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Article (Accepted Version)

Davies, Paul (2017) Uneasiness: the line between Sterne's novel and Locke's essay. *Textual Practice*, 31 (2). pp. 247-264. ISSN 0950-236X

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Uneasiness: The Line between Sterne's Novel and Locke's Essay

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(1)

Commentators often speak of the restlessness or agitation of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, its inability to leave the reader alone to follow and to observe the following of a narrative line. Such a line, if it would tell or stand as the image of a life, ought ideally to be straight. Tristram acknowledges and bemoans the fact that he has so noticeably failed to meet this demand and intervenes in the telling of his life, one more time, to try to convince us that at least matters are improving, if we are willing to indulge him one or two extra deviations.¹ Kant, for one, applauds and seems amused by the constant doing and undoing of Sterne's writing,² and Nietzsche, for another, is drawn to the manner in which Sterne leaves neither place nor time for the reader to know what is meant to be taken seriously and what is not. It is just this quality of constant and exhaustive disruption that exasperates Thackeray.³ Yet there is also throughout the novel, a deliberate slowness and stillness. This is marked most obviously in the perpetual inability to accomplish even the smallest of tasks, an ability stretched across the generations (for example, the irritations of the parlour door hinge), but it also comes to the fore in one of the key sections of the novel where significantly Locke's philosophy is invoked. The topic is duration. It is worth noting the way in which the communicating of a thought and an experience, and the naming of the doctrine tasked with explaining that experience, are here reduced to a sort of paralysis, the result being, for Walter and Toby, sleep and, for author and reader, an opportunity finally for a preface.

Walter Shandy, looking at his watch, reports that it is two hours and ten minutes since the arrival of Dr Slop and Obadiah. Yet 'I know not how it happens, brother Toby - but to my

imagination it seems almost an age'. Tristram, letting us know what this far into the novel we have surely already suspected, continues:

Though my father said 'he knew not how it happened' yet he knew very well how it happened; and at the instant he spoke it, was pre-determined in his mind, to give my uncle Toby a clear account of the matter by a metaphysical dissertation upon the subject of duration and its simple modes, in order to show my uncle Toby, by what mechanism and mensurations in the brain it came to pass, that the rapid succession of their ideas and the eternal scampering of the discourse from one thing to another, since Dr Slop had come into the room, had lengthened out so short a period, to so inconceivable an extent - 'I know not how it happened, - cried my father - but it seems an age.' (3, 18, 222)

The 'eternal scampering' from one thing to another here decelerates in an intentionally slow-witted sentence that begins with Tristram citing his father in order to reveal the thought behind his words, and ends with a repetition of his father speaking those words. The 'rapid succession of their ideas' that had, at least for Walter, made the two hours and ten minutes seem an age, is itself stated in a line that induces the sense of time passing unnecessarily not in a surfeit of thoughts but in something like their absence. Scarcely no ideas are in play, save the plodding introduction and repetition of the topic.

'I know not how it happened, - cried my father - but it seems an age.' - 'Tis owing, entirely, quoth my uncle Toby, to the succession of our ideas.' (3, 18, 222)

Tristram's description of Walter's intention to reflect on the temporality of our inner experience of the succession of ideas, a description that has already made use of the phrase, returns to the scene it is recounting at just that moment when Toby interjects by announcing and naming 'the succession of ideas'. And Walter's (and Tristram's) response?

(M)y father, who had an itch in common with all philosophers, of reasoning upon everything which happened, and accounting for it too - proposed infinite pleasure to himself in this, of the succession of ideas, and had not

the least apprehension of having it snatched out of his hands by my uncle Toby, who (honest man) generally took everything as it happened - and who, of all men in the world, troubled his brain least with abstruse thinking; the ideas of time and space, or how we came by those ideas or of what stuff they were made, - or whether they were born with us - or we picked them up afterwards as we went along, - or whether we did it in frocks, - or not till we had got into breeches - with a thousand other enquiries and disputes about INFINITY, PRESCIENCE, LIBERTY, NECESSITY, and so forth, upon whose desperate and unconquerable theories so many fine heads have been turned and cracked, - never did my uncle Toby's the least injury at all. (3, 18, 223)

Rather than permitting Walter to continue with his intended disquisition, Tristram chooses to list the concepts such a disquisition might have properly treated, and he does so by referring them to Toby rather than Walter. It is thus Toby's name and Toby's indifference to philosophy that prompts Tristram's philosophical and Lockean litany. It seems in keeping with the tenor of the passage to labour the point. Walter, pretending to be surprised at how slowly the time has gone, prepares to explain the phenomenon. Tristram intervenes to explain the pretence and outline the intention. Toby interrupts to give the correct technical name of the phenomenon. Initially, this naming and interrupting fail to distract Walter. Toby's 'the succession of our idea', the solution to the problem Walter is feigning surprise at, is simply heard as his own. For Tristram's purposes, however, the fact of its being Toby's utterance leads to a description of Toby's lack of interest in any attempt to explain either the succession of our ideas (the very doctrine he has named) or the various metaphysical problems and themes raised by its introduction and identification. And it is under Toby's name that we find those problems and themes being listed, and among them, crucially, the matter of innate ideas. Tristram draws our attention to Walter's appropriating of Toby's words and then, as though in recompense, re-appropriates Walter's philosophical interests for the sake of demonstrating Toby's lack of interest. If this is not tortuous enough, Tristram then proceeds to narrate Walter's dawning awareness of Toby's lack of interest. Walter was 'no less surprised than he was disappointed with my uncle's fortuitous solution'. If Walter's first

inclination is to continue as though no one else had spoken, the awareness that it was Toby's voice and Toby's words leads him to ask:

