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INVITED ARTICLE

Locke and Leibniz on epistemic autonomy

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Abstract

This article argues that Locke's views about the nature of knowledge, on the one hand, and about the proper regulation of probable judgment, on the other hand, give rise to a radical form of individual epistemic autonomy. Three theses are defended: First, Locke's conception of the nature of knowledge implies that the knowledge of other individuals has little (to no) influence on whether one knows something. Locke denies that knowledge is the kind of thing that could, even in theory, be transmitted by testimony. Second, Locke's treatment of probability and probable judgment gives a specific role to testimonial evidence, but within such strict limits that the *probable judgments* of others should play no role in influencing the strength of one's own judgments. Third, in his *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, Leibniz recognizes the radicalness of Locke's position and sees this as reason to reject aspects of Locke's account of knowledge and his treatment of probable judgment. Finally, these views have implications for how Locke conceives of collective inquiry and the division of epistemic labor among inquirers.

Wariness of authority is one of the guiding themes of Locke's work, from his political philosophy to his views about religious toleration to his epistemology.[1] If we focus on Locke's positions on questions central to social epistemology, Locke makes significant contributions to debates about the nature and role of testimonial evidence and on questions about disagreement. However, his contributions to these debates tend to emphasize the role of the individual epistemic agent and the importance of making up one's mind for oneself. As we will see, he argues that testimonial evidence can properly play only a very limited role, and he thinks that others' agreement or disagreement with us itself has no bearing on how we ought to judge. Indeed, I shall argue in this article that Locke's views about the nature of knowledge, on the one hand, and about the proper regulation of probable judgment, on the other hand, give rise to a radical form of individual epistemic autonomy. When it comes to social epistemology,

[1]See, for example, William Uzgalis's entry on John Locke in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ([2001] 2022).

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Locke does not merely disregard the social and cooperative aspects of knowledge; rather, he argues that others can and ought to have only very limited influence on what we know and how we judge.

In this article, I will defend three theses about Locke's commitment to individual epistemic autonomy, devoting one part of the article to each. First, when it comes to knowledge, I will argue that Locke's conception of the nature of knowledge implies that the knowledge of other individuals has little (to no) influence on whether one knows something. Locke denies that knowledge is the kind of thing that could, even in theory, be transmitted by testimony. Second, turning to the regulation of probable judgment, I will argue that Locke's treatment of probability and probable judgment gives a specific role to testimonial evidence, but within such strict limits that the *probable judgments* of others should play no role in influencing the strength of one's own judgments. Third, I will turn to Leibniz's engagement with Locke's social epistemology in the *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, and I will argue that Leibniz recognizes the radicalness of Locke's position and sees this as reason to reject aspects of Locke's account of knowledge and his treatment of probable judgment.

1 | LOCKE ON KNOWLEDGE AND EPISTEMIC AUTONOMY

Locke insists that whether I know something does not depend on whether someone else knows it: each of us knows only by the exercise of our own rational capacities. For example, he claims,

> For, I think, we may as rationally hope to see with other Mens Eyes, as to know by other Mens Understandings. So much as we our selves consider and comprehend of Truth and Reason, so much we possess of real and true Knowledge. The floating of other Mens Opinions in our brains makes us not one jot the more knowing, though they happen to be true. (E 1.4.23, p. 101)[2]

Locke denies that testimony ever transmits knowledge. Someone's testifying to me their knowledge of some proposition *p* may give me good reason to form a probable judgment that *p*, but it never suffices for me to know that *p*. Locke's example is the testimony of a mathematician, who testifies that the internal angles of a triangle equal two right angles to someone who has not considered or understood the demonstration of this. Locke claims that in this case the mathematician, who has done the demonstration, knows the proposition, "But another Man who never took the pains to observe the Demonstration, hearing a Mathematician, a Man of credit, affirm the three Angles of a Triangle, to be equal to two right ones, *assents* to it; i.e. receives it for true" (E 4.15.1, p. 654). Locke here uses "assent" in contrast to "know": "assent" in Locke's terminology is the verbal analogue of probable judgment, which is sharply distinguished from knowledge (E 4.14.3, p. 653).

My aim in this part of the article is to argue that Locke's denial that testimony transmits knowledge follows from his views about the nature of knowledge. When one appreciates what, in Locke's view, knowledge is, it is entirely unsurprising that he denies that testimony is a source of knowledge. Moreover, this account of knowledge has important implications for attributing to Locke an account of collective knowledge. I will argue that Locke's epistemology does not really accommodate a robust account of collective knowledge. Locke is interested in collective inquiry and cooperation among inquirers, but collective inquiry cannot adequately be explained in terms of collective knowledge.

[2]Parenthetical citations to Locke's *Essay* include book, chapter, and paragraph numbers, followed by the page number in the 1974 Nidditch edition.

