

LOCKE'S THEORY OF REFLECTION

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Those concerned with Locke's *Essay* have largely ignored his account of reflection. I present and defend an interpretation of Locke's theory of reflection on which reflection is not a variety of introspection; rather, for Locke, we acquire ideas of our mental operations indirectly. Furthermore, reflection is involuntary and distinct from consciousness. The interpretation I present also explains reflection's role in the acquisition of non-sensory ideas (e.g., ideas of pleasure, existence, succession, etc.). I situate this reading within the secondary literature on reflection and discuss its consequences for interpretations of Locke's views on empiricism, knowledge, and personal identity.

0. INTRODUCTION

For Locke, reflection is an operation minds perform. When a mind reflects, it takes notice of its own mental operations, and it acquires ideas of these operations.¹ Few readers of Locke's *Essay* would disagree with these claims. Unfortunately, few have said more than this about Locke's views on reflection. I argue that there is much more to be said. Locke has a coherent and intricate theory of reflection that plays a fundamental role in some of his most influential doctrines.

Section one contains a brief survey of what others have written on Locke and reflection. I focus for the most part on the problems others have found in Locke's account and the conditions that an adequate interpretation should satisfy. I should emphasize that nowhere in this paper do I present a criticism of Locke; the problems I pose are aimed at interpretations of his

¹ Locke defines reflection in Locke (1689/1975: book II, chapter 1, section 4). Hereafter, I cite passages of this work as (Book, Chapter, Section). All italics and capitals in quotations are from Locke's text. I use 'idea' as a count noun and I take Locke to employ it in roughly the same way. The best way to individuate ideas is relative to minds, times, and topics. Further, ideas are distinct from mental operations; see (II, 1, 7). For the most part, I will ignore the other issues surrounding the best way to interpret Locke's use of 'idea' because very little of my discussion turns on them.

views. On my reading, Locke's theory of reflection is coherent and potentially enlightening. In section two, I present an interpretation of Locke's account of reflection. Section three contains replies to several objections. In section four, I consider the consequences of the interpretation I offer for broader issues in Locke scholarship.

1. CONDITIONS ON AN INTERPRETATION OF LOCKE'S THEORY OF REFLECTION

This section contains a brief survey of what others have written about reflection and six conditions on what counts as an acceptable reading of Locke's theory of reflection. For the most part, discussions of Locke on reflection have been critical. Some even accuse him of incoherence. However, on my reading, Locke's views on reflection are coherent and plausible (given the rest of what he wrote and the time in which he wrote it). This section is organized by the problems that such a reading must address.

1.1 INTROSPECTION

'Introspection' is a contemporary word for a mind's direct awareness of its own mental phenomena. Since Locke limits reflection to mental operations, an interpretation of reflection as a variety of introspection would hold that reflection is the mind's direct awareness of its operations. A number of interpreters attribute this view to Locke. Lee, Browne, Leibniz, Reid, Cousin, Grau, Ryle, Klemmt, O'Connor, Kraus, Aaron, Mabbott, Talmor, Rorty, and Jenkins all take reflection (for Locke) to be some sort of direct awareness of mental operations.² Although Kulstad argues that Locke is inconsistent on this issue, both he and Ayers assume that for Locke,

² Lee (1702: 40-41), Browne (1728: 64-72), Leibniz (1765: 51), Reid (1785: I, 5), Cousin (1873: 102), Grau (1916: 110), Ryle (1949: 159), Klemmt (1952: 49), O'Connor (1967: 95), Kraus (1969: 31), Aaron (1971: 129), Mabbott (1973: 51), Talmor (1978: 116), Rorty (1979: 50), and Jenkins (1983: 21). Cousin cited in Kulstad (1991: 84-85). Browne and Grau cited in Thiel (1994: 99, 102), respectively.

a mind must have some direct awareness of its own operations.³ Those who take reflection to be a type of introspection have difficulty distinguishing reflection from consciousness. Indeed, I have included some of those on the above list because they take reflection to be consciousness of one's mental operations.⁴ Another issue for such a reading is that Locke suggests that reflection and sensation are two actions of the same faculty. However, sensation for Locke is indirect on many accounts. How can it be that a single faculty provides direct awareness in one case and not in another?⁵

Several interpreters have criticized Locke for accepting an account of introspection. Some have claimed that it is impossible for a mind to be aware of both some object and its own awareness simultaneously. Thus, they argue, introspection can only be *retrospection*. That is, a mind can be aware only of that which has already occurred in it; but then this awareness is not direct—it is mediated by memory.⁶ However, these criticisms are misdirected if Locke does not take reflection to be a type of introspection.

Readers who deny that reflection is a variety of introspection face problems as well.⁷ The biggest challenge for them is to explain how the mind acquires ideas of its own operations. Locke says very little on this issue. Another challenge for these readings is to say why our ideas of mental operations are accurate. If reflection is not the creation of ideas of mental operations through direct awareness of them, then what guarantee is there that these ideas correctly represent these operations?⁸

³ Kulstad (1991: 88-89) and Ayers (1991b: 260, 266-267). Kulstad (1991: ch. 3) is a reprint of Kulstad (1984). All references are to the reprint.

⁴ Specifically, Browne, Leibniz, Reid, Cousin, and Klemmt.

⁵ O'Connor (1967: 97).

⁶ Sergeant (1697: 123), Ryle (1949: 165), O'Connor (1967: 103), and Rabb (1985: ch. 1); Sergeant cited in Thiel (1994: 93).

⁷ See McRae (1976: 34), Obstfeld (1983), and Rabb (1985: ch. 1). Kulstad (1991) discusses several of these interpretations too, but he does not endorse any of them.

⁸ See Mabbott (1973: 55), Aaron (1971: 130-131), and O'Connor (1967: 112).

Any account of reflection will have to take a stand on whether reflection is direct or indirect and provide solutions to the associated problems. I argue that, for Locke, reflection is indirect and that he has no notion of introspection that applies to mental operations.

1.2 UNREFLECTED OPERATIONS

A mind is *transparent* if and only if it is aware of everything that is or occurs in it. Are minds transparent with respect to their own operations? In other words, does reflection result in an idea of every operation a mind performs? Several people point out a tension in Locke's comments on unreflected operations. He states that children rarely reflect and that we perform some operations too quickly for us to notice them.⁹ However, in other places, he suggests that minds are transparent.¹⁰ O'Connor, Mabbott, Obstfeld, and Kulstad argue that Locke allows for unreflected operations.¹¹ Ayers endorses a version of this reading as well.¹² However, Kulstad and Mabbott also claim that Locke's views are contradictory on this issue.¹³ O'Connor seems to avoid attributing inconsistency to Locke by arguing that 'reflection' is ambiguous.¹⁴ Any adequate reading of reflection will have to sort out these issues. I argue that, for Locke, we do not form ideas of all our mental operations; however, every mental operation makes an impression on the mind.

1.3 SENSATION AND REFLECTION

⁹ (II, 1, 8) and (II, 9, 8), respectively.

¹⁰ See (I, 1, 5), (II, 1, 25), (II 27, 9), and (IV, 21, 4).

¹¹ O'Connor (1967: 99), Mabbott (1973: 54-55), Obstfeld (1983: 52), and Kulstad (1991: 91-94).

¹² Ayers (1991a: 205).

¹³ Kulstad (1991: 109-115) and Mabbott (1973: 54-55).

¹⁴ O'Connor (1967: 99).

Locke claims that sensation and reflection are the only sources of ideas. He suggests that they are two aspects of a single faculty. Some have raised problems with this view. For Locke, sensation is involuntary, but Gibson, O'Connor, McRae, Kulstad, and Thiel argue that reflection must involve a voluntary aspect.¹⁵ If sensation and reflection are activities of a single faculty, how can one be voluntary and the other involuntary? Krüger presents a paradox for Locke's account of experience that is based on the claim that sensation and reflection are both involuntary. According to Krüger, Locke accepts that simple ideas are involuntarily acquired, that abstract ideas are voluntarily acquired, and that some simple ideas are abstract.¹⁶

A related issue is whether Locke's theory of perception is representational. Some commentators who attribute a representational theory to Locke see the distinction between primary and secondary qualities as dependent on it. However, if Locke is a representationalist about perception, and reflection is a type of perception, then he should be a representationalist about reflection too. One problem with such a reading is that Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities does not seem to apply to mental phenomena.¹⁷

An adequate interpretation of reflection should explain its relation to sensation and take a stand on the extent to which reflection is voluntary. It should also explain the relation between reflection and the representational account of perception. I argue that reflection and sensation are indeed aspects of a single faculty, that reflection is involuntary (but a voluntary act of attention is essentially involved with it), and that the mind is acquainted with its own operations only through ideas of them.

¹⁵ Gibson (1917: 57-58), O'Connor (1967: 97), McRae (1976: 34-35), Kulstad (1991: 92-109), and Thiel (1994: 103).

¹⁶ Krüger (1973: 11-13) and Krüger (1981: 78-79).

¹⁷ See Mackie (1976) and Mackie (1985) for more on the relation between representational interpretations and the distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

1.4 IDEAS OF REFLECTION

Locke titles section II.6, 'Of Simple Ideas of Reflection'; in it he discusses ideas whose acquisition involves reflection. However, the expression 'idea of reflection' is ambiguous. For it can also refer to an idea of the mental operation, reflection. Throughout this paper, I use the term *idea from reflection* for an idea whose acquisition essentially involves the mental operation of reflection (but might be about something other than reflection), and I use the term *idea about reflection* for an idea whose object is the mental operation of reflection. Presumably, ideas about reflection are ideas from reflection. That is, an idea whose object is the mental operation of reflection can be acquired only through the use of the mental operation of reflection.

Among the ideas from reflection are ideas of mental operations and a special set of ideas that have perplexed many readers. Locke states that one arrives at them through either sensation or reflection (or both). They include the ideas of existence, unity, pleasure, pain, succession, etc. Following Yolton, I will refer to this particular subset as the *non-sensory ideas*.¹⁸

Several interpreters have expressed puzzlement over how reflection is involved in the acquisition of non-sensory ideas.¹⁹ Yolton argues that reflection is not actually involved in the acquisition of non-sensory ideas at all. That is, we do not acquire these ideas by reflecting on mental operations. Yolton suggests that 'reflection' is ambiguous for Locke. In a narrow sense, it is the faculty we use to acquire ideas of our mental operations. In a wider sense, it includes whatever is involved in the acquisition of the ideas from reflection (including the non-sensory ideas).²⁰ However, Locke argues that there are only two sources of our ideas: sensation and reflection (in the first sense). Thus, Yolton's reading undermines Locke's version of concept empiricism.