Do you understand the theory of that affair? replied my father.
 Not I, quoth my uncle.
 - But you have some ideas, said my father, of what you talk about? -
 No more than my horse, replied my uncle Toby.
 Gracious heaven! cried my father, looking upwards and clasping his two hands together, - there is a worth in thy honest ignorance, brother Toby, - 'twere almost a pity to exchange it for a knowledge - But I'll tell thee. - (3, 18, 223-4)

Toby's cheerful admission that he does not understand the words and the doctrine he has correctly identified helps us see that the phrase Walter was inclined to take as his own ('the succession of our ideas') before recognising it as Toby's actually was Walter's phrase all along. Toby, familiar with his brother's speeches, knows the name of the solution and the doctrine, but no relevant ideas of his own accompany the name. Tristram turns our attention back to Walter and to Walter's isolation not simply as a consequence of his intellectual egotism but as a sort of loneliness. Walter recognises Toby's voice but also realises that what it has said is no more than a spur to Walter's peroration, a way of keeping him on track, an encouragement even an affectionate one, but also a means of returning Walter to his world and his interests (his hobbyhorse) so as to allow Toby the peace of returning to his own. On this reading, Toby's 'the succession of our ideas' is nothing but the mechanical repetition of Walter's 'the succession of our ideas'. If Sterne has Tristram refrain from making this explicit in a passage that exemplifies Tristram's frequently ruinous explicitness, it is to give the mechanical its human or sentimental aspect. An easy companionship leads the words of the one to emerge from the mouth of the other. Finally we come to Walter's Lockean 'dissertation', complete with footnote ('*Vide* Locke'). Toby's interruptions ('What is that to anybody', 'You puzzle me to death') are now unequivocally in his own voice.

The argument unfolds. To understand infinity, we need to understand duration; duration, considered as the internal awareness of the succession of ideas, leads us to an understanding of ourselves as existing, the self being a function of the succession of ideas. An image for this succession is required, and Walter proposes ‘the images in the inside of a lantern turned round by the heat of a candle’. Toby offers an alternative, ‘a smoak-jack’, and the dissertation comes to a halt.⁴ Tristram, devoting a chapter to the repercussions, writes ‘What a conjecture was here lost! My father in one of his best explanatory moods. ... my uncle in one of the finest dispositions for it in the world’ (3, 19, 225). Walter, thus far, had merely given a partial summary of Locke on the origin of our idea of duration. What Toby's image has denied us would have been so much more, although Tristram concedes that Walter, ‘in eager pursuit of a metaphysic point’ would have followed it ‘into the very regions where clouds and thick darkness would soon have encompassed it about’. Toby's smoak-jack, now re-deployed by Tristram, gives a more accurate image for the inevitable obfuscations. Tristram captures the still silenced Walter in a wonderful sentence: ‘Though my father persisted in not going on with the discourse, - yet he could not get my uncle Toby's smoak-jack, out of his head’ (3, 20, 226). He begins to ‘commune’ and ‘philosophize’ to himself, unable to make sense of it, the darkness to which he would have drawn Toby, Tristram, and Tristram's readers is now his alone, until, fatigued and distracted, he falls asleep. Toby, far less bothered by the sense of his image, sleeps easily. Walter and Toby now at rest, Tristram (or Sterne) finds time for the ‘author's preface’ and for the critical discussion with Locke about the relationship between wit and judgement.

The entire sequence in these three chapters can be summarised: the arduous and repetitive introduction of ‘the succession of ideas’; the interrupted attempt to begin the dissertation; the dissertation as a preliminary gloss on Locke's doctrine; the final interruption (Toby's image); the preface. But can this sequence or indeed anything in it really count as an

argument against Locke? The mindless repeating of ‘the succession of ideas’ is funny but any philosophical doctrine or formula could suffer the same fate: ‘the eternal return of the same’, ‘the question of being’, ‘the theory of meaning’, ‘*differance*’. Ignorant and sleep inducing interruptions are funny but they would have an equally destructive effect on an attempt to summarise any philosophical theory. That one's thoughts can be waylaid by the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of an image is no more a problem for Locke than for any other philosopher. And even the specific engagement with Locke's treatment of wit and judgement, itself arguably an unfair interpretation of Locke, doesn't seem to reflect in any way on the conversation preceding the preface.⁵ Attempts to bolster the philosophical achievements of the sequence might claim that there are at least two implicit anti-Lockean arguments here. One reduces Locke's metaphysics to the solipsism to which his accounts of ideas and the communication of ideas seem bound. The other gives a neo-Humean or quasi-Wittgensteinian gloss to the context of the shared life and history we encounter in the novel, the lived contexts of misunderstandings and of improbable and impossible affections.⁶ But were we to work out either of these in detail and read it alongside the sequence, it would sound just as vulnerable to ridicule. We are not given enough of Locke for us to interpret the sequence plausibly as a piece of anti-Lockean *philosophy*, and any philosophy presented as Locke's has been here would sound just as unconvincing.

