690s.<sup>19</sup>

However, it was not recognised that Milles later published a work indebted to Lockean ideas. His *Natural Immortality of the Soul Asserted* (1707) was directed against the Irish scholar Henry Dodwell's argument in his *Epistolary Discourse* (1706) that the soul is naturally mortal. The title page of Milles's *Natural Immortality* proudly displayed a quotation from Locke on the possibility of matter thinking. Other Christ Church men, such as South and Gastrell, had believed that Locke had raised this possibility as a pious reflection upon divine omnipotence and human limitations. Similarly, Milles recognised that some believed the *Essay's* statements on thinking matter had encouraged scepticism about the immortality of the soul, but he defended Locke's public reputation by declaring that he doubted that "this worthy Person designed any of these ill uses." He hinted that he approved of Locke's "good luck to be much admired by the Learned World." The preface indeed sought to refute the doctrine of thinking matter upon Locke's own principles. Appealing to Newton's physics and the Lockean association of ideas, Milles argued that matter is passive and extended. Both properties were incompatible with consciousness. For instance, according to the natural idea of extension, if thinking matter were to be divided, each part would have a distinct consciousness. For Milles, this was a patently absurd possibility.<sup>20</sup> In this way, he made a sophisticated attempt to denude Locke's philosophy of its more subversive implications.

New evidence also shows that this positive appreciation of Locke's writings at Christ Church was not confined to the *Essay*. One younger Christ Church student—Edward Wells—published some of the few largely positive Anglican responses to Locke's *Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St.*

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<sup>19</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 113–27.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Milles, *The Natural Immortality of the Soul Asserted, and Proved From the Scriptures, and First Fathers: in Answer to Mr Dodwell's Epistolary Discourse* (Oxford, 1707), sig. A1r, 2–3, viii–xi; Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 113–27.

*Paul* (1705–7) in the early eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup> These responses appear to have gone entirely unnoticed by scholars. Having achieved his BA and MA at Christ Church in 1690 and 1693 respectively (the same years as Carter), Wells was deeply embroiled in the affairs of that college. In 1691, Wells published a compilation of Xenophon’s writings as part of the series of New Year Books started by the old Dean John Fell.<sup>22</sup> On 10 July 1694, Wells gave an oration in memory of Fell.<sup>23</sup> He also seems to have been a diligent tutor, receiving preferments from the families of two of his pupils: Thomas Bennett and Browne Willis.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Wells spent much of the early eighteenth century publishing educational works. He produced: an accessible account of *Antient and Present Geography* (1706) for the use of university students; a simplified catechism for the ordinary Christian reader; a course of mathematics for young gentlemen; and a summary of God’s dispensations towards humanity for divinity students.<sup>25</sup> As with many Christ Church readers of the *Essay*, Wells was an active high church polemicist who simply ignored the very different political conclusions that Locke had inferred from his philosophy and Scriptural interpretations. Amidst the early eighteenth-century controversy about Dissenters who conformed occasionally to the Church of England to avoid civil disabilities, Wells wrote several attacks on the sinfulness of schism and separation.<sup>26</sup>

It was, however, Wells’s educational projects that produced his appeals to Locke. In 1709, Wells published the first part of his *Help for the More Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures*, which contained a parallel Greek and English text of St. Paul’s epistles to the Thessalonians and the Galatians, alongside a paraphrase and annotations. He aimed to repeat this process for St. Paul’s other epistles—a task that he finished in 1715. Wells’s discussion of the origins of this project displayed his Lockean influences. He recalled that he had already begun work on his commentary when he heard of the publication of Locke’s *Paraphrase*. When Wells read the *Paraphrase*, he was “*pleas’d to see so Fam’d a Person*” as Locke agreed

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<sup>21</sup> For discussion of the controversy surrounding the *Paraphrase* see: Jacob Donald Chatterjee, “Christian Antiquity and the Anglican Reception of John Locke’s *Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*, 1707–1730,” *Locke Studies*, 20 (2021): 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.5206/ls.2020.10597>.

<sup>22</sup> Xenophon, *Logos eis Agēsilaon Basilea* [...], ed. Edward Wells (Oxford, 1691).

<sup>23</sup> Anthony Wood, *The Life of Anthony à Wood*, ed. Thomas Hearne (Oxford, 1772), 388.

<sup>24</sup> E. G. W. Bill, *Education at Christ Church, Oxford, 1660–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 232.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Wells, *A Treatise of Antient and Present Geography* (Oxford, 1706); Edward Wells, *The Common Christian Rightly and Plainly Instructed in the Grounds of Christianity*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1708); Edward Wells, *The Young Gentleman’s Course of Mathematicks*, 3 vols. (London, 1714); Edward Wells, *An Help for the Right Understanding of the Several Divine Laws and Covenants* (Oxford, 1729).

<sup>26</sup> He explicitly condemned occasional conformity: Edward Wells, *A Letter from a Minister of the Church of England, to a Dissenting Parishioner of the Presbyterian Perswasion* (Oxford, 1706), 36.

with his view that the division of Scripture into chapters and verses often obscured its meaning.<sup>27</sup> Notably, Wells's account implied that he had already encountered some of Locke's earlier writings before reading the *Paraphrase*; otherwise, he would have had no reason to be "pleas'd" that Locke was writing on the same subject as him.

