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Victor Nuovo

Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment

Interpretations of Locke



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CHRISTIANITY, ANTIQUITY, AND ENLIGHTENMENT

CHRISTIANITY, ANTIQUITY,
AND ENLIGHTENMENT.
INTERPRETATIONS OF LOCKE

Victor Nuovo

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Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment.

Interpretations of Locke

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*To Sandy Stewart, †John Stephens, and Ralph Waller,
friends who helped me along the way*

*And to Betty,
dearest friend, beloved companion*

Preface

This volume brings together eleven studies on the Christian philosophy of John Locke. Most of them are not new: five were previously published; three others were delivered as lectures or addresses and now appear in print for the first time. The origin of each of these studies is disclosed in a footnote at the beginning of each of these chapters. Three of the chapters are entirely new.

None of the studies previously published or delivered appears in its original form. I have revised them all, in some instances substantially. I have also tried to make this set of studies, each conceived and executed on a different occasion, cohere in a single book whose chapters develop a common theme and follow generally along a single line of argument. I have revised and rearranged them all with this end in view. This has been a pleasant task and less difficult than I first imagined it would be, for it seems, in retrospect, that I have been aiming at the same goal in all of them: to recover the mind of John Locke. What I present here, then, is original work on Locke in a form that may be taken as authoritative, at least for the time being, for it is my hope that what is presented here may not only be instructive, but may also open pathways that lead to new discoveries about Locke's mind that will necessitate revision of prevailing opinions, mine and others'.

I am grateful to Sarah Hutton for suggesting that a collection of my studies on Locke would be of interest to scholars, for providing me with the opportunity to produce one, and for giving me encouragement and support along the way. Her generosity and good will have put me immeasurably in her debt.

There are many others to whom I am indebted: Michael Ayers, Peter Anstey, Stanley Bates, Jim Berg, Melanie Bigold, Dan Brayton, Jane Chaplin, Marina Frasca-Spada, Mark Goldie, Douglas Hedley, Kareem Khalifa, Sue Killoran, John Milton, Paul Monod, John Rogers, Paul Schuurman, Paul Sigmund, Luisa Simonutti, Lesley Smith, Christopher Star, Tim Stanton, Richard Yeo, and John Walsh. There are others, I am sure, that I have overlooked.

Grateful acknowledgment is given to Middlebury College for grants from its faculty emeritus research fund, and for providing me with a study in its magnificent new library, to the Principal and Fellows of Harris Manchester College, Oxford, for never failing hospitality and friendship, and to the Andrew Mellon Foundation for awarding me a Mellon Emeritus Fellowship, which has sustained my research for nearly 4 years.

Thanks to the Keeper of Western Special Collections, the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, for permission to include transcriptions of the following manuscripts: Locke 16. 25 (Locke's interleaved English Bible): transcriptions of a selection of notes by Locke from the writings of Nicholas Gibbon (Ch. 2); MS Locke c. 43, 'Adversaria Theologica', pp. 1–7 (Ch. 3); MS Locke c. 27, 'Dubia circa philosophiam orientalem', fos 75–7 (Ch. 10).

Middlebury, VT
19 July 2010

Victor Nuovo

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Abbreviations

Boyle, <i>Works</i>	<i>The Works of Robert Boyle</i> , ed. Michael Hunter and Edward B. Davis, 14 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto: 2000).
<i>Conduct</i>	John Locke, <i>Of the Conduct of the Understanding</i> , ed. Paul Schuurman (Keele, 2000).
<i>Correspondence</i>	<i>The Correspondence of John Locke</i> , ed. E. S. de Beer, 8 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976–1989). Citations are by volume and page; in a few instances they are cited by volume and letter number. Letter numbers run consecutively throughout the collection.
<i>Education</i>	John Locke, <i>Some Thoughts Concerning Education</i> , ed. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
<i>Essay</i>	John Locke, <i>An Essay concerning Human Understanding</i> , ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Citations are by book, chapter and section, followed by pagination according to Nidditch, e.g. <i>Essay</i> I. iv. 8 (87).
<i>Law of Nature</i>	John Locke, <i>Essays on the Law of Nature</i> , ed. and tr. W. von Leyden (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1954).
<i>LL</i>	John Harrison and Peter Laslett, <i>The Library of John Locke</i> , 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). Books contained in Locke's library are cited by the catalogue number of the work cited, e.g., <i>LL</i> 123.
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 2nd edn, (Online edition, 2005)
<i>Paraphrase and Notes</i>	John Locke, <i>A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul</i> , ed. Arthur W. Wainwright, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