¹⁸ Yolton (1968: 49). See also (I, 7, 1) through (I, 7, 10).

¹⁹ Lee (1702: 54), Leibniz (1765: 51-52), Yolton (1968: 49), Yolton (1985: 135-138), and Yolton (1993: 210-212).

²⁰ See Yolton (1993: 210-212).

Kulstad also presents a reason for doubting whether we acquire all our ideas from sensation and reflection. He argues that if Locke permits unreflected operations, and reflection is direct consciousness of one's mental operations, then sensation and reflection cannot be the only ways one acquires ideas. For, if one is conscious of an unreflected operation, then one must have an idea of it. By hypothesis, this idea cannot come from reflection, and it cannot come from sensation because it is an idea of a mental operation. Thus, it must come from some other source.²¹

An account of reflection must either explain reflection's role in the acquisition of non-sensory ideas or provide some other explanation for how we acquire them. I argue that, for Locke, reflection and sensation are the only sources of ideas, and I explain how reflection is involved in the acquisition of non-sensory ideas.

1.5 REFLECTION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The relation between reflection and consciousness is an important issue for Locke's theory of personal identity. Kulstad argues that Locke is inconsistent on this issue. He claims that reflection and consciousness are not the same because one can be conscious of ideas and mental operations, but one can reflect only on mental operations. He also argues that reflection on mental operations and consciousness of mental operations must be distinct as well. However, he finds problems with each of three proposals for how to understand this distinction. Webb, Gibson, Krüger, McRae, Thiel, and Yolton also argue that reflection and consciousness must be distinct for Locke.²² Leibniz, Reid, Cousin, and Klemmt all read Locke as identifying them.²³

²¹ Kulstad (1991: 111-112).

²² Webb (1857: 63-66), Gibson (1917: 57), Krüger (1973: 53-55), McRae (1976: 34), Thiel (1983: 89-104), Yolton (1993: 209), and Thiel (1994: 102-105).

Leibniz argues that Locke's failure to distinguish between reflection and consciousness leads to a problem. According to Leibniz, Locke assumes that consciousness of some mental phenomenon is distinct from the mental phenomenon itself and that an act of consciousness accompanies each mental act. These commitments imply that an infinite sequence of acts of consciousness follows every mental act.²⁴

An account of reflection should take a stand on whether reflection and consciousness are distinct. If one takes reflection and consciousness to be identical, then one should address Leibniz's problem as well. I argue that consciousness and reflection are distinct for Locke and that a mind is not conscious of its mental operations. A mind is aware of its own operations only indirectly; minds are conscious of ideas of mental operations, and reflection furnishes these ideas.

1.6. REFLECTION SEQUENCES

Closely related to Leibniz's problem is what I call the *problem of reflection sequences*. The problem is: a *prima facie* plausible reading of reflection implies that minds contain an infinite sequence of ideas from reflection for each idea from sensation. I call these infinite sequences of ideas from reflection *reflection sequences*.

The problem of reflection sequences results from interpreting reflection to be an involuntary mental operation that creates ideas of all a mind's operations. I address four aspects of this interpretation. The first derives from Locke's definition of reflection: "By *REFLECTION* then, in the following part of this Discourse, I would be understood to mean, that notice which the Mind takes of its own Operations, and the manner of them, by reason whereof, there come to

²³ Leibniz (1765: 51), Reid (1785: I, 5), Cousin (1873: 102), and Klemmt (1952: 49). Reid, Cousin, and Klemmt cited in Kulstad (1991: 84-85).

²⁴ Leibniz (1765: 117-118). See also Thiel (1994: 109-115).

be *Ideas* of these Operations in the Understanding,” (II, 1, 4). According to Locke, reflection creates ideas of the mind’s operations. Second, I argue in section 2.1 that reflection and sensation are two operations performed by a single mental faculty. Thus, reflection is a mental operation. Third, for Locke, the mental faculty that performs reflection, the understanding, is passive: “the *Understanding* is meerly *passive*; and whether or no, it will have these Beginnings, and as it were materials of Knowledge, is not in its own Power,” (II, 1, 25).²⁵ Fourth, the following is one passage in which Locke suggests that there are no unreflected operations: “the Operations of our minds, will not let us be without, at least some obscure Notions of them,” (II, 1, 25). Thus, reflection seems to be an involuntary mental operation that creates an idea of every operation a mind performs.

To illustrate the problem with this interpretation, consider an example in which a person, Langden, is at the zoo and sees a monkey. He acquires the idea of the monkey through sensation, which involves mental operations. Then Langden’s mind creates ideas of these mental operations through reflection. Thus, he acquires ideas of the mental operations responsible for the creation of his monkey idea. Because reflection is a mental operation, and Langden’s mind involuntarily creates ideas of all its operations, his mind then creates an idea about reflection through a new act of reflection. Hence, Langden acquires the idea of the mental operation (i.e., reflection) responsible for the creation of his ideas of the mental operations responsible for the creation of his monkey idea. And so on; the process continues for the duration of his life.²⁶ This story is obviously unrealistic.

To motivate the problem, I want to consider several potential solutions that must, in the end, be rejected. The first of these depends on the claim that there can be ideas that the mind

²⁵ Locke reiterates this fact in (II, 12, 1).

²⁶ It seems to me that one could interpret Leibniz as expounding this problem as well. See note 24.

does not notice. According to this view, the mind might very well create never-ending sequences of ideas for every idea it has, but humans do not notice the vast majority of these. This potential solution reconciles the role of reflection in Locke's theory of ideas with our experience of our own mental activity.

Unfortunately, this solution depends on a claim that Locke rejects. He explicitly states that there is no such thing as an unnoticed idea. "Our *Ideas* ... cease to be any thing, when there is no perception of them," (II, 10, 2). This approach cannot solve the problem.

A second potential solution would be to interpret reflection not as an idea-creating operation of the mind, but rather, as a specific attitude toward already existent ideas. According to this interpretation, when Langden reflects on the idea of the monkey delivered from sensation, he does not create a new idea. Instead, his mind takes a different, reflective attitude toward the monkey idea. An adherent of this solution would reject the claim that, for Locke, reflection creates *new* ideas in the mind. However, Locke writes, "the Mind comes to reflect on its own *Operations*, about the *Ideas* got by *Sensation*, and thereby stores it self with a new set of *Ideas*, which I call *Ideas of Reflection*," (II, 1, 24).²⁷ For Locke, reflection is not a new attitude toward old ideas; it furnishes the mind with new ones. Thus, the second proposed solution fails as well.

The third *prima facie* solution is to say that although reflection continually delivers ideas of mental operations, they go straight into memory where they vanish after some time if the person in whom this process occurs does not bother to recall them. This solution reconciles the claim that the mind is always creating ideas about its own operations with the fact that we do not experience this activity. If Langden desired to take notice of them, the ideas would be there in his memory for him to recall.

²⁷ See also (II, 11, 14).

The problem with this solution is that it requires an erroneous account of Locke's remarks on memory. Ideas can be *contemplated*, which is just the act of perceiving them. But Locke explicitly states that when an idea is not currently contemplated by the mind, it no longer exists. Memory is not a repository of ideas; rather it is the power of the mind to recreate ideas it had at an earlier time.²⁸ Thus, the view that ideas from reflection go directly into memory runs counter to Locke's view on the nature of memory.

Any interpretation of Locke's theory of reflection must address the problem of reflection sequences. I argue in section 2.2 that Locke avoids the problem by denying that the mind creates an idea of every mental operation through an act of reflection.

2. A THEORY OF REFLECTION

I present an interpretation of the role of reflection in Locke's theory of ideas in several parts. First, I argue that sensation and reflection are the only sources of ideas and that they are two operations of a single mental faculty. Second, I defend the claim that, for Locke, there are unreflected mental operations (i.e., mental operations about which the mind creates no ideas). Third, I show that Locke's accounts of sensation and reflection require a distinction between mental impressions (i.e., mental entities that are not necessarily perceived by the mind) and ideas (i.e., mental entities that are necessarily perceived by the mind), such that mental impressions give rise to ideas when an appropriate action of the mind is taken. Fourth, I combine these elements into a theory of reflection and an account of attention's role in the creation of ideas

²⁸ See (II, 10, 2). Memory causes a tension in my assumption about how ideas are individuated. When a person comes to have an idea of a particular orangutan, loses the idea, and then uses his memory to recreate it, is the recreated idea identical to the original? It seems to me that one could say either that they are two tokens of the same type (by retaining the original criteria of individuation) or that they are identical tokens (by altering the original criteria of individuation). Again, I do not think that much turns on this choice. See note 1.

from reflection. I also address the questions: on which mental operations does the mind reflect? How should one reconcile the passivity of reflection with the appearance that it is voluntary?

2.1 SENSATION AND REFLECTION

Locke's version of concept empiricism commits him to explaining how we acquire all our ideas from one of three sources: sensation, reflection, and the mind's creation of new ideas from old ones. Locke says of sensation and reflection that "[t]hese two are the Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the *Ideas* we have, or can naturally have, do spring," (II, 1, 2). That Locke endorses this explanatory strategy is not controversial. The challenge is to provide an account of reflection and its role in the creation of non-sensory ideas that vindicates it.

For Locke, sensation and reflection are two modes of perception. Locke states that the mind performs two fundamental actions: perception and volition. The faculties associated with these actions are the understanding and the will, respectively.²⁹ It is plausible that one of these two faculties performs the actions of sensation and reflection. Because both sensation and reflection are passive, the only candidate faculty is the Understanding.³⁰

Locke often writes of reflection as a mental action that occurs when the mind turns inward and notices its own operations. This phrase, 'the mind turns inward', lends support to the interpretation that sensation and reflection are two operations of a single mental faculty. A typical passage: "The Mind receiving the *Ideas*, mentioned in the foregoing Chapters, from without, when it turns its view inward upon itself, and observes its own Actions about those *Ideas* it has, takes from thence other *Ideas*, which are as capable to be the Objects of its Contemplation, as any of those it received from foreign things," (II, 6, 1). Another similar

²⁹ (II, 6, 2).

³⁰ See (II, I, 25), where Locke claims that the understanding is passive and cites the faculties of sensation and reflection to support his claim.

passage: “When the Mind turns its view inwards upon it self, and contemplates its own Actions, *Thinking* is the first that occurs,” (II, 19, 1). If reflection occurs when the mind “turns inward,” then reflection is the same activity as the mind “turned outward,” except that the object of the mind’s view is different in each case. If Locke thought of reflection as a distinct activity, then he would have written something to the effect that reflection occurs when the mind initiates that special type of activity. He would not have written as if reflection is the redirection of a mental activity already in progress.