Given the centrality of the *Paraphrase* to the construction of the *Help*, it is unsurprising that Wells made regular references to Locke's Scriptural exegesis. He directly transcribed Locke's explanation of the purpose of St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians because he thought it "could not be Better express'd."<sup>28</sup> Throughout the rest of his commentaries, Wells simply treated Locke as one among many learned interpreters of Scripture, alongside the Anglican divines John Mill, Henry Hammond, and Daniel Whitby. Wells frequently referred to Locke's arguments as being "well observed."<sup>29</sup> At one point, he even suggested that Locke's reading of one of St. Paul's accounts of Christ's redeeming purpose was more accurate than what had been presented by Mill.<sup>30</sup>

Wells was occasionally more critical of Locke. For instance, he attacked Hammond and Locke for referring to St. Paul's audience in Corinthians as all those that are called by the name of Christ, rather than those who call upon Christ. He suspected that Locke's reason for this interpretation—that men worship God alone—pointed towards an anti-Trinitarianism that contradicted the settled doctrine of the early church.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, this critique of Locke was unusual, and Wells tended to simply ignore Locke's more controversial readings. He lauded Locke's reasoning in general, even if he recognised that it could be flawed. Wells's *Help*, therefore, provides striking evidence that the positive appreciation of Locke's writings at Christ Church was not, as I had previously suggested, confined to the *Essay*, but also extended to his religious writings. Indeed, Wells was a professed admirer of Gastrell's *Considerations*, so he was not averse to works that adapted a recognisably Lockean philosophy to defend central religious

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Wells, *A Specimen of an Help for the More Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures: being St. Paul's Two Epistles to the Thessalonians, and his Epistle to the Galatians*, 2nd edn. (London, 1716), sig. A3r–B1r.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Wells, *An Help for the More Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures: being St Paul's Two Epistles to the Corinthians* (Oxford, 1714), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Wells, *An Help for the More Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures: being St Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford, 1715), 72; Wells, *Corinthians*, 37, 43, 157, 167.

<sup>30</sup> Wells, *Romans*, 64.

<sup>31</sup> Wells, *Corinthians*, 3–5.

mysteries.<sup>32</sup> That Wells utilised Locke's *Paraphrase* in such an educational work suggests that he believed it was suitable for the consumption of students—at least in small doses.

#### **4. New Evidence of the European and North American Reception of Christ Church Lockeanism**

The wider reworking of Lockean ideas at Christ Church also reshaped how other English and European writers interpreted the *Essay*. In the 1730s and 1740s, a series of Lockeans at Cambridge associated with Daniel Waterland and leading Dissenting writers, such as Henry Grove, read Locke as proposing a reductionist theory of obligation in the light of Gastrell's Boyle Lectures. Gastrell's influence on interpretations of Locke was also diffused far beyond England. Crucially, the notes that the Huguenot theologian Jean Barbeyrac added to his translation of Samuel Pufendorf's *De Iure Naturae* (*Le Droit de La Nature*, 1706) read Locke in a Gastrellian manner. He appealed to Gastrell's Boyle Lectures to present an influential exposition of Locke as reducing obligation to God's power of imposing rewards and punishments. Gastrell's writings were also popular on the Continent in their own right. Even towards the end of the eighteenth century, Gastrell's philosophical thought was being discussed by Baron d'Holbach, the renowned atheist, and Giuseppe Tamagna, a professor of theology at the University of Rome. Gastrell's Boyle Lectures and *Christian Revelation* were translated into German, and an abridgement of the Boyle Lectures was rendered into French.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, it has not been noted that Johann Joachim Spalding, a leading Enlightenment theologian, published a 1755 German translation of Gastrell's *Principles of Deism* in Leipzig, which received a complimentary review from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing himself. Interestingly, Spalding's preface also claimed that he had begun writing the work a few years before it was published, which raises the possibility that Gastrell's *Principles of Deism* influenced Spalding's widely read *Betrachtungen über die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1748).<sup>34</sup> This possibility is particularly

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<sup>32</sup> For Wells on Gastrell's *Considerations* see: Edward Wells, *An Help for the More Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures: being St Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews* (Oxford, 1713), 6.

<sup>33</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 130. The *History of Universities* article also contains a typographical error, referring to the French Protestant theologian Jacques Bernard's review of the *Paraphrase* being published in April 1704 when it was in fact published in April 1705: Jacques Bernard, ed., *Nouvelles de La République des Lettres Tome VII Comprenant Les Années 1705–1706* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1966), 117–19. That article also did not refer to the fact that the combined German translation of the Anglican divine William Beveridge's *Thoughts on Religion* and Gastrell's Boyle Lectures went through a new edition in 1722: Francis Gastrell, *Von der Wahrheit, Gewißheit und Nothwendigkeit der Religion Überhaupt* (n. p. 1722).

<sup>34</sup> [Francis Gastrell], *Richtige Vorstellung der Deistischen Grundsätze*, trans. Johann Joachim Spalding (Leipzig, 1755); Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Lessing's Werke*, ed. Richard Gosche and Robert Boxberger, 8 vols. (Berlin, 1880), 3:188–9. Spalding's translation is not noted in: Edgar Mackenzie, A

interesting because Spalding made several conceptually similar claims to Gastrell. For instance, Spalding structured his arguments for the necessity of an afterlife around the hierarchy of human pleasures at the same time as contending that Christianity is the only religion capable of motivating a voluptuous humanity.<sup>35</sup>

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Gastrell's Boyle Lectures were also provoking debate in North America and Yale College in particular. The central figure in the transmission of Gastrell's thought to the American colonies was Samuel Johnson, the educational reformer who had been appointed as a tutor at Yale in 1716. Johnson recalled in his account of his own life that he had read Locke in 1714 and come to despise what he regarded as the obscurantism of Scholasticism. By 1716, he had started teaching Locke at the college, but, after some controversy over these new educational methods, he decided to leave the college. Upon becoming convinced of the necessity of obtaining an episcopal ordination, he left for England in the winter of 1722, where he met Gastrell on 28 May 1723 and dined with him the following day. He returned to Connecticut later that year. Between 1723 and 1725, Johnson read a vast number of English works, including Gastrell and Atterbury's sermons and Gastrell's *Moral Proof*.<sup>36</sup> When George Berkeley, another early admirer of Locke, travelled to the American colonies in 1729, moreover, Johnson met with him and began a correspondence. It also seems to have been Johnson who convinced Berkeley to donate a large number of books to Yale in 1733. Gastrell's Boyle Lectures were amongst the works donated and the work continued to be listed in the 1743 Yale library catalogue.<sup>37</sup>

Gastrell's Boyle Lectures were studied by at least one student at Yale. In 1748, Ezra Stiles, later the president of Yale, read the work soon after finishing his undergraduate studies in 1746.<sup>38</sup> Johnson, meanwhile, continued to engage in projects for reforming the curriculum indebted to Lockean ideas. In 1744, he published *An Introduction to the Study of*

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*Catalog of British Devotional and Religious Books in German Translation from the Reformation to 1750* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of Spalding's thought see: Michael Printy, "The Determination of Man: Johann Joachim Spalding and the Protestant Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 72, no. 2 (2013): 189–212, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2013.0010>.