(2)

But perhaps we go wrong in trying to reconstitute the Shandyeian undermining or challenging of Locke at the level of these chapters and this sequence. Might it not be best to contrast the *Essay* and the novel in terms of their respective general projects, the ‘life’ of an individual seeking self-understanding in a work of philosophy, on the one hand, and the life and opinions of the individual who is Tristram Shandy in a work of literature, on the other?

Pray, Sir, in all the reading which you have ever read, did you ever read such a book as Locke's *Essay upon the Human Understanding*? ----- Don't answer me rashly, -- because many, I know, quote the book, who have not read it, --- and many have read it who understand it not:--- If either of these is your case, as I write to instruct, I will tell you in three words what the book is -- it is a history. --- A history! of who? what? where? when? Don't hurry yourself. -----It is a history-book, Sir, (which may possibly recommend it to the world) of what passes in a man's own mind, and if you will say so much of the book, and no more, believe me, you will cut no contemptible figure in a metaphysic circle.

But this by the way. (2, 2, 98)

To turn back to Locke's *Essay* after reading Sterne's novel is to find oneself detecting Shandyeian voices and gestures almost everywhere: from the etiquettes of the frontispiece where we meet John Locke, gentleman, to the epistle to the reader and the frequent subsequent appeals and apologies to the same reader for having to repeat, qualify and revise so much of the material, to the surprised confession that a book on understanding should have to devote a section to the topic of words. Some of these belong to the contingencies and conventions of printing, patronage, and pedagogy, but some seem to touch the very heart of Locke's endeavour. A book that would follow an individual attempt to reach self-understanding will rely on no pre-determined methods, laws, or concepts (no innate ideas). It will show how the acquisition of each part of our knowledge can be explained in terms of experience: the complex ideas arising from the simple ideas, and the simple ideas from immediate experience. And it will do so in such a way that the reader or student can first observe how knowledge and complexity arises and then come, in reflection, to understand themselves. For the self is reflective as soon as it apprehends a simple idea, and reflecting on this apprehension comes to apprehend reflection as such as the promise and possibility of self-understanding. So much follows from a simple attentiveness to what is present in a mind. Locke insists that it is precisely the absence of innate ideas, the fact that we do not need to theorise or appeal to a knowledge already present at birth, that makes the self accessible to a genuine understanding. The history Locke will tell will be the inner history of

the one who tells it, and it will be a human history and its outcome will be a human understanding that will have no cause to deem itself lacking or unworthy. In this context, any emendations or expressions of surprise about having to add topics, chapters, and ‘books’ might serve to check the optimism of the undertaking. That it never seems to do so can, after Sterne, only add to the sense of something's going amusingly amiss. Indeed what are we to say about Locke's title, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*? Is there a precedent for such a long drawn out single and singular ‘essay’ incorporating four books and sixty nine chapters, and running to hundreds of pages? How can Tristram’s dogged attempts to trace the lines of a life not be seen as an undermining counterpart to the Lockean history, the presentation and representation of a sustained failure to achieve self-understanding. And how can a line that leads back to the *Essay* from the novel not recognise the over-determined resonances of the opening ‘Epistle’?

This discontinued way of writing may have occasioned, besides others, two contrary Faults, viz, that too little, and too much may be said in it. If thou findest anything wanting, I shall be glad, that what I have writ, gives thee any Desire, that I should have gone farther: If it seems too much to thee, thou must blame the Subject; for when I first put Pen to Paper, I thought all I should have to say on this Matter, would have been contained in one sheet of Paper; but the farther I went, the larger Prospect I had: New discoveries led me still on, and so it grew insensibly to the bulk it now appears in. I will not deny, but possibly it might be reduced to a narrower compass than it is; and that some Parts might be contracted: the way it has been writ in, by catches, and many long intervals of Interruption, being apt to cause some Repetitions. But to confess the Truth, I am now too lazie, or too busie to make it shorter.⁷

But however enlightening it is to bring the *Essay* alongside the novel in this manner, again can anything here function as an argument? The amusement to be had from observing the contingencies and ironies that befall the *Essay* are acknowledged ruefully by Locke himself. That Sterne chooses to make those features central to his novel gives it an extraordinary license to ridicule Locke (and philosophy) but it is difficult to determine any greater significance for its relation to Locke or philosophy.