Further evidence for the claim that reflection and sensation are two types of a single mental activity comes from the following passage: “The other Fountain, from which Experience furnisheth the Understanding with *Ideas*, is the *Perception of the Operations of our own Minds* within us, as it is employ’d about the *Ideas* it has got ... This source of *Ideas*, every Man has wholly in himself: And though it be not Sense, as having nothing to do with external Objects; yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be call’d internal Sense,” (II, 1, 4). Here Locke claims that it is appropriate to call reflection *internal sense*. The implication is that sensation is external sense and reflection is internal sense; they are two aspects of a single faculty.

Finally, although Locke apologizes in the introduction for his excessive use of the term ‘idea’, he could have used it more than he did. Indeed, he employs the term ‘perception’ as a synonym.³¹ It makes sense for Locke to use the term ‘perception’ as a synonym for ‘idea’ because perceptions are created by the activity of perception. The only sources of perceptions are sensation and reflection. Thus, sensation and reflection are two types of perception, the activity that gives rise to perceptions.

³¹ For the apology see (I, 1, 8). For examples of ‘perception’ used in place of ‘idea’, see (I, 1, 4), (I, 3, 21), and (II, 1, 3).

Although I have given some evidence for my claim about the intimate relation between sensation and reflection, I admit that none of it is conclusive. My arguments all have the form of what C. S. Peirce calls *abduction*.³² That is, it makes the most sense to say that sensation and reflection are two types of a single mental activity. They are distinguished not by being different activities, but by the target of the activity. Sensation is the perceptual process that creates ideas of external objects, while reflection is the perceptual process that creates ideas of mental operations.

2.2 UNREFLECTED MENTAL OPERATIONS

In this subsection, I argue that, for Locke, the mind does not reflect on all its mental operations. The mind is often ignorant of its own operations. The justification for this interpretation derives from passages like the following:

Children, when they come first into it, are surrounded with a world of new things, which, by a constant solicitation of their senses, draw the mind constantly to them, forward to take notice of new, and apt to be delighted with the variety of changing Objects. Thus the first Years are usually employ'd and diverted in looking abroad. Men's Business in them is to acquaint themselves with what is to be found without; and so growing up in a constant attention to outward Sensations, seldom make any considerable Reflection on what passes within them, till they come to be of riper Years; and some scarce ever at all, (II, 1, 8).

Locke states that children do not employ reflection much (or do not reflect at all). Perhaps Locke endorses the counterintuitive claim that children perform no mental operations. The following passage puts this worry to rest. "I grant that the Soul in a waking Man is never

³² For a discussion of abduction and references to Peirce's work, see Hintikka (1998).

without thought, because it is the condition of being awake," (II, 1, 11). Children are awake; hence, their minds operate. But children do not reflect (or at least not much). Therefore, some of a mind's operations go unreflected.

Perhaps we can reconcile Locke's remarks on children with the passages that suggest humans reflect on all our mental operations: Locke might hold that once we begin to reflect, we acquire ideas of all our mental operations. Unfortunately, this interpretive strategy will not work. It is essential to Locke's account of perception that minds perform operations of which they are unaware.

According to Locke, "*the Ideas we receive by sensation, are often in grown People alter'd by the Judgment, without our taking notice of it,*" (II, 9, 8). He presents the example of a person who looks at a uniformly colored sphere. Sensation produces an idea of a shaded flat circle. However, the person's mind alters this idea so that it becomes an idea of a uniformly colored sphere. Locke explains that this change is "performed so constantly, and so quick, that we take that for the Perception of our Sensation, which is an *Idea* formed by our Judgment," (II, 9, 9). Thus, our minds perform this operation so quickly we do not notice it. Locke concludes: "*Habits, especially such as are begun very early, come, at last, to produce actions in us, which often escape our observation,*" (II, 9, 10). Locke has no choice but to admit that there are unreflected operations because his account of the way we transform two-dimensional sensory information into our three-dimensional experience of the world involves mental operations. Yet, we do not create ideas of these operations; we simply experience a three-dimensional world.

The following passage serves as further evidence for this claim. "Men then come to be furnished with fewer or more simple ideas from without, according as the objects they converse with afford greater or less variety; and from the operations of their minds within, according as

they more or less reflect on them,” (II, 1, 7). Locke states that if one reflects on more of one's mental operations, then one will have more ideas from reflection. If he were committed to the claim that there are no unreflected mental operations, then one's ideas from reflection would depend entirely on which operations one's mind performs. There would be no possibility of reflecting on more or fewer of them.

The claim that, for Locke, minds perform some operations for which they create no ideas constitutes a solution to the problem of reflection sequences (presented in section 1.6). Of course, anyone who endorses this solution will have to either take Locke to be inconsistent on the issue of unreflected operations or offer an alternative reading of the passages in which he suggests that no mental operations escape reflection. I adopt the latter strategy and offer interpretations of these passages in section three.

Another challenge for this solution is to specify the mental operations on which the mind reflects and explain how it selects them. If Locke were to hold that reflection is voluntary, then it would be easy to specify the operations on which the mind reflects: they would be exactly those operations on which the mind chooses to reflect. However, Locke does not adopt this strategy. Thus, a related challenge is to explain why Locke explicitly denies what seems so obvious to many: reflection appears to be a voluntary operation of the mind.

2.3 IDEAS AND MENTAL IMPRESSIONS

I now turn to defending a controversial claim about Locke's theories of sensation and reflection. I argue that Locke accepts a distinction between ideas, which are necessarily perceived by the mind, and mental entities that are not ideas in the sense that they are not necessarily perceived by the mind. I refer to the latter as *mental impressions*. In this subsection,

I present two arguments for this thesis; in the next subsection, I employ the distinction between ideas and mental impressions in an interpretation of Locke's theory of reflection.

The first argument is based on some of Locke's comments on distraction. When a person is distracted, she does not receive certain ideas from sensation that she otherwise would have. I first want to provide a sketch of Locke's account of sensation. Locke uses the term 'sensation' to refer to the entire process by which an object interacts with a human's sense organs and causes an idea of that object to be created in that human's mind.³³ As a corpuscularian, Locke explains sensation in terms of particles and their interaction with human sense organs. The object of sensation affects the sense organs through the activity of particles. Once the sense organs are sufficiently stimulated in this way, something happens in the body of the human that Locke does not explain well. He uses the terms 'nerves' and 'animal spirits' to refer to the parts of the body responsible for taking the information from the sense organs to the mind. A sense organ stimulates the animal spirits to move to a certain degree and in a certain way. The type and degree of motion depends on what has stimulated the sense organ. The motion in the animal spirits then causes the mind to have an idea of the object that stimulated the sense organ. Presumably, the idea that results depends on the type and degree of motion in the animal spirits.³⁴

There is an additional subtlety in Locke's account of sensation. For Locke, it is possible that a person's mind fails to create an idea from sensation even though an object has stimulated his sense organs and the animal spirits have faithfully delivered the information about the object to his mind. This can happen when a mind is busy with some other business.

³³ (II, 9, 4).

³⁴ See (II, 3, 1), (II, 8, 4), (II, 8, 12), and (II, 33, 6) for Locke's take on the process of sensation.

How often may a Man observe in himself, that whilst his Mind is intently employ'd in the contemplation of some Objects; and curiously surveying some *Ideas* that are there, it takes no notice of impressions of sounding Bodies, made upon the Organ of Hearing, with the same alteration, that uses to be for the producing the *Idea* of a Sound? A sufficient impulse there may be on the Organ; but it not reaching the observation of the Mind, there follows no perception: And though the motion, that uses to produce the *Idea* of Sound, be made in the Ear, yet no sound is heard. Want of Sensation in this case, is not through any defect in the Organ, or that the Man's Ears are less affected, than at other times, when he does hear: but that which uses to produce the *Idea*, though conveyed in by the usual Organ, not being taken notice of in the Understanding, and so imprinting no *Idea* on the Mind, there follows no Sensation, (II, 9, 4).³⁵

If someone is preoccupied with a certain idea, it is possible that his sense organs are stimulated by an object, the animal spirits relay the appropriate information from the sense organ to his mind, but no idea is created in his mind. The person remains oblivious to whatever caused the sense impression in the first place. Locke is very clear that the problem is not with the physical impression made on the sense organ in question or with the animal spirits that faithfully deliver the information to the mind. No idea is created because the mind is distracted. If the mind had been paying attention, an idea would have been created. In particular, Locke claims that the understanding does not take notice of that which usually produces the appropriate idea. The understanding is, of course, one of the faculties of the mind. Thus, whatever it is that usually produces the appropriate idea is a mental entity—something of which the understanding can take notice. Therefore, for Locke, there are mental entities that are not ideas, but which give rise to

³⁵ See also (II, 19,3).

ideas when an appropriate action of the mind is undertaken. I call these mental entities *mental impressions*, and I call the action of the mind on an mental impression that results in the appropriate idea, *attention*.³⁶

If one refuses to accept the fact that Locke is committed to the existence of mental impressions, then, to interpret his account of distraction in the passage above, one must either: (i) blame the physical aspects of sensation (e.g., sense organs or animal spirits) for the fact that no idea is produced, or (ii) accept that the understanding can directly perceive something physical. The first option is unacceptable because Locke states that the difference between the situation in which an idea is created and the situation in which no idea is created is due to the action of the mind. He writes that if the mind had acted differently, the idea in question would have been created. He does not explain the difference by appeal to the physical aspects of sensation (e.g., sense organs or animal spirits). Nor would it make sense for him to explain the difference in this way because the sense organs and the animal spirits are passive—once a physical impression is made on the sense organ by an object, the mind has no control over the process by which information about that object is transmitted to the mind. An account of distraction must explain the difference between the distracted person and the attentive person by appeal to something the person potentially has control over. At least in some situations, the distracted person could have chosen to pay more attention to the deliverances of his sense organs. Thus, the difference between the distracted person and the attentive person must be that the attentive person's *mind* behaves differently, not that the physical processes in his body occur differently.