- Reasonableness* John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity as deliver'd in the Scriptures*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).
- Toleration* John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Toleration and other writings on Law and Politics, 1667–1683*, ed. J. R. and Philip Milton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).
- Tolerantia* John Locke, *Epistola de Tolerantia*, ed. Raymond Klibansky, tr. J. W. Gough (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).
- Two Treatises* John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).
- WR* *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, ed. Victor Nuovo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

Introduction

The three topics named in the title of this book: Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment, are not meant merely to describe the contents of the various chapters it contains. A narrative is implied in their selection and arrangement, and embedded in the narrative is an argument, whose proof is offered in the several chapters that follow. The narrative is a familiar one: its theme is the transition during the early modern period of European intellectual history from religion to enlightenment. The argument is that the intellectual sources of this development derive from antiquity. By ‘enlightenment’ I mean philosophical enlightenment, or the emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of Enlightenment philosophies. In some places, the term enlightenment will be assigned a social rather than a philosophical sense, to apply to those emerging liberal policies that limited the power of government and churches, thus preventing them from interfering in private individual life. More on this will follow.

The argument is inductive and cumulative. It consists of interpretations of Locke that, taken together, show how meandering the course from religion to enlightenment was. These interpretations also have another goal, of equal importance, to understand the mind of John Locke. Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment were currents running through his mind and flowing out from it. That outflow is his intellectual legacy. What I hope to show is how these currents follow not separate channels but constantly intermix, which accounts for the meandering, producing complexities and ambiguities in his thought and expression, and sometimes confounding his interpreters. It is not my purpose, however, to perplex, rather it is to discover the richness of Locke’s thought – indeed to celebrate it, for Locke’s learning is a wonder to behold, rich, variegated, but coherently philosophical – to identify the varieties of intellectual traditions that find expression in his writings and to explain their presence, and then to fix his place in the intellectual history of his era and, more broadly, in the history of philosophy.

Regarding Locke’s legacy, explaining how he became the ‘father’ of the English Enlightenment will prove not to be a simple matter. It may be that he is its most probable father, but it is just as likely that he would not have claimed the child.¹

¹Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World* (New York: Norton, 2000) 481.

Christianity. That Locke was a Christian, and a very serious one besides, is no longer a matter of controversy. I trust that there is sufficient evidence presented in this volume to refute any lingering tendency to deny it. Still, the nature of Locke's Christianity and the part it played in his philosophical work remain matters of uncertain definition. I trust, then, also, that the several chapters about to be presented will, in different ways, help to clarify these things also. A principal claim made here is that Locke was a Christian philosopher and a philosophical Christian as well. Philosophy and Christianity were woven together in his thinking to produce subtle and always interesting patterns of thought and expression.

In the opening chapter, I argue that that the primary content of Locke's Christian philosophy involves a correlation of a unique Protestant version of Christianity, grounded upon the Bible and giving priority to the New Testament, with the new natural philosophy epitomized in the work of Robert Boyle. This correlation is personified in the character of the Christian Virtuoso, whose features are evident throughout Locke's intellectual life. In the exposition of this character I will attempt show how subtly these two domains were joined by the ingenuity of the virtuoso, whose explorations into nature and the Bible and the method of them work together to form a unitary point of view and conviction.

The next five chapters study the nature and scope of Locke's Christianity. My purpose in all of them is not merely to expound his Christian opinions but to determine their place in his philosophy and to assess the formative role they played in his thought. Chapter 2 is a narrative of Locke's theological projects during last decade of his life and of their products, most notable of which are *The Reasonableness of Christianity* and *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*. Locke's manuscript remains are considered here also, especially the 'Adversaria Theologica' in which he developed a personal program of theological study that included speculative questions not ordinarily associated with Locke. The penultimate section of this chapter provides a convenient transition to Chap. 3. It gives an account of Locke's *Discourse of Miracles*, written in 1702 but published posthumously. Here he makes the remarkable claim that a proper understanding of the evidential force of miracles establishes faith in divine revelation with a degree of assurance that rivals the certainty of cognition, and that, accordingly, a Christian can look upon biblical accounts of divine revelation with an unshakable assurance, as an 'infallible' source of truth.

Chapter 3 is an attempt to fill an important lacuna in Locke scholarship. It concerns his recognition of the divine authority of the Bible and how he came by it. There seems to be an incongruity in Locke's acceptance of the divine authority of Scripture, because he nowhere appears to have justified it. In fact, I argue, Locke did do this repeatedly, but in a way easily overlooked. Locke's proof that the Bible is divine is cumulative, one that recurs throughout his writings on religion and is integral to his biblical hermeneutics. He supposed that biblical interpretation, properly practiced according to critical, historical principles, has evidentiary force concerning its origin. This theme is touched upon also in the succeeding two chapters.