Rather than treating the Locke related sequence we read earlier as ridicule or argument, might it not be better analysed in terms of the way it presents the relations firstly between Walter, Toby, and Tristram, and secondly between Walter and Toby in Tristram's representations of them. Locke's doctrine ('the succession of ideas') resonates differently for each character and for each of these sets of relations. The 'preface' might then be read as Tristram's attempt to give his own (partial and overdetermined) views on Locke, distinguishing them from the 'darkness' of his father's speculations and the innocent empty headedness of his uncle's. This would provide a different frame for the reflections on the necessary role 'wit' must play in the whole endeavour of telling of an individual's life and opinions. It would also encourage us to think again about what concerns the novel and the *Essay* might share.

To the extent that we see Sterne as either arguing with or ridiculing Locke, there is no need to return to the *Essay* after reading the novel unless to be newly amused by it or to acknowledge its historical role and context. The remainder of this paper will try to trace a different line back from novel to *Essay*, suggesting that we can, after and thanks to Sterne, discern a moment or mood in the *Essay* that might otherwise have been missed, a moment or mood that in its Lockean treatment also helps us grasp something about the novel.

(3)

'Uneasiness' is perhaps not a word we are aware of encountering in *Tristram Shandy*. But in the first volume we do read of Walter's 'scruples and uneasinesses' concerning the location and the quality of Mrs Shandy's 'lying-in' (1, 18, 51), and the preparations for Tristram's birth and the first weeks of his life. Walter's concern is threefold, taking in not only the well-being of wife and child, but also the protecting of Walter himself from criticism should there be any error or misfortune, and the example Walter can set by demonstrating the public and

political benefit of remaining in the country and of eschewing the 'current of men and money towards the metropolis'. The 'scruples and uneasinesses' as they stretch beyond the empathies and egotism respectively of the first two of these to the more abstract but doubtless equally egotistical third turn into an extreme anxiety. Walter, contemplating the fate and the dissemination of the principle on the basis of which he wants to think he has made his decision as to what is best for Mrs Shandy and Tristram, is 'extremely anxious' (1, 18, 52). 'Anxious' is another word scarcely used in the novel. When it is, it singles out Walter, be it as now when he is worrying about the 'lying-in' or, as later (which is to say earlier), when he is caught up in the complexities of having to deal with both Bobby's educational travels and the management of the Ox-moor. In each case, Walter is rescued from his uneasiness or anxiety, however extreme, by a catastrophe: Tristram's botched birth and baptism in the one, and Bobby's death in the other. The scruples, uneasinesses, and anxieties at issue are those of a character (and characters) attempting to negotiate a path away from trauma and catastrophe. They disclose the parameters and qualities of a life increasingly caught up in its own attempts to alleviate them, and to alleviate them in an activity that derives solely from the private interests and passions (the hobby-horses) of the uneasy and anxious individual. And they seem bound to fail, after all it is Walter's intellectualising, the very thing that gives his life even the hope of a pleasing ease or order, that exacerbates his anxiety. 'What is the life of man! Is it not to shift from side to side? - from sorrow to sorrow? - to button up one cause of vexation! - and unbutton another' (4, 31, 399).

'Vexation' is a word the novel seems more willing to emphasise. Recounting his mishaps in Lyons, Tristram states that 'to those who call vexations, VEXATIONS, as knowing what they are, there could not be a greater, than to be the best part of a day (in) ... the most opulent and flourishing city in France - and not be able to see it' (7, 30, 625). The

play between use and mention (the vexation of vexation and the vexation of VEXATION) is brought to the fore in a written illustration:

To be withheld upon any account must be a vexation; but to be withheld by a vexation
- must certainly be what philosophy justly calls
VEXATION
upon
VEXATION (7, 30, 625)

If neither Tristram nor Sterne is inclined to let ‘uneasiness’ name and characterise these vexations and the vexatious to and fro that seems essential to the *uneasy* balance of a human life, the same cannot be said for the philosophers. It is a word that plays a substantial role in the moral psychologies of Locke and Hume, and it is a word that clearly intrigues Leibniz who, reading and responding to Locke in his *New Essays*, searches for an appropriate French or German translation.⁸

‘Uneasiness’ is not a word that belongs to the novel, nevertheless Sterne will use it in an important and highly charged reference to the novel and to the writing of the novel, and in such a manner that it is difficult not to find oneself thinking of Locke. It occurs in a letter Sterne sends, along with copies of the first volumes of the novel, to his patron Lord Rockingham.

There is an Anecdote relating to this ludicrous Satyr, which I must tell your Lord! - & it is this, 'that it was every word of it wrote in an affliction; & under a constant uneasiness of mind. Cervantes wrote his humorous Satyr in a Prison - and Scarron his, in pain and Anguish - such Philosophers as will account for everything, may explain this to me.'⁹

There are significant differences in the connotations and implications of ‘uneasiness’ for Locke, Leibniz, and Hume, and in the descriptive and explanatory work each of them requires the word to do. Ultimately for Hume and Leibniz, the mental or emotional states or

the varied phenomena we might call ‘uneasinesses’ pose no deep philosophical or psychological problem. For Locke, however, ‘uneasiness’ generates as many puzzles and ambiguities as it resolves, and it is to Locke's ‘uneasiness’ we want to turn with the help and encouragement of Sterne's novel and with the way the novel extensively and repetitively represents these puzzles and ambiguities even in the absence of the word itself. In both the novel and the *Essay*, uneasiness may find a temporary alleviation in repose, reverie, or easy companionship, and sometimes in a judgment or decision, the settling of a practical or scholarly dispute, that can count as the completion of a process of reasoning.¹⁰