The second option for explaining distraction while avoiding mental impressions is to claim that the understanding can perceive physical entities like the animal spirits. This

³⁶ I claim that this use of 'attention' is consistent with Locke's use of that expression. 'Mental impression' is my term; I do *not* claim that Locke uses 'impression' in the way I use 'mental impression'.

explanation is radically implausible given that Locke never speaks of the understanding directly perceiving a physical entity; the understanding perceives only mental entities like ideas.³⁷

Indeed, Locke defines 'idea' as "whatever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks," (I, 1, 8). Of course, if the understanding must attend to some mental entity in order to have an idea, then the mental entity to which it must attend cannot itself be an idea. Thus, it seems that there is a tension between Locke's definition of 'idea' and his claims in the passage above on distraction. I address this tension in the next subsection. For now, I want to emphasize that the objects of the understanding are necessarily *mental* entities—they are potential objects of the understanding.

To sum up: in his account of distraction, Locke appeals to mental entities that are not ideas, that are not necessarily perceived by the mind, and that give rise to ideas when the mind acts appropriately. Thus, he accepts a distinction between ideas and (what I call) mental impressions. I call this the *distraction argument* for mental impressions.

There is further evidence that Locke accepts a distinction between ideas and mental impressions. In section 2.2, I argued that, for Locke, minds do not produce ideas of all their operations. To support this claim, I cited Locke's account of perceptual processing. Locke claims that our minds often alter the ideas we receive from sensation without our taking notice of this activity. In the example of the person looking at a sphere, sensation produces the idea of a two-dimensional circle in the mind of the person in question, but the person's mind transforms this idea into the idea of a three-dimensional sphere. I argued in section 2.2 that because the person in question does not notice the action of the mind that transforms the former idea into the latter, Locke accepts that minds perform some operations of which they produce no ideas. Thus,

³⁷ This claim does not require that Locke accept the representational theory of mind. The claim that the understanding perceives only mental entities does not preclude the claim that when the mind perceives an idea of an object, it perceives that object. See Rogers (2004) for suggestions of how to render these claims compatible.

there are unreflected mental operations. In this subsection, I am concerned with the distinction between ideas and mental impressions. The same example supports my claim that Locke is committed to such a distinction. Not only does the person in the example not perceive the action of the mind that transforms the idea of the two-dimensional circle into the idea of a three-dimensional sphere, she does not perceive the idea of the two-dimensional circle. She perceives only the idea of the three-dimensional sphere. Thus, Locke distinguishes between mental entities that are necessarily perceived by the mind (ideas) and mental entities that are not necessarily perceived by the mind but give rise to ideas when the mind takes an appropriate action (of course, in this case, he uses 'idea' to refer to both types of mental entities; my point is that his account requires a distinction between them).

I want to discuss three issues related to this example. First, Locke's account of perceptual processing in which the mind transforms the idea of a two-dimensional object into an idea of a three-dimensional object such that the mind does not perceive the idea of the two-dimensional object is in tension with Locke's claim (quoted above) that ideas are whatever the mind perceives. I address this tension in the next subsection. Second, Locke claims that this process of perceptual processing occurs not only in the visual case, but in the auditory case as well when we hear speech.³⁸ Thus, there are good reasons for thinking that this process is associated with a wide range of sensory activities. Third, there is a decision to be made about how many ideas are involved in the process described: is the idea of the two-dimensional circle the same idea as the idea of the three-dimensional sphere, or are they distinct? That is, does the process I have been calling perceptual processing alter the ideas created by sensation without creating new ideas or does it create new ideas? There is evidence that Locke thinks the ideas are distinct and that the process creates new ideas. At the end of the section in which he discusses

³⁸ (II, 9, 9).

perceptual processing, Locke writes, “And therefore ’tis not so strange, that our Mind should often change the *Idea* of its Sensation, into that of its Judgment, and make one serve only to excite the other, without our taking notice of it,” (II, 9, 10). In this passage he clearly states that there are two ideas involved and that the idea from sensation (e.g., the idea of the two-dimensional circle) “excites” the idea that results (e.g., the idea of the three-dimensional sphere).

To sum up: in his account of perceptual processing, Locke appeals to mental entities that are not necessarily perceived by the mind, and that give rise to ideas when the mind acts appropriately. Thus, he accepts a distinction between ideas and (what I call) mental impressions. I call this the *perceptual processing argument* for mental impressions.

2.4 REFLECTION

In the previous three subsections, I argued for three interpretations of Locke’s text: (i) sensation and reflection are two aspects of a single mental faculty (section 2.1), (ii) minds perform some operations of which they create no ideas (section 2.2), and (iii) Locke employs a distinction between ideas and mental impressions, where ideas are mental entities that are necessarily perceived by the mind and mental impressions are mental entities that are not necessarily perceived by the mind, but give rise to ideas when the mind performs certain actions (section 2.3). In this subsection, I appeal to these results in proposing an interpretation of Locke’s theory of reflection.

The account of reflection I propose is analogous to Locke’s account of sensation except that there are no physical organs on which the operations of the mind register physical impressions. Indeed, in reflection, there are no physical impressions at all. However, there are mental impressions.

The first step in reflection is a mind's performance of a mental operation. The second step is that a mental impression is created by that mental operation. The mind in question does not yet perceive this mental impression. The creation of the mental impression is involuntary—once the mind performs the operation in step one, it has no choice but to receive a mental impression from that mental operation. In the third step, the mind attends to the mental impression created by the mental operation. Attending to the mental impression is voluntary—if the mind is occupied with other business then it might not attend to the mental impression. The fourth and final step is the creation of the idea of the mental operation performed in step one. This step is involuntary; once the mind has attended to the mental impression, it has no choice in whether an idea of the mental operation that left that mental impression will be created. This four-part process is reflection; it is the process by which the mind acquires ideas of its mental operations.

Consider an example. A person, Willy, is in the jungle, up in a tree, when a monkey catches his eye. The particles from the monkey affect Willy's sensory organs and create a physical impression. The information about the monkey is coded into a specific type and degree of motion in Willy's animal spirits, which bring this information to his mind. The action of the animal spirits creates a mental impression of the monkey. Assume that Willy attends to this mental impression, and it becomes a full-fledged idea. It is the idea of the monkey he sees. Assume that Willy contemplates his monkey idea. Contemplation is a mental operation. As such, it creates a mental impression in Willy's mind. This mental impression contains the information about the mental operation that occurred when Willy contemplated his monkey idea. Willy can now voluntarily attend to the mental impression left by this mental impression. Assume that he does so. This attention to the mental impression creates the idea of the mental

operation that left that mental impression. That is, it creates the idea of the contemplation of the monkey idea. Willy now not only has the monkey idea, but he has the idea of one of his mental operations—the contemplation of the monkey idea. Of course, the mental operations involved in the creation of the idea of the contemplation of the monkey idea leave mental impressions too, and Willy can choose to attend to them, thereby creating more ideas of his mental operations. However, he need not take notice of his mental impressions. If he does not, then the information about his mental operations will be lost to him.

We are now in a position to appreciate the sense in which reflection is passive, yet it seems to us that we can freely choose to reflect on our mental operations. The creation of the mental impression is purely passive. The person has no choice about whether a mental impression will be created. The person then either actively attends to the mental impression or ignores it. This is the voluntary aspect of reflection. If one attends to the mental impression, then an idea is created. This creation activity is passive. The person cannot attend to a mental impression yet choose not to create an idea of it. Of course, the idea created depends on the mental impression. This process is passive as well; the person has no control over which idea will be created. Reflection, the operation by which one's mind creates ideas of one's mental operations, is passive, as Locke says. However, a voluntary action, attending, is a necessary condition for the process of reflection to result in an idea. Without attention, an unnoticed mental impression is all that occurs.

One of the most important consequences of this interpretation is that, for Locke, the mind does not have direct access to its own operations. The mind comes to learn about its mental operations not by directly perceiving them, but by contemplating the ideas that result from

attending to mental impressions left by mental operations. This is the sense in which, on the interpretation of reflection I offer, reflection is not a type of introspection (see section 1.1).

A closely related issue is the relation between reflection and consciousness. Locke defines consciousness as “the perception of what passes in a Man’s own mind,” (II, 1, 19). One must decide what Locke includes under the category of that which passes in a mind. If Locke includes only ideas, then it follows from the interpretation of reflection offered here that minds are not conscious of their own mental operations. Although a full interpretation of Locke on consciousness is beyond the scope of this paper, it seems to me that this is the most plausible interpretation. Otherwise, if Locke allows mental operations to count as that which passes in a mind, then he is committed to the claim that one can be conscious of a mental operation even if one is unaware of it (e.g., in cases where the mental impression left by the mental operation does not give rise to an idea). This result seems counterintuitive.

Before considering objections to the interpretation I have presented, I want to consider the issue of what mental impressions are. In both the distraction argument and the perceptual processing argument, the conclusion is that Locke must distinguish between mental items that are necessarily perceived by the mind and mental items that are not necessarily perceived by the mind. The former are ideas and the latter are mental impressions. Moreover, attention to mental impressions results in the creation of ideas. Beyond these claims, I have said nothing about what mental impressions might be and how to square the distinction between ideas and mental impressions with other claims Locke makes. In the remainder of this subsection I discuss one suggestion for how to understand mental impressions.

The suggestion is that impressions are simply ideas. Recall that in the passage I cited in the perceptual processing argument, Locke claims that sensation creates the *idea* of a two-

dimensional circle and then the mind transforms it into the idea of a three-dimensional sphere. Locke uses the term 'idea' for the entity that I have been calling a mental impression. Of course, if mental impressions are ideas, they must be ideas that a mind can have without perceiving them. It seems difficult to render that result consistent with the other claims Locke makes about ideas. In particular, Locke writes, "*Ideas* ... cease to be any thing, when there is no perception of them," (II, 10, 2). He also defines 'idea' as whatever the mind perceives when thinking.³⁹

It seems to me that one can treat mental impressions as ideas and remain consistent with Locke's other claims. If mental impressions are ideas, then they are ideas that a mind has for a very short period of time. They disappear before the mind has a chance to perceive them. That is consistent with ideas ceasing to be anything once the mind stops perceiving them. That is, once the mind has an idea, the existence of the idea depends on being perceived; however, it is possible for a mind to have an idea prior to perceiving it. Furthermore, it could be that Locke uses the property of being perceived by the mind as the reference-fixing feature of 'idea', while allowing that some ideas are not perceived by the mind. Consider an example. I tell my child that a tiger is whatever animal is in the northernmost cage at the local zoo. That explanation does not imply that all tigers are in that cage in the local zoo. I have appealed to a limited sample of tigers in order to fix the reference of 'tiger'.⁴⁰ Likewise, Locke's claim that an idea is whatever is perceived by the mind need not imply that all ideas are perceived by the mind. Thus, the claim that mental impressions are ideas that disappear too fast for the mind to perceive them seems to be consistent with Locke's other claims about the nature of ideas.

