

## Toland and Locke in the Leibniz-Burnett Correspondence

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Thomas Burnett of Kemnay (1656-1729), who corresponded with Leibniz for several years, is perhaps best known to historians of philosophy as one of those via whom Leibniz tried to communicate with Locke.<sup>1</sup> But he was more generally a source of intellectual news for Leibniz — principally about new work in English, but also about events wherever Burnett’s travels took him.<sup>2</sup> Among other correspondence, between November 1695 and September 1701 Burnett wrote about four letters a year to Leibniz from England, almost all from London.<sup>3</sup> He was in this way a major source of information for Leibniz about Locke and the English intellectual debates in which Locke was participating.

Thinking about that context for Locke’s work, and Burnett’s presentation of it, suggests a series of questions. How did Burnett present Locke to Leibniz? How did Locke appear to Leibniz, given his reading of Burnett? And in either case, is the answer ‘as a religiously suspect

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<sup>1</sup> There is a short biography of Burnett in Burnett (1901, 119-25). This Thomas Burnett should not be confused with the Thomas Burnet (c1635-1715) who wrote the *Telluris Theoria Sacra*. Burnet is often said to have written “Remarks”, “Second Remarks”, and “Third Remarks” on Locke’s *Essay*, but that view has been challenged by Walmsley, Craig, and Burrows (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Over 100 letters to and from Burnett have been published. These include, with the progress of series 1 of the Academy edition of Leibniz, increasingly many of the letters between him and Leibniz. Thus their exchange is noticeably more accessible than it had been until recently, when much of it was available only in the abbreviated version published by Gerhardt, or in an occasional letter published by Klopp. Gerhardt apparently did not think much of Burnett — and even less of his French, which he found “wenig correct und sehr unorthographisch” (G 3.153). The largest part of Burnett’s published correspondence outside that with Leibniz is that with Catherine Trotter (Trotter 1851, 2.153-207). Trotter’s correspondent is identified there as “George Burnet of Kemnay”, but internal evidence shows this is the same Burnett who was corresponding with Leibniz. E.S. de Beer, the editor of Locke’s correspondence, agrees with the identification (Locke 1976-89, 6.60). Parts of Burnett’s correspondence have also been published in Burnett (1901, 199-25), Jolley (1984, 43-4), Kemble (1851, 191-6), Locke (1976-89, letters 2228, 2709, 2710, 2724A), and Riley (2003).

<sup>3</sup> One letter (A 1.16.134) was addressed from Bath and another (A 1.17.201) from Oxford.

person’, or indeed ‘as a Socinian’?<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Jolley, discussing the Burnett correspondence and the reception of Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity*, argues that “the context in which Leibniz learned about Locke was primarily a theological one” and Leibniz did not, as he might have done, react “with simple indifference to the rumours which were current in England about Locke’s theological heterodoxy” (Jolley 1984, 52).<sup>5</sup> Much of this paper is concerned with showing the varied contexts in which Burnett presented Locke to Leibniz. They were, I argue against Jolley, far from overwhelmingly theological.<sup>6</sup> I focus on the correspondence between Leibniz and Burnett — not the only relevant part of the context, but a very important part. In this correspondence, did Leibniz learn about Locke in a primarily theological context? Did Burnett describe Locke and his English context in a way that made Leibniz suspicious of Locke’s religious views?

The paper also considers the presentation and reception of another figure in the correspondence: the sometime Lockean, and genuinely religiously controversial figure, John Toland. Toland was, as Burnett put it, “more suspected for his political and religious principles

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Socinian’ brings with it a good deal of baggage and complexity. On Socinianism in this context, see Marshall (2000). In this paper I consider whether the content of Locke’s religious views would have seemed notably unorthodox and problematic to Leibniz, without asking whether that potential appearance merits being called Socinian.

<sup>5</sup> Bennett (1986) expresses doubts about related aspects of Jolley’s reading. In contrast to Jolley, (though not focusing on the Leibniz-Burnett correspondence) Maria Rosa Antognazza argues that though Leibniz and Locke disagreed on some religious matters, and “[a]lthough in the very last years of his life Leibniz wrote that Locke had inclined towards Socinianism, this was not due to his views on the Trinity but to questions of natural theology ... and to the problem of the immortality of the soul” (Antognazza 2008, 134).