The problem first arises when Locke realises that he had been mistaken in thinking that the absence of the good, say, is enough to cause and guide the search to achieve or acquire the good. If that were the case then, along with the felt absence, I would already have to possess an idea of what it was the felt absence of, and that idea would have to be strong enough to identify the absence from the very beginning, distinguishing it essentially from any other absence. But such an idea is ruled out by the argument against innateness, the argument with which the *Essay* has to begin. What is present in the mind cannot be the absence of the idea of the good (which absence already presupposes a different type of prior possession), but a felt absence that disturbs or affects the mind in such a way that it seeks alleviation. If what I am is a being with no other way of possessing ideas than through experience and reflecting on experience, then we need a different account of what it is to feel the lack or absence of something and a different explanation as to how that felt absence can orient a person towards that thing.

To return then to the Enquiry, *what is it that determines the Will in regard to our Actions?* And that upon second thoughts I am apt to imagine is not, as is generally supposed, the greater good in view: But some (and for the most part the most pressing) *uneasiness* a Man in at present under. This is that which successively determines the Will, and sets us upon those Actions, we perform. This *Uneasiness* we may call, as it is, Desires, which is an

uneasiness of the Mind for want of some absent good. All pain of the body of what sort soever, and disquiet of the mind, is *uneasiness*. (Book 2, Ch.21, section 31, 250-1)

This ‘uneasiness’ proves remarkably difficult to define but, having introduced the term, Locke makes it do a lot of work. The determining of the will is no longer the idea of an absent good, but an uneasiness. This uneasiness is not to be understood as a cognition, but as an affectivity with a capacity to orient the person so affected. It is not however to be simply identified with or defined in terms of desire, although wherever there is a desire, there is always also an uneasiness. It is only with reference to uneasiness, that we can begin to understand the self as motivated to seek satisfaction or rest, but to the extent that no idea can be found in the mind that is separable from this drama of uneasiness, an idea too is proximally an uneasiness. Ideas are everywhere and always bound up with uneasinesses and the constant ‘succession of ideas’ is also always a succession of uneasinesses. If a person or self is a function of that succession, then a person or self is disclosed in its essential uneasiness. ‘Person’, for Locke, is a ‘forensic’ term. It appropriates and locates actions and laws. To be a person is to have an identity and a consciousness (an identity by means of consciousness) as a reasoning, law-governed, experiencing agent.¹¹ But this experience and agency always has its mood or affective character, its *uneasiness*. The experience of the passing of time (duration) has its mood or its disposition, its *uneasiness*, and it is present in the mind only as this felt uneasiness.

The most satisfying alleviation of the disturbance caused by the absence of the good would be the acquisition of the good, but the primary felt concern is with treating and curtailing the disturbance, the feeling of pain or displeasure, and there are many other things and distractions which might be able to do that, and moreover do it in such a way as to provide a quicker or easier satisfaction. Uneasiness thus enables us to say that a person can (rationally) desire to perform a particular action (for example see to the squeaking parlour

door hinge), have the mental and physical capacities and the time to do it, and yet still fail to do it. Does it help us with the problem of weakness of the will (*akrasia*)? The argument against innateness removes that aspect of the problem that led Plato and Socrates to deny that there could be such a state, but does uneasiness take a positive step towards solving it? We would need a whole other paper to treat this issue but, for our purposes here, we can say that, although Locke does not provide a formal solution to the problem, nor an adequately robust account of the will to extract a substantial theory of weakness of the will, what the introduction of uneasiness does is to enhance the description of a life and a person in which and for whom weakness of the will is always a risk.¹²

It may seem the simplest of corrections but this emphasising of uneasiness effects a change not only in the content of the *Essay* but also in the nature of the project itself. To seek self-understanding is to begin with the felt absence of such an understanding and to endeavour to guide and train it towards a productive and fulfilling outcome, and to give meaning to that outcome. It is the training of a self capable of accounting for itself, a matter, we might say, of *conscience*.

(4)

Quite a large part of the two hours and ten minutes since the arrival of Obadiah and Dr Slop that passed so slowly for Walter and prompted his disastrous attempt at a Lockean exposition were of course taken up with Obadiah's reading of Yorick's sermon. The sermon took as its text, a verse from the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'For we trust we have a good conscience'. 'Conscience' is a word that, with Locke's *Essay*, is only beginning the long journey that will distinguish it from 'consciousness' and give it a central role in the modern conception of subjectivity and selfhood. It nonetheless can be used to clarify an essential feature of Locke's forensic personhood. If consciousness consolidates personal identity, conscience is the