Chapter 4 has two purposes. The first is to provide an exposition of Locke's Christology, which, on examination proves to have been richer and subtler than is

commonly supposed. Locke's is a solidly based biblical Christology that I characterize as basically 'messianic', which is to say it emphasizes the cosmic historical and dynamical and mythical aspects of Jesus Christ and his mission. I argue that these features of Locke's Christology are determinative of his worldview. The second purpose looks beyond Locke's theological writings to discover Christological moments in his philosophical writings and assesses overall the place of Christology in his thought.

Chapter 5 examines the hermeneutics of *The Reasonableness of Christianity* and *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*. Locke believed that among the Apostles, St Paul had received a unique endowment. His mind had been infused with the whole Christian revelation, which found expression in his letters. Because of his learning and keen intellect, his mind was a fit vessel for this act of divine superaddition. Locke supposed that the task of a Christian interpreter is to retrieve St Paul's meaning in his letters; the same goal is pursued in his interpretation of messianic secrecy, that is, the reluctance of the Messiah to declare his identity. Here it is the mind of Christ that he seeks to understand. Locke's hermeneutics is shown to be not only an endeavour to understand a text by retrieving the intentions of an author. It has a religious goal also: to perfect one's faith – which, it turns out, for Locke, is the same as enlarging reason, to direct it towards a perfect or consummate state epitomized by St Paul. This might be called the crowning achievement of Christian virtuosity.

Chapter 6 presents the text and translation of a manuscript containing Locke's notes on the Christian Kabbalah, or more particularly, on a treatise entitled *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae (An Outline of Christian Kabbalah)*, which represents an attempt to appropriate the Jewish Kabbalah for Christianity. Against the panorama of a narrative of fall and redemption, a variety of theological issues are considered by Locke: the soul of the Messiah, the fall and perseverance of angelic beings, the difference between matter and spirit, and the soul's metaphysical journey of descent and ascent. A historical introduction precedes the text. Locke compiled these notes sometime either in the late 1680s or, more likely, in the early 1690s. In spite of his doubts about the Kabbalah, expressed in the title, he went on to appropriate significant parts of it.

Antiquity. That the sources of the philosophical enlightenment were derived from antiquity is not a controversial claim. The next three Chaps. 7–9 show how Locke appropriated these sources and to what extent they had an enlightening effect on his mind. I use two criteria to determine philosophical enlightenment, both involve a repudiation of voluntarism. The first views God as pure intelligence, as *nous* or divine reason; the second is moral autonomy, the doctrine that right reason or the knowledge of the good are sufficient to determine the will. In both cases the idea of the will of God is rendered otiose.

All three chapters prove beyond a doubt that Locke appropriated significant parts of Platonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism, but not always and not primarily with an eye towards philosophical enlightenment in the sense used in this volume. Chapter 7 makes him out to be a religious not a philosophical Platonist. He used Platonic ideas as instruments to extend the scope of his mind and to make it more

receptive of revelation. Chapter 8 shows how Stoic ideas are embedded in Locke's principal doctrines concerning knowledge, the will, law of nature, and universal providence, but only to an extent that he was able to render them compatible with his Christian beliefs. As its title suggests, in Chap. 8 we find Locke on the attack. This is not surprising because Epicureanism involves the denial of the divine creation of the world and divine providence in any form, general or particular. It also denies mankind a preeminent place of in the natural world. It denies teleology, except in a restricted evolutionary biological sense. However, Epicureanism was also instrumental in the development of the new science, or experimental natural philosophy, both with respect to its theory of atoms and mechanism and its experimental point of view. Epicurean physics was something that every Virtuoso was required to know. Locke was no exception. Access to this was largely through Lucretius' great poem, *De rerum naturae*, which not only argued for a consistent and thoroughgoing materialism, but which also provided a sublime vision of nature operating without God, which was the more dangerous because of the fascination it evoked. Hence the curious ambivalence in seventeenth century attitudes towards Epicurean physics. It is obvious that Locke was repelled and attracted by it. In his endeavour to defend Christian theism against Epicurean materialism, we once more catch a glimpse of Locke the Platonist, or rather, that peculiar ambiguous character of Plato's *Sophist*, the reformed giant.

Enlightenment. The final two Chaps. 10 and 11 are about Locke's Enlightenment and his legacy. They are assessments of the extent in which Locke himself may be regarded as enlightened, and of his legacy as a founder of the English Enlightenment.

