

# interpretation

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Volume 13 number 3

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## Book Reviews

**Locke's Education for Liberty.** By Nathan Tarcov. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. viii + 272 pp.: \$22.00.)

J. E. PARSONS, JR.

Nathan Tarcov's outstanding book on Locke's *Education* punctures a few myths about Locke and coins a new word, "algedonism," (or the tendency to avoid pain) which ought to pass into our Lockean literature as a key term. First, Locke's *Education* is not merely addressed to parents anxious to do the best by their children, but constitutes a way of perpetuating the Lockean regime by habituating children to the civil virtues which liberty presupposes—at least for a certain stratum of the population. These virtues cluster around the concern for reputation in the grown child, which is indispensable for the habitual law-abidingness that Locke terms "the law of opinion" in the *Essay*. A good reputation for Locke is one of the most lasting pleasures of human life and disgrace one of its most lasting pains.

Incidentally, Bacon, a great authority for Locke, defines education as early custom or first method of habituation: "Certainly custom is most perfect when it beginneth in young years: this we call education which is, in effect, but an early custom" (*Essays*, xxxix, "Of Custom and Education"; cf. Tarcov, pp. 6, 89). Bacon adds a point not fully explicable in terms of Locke's broad pedagogy: "[*Scil.* the philosophic aptitude]" is present " . . . in some minds that have not suffered themselves to fix, but have kept themselves open and prepared to receive continual amendment, which is exceeding rare" (*ibid.*). And this constitutes the main apparent problem of Locke's *Education*: how does it account or even make allowance for a philosophical member of the gentry like Locke himself?

The second myth that Tarcov's book punctures is the gratuitously assumed, almost *ex cathedra*, infallibility of Laslett's edition of the *Two Treatises*. As Tarcov makes abundantly clear: "Locke writes that the 'desire of having more than Man needed' led to the invention of money, which in turn motivated men to greater degrees of industry. . . . Laslett alters 'Man' in the phrase 'desire of having more than Man needed' to 'Men', following the first edition rather than the later ones, which Locke corrected, and he also makes other alterations, without textual authority, in a way that diminishes the connection between this desire and the invention of money" (pp. 177, 253, note 187). What is more, Laslett's inventive chronology at *Treatises* I, secs. 168–9 and notes to secs. 136 and 150 is faulty, and in the first instance alters the text without warrant; Tarcov concludes that Laslett "seems to think that Locke lived in the seventh century and that the exile in Egypt took place in 706 B.C." (pp. 229–30, note 324).

Yet Tarcov himself is not without his own inconsistencies and omissions: cf.

p. 217 note 71 with p. 263, for example, and his index fails to record several references to Laslett, including p. 253, note 187 adverted to in this review. Also there are some omissions in the bibliography, viz. the articles of Michael Zuckert and notably Robert Horwitz's "John Locke and the Preservation of Liberty: A Perennial Problem of Civic Education" (*The Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. VI, fall 1976, pp. 325–53), which, though differing in means, comes to similar conclusions to those of Tarcov. Nevertheless, Tarcov is clearly one of the princes in the republic of Locke scholarship, to use a metaphor warranted by the Machiavelli scholarship of Tarcov's Ph.D. dissertation adviser, Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.

The structure of *Locke's Education for Liberty*, after an introduction that stresses the distinctions between Lockean parental power and political power, and the importance of separating children's desire for liberty from their equally strong desire for domination, includes a discussion of Filmer, Hobbes and Locke respectively, a section by section commentary on *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and a conclusion.

The central commentary dwells on what Tarcov calls "moral education" (p. 210) or education proper. Later I will elucidate the problem of the feasibility of Lockean education nowadays, about which Tarcov is more sanguine than I. I will also discuss the dilemma of education worthy of the name, to be found in Kant's *Reflections on Education*.

Tarcov's central commentary has three main divisions: (1) the training of the body and courage, (2) the rechanneling of basic human passions through habituation to virtues that enable liberty, such as civility and industriousness, and (3) the careful and methodical cultivation of the mind. With regard to the latter, Tarcov never tires of emphasizing the priority of moral habituation to learning as such and the correct motive for learning, viz. the cultivation of natural curiosity, self-esteem and emulation. Expressed differently, learning must proceed upon the principle of Tom Sawyerism, as Robert Horwitz has suggested. Let the child regard learning not as a duty but as a privileged game for adults, and you will hardly be able to restrain him from this good "sport."