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Let us begin, then, with Locke's definition of knowledge. Locke defines knowledge as "*the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our Ideas*" (E 4.1.2, p. 525). Locke, following a long tradition of philosophers, treats knowing as a kind of intellectual perception or seeing.[3] Knowing is a matter of seeing or grasping the truth of some proposition. This is why Locke claims we can no more know for someone else than we can see with another's eyes.

A puzzling feature of Locke's definition, however, is *what* Locke thinks one perceives or sees when one knows. Locke claims that what one perceives is the agreement or disagreement of ideas. This aspect of Locke's definition of knowledge makes sense, however, in light of Locke's views about propositions. The claim that knowing is perceiving an agreement or disagreement between ideas amounts to the claim that knowing is perceiving the truth of an affirmative or negative proposition.

Locke also claims that knowledge is propositional (E 2.33.19, p. 401).[4] Locke distinguishes two types of propositions: mental propositions, which are thoughts, and verbal propositions, which are sentences (E 4.5.2, p. 574). Locke thinks that only propositions are true or false, and propositions have subject-predicate structure: "*Truth* . . . in the proper import of the Word, [signifies] nothing but *the joining or separating of Signs, as the Things signified by them, do agree or disagree one with another*" (E 4.5.2, p. 574). He then claims that "the *joining* or *separating* of signs here meant is what by another name, we call Proposition. So that Truth properly belongs only to Propositions . . ." (E 4.5.2, p. 574).

What Locke describes as joining or separating signs are two ways of forming propositions, affirming or denying. If one forms the propositional thought that triangles have three sides, one joins signs or affirms the idea of three-sidedness of the idea of a triangle. If one forms the propositional thought that triangles do not have four sides, one separates or denies the idea of four-sidedness of the idea of a triangle. Thus, Locke's claim that knowing is perceiving that ideas agree or disagree reflects the view that knowledge is propositional and that propositions have a subject-predicate structure. To perceive that ideas agree is to perceive that an affirmative proposition is true, whereas to perceive that ideas disagree is to perceive that a negative proposition is true.

We can better understand Locke's definition of knowledge by thinking about two examples: knowing "2 + 2 = 4" and "my mother is not my nurse." In the first case, Locke thinks that knowing that 2 + 2 = 4 is a matter of perceiving that the idea of 2 and 2 agree with the idea of 4. To perceive that the ideas agree in this case is to grasp that they stand in the relation of *equality*. In the case of knowing that one's mother is not one's nurse, one of Locke's examples of a child's early knowledge, the child perceives that the idea of the mother disagrees with the idea of the nurse, in the sense that they do not stand in the relation of *identity*.

Locke classifies propositions known in terms of four kinds of agreement or disagreement: identity (or diversity), relation, coexistence or necessary connection, and real existence (E 4.1.3, p. 525). Thus, the proposition "2 + 2 = 4" is a case of relation, since the relevant type of agreement is equality. "My mother is not my nurse" is an example of identity or, rather, diversity.

If Locke thinks that perceiving an agreement or disagreement between ideas is a matter of seeing or grasping the truth of a proposition, Locke thinks that this seeing is *certain*. Locke frequently describes knowledge as certain; for example, he writes, "Certainty of knowledge is to perceive the agreement or disagreement of *Ideas*, as expressed in any Proposition. This

[3]See, for example, Ayers and Antognazza (2019), Antognazza (2021, 2024).

[4]See, for example, Mattern (1978) and Marušić (2014). Anstey (2021) argues that Locke does not think of all knowledge as propositional, but instead some knowledge should be understood in terms of acquaintance.

we usually call knowing, or being certain of the Truth of any Proposition" (E 4.6.3, pp. 579–580). Indeed, in this passage Locke treats "knowing" and "being certain" as synonymous expressions.

There is some debate in the literature about what the relevant notion of certainty is.[5] Sometimes the relevant notion of certainty seems to be something like high degree of subjective confidence: one doesn't know something unless one is confident that it is true.[6] However, Locke's discussions of certainty also imply that certainty entails infallibility. Locke claims that one does not know if one might have been wrong; for example, he denies that I know now that someone I saw recently still exists, since I might have been wrong. He claims,

> For if I saw such a Collection of simple *Ideas*, as is wont to be called *Man*, existing together one minute since, and am now alone, I cannot be certain, that the same Man exists now, since there is no necessary connexion of his Existence a minute since, with his Existence now: by a thousand ways he may cease to be, since I had the Testimony of my Senses for his Existence. (E 4.11.9, p. 635)

Locke's point here is not merely the (largely) uncontroversial point that knowledge is factive, that I cannot know a proposition unless the proposition is true. Rather, Locke's point is that the evidence that one has of the man's current existence is evidence that one could have even if the man no longer existed—even if the proposition were false—and as a result one does not know that he currently exists, even if he does. This suggests that knowledge, according to Locke, is infallible in the sense that one only knows something if one could not be in that state if the proposition known were false. In other words, when one perceives that ideas agree (or disagree) one could not be in a position to perceive that agreement (or disagreement) if the proposition known were not true. Since the state one is in when one takes the man to continue to exist is one that one could be in even if he did not continue to exist, it is not knowledge.