In Chap. 10, I argue that a religious motive is uniformly present in Locke's political thought, although it finds expression in a variety of ways and is often mixed almost helter-skelter with secular arguments, yet never displaced by them. This religious motive, which is Christian and exclusivist, seems anti-Enlightenment. Yet Locke was a strong proponent of religious toleration, of the right of individuals to choose their own religion, free from domination by state or church. Religious liberty is surely a liberal idea, and liberal ideas, whatever their focus, are characteristically enlightening. Liberty to travel or to trade, liberty of speech or assembly, liberty of the press: these are all enlightening, because they subvert dogmatism and therefore free the minds of individuals to think in open fields. Religious liberty has a similar effect. Moreover, it is arguable that defending these sorts of liberty is an expression of an enlightened mind. And if so, we may infer from this that Locke's mind was indeed enlightened. I prefer to call this sort of enlightenment 'institutional', in contrast to philosophical enlightenment, which is my main concern in this book.

Philosophical enlightenment is the main theme of Chap. 11, but Locke is not its protagonist. The place of honour is assigned to Catharine Cockburn. An explanation is in order. Catharine Cockburn was a philosopher well versed in Locke, and in many respects she shared his sentiments, especially concerning toleration. She wrote publicly although anonymously in his defence. She also published work defending Samuel Clarke. She wrote from a philosophical position that was her own, and what is noteworthy about her writings is that the criteria of philosophical

enlightenment are clearly expressed in them and always prominent. The overpowering will of God is diminished if not absent from her thinking. She was an autodidact who was deeply read in Roman philosophy, and in such moderns as Grotius, Locke, and Clarke, and in British moral philosophy generally. She showed great loyalty to Locke. She traversed many of the intellectual paths that he did. Yet it was she rather than he who more unequivocally exemplified Philosophical Enlightenment in England. What this suggests is that the achievement of enlightenment, philosophically regarded, was not something Locke achieved all by himself and certainly not unambiguously. Rather, philosophical enlightenment was achieved more decisively and unambiguously by others who followed in Locke's train. They had a clearer purpose and a firmer resolve. Such was Catharine Cockburn.

Chapter 1

A Portrait of John Locke as a Christian Virtuoso*

This above all, to thine own self be true and it must follow as the night the day thou canst not then be false to any man¹

Introduction

Anyone who has read John Locke's account of personal identity will remember that he equated it with consciousness of self over time whereby an individual owns its actions and passions past and present. He labels individuals who do this 'persons'. 'Where-ever a Man finds, what he calls *himself*, there I think another may say is the same *Person*.'² In addition he observes that 'person' is a forensic term, because individuals own not only their bare actions, but the merit or demerit of them also. This applies only to 'intelligent Agents capable of Law', that is, capable of following a rule. They personify the rule of law. On this account, a certain rule or measure of thought and action becomes an integral part of one's own self (which develops over time), to be sure a normative part. Its presence is detected in the feelings of satisfaction and shame that attach themselves to memories of things past, and to the aspirations of hope and the fear of condemnation that arise when we reflect upon them.

*This chapter is a revised and enlarged version of a keynote address delivered at the Tercentenary Conference on John Locke held in Brisbane, Australia in June 2004.

¹William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I. 3. 79–82. For a plausible interpretation of these lines that fits the theme of this paper, see Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 3. Trilling characterizes the age in which Locke lived as an age of sincerity, which he defines as an endeavour to achieve congruence between one's public avowals with one's internal beliefs. Like all moral norms, it was often touted rather than obeyed, and its avowals were therefore frequently suspect. An age of sincerity is also likely to be an age of suspicion. The two go together, and their conjunction is not a reason to discount the seriousness of its practitioners, of which the Christian virtuoso is a type, to achieve it.

²*Essay*, II. xxvii. 26 (346).

Being true to one's own self, forensically considered, involves the practice of honest self-examination according to an internal standard. Truthfulness in all other respects is akin to it, for this forensic practice is a kind of discerning; a person is truthful who takes care that what it says conforms to what it knows to be true. Care is another intrinsic aspect of personality, for persons endeavor to conform their actions to law out of a concern for their happiness. It is supposed that one's happiness depends upon it also, for honesty in all one's judgments about one self is a condition of divine favor, without which happiness is impossible. Locke believed that this law is not a natural endowment, engraved on the mind, ready to be read when needed. Rather it is something to be sought after in honest pursuits of truth. Rightly understood, it is an eternal rule of right, rooted in divine goodness, but like all else that we come to know or believe, natural or revealed, our acceptance is the result of experience and judgment, whereupon it is stored in the memory, revived in the mind and applied to our actions in reflective or deliberative moments that span our waking life. Over time, these practices cast the self into a particular shape and character. Hence, it would not be impertinent to inquire about the rule-governed character that Locke applied to his own self. What kind of person did John Locke take himself to be? I answer, a Christian Virtuoso.

