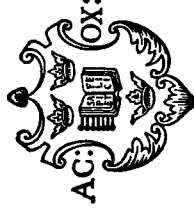


JOHN LOCKE

AN ESSAY
CONCERNING HUMAN
UNDERSTANDING



EDITED WITH A FOREWORD
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have occasion to consider; most of the Propositions we think, reason, discourse, may act upon, are such, as we cannot have undoubted Knowledge of their Truth: yet some of them border so near upon Certainty, that we make no doubt at all about them; but *assent* to them as firmly, and act, according to that Assent, as resolutely, as if they were infallibly demonstrated, and that our Knowledge of them was perfect and certain. But there being degrees herein, from the very neighbourhood of Certainty and Demonstration, quite down to Improbability and Unlikelihood, even to the Confines of Impossibility; and also degrees of *Assent* from full *Assurance* and Confidence, quite down to *Conjecture*, *Doubt*, and *Distrust*. I shall come now, (having, as I think, found out the bounds of humane Knowledge and Certainty,) in the next place to consider *the several degrees and grounds of Probability, and Assent or Faith*.

§ 3. *Probability* is likelihood 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 be received for true. The entertainment the Mind gives this sort of Propositions, is called *Belief*, *Assent*, or *Opinion*, which is the admitting or receiving any Proposition for true, upon Arguments or Proofs that are found to persuade us to receive it as true, without certain Knowledge that it is so. And herein lies the *difference between Probability and Certainty*; *Faith* and *Knowledge*, that in all the parts of Knowledge, there is intuition; each immediate *Idea*, each step has its visible and 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.

§ 4. *Probability* then, being to supply the defect of our Knowledge, and to guide us where that fails, is always conversant about Propositions, whereof we have no certainty, but only some inducements to

§ 3. Being that which makes us presume things to be true, before we know them to be so.
 § 4. The grounds of Probability are two; conformity with our own Experience, or the Testimony of others Experience.

(5) resolutely] 2-5 | vigorously 1 (10) from] 5 (likewise Coste) | from certain Knowledge, and what is next it, 1-4 (11) and Distrust] 5 (likewise Coste) | Distrust, and Disbelief 1-4 (12-13) (having ... Certainty,)] 5 (likewise Coste) | as having (as I think) found out the bounds of humane Knowledge and Certainty, 1-4 (14) Assent] 1-3, 5 | assent. 4 (15) Probability] 2-5 | Probability then 1 (18) Propositions] 1-2, 4-5 | Proposition 3 (29) then, 2-5 | then 1 (30) is] 2-5 | it is 1 (30-1) Propositions] 3-5 | things 1-2 (31)-656(1) whercof. . . true] 1-2, 4-5 | which we have some Inducements to receive for true, without certain Knowledge that they are so 3 (likewise Coste)

CHAPTER XV

Of Probability.

§ 1. As Demonstration is the shewing the Agreement, or Disagreement of two *Ideas*, by the intervention of one or more Proofs, which have a constant, immutable, and visible connexion one with another: so *Probability* is nothing but the appearance of such an Agreement, or Disagreement, by the intervention of Proofs, whose connexion is not constant and immutable, or at least is not perceived to be so, but is, or appears for the most part to be so, and is enough to induce the Mind to judge the Proposition to be true, or false, rather than the contrary. For example: In the demonstration of it, a Man perceives the certain immutable connexion there is of Equality, between the three Angles of a *Triangle*, and those intermediate ones, which are made use of to shew their Equality to two right ones: and so by an intuitive Knowledge of the Agreement, or Disagreement of the intermediate *Ideas* in each step of the progress, the whole Series is continued with an evidence, which clearly shews the Agreement, or Disagreement, of those three Angles, in equality to two right ones: And thus he has certain Knowledge that it is so. 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. In which case, the foundation of his Assent is the Probability of the thing, the Proof being such, as for the most part carries Truth with it: The Man, on whose Testimony he receives it, not being wont to affirm any thing contrary to, or besides his Knowledge, especially in matters of this kind. So that that which causes his Assent to this Proposition, that the three Angles of a *Triangle* are equal to two right ones, that which makes him take these *Ideas* to agree, without knowing them to do so, is the wonted Veracity of the Speaker in other cases, or his supposed Veracity in this.