possibility of an inner and integral judgment. Conscience is a person's holding themselves to account as guilty or innocent, or rather, it is that capacity of being a person that has the right to accuse and judge the person. It is also, as Yorick puts it in the sermon, 'the knowledge which the mind has within herself' of this guilt or innocence. Conscience is not a law unto itself (there is no hint of a categorical imperative) and so no particular moral principles can be derived from it. Conscience counts as no evidence for innate (moral) ideas and so only a philosophy that has broken with innateness can hope to give a satisfactory account of it. In order to negotiate its relationship with the moral principles and the religion that constitute or count as the law, conscience must be considered as a judge and its practice as the practice of judgment. Morality without religion cannot meaningfully comprehend the idea of conscience. Religion without morality elides the difference between conscience and law. There is thus no room for a religion that would permit a priest to serve as one's conscience, no room either for a law or procedure whereby my conscience can be assuaged by penance or confession. A person's conscience is necessarily theirs. To the extent that the consequences of conscience accusing or not accusing a person of wrongdoing can be painful or pleasurable and capable of initiating a new course of action, conscience falls within the scope of uneasiness. Only a self capable of uneasiness, in the sense we have outlined above, can be said to have a conscience. Each of these claims could and would be endorsed by both Locke and Sterne and, to the extent that they are deemed consistent with the author of the sermon in the novel, this part of the novel is straightforwardly Lockean.

Locke recognises that it seems reasonable to assert that a person can only be held responsible for actions they are conscious of having committed. Past actions that cannot be consciously assigned to the person are not actions they can be expected to account for, and it would seem that I cannot be rewarded or punished for something I am not conscious of having done. This raises many problems. If being conscious of being the same person is a

prerequisite for being the same person, Socrates asleep is not the same person as Socrates awake. Locke is willing to concede the point. It may be that a body can be home to more than one person. But it looks as though we do presuppose sameness of personhood when it comes to matters of culpability:

(I)s not a Man Drunk and Sober the same Person, why else is he punish'd for the Fact he commits when drunk, though he is never afterwards conscious of it? Just as much the same Person, as a Man that walks and does other things in his sleep, is the same Person, and is answerable for any mischief he shall do in it. (2, 27, 22, 343)

For practical purposes of criminal law, a court will sometimes need to punish a person even though it cannot be proved that the person has no consciousness of having committed the offence. The claim that I have no consciousness of having done something is synonymous with the claim that my conscience does not accuse me of doing that thing, and that claim by itself is not an acceptable or sufficient defence. Contrast this unavoidable shortcoming of human judgment with God's judgment:

But in the great Day, wherein the Secret of all Hearts shall be laid open, it may be reasonable to think, no one shall be made to answer for what he knows nothing of; but shall receive his Doom, his conscience accusing or excusing him. (2, 27, 22, 344)

At the final judgment, conscience will necessarily concur with the external verdict. If I am not conscious of committing a deed and my conscience is clear, it cannot possibly come about that I will be called to answer for that deed. In the world of human judgment, however, statements about what I am or am not conscious of, and therefore statements about my conscience, cannot suffice. They can always be challenged by the facts.

Yorick's sermon makes a similar move from the apparent certainty of conscience as an inner voice to the practical need for scepticism about people's experiences and reports of that voice. One cannot fail to recognise the validity of one's own conscience.

If a man thinks at all, he cannot well be stranger to the true state of this account; - he must be privy to his own thoughts and desires; - he must remember his past pursuits, and know certainly the true springs and motives which, in general, have governed the actions of his life. ... In other matters we may be deceived by false appearances, but here the mind has all the evidence and facts within herself ... (2, 17, 145)

The impossibility of being deceived by one's conscience also means that one has:

just grounds to believe the judgement thou hast past upon thyself is the judgment of God and nothing else but an anticipation of that righteous sentence which will be pronounced upon thee hereafter by that Being, to whom thou art finally to give an account of thy actions. (2, 17, 154)

If the voice of conscience is the inner manifestation of the voice of God, then any accusation made by that voice is valid. Yorick exempts cases of hypochondria and melancholy.

Assuming I am not morbidly seeking guilt, then from any prick of guilt-inducing conscience, I must infer that I am guilty. But, Yorick continues, 'the converse of the proposition will not hold true; - - namely that whenever there is guilt the conscience must accuse; and if it does not, that a man is therefore innocent' (2, 17, 148). Nothing about the lack of guilt is entailed by the absence of conscience. Why not? Yorick's answer is not a philosophical one. Instead he notes the prevalence of people who have done terrible things and suffered no remorse or guilt. He contrasts David's feeling of guilt after cutting Saul's robe as he slept in the cave with his complete lack of any such feeling after arranging the death of Bathsheba's husband Uriah. It is simply a fact that guilty people are often free of any troubled or guilty conscience.

How then are to understand the verse 'For we trust we have a good conscience'?