My intention, however, is not merely to identify and describe what I take to be Locke's character, but to offer it as a means to gain access to what he intended in his writings and to gain a proper understanding of them. I begin by offering an account of the character a Christian Virtuoso in its context, as it was conceived and lived by Robert Boyle, who, even if he was not the originator of the idea, reflected on it, wrote about it, and exemplified it before Locke's very eyes. Next, I recount some biographical facts about Locke that give credibility to the claim that he came to recognize his calling as that of a Christian Virtuoso. Finally, I use this portrait as a means of gaining insight, through his writings, into Locke's mind and his own thoughts, from whence, I believe, it should be possible to reconstruct, or rehearse, his authorship, or, to employ a Lockean expression, to retrace his path as he 'let loose his thoughts and followed them in writing', interpreting Locke's writings by consulting Locke himself.³ This way of proceeding has this in its favor: it follows a method that Locke himself employed in interpreting St Paul, one that he expressed confidence could be applied to any literary work: reading a work through as many times as it takes to grasp its purpose and scope, determining its proper parts, and then relating parts and whole in an endeavour to comprehend its meaning.⁴ I cannot do justice to such an undertaking here, especially in the case of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, which surely must be given priority in any attempt to

³*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Epistle to the Reader (6) 'This, Reader, is the Entertainment of those, who let loose their own Thoughts, and follow them in writing'. The subsequent clause may be appealed to as justification for this approach. I have elaborated on this process in my 'Locke's Hermeneutics of Existence and his Representation of Christianity' forthcoming in Luisa Simonutti, ed. *Conscience and Scripture. Locke and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Dordrecht: Springer, in preparation).

⁴See my 'Locke's Hermeneutics'.

understand Locke's entire intellectual project. Rather, I will select places in Locke's great work that I believe best convey a sense of the whole. If my readings in these instances ring true, then what is offered in the final stage of this paper may serve as preliminary proof of the plausibility of my claim about Locke's character and its use as a principle of interpretation. What follows may be taken as an initial run around a hermeneutical circle.

The Character of a Christian Virtuoso

In the seventeenth-century England, the term virtuoso denoted an experimental natural philosopher. 'Christian Virtuoso', then, signified an experimental natural philosopher who was also a professed Christian. But the term, which appears to have been coined by Robert Boyle, was intended to mean something more than the juxtaposition of these two practices in a single life. Its adoption and use was meant to affirm that Christianity and virtuosity were not merely compatible, but also mutually beneficial and sustaining. The Virtuoso is able to progress farther in natural philosophy because of his Christianity, and his understanding of the Christian revelation is rendered more comprehensible and sure by his virtuosity.

Virtuosi were usually gentleman, who had the leisure and the wherewithal to engage in pursuits after truth. They were professed lovers of truth, who had become addicted to the cognitive delights that accrued from experimental practice, of trial and discovery whereby nature was forced to disclose her secrets. Accordingly, they willingly subjected themselves to the discipline and hard labor that its pursuit required, not deterred by the fact that experimental methods required that they engage in the common practices of tradesmen that were, customarily, beneath their dignity. Consistent with their love of truth, they cultivated an impartiality of judgment and, consistent with a practice that yielded its results piecemeal, they assumed an attitude of intellectual modesty; they cultivated a patient curiosity about the underlying structure and causes of things, and a docility that prepared them to accept results of well-conceived experiments even when they were unexpected and seemed paradoxical. Thus, they developed what Boyle described as 'a well grounded and duly limited' docility that focused upon bare facts situated in plausible hypotheses suited to them; they endeavored to sustain an openness of mind and a readiness to accept what nature discovers to the attentive observer through repeated experimental trials. This is a mental attitude unburdened of theoretical presuppositions and dogmatic preconceptions, open to the reception of naked empirical truths even when they are contrary to received opinion or what is taken to be common sense.

Nature's prime secret—which was not then supposed to be very secret—is her authorship. Experimental natural philosophy makes its practitioners cognizant of the design of things that testifies to the wisdom and power evident in natural things and the processes that produce them. It gives rise to natural theological belief in a divine providence that from the beginning has determined the course of natural

events, and that operates consistently for the benefit of creatures, especially mankind, so that goodness is added to the list of divine attributes discoverable by trying nature. Repeatedly demonstrated natural theological beliefs joined to the characteristic docility of the Virtuoso makes him receptive to the characteristically unexpected disclosures of revelation, which in turn elevates his mind beyond the bounds of sense, makes him aware of transcendent benefits that follow the train of discovery, most importantly, immortal bliss and cognitive perfection in the world to come.

The discovery of revealed truth is enhanced by the Christian's virtuosity. Scripture is tried in a manner not unlike nature, its disclosures as it were forced out by relentless exegesis whose results then enlarge reason not unlike the way in which experimental practice enlarges reason by leading it to discover unanticipated truth.

