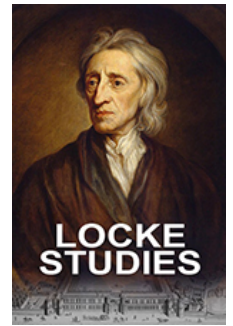


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An Advertisement for the Publication of Abridgements of the Essay concerning Human Understanding and Other Philosophical Writings, 1672-1689, ed. J.R. Milton

Rafael Major et Svetozar Minkov



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Résumé de l'article

As many readers of *Locke Studies* are aware, the long-awaited publication of a scholarly edition of Locke's published *Abrégé* and the transcription of an English "Epitome" of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (*Essay*) should be published in the near future. Both of these documents are tantalizing for aiding in the interpretation of the *Essay* because they are the author's own efforts to clarify the argument and design of his great work prior to publication. This short note briefly summarizes the evidence for the superiority of the "Epitome" over the *Abrégé* and suggests several ways in which a clearer understanding of these documents could contribute to a more accurate reading of the *Essay*.

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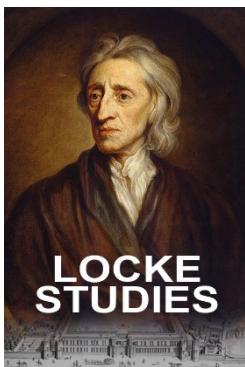
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Abstract:

As many readers of *Locke Studies* are aware, the long-awaited publication of a scholarly edition of Locke's published *Abrégé* and the transcription of an English "Epitome" of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding (Essay)* should be published in the near future. Both of these documents are tantalizing for aiding in the interpretation of the *Essay* because they are the author's own efforts to clarify the argument and design of his great work prior to publication. This short note briefly summarizes the evidence for the superiority of the "Epitome" over the *Abrégé* and suggests several ways in which a clearer understanding of these documents could contribute to a more accurate reading of the *Essay*.

Keywords: *Abrégé*, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, "Epitome", James Hill, John Locke, J. R. Milton, Peter Nidditch, G. A. J. Rogers,

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As many readers of *Locke Studies* are aware, the long-awaited publication of a scholarly edition of Locke's published *Abrégé*¹ and the transcription of an English Epitome² of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding (Essay)* should be published in the near future. Both of these documents are tantalizing for aiding in the interpretation of the *Essay* because they are the author's own efforts to clarify the argument and design of his great work prior to publication. As Peter Nidditch indicates, these distillations of the *Essay* were recognized very early as some of the "most interesting features of the manuscript material"³ by scholars going through the Lovelace collection for the first time. Further, the transcription of the English "Epitome" contains corrections, substitutions, and additions in Locke's own hand which could offer further insight into the philosopher's settled views. Thanks to several decades of effort by Nidditch, G. A. J. Rogers, and J. R. Milton, these documents will finally be available in an authoritative edition compiled according to the canons of modern textual scholarship.⁴

James Hill and J. R. Milton made an extensive comparison of the *Abrégé* and the transcription of the "Epitome" partly in an effort to highlight their neglect in modern secondary literature: "both the French and the English texts of the 'Epitome' deserve very much closer attention than they have hitherto been given."⁵ Relying on either text as a guide does not appear possible, however, due to substantial differences between them. Hill and Milton conclude that both texts must be considered side by side.⁶ This

¹ John Locke, *Abregé d'un ouvrage intitulé Essai philosophique touchant l'entendement* (Amsterdam, 1688). This French text is an "off-print" Locke made of a published version that is substantially identical: "Extrait d'un livre Anglois qui n'est pas encore publié, intitulé Essai philosophique concernant l'entendement, où L'on montre quelle est l'étendue de nos connoissances certaines, & la maniere dont nous y arvenons'," *Bibliothèque universelle et historique* 8, January–March (1688): 49–142. Following James Hill and J. R. Milton, "The Epitome (*Abrégé*) of Locke's *Essay*," in *The Philosophy of John Locke: New Perspectives*, ed. Peter R. Anstey (London: Routledge, 2003), we refer to both texts as the *Abrégé* in what follows.

² Bodleian Library MS Locke c. 28, fols 52–82^{r-v}, in the hand of Sylvester Brounover. The precise date of this document is not certain. According to Hill and Milton, the best serviceable version currently appears in John Locke, "Abstract of the Essay," in *The Life of John Locke with Extracts from His Correspondence, Journals and Common-Place Books*, 2 vols, ed. Peter King (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), 2: 231–93. See Hill and Milton, "The Epitome (*Abrégé*) of Locke's *Essay*," 6. King claimed to have discovered it inserted in "the MS. Copy of the Essay on Human Understanding dated 1671." King, introduction to "Abstract of the Essay," 231, quoted in Hill and Milton, "The Epitome (*Abrégé*) of Locke's *Essay*," 22n16.

³ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), xiin5.

⁴ The new edition will be issued by Oxford University Press.

⁵ Hill and Milton, "The Epitome (*Abrégé*) of Locke's *Essay*," 21.