<sup>36</sup> Herbert Wallace Schneider and Carol Catherine Smith Schneider, ed., *Samuel Johnson, President of King's College: His Career and Writings*, 4 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 1:7, 8, 503, 504. For Johnson's meeting with Gastrell see: Eben Edwards Beardsley, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Samuel Johnson*, 2nd edn. (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1875), 47.

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Keogh, "Bishop Berkeley's Gift of Books in 1733," *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 8/1 (1933): 1–26, at 21; Henry M. Fuller, "Bishop Berkeley as a Benefactor of Yale," *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 28/1 (1953): 1–18; Thomas Clap, *A Catalogue of the Library of Yale-College in New-Haven* (New Haven, 1743), 22.

<sup>38</sup> Abiel Holmes, *The Life of Ezra Stiles, D.D. LL.D* (Boston, 1798), 45.

*Philosophy*, partly for the use of Yale students. Johnson's recommended reading included Locke's *Essay*, Whitby's *Ethices*, Berkeley's anti-Deist dialogue *Alciphron* (1732), Atterbury's sermons, and the Boyle Lectures in general.<sup>39</sup> By 1746, he had published his popular ethics textbook: the *Ethices Elementa*. The work had much in common with Gastrell's reading of Locke's moral philosophy. Building upon the premise that human beings "enjoy Pain and suffer Pleasure," Johnson argued that one is obligated to pursue virtue because it produces the highest delights in this life and the next. Johnson's *Ethices* did not slavishly follow Gastrell's Lockean synthesis. Adapting the notions of the unorthodox Anglican cleric William Wollaston's *Religion of Nature Delineated* (1722), he argued that moral good consists in engaging in actions conformable to the true purposes of nature because doing so produces happiness or pleasure.<sup>40</sup> But much of the core of Johnson's ethical thought remained indebted to Locke and Gastrell.

Moreover, the rise of these hedonistic moral ideas at Yale generated a fierce reaction that centred around Gastrell's Boyle Lectures. In 1755, Thomas Clap, the Calvinist president of Yale from 1740, published a *Vindication* of Reformed doctrine, which contained a summary of an alternate scheme of religion that was being "highly extolled and assiduously spread about the Country." According to Clap, this system of thought claimed that man is "under no *Obligation* to obey the Laws of God, but only from *Self-Interest*; that the only Evil of Sin, consists in Men's not pursuing their own Interest." Crucially, he explicitly connected this way of thinking about ethics with Gastrell, and Archibald Campbell, the Scottish author of the neo-Epicurean system of morality in *Enquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue* (1728).<sup>41</sup> Such was Clap's enduring concern about the rise of the Gastrellian schema of ethics that he published his own moral philosophy textbook in 1765 to counter it. His *Foundation of Moral Virtue and Obligation* sought to refute what Clap regarded as the mistakes of the other philosophers in order to define the end of life as the imitation of God's moral perfections. The first alternative theory that he challenged was Gastrell and Campbell's view that "the only Motive and Obligation to Obedience to the Laws of God, is to procure the divine Favour, to obtain Rewards and avoid Punishments." In opposition to this view, he argued that perfection is higher in the divine order of reality than pleasure, and that to invert this hierarchy was tantamount to claiming that "*a small Part is*

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<sup>39</sup> Samuel Johnson, *An Introduction to the Study of Philosophy* (London, 1744), 24, 25, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Ethices Elementa* (Boston, 1746), 16, 9–15, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Clap, *A Brief History and Vindication of the Doctrines Received and Established in the Church of New-England* (New Haven, 1755), 19, 28. For further discussion of Archibald Campbell see: Paul Sagar, "Sociability, Luxury and Sympathy: The Case of Archibald Campbell," *History of European Ideas* 39, no. 6 (2013): 791–814, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2012.747255>; Tim Stuart-Buttle, "Recognition, Sociability and Intolerance: A Study of Archibald Campbell (1691–1756)," *Global Intellectual History*, 5, no. 2 (2020): 231–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2019.1699889>.

*bigger than the Whole.*"<sup>42</sup> Clearly, Gastrell's Boyle Lectures were widely recognised at Yale as promoting an unorthodox system of moral theology; a theory that was becoming influential to a worrying extent.

### **5. The Later Eighteenth-Century Reception of Locke's Writings at Christ Church, 1720–1800**

The influence of Lockean ideas was, however, even more evident at Christ Church after the 1720s. As the political composition of the college gradually changed after the death of Dean Smalridge in 1719, the phenomenon of high church divines admiring the *Essay* became less significant in the reception of Locke's thought at Christ Church. The emerging Whig political ascendancy ensured that many of the senior positions in the college were bestowed upon those with the same allegiances. This policy often created tensions. When the committed Whig William Bradshaw was appointed the Dean of Christ Church in 1724, the more conservative members of the college pretended to forget his name and referred to him as John Bradshaw in an allusion to the infamous regicide.<sup>43</sup> Yet, it seems doubtful that these disputes had a significant impact on the reactions to Locke at the college.

Exalting the status of Gastrell and his Lockean writings, after all, became a way for the more conservative members of Christ Church to resist their Whig governors. For instance, when George Wigan, the lecturer in rhetoric, preached Gastrell's funeral sermon after his death in November 1725, and lauded "the great service he hath done to Religion and the Universities by his public writings," the assembled Whig Canons were outraged.<sup>44</sup> Members of the college from across the political spectrum thus had reasons to admire Locke's thought. Indeed, after 1730 Locke's writings provoked positive responses from Christ Church men with a wide range of differing political allegiances. In adopting Lockean ideas, Court Whigs, such as John Conybeare, jostled with participants in the "patriot" opposition to Walpole, such as Baron Lyttelton, and Tories, such as Edmund Bateman. The resultant vision of Locke's thought remained conservative and had much in common with Gastrell and Atterbury's interpretations. He continued to be read as delineating the limitations of the human understanding to carve out an important role for divine Revelation and exalting eschatological sanctions as the only way to ensure that it is always rational for hedonistic man to act in accordance with morality.