The pursuits of a Christian Virtuoso require that he forego many common gentlemanly pursuits: worldly ambition and sensual delights and, if need be, a settled place in the world—in that respect, his style of life differs little from that of a Christian pilgrim and blends easily with it. He eschews flights of speculative fancy and favours common tangible truths found out by methods and practices that once seemed suited only to vulgar trades. Out of dedication to intellectual pursuits the Christian virtuoso will prefer to remain celibate and, accordingly, chaste. This attitude is sustained by a sincere Christian piety that subordinates worldly ambition to the pursuit of heaven.

The Origin of the Character and Its Idea

The expression 'Christian Virtuoso' was given currency by Robert Boyle. It is the title and theme of a long and characteristically unfinished work in which he was intermittently engaged for over two decades. The origin of the work is clouded in uncertainty. It is an apologetic work justifying the vocation of Christian virtuoso. It is a deeply personal work. Boyle was challenged from both sides: the clergy worried that the practice of natural philosophy, because it directed his attention away from God, the ultimate cause, to secondary causes, would weaken his acceptance of theism and even more of the supernatural truths of Christianity, and by virtuosi, who regarded his Christian pursuits as eccentric and inconsistent with serious natural enquiry.⁵ In his preface, Boyle writes that he had written it many years before its publication, but he doesn't tell us just how many. The earliest surviving manuscripts relating to *The Christian Virtuoso* date from the 1670s; the editors of the modern collected edition of Boyle's writings conjecture on the basis of surviving manuscripts that Boyle began writing it early in that decade. One of these dated

⁵Robert Boyle, *The Christian Virtuoso. The First Part* (1691), Boyle, *Works*, xi, 283.

1675 is identified by the initials 'CV'. Early in the next decade, Locke reviewed a version of the work, and wrote some critical notes on it. He refers to the text simply as 'Boyle... his treatise 1681', which suggests that the manuscript he had was without a title.⁶

But the idea of a Christian Virtuoso, if not the name, surely predates this. Most likely the character came before the name, and the idea of it grew out of vocational conflicts that are reported in his early works.⁷ Its origins date back at least to 1662, when the Royal Society was incorporated, for the term, Virtuoso, was then used to signify a practitioner of the new experimental natural philosophy, a participant in the scientific revolution, and, by extension, it was applied also to members of the Royal Society. One of the concerns of the early apologists of the Royal Society was to demonstrate the compatibility of the natural philosophical work of its members with the Christian Religion. Boyle's book accomplishes just that, and this apologetic purpose puts it in the same class with Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* (1667), Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665), and Joseph Glanvill's *Plus Ultra* (1668). Boyle wrote other works during this period for a similar purpose: *The Style of the Scripture* (1661) *The Usefulness of Natural Philosophy* (Parts I and II.1, 1663) and *The Excellency of Theology* (first published 1674, but composed, 1665), all of them designed to demonstrate that the practice of natural philosophy and of Christianity were not only compatible but mutually sustaining. There are verbal and thematic affinities between these works and *The Christian Virtuoso*, enough of them to justify the probability that the idea of *The Christian Virtuoso* if not an early draft of it existed a decade or more before the manuscript remains that we now possess.⁸ Even if this were not so, Boyle's way of life was already then taken as an exemplar of what a Christian Virtuoso was supposed to be.⁹

The full title of Boyle's book is as follows: *The Christian Virtuoso: shewing, That by being addicted to Experimental Philosophy, a Man is rather Assisted than Indisposed, to be a Good Christian*. Since being a Virtuoso involves having a certain cognitive stance along with certain skills of reasoning, Boyle's strategy is to

⁶ 'Boyle. Observations on his treatise 81', MS. Locke c. 27, fols. 67–68.

⁷ Robert Boyle, *Some Considerations Concerning the Usefulness of Natural Philosophy. The First Part* (1663), Boyle, *Works*, iii, 213; see also *The Excellency of Theology*, Boyle, *Works*, viii, published in 1674 but written a decade or more before; also *Some Considerations About the Reconceivableness of Reason and Religion*, Boyle, *Works*, viii, published 1675 but also written at least a decade earlier.

⁸ Composing works and laying them by for later examination by associates and eventual publication was Boyle's common practice. See, e.g., Edward B. Davis, "'Parcere Nominibus'", Boyle, Hooke and the rhetorical interpretation of Descartes', in *Robert Boyle Reconsidered*, ed. Michael Hunter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 157f.

⁹ Locke expressed such an opinion of Boyle in his 'Advertisement' to Boyle's *General History of the Air*, Boyle, *Works*, xii, 5. See also Sir Peter Pett 'notes on Boyle' in *Robert Boyle, by Himself and His Friends* ed. Michael Hunter (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1994), 54–83, and Gilbert Burnet's funeral sermon printed in the same volume.

show how this cognitive stance and accompanying skills are also conducive to being a Christian.

