

## ***The Christian Virtuoso* and John Locke**

In 1681 John Locke read and commented upon a manuscript by Robert Boyle. Locke's notes on this manuscript are found in MS Locke c. 27, fols. 67-8 and are endorsed '*Boyle Observations on his Treatise 81*'. they were first commented upon by Mario Sina in 1972, who suggested that they might be comments on the published text of *Some Advices About Judging of Things Said to Transcend Reason* (1681).<sup>1</sup> More recently, M.A. Stewart has published the notes, and, while conceding that 'we cannot immediately identify a relevant Boyle manuscript',<sup>2</sup> he suggests that it might well have been a draft of Boyle's *Christian Virtuoso* which was eventually published in 1690-1. Further investigation reveals that this latter suggestion is almost certainly correct, for there is a near perfect match between both the content and sequence of some of Locke's comments and the published text of *the Christian Virtuoso*. The relevant comments and the matches in Boyle's work are reproduced below. The page numbers in the left column refer to Locke's copy of Boyle's manuscript and the references to Boyle's *Christian Virtuoso* in the right column are from volume 5 of the 1772 edition of his *Works*<sup>3</sup>

### **Locke's comments on Boyle's MS**

### **Boyle's *Christian Virtuoso***

p. 25: That experience should confirme to men many things which might seeme very irrational is not strange in natural & civil history . . .

p. 529, ll. 6f.: most rational men scruple not to believe, upon competent testimony, many things, whose truth did no way appear to them by the consideration of the nature of the things themselves, nay, though what is thus believed upon the testimony be so strange, and, setting aside that testimony, would *seem so irrational*, that, antecedently to that testimony, . . . (ll. 13f.) concerning things merely natural or civil, whereof of human reason is held to be a proper judge: . . .

p. 27: In theologicall experience noe body can question the testimony of god . .

p. 529, ll. 23f.: we ought, of all the things that can be recommended to us by testimony, to receive those of the highest degree of assent, that are taught us by God, . . .

p. 33: Our reposeing of trust in the testimony of inspired persons is not the trust of one ...

p. 530, l. 11: repose a great deal of trust in the testimony of inspired persons, such as Christ and his apostles . . .

p. 35: Navigators to America seting aside reason may by the experience of others be confirmed or confuted in their seeming irrational relations, but the assertions of pretenders to inspiration can only be examind by reason.

p. 530, l. 19: as the consulting with navigators and travellers to *America* . . .

There are two further matches of less certain status. The first is a verbal correction:

p. 27: Involve leg: contain

p. 529, l. 18: involve

While the suggested correction seems to fit the pagination of the manuscript that Locke was working on, the word 'contein' is hardly a suitable substitute for 'involve'. Boyle is speaking of those things which 'involve or require such a knowledge of what is infinite, as much passes the reach of our limited intellects'. It may be that Boyle has reworked the sentence here or that Locke is referring to a sentence that was omitted from the published version. It is clear from other of Locke's comments that Boyle did indeed excise some material from the draft that he gave to Locke, for Locke refers to an illustration about a physician and his patient and to 'the instance of diamonds as put in the former page', neither of which appear in the published version.

The second uncertain match is a suggested addition to a sentence:

p. 69: Unassisted. 1. nor could ever have placep. 532, ll. 12f.: the knowledge our virtuoso may be have of in the settled constitution of the universe what cannot be justly expected or pretended from the without the extraordinary interposition of a mechanical powers of matter, will enable him to discern, divine power. that divers things are not produceable by them, without the intervention of an intelligent superior power.

If Locke's draft read 'that divers things are not produceable by them unassisted', it may well be that Boyle, while changing the wording, paid heed to Locke's suggestion. While this is only conjecture, it would establish a further connection between Boyle and Locke, viz. that not only did Boyle solicit comments from Locke, but that he took receipt of those comments and gave them due consideration.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mario Sina, 'Testi teologico-filosofici Lockiani dal ms. Locke c. 27', *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica*, 64 (1972), 54-75.

<sup>2</sup> M.A. Stewart, 'Locke's "Observations" on Boyle', *The Locke Newsletter*, 24 (1993), 21-34, on p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, ed. Thomas Birch, (2nd edn., 6 vols, London, 1772).