This interest in Locke's thought was increasingly reflective of wider intellectual tendencies at Oxford later in the eighteenth century. Already in 1726, Nicholas Amherst, an expelled student of St. John's College, Oxford,

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Clap, *An Essay on the Nature and Foundation of Moral Virtue and Obligation* (New Haven, 1765), 3, 13–14, 17, 13–17.

<sup>43</sup> Bill, *Education at Christ Church*, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Hearne, *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, ed. Charles Edward Doble Rannie, David Watson Ramie, Herbert Edward Salter, 11 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society, 1885–1921), 9:60.

and a vehement critic of that university, was remarking that “*Locke, Clarke, and Sir Isaac Newton* begin to find countenance in the schools, and that *Aristotle* seems to totter on his antient throne.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, several leading members of colleges other than Christ Church promoted Lockean philosophy. Edward Bentham, a fellow of Oriel College and later Regius Professor of Divinity, adapted the teaching of logic to Lockean ideas in the *Reflections* (1740) and the *Introduction to Logick* (1777).<sup>46</sup> His ethics textbook—*An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (1745)—continually referenced Locke in support of its argument that pleasure and pain are the sole objects of desire and aversion as well as the foundation of all the passions.<sup>47</sup> At Queen’s College, Provost Joseph Smith drafted a curriculum for students that set Locke as reading for questions, such as whether all knowledge originates from sense impressions.<sup>48</sup> Undergraduates, such as John James, continued to read Locke at Queen’s College until the 1770s if not later.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, William Jones, who matriculated a University College in 1764, recalled one fellow reading the *Essay* in detail with his pupils, though he ignored many of Locke’s criticisms of Scholastic authors.<sup>50</sup>

Lockean ideas were also conveyed during Oxford’s public occasions. Although in the 1710s and 1720s it was more common to critique Locke in sermons before the university, this pattern of engagement soon changed.<sup>51</sup> Preachers at Oxford began to regularly utilise a Lockean philosophical framework.<sup>52</sup> In the mid-1730s, for instance, James Edgcumbe, a fellow of

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<sup>45</sup> Nicholas Amhurst, *Terrae-Filius: or, the Secret History of the University of Oxford*, 2nd edn. (London, 1726), xvii.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Bentham, *Reflections upon the Nature and Usefulness of Logick* (Oxford, 1740), 5–9; Edward Bentham, *An Introduction to Logick, Scholastick and Rational* (Oxford, 1773), i–iii; 100–104.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Bentham, *An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (Oxford, 1745), 3–4, 8–12, 13, 81, 81–101, 102–9.

<sup>48</sup> John W. Yolton, “Schoolmen, Logic and Philosophy,” in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume V The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Lucy S. Sutherland and L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 565–92, at 581–2.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Evans, ed., *Letters of Richard Radcliffe and John James of Queen's College. Oxford, 1755-83: with Additions, Notes, and Appendices* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 55, 165–6.

<sup>50</sup> John Shore, Lord Teignmouth, *The Works of Sir William Jones: With the Life of the Author*, 2 vols. (London: John Hatchett, 1806), 1:55.

<sup>51</sup> For criticism of Locke see: Winch Holdsworth, *A Sermon Preached before the University of Oxford at St. Mary's on Easter-Monday, 1719* (Oxford, 1720); Henry Felton, *The Resurrection of the Same Numerical Body, and its Reunion to the Same Soul; Asserted in a Sermon Preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's, on Easter-Monday, 1725*, 2nd edn. (London, 1725), 24.

<sup>52</sup> For explicit references to Locke see: Francis Webber, *The Jewish Dispensation Consider'd and Vindicated, with a View to the Objections of Unbelievers, and Particularly of a Late Author called The Moral Philosopher. A Sermon Preach'd before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's, on Sunday, October 23d. 1737* (Oxford, 1738), 38; Thomas Randolph, *An Enquiry into the Sufficiency of Reason in Matters of*



Exeter College, Oxford, preached two sermons before the university on the insufficiency of human reason without divine Revelation, which continually referenced Locke to demonstrate the limitations and purposes of the human understanding. He ended his argument with the Lockean claim that morality could only be based on God's will because only He could ensure that pleasure and pain are inseparably linked to right action.<sup>53</sup> Lectures at Oxford also frequently presented Lockean ideas.<sup>54</sup> For instance, Richard Wooddeson, the Vinerian Professor of Common Law from 1777, delivered a course of lectures that referenced Locke's *Essay* in order to prove that there are no innate moral ideas and that the will is often determined by uneasiness.<sup>55</sup>

That Lockean ideas were increasingly prevalent at Oxford should not, however, detract from the fact that Christ Church remained one of the most important centres for the promotion of these philosophical notions. The earlier interest in Locke's thought persisted throughout the 1720s. Two readers of Locke from this period were active in patriot Whig politics: Gilbert West and George Lyttelton, relations from an aristocratic family

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*Religion. A Sermon Preach'd Before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's, on Sunday, December 17th. 1738* (Oxford, 1739), 7; Jeremiah Seed, *Discourses on Several Important Subjects*, 2 vols. 6<sup>th</sup> edn. (London, 1766), 1:241; John Rotheram, *Three Sermons on Public Occasions, Preached Before the University of Oxford* (London, 1766), 129, 130. For sermons that appear to have utilised Lockean ethical ideas implicitly see: John Burton, *A Sermon Preach'd at the Assizes Before the Honourable Sr. Thomas Abney, and Mr. Serjeant Willes, and Before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's, Aug. 7. 1746* (Oxford, 1746), 8–10; John Bilstone, *Thirteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1749), 210; William Dodwell, *The Eternity of Future Punishment Asserted and Vindicated* (Oxford, 1743), 1–3.