This explains why Locke thinks that it is impossible for testimony to transmit knowledge. Testimony is not infallible in the way that knowledge requires. Even when someone I trust, who knows that *p*, testifies to me that *p*, I could be in the very same state even if *p* were false. Testimony does not allow me to grasp the truth of the proposition in the way that knowing requires. Of course, there may be cases where someone's testimony prompts me to grasp the truth of a proposition for myself, and in this limited way testimony can play an important role in knowledge acquisition. For example, someone who testifies some surprising mathematical proposition might prompt me to reflect in a way that leads me to grasp the demonstration, but it is my own consideration of the demonstration and not the testimony that is the source of knowledge.

In a somewhat mysterious passage, Locke distinguishes propositions known from propositions that are merely probable in terms of the kind of evidence that we have for them. He writes,

> herein lies the difference between Probability and Certainty . . . that in all the parts of Knowledge, there is intuition; each immediate *Idea*, each step has its visible and

[5]This arises because Locke claims that knowledge is certain but also holds that there are three degrees of knowledge and seems to hold that intuitive knowledge is more certain than demonstrative. For more on this see, Marušić (2021), Rickless (2008), and Weinberg (2013).

[6]Here I disagree with the claim in Newman (2007) that Locke denies that knowing *p* requires believing that *p* or having any other doxastic attitude toward *p*.

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> certain connexion; in belief not so. That which makes me believe, is something extraneous to the thing I believe; something not evidently joined on both sides to, and so not manifestly shewing the Agreement, or Disagreement of those *Ideas*, that are under consideration. (E 4.15.3, p. 655)

Locke characterizes the evidence in cases of probable judgment as "extraneous" or extrinsic, whereas knowledge is characterized by evidence that seems to be internal in some sense. The mystery, however, is that the internal/external distinction that Locke here sketches does not seem to map onto any of the familiar internal/external distinctions in contemporary epistemology. Locke's thought seems to be that the evidence in cases of knowledge reveals or displays the agreement or disagreement between ideas, by showing how the ideas are related. This is true not only in cases of intuition, but also in demonstration, even though in demonstration the relation between the ideas is only revealed by means of the connection with intermediate ideas. Locke's thought, though, seems to be that in cases of knowledge, the truth of the proposition is itself made evident, whereas in cases of probable judgment there are other, "extraneous" considerations that support the truth of the proposition.

This distinction between internal and external evidence helps explain the sharp divide that Locke sees between knowledge and probable judgment. Maria Rosa Antognazza (2021) argues that, according to traditional epistemology, knowledge and belief are fundamentally different kinds of state. Locke's epistemology follows this tradition in holding that knowledge is fundamentally different from probable judgment because its evidence is "internal" rather than "extraneous." However, one objection to this traditional account of knowledge is that it sets the bar to knowing too high: if knowing is grasping for myself the truth of a proposition, then it seems that genuine knowledge is very limited. Antognazza (2021) argues that this concern is mitigated by appeal to collective knowledge; she writes,

> there is a key social dimension to knowledge that allows us to count as known by the community (compare Hyman 1999, p. 433; 2015, p. 159), rather than by each individual in the community, those aspects of "what is" with which some group or individual in the community has, or has had, the kind of cognitive contact required for knowledge. A prime example of this is science. The level of sophistication and specialization in any of the natural sciences is such that no individual scientist can claim to have done, or be able to do by herself, all the experiments, demonstrations, gathering of data, and so on, presupposed by her own scientific work. Much of what a scientist does is based on authority and testimony. However, in so far as there is someone or some group in the scientific community which does have the relevant cognitive contact with "what is," that aspect is known by the scientific community collectively although not distributively by each individual member. (2021, p. 303)

Antognazza argues that even if individual knowledge is limited, we can avoid some of the problematic implications of this by appealing to collective knowledge. According to this proposal, a group G can be said to know collectively that *p* just in case some individual in G knows that *p*. Antognazza suggests that collective knowledge can be used to explain how cooperative inquiries, like the sciences, work, and one might suggest that Locke can also appeal to this conception of collective knowledge to explain how collective inquiries like the sciences work.

However, I am somewhat skeptical that this conception of collective knowledge can do the work Antognazza suggests. Collective knowledge, on this account, is not closed under known entailment. As a result, collective knowledge cannot explain how the epistemic progress of a group depends on the efforts of the individuals in the group. For example, suppose that exactly one member of a group G, A, knows that *p*. And suppose that exactly one other member of G, B,

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knows that *p* entails *q*. A does not know that *q*, since she does not know that *p* entails *q*. B also does not know *q*, since he does not know that *p*. Therefore, no one in the group knows *q*. In this case, the group collectively knows that *p* and collectively knows that *p* entails *q*, but does not collectively know that *q*. If this is right, then this kind of collective knowledge is of limited use in explaining collective inquiry: if A and B get together and share what they know, neither of them, nor therefore the group, *thereby* acquire any new knowledge. That is, neither acquires any new knowledge *unless* they grasp the demonstration of the proposition they did not know. If A now sees for herself that *p* entails *q*, then both A and the group acquire new knowledge, and now know *q*. In this case, though, B's contribution is merely in prompting A to come to know that *p* entails *q* for herself.