§ 2. Our Knowledge, as has been shewn, being very narrow, and we not happy enough to find certain Truth in every thing which we

§ 1. Probability is the appearance of agreement upon fallible proofs. § 2. It is to supply the want of Knowledge.

(32) thing which] 4-5 | thing, 1-3

receive them for true. The *grounds of it* are, in short, these *two* following:

First, The conformity of any thing with our own Knowledge, Observation, and Experience.

5 *Secondly*, The Testimony of others, vouching their Observation and Experience. In the Testimony of others, is to be considered, 1. The Number. 2. The Integrity. 3. The Skill of the Witnesses. 4. The Design of the Author, where it is a Testimony out of a Book cited. 5. The Consistency of the Parts, and Circumstances of the Relation. 6. Contrary Testimonies.

§ 5. Probability wanting that intuitive Evidence, which infallibly determines the Understanding, and produces certain Knowledge, *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 ballancing 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. For example:

If I myself see a Man walk on the Ice, it is past *Probability*, 'tis Knowledge: but if another tells me he saw a Man in *England* in the midst of a sharp Winter, walk upon Water harden'd with cold; this has so great conformity with what is usually observed to happen, that I am disposed by the nature of the thing it self to assent to it, unless some manifest suspicion attend the Relation of that matter of fact. But if the same thing be told to one born between the Tropicks, who never saw nor heard of any such Thing before, there the whole Probability relies on Testimony: And as the Relators are more in number, and of more Credit, and have no Interest to speak contrary to the Truth; so that matter of Fact is like to find more or less belief. Though to a Man, whose Experience has been always quite contrary, and has never heard of any thing like it, the most untainted Credit of a Witness will scarce be able to find belief. And as it happened to a *Dutch* Ambassa-

§ 5. In this all the agreements pro and con ought to be examined, before we come to a Judgment.

(1) them] 4-5 | it 1-2 (1) v. 655(31), n. (11) Probability] 2-5 | Now Probability 1 (13) if... rationally] 3-5 (rationally 3) | before it rationally assents or dissents to any probable Proposition 1-2 examine] 1-3, 5 | examine (14-15) any... from] add. 3-5 (assent... dissent 3) (33) belief] 1-3, 5 | belief, 4 And as] 5 | As 1-4 Dutch] 3, 5 (likewise Coste) | Dutch 1-2, 4

dor, who entertaining the King of *Siam* with the particularities of *Holland*, which he was inquisitive after, amongst other things told him, that the Water in his Country, would sometimes, in cold weather, be so hard, that Men walked upon it, and that it would bear an Elephant, if he were there. To which the King replied, 5 *Hitherto I have believed the strange Things you have told me, because I look upon you as a sober fair man, but now I am sure you lye.*

§ 6. Upon these grounds depends the *Probability* of any Proposition: And as the conformity of our Knowledge, as the certainty of Observations, as the frequency and constancy of Experience, and 10 the number and credibility of Testimonies, do more or less agree, or disagree with it, so is any Proposition in it self, more or less probable. There is another, I confess, which though by it self it be no true ground of *Probability*, yet is often made use of for one, by 15 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. And if the Opinions and Perswasions of others, whom we know 20 and think well of, be a ground of Assent, Men have Reason to be Heathens in *Japan*, Mahumetans in *Turkey*, Papiests in *Spain*, Protestants in *England*, and Lutherans in *Sweden*. But of this wrong ground of Assent, I shall have occasion to speak more at large in another place.

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CHAPTER XVI

Of the Degrees of Assent.

§ 1. THE grounds of Probability, we have laid down in the foregoing Chapter, as they are the Foundations on which our *Assent* is built; so are they also the measure whereby its several degrees are, or ought to be *regulated*: only we are to take notice, that whatever grounds of Probability there may be, they yet operate no farther on 30 the Mind, which searches after Truth, and endeavours to judge

§ 6. They being capable of great variety.

§ 1. Our Assent ought to be regulated by the grounds of Probability.

(16), and,] 3-5 | ; and 1er-2 | any, 1 (19) amongst] 1-3 | among] 4-5