⁶ Given the evidence they adduce, the *Abrégé* might be slightly more authoritative because it appears to be composed at a later date with significant excerpts from Draft C of the *Essay*.

conclusion, however, ignores unambiguous evidence from Locke's correspondence that an English "rough draught" is superior. The French text, which is significantly longer than the available English version, appears to obscure, rather than clarify Locke's view of the *Essay*. Discerning the precise relationship between the two early documents is important, but less important and far less urgent than understanding the transcription of the English "Epitome." After briefly summarizing the evidence for the superiority of the "Epitome," we suggest several possible discussions that could contribute to a more accurate reading of the *Essay*.

On 31 January 1695 Locke was sent an unsolicited letter from John Wynne concerning the possibility of an abridgement of the *Essay* for the purpose of making it more accessible to university students. As Locke admits in the published "Epistle to the Reader" (and privately to several friends) the text contained many unnecessary repetitions and a leaner version could potentially be an improvement.⁷ Wynne knew a published version of the *Abrégé* existed, but hoped to facilitate a more accessible version to be made available in English.⁸ Locke felt the need to inquire about Wynne's "Character"⁹ before agreeing to collaborate, but he also immediately wrote back the following:

The abstract which which [sic] was published in French in the Bibliotheque universelle of 1688 will neither in its size or designe answer the end you propose, but if the rough draught of it, which I think I have in English some where amongst my papers be of any use to you, you may command it or whatever service I can doe you in any kinde.¹⁰

If this "rough draft" is indeed the Brounower transcription, Locke's concern for the "size and designe" seems clear. The lengthier *Abrégé* is an extension rather than a clarification

⁷ See the "Epistle Dedicatory" (*Essay*, 8, lines 15–29) and, e.g., Locke to Edward Clarke, 21/31 December 1686, Locke to Edward Clarke, 27 January/6 February 1688, and notably Locke to William Molyneux, 20 January 1693: "I confess, I thought some of the explications in my book, too long, though turn'd several ways, to make those abstract notions the easier sink into minds prejudiced in the ordinary way of education, and therefore I was of a mind to contract it," *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 8 vols, ed. E. S. de Beer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976–), 4: 623. And more stridently still, "One thing particularly you will oblige me and the world in, and that is, in paring off some of the superfluous repetitions, which I left in for the sake of illiterate men, and the softer sex, not used to abstract notions or reasonings," Locke to William Molyneux, 26 April 1695, *Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 352.

⁸ John Wynne to Locke, 31 January 1695, *Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 261–62.

⁹ Locke to John Freke and Edward Clarke, 8 February 1695, *Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 265. A positive judgement of Wynne's "Character" was given by John Toland. John Freke to Locke, 29 March 1695, *Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 318.

¹⁰ Locke to John Wynne, 8 February 1695, *Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 267. De Beer identifies this "rough draught" as Brounower's transcription of the "Epitome".

of the English Abstract.¹¹ Further, the sections that were added to the French translation by Le Clerc are potentially misleading with regard to the “designe” of the argument as a whole.¹² These characterizations regarding the “Epitome” are plausible, but further investigation is necessary. Before additional interpretive weight can be attributed to it, scholars must determine: 1) whether Locke is in fact referring to the Brounower transcription; or 2) whether the Brounower transcription is an accurate copy of a “rough draught” manuscript of Locke’s that is now lost. The only certainty at this point is Locke’s assessment of the *Abrégé* compared to a shorter English version.

We have been referring to the Brounower text as a “transcription” based on the evidence suggested by Hill and Milton. If, for example, the surviving Brounower text is the manservant’s hurried attempt to capture dictation, it would be less worthy of consideration. As Hill and Milton persuasively show, however, this is highly unlikely. Based on Brounower’s fidelity to Locke’s spelling and the evidence from other manuscripts, they conclude “Locke seldom if ever dictated the material that Brounower copied, and it can be concluded with confidence approaching certainty that Brounower’s copy was made from an earlier manuscript.”¹³ As J. C. Walmsley suggests, the original manuscript was also likely a “unified whole” rather than taken from a collation of sources.¹⁴ The other feature of the existing “Epitome” is the existence of “a fair number of alterations in Locke’s hand.”¹⁵ It appears Locke took the time to read through the transcription for possible errors and revisions. Judging by the variations in ink color in these proposed alterations (the “great majority” in Locke’s hand), Hill and Milton conclude that they were added at different times. Would Locke occupy his time with multiple editing sessions of the Brounower transcription if its accuracy was not of some importance to him? Did he return to the “Epitome” as late as 1695 as he worked with Wynne on editing the latter’s *Abridgement* of the *Essay*? These questions seem important, and the forthcoming *Abridgements of the Essay concerning Human Understanding and Other Philosophical Writings, 1672–1689* will make their consideration possible for a wider audience of scholars for the first time.