This kind of account of collective knowledge is not, by itself, an account of how a group makes epistemic progress. At least, it is not a story according to which epistemic progress results from an epistemic division of labor, where individuals can investigate distinct questions individually and pool their knowledge to make new discoveries. Rather, the role of collaboration in the acquisition of knowledge seems to be a story about the *duplication* of labor, rather than the division of labor: your discovery that *p* may make it easier for me to come to know *p*, because I can, say, read your demonstration, but no one can carry out the work of knowing for anyone else.

Locke does have more to say about collective inquiry, but, as we will see in what follows, he seems to conceive of the division of epistemic labor as dividing up the work of collecting evidence and making observations; he does not conceive of it as dividing the work of knowing among the individuals engaged in inquiry.

2 | LOCKE ON JUDGMENT AND EPISTEMIC AUTONOMY

We have seen that Locke sharply distinguishes between knowledge and probable judgment. While knowledge is *perceiving* an agreement or disagreement between ideas, Locke defines judgment in terms of *presuming* an agreement or disagreement between ideas; he writes "Judgment . . . is the putting *Ideas* together, or separating them from one another in the Mind, when their certain Agreement or Disagreement is not perceived, but *presumed* to be so" (E 4.14.4, p. 653). The distinction between perceiving and presuming tracks the distinction between internal and external evidence sketched above: when the evidence for a proposition is internal, this makes one see the truth of the proposition, when the evidence for a proposition is external, there are considerations that make the truth of a proposition likely, but which fall short of revealing or displaying its truth in the way required for knowledge.

This presumption of truth comes in degrees; one may judge with more or less confidence. Locke describes the degrees of judgment in qualitative, rather than quantitative, terms. He writes that judgments range from "full *Assurance* and Confidence quite down to Conjecture, Doubt, and Distrust" (E 4.15.2, p. 655). One might think of Locke's degrees of judgment as similar to credences, except qualitative rather than quantitative, and distinguished by one's subjective confidence in the truth of a proposition.

It is important, I will argue, that Locke distinguishes these degrees of confidence from probability. Probability is not the same as the degree of confidence but, rather, is a measure of evidential support. Locke's guiding thought in explaining how we ought to regulate our judgment, which I will call his "evidentialism," is that we ought to strive to align the confidence with which we judge to the probability of the proposition. Someone who judges very confidently a proposition that has low probability is not judging as he ought, but someone who judges very confidently a proposition that has very high probability is judging correctly. The distinction between degree of confidence and probability is crucial to making sense of Locke's views about how we ought to judge. Locke expresses his commitment to this evidentialist view when he writes,

> *the Mind if it will proceed rationally, ought to examine all the grounds of Probability*, and see how they make more or less, *for or against* any probable Proposition, before it assents to or dissents from it, and upon a due balancing the whole, reject, or receive it, with a more or less firm assent, proportionably to the preponderancy of the greater grounds of Probability on one side or the other. (E 4.15.5, p. 656)

Locke's conception of probability is, therefore, essential to understanding his views about how we ought to judge. Locke takes probability to be a measure of evidential support. He defines probability, claiming, "*Probability* is likeliness to be true, the very notation of the Word signifying such a Proposition, for which there be Arguments or Proofs, to make it pass or received for true" (E 4.15.3, p. 655). Locke is clear that it makes no sense to think that a proposition by itself is probable or improbable; probability is always the probability of a proposition in light of some body of evidence, some arguments or proofs. As we will see, this is central to Locke's views about judgment. We might then think of probability as a measure of the external or extraneous kind of evidence Locke describes; very high probability is very strong external evidence while low probability is weak external evidence.

Locke's evidentialism is, unsurprisingly, quite demanding. Locke thinks that we ought to proportion the strength of our judgment to the probability of the proposition, not just in light of the evidence we happen to have, but in light of "all the grounds of probability" (E 4.15.5, p. 656). He claims that reason requires us to ensure that we have collected all the available evidence and to tailor the strength of our judgment to the probability of the proposition in light of this body of evidence.[7]

Our next question, then, is what the grounds of probability are. Locke distinguishes two grounds of probability. The first, he claims, is "the conformity of any thing with our own Knowledge, Observation, and Experience." The second ground of probability is "The Testimony of others, vouching their Observation and Experience" (E 4.15.4, p. 656).[8] It is striking and significant that Locke restricts testimonial evidence to testimony vouching one's own observation and experience. I will argue in the remainder of this section that this restriction makes sense in light of Locke's conception of probability, and that it is of apiece with his view that we ought to make probable judgments in an epistemically autonomous way. In particular, Locke denies that the probable judgments of others have any epistemic bearing on how we ought to judge. Locke is committed to epistemic autonomy about judgment in the sense that the strength of someone else's judgment about *p* makes no difference to how one ought to judge that *p*.