<sup>53</sup> James Edgcumbe, *Human Reason an Insufficient Guide in Matters of Religion and Morality: Being the Substance of Two Sermons Preach'd before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's Church, On Sunday, October 27, 1734, and Monday February 2. 1735-6* (London, 1736), 4–5, 11–12, 29, 38–9.

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, William Blackstone, *A Discourse on the Study of the Law; being an Introductory Lecture, Read in the Public Schools, October XXV, M.DCC.LVIII* (Oxford, 1758), 5; Thomas Bever, *A Discourse on the Study of Jurisprudence and the Civil Law; being an Introduction to a Course of Lectures* (Oxford, 1766), 34–6; Joseph White, *Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford, in the year 1784, at the Lecture Founded by the Rev. John Bampton, M. A. Late Canon of Salisbury* (Oxford, 1784), 39; Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. George Gregory, 2 vols. (London, 1787), 1:264; Richard Shepherd, *The Ground and Credibility of the Christian Religion: In A Course of Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford, at the Lecture Founded by the Rev. John Bampton, M. A. Late Canon of Salisbury* (London, 1788), 223; Edward Tatham, *The Chart and Scale of Truth, by Which to Find the Cause of Error. Lectures Read Before the University of Oxford, at the Lecture Founded by the Rev. John Bampton, M.A.* 2 vols. (Oxford, 1790), 1:7, 21, 37, 103; 2:69; Henry Kett, *Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford at St. Mary's in the year MDCCXC. at the Lecture Founded by the Late Rev. John Bampton, M. A. Canon of Salisbury* (Oxford, 1791), 161; Robert Gray, *Sermons on the Principles Upon Which the Reformation of the Church of England Was Established; Preached Before the University of Oxford, in the Year 1796, at the Lecture Founded by the Late Rev. John Bampton, M.A. Canon of Salisbury* (Oxford, 1796), 93; William Barrow, *Eight Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford, in the Year 1799, at the Lecture Founded by the Rev. John Bampton, M. A. Late Canon of Salisbury* (London, 1799), 79.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Wooddeson, *Elements of Jurisprudence Treated of in the Preliminary Part of a Course of Lectures on the Laws of England* (London, 1783), 13, 34.

who matriculated at Christ Church in 1721 and 1726 respectively. These figures displayed some admiration for Locke's political thought. For instance, West exalted Locke as one of the individuals responsible for reviving British liberty in a 1732 ode to the Stowe gardens of his uncle Viscount Cobham:

Next Locke, who in defence of Conscience rose,  
And strove religious Rancour to compose:  
Justly opposing every human Test,  
Since God alone can judge who serves him best.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, West made more extensive use of Locke's philosophical and religious ideas in his 1747 response to the Deist writer Peter Annet's *The Resurrection of Jesus Considered by a Moral Philosopher* (1744). He began by appealing to the "great and venerable" name of Locke to demonstrate that one could both be a philosopher and a Christian. Locke's high reputation as philosopher thus ensured that he was an invaluable figure to conscript to the side of true religion. In the course of proving Christ's Resurrection, moreover, West referenced both Locke's *Reasonableness*, and his *Essay*. He referenced Locke's *Paraphrase* to support of his readings of particular passages of Scripture, and to defend the credibility of sensory evidence.<sup>57</sup> By 14 November 1754, the literary hostess Elizabeth Montagu was writing to West, presuming upon their shared admiration for Locke's philosophy.<sup>58</sup>

The Lockean influences of West's cousin Lyttelton were even more prominently displayed. His first published use of Locke's ideas was his own refutation of Annet in his *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul* (1747). Lyttelton appealed to Locke's *Paraphrase* to resolve the apparent tension between St. James and St. Paul's expositions of the relationship between faith and works. He referenced Locke's discussion of free-will in the posthumously published *Familiar Letters* (1708) to show that reason alone is incapable of resolving many apparent contradictions.<sup>59</sup> His poems and private letters also contained several admiring remarks on

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<sup>56</sup> Gilbert West, *Stowe, the Gardens of the Right Honourable Richard Lord Viscount Cobham* (London, 1732), 8.

<sup>57</sup> Gilbert West, *Observations on the History and Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, 3rd edn. (Dublin, 1747), xiii–xiv, 30, 106, 111, 144, 198, 229.

<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Montagu to Gilbert West, 14 November, 1754, in *Elizabeth Montagu, the Queen of the Bluestockings: Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761*, ed. Emily J. Climençon. 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906) 2:61–2.

<sup>59</sup> George Lyttelton, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul* (London, 1747), 19, 75.

Locke as a great philosopher.<sup>60</sup> Lyttelton's pre-eminent fascination with Lockean ideas was also manifest in his most famous work: the *Dialogues of the Dead* (1760). This work contained a fictional dialogue between Locke and Pierre Bayle, the French sceptic. Under Lyttelton's pen, Locke was depicted as delineating the limits of the human understanding in order to support humanity's proper concerns of religion and morality. Locke's moderation and religiosity was contrasted sharply with Bayle's scepticism of reason's capacity to arrive at any certain truth whatsoever.<sup>61</sup>

These more famous literary uses of Locke occurred against a backdrop of his increasing influence within the college. After Richard West, who had matriculated at Christ Church in 1735, wrote a description of Oxford to his school-friend Thomas Ashton in 1736, he received a reply suggesting that Locke and Isaac Newton must be admired at the university. After all, Locke had "artfully unravell'd the intricate Maze of thought."<sup>62</sup> The Christ Church Collections Books—undergraduate reading lists compiled by the censors for examinations from 1700 onwards—reveal that Locke's *Essay* was compulsory reading for fourth year undergraduates from 1744 onwards.<sup>63</sup> This educational framework probably formalised an already existing tendency in student reading, especially as Locke's *Essay* had been frequently taught to undergraduates in the 1690s and early eighteenth century. A further case study of tutorial relationships suggests that this pedagogical use of Locke persisted into the 1730s. When John Taylor, a school-friend of the English essayist Samuel Johnson arrived at Oxford, Johnson "made inquiry all round the University" and "found that Mr. Bateman, of Christ-Church, was the tutor of highest reputation." As a result, Johnson recommended that Taylor attend that college. Indeed, according to Johnson's biographer James Boswell, "Mr. Bateman's lectures were so excellent, that Johnson used to come and get them at second-hand".<sup>64</sup> It was an established pattern that tutors, such as John Wynne and Richard Laughton, who were well-versed in Lockean or Newtonian ideas often acquired a large following.<sup>65</sup>

Bateman's Lockeanism may, therefore, have been a reason for his high status amongst Oxford undergraduates. After all, his adherence to Locke's

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<sup>60</sup> George Lyttelton, *Poems by the Right Honourable the Late Lord Lyttleton* (Glasgow, 1773), 28; George Lyttelton, *Letters of the Late Lord Lyttelton*, 2 vols. (London, 1782), 2:126.