If mental impressions are ideas, then the following picture of reflection results. Every time a mind operates, it creates an idea of the mental operation in question. However, the mind

³⁹ (II, 1, 8).

⁴⁰ See Kripke (1980) for the distinction between reference fixing and meaning fixing.

does not yet perceive this idea. If the mind attends to this idea, then the idea remains in the mind, and the mind has acquired an idea of the mental operation in question. If the mind does not attend to the idea, then the idea disappears. In this case, the mind never perceives the idea and never acquires information about the mental operation that caused it. On this reading, what I have been calling *mental impressions* are fleeting ideas and what I have been calling *ideas* are lasting ideas. It is easy to render this interpretation consistent with my claim in section 2.2 that minds do not create ideas of every mental operation. If mental impressions are fleeting ideas, then the claim for which I argued in section 2.2 is that minds do not create *lasting ideas* (i.e., ideas perceived by the mind) of every mental operation.

To be clear: I do not claim that Locke endorses this interpretation of mental impressions and I do not endorse it as the best explanation of mental impressions. I present it as evidence that it is possible to give an account of mental impressions in Lockean terms. Much more work would have to be done before I would be satisfied with it. In the rest of this paper, I use the expressions 'mental impression' and 'idea' to mark the distinction in question. I assume that ideas are necessarily perceived by the mind, while mental impressions need not be perceived by the mind. Both are mental entities, and when a mind attends to a mental impression, it acquires the relevant idea.

3. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Objection 1: Any interpretation of Locke's theory of reflection must be directly supported by the text. However, the account of reflection offered in section two is not supported by Locke's text. In particular, there is no direct textual evidence that Locke distinguishes between

mental impressions and ideas, that mental operations leave mental impressions, or that attention to a mental impression gives rise to an idea.

Reply 1: When an author writes little or nothing on some central aspect of his work, it is up to us, his interpreters, to reconstruct an account of this aspect. This is what I have done for Locke's account of reflection. Obviously, if Locke does not explain how reflection works in the text, then no one can support an interpretation of Locke's account of reflection by appeal to the text. There is no text to which one can appeal. In other words, the objection implies that any substantive proposal for Locke's theory of reflection is unacceptable because any such proposal will necessarily go beyond the text.

The choices for interpreting Locke on reflection are: present an account that is Lockean in spirit in the sense that it appeals to accepted Lockean doctrines that are supported by the text, or stubbornly refuse to say anything about it at all. I have chosen the former option. Clearly, there is a place in philosophical interpretations of texts from the history of philosophy for reconstructive projects of the type in which I have engaged. Such a project is especially urgent for a topic like Locke's theory of reflection, which several prominent interpreters have said is hopelessly incoherent.⁴¹

The criteria for evaluating a reconstructive project are different from the criteria for evaluating an interpretation of a specific passage or a topic on which an author writes a good deal. In particular, a reconstructive project must be evaluated by whether it is the best explanation of the phenomenon in question. That is, a reconstructive project should: (i) appeal to accepted doctrines that are supported by the text as much as possible, (ii) support the moves beyond the text by arguments that themselves appeal to doctrines supported by the text, (iii) avoid attributing to the author concepts or doctrines that are incompatible with those found in the

⁴¹ See Kulstad (1991: 109-115) and Mabbott (1973: 54-55) for examples.

text, and (iv) avoid attributing to the author implausible doctrines or fallacious reasoning (relative to the time and place of the text). Conditions (i) and (ii) require an interpretation to be *conservative*, whereas conditions (iii) and (iv) require an interpretation to be *charitable*.

The interpretation of Locke's theory of reflection I offer is both conservative and charitable. I have argued that, for Locke, sensation and reflection are two aspects of a single faculty (in section 2.1), that minds can operate without creating ideas of their operations (in section 2.2), and that Locke implicitly distinguishes between ideas (i.e., mental entities that are necessarily perceived by the mind) and mental entities that are not ideas (i.e., mental entities that are not necessarily perceived by the mind), but which give rise to ideas when an appropriate action of the mind is taken (in section 2.3). These claims are the basis of my interpretation of Locke's theory of reflection and all three of them are supported by direct evidence from his text. The claims that mental operations leave mental impressions and that attending to a mental impression left by a mental operation gives rise to an idea of that mental operation are supported by the link between sensation and reflection. The end result of the process of sensation is the creation of an idea of an object; the end result of the process of reflection is the creation of an idea of a mental operation. In sensation, the creation of the idea of the object requires that information about the object is encoded in a mental impression; in reflection the creation of the idea of the mental operation requires that information about the mental operation is encoded in a mental impression. The process of sensation concludes when the mind attends to the mental impression and creates the idea of the object; the process of reflection concludes when the mind attends to the mental impression and creates the idea of the mental operation.

Objection 2: The interpretation of Locke's theory of reflection offered in section two depends on the distinction between ideas and mental impressions. Locke, of course, uses both

‘idea’ and ‘mental impression’ in the *Essay*. The received reading is that Locke uses ‘impression’ to mean *physical impression*—the stimulation of a sense organ by the impact of particles. For the interpretation offered in section two to be acceptable, one must show that Locke uses ‘impression’ to mean *mental impression*. However, there is no textual evidence that Locke uses ‘impression’ to refer to mental entities that are not ideas.

Reply 2: I do not claim that Locke sometimes uses ‘impression’ to mean what I mean by ‘mental impression’. ‘Mental impression’ is my term. I use it to mark a distinction Locke is committed to making. My justification for the claim that Locke requires this distinction derives from the distraction argument and the perceptual processing argument, not from an analysis of his use of ‘impression’. Thus, I need not show that Locke uses ‘impression’ in the way I use ‘mental impression’.⁴²

Objection 3: The claim that Locke implicitly distinguishes between mental impressions and ideas is incompatible with his other views. In particular, it undermines his argument in Book I that there are no innate ideas or principles. For, a Rationalist can claim that minds are created with innate mental impressions that become ideas when the mind attends to them later in life. Furthermore, the claim that the minds can have mental impressions without perceiving them is incompatible with the following passage:

For to imprint any thing on the Mind without the Mind’s perceiving it, seems to me hardly intelligible. ... To say a Notion is imprinted on the Mind, and yet at the same time to say, that the mind is ignorant of it, and never yet took notice of it, is to make this Impression nothing. ... For if these words (*to be in the Understanding*) have any Propriety, they signify to be understood. So that,

⁴² Having made this point, I can say that I think Locke does use ‘impression’ to refer to (what I call) mental impressions, but I cannot argue for this claim here.

to be in the Understanding, and not to be understood; to be in the Mind, and, never to be perceived, is all one, as to say anything is, and is not, in the Mind or the Understanding, (I, 2, 5).

In this passage, Locke clearly states that nothing can be in the mind without the mind perceiving it. Thus, there is no room on the Lockean theory of mind for mental impressions.

Reply 3: The distinction between mental impressions and ideas is consistent with Locke's criticism of rationalism. A mental impression is not the kind of thing that can be innate, lie dormant during infancy and early childhood, and spring into an idea when one arrives at the proper age (as required by the Rationalist). Mental impressions (on any interpretation) are fleeting. Without attention, they disappear. Thus, the account of reflection I offer in no way threatens Locke's criticisms of Rationalism.

I agree that in the passage quoted in the objection, Locke clearly states that it is impossible for something to be in a mind without that mind perceiving it. This claim is obviously incompatible with other claims he makes about minds. For example, he claims that minds perform operations without perceiving them (in the passages quoted in section 2.2) and he claims that minds can have ideas without perceiving them (in the passages quoted in section 2.3). Thus, Locke's own text provides good reasons to think that he has overstated his claim in the passage quoted in the objection. Moreover, this passage occurs in the course of his criticism of Rationalism. In order to reject Rationalism, Locke needs to show that there are no innate principles and there are no innate *lasting* ideas; his arguments support these claims. He does not need to show that nothing mental can escape perception by the mind, and his arguments do not support such a claim. Thus, the most plausible interpretation of this passage is compatible with the interpretation of his theory of reflection I propose.

Objection 4: Kulstad argues that, according to Locke, not only can the mind be conscious of its own operations, but also that there can be no unconscious operations. That is, the mind is conscious of every operation it performs. Recall that Kulstad admits that there can be unreflected operations (he is careful to distinguish reflection from consciousness). I have denied that the mind is conscious of any of its operations. Minds are aware of their operations only by being conscious of the ideas of these operations; minds are not conscious of the operations themselves. Thus, Kulstad's arguments constitute objections to my reading.

Kulstad begins by considering two of Locke's comments: "Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a Man's own mind," (II, 1, 19) and "[reflection] is the *Perception of the Operations of our own Minds*," (II, 1, 4). He argues that operations are among the things that pass in a mind by appeal to the following quotation: "*What Perception is*, every one will know better by reflecting on what he does himself, when he sees, hears, feels, *etc.* or thinks, than by any discourse of mine. Whoever reflects on what passes in his own mind cannot miss it," (II, 9, 2). The last sentence of this passage implies that one can reflect on what passes in one's mind. Because one reflects on mental operations, they must be among the things that pass in one's mind.⁴³

Kulstad goes on to argue that one is conscious of all one's mental operations. He cites Locke's claim that children "seldom make any considerable Reflection on what passes within them," (II, 1, 8). Kulstad argues that Locke's point is that children do not reflect much. Yet, Locke makes the point by saying that they do not reflect much on what passes within them. If Locke holds that there are mental operations that do not pass in one's mind, then he would say that children rarely reflect on either those mental operations that pass in their minds or those

⁴³ Kulstad (1991: 89).

mental operations that do not. However, Locke does not say this. Thus, he must hold that every operation of a mind passes in that mind.⁴⁴

Reply 4: One problem with these arguments is that Kulstad simply assumes that humans are conscious of everything that passes within them. However, Locke denies this claim in the following passage, which occurs in his discussion of how we *unconsciously* transform ideas of sensation into ideas of judgment: “[W]e shall not be so much surprized that this is done in us with so little notice, if we consider, how the facility which we get of doing things, by a custom of doing, makes them often pass in us without our notice,” (II, 9, 10). Locke endorses the claim that some things pass in us without our notice. For Locke, the phrase ‘things that pass in the mind’ is not a technical term; he often uses it as a general term for mental phenomena. These results undermine both of Kulstad’s arguments. One can admit that mental operations are among the things that pass in one’s mind without accepting the view that we are conscious of all of them. Thus, Kulstad’s second argument fails. Kulstad’s first argument involves an inference from Locke’s use of the phrase ‘reflection on what passes in one’s mind’, to the claim that some of the things on which one reflects (operations) are some of the things of which one is conscious. However, this result does not follow. It is not the case that one is conscious of everything that passes in one’s mind. One is conscious of some of the things that pass in one’s mind; one reflects on some of the things that pass in one’s mind. There is no reason to think that these categories overlap. Thus, Kulstad’s first argument fails as well.