One might wonder whether Locke really intended the restriction of testimony to the vouching of one's own observation and experience to be taken seriously. It might seem too deeply at odds with our ordinary testimonial practices, which seem to involve lots of testimony about things that extend beyond our own observation and experience. It might also seem at odds with places in the text where Locke himself discusses testimony about testimony. For example, he writes, "A credible Man vouching his Knowledge of it [i.e., some proposition], is a good proof: But if another equally credible, do witness it from his Report, the Testimony is weaker; and a third that attests the Hear-say of an Hear-say, is yet less

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[7]For a fuller account of Locke on probability and probable judgment, see Boespflug (2023).

[8]Locke's distinguishing these two grounds of probability seems to suggest that he takes testimonial evidence to be distinct in kind from observational evidence. This might be taken to suggest that he is a nonreductivist about testimony. For discussion of whether Locke is a reductivist or nonreductivist, and, indeed, of whether his view is usefully characterized in terms of either position, see, for example, Boespflug (2019), Pearce (Forthcoming), and Shieber (2009). I do not wish to take sides in this debate. It seems to me that Locke is more interested in defending restrictions on what counts as testimonial evidence, rather than giving an account of why testimonial evidence is evidence in the first place.

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considerable" (E 4.16.10, p. 664). Locke's point here is that testimonial evidence becomes weaker as the chain of transmission becomes longer. Yet if testimony about testimony is evidence at all, then is this not inconsistent with restricting testimony to vouching one's own observation and experience?

I think that what Locke has in mind here is something like the following: A testifies to B something that she has observed, say, that there was a fox in the meadow. B cannot appropriately testify to C that there was a fox in the meadow, but B can testify that A told her that there as a fox in the meadow. Similarly, C can testify that B said that A said there was a fox in the meadow, and so on. In this case, each person is only testifying to their observation and experience, in this case the experience of receiving another's testimony. Moreover, this is not so deeply at odds with our ordinary ways of testifying: if I have not seen the fox myself, but merely heard testimony to that effect, I would likely qualify my testimony in some way. I might say, "I heard that a fox has been seen in the meadow recently," indicating that I am relying on another's testimony rather than my own experience. Finally, Locke's suggestion that we ought to give less credence to longer testimonial chains can only be implemented if we track the chain of transmission. One way to do this is to testify about our experience of receiving testimony, rather than to testify to the very same proposition as the testimony we received.

In addition to the qualification that testimony vouches one's observation and experience, Locke denies that the probable judgments of others form a third ground of probability. He writes, "There is another, I confess, which though by it self it be no true ground of *Probability*, yet it is often made use of for one, by which Men most commonly regulate their Assent, and upon which they pin their Faith more than any thing else, and that is, the *Opinion of others*; though there cannot be a more dangerous thing to rely on, nor more likely to mislead one; since there is much more Falshood and Errour amongst Men, than Truth and Knowledge" (E 4.16.6, p. 657). Locke is clear that we do not judge as we ought if we take the opinions of others to be evidence for or against our judgments.

One might worry here that what Locke means by "opinion" is something more restrictive than "probable judgment" in general, so that Locke does not mean to deny that others' probable judgments are a ground of probability but only that a narrower class of "opinions" are. Perhaps Locke means something like "baseless judgment" by his use of "opinion"?

To allay this worry, I will argue that Locke's exclusion of others' probable judgments as a ground of probability makes sense in light of his evidentialism and his account of probability as a measure of evidential support. Locke's commitment to what I've called epistemic autonomy about judgment hangs together with his account of probable judgment more generally, rather than being an optional addendum to that account.

Recall that Locke's evidentialism requires us to examine all the grounds of probability and to proportion the confidence with which we judge to the probability of the proposition in light of all the available evidence. Suppose, for *reductio*, that Isla's judgment that p is among the evidence available to me. Judgment, of course, comes in degrees, and it makes a difference whether Isla is assured that p or merely suspects that p. Should it not make a difference, as well, whether Isla has herself judged as she ought, and proportioned the strength of her belief to the available evidence? If she has not, then her judgment, all else being equal, carries less weight than if she had. So, at least, it seems that I had better have evidence that Isla's judgment is a rational one. Yet perhaps that evidence might just be my general experience of Isla as someone who deliberates carefully and who is not quick to judgment? If a thoughtful, rational person has carefully considered the evidence and is assured that p, surely that ought to influence my confidence that p?