<sup>6</sup> Locke did not exist or argue in a purely English context, isolated from discussions elsewhere. And Leibniz would certainly not just have thought of him as part of an English debate, but also in a broader one. Nevertheless, learning about the English context was part of learning about Locke and what he was trying to do. And much as debates were not purely local or national, there were local networks and focuses of discussion – there are such things still, even with long-distance communication being much easier.

than anyone else in England” (Burnett to Leibniz, 2 September 1701, A 1.20.247, p.404.).<sup>7</sup>

Toland is an interesting figure in his own right, and we might also learn something about Burnett’s portrayal of Locke by contrasting it with the way he portrays an undoubtedly controversial figure.

## 1. Toland

I begin, then, by considering the presentation and reception of Toland. I do this by looking at how Burnett and Leibniz talked about three of Toland’s works: *Christianity not Mysterious*, his *Life of Milton*, and *Anglia libera*.<sup>8</sup>

*Christianity not Mysterious* is perhaps Toland’s most famous book these days, because of its associations with Locke and Locke’s complaints that Stillingfleet was unfairly accusing him of errors that Toland had made.<sup>9</sup> It is exactly the sort of book — somewhat philosophical, and a topic of debate — that Burnett often mentioned to Leibniz. Leibniz was aware of *Christianity not Mysterious*, but the book’s appearances in this correspondence are minimal, and it seems to have taken Leibniz some time to engage in detail with it. Burnett mentioned *Christianity not Mysterious* to Leibniz in a letter of 7 February 1698, noting that it had been condemned in Ireland (A 1.15.203). Leibniz, in a letter to Burnett of 30 January 1699, noted that Stillingfleet was alarmed by what Toland did with ideas from the *Essay* (A 1.16.506, p.508). Leibniz’s written comments

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<sup>7</sup> Dates in this paper are given in new style, with the year beginning on the first of January. Most references are to the Academy edition of Leibniz’s work, using the abbreviation ‘A’ followed by series, volume, and item numbers. Page numbers are also indicated, where needed, to identify particular passages more precisely.

<sup>8</sup> For broader accounts of Toland and his work, see Champion (2003), Dagron (2009), Daniel (1984), and Sullivan (1992).

<sup>9</sup> Champion (2003, 70) provides details of the work’s early editions. More generally, Champion (2003, 69-89) considers the reception of *Christianity not Mysterious*.

on Toland's book, the "Annotatiunculæ", are then dated 8 August 1701.<sup>10</sup> Toland was in Hanover that month, for the presentation of the Act of Settlement to the Electress Sophia. As Leibniz said to Burnett on 24 February 1702, "I took the liberty of giving him in writing my reflections on his *Christianity not Mysterious*, which he took in good part" (A 1.20.467, p.809).<sup>11</sup>

Around the same time, Burnett drew Leibniz's attention to another of Toland's works, his 1698 life of John Milton, the poet and republican thinker.<sup>12</sup> The *Life* was part of a much broader project of republishing the works of 'republican' figures of the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup> This was — in contrast to *Christianity not Mysterious* — a book that Leibniz read quite quickly, and offered critical comments on. Burnett told Leibniz of the book in a letter on 9 July 1699. Leibniz offered his critical discussion in a letter to Burnett of 12 February 1700 (A.1.18.211).<sup>14</sup>

Toland continued here to associate his thought with Locke's. In *Christianity not Mysterious* this was done by applying Lockean epistemological views. In the *Life of Milton* it was done by direct praise of Locke's philosophy. Toland says indeed that Locke,

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<sup>10</sup> "Annotatiunculæ subitaneæ ad librum de Christianismo Mysteriis carente: Conscriptæ 8 Augusti 1701", in Toland (1726). The text is on pages 60-76 of the appendices in volume 2.

<sup>11</sup> "j'ay pris la liberté de luy communiquer par escrit mes reflexions sur son Christianisme sans Mystere qu'il prit en bonne part" (A 1.20.467, p.809).

<sup>12</sup> In this paper I refer to the 1699 London edition, rather than the 1698 Amsterdam one.