Objection 5: Mabbott, Obstfeld, and Kulstad all raise problems associated with Locke’s claims about unreflected operations. Locke claims that the ideas of pain and pleasure are ideas from reflection and that humans, in general, do not reflect until they mature. Mabbott argues that it follows that children do not feel pain or pleasure.

⁴⁴ Kulstad (1991: 89 n. 23).

Mabbott, Obstfeld, and Kulstad all raise another problem. Kulstad expresses it best in the following passage:

Locke suggests at a number of points that young children do not reflect. But he obviously believes that they perform mental operations. Let us juxtapose this possible state of affairs with Locke's principle that all ideas are derived from sensation and reflection and his statement that "the operations of our minds will not let us be without, at least, some obscure notion of them". My claim is that these points simply cannot be brought into harmony with one another, (Kulstad 1991: 112).⁴⁵

There are several passages where Locke seems to say that we reflect on all our mental operations. Thus, the interpretation given in section two is unacceptable.

Reply 5: With respect to Mabbott's argument concerning pleasure and pain, it seems to me that there is an important distinction between feeling pain and being conscious of the idea of pain. Consciousness of the idea of pain need not be painful. Thus, children can feel pleasure and pain, but they need not have the ideas of pleasure and pain until they mature.

I agree that there are passages in which Locke seems to claim that we reflect on all our mental operations. Because I have argued that, for Locke, minds do not reflect on all their operations, I need to provide alternative interpretations of these passages.

The passage Kulstad cites is the following:

In this Part the *Understanding* is merely *passive*; and whether or no, it will have these Beginnings, and as it were materials of Knowledge, is not in its own Power.

⁴⁵ See also Mabbott (1973: 54), where he presents the same criticism but cites Locke's claim that thinking consists in being conscious that one thinks; see (II, 1, 19). Obstfeld argues that, for Locke, one must reflect on one's mental operations for them to exist at all. A premise of her argument is that consciousness of a mental operation is a necessary condition for it to exist; see Obstfeld (1983: 52). I have argued that one can know that one thinks without being directly conscious of one's mental operations and that we are not conscious of our mental operations.

For the Objects of our Senses, do, many of them, obtrude their particular *Ideas* upon our minds, whether we will or no: And the Operations of our minds, will not let us be without, at least some obscure Notions of them. No man, can be wholly ignorant of what he does, when he thinks. These *simple Ideas*, when offered to the mind, *the Understanding can* no more refuse to have, nor alter, when they are imprinted, nor blot them out, and make new ones in it self, than a mirror can refuse, alter, or obliterate the Images or *Ideas*, which, the Objects set before it, do therein produce. As the Bodies that surround us, do diversely affect our Organs, the mind is forced to receive the Impressions; and cannot avoid the Perception of those *Ideas* that are annexed to them, (II, 1, 25).

First, Locke's point in this passage is that the understanding is passive. We cannot choose which ideas we receive by perception. Second, the term 'notion' is not a technical term for Locke. Thus, the expression, 'some obscure notions of them' could very well refer to mental impressions left by mental operations. Third, the expression, 'those simple ideas' does not refer to the obscure notions. He is referring to the particular ideas delivered by sensation mentioned in the second sentence. It seems to me that a reading of this passage that includes these three points is faithful to Locke's text, and it is compatible with both the interpretation of reflection I offer and his claims about unreflected operations in children and perceptual processing.

Another possible reading depends on a type/token ambiguity. According to this reading, Locke's point in the sentence about mental operations is that for every type of mental operation, we have an idea of a mental operation of that type. However, the mind does not

notice all its particular operations. This reading too is compatible with his other claims and the interpretation of reflection I offer.⁴⁶

Objection 6: If a person can choose to attend to a mental impression, then she must have some way of knowing that the mental impression is present before she attends to it. However, she cannot know that the mental impression is present until she attends to it. Thus, the account of reflection offered in section two is unacceptable.

Reply 6: I do not have any textual evidence to use in a reply to this objection, and I think that it might be a problem for Locke; however it is not an objection to the interpretation of reflection I offer. Nevertheless, I think Locke could respond to it by saying that the mental impressions from various sources are allocated different “positions” in the mind. If a person chooses to attend to the mental impressions created by the animal spirits delivering information from his ears, then he simply directs his attention toward that “area” of his mind. He does not know what mental impressions are there before he attends to them, but he knows the “place” to which he should direct his attention if he wants to create ideas of that which is stimulating his ears (likewise for all the senses). Reflection seems to be a bit different. If a person wants to perceive an idea of the mental operation of abstraction, he simply creates an abstract idea, and attends to the mental impression the mental operation leaves. This creates an idea of the mental operation that created the idea. As I said, I have no textual evidence for this story, but it seems like a way Locke could respond to the objection.

Objection 7: I have not satisfied one of the conditions on an adequate theory of reflection proposed in section one: I have not explained how reflection is involved in the acquisition of the all the ideas from reflection. These include ideas of mental operations: perception (II, 6, 1),

⁴⁶ The reading based on type/token ambiguity can be used on the other passages in which Locke seems to suggest that there are no unreflected operations. See (II, 27, 9) and (IV, 21, 4).

volition (II, 6, 1), retention (II, 10, 1), contemplation (II, 10, 1), discernment (II, 11, 1), comparison (II, 11, 4), composition (II, 10, 6), enlargement (II, 10, 6), and abstraction (II, 10, 9). Ideas from reflection also include non-sensory ideas: pleasure (II, 7, 2), pain (II, 7, 4), existence (II, 7, 7), unity (II, 7, 7), power (II, 7, 8), succession (II, 7, 9), duration (II, 14, 1), time (II, 14, 17), eternity (II, 14, 27), and infinity (II, 17, 3).⁴⁷

If there is no way to explain how non-sensory ideas are acquired by appeal to sensation and reflection, then there are severe consequences for Locke's concept empiricism. Yolton argues that neither reflection nor sensation can account for the acquisition of non-sensory ideas.⁴⁸ It is important to feel the force of this objection. As a concept empiricist, Locke claims that all our ideas come from sensation and reflection. To understand this claim, one must distinguish between ideas created by reflection and ideas created by other mental operations. Minds acquire ideas of mental operations by reflection. They acquire other ideas (e.g., ideas of relations, composites, and abstract entities) by performing operations on ideas they already have. For example, once a mind has the idea of blue and the idea of an orangutan, it can generate the idea of a blue orangutan by performing the operation of composition on them. When Locke says that all our ideas come from sensation or reflection alone, he means that, given any idea, it is possible (in principle) to specify the simple ideas (which are acquired exclusively by sensation or reflection) and the mental operations that were involved in its creation. Yolton's point is that the non-sensory ideas cannot be decomposed in this way. That is, they are not acquired through sensation, they are not acquired through reflection, and they are not the product of mental

⁴⁷ Note that Yolton (1985: 136-137) claims that space is an idea from reflection but Locke disagrees; see (II, 5). It is interesting that, for Locke, time is an idea from reflection but space is not.

⁴⁸ Yolton (1985: 135-138) and Yolton (1993: 210-212). Kulstad also argues that if one distinguishes between reflection on mental operations and consciousness of mental operations, then one must admit that sensation and reflection are not the only sources of ideas; see Kulstad (1991: 109-112). However, this argument assumes that one is conscious of all one's mental operations. In my reply to objection four, I showed that this assumption is mistaken. Thus, Kulstad has given us no good reason to posit a third source of ideas.

operations on other ideas. The non-sensory ideas pose a serious threat to Locke's concept of empiricism.

Reply 7: When discussing non-sensory ideas, Locke uses two metaphors. He often says that they *are suggested* to the mind or that they arise from *reflection on the train of ideas*. The former occurs in the following passage: "*Existence and Unity are two other Ideas, that are suggested to the Understanding, by every object without, and every Idea within,*" (II, 7,7). The latter metaphor occurs in his account of the ideas of succession and duration: "That we have our notion of succession and duration from this original, viz. from reflection on the train of ideas, which we find to appear one after another in our own minds, seems plain to me," (II, 19, 4). The phrase 'reflection on the train of ideas' can only be a metaphor because reflection provides ideas only of mental operations. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as reflection on the train of ideas.

Although Locke writes very little about these metaphors, he has provided all the materials for satisfying explanations of them. Nevertheless, I must admit that my explanations will be speculative. I begin with an account of *suggestion* (the first metaphor). To illustrate this account, I explain how a person, Armen, acquires the idea of existence. Assume that Armen first acquires an idea of some physical object, a lemur, through sensation. According to Locke's account of sensation, Armen acquires the idea of the lemur by attending to the mental impression left on his mind by animal spirits. My proposal is that Armen acquires the idea of existence in three steps. First, he contemplates the idea of the lemur. On the reading of Locke's theory of reflection I endorse, the mental operation of contemplation leaves a mental impression in Armen's mind. Second, Armen attends to this mental impression and create an idea of this mental operation. However, attending to the mental impression left by this mental operation

creates another idea as well. It creates the idea of the existence of the idea of the lemur. Simply by attending to the mental impression, Armen creates this second idea. It, so to speak, “comes along for free.” The third step is that Armen abstracts on the idea of the existence of the idea of the lemur and thereby acquires the idea of existence in general. Thus, we can see why Locke treats existence as an idea from reflection. One must reflect on one’s mental operations to acquire the idea of existence.

My explanation of Locke’s second metaphor, reflecting on a train of ideas, is more complicated. To illustrate, I will explain how a person, Stu, acquires the idea of succession. He acquires it in several steps. First, Stu acquires ideas of physical objects from sensation. Let us call them i_1, i_2, i_3 , etc. Second, Stu performs some mental operations on these ideas—he contemplates them and distinguishes between them. Stu contemplates i_1 . Stu contemplates i_2 . Stu discerns i_1 from i_2 . Stu contemplates i_3 . Stu discerns i_2 from i_3 . And so on. Thus, Stu performs a sequence of mental operations. Third, Stu reflects on these operations and acquires ideas of them. Thus, Stu now has the idea of his contemplation of i_1 , the idea of his contemplation of i_2 , etc., and the idea of his discernment of i_1 from i_2 , the idea of his discernment of i_2 from i_3 , etc. Fourth, Stu performs several mental operations on these ideas. Stu contemplates the idea of his contemplation of i_1 . Stu contemplates the idea of his contemplation of i_2 . Stu contemplates the idea of his discernment of i_1 from i_2 . Stu contemplates the idea of his discernment of i_2 from i_3 . In addition, Stu discerns the idea of his contemplation of i_1 from the idea of his contemplation of i_2 . The last mental operation is quite different from the one that preceded it. The last mental operation in the above sequence is Stu’s discernment of the idea of one mental operation from the idea of another mental operation, but the mental operation that preceded it is Stu’s contemplation of the discernment of the idea of one object from the idea of

another object. Contemplating the idea of a discernment is different from discerning the ideas of contemplations. I want to explain his perception of the passage of ideas in his mind in terms of the latter case.