I think that Locke's answer is "no" because taking Isla's judgment as bearing on the confidence with which I judge risks double-counting important evidence. Suppose that I judge as I ought and consider all the grounds of probability and consider how strongly they support the truth of p. If I consider the very same evidence that Isla considers, then it seems

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that Isla's judgment itself either makes no difference to my judgment, or, if it does, I must have double-counted some evidence, and Isla's judgment distorts my assessment of the probability.[9] If, on the other hand, Isla judged in light of evidence that I have not considered, then I think Locke thinks I ought to consider that evidence itself, and not merely Isla's assessment of it. Locke thinks relying on the judgments of others is a dangerous shortcut—it is useful only when one neglects the work of collecting and assessing the available evidence for oneself.

Locke claims that disagreement with others also should not count as evidence against our views, or at least the disagreement itself should not lead us to alter our judgments. Locke writes, "Since therefore it is unavoidable to the greatest part of Men, if not all, to have several Opinions, without certain and indubitable Proofs of their Truths; and it carries too great an imputation of ignorance, lightness, or folly, for Men to quit and renounce their former Tenets, presently upon the offer of an Argument, which they cannot immediately answer, and shew the insufficiency of: It would, methinks, become all Men to maintain *Peace. . . and Friendship, in the diversity of Opinions*" (E 4.16.4, p. 659). Interestingly, Locke thinks that the correct response to such disagreement is toleration of diverse and opposing opinions, rather than epistemic pressure to align one's judgments with others' judgments.

We can return, then, to Locke's conception of collective inquiry and his vision for how epistemically autonomous individuals might work together in advancing the sciences. As we saw in the last section, Locke thinks that, in the case of knowledge, collaboration may make it easier for others to acquire knowledge, but the work of knowing cannot genuinely be shared among individuals. Locke clearly recognizes that testimony plays a crucial role in the sciences, but his vision of the sciences seems to be one in which the work of observing and collecting evidence is shared, but where each individual ought to assess the available evidence and make a judgment for him or herself.[10] In particular, Locke does not countenance deference to expert opinion; he does not envision the sciences as involving collaboration in which some individuals collect and assess the evidence in particular domains and everyone else relies on their judgments in those domains. Locke's picture of the sciences accords with his position at (or at least near) the cutting edge of the sciences in the seventeenth century; his vision for the sciences is one in which informed individuals judge for themselves in a variety of domains, making use of the evidence collected and transmitted by others.[11]

3 | LEIBNIZ'S REJECTION OF LOCKEAN EPISTEMIC AUTONOMY

In this final part of the article, I will turn to Leibniz's engagement with Locke's views in his *New Essays*. Leibniz, I will argue, sees that Locke's views about the nature of knowledge and the regulation of probable judgment imply a particularly strong form of individual epistemic autonomy, which Leibniz rejects. Indeed, I will claim that Leibniz sees these problematic implications as reasons to resist aspects of Locke's treatment of knowledge and probable judgment. Leibniz proposes ways of thinking about knowledge and probable judgment that leave

[9]One might reply here that even if Isla's judgment that *p* is not evidence that *p*, it might still be evidence for or against my assessment of the probability of *p*. For example, if Isla and I agree, perhaps that is evidence that I have assessed the probability correctly. But, given how Locke thinks about probability, that should not alter the strength of my judgment that *p*. It would be very odd to think that evidence that I have assessed the probability that *p* correctly ought to change the confidence with which I judge that *p*. If Isla and I both judge that *p* is dubious, our agreement should not make me think *p* is more likely to be true!

[10]See Anstey (2011) for a detailed discussion of Locke's natural historical approach to scientific investigation.

[11]See Shieber (2009) for a discussion of the ways in which Locke's interest in the increased availability of books influenced his views about testimony.

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space for the knowledge and judgments of others to have greater epistemic importance than Locke allows.

Starting with Leibniz's discussion of Locke's definition of knowledge, it is striking that Leibniz seeks to lower Locke's high bar for what counts as knowledge. For example, in response to Locke's defining knowledge as the perception of the agreement or disagreement between ideas, Leibniz writes,

> it is true indeed that truth is always grounded in the agreement or disagreement of ideas, but it is not generally the case that our knowledge of truth is a perception of this agreement and disagreement. For when we know the truth only in the manner of empirics, through having experienced it without knowing how things are connected or what principles are at work. . . . we have no “perception” of that agreement or disagreement, unless you mean that we sense it confusedly without being aware of it. (NE 4.1.2 357)[12]

Leibniz does not deny that some knowledge, indeed the highest forms of knowledge, involve perceiving an agreement or disagreement between ideas. Leibniz seems to understand this definition as implying that knowing a proposition is a matter of grasping clearly what it is that makes the proposition true. To perceive that ideas agree (or disagree) is to see clearly why a proposition is true. This is, I think, related to Locke's notion of the internal evidence characteristic of knowledge: to know something is to grasp the truth of the proposition in a way that reveals what makes it the case. In a mathematical demonstration, for example, the demonstration of a proposition not only proves that the proposition is the case, but, Locke thinks, also provides a kind of understanding about why it should be so. Leibniz, however, thinks that there are lower forms of knowledge that lack this feature; an empiric may know that something is the case without having any conception of why or what makes it the case.[13]