<sup>13</sup> As well as being published as a freestanding book, the *Life* was also published as an introduction to an edition of Milton's works. This edition, like the related editions of the works of Harrington and others, served as a way to take ideas from earlier debates and enter them into — indeed, make use of them in — contemporary debates. That these works are described as republican does not mean they were used as part of a push to get rid of the monarchy. Rather, the project — whether for pragmatic or principled reasons — involved arguing for the maintenance of the monarchy and the Protestant succession, along with certain sorts of liberty and (Protestant) toleration. On this project, see chapter 4 of Champion (2003).

<sup>14</sup> Later that year, Burnett mentioned Toland's *Amyntor*, which defended the *Life of Milton*, in a letter to Leibniz of 20 October 1700. Leibniz's letter to Burnett of 18 July 1701 makes reference back to these issues, but is also concerned with the issues discussed in the following section.

in his Book of *Human Understanding* must be confest to be the greatest Philosopher after CICERO in the Universe; for he's throly acquainted with human Nature, well vers'd in the useful Affairs of the World, a great Master of Eloquence (Qualities in which the Roman Consul excel'd) and like him also a hearty lover of his Country, as appears by his Treatises of *Government* and *Education*, not inferior in their kind to the divinest Pieces of TULLY (Toland 1699, 147).

Leibniz's response to the *Life* was a qualified one: "it is a nice piece", he said, "But...".<sup>15</sup> He singled out two issues for criticism. First, he disapproved of the manner in which Toland discussed Usserius and Salmasius.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, he found Toland sometimes too favourable to the "disorders" of Milton's time.

Burnett began to describe his own view of Toland in more detail in a letter to Leibniz of 1 December 1700, which mentions Toland's publication of an edition of Harrington's works (A 1.19.131). This was another part of the republican publishing project.<sup>17</sup> Mention of this work caused Burnett to comment on Toland: he is knowledgeable, and writes in a good lively style,

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<sup>15</sup> "La vie de Milton est une belle piece. Mais je voudrois qu'on en eût retranché les endroits où il est parlé avec quelque espece de mepris de deux grands hommes Usserius et Salmasius, item les endroits qui paroissent trop favorables aux desordres du temps de Milton" (A 1.18.211, p.386). There is a near-identical comment on p.378 in another version of the letter.

<sup>16</sup> Toland's discussed Milton's *Prelatical Episcopacy* as a response to the work of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, commenting that "USHER's chief Talent lying in much reading, and being a great Editor and Admirer of old Writings, MILTON shews the Insufficiency, Inconveniency and Impiety of this method to establish any part of Christianity" (Toland 1699, 30). Toland also discussed Milton's response to Salmasius's *Defensio regia pro Carolo I*, commenting that Salmasius "gave a true Demonstration that mere Scholars, when they meddle with any thing that requires Reasoning or Thought, are but mere Asses" (96). Though Toland says he does not "pretend wholly to excuse" (98) the way Milton treated Salmasius, he does conclude – after, among other things, criticisms of Queen Christina's organization of the Swedish court (103) – that "in the judgment of all *Europe*, MILTON got infinitely the better of SALMASIUS" (105).

<sup>17</sup> Harrington, whose *Oceana* had first been published in 1656, had died in 1680.

“but his spirit is almost always badly employed”.<sup>18</sup> The sort of mixed impression Leibniz had of Toland’s book, Burnett repeated as an impression of his character.<sup>19</sup>

A third work of Toland’s that appears in Burnett’s correspondence with Leibniz is *Anglia libera*. I begin here with a letter that Leibniz knew about, but which was not addressed to him, one written by Burnett to the Electress Sophia on 23 June 1701. This was written on the occasion of the Act of Settlement, which settled the succession of the English throne on Sophia and her heirs — the Protestant succession mentioned above — and is mostly about that. It also contains a note about Toland. Toland was not, Burnett says, the author of a controversial work attributed to him.<sup>20</sup> But Toland had told Burnett about something he was writing, with the encouragement of senior governmental figure, supporting the actual resolution of the succession issue (Klopp 8.265-6). This would be the work that was published as *Anglia libera*.<sup>21</sup>

Burnett wrote to Leibniz the next day, and his letter (A 1.20.155) contains further comments on Toland’s knowledge and character, Burnett seeming to think Leibniz might come across Toland in person. Again the commentary is mixed. Burnett is not himself hostile about Toland, but he does report that others are:

There’s no-one with better knowledge of the present state of England, the secret history of its parties, and political and historical books ... I find him very civil to me in particular, very reasonable in his discourse, and neither atheist nor republican. Perhaps,

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<sup>18</sup> “[M]ais son esprit êt presque toujours mal employé” (p.270).