<sup>61</sup> George Lyttelton and Elizabeth Montagu, *Dialogues of the Dead* (Dublin, 1760), 260–72.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Ashton to Richard West, June 1736, *The Correspondence of Gray, Walpole, West and Ashton*, ed. Paget Toynbee, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), 1:83.

<sup>63</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 121.

<sup>64</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Norman Hill and Lawrence Fitzroy Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934–64), 1:76.

<sup>65</sup> Chatterjee, "Christ Church, Oxford," 113, 136.

philosophical thought was manifest in a sermon that he preached before the Lord Mayor of London on 29 May 1743. In this sermon, Bateman defined the understanding in Lockean terms as the faculty of associating ideas derived from sense impressions. He explicitly appealed to Locke in order to prove the reasonableness of believing in religious mysteries above reason.<sup>66</sup> It seems probable that he would have been even more likely to use such ideas in the academic situations to which they were most suited. Indeed, Bateman's tutee Taylor referenced Locke's *Essay* in his *Elements of the Civil Law* (1755) to demonstrate that a law must have sanctions to be obligatory.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, the *Summary of the Roman Law* (1772) extracted from Taylor's *Elements* was prefaced with a dissertation on obligation, which reiterated the now common Lockean view that ethics is reducible to rational pursuit of pain and pleasure.<sup>68</sup>

It is, therefore, unsurprising that Locke retained his hold on many of the churchmen of that college. John Free, who matriculated at Christ Church in 1727, spent much of the 1730s preaching sermons before the University of Oxford, which were inflected with Lockean notions. He argued that all "Ideas" originate from sense impressions; that the human understanding is constructed for limited purposes; that "Uneasiness" is the central human motivation; and, that morality consists in the self-interested pursuit of pleasure culminating in the rewards of the next life. Interestingly, Free recounted that he preached these sermons to his parishioners at Runcorn in Cheshire, but their academic style ensured that they were little "understood, or relished."<sup>69</sup> As unsuccessful as this attempt may have been, it hints at how the transmission of Locke's ideas through university education led to these notions percolating down to sermons heard by less elite audiences.

Throughout the rest of the eighteenth century, the number of Christ Church men who engaged with Locke's writings only proliferated. Some of this engagement with Locke's thought simply reflected its growing popularity in eighteenth-century educational institutions more generally. At least two prominent figures at mid-eighteenth-century Christ Church who made extensive use of Lockean ideas had been educated at other Oxford colleges. John Conybeare, who had been admitted to Exeter College, Oxford, on 22 March 1708, became the Dean of Christ Church in 1733. His sermons relied almost constantly on Lockean ideas. The title-page of his 1722 sermon before the University of Oxford, for instance, was prefaced with a

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<sup>66</sup> Edmund Bateman, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Right Honourable the Lord-Mayor and the Court of Aldermen, in the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, on Trinity-Sunday, May 29. 1743* (London, 1743), 10, 13.

<sup>67</sup> John Taylor, *Elements of the Civil Law* (Cambridge, 1755), 154.

<sup>68</sup> John Taylor, *A Summary of the Roman Law, Taken from Dr. Taylor's Elements of the Civil Law* (London, 1772), i–lxx.

<sup>69</sup> John Free, *A Volume of Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (London, 1750), 49, 70, 80, 95, 96–7, 328, 352, xii.

quotation from Locke on the limits of the human understanding. Throughout the rest of the sermon, Conybeare sought to wrest the Lockean language of ideas from John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) in order to prove that is reasonable to believe in a mystery that one can only conceive of inadequately.<sup>70</sup>

This philosophical orientation signalled the direction of his later publications. Perhaps the best example of this Lockean orientation was Conybeare's 1732 critique of the Deist philosopher Matthew Tindal's argument in *Christianity as Old as Creation* (1730) that the only truths of Christianity are those of natural religion.<sup>71</sup> Conybeare's response regularly appealed to Locke to exalt the necessity of Christian Revelation. To show that natural reason could not arrive at certain knowledge of morality, he discussed how Locke had believed that ethics could be demonstrated with mathematical certainty, but had eventually conceded in the *Familiar Letters* (1708) that he could never construct a system as perfect as that of the Gospels. Elsewhere, he sought to use Locke's account of testimony and sensory impressions to show that Revelation was credible and provided a form of knowledge that could not be arrived at through natural means. Much of the thrust of his argument also centred around a theory of moral obligation, which was similar to Gastrell's reading of Locke. He argued that an individual is only obliged to act in accordance with a law as long as it is enforced by sanctions that ensure it is always ultimately more pleasant to obey than to disobey. As natural religion could not provide such sanctions, Christian Revelation with its promulgation of eschatological rewards was necessary for morality—a case that he had already made in two earlier sermons.<sup>72</sup>

Another example of a Lockean from a different college who would become prominent at Christ Church was John Tottie, a Canon of Christ Church from 1760. In a 1734 sermon before the University of Oxford, he challenged the third Earl of Shaftesbury's suggestion in the *Characteristics*

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<sup>70</sup> John Conybeare, *A Sermon Preached Before the University of Oxford At St. Mary's, On Sunday, October 21<sup>st</sup> 1722* (Oxford, 1723), sig. A1r and *passim*.

<sup>71</sup> For discussion of Tindal's argument see: Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England: Theology, Politics, and Newtonian Public Science* (Manchester, 2009), 178–83.