Leibniz goes on to suggest that knowledge need not be certain or infallible either. He claims, “Perhaps *opinion*, based on likelihood, also deserves the name of knowledge; otherwise nearly all historical knowledge will collapse, and a good deal more. But, without arguing about names, I maintain that the study of the degrees of probability would be very valuable and is still lacking” (NE 4.2.14, p. 372). Leibniz is aware that one might worry that this is merely a verbal dispute about the use of the word “knowledge”: Locke wants to restrict its applicability to states that are certain and infallible, whereas Leibniz does not. For example, “historical knowledge” would be largely knowledge by testimony, which Locke would count as merely probable judgment and not knowledge at all.

This is additionally confirmed by Leibniz's suggestion that there are at least four degrees of knowledge, rather than the three Locke distinguishes. He writes, “I even think to these three kinds of certainty or certain knowledge [intuition, demonstration, and sensitive knowledge] you could add *knowledge of likelihood*. So there will be two sorts of knowledge, just as there are two sorts of proof: one results in certainty and the other leads only to probability” (NE 4.2.14, p. 372). At first glance, it seems that what Leibniz has in mind here might be certain knowledge about

[12]Parenthetical references to Leibniz's *New Essays* [NE] include book, chapter, and section number, followed by page number in the 1996 Remnant and Bennett edition.

[13]Leibniz seems to assume here that empirical knowledge does not involve perceiving an agreement or disagreement between ideas, because it does not involve understanding of why something is the case. I suspect that Locke does hold that knowledge had through the senses involves perceiving an agreement or disagreement between ideas and is characterized by the internal sort of evidence, even if it does not involve understanding of causes. However, the interpretation of Locke's account of sensitive or perceptual knowledge is highly controversial, including whether it is genuine knowledge and whether it accords with Locke's general definition of knowledge. See, for example, Marušić (2016), Rickless (2008, 2016), and Rockwood (2013).

probabilities; for example, I might know that the probability that *p* plus the probability that not-*p* are 1. This seems to fit with his claim that a study of the degrees of probability would be useful. However, the claim that this means that there are two sorts of knowledge, one of which "leads only to probability," suggests that what he has in mind is not a science of probability but merely probable knowledge, which is not certain. Perhaps Leibniz has in mind something like the knowledge that it is highly likely that if a fair coin is flipped ten times, it will come up heads at least once. Locke, at least, seems to treat such cases only in terms of judging with a high degree of confidence that a coin will land heads at least once in ten tosses, rather than as knowledge about what will likely happen. Locke could, perhaps, accommodate the thought that there is a relationship between knowing that something is highly probable and judging with high confidence that it will occur, but I do not think he foresaw this possibility.

In his discussion of Locke's views about probability and testimony, Leibniz argues against Locke's claim that others' opinions are not a ground of probability at all. He writes, "[probability or likelihood] must be drawn from the nature of things; and the opinion of weighty authorities is one of the things which can contribute to the likelihood of an opinion, but it does not produce the entire likelihood by itself" (NE 4.2.14, pp. 372–373). Whereas Locke denies that the judgment of a thoughtful, deliberative person that *p* has any bearing on how confident I ought to be that *p*, Leibniz wants to make room for limited deference to, or at least consideration of, the opinions of authorities or experts.

Leibniz responds similarly to Locke's restriction on testimony to vouching one's own observation and experience. He appeals to distinctions made in legal testimony to suggest that the standards of ordinary testimony ought not be higher than those in a court of law. He writes, "Men's testimony doubtless carries more weight than their opinions do, and we give it greater consideration in the courts. However, we know that judges sometimes require an oath of 'credulity,' as it is called, to be taken; during an examination witnesses are often asked not only what they saw, but what they judge and at the same time the reasons for their judgment; and what they say receives appropriate consideration" (NE 4.15.6, p. 458). Here Leibniz does not entirely reject Locke's position—he agrees insofar as he thinks that testimony vouching one's own experience carries greater evidential weight than testifying to one's own judgment or opinion. Nevertheless, the latter still "receives appropriate consideration"; Leibniz clearly thinks that others' judgments are appropriate to consider because they have some epistemic significance.

Most importantly, Leibniz argues that Locke conflates presumption and conjecture.[14] Locke describes all judgment as *presuming* that ideas agree or disagree. All probable judgment is a presumption of the truth of a proposition, according to Locke. Locke uses the word "conjecture" as the name for a particular degree of judgment or confidence with which one may presume the truth of a proposition. In Locke's list, conjecture is the degree of judgment between confidence and doubt. Leibniz argues that jurists distinguish between presumption and conjecture and that the two function in importantly different ways. He writes,

> As for "presumption," which is a jurists' term, good usage in legal circles distinguishes it from "conjecture." It is something more than that, and should be accepted provisionally as true until there is proof to the contrary; whereas an indication, a conjecture, often has to be weighed against another conjecture. (NE 4.16.4, p. 457)

A presumption, according to Leibniz, should not be understood as something that is likely to be true in light of some body of evidence. Rather, a presumption is accepted as provisionally true, not in virtue of having any particular degree of probability but for some other reason. For example, the presumption of innocence in a court of law is not a judgment that there is some probability

[14]For additional discussion of Leibniz's discussion of presumption in response to Locke, see Pearce (Forthcoming), and for discussion of the role of presumption in Leibniz's thought, see Blank (2021).