<sup>19</sup> Locke might have had a similar view (Champion 2003, 73-5)

<sup>20</sup> The A editors identify this as *Limitations for the next foreign successor, or new Saxon race* (A 1.20, p.282.)

<sup>21</sup> There too, there are Lockean themes (Champion 2003, 120-1; Lurbe 2009).

in a young man, taking the liberty of being so outspoken in religion and politics has looked like one or the other.<sup>22</sup>

So Toland is knowledgeable, but strongly opinionated in a way that might be misunderstood as atheist or republican. Following up on these comments of Burnett's, Leibniz responds, evaluating Toland in much the same way. Recalling his thoughts on Toland's *Life of Milton*, Leibniz describes Toland as knowledgeable and spirited, but needing a little more moderation (18 July 1701, A 1.20.185, p.282).

Burnett's comments on Toland continued. A letter to Leibniz of 2 September 1701 (A 1.20.247) involves a discussion of Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious*, his private beliefs, politics, etc., that is notable for its length (pp.402-4). Among these comments, Burnett notes that Toland is for the monarchy in its current form — but because, roughly, republicans don't currently see a chance of getting a better form of government. Towards the end, Burnett reverts to his stance of reporting, and not wholeheartedly affirming, but also not denying, the negative things said about Toland: "These things I am writing to you ... I don't say that I positively affirm them, but that I presume them, and that Mr. Toland is more suspected for his political and religious principles than anyone else in England".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "il n'y a persone qui sait [mieux] l'état present del Engleterre, ni l'histoire secrete de toutes parties que lui, come aussi des livres politiques et historiques ... Je le trouve toujours fort civil a moy en particulier, fort raisonnable dans son discours, ny Athé, ni republicain. peutêtre un[e] liberte dans un jeun home de s'opposer trop hardiment aux sentiments outrés dans la religion, et dans la politique l'a fait passer pour l'un et l'autre" (Burnett to Leibniz, 24 June 1701, A 1.20.155, pp.232-3).

<sup>23</sup> "Al egard de tout ce que je Vous écris...je ne vous dis que j'affirme ces choses positivement, mais que je les presume, et que Mons<sup>r</sup> Toland êt plus suspecte pour ses principes della politique et della religeone touts deux qu'aucun autre en Engleterre" (pp.403-4). In his letter to Burnett of 24 February 1702 (A 1.20.467), Leibniz wonders whether Toland has been sent to find out how the Hanoverians govern, and then says he doesn't know if Toland will publish an account of his trip (p.810) – something Toland ultimately did (Toland 1705). Later in that same letter, Leibniz mentions two publications of Toland's, one of which has political implications, and about which about Leibniz clearly wishes people in Hanover had been consulted (p.816).

The above shows us something of how the ever-controversial Toland appears in the correspondence. How does this help us think about Locke, and how he was presented to and understood by Leibniz?

First, we see Burnett presenting works of Toland's in which he associates his views with Locke's. But there is no reason to think that Leibniz did not see what was going on here, that Toland was appropriating and using parts of Locke's philosophy for his own purposes. There is no sign of Leibniz thinking that, for example, the views of *Christianity not Mysterious* are actually Locke's, even if they do rely on Lockean epistemological views. So there is nothing here to show Locke himself as particularly radical, nor to show Leibniz understanding him in that way.

Secondly, we see both Burnett and Leibniz expressing concerns about Toland. They were both measured in their expression: one criticism voiced by both was a wish that Toland be more moderate, and not push things so far.<sup>24</sup> But there certainly was criticism. Perhaps there was more from Leibniz than from Burnett, who was usually of a reporter than a critic in his correspondence with Leibniz. Burnett is critical though, and his portrayal of Locke differs, as we shall see. Whereas Burnett tried to explain why Toland was criticized, in Locke's case he said the criticism was mistaken.