As regards moral education, punishment should never be administered without giving reasons, and the tutor (p. 123) only with the parents' concealed consent should punish the child, so he develops no aversion to his parents. Reward should be presented as a natural consequence of behavior and as an inducement toward "a more or less natural temper of benignity and compassion, a sentiment of humanity, or a good nature," once custom has bidden fair to overcome the "'Roots of almost all the Injustice and Contention, that so disturb Humane Life (pp. 168–9)'"—self-love. More could be said about the methods of Lockean education proper and of learning, but so long as we remember that they are grafted on the stock of habituation (proceeding from initial severity to relaxation of restraints), justifiable self-esteem and civility or good breeding, we cannot go far wrong (see pp. 95, 97, 101–4, 111–12, 169, 193–8).

Accordingly, our author presents a portrait of Locke's "liberal version of the family as the home of pleasant study and educative play, a home founded on liberty, civility, and love rather than patriarchal tyranny" (p. 209). On Lockean liberalism in general Tarcov regrettably fails to connect two of his most valuable and hard-won insights: (1) Lockean tends to include Hobbesian rationality (p. 247, note 82), and (2) Locke, by implication, had a less partisan, more objective view of the ancients than did his predecessors, such as Bacon and especially Hobbes (cf. p. 259, note 75). Let Locke speak for himself on this subject in a quite surprising passage from *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, sec. 24 (adverted to in the last note): "Some will not admit an opinion not authorised by men of old, who were then all giants in knowledge. Nothing is to be put into the treasury of truth or knowledge, which has not the stamp of Greece, or Rome, upon it. . . . Others, with a like extravagancy contemn all that the ancients have left us, and being taken with the modern inventions and discoveries, lay by all that went before, as if whatever is called old must have the decay of time upon it, and truth, too, were liable to mould and rottenness. Men, I think, have been much the same for natural endowments at all times. . . [For] *truth is always the same; time alters it not*, nor is it the better or worse, for being of ancient or modern tradition. . . There is no occasion, on this account, *to oppose the ancients and the moderns to one another*, or to be squeamish on either side (emphasis added)." My point here is that Locke's inclusion of Hobbesian rationality is based upon a substantive conception of reason, which occurs because Locke takes an even-handed view of the ancients, unlike Hobbes, for whom reason tended to be just a further passion.

I come at length to the question of the feasibility of Lockean education for the present day, mentioned by Robert Horwitz in the article above cited. Locke presupposes the availability and the affordability of a tutor to supervise, in part, the formation of one's children's character. Locke's *Education* treats only of the education of gentlemen, and gentlemen presuppose a gentry, or aristocracy, or both. Nowadays we have in our large industrial cities, at least, "gentrification" without a gentry proper, or aristocracy, although it may be argued that we possess a graded plutocracy of sorts (see the *Social Register*). If the tone of life is imitated from the very rich and filters down in society, a certain note of superciliousness and incivility is struck, which tends to treat those of inferior economic status in a patronizing way. In other words, we are ruled by establishments permeated by the snob and the snub. In this perspective, the late Nelson Rockefeller's famous greeting, "Hello, fellah" may well mean, in effect, "get lost, you nobody." And Nelson Rockefeller could not have become vice president except for his incalculable wealth. For him, truly, politics was a hobby, the same way raising goldfish or woodworking is for those of lesser means.

On the other hand, to return to our problem, some who benefit from "gentrification" are younger couples who both work, are childless and intend to remain that way to maximize the pleasures that accrue from a joint annual income of

\$50,000 and upwards. These couples simply do not *want* children, and if they do not contract a costly cocaine habit, they can have many other outlets for spending income in our consumer-oriented economy, such as BMWs or trips to Bali. The tutor, where and when he or she exists, is an instructor or trainer, not a character former, as Locke and Rousseau insist the tutor be. In so many people's education nowadays, the place of the Lockean tutor or parent is taken by the mindless moralism of television, especially in families where both spouses work outside the home. More and more in our society we have children who like Topsy, "just growed"—with the benefit of public schooling, such as it is.