<sup>72</sup> John Conybeare, *A Defence of Reveald Religion Against the Exceptions of a Late Writer, in his Book, Entitled, Christianity as Old as the Creation* (London, 1732), 236, 238, 239, 303, 319, 320, 321, 338, 57–65. One copy of this work in the British Library (shelfmark 858.f.18) has extensive marginalia in an eighteenth-century hand, which analyses Conybeare's interpretation of Locke (see, for instance, pages 303–8). John Conybeare, *The Penal Sanctions of Laws Consider'd. A Sermon Preach'd at St. Mary's in Oxford, at the Assizes, Before the Honourable Mr. Justice Reynolds; and Before the University; on Thursday, July 20<sup>th</sup>. 1727* (Oxford, 1727), 8–9 and *passim*; John Conybeare, *The Expediency of a Divine Revelation Represented. A Sermon Preach'd Before the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen, And Citizens of London, at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, on Sunday, February 16, 1728/9* (Oxford, 1729), 22–9.

(1711) that ridicule could reveal the truth.<sup>73</sup> To this end, Tottie quoted Locke's *Essay* to demonstrate that truth could only be attained by an unbiased inquiry into the agreement of ideas derived from sense impressions.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, the homegrown interest in Lockean ideas remained strong, and Christ Church men frequently deployed Locke's philosophical thought in polemical debates. For instance, William Romaine, who received his BA at Christ Church in 1734 and later became a famous evangelical preacher, made Locke's *Essay* central to his refutation of Bishop William Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses* (1738–41).<sup>75</sup> In two sermons preached before the University of Oxford in 1739 and 1741, Romaine contested Warburton's argument that the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Hebrew Bible—had not disclosed rewards and punishments in the afterlife. He contended both that natural reason showed the necessity of God proclaiming eschatological rewards and punishments and that the promulgation of these sanctions was displayed in the Old Testament.

In support of the first strand of his argument, Romaine referenced Locke on numerous occasions to evince that human beings must act according to rational motivations of pain and pleasure. If God had proposed duties to his subjects that were not fully enforced by such sanctions, according to Romaine, it would be irrational for man to pursue those goods and unjust for God to punish this disobedience. Temporal rewards and punishments were insufficient to make it always rational to be moral, so God must have proposed eschatological sanctions to ensure the obedience of the Hebrews.<sup>76</sup> During this argument, Romaine also appealed to John Gay's "Preliminary Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue or Morality" in Edmund Law's translation of William King's *Origin of Evil* (1731). Both Law and Gay were prominent defenders of Lockean ideas of morality and philosophy at Cambridge. As such, this reference reveals that members of Christ Church were not only engaging with Locke, but were also reading some of his most influential later adaptors from Cambridge.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> For discussion see: Ross Carroll, "Ridicule, Censorship and the Regulation of Public Speech: the Case of Shaftesbury," *Modern Intellectual History*, 15, no. 2 (2018): 353–80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244316000305>.

<sup>74</sup> John Tottie, *Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1775), 9.

<sup>75</sup> On this controversy more generally see: Michelle Pfeffer, "The Pentateuch and Immortality in England and the Dutch Republic," in *The Worlds of Knowledge and the Classical Tradition in the Early Modern Age*, ed. Dmitri Levitin and Ian Maclean (Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2021), 142–76.

<sup>76</sup> William Romaine, *A Sermon Preached before the University of Oxford at St. Mary's, March 4, 1739* (London, 1739), 8, 10, 14, 15; William Romaine, *Future Rewards and Punishments Proved to be the Sanctions of the Mosaic Dispensation. In a Second Sermon on Mark xii. 24, 25, &c. Preached Before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's, December 6, 1741* (London, 1742), 4.

<sup>77</sup> For uses of Locke in this work see: John Gay, "Preliminary Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue or Morality," in *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, by William King, ed. and trans. Edmund Law (London, 1731), xxxvi, 2 and *passim*. For more on the Cambridge Lockean see: Brian Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from*

The later eighteenth century even brought about a new appreciation for Locke's *Paraphrase* at Christ Church. John Butley, who matriculated at Christ Church in 1739, regularly referenced Locke's *Paraphrase* in his own *Holy Bible Illustrated* (1754).<sup>78</sup> By 1780, indeed, Lewis Bagot, the Dean of Christ Church, was remarking upon how many readers of Scripture set out to interpret it "with Mr. Locke's Comment in their hand."<sup>79</sup> When placed in the context of the earlier uses of Locke's *Paraphrase* that have already been discussed, this comment suggests that this work exerted a far greater influence on eighteenth-century culture than has often been recognised.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, clergymen and academics at other colleges and universities frequently made similar remarks upon the *Paraphrase*. For instance, John Jebb, a fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge, and a leading educational reformer, lauded the method of Locke's *Paraphrase* in his own proposal for harmonizing the Gospels. He remarked that Locke's "method of studying Scripture by making it its own Interpreter, which has now been adopted by a numerous band of followers, opens to us the fairest prospect of succeeding in our attempts to investigate the real meaning of the sacred writers."<sup>81</sup>

It was also indicative of Locke's high reputation in mid-eighteenth-century Oxford that one anonymous Student of Christ Church published a poem in 1762, which lauded Locke as one of the ornaments of "Bright Learning."<sup>82</sup> In 1801, Charles Henry Hall, who matriculated at Christ Church in 1779 and later became the dean of the college, was still able to remark that Locke's *Essay* was "frequently recommended and read privately."<sup>83</sup> Of course, adopting a Lockean philosophical and religious framework was much less unusual later in the eighteenth century than it was in the 1690s and the early 1700s as the *Essay's* philosophy was increasingly woven into the fabric of English intellectual life. Still, these works clearly demonstrate the persistence of a Lockean tradition at later

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*Locke to Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 82–119; Niall O'Flaherty, *Utilitarianism in the Age of Enlightenment: The Moral and Political Thought of William Paley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 35–57.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, John Butley, *The Holy Bible Illustrated and Explained: Or, A Complete Treasure for Every Christian*, 5th edn. 2 vols. (London, 1762–64), 2:977.