## 2. Locke

### 2a. Locke's *Essay* and the subsequent exchange with Stillingfleet

What about Locke, and the way he looked to Leibniz? As with Toland, we can recognize various ways in which Locke appears in Burnett's correspondence with Leibniz, relating to various works that Locke was the author of — or, indeed, works that Burnett mistakenly thought Locke

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<sup>24</sup> “Il a beaucoup d'esprit, et meme il ne manque pas d'erudition, mais ses sentimens vont trop loin” (A 1.20.467, p.809).



was the author of, as when he identified Damaris Masham's work on the love of God as being by Locke.<sup>25</sup>

Locke does appear in the guise with which philosophers are probably most familiar, as the author of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. However, he is in fact only rarely explicitly connected with the *Essay* in this correspondence, and then perhaps more often by Leibniz than by Burnett. The explanation is simply that Burnett was reporting new publications that people were talking about, and the *Essay* had been published before the correspondence began. Leibniz was of course writing about the *Essay* during the time he was corresponding with Burnett. So, for example, Leibniz's letter to Burnett of 17 March 1696 (A 1.12.309) was sent with a version of Leibniz's "Quelques remarques sur le livre de Mons. Lock intitulé *Essay of Understanding*" (A 6.6, pp.3-9) and subsequent letters consider the distribution of this. The business of establishing communication between Leibniz and Locke was slow, and Burnett was not in a great hurry about it. Later, on 3 December 1703 (A 1.22.412), Leibniz noted to Burnett that the publication of the French translation had led him to read the *Essay* again — this after much of the correspondence, and after Leibniz had done some significant writing about Locke.

Locke's exchange with Stillingfleet is more noticeable on both sides of the correspondence. This is something that Burnett told Leibniz about, that Leibniz paid a fair amount of attention to, and that he wrote comments on — some here, but also in other documents.<sup>26</sup> This is perhaps the best-known part of Leibniz-Burnett exchange.<sup>27</sup> One might be tempted to think that the exchange about Locke and Stillingfleet is, if we're interested in Locke, the main thing of interest in the Leibniz-Burnett correspondence. There is a much more going

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<sup>25</sup> "Je vous envoya allors pour Madame l'Electrice Mons<sup>r</sup> Locke *upon the Love of God*" (A 1.16.413, p.679), referring apparently to Masham's 1696 *Discourse concerning the Love of God*.

<sup>26</sup> See most obviously the Preface to the *New Essays*, but also earlier documents printed in A 6.6.

<sup>27</sup> Note for example the extracts translated at Leibniz (1989, 284-90).

on though. I want to focus on all the other ways in which Locke shows up in the correspondence, rather than this well-known thing. To do otherwise would involve a considerable risk of distorting the picture of the broader context in which Burnett presented Locke's work.

That said, this aspect of the correspondence does have a notable feature. Here, as in the *New Essays* and other related texts, we see Leibniz expressing suspicions about Locke's views on issues that have religious aspects. These suspicions did not derive from something Burnett had written, or from beliefs about Locke's English context. Rather, they come from reading Locke's works (and, granted, Stillingfleet's). Thus, for example, Leibniz noted in a letter to Burnett that "There is another incidental, but rather important question, namely, whether thought is absolutely incompatible with matter. Locke, in his *Essay on Understanding*, book 4, chap. 3, admits that he does not perceive this incompatibility" (A1.16.313; Leibniz 1989, 288).<sup>28</sup> The reason Leibniz thought Locke had dubious views about the soul was that Leibniz read what Locke said about the soul, and thought it was dubious. This is, at any rate, a simple and straightforward explanation that is available to us, and that fits the available evidence.

## 2b. Education, money, and connections with Bentley

Locke's first appearance in Burnett's letters to Leibniz is in a letter of 14 June 1695 that mentions Locke's views on education (A 1.11.343).<sup>29</sup> Leibniz, in his reply of 21 June (A 1.11.348), appears not completely sure that the Locke Burnett mentioned was the Locke who wrote the *Essay*, about which he comments positively. This little exchange continued in a letter

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<sup>28</sup> In that letter Leibniz is more concerned to puzzle out what Locke's view is, than to criticize it. It nevertheless provides a clear example of Leibniz's concern with this aspect of Locke's work.

<sup>29</sup> Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* was first published in 1693, and a third edition was published in 1695.

from Leibniz of 2 December 1695 (A 1.12.136), when Leibniz commented positively on both the *Essay* and the work on education (p.175) — suggesting indeed that he liked the education work better, just because he'd thought more about the other material and had more to disagree with. So this is how Locke first appears — not only is he the author of the *Essay*, he is also the author of an interesting work on education.