Perhaps Kant was more perceptive than Locke in that he was more philosophical in his *Education*: he certainly better foresaw the later modern twists and turns in education, for Kant omits all reference to a tutor and seems to assume in his *Reflections on Education* that schools and universities will serve in place of tutorial-parental supervision. And Kant poses a dilemma as old as Plato's *Republic* and yet in his terms far more insoluble, being not even amenable to solution in speech. That question is: who educates the educators, especially if the education of the present and previous generation is seriously defective? Kant's solution is to proceed toward a doctrine of infeasible historical progress, however slow and seemingly retrograde. Yet today the notion of such an implied moral progress of humanity is less and less acceptable as we proceed to suffer the brutalizing inhumanity of the very scientific development which gave Kant such assurance. To return to our dilemma: Kant states in the Introduction to his *Reflections*, "Man only becomes man through education. He is solely that which education makes of him. It is necessary to note well that man is only educated by men and by men who have equally been educated. It is because of lack of discipline and instruction in some men that makes of these bad educators for their pupils. If only *a being of a superior nature* were to take charge of our education, one would then see *what could be made of man* (emphasis added)."

Philonenko, the French translator of Kant's *Reflections*, footnotes this passage to the effect that according to Kant, man is an animal in need of a master. But such a master is not available for man since such a master, being human, is himself an animal in need of a master. For Kant, as Philonenko suggests, man is an animal in need of a true educator, but a true educator, being human, is nowhere to be found, because he himself is in need of education. In other words, the deadly circle of indiscipline and ignorance cannot be broken—that is our dilemma. As Philonenko states it: "The problem of education is thus insoluble by right on the human level. It would be necessary that a god took charge of education for the problem to receive a perfect solution. The difficulty indicated is not a difficulty susceptible of being overcome—it does not concern, in effect, a question of degree; it is a difficulty of principle. Every human educator is a defective educator, because he has himself been educated defectively" (Kant, *Réflexions sur l'éducation*, trans. and notes by A. Philonenko [Paris: J. Vrin, 1966], p. 73, note 12).

Nevertheless, despite the Kantian argument, I hold that something like true education is possible, but not to be assumed as likely. When we hear commencement speakers wax eloquent over “the dynamics of education” or “the educational process” we should either conclude that they think they know what they do not or that they are wolves in sheep’s clothing. Perhaps this reminder may serve to measure more than anything else the distance between Locke’s *Education* and our educational practices—a fact which, by implication, does not escape Professor Tarcov.

**The Modern Self in Rousseau’s Confession: A Reply to St. Augustine.** By Ann Hartle. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984. xiii + 186 pp.: \$19.95.)

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Ann Hartle’s thoughtful analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions* seeks to demonstrate that it must be read less as an autobiography than as “a philosophical work of art” (p. 12). In pursuing such a goal, Hartle explicitly refuses to approach this work from a psychological point of view, that is, to presume that she is more aware than Rousseau of what he was trying to do with the *Confessions*. Her argument is grounded rather on detailed knowledge of the *Confessions*, clear understanding of Rousseau’s other writings, and provocative insights into the work of his predecessors, especially St. Augustine and Plutarch. She views Rousseau’s *Confessions* as a response to St. Augustine’s *Confessions* and an attempt to contrast his own life with St. Augustine’s as Plutarch contrasted those of illustrious Greeks and Romans in his *Parallel Lives*. Rousseau’s goal, argues Hartle, is to depict the soul of modern man as molded by the creative imagination and thus as independent of divine intervention. Intelligent and captivating as this interpretation is, I think it places too much emphasis on the *Confessions* and succeeds only by isolating that work from the *Dialogues* and, above all, from the *Reveries*.

Hartle considers the unquestioned premise for modern man’s thinking about himself to be reliance on an irreducible inner self which captures his essence. She wishes to question that premise, to look into its origins and to determine what it stands in opposition to. Contending that Rousseau develops the idea of the inner self in the *Confessions* to define man’s nature, she explores the idea of the inner self and the character of the *Confessions* in a series of overlapping and thus frequently repetitive analyses. The first of her five chapters advances a series of reasons for understanding the *Confessions* as a philosophical work, chief among them being Rousseau’s explicit insistence that it offers the only true portrait of human nature. For Hartle, then, the *Confessions* is neither apologetic nor