<sup>79</sup> Lewis Bagot, *Twelve Discourses on the Prophecies Concerning the First Establishment and Subsequent History of Christianity* (Oxford, 1780), 136.

<sup>80</sup> Arthur Wainwright, introduction to *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, by John Locke, 2 vols., The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1:59–70.

<sup>81</sup> John Jebb, *A Short Account of Theological Lectures Now Reading at Cambridge*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1772), 4.

<sup>82</sup> Student of Christ-Church College [pseud], *The Peace: a Poem* (London, 1762), 20.

<sup>83</sup> Bill, *Education at Christ Church*, 300.

eighteenth-century Christ Church and Oxford, which some historians have depicted as having been dominated by a hidebound Scholasticism.<sup>84</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

What, then, is the significance of this largely overlooked evidence of the reception of Locke at Christ Church? Fundamentally, it strongly supports the overall narrative of my *History of Universities* article. Prideaux's use of Locke's *Two Treatises* is an important example of how a Christ Church contemporary who had reacted negatively to Locke's politics in the 1680s was willing to use even his political writings in a different era. The examples of Taswell and Bagshaw illustrate the popularity of anti-Calvinist moral theology and Epicurean texts at the college. The library catalogues of Trelawney, Hooke, Stratford, Woodroffe, and Aldrich further demonstrate how personal connections often led to a sustained interest in Locke's writings. Milles's defence of the *Immortality of the Soul* utilized Locke's philosophy to refute the more subversive implications that others had inferred from it. Wells's use of Locke's *Paraphrase* reveals that the institutional interest in his writings extended beyond the *Essay* and was manifest in works with an explicitly educational purpose. His high church beliefs once again demonstrate that political ideals did not always or even usually determine the reception of Locke's religious and philosophical writings. Spalding's admiration for, and translation of, Gastrell's *Principles of Deism* further evinces the extent of his European significance. Clap's intense concern about the influence of Gastrell's distinctive moral theology at Yale indicates the far-reaching diffusion of the Christ Church reading of Locke. The later adherents of Locke's writings at that college reveal the ways in which a more conservative vision of his thought became embedded in eighteenth-century culture.

On the whole, this additional evidence further supports the recovery of Christ Church as a powerhouse in the production of Lockean ideas in the early 1700s. The widespread popularity of Locke's writings at Christ Church can be summarised in numerical terms. The *History of Universities* article reveals that in the period between 1690 and 1725 at least twenty-three individuals with a connection to Christ Church displayed some engagement with Locke's philosophy. Three of these individuals—Atterbury, Gastrell, and Carter—published sixteen works indebted to Lockean ideas. This article suggests that another six such figures had encountered Locke's works, and that three more Christ Church educated clergymen published five works influenced by his writings. In total, therefore, around twenty-nine Christ Church men in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century displayed some engagement with Locke's ideas. Six of these figures produced twenty-one works indebted to Lockean philosophy. As there were around thirty

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<sup>84</sup> Michael Stewart, "The Curriculum in Britain, Ireland, and the Colonies," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Knud Haakonssen, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1:97–120, 98.



yearly matriculants at Christ Church in the early eighteenth century, this number reflects an extensive institutional interest in Locke's writings.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, this figure probably only shows a proportion of the total of those interested in Locke at Christ Church because the college as an institution also indicated its fascination with his philosophy through the curriculum and college library acquisitions. It is also likely that this account is not exhaustive with respect to published writings, and that further inquiry into the college's manuscript holdings will reveal more evidence of Locke's readers.

The methodological upshot of this overall picture of Locke's reception at Christ Church is that institutional contexts were often crucial in shaping responses to new ideas. Beyond Christ Church, Locke's critics and admirers tended to have been educated at particular colleges. Brasenose College, Oxford, and St. John's College, Cambridge, produced a slew of Locke's opponents, whilst Clare College and Magdalene College in Cambridge became centres for the positive engagement with Lockean ideas. These contexts were recognised by contemporaries. As the 1698 *Free but Modest Censure* declared, assessing the controversy over the *Essay* involved "adjusting the Debates between Cambridge and Oxford, between the St. Johns men on one side, and the men of Christ-Church on the other".<sup>86</sup> Studying the myriad ways in which institutions moulded reactions to Locke's writings could provide more nuanced and varied pictures of their diverse receptions. A renewed attentiveness to the particularities of place could, moreover, shed new light on the reception of other well-known eighteenth-century thinkers.<sup>87</sup> For responses to new texts were not only determined by abstract ideological considerations and political interests, but were also informed by the intellectual atmospheres of the places where the authors had been educated and formed friendships with likeminded contemporaries.

*University of Oxford*

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<sup>85</sup> Bill, *Education at Christ Church*, 167–70.

<sup>86</sup> F.B., M.A. of Cambridge [pseud], *A Free but Modest Censure on the Late Controversial Writings and Debates of the Lord Bishop of Worcester and Mr. Locke* (London, 1698), 31.

<sup>87</sup> For instance, many of the Cambridge Lockeans presented similar critiques of the Dutch physician Bernard Mandeville: Jacob Donald Chatterjee, "One Hundred and Eighty-Two Overlooked British Comments on Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, 1724–1800," *Historical Research*, 95, no. 269 (2022), 447–70, 457, 462, 461, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hisres/htac007>; Daniel Waterland, *Christianity Vindicated Against Infidelity* (London, 1732), 34–5; Daniel Waterland, *Sermons on Several Important Subjects*, 2 vols. (London, 1742), 1:62–86; Thomas Rutherford, *An Essay on the Nature and Obligations of Virtue* (Cambridge, 1744), 40–60; David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 2 vols. (London, 1749), 2:209; John Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics* (London, 1751), 113–221. Waterland must have followed the debate over the *Fable* closely because he owned the second part of Mandeville's *Fable*, his *Free Thoughts*, and at least four critiques of the *Fable*: *A Catalogue of the Entire Library of the Learned Daniel Waterland* (London, 1742), 5, 14, 27, 37, 39.

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