

VII.—NOTE.

NOTE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCKE AND DESCARTES.

1. My colleague Prof. Koebner, formerly of the University of Breslau, while working on the Locke manuscripts in the Lovelace Collection, came upon a good deal of new material affecting John Locke. These papers, as is well known, have been looked through at various times (it was among them that both Lord King and Fox Bourne, and in our own day Benjamin Rand, found the documents they published), but it would appear that they would still repay the interest of any one who could devote to them the necessary time and attention. I am writing this note on one of the points raised by Prof. Koebner in the hope that it may stimulate someone to go into the whole question more thoroughly, taking all the available sources, including the Shaftesbury papers, into account.

2. The point in question is this. Some of these papers, particularly the large quarto (Lovelace MS. Q. IX., 7) which contains some other material already published, suggest that Locke made a special study of Descartes during his travels in France (1675-79). The problem is whether the question can be solved by reference to our other sources, and whether it is of any importance. I think that it can be solved and that it is of importance.

3. The *old view* of the relationship between Locke and Descartes is that Locke represents the 'empirical' reaction against Cartesian 'rationalism', and this was supposed to be shown in the Essay, particularly and typically in Book I, the attack on 'innate ideas'. It is clear, however, that Locke is also a 'rationalist' (*cf.* the clear-cut distinction between 'knowledge' and 'opinion' which is the basis of his whole theory of knowledge), and the 'innate ideas' he attacks have been shown to be not (primarily) those of Descartes (on this see already Hume's *Enquiry concerning the Understanding*, section II., last note). It is essential, therefore, before considering the question of the relationship between the two thinkers, to agree on points of similarity and difference between them which could serve as criteria for discussion.

4. *Points of similarity*: The most characteristic would seem to be (a) the conception of 'demonstration' as the last link of a chain of 'intuitions', and (b) the use made of the immediate apprehension of the existence of the 'self'. The former, the mainspring of the Cartesian logic, is found in its most explicit form in the *Regulæ*, the latter, the starting point of the Cartesian metaphysic, in the *Meditations*; but they are both clear enough in the *Discourse on Method* (the point is of some importance in view of the date of the publication of the *Regulæ*, although it seems clear on other grounds that the *Regulæ*, although not printed until 1701, circulated in manuscript before that date, and may well have been seen by Locke).

5. *Points of difference*: (c) Locke's refusal to accept Thought as the essence of mind; (d) his parallel refusal to accept Extension as the essence of body; (e) his severance of physics from mathematics.

6. Leaving aside for the moment the Draft of the Essay published by Rand and dated 1671, and taking the extracts from Locke's papers published by the biographers, it would seem clear at least that Locke was interested in, and made *some* study of, Descartes, during the years he spent in France. For example: (a) the *Journal* for 22nd March, 1676 notes 'the new philosophy of Des Cartes prohibited to be taught in universities, schools and academies' (King (ed. 1830), i., 119); (b) the *Journal* for 27th March of the same year shows him occupied with the problem of space and body, and we have the phrase 'imaginary space' which reminds one of the 'imaginary spaces' of Discourse V. (*ibid.*, 123). Much more important is (c) the essay on Knowledge (8th Feb., 1677). This begins with the 'QUESTION: How far, and by what means, the will works upon the understanding and assent'. On this it may be observed that (i) it is purely Cartesian; (ii) nothing like it is to be found in the Draft; and (iii) the addition of the last two words to the normal Cartesian question indicates the special interest which is Locke's own. The passage is further interesting in that it contains Locke's judgement on physics ('we cannot understand the essence of things') which is to be found both in the Draft and the Essay.

7. We may now turn to the Draft itself (remembering its date, 1671) and examine it with reference to our specific points.

(a) *The conception of demonstration*: This is *not* in the Draft, where there is no idea of a 'chain'. On the contrary, 'demonstration' is 'intuition' (p. 103), *i.e.*, the actual seeing ('showing men how they shall see right', 104), and so on pp. 97 f., 101 f., 105, 108, 111 f., 117 (contrast with the stress on mediation in Essay IV., 1, § 9; 2, § 2 f.; 3, § 18, etc.).

(b) *The intuition of the 'self'*: 'This being, according to Descartes, to everyone past all possibility of doubt, that while he thinks or thinks that he writes, he that thinks does exist' (p. 88). But it should be noted that this reference is quite incidental and is *not*, as it is in the Essay, the explicit ground of the proof of the existence of God (treated of in pp. 206-07), although the ontological argument is rejected in the Draft (p. 207) in the same way as it is in the Essay.

(c) *Locke's refusal to accept thought as the essence of mind*, and (d) *the parallel refusal to accept Extension as the essence of body*: in the Draft (pp. 64-65, 198-206) we have the same so-called materialistic doctrine as in the Essay, but nothing of its specific anti-Cartesian polemic.

(e) *The severance of physics and mathematics*: in the Draft we have the same general doctrine of substance ('collection of simple ideas'; 'unknown cause', etc.; cf. pp. 64, 123, 127, 165, 195, 198, 202) which we find in the Essay, together with the corollary that there are 'no universal propositions concerning causes and effects' (p. 279 f.). But we have nothing of the Essay's main point that mathematics is certain because it is abstract, physics *uncertain* because it is particular, and nothing of the Essay's well known attempt to present a view of morals as a deductive science on the model of mathematics (for the Draft's view of morals, cf. 291 ff.). On the contrary, the Draft insists that knowledge is of real existence, *i.e.*, 'apprehending things as they really are or do exist' (pp. 85, 300).

8. It would seem to follow that Locke's special study of Descartes began *after* the completion of the Draft in 1671, and was strong at the beginning of 1677. Pending a more systematic examination of the Lovelace and Shaftesbury papers and a more detailed investigation of the Draft in connection with the Essay, the general opinion may be expressed that while there is no doubt that when Locke wrote the Draft he knew of

Descartes (and who could not in 1670 ?), he had not made any special study of him or ever realised how important for his own enquiries Descartes' results were. Indeed, the phrasing of the only specific reference to Descartes in the Draft (quoted above), as, too, of the oblique references (132, 207), is compatible with the most cursory acquaintance, even by hearsay. But having written the Draft and having the leisure of travel, particularly in France, Locke turned specifically to Descartes and sharpened his own views on Descartes' writings, reaching only then the characteristic doctrines indicated above (§ 4) while retaining his native independence (§ 5). It may be noted in this connexion that the *Thoughts on Education* (1690) still consider Descartes primarily as a physicist (§ 193).

9. It seems to me that here we have the real explanation of the old puzzle why Locke delayed so long in publishing the results of his meditations. It is generally assumed that his views remained unchanged from the time of his famous talk with his friends on the subject of 'morality and revealed religion' till the date of the publication of the completed Essay. The publication of the text of the Draft was thought to confirm this view, and indeed it may well be that Locke's views on fundamentals did not change. But it is also clear that his views on many important subsidiary questions did change (for the fact see R. I. Aaron, *Proc. Arist. Soc.*, 1932-33, p. 196 ff.), and it may well be that he delayed publication until he had cleared them up.

10. It should be added that while the points indicated in §§ 4-5 are simple and striking, and are offered as ready criteria for this special problem, it remains that the aims of the two thinkers are essentially different. In spite of *Regulæ viii* Descartes was not interested in the 'critical' problem; and Locke entered into the 'critical' problem from a primary interest in ethics and religion. Locke was therefore in any case only likely to use Cartesian ideas in order to clear up his own, and that is the view that would seem to emerge from the considerations offered above.

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