Before suggesting some other discussion points, we would like to offer a tentative speculation on the fate of the original “Epitome” manuscript in Locke’s own hand. One possibility that has not been considered in depth was its importance for securing the approval and public blessing of Lord Pembroke. As is well known, the two men were long-

¹¹ The “Epitome” is approximately 14,000 words, and the *Abrégé* is 20,000; see Hill and Milton, “The Epitome (*Abrégé*) of Locke’s *Essay*,” 6.

¹² The most striking addition is an exponential expansion of Locke’s proof of the existence of God (IV.10). The *Abrégé* also contains eleven additional chapters in Book II and “other additions and alterations, some of considerable importance.” See Hill and Milton, “The Epitome (*Abrégé*) of Locke’s *Essay*,” 6–11.

¹³ Hill and Milton, “The Epitome (*Abrégé*) of Locke’s *Essay*,” 4.

¹⁴ J. C. Walmsley, “Dating the ‘Epitome’ of the *Essay*,” *Locke Studies* 4 (2004): 218–19.

¹⁵ Hill and Milton, “The Epitome (*Abrégé*) of Locke’s *Essay*,” 4.

time correspondents and Locke was increasingly anxious to secure permission for the *Essay*'s "Epistle Dedicatory" as its publication grew nearer. It might have been of some importance not to send a copy for accuracy, and to emphasize Locke's personal effort to keep Pembroke informed of his progress.¹⁶ The precise date Pembroke received an English abstract of the *Essay* is not certain.¹⁷ After reading it, Pembroke was optimistic about Locke's extract of his progress, but more interested in the full publication of the *Essay*. What is certain, however, is the delivery of the *Abrégé* occurred in February 1688. This bound version of the French translation contained a short dedication to Pembroke, but the nobleman was most pleased that the new version "was writt in French."¹⁸ The availability of this translation of Locke's new philosophy to a European audience was a welcome development. According to Hill and Milton, there is no evidence whether Pembroke was sent the English or the French version of the abridgement. Based on Pembroke's reaction to the *Abrégé*, however, we conclude that the earlier version Locke sent him was certainly written in English, and likely in Locke's own hand.

Other points of discussion can be considered more thoroughly when *Abridgements of the Essay concerning Human Understanding and Other Philosophical Writings, 1672–1689* is finally published. Why, for example, is so little attention given to Book I of the *Essay* in either abstract? His denial of innate ideas was so sensational in the *Abrégé* that controversial rumors had already reached England before the *Essay* was published. Did Locke not consider his famous contention to be an essential part of argument and design?¹⁹ More strikingly, why is the proof for the existence of God in the "Epitome" only a single incomplete sentence?²⁰ Was the relevance of the existence of God, in Locke's mind, of much less importance for his argument than currently thought? Finally, Hill and Milton point to the scant treatment in the "Epitome" of *Essay* II.xxi, "Of Power," as a key indication of the insufficiency of the text: "sub-optimal by any standards."²¹ Yet, it was in collaboration with Locke that Wynne made notable redactions of this same important

¹⁶ When instructing Edward Clarke to deliver a longer draft of the entire *Essay* to Pembroke, Locke instructed him to dispose of all evidence it had originally been intended for another recipient; see Locke to Edward Clarke, 20/30 December 1687, *Correspondence of John Locke*, 3: 322–23.

¹⁷ De Beer identifies Locke's mention of a "litle Manu-script" in August, 1687 as an English version of the *Abrégé*, while Walmsley hypothesizes an earlier date; see *Correspondence of John Locke*, 3: 251n1; Walmsley, "Dating the 'Epitome'," 212.

¹⁸ Edward Clarke to Locke, 2 March 1688, *Correspondence of John Locke*, 3: 389.

¹⁹ Wynne did not think the "first Book" was necessary; see John Wynne to Locke, 30 March 1695, *Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 318–19.

²⁰ The sentence fragment cannot be explained by a missing leaf in the manuscript; see Hill and Milton, "The Epitome (*Abrégé*) of Locke's *Essay*," 22n26 and context.

²¹ Hill and Milton, "The Epitome (*Abrégé*) of Locke's *Essay*," 14.

chapter.²² Could the “Epitome’s” scant treatment of II.xxi paradoxically be a clearer picture of Locke’s thought because it is so succinct? These issues are surely compounded by the incredible influence of Wynne’s *Abridgement* in transmitting and establishing the influence of the *Essay*.²³

²² John Locke, *An Abridgment of Mr. Locke’s Essay concerning Humane Understanding*, ed. John Wynne (London: A. and J. Churchill, 1696), sigs A3^r-v. Locke’s role in editing Wynne’s *Abridgement* of the *Essay* is underappreciated, partially due to Locke’s request to minimize his role. See John Wynne to Locke, 25 June 1695: “I have struck out that part of my Epistle, which left disposal of it to you,” *Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 392.

²³ For the popularity of the *Abridgement*, see *Biographia Britannica: Or, The Lives of the Most Eminent Persons who Have Flourished in Great Britain and Ireland, from the Earliest Ages, Down to the Present Times*, 5th vol., ed. William Oldys (London: 1747), s.v. “Locke”; Jean S. Yolton, *John Locke: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1998), 155–69.

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