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that one is innocent. Rather, the presumption of innocence is accepted as provisionally true, until the evidence suggests otherwise. Thinking of the presumption of innocence in terms of the likelihood that one is innocent is to misunderstand what a presumption is.

Leibniz's objection to Locke here is not merely that Locke fails to attend to a distinction drawn in legal circles. Rather, Leibniz's objection is that Locke's conception of judgment is that judgment is, by its very nature, an estimation of the likelihood of truth in light of a body of evidence. Locke's evidentialism requires that the strength of one's judgment should always be proportionate to the probability of the proposition in light of the evidence. Leibniz's complaint is that some propositions ought to be accepted as true, not in virtue of their probability in light of evidence, but for other reasons, if only provisionally, until evidence is brought against them. Locke's treatment of judgment leaves no room for presumption of truth in this sense.

Leibniz suggests that the notion of presumption can help us make sense of the appropriate role that others' opinions ought to play. Presumption also helps explain why it might be permissible to defer to epistemic authorities, but also why we might not be epistemically required to follow authority. He writes, ". . . in many cases one cannot help yielding to authority. . . . As for 'received opinions' they have in their favour something close to what creates a 'presumption' as the jurists call it; and although one is not obliged always to adopt them without proof, neither is one permitted to destroy them in the minds of others unless one has proofs against them" (NE 4.20.17, p. 518).

Interestingly, Leibniz here seems to be agreeing with Locke that the fact that an epistemic authority judges that *p* does not bear on the probability that *p*, but it does create a presumption in favor of *p*. This presumption makes it appropriate to treat *p* as true, at least until one has proof that *p* is false. Leibniz applies this thought to what he calls the "argument drawn from large numbers." For Locke, of course, if one other person's judgment that *p* makes no difference in how confident I ought to be that *p*, then clearly any number of other people's judgments that *p* makes no difference either. However, if one other person's judgment does make a different to how confident I ought to be, then what about many people's judgments? On the one hand, it seems that, all else being equal, the more people who judge that *p* the bigger the difference it ought to make to my confidence that *p*. On the other hand, if all those people judge that *p* in light of the very same body of evidence, then it is easy to overestimate the significance of their agreement. Leibniz claims that the right way to understand this agreement is in terms of presumption: the agreement of many people grounds a presumption, even if not necessarily higher probability of truth. He claims,

> there has been much controversy over the "argument drawn from large numbers"—the large numbers of people holding a given view—but all that can be derived from that argument, when what is at issue is approval of a reason rather than testimony to a fact, is something which amounts to what I have just been saying [i.e., that there is a presumption in its favor]. (NE 4.20.17, p. 518)

One of Leibniz's worries about Locke's commitment to individual epistemic autonomy is how to make sense of fields of inquiry like history, where it seems that we must rely on a variety of sources, including but not limited to eyewitness reports. Leibniz gives a variety of examples of both rather fanciful histories and well-grounded ones: Livy's accounts of battles seem to be "imaginary"; a biography of Cromwell imagines him in the inns of Paris, despite other sources suggesting that he was never in France at all (NE 4.16.10, p. 467). There is one source of evidence that Leibniz thinks is particularly important, but which Locke seems hard pressed to appreciate fully: the agreement of historical works arising out of distinct traditions. Leibniz explains,

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> when the histories of different nations converge, in matters where it is not likely that one has been copied from the other, that is powerful evidence of truth. The agreement in many things between Herodotus and the history of the Old Testament is like that. . . . Again, those who are trying to establish the facts get satisfaction from the agreement between Arabic, Persian, and Turkish historians on the one hand, and Greek, Roman and other western ones on the other. (NE 4.16.11, pp. 469–470)

The epistemic value of the convergence or agreement of independent sources, in history as well as in other fields of inquiry, is not something Locke can easily explain. While Locke can allow that two people testifying to something they have witnessed is better evidence than one, this does not seem to capture fully the epistemic significance of the agreement of independent investigations. As we saw in the previous section, Locke, it seems to me, tends to think of scientific collaboration in terms of the collection and availability of observational and experimental evidence, in light of which individuals can form their own judgments. No doubt this is an important source of scientific progress, and one that Locke's historical position made him especially aware of. However, it also seems clear that it cannot be the whole story, capturing the epistemic significance of agreement, disagreement, expertise, and the myriad ways in which what we know and believe rightly or wrongly depends on others.

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