Yorick's sermon advises us to be suspicious of any sort of particularism in our talk about conscience:

When a man tells you in any particular instances, -- That such a thing goes *against* his conscience, - always believe he means exactly the same thing as when he tells you such a thing goes *against* his stomach; - a present want of appetite being generally the cause of both. In a word, - trust that man in nothing, who has not a CONSCIENCE in everything. (2, 17, 164)

Just as Locke discouraged us from giving a special moral or epistemic status to statements about conscience and consciousness when reporting on our actions, so Yorick suggests particularist conscience talk be analysed and treated in the same way we would analyse and treat talk of any other likes, dislikes, and preferences. If 'conscience' is to be meaningful, nothing and no aspect of a human life is to be judged as being beyond its remit. But how could we possibly discern the presence of goodness and a good conscience in these circumstances? For Yorick, there is only one answer: by their fruits you shall know them. In the end, there are the things we say and do, produce and achieve in the world. All there is, in the end, is the good we have done or not done. And Locke would concur.

Were we comparing Locke's *Essay* with a sermon preached by Sterne, there would be little more to add. Sterne's Lockeanism or at least his indebtedness to Locke is clear. But the comparison is not between two pieces of non-fiction, a sermon and a work of philosophy, but between Locke's *Essay* and Sterne's novel, and specifically here between the *Essay* on the one hand and a sermon *in* the novel on the other. What can we say about that? Tristram tells us that there are two main reasons for including the sermon, one to try to do justice to Yorick so that he might finally rest in peace (and putting an end to the rumour that Yorick is still at large), and the second to generate interest in Yorick's sermons, several others being available. Sterne derives some metafictional amusement from the shared identity of the sermon read out by Obadiah and the sermon preached by Sterne in York, but the more interesting and difficult point centres on the differences between the straightforward Lockeanism of Sterne's sermon outside the fiction (the novel) and the consequences for that Lockeanism in the fictionalised performing of the sermon in the wider context of the novel.

Let us note some of the telling differences the novel might be said to make to a reading of the sermon: (a) Yorick and the sermon, the sin of religious pride is exemplified by the person who identifies their religion with their good conscience, offering the former as evidence of the latter. Such a person insists that 'I am truly religious' or 'I am of the true religion' entails 'I have a good conscience'. For Tristram and his 'life and opinions', the part of the proud religious is played by the unlikely figure of Dr Slop. Interestingly Dr Slop's falling asleep during the reading of the sermon is presented by Tristram as just as much an act of interruption as anything he actually says and so stands as something he might be expected to have to answer for. (Compare the sense and quality of his sleeping with that of Walter and Toby.); (b) For Yorick and the sermon, we are instructed to think of conscience as a British judge, interpreting rather than making the law, and the image is benign and respectful. Tristram's writing, by contrast, frequently lampoons and berates those who would judge. He sometimes imagines his readers as judges and proclaims an indifference to their verdict or interpretation; (c) For the sermon, as for Locke's *Essay*, at least in Tristram or Sterne's eyes, the stress must fall on judgment. For the novel and its 'author's preface', there can be no (human) judgment without wit; (d) For Yorick, the genre of the sermon suffices for a lesson in the understanding of conscience. For Tristram, the sermon and its lesson must risk the same interruptions and indignities as any other piece of writing, any other communication; (e) For Yorick's sermon, the judgment that conscience eschews particularism, can be offered as a general moral and religious lesson, and issued in a general judgment. In the context of the novel, and in Tristram's hands, that lesson is returned to the particular demands and needs of particular characters in a particular house and at a particular time (near to the hour of Tristram's birth), and the general judgment is compromised and claimed by the inevitable particularity and contingency of wit.

Each of these contrasts indicates a way in which the Lockeanism of the non-fictional sermon is altered or tempered in the novel. But given the focus of our investigations here, there are perhaps two more significant differences. Firstly, the implication of Yorick's sermon is that conscience can never allay uneasiness and can never avoid the language of will, desire, and appetite that a Lockean uneasiness necessarily informs. The implication of Tristram's and Sterne's re-framing of the sermon and so the implication of the fictionalising of the sermon, however, is surely that the uneasiness spreads from Yorick to his acquaintances, from Walter and Toby to Tristram, and from Tristram to all his characters and to all his fictional readers, and from his non-fictional author to us, the non-fictional readers. The 'uneasiness' mentioned in the letter to Rockingham that works as a spur for the writing of the novel is echoed, in the novel, by the felt absences that motivate and frustrate Tristram and each of his characters: the felt absence and the concomitant uneasiness in the face of the absence of, among so many other things, a brother, a father, a companion, a capacity to begin and to conclude well, a final determinate judgment.

Secondly and finally, in both the *Essay* and the novel, use is made of the day of the last judgment. Yorick's sermon cites it in order to underscore the confidence we ought to have in the inner divine judgment we discern as conscience. Locke mentions it in order to show how it will only be on that day that conscience will coincide with a foolproof or absolute self-evidence. The image of the last judgment nevertheless has an authority or a resonance in the reading of the sermon that is lacking or unnecessary in the *Essay*. If a good conscience is to be a conscience in and for everything, then on the last day one will be obliged to give an account of that everything. To present, for final judgment, a life, a complete individual life. Tristram inserts the sermon into his account of his life, an account rendered impossible by the demand he (his conscience?) has made of him. Nothing is to be omitted. Locke's solution was to tell the development of an abstract individual, an individual

who could be any one, any *person*. But such an abstraction could never be a *literary* or *fictional* solution. It could never succeed in a book where the stress falls as much on the limits of the fiction (Sterne's limits) as the limits in the fiction (Tristram's limits). In the novel, we are not only shown the frustrations of a particular attempt to achieve self-understanding, but also how to read and empathise with those frustrations as they arise inevitably in the *Essay* itself when the *Essay* is mentioned, cited, and implicated in the novel by both Sterne and Tristram.