How does Stu get from here to the idea of succession? He reflects again and acquires ideas of these discernments. He now has the idea of his discernment of the idea of his contemplation of i_1 from the idea of his contemplation of i_2 . He also has the idea of his discernment of the idea of his contemplation of i_2 from the idea of his contemplation of i_3 . And so on. The terminology is getting rough, so I will refer to these ideas as d_1 , d_2 , etc. Stu finally arrives at the idea of succession by *comparing* d_1 , d_2 , etc. Locke's metaphor, *reflection on the train of ideas*, is a sloppy way of talking about comparing the ideas of discernments, where the ideas discerned are ideas of contemplations.

The operation of comparison is one that gives rise to ideas of relations. Locke is primarily concerned with relations between physical objects. Humans arrive at these ideas by comparing ideas of physical objects. However, succession is a relation between ideas of mental operations. Stu cannot just compare i_1 , i_2 , etc., and acquire the idea of succession. He would instead get an idea of the relation between the objects these ideas represent. He cannot arrive at the idea of succession by comparing his contemplations of these ideas either, because contemplations are not ideas. Nor will it do to compare the ideas of his contemplations of ideas.⁴⁹ For the idea of succession is (roughly) the idea of different ideas passing in one's mind. To acquire this idea, Stu must compare the ideas of his discernments of the ideas of his contemplations of the ideas of physical objects.

⁴⁹ I do not want to assume that one can immediately tell the difference between the idea of the contemplation of one idea and the idea of the contemplation of another idea. Perhaps ideas of contemplations are not individuated by the objects of contemplations. As far as I can tell, Locke says nothing on this issue.

Of course, I have explained how Stu can acquire the idea of a particular succession. To acquire the idea of succession in general he will have to abstract from this particular idea. Locke does not mention this issue, but it seems evident that we arrive at all the general ideas we acquire from reflection by abstracting on particular ideas we acquire from reflection. Further, it seems to me that one can explain the difference between succession and duration in terms of the comparisons required to generate them. If Stu compares d_1 , d_2 , etc., with respect to space, then he acquires the idea of succession; if he compares them with respect to time, then he arrives at the idea of duration.

A number of problems remain. First, the ideas from reflection are simple ideas. It is unclear to me whether my explanations account for this fact. Second, I have not explained how we acquire other ideas from this group (e.g., ideas of pleasure, pain, power, eternity, etc.). I claim that either the account of suggestion or the account of reflection on a train of ideas explains them as well. In particular, the account of suggestion explains how we acquire the ideas of pleasure, pain, existence, unity, and power, while the account of reflection on the train of ideas explains how we acquire the ideas of succession, duration, time, eternity, and infinity. Third, on Locke's account, the ideas from this group arise involuntarily. Of course, there is a complicated story to tell about how attention (which can be voluntary) is involved in reflection (which is involuntary), but my explanations of Locke's metaphors depend on comparison and abstraction, which seem to be voluntary mental operations. Perhaps there is some way to explain how these operations are passively activated, but I will not speculate any further on these matters.

A reader who is tempted to reject to these explanations of how we acquire non-sensory ideas on the grounds that they are not supported by the text is a reader who misunderstands the

objection and my reply. The objection is that one who proposes an interpretation of Locke's account of reflection is obligated to show that it can explain how we acquire non-sensory ideas. In my reply, I discharge this obligation. No account of how we acquire non-sensory ideas could possibly be supported by the text because Locke does not discuss this topic. Moreover, I have shown how we acquire such ideas without appeal to anything other than the account of reflection proposed in chapter two, which itself meets the criteria for an acceptable reconstruction of Locke's theory of reflection.

Objection 8: Obstfeld argues that, for Locke, reflection involves a causal process that is analogous to the one involved in sensation. Instead of a mental process of reflection, she suggests that Locke must be committed to a physical mechanism by which the mind comes to be aware of its own operations.⁵⁰ Note that she does not advocate a physical correlate to the mental process of reflection. For Obstfeld, reflection is not a mental process at all. Her account of reflection constitutes an objection to my interpretation.

Reply 8: If humans could reflect only by employing a physical mechanism, what sort of story would Locke have? Certainly, this organ (or whatever physical structure it is that would be involved in reflection) would have to receive physical impressions from the mind's operations. These physical impressions would then have to be sent, via animal spirits, to the mind where they would be turned into ideas of the mind's operations (note that Obstfeld does not admit the distinction between mental impressions and ideas). There are several problems with such an account. First, humans have no such sense organ. This fact should be enough to dissuade anyone from adopting such an account. Second, even if humans had a sense organ of this type, it would have to be stimulated by particles coming from the mind's operations. That is, the mind would have to be hooked up to some other organ (or perhaps the same one) that sends out

⁵⁰ Obstfeld (1983: 52-53).

particles anytime the mind operates. These particles would stimulate the reflection organ and cause a physical impression in it. Thus, Obstfeld's physical account of reflection involves positing two organs (or one that performs two jobs) that do not exist in humans and some way for the mind to convert information about its operations into particles. These objections should be enough to warrant a mental account of reflection.

Objection 9: Mabbott and O'Connor both raise a problem for the view that sensation and reflection are aspects of a single mental faculty. Locke distinguishes between primary and secondary qualities for the objects of sensation, but not for the objects of reflection. Locke is often interpreted as endorsing a representational theory of perception. The problem is that if Locke endorses a representational theory of perception and reflection is a type of perception, then he should endorse a representational theory of reflection as well. That is, he should distinguish between primary and secondary qualities of the mind.⁵¹

Reply 9: I have not taken a stand on whether a representational theory of perception is appropriate for Locke (although it seems to me that it is). However, I have argued that sensation and reflection are two types of perception. Thus, if such a theory is appropriate, then a representational theory of reflection is in order as well. I have argued that, for Locke, reflection is not direct and that the mind has no direct awareness of its operations. Thus, there is a difference between the mind's operations and that of which it is directly aware—ideas of these operations. Nevertheless, there is no reason to distinguish between primary and secondary mental qualities because Locke assures us that our ideas of our mental operations are guaranteed to be clear and distinct.⁵² Although an explanation of this fact is beyond the scope of this paper, it seems to me that one can offer an acceptable account on Locke's behalf. The point I want to

⁵¹ Mabbott (1973: 55) and O'Connor (1967: 97).

⁵² (II, 1, 7).

emphasize is that unless one could show that such an account is impossible, one would not have an objection to the interpretation of reflection offered in section two.

4. CONSEQUENCES

In this section, I discuss the consequences of the interpretation of reflection I offer for five issues in Locke scholarship. Reflection plays a central role in many of Locke's doctrines. If one wants to understand, appreciate, or assess Locke's doctrines and his reasons for holding them, then one must have an adequate grasp of his views on reflection. I would like to say that I have not engaged in assessing Locke's doctrines or arguments. My claims are neither criticisms of Locke nor defenses of him. My point has been to present a plausible and charitable interpretation of his remarks on reflection.

4.1 CONCEPT EMPIRICISM

In the first book of the *Essay*, Locke rejects the rationalist doctrine that some principles and ideas are innate. He endorses *concept empiricism*: experience is the source of all our ideas.⁵³ In addition to his criticism of rationalism, Locke defends concept empiricism by attempting to derive all our ideas from two sources: sensation and reflection. For Locke, every idea belongs in one of three categories: ideas of things in the external world (i.e., ideas from sensation), ideas of mental operations (i.e., ideas from reflection), and ideas that result from mental operations on other ideas. One of the most difficult challenges for a reading of Locke's account of reflection is to explain how we arrive at the ideas from reflection (especially the non-sensory ones). I presented two suggestions for how we do this in section three. One consequence of these suggestions is that Locke's version of concept empiricism seems to have the resources to explain

⁵³ (II, 1, 2)

how we acquire all our ideas. Of course, it faces other problems that seem to many (including me) to be fatal.

One other issue I can mention is the extent to which experience is involuntary for Locke. It seem to me that, for Locke, although we can choose neither the mental impressions we have nor the ideas that result from attending to them, attention plays an essential role in both sensation and reflection. This interpretation has consequences for the criticisms of Locke's views on the passivity of experience.⁵⁴ It also suggests that more work needs to be done on Locke's account of attention.

4.2 ARGUMENTS INVOLVING REFLECTION

Many of Locke's arguments involve reflection. I will mention two; both pertain to concept empiricism. The first is an argument that no principles are innate. Locke argues that if a principle in one's mind were innate, then one would perceive it from birth. However, we do not perceive principles from birth. Thus, there are no innate principles.⁵⁵ Mark Kulstad claims that one interpretation of reflection undermines this argument against innate principles. Kulstad's worry is that some of Locke's comments on reflection suggest that the mind is not transparent. That is, they suggest that we are not aware of all that transpires within our own minds. A rationalist could seize on an interpretation of reflection that denies transparency and counter Locke's criticism with the claim that innate principles initially reside in the opaque regions of our minds.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See Krüger (1973) and Krüger (1984).

⁵⁵ (I, 2, 5).

⁵⁶ Kulstad (1991: 98-99).

Second, Locke argues that many of our common sense ideas are guaranteed to be distinct (i.e., not confused).⁵⁷ Joseph Camp claims that, for Locke, this argument is a defense of concept empiricism from Descartes' claim that most of the ideas of common sense are confused.⁵⁸ According to Camp's reconstruction, Locke argues that when someone has an awareness of red, she knows that she has this awareness because awarenesses are epistemically reflexive. Further, she cannot confuse this awareness with some other one. Moreover, her awareness of red is just the property of redness existing in her mind. Thus, she cannot confuse redness with any other property. Therefore, one can have unconfused knowledge that results from awareness of common sense ideas.⁵⁹

I have argued that minds are not aware of all their operations, but this conclusion does not affect Locke's argument against innate principles. The claims that one cannot have ideas without being conscious of them and that one cannot possess principles without having the ideas that constitute them survive unscathed. Thus, my account of reflection does not interfere with Locke's argument that if humans had innate principles or ideas, we would always be aware of them.