What then is the stance and what are the skills of the Virtuoso? His theater is the world of experience. Merely Speculative truths and metaphysical dogmas are of no concern to him. His commitment is to the accumulation of knowledge in natural histories rather than the systematic construction of it. Hypotheses provide order and explanation, but even ones of great generality and explanatory power, such as the corpuscular hypothesis, are of limited scope.¹⁰ The study of mathematics is recommended because it does not pretend to any other truth than its own, and because it is instrumental in refining the virtuoso's deductive skills and of use in the interpretation of facts. Boyle describes the virtuoso's cognitive stance as 'a well grounded and duly limited, Docility'. A well-grounded docility is one that is founded upon experience and it is duly limited when it restricts its judgments to those whose meaning and truth is derived from it. This docility is shaped by the experimental philosopher's 'temper of mind' and of the way that he philosophizes. His 'Temper of mind' is a sincere and indiscriminating love of truth. The Virtuoso is 'addicted to Knowledge Experimental', which is to say, he has dedicated his life to a tireless pursuit of it.¹¹ He never has enough. Like a lover he is enamored of all the qualities of his beloved, and so is irresistibly drawn after truths of all varieties, even minor, ordinary truths, in themselves seemingly of no account, mere matters of fact. He delights in everything that an open and attentive mind receives through the senses; his addiction extends even to unpleasant things, to putrid and repellent perceptions. The virtuoso's indiscriminating love of truth is a sort of training in impartiality. He 'is accustom'd both to Persue, Esteem, and Relish many Truths' that neither cause him immediate sensory delight, or 'gratifie his Passions', or satisfy his worldly Interests. They 'only entertain his Understanding with that Manly and Spiritual Satisfaction afforded it by the attainment of Clear and Noble Truths, which are its genuine Objects and Delights'. These 'Clear and Noble Truths' are the rewards of the virtuoso's docility, which is better imagined as intelligent receptivity than mere passivity. It is as though the pleasure of small truths were given by providence as a guarantee and anticipation of a fuller satisfaction that awaits the virtuoso as he endeavors to interpret them, to fit them into well formed hypotheses, for which they serve as confirmation or proof, for the Virtuoso's disposition is an active one and, as I have noted, tireless and, at its best, always ingenious and ingenuous. With 'a Serious and Settled application of Mind'

¹⁰ According to the corpuscular hypothesis, gross material bodies are made up of indiscernibly small corpuscles (tiny bodies) that vary in size, shape and bulk and whose divinely appointed ways of cohesion and motion determine the properties and operations of their perceptible grosser counterparts. For a survey of corpuscularism during the 17 C, see Daniel Garber, et al., 'New Doctrines of Body and its Powers, Place and Space', *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth Century Philosophy*, ed. Michael Ayers and Daniel Garber, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1998), i, 552–623. On corpuscularism in Boyle, see Peter Anstey, *The Philosophy of Robert Boyle* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2f. and passim.

¹¹ *The Christian Virtuoso*, Boyle, *Works*, xi, 291.

the virtuoso devises ‘intricate and laborious Experiments’ or trials, by which the ‘mysteries of nature’ are slowly brought to light. Moreover, with the aid of ingenious instruments, which are the productions of a lowly mechanic art, the virtuoso enters into the ‘Recesses’ of things, measures the effects of their operations and begins to apprehend their underlying causes and structure. In this way the Virtuoso discovers real and unanticipated truths of nature, truths that previously might have seemed to the imagination beyond the scope of reason or even contrary to it. These are, to be sure, mysteries of mere physical nature, but the satisfaction that comes with the discovery of such unexpected earthy truths prepares the mind for a greater satisfaction that will come with the disclosure of the more sublime truths of revelation. Finally, through the method of experimentation the Virtuoso cultivates the skills of sagacity and judgment, skills that are employed to decide fitness and weight of facts as evidence. Thus the virtuoso is a skilled assessor of facts, not only of his those gathered by himself but of those purveyed by others, for Boyle is insistent that experience must be enlarged if the commonwealth of learning is to increase. Hence the virtuoso depends upon and therefore must cultivate the skill of appraising the testimony of others. He becomes a sort of critical historian of facts. His docility with respect to factual news, however, is not supposed to degenerate into mere credulity.