(4)

An understanding, for example a human understanding, in search of self-understanding is perhaps necessarily and at least for as long as the search continues an uneasy one. Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* offers both a description of this search and an account of the contents of the sought for understanding. It shows us what self-understanding must be in order for its absence to be felt as an uneasiness, but also what it must be in order for self-understanding to be possible, and for Locke it is possible. Sterne's representations of the 'successions of uneasinesses' that are Toby, Walter, and Tristram can themselves be read as a contribution to human understanding and to the dilemmas befalling those inclined or disinclined to seek it. Read in such a way, they draw attention to this feature of Locke's *Essay*. Uneasiness can be taken as naming a phenomenon or state that Leibniz, Hume, and Locke can each recognise and describe. For Leibniz, it is the weighted mechanism that ensures motion as psychically and physically balanced, for Hume and Locke, the ordinary feature of a life and a self that can be understood solely from and in terms of experience. For Leibniz, the balance-obtaining lack of balance that is a human life in motion is underwritten by the principles of reason. And for Hume, the unavoidability of uneasiness, the fact that such a state characterises our way of negotiating ourselves cognitively and morally (theoretically

and practically) in the world, means that we will not and cannot find necessity, a law or principle that could extend from within us to the entire universe. For neither of these philosophers does uneasiness pose a philosophical difficulty. Either, with Leibniz, it can be understood according to the relevant a priori principles, or, with Hume, it is evidence that we ought to give up looking for a metaphysical understanding. Locke is the only one whose investigations into the uneasiness of human understanding insist on both accepting its unavoidability and insisting that necessity, necessary truth, and necessary goodness, are within the grasp of human understanding. To understand that we need to understand ourselves is compatible with an access to the universal. But the self or individual that seeks such understanding and so, from the first, is revealed in and as an uneasiness must be construed, also from the first, as much morally and theologically as cognitively. So construed it can think of itself and its life as matters for appropriate recall and judgement, something to be answered and taken responsibility for. Doubtless there are many Leibnizian and Humean arguments to be raised against the Lockean account but that has not been our concern here. This Lockean acceptance of uneasiness is the philosophical conception of a life to which Sterne's novel remains closest. It is the commitments of such a conception that extend from the *Essay* to the novel and that, on one reading at least, the novel helps us to recognise in the *Essay*.

¹ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne, Vols. 1-2, *The Text*, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978, 1984), 6, 40, 570.

² Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, translated by Mary Gregor, Paul Guyer, Robert B. Loudon, Holly Wilson, Allen W. Wood, Günter Zöllner, and Arnold Zweig (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 339.

³ For a discussion of the intriguing contrast between Nietzsche and Thackeray, see Samuel Weber, 'The Critics' Choice' in *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 59-61.

⁴ See Judith Hawley, 'Tristram Shandy, Learned Wit, and Enlightenment Knowledge', in Thomas Keymer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Laurence Sterne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 34-48.

⁵ See Mark Loveridge, *Laurence Sterne and the Argument about Design* (London and Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1982) 142ff; Lila Graves, 'Locke's "Essay" and Sterne's "Work Itself"', *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 12 (1982), 36-47

⁶ For an interesting attempt to read just such a Wittgensteinian interpretation, see Bernard Harrison, 'The Defence of Wit: Sterne, Locke, and the Particular' in *Inconvenient Fictions: Literature and the limits of Theory*

(Yale University Press, 1991). For a demonstration of some of the often underappreciated subtleties of Locke's (non-solipsistic) treatment of language, see Hannah Dawson, *Locke, Language, and Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007) and 'The Rebellion of Language Against Reason in Early Modern Philosophy' in *Intellectual History Review*, 17:3, 277-290 (2007).

⁷ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter Nidditch (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975), 8.

⁸ G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, translated and edited by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981), 164, 188.

⁹ Cited in Arthur H. Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years* (London, Routledge, 1992), 2.

¹⁰ 'Uneasiness' also appears in Samuel Johnson's *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, where it can seem synonymous with unhappiness and discontent, states that are investigated, re-evaluated, and arguably overcome or at least accepted as the story develops.

¹¹ Recent Locke scholarship has thrown some interesting light on the complexities of his accounts of the person and personal identity. See in particular Galen Strawson, *Locke on Personal Identity: Consciousness and Concernment* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011) and Etienne Balibar, *Identity and Difference: John Locke and the Invention of Consciousness*, edited by Stella Sandford and translated by Warren Montag (London, Verso, 2013).

¹² See Michael Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology* (London, Routledge, 1991), two volumes published as a single volume, volume II, 192-195.