Camp's reconstruction of Locke's argument that our common-sense ideas are distinct relies on the claim that awareness is epistemically reflexive. It is hard to know how to assess this claim. For Locke, knowledge is primarily perception of the relations between ideas. Thus, if Camp's claim is that, for every idea we contemplate, we also have the idea of our contemplation of it, then my reading of Locke's account of reflection is incompatible with Camp's interpretation of this argument. If his reading implies that there are no unreflected mental operations, then our interpretations are incompatible as well. If Camp's reading is that whenever

⁵⁷ (IV, 7, 4) and (IV, 7, 10).

⁵⁸ See Camp (2002: 14-23, 205-217) for discussion and references.

⁵⁹ Camp (2002: 208-209).

one has an idea, one has an idea of its existence, then, again, our interpretations are incompatible. If, however, he means that when one contemplates an idea, one perceives the relations between it and other ideas, then our readings are independent of one another.

I would like to suggest that my reading of Locke on reflection has an implication for Locke's views on the distinctness of common-sense ideas. Locke claims that the ideas acquired through reflection are guaranteed to be distinct. On my reading, the non-sensory ideas are actually acquired through reflection; thus, they are guaranteed to be distinct. Perhaps they constitute enough of a base for a reply to Descartes' criticisms.

4.3 EPISTEMOLOGY

For Locke, one type of knowledge consists in perception of the connections between ideas.⁶⁰ Locke distinguishes between ideas and mental operations. Moreover, the mind acquires all the ideas of its operations through reflection.⁶¹ Insofar as knowledge involves comparisons of ideas, it depends on operations of the mind. Thus, reflection plays an important role in our second-order knowledge. That is, for Locke, the extent to which we know about our own knowledge depends, in part, on reflection. The debate in contemporary epistemology between internalists and externalists focuses on second-order knowledge. Epistemological externalism is (roughly) the view that one need not be able to justify one's belief (or even believe that it is justified) for it to count as knowledge.⁶² Did Locke hold such a view?

An epistemological consequence of my reading of Locke on reflection is that one can have knowledge (i.e., perceive the relation between two ideas) without having the idea of this

⁶⁰ (IV, 2, 1).

⁶¹ I argue for these claims in section 2.1.

⁶² See Williams (2001) for an introduction to these issues. See Woolhouse (1994) for a survey of Locke's epistemology.

particular mental operation. If what we know about what we know depends on having ideas of all the mental operations involved in knowledge, then it seems that, for Locke, it is possible to know something without knowing that one knows it. In other words, Locke's theory of reflection does not force him to be an epistemological internalist. Of course, one would have to engage with a plenty of other issues if one wanted to argue that Locke is an epistemological externalist. My point is that my interpretation of his take on reflection has consequences for how to interpret his epistemological doctrines.

6.4 LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE

Locke says a number of things about minds and what they can know. One of his stated goals is to provide us with an account of the limits of human knowledge.⁶³ An important question one should ask about philosophers engaged in such pursuits is: if we assume that what they claim to know is correct, then is it possible for them to know it? For example, does Locke either refute his views on minds or violate his strictures on knowledge when he presents and defends his views on minds and the limits of knowledge? If the interpretation of Locke's theory of reflection offered here is correct and Locke's theory of reflection is correct, then is it possible for Locke to have acquired his theory of reflection?⁶⁴ How is it that one acquires the idea about reflection?

When one attends to the mental impression left by a mental operation, one acquires the idea of that operation. Thus, one can acquire the idea about reflection (recall that I use 'idea about reflection' as a term for an idea whose object is the process of reflection) by attending to

⁶³ See (II, 23, 23), (IV, 3, 6), and (IV, 3, 28).

⁶⁴ A negative answer to this question might provide a reading of Locke's *Essay* that is analogous (in one sense) to both Strawson's reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1789) in Strawson (1966) and Diamond's reading of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1922) in Diamond (1991: ch. 6).

the mental impressions made by the mental operations involved in reflection. For example, assume that Mindy acquires the idea of a certain pair of handcuffs by sensation. Assume also that she contemplates this idea; the mental operation of contemplation makes a mental impression. Assume finally that Mindy attends to this impression and, according to what I have said about reflection, she acquires the idea of that mental operation—the idea of her contemplation of her handcuffs idea.

On the account of reflection I attribute to Locke, the process that results in the creation of the idea of Mindy's contemplation of her handcuffs idea has four steps: (i) the original mental operation (her contemplation of her handcuffs idea), (ii) the creation of the mental impression by this mental operation, (iii) attention to this mental impression, and (iv) the creation of the idea of the mental operation. It is not implausible to assume that three specific operations are involved in this four-step process: (1) impression creation (the mental operation that takes one from step (i) to step (ii)), (2) attention (the mental operation in step (iii)), and (3) idea creation (the mental operation that takes one from step (iii) to step (iv)). These three mental operations, of course, leave mental impressions. Assume that Mindy attends to them. The result is that she acquires an idea of each of these three mental operations that are involved in the process of reflection. Assume that she contemplates each one, creates ideas of these contemplations (through reflection), discerns the ideas of these contemplations, and creates ideas of these discernments (again, through reflection). Mindy now compares these ideas of the discernments and becomes aware of the fact that the three mental operations, (1) – (3), are involved in the four-step process, (i) – (iv), of reflection. That is, she acquires the idea of the process of reflection. If Mindy performs abstraction on this idea, then she can acquire the idea about reflection in general. If she has ideas of her other mental operations, then she will be able to perceive the relations between

them and arrive at the theory of reflection I have presented here. Thus, according to my account of Locke's theory of reflection, Locke could have acquired his theory of reflection.⁶⁵

Although Locke uses the term 'idea' 3839 times in the *Essay*, he does not explain how we acquire the idea of an idea.⁶⁶ Perhaps this seems like an embarrassment for Locke. I would like to suggest a different interpretation. There is no such thing as an idea of an idea. Why? One can acquire an idea in one of three ways: from sensation (which makes it an idea of some external entity), from reflection (which makes it an idea of a mental operation), or by mental operations on other ideas (which makes it an idea of a relation, composite entity, or abstract entity). There is no place in this account for an idea of an idea. One cannot acquire it from sensation or reflection because ideas are neither external entities nor mental operations. One cannot acquire it by mental operations on other ideas because one would have to have already had it. The mistaken view that reflection is akin to introspection is the basis for the claim that one can acquire an idea of any mental phenomenon, including ideas.

This result seems to pose a problem for Locke's philosophy of language. For, Locke writes, "*Words, in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind of him that uses them,*" (III, 2, 2). Thus, according to Locke, 'idea' in his *Essay* should stand for an idea in Locke's mind. It might seem that the "idea idea" is the only logical choice for what 'idea' should represent. I have a different interpretation. Locke does not treat all expressions as if they have representational roles to play. He allows for what he calls *particles* to play expressive roles. For Locke, particles "are all *marks of some Action or Intimation of the*

⁶⁵ Again, this account is not supported by the text, but that is not its point. I am *not* saying, "This is how to interpret such and such passage of Locke's text." I am saying, "Given what Locke writes, this is the best way of understanding the process by which one acquires an idea about reflection." Because Locke does not write about this process, no account of it can possibly be supported by the text. The account I offer shows that it is possible to explain in Lockean terms how one acquires this idea.

⁶⁶ I arrived at this figure by using the searchable version of Locke's *Essay* at <http://www.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Philosophy/Locke/echu/>.

Mind,” (III, 7, 4). Examples of particles include, ‘is’, ‘is not’, and ‘but’.⁶⁷ These words do not stand for ideas, but instead, express mental operations. I want to suggest that ‘idea’ is best interpreted as a particle. It seems to me that it expresses the mental operation of contemplation. With this interpretation in mind, the claim that there is no such thing as an idea of an idea is closely related to the claim that reflection is indirect (e.g., there is no such thing as the contemplation of contemplation).

4.5 PERSONAL IDENTITY

I have argued that a person can be conscious without having any ideas of her mental operations (for Locke most children are like this). One consequence of this interpretation concerns Locke’s definition of personhood. Locke writes, “to find wherein *personal Identity* consists, we must consider what *Person* stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing, in different times and places,” (II, 27,9). It is possible to interpret this passage as defining personhood in terms of potential reflection. That is, people are capable of acquiring ideas of their mental operations by attending to the mental impressions left by them.

I have also argued that, for Locke, reflection and consciousness are different. For those interpreters who take Locke to have defined personal identity in terms of memory, my discussion will have little importance.⁶⁸ However, it seems to me that Locke explains personal identity in terms of consciousness.⁶⁹ Despite my claim that, for Locke, consciousness and reflection are distinct, my reading of Locke on reflection will have consequences for such interpretations. In particular, I have argued that we are not conscious of our mental operations. We can acquire

⁶⁷ (III, 7, 1-5). See also Henze (1971).

⁶⁸ See Flew (1968) for an example.

⁶⁹ See Atherton (1983).

ideas of them and then we can be conscious of these ideas, but we cannot be conscious of the mental operations themselves. Nevertheless, it seems that any plausible account of personal identity should entail that people perform mental operations. Thus, my reading of Locke's remarks on reflection poses a challenge for interpretations of personal identity that emphasize consciousness: (i) if a person performs an action, then she must be conscious of it, (ii) people perform mental operations, and (iii) people are not always conscious of mental operations. It seems to me that Locke's views on personal identity *are* compatible with his theory of reflection, but an adequate account of the former will have to solve this problem.

5.0 CONCLUSION

I have presented an interpretation of Locke's theory of reflection. In section one, I proposed six conditions on any such interpretation. In sections two and three, I have attempted to meet these conditions. In particular, I argued that, for Locke, sensation and reflection are two aspects of a single mental faculty, that minds perform some operations on which they do not reflect, and that Locke's remarks on sensation and reflection suggest that he distinguishes between mental entities that are necessarily perceived by the mind (ideas) and mental entities that are not necessarily perceived by the mind (mental impressions). On the interpretation I offer, mental operations leave mental impressions, and by attention to these mental impressions, minds create ideas of the mental operations that left them. In section three I replied to several objections to this interpretation, and in section four, I briefly discussed some consequences of it.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ I would like to thank Joe Camp for stimulating conversations on these issues and two anonymous referees for their insightful comments on an earlier draft.

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