Slightly later in the correspondence, Locke appears frequently in another guise, as the author of works on money.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, for an important time in the late 1690s this is a significant way in which Locke was represented. This aspect of the correspondence began in a letter from Burnett to Leibniz of 6 February 1696 (A 1.12.266). Burnett mentioned discussions of Locke's work on money on 14 May 1697 (A 1.14.105). Leibniz commented on 28 May 1697 (A 1.14.132). Burnett sent related books with a letter of 2 August 1697 (A 1.14.223). Leibniz discussed this again on 3 September 1697 (A 1.14.264). And Leibniz discussed money yet again on 30 January 1699 (A 1.16.313), with positive mention of Locke. So Locke the author of the *Essay* was also Locke who had interesting things to say about education, and Locke who had interesting (albeit disputed) things to say about money. This is not some terrible Socinian heretic — this is someone who, like Leibniz himself, had worthwhile things to say about a wide range of topics.

Someone else who is quite prominent in Burnett's letters is Richard Bentley. There are several mentions of his debate with Charles Boyle about the ancientness (or otherwise) of the epistles of Phalaris. There are also related mentions of Bentley's work on Aesop, and a broader fashion for discussing Aesop at the time. These are the debates addressed by Jonathan Swift in his *Battle of the Books*. Bentley was, in a way, a controversial figure. And he was a controversial figure whom Burnett depicted as an associate of Locke's, particularly in letters of mid-1697 (e.g.,

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<sup>30</sup> Locke's writings on money are now collected in Locke (1991).

A 1.14.223). Leibniz, however, is also positive about Bentley (see A 1.14.260). And though Bentley was controversial in the sense that he was involved in a controversy or debate, he was not controversial in a way that bothered Leibniz.<sup>31</sup>

### 2c. Locke's *Two Treatises*

In a letter to Leibniz of 15 October 1698 (A 1.16.134) Burnett introduced three related works.<sup>32</sup>

One was Sydney's recently posthumously published *Discourses Concerning Government*. This, Burnett noted, was intended to reply to Filmer's *Patriarchia*, a book "in favour of the King and the absolute power of the English monarchy".<sup>33</sup> Burnett observed that Locke too was responding to Filmer. Burnett commented positively on both Locke's work and Sydney's, though noting that Sydney was overly constrained by the way in which he follows the structure of Filmer's work. Concluding this little section of the letter, Burnett remembered to introduce the other part of Locke's work, very briefly describing the second treatise, though describing it as the first part of Locke's work. Despite that mention, Burnett appears more interested in thinking about the

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<sup>31</sup> Despite Bentley's Newtonian associations, this aspect of the correspondence does not appear to shed great light on Leibniz's thoughts about English Newtonians. Leibniz did think that Newtonians, as well as Lockeans, were misguided, but he thought they were wrong for different reasons. See the beginning of the published Leibniz-Clarke correspondence: "Natural religion itself, seems to decay (in England) very much. Many will have human souls to be material: others make God himself a corporeal being. Mr Locke, and his followers, are uncertain at least, whether the soul be not material, and naturally perishable. Sir Isaac Newton says, that space is an organ, which God makes use of to perceive things by" (Leibniz 1956, 11). Leibniz sees multiple mistaken groups here. He distinguishes Lockeans and Newtonians as two groups, making two sorts of mistakes (about the soul, and about God's nature and relation to the world).

<sup>32</sup> On Leibniz on the *Two Treatises* more generally, see Jolley (1975).

<sup>33</sup> Filmer, as Burnett puts it, "avoit ecrit un traité en faveur du Roy et della puissance absolue della monarchie engloise d'une maniere fort plausible pour la raisone et pour l'authorité tellement que les cours des Roys Charles y Jacques recoiurent come leur Palladium" (p.228).

debate between Filmer and his critics, than in considering Locke's (now most famous) second treatise.<sup>34</sup>

Leibniz did mention the *Two Treatises* to Burnett, a little over a year later, in a letter of 12 February 1700 (A 1.18.211). A draft of mid-1699 includes a note that Leibniz had not then finished the book (p.380), as well as some brief critical discussion. At any rate, this is another way in which Locke was presented to Leibniz at this time: as the author of a work of political philosophy, directed against Filmer's defence of the absolute power of the monarch. Again there are things one might disagree with — again, indeed, there are things that Leibniz did disagree with — but there is nothing here to suggest the presentation of Locke as disreputable, subversive, or beyond the pale.