The cognitive stance and skills of the Virtuoso are supposed to be conducive to Christianity in several respects.¹² First under nature’s tutelage the Virtuoso acquires ‘a firm Belief’ in the existence and attributes of God and of his providence.¹³ His perceptions of the remarkable contrivances of nature make him all the more cognizant of the wisdom and power of an intelligent designer, and they educe a sense of gratitude and obligation. Such natural religion is the propaedeutic of revealed religion, for nature’s instruction makes her docile pupils aware of their cognitive limitations even as she enlarges the scope of their imaginations. Thereby she instills a curiosity to consider things that may lie beyond her boundaries, and entices them with anticipations or analogies of them. Second, because the truth of the Christian religion is founded on certain historical matters of fact, the Virtuoso, who is a connoisseur of facts and of testimony concerning matters of fact, is well prepared to

¹²The cognitive stance of the Virtuoso, which I emphasize here, also has a rhetorical aspect to it. This should not be surprising, for the virtuoso who publishes his opinions ‘to the world’ can hardly avoid a rhetorical strategy, especially if he has classical learning and, hence, a ready skill to do so. Steven Shapin explores this rhetorical and self-promotional aspect of the Christian Virtuoso in *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Shapin’s method has its limitations. He equates the role of the Christian Virtuoso and his discourse with a public posture and a convenient rhetorical device intended to gain public credibility. Although he acknowledges Boyle’s sincerity, he gives it little weight. Michael Hunter’s ‘The Conscience of Robert Boyle’ (in his *Robert Boyle, 1627–1691: Scrupulosity and Science*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000, 58–71) is an important corrective. However, Hunter views Boyles fits of conscience, his scrupulosity, as dysfunctional, and makes Boyle into an obsessive-compulsive, perhaps overlooking that these characteristics are aspects of his virtuosity.

¹³Boyle, *Works*, xi, 297, 298.

assess the authenticity of testimonies concerning divine revelation and the facts in which they are incarnate. Finally, the docility of the virtuoso, which disposes him to the enlargement of his mind with ever new and unforeseen facts of nature, also disposes him to accept, on sound testimony, that there have been miraculous occurrences, and the due limitations of his docility open his mind to the probability that there are things that exist beyond the range of ordinary natural experience. Since these limitations are factual and not metaphysical, it remains possible that a mind nourished on earthly facts can be enlarged beyond its terrestrial limitations. Locke's remark about reason and revelation may be cited as an apt summary of the process described above.

Reason is natural *Revelation*, whereby the eternal Father of Light, and Fountain of all Knowledge communicated to Mankind that portion of Truth, which he has laid within the reach of their natural Faculties: *Revelation* is natural *Reason* enlarged by a new set of Discoveries communicated by GOD immediately, which *Reason* vouches the Truth of, by the Testimony and Proofs it gives, that they come from GOD. So that he that takes away *Reason*, to make way for *Revelation*, puts out the Light of both, and does much what the same, as if he would persuade a Man to put out his Eyes the better to receive the remote Light of an invisible Star by a Telescope.¹⁴

Being a Christian Virtuoso has also a broader moral aspect, which may more easily be comprehended by considering what the Virtuoso is not. He avoids the way of the Libertine and the Sensualist, both contemporary types of gentlemen. A libertine, in Boyle's usage, is primarily a free thinker, someone who recognizes no intellectual authority but his own reason and who has concluded that, reason being the highest authority, there can be no mysteries in the world, nothing that cannot be discovered and clarified by his own rational lights.¹⁵ The term is synonymous with 'Deist'.¹⁶ A Sensualist is a voluptuary and a sybarite, someone whose curiosity is addicted to ever more novel and gratifying sensual adventures, and who does not scruple to mix the more refined with the crude. Hence, the Sensualist desires indiscriminately 'Fame or Mistresses, Baggs or Bottles'.¹⁷ The two types sometime combine in the Sensual Libertine.¹⁸ The Christian Virtuoso is supposed to be

¹⁴ *Essay*, IV. xix. 4 (698); see also Locke, *Education*, 244f.

¹⁵ *Christian Virtuoso*, xi, 306.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, iii, 301. Free thinkers such as Charles Blount (1654–93) and John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester (1647–80), known to Boyle, may have suggested these characters to him.

¹⁷ *Usefulness*, Boyle, *Works*, iii, 278.

¹⁸ On the other hand, Boyle recognized that some free thinkers objected to Christianity because it fell short of pagan nobility. A short work appended to the first published edition of *The Christian Virtuoso* offers a refutation of the claim of a libertine, an advocate of atheism and materialism, that the virtue of magnanimity, that is nobility of greatness of mind, was more likely to be cultivated by a libertine than by a Christian. In response, Boyle contends that Christianity promotes all of the pagan virtues: among them courage, liberality, patience, a contempt for all that is base, as well as a readiness to forgive, impartiality with respect to persons and indifference to worldly goods, and humility. *Greatness of Mind Promoted by Christianity*, Boyle, *Works*, xi, 347, 365 and passim.