#### 2d. The Reasonableness of Christianity

Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity* was published in 1695, though without his name on the cover. This led to a series of exchanges with one John Edwards. Burnett reported these exchanges to Leibniz in a letter of 4 May 1697:

[Locke] hasn't sent you a copy [of his Second Vindication against Edwards], as he hasn't put his name to *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, because the novelty of his manner there might scandalize the clergy, etc, etc. You may not name him in this connection, except

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<sup>34</sup> Note again how earlier works were being re-employed in political discussion. Filmer's *Patriarcha* itself was published posthumously in 1680, but had been written about 40 years before, and Filmer had died in 1653. Sydney's *Discourses* had been written in the two years before his death in 1683. For a reading of Locke that emphasizes the connections between "Locke's political theory" and "the political ideas of the Civil War radicals" see Ashcraft (1980, 431).

sub rosa. An Oxford academic has written against this book, but quite uselessly (so we say) because Locke had already anticipated the objections (A 1.14.105, p.182).<sup>35</sup>

This is not the only mention of criticism of the *Reasonableness* in Burnett's letters. Burnett's letter to Leibniz of 20 October 1700 (A 1.19.132, pp.274-5) mentions criticism of Locke's work by one Nathaniel Taylor, a Presbyterian minister in London.<sup>36</sup> If there is somewhere in Burnett's letters to Leibniz where Locke is portrayed as religiously dubious, it should be here or hereabouts. But is it here?

Burnett did acknowledge that some people associated Locke with Socinianism, but he thought they were wrong: "His [Locke's] misfortune is to be suspected of Socinianism in which I believe one does him wrong".<sup>37</sup> Jolley seems, however, to have a different take on this issue. He quotes a letter in which Burnett reports some remarks of Gastrell's to Locke, saying that Socinians, deists, atheists, and freethinkers admired Locke, and he ought to disavow them.<sup>38</sup> Burnett then remarks that Gastrell nevertheless "esteems him [Locke] highly", and that Leibniz "can do the same without complimenting him as much as you did the late M. Pellisson".<sup>39</sup> Jolley claims that "Such a passage suggests that, in Burnett's view, one of the primary aims of Leibniz's critique would be to defend orthodox theology against Locke's attacks", but this suggestion is not strongly supported by the passage quoted. Burnett was aware that Socinians and other dubious

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<sup>35</sup> "Il n'a vous pas envoyé un exemplaire, par ce que il ne mêt son nom à cet argument *The reasonableness of the christian religion*, car le nouveauté de sa maniere là dedans, pourroit scandalizer le clergé etc. etc. Vous ne devez pas le nomer sur cette matiere, mais *sub rosa*. Un Accademicien d'Oxford a écrit contre son livre dont je vous parle tout à cette heure, mais fort inutilement (à ce qu'on dit) Mons<sup>r</sup> L. ayant preoccupé ces objections lui meme" (p.182). Locke's *Vindications of the Reasonableness* are now collected in Locke (2012).

<sup>36</sup> Taylor (1700).

<sup>37</sup> That's Leibniz's extract from a letter of Burnett's to Jablonski, 29 January 1699, quoting the translation of Jolley (1984, 43).

<sup>38</sup> This is Burnett's letter to Leibniz of 25 January 1704 (A 1.23.42). Francis Gastrell had published *Some Considerations Concerning the Trinity* (which is mentioned by Burnett in this letter) in 1696. He became bishop of Chester in 1714.

<sup>39</sup> Jolley (1984, 44) quoting Burnett's letter to Leibniz of 25 January 1704 (A 1.23.42, p.61).

characters associated their views with Locke's — think of Toland here. Perhaps Burnett wished, with Gastrell, that Locke would do more to disassociate himself from such characters. But Burnett did not endorse the view that Locke himself was one of these dubious characters. That would have been inconsistent with the esteem for Locke he attributed to Gastrell and recommended to Leibniz. This discussion seems entirely consistent with Burnett's other remark: he knew that people suspected Locke of Socinianism, but thought this was wrong.

Turning back to the *Reasonableness* itself, it is difficult to tell what Leibniz thought of it at this point. Later on, he did mention it in a 1705 letter to Masham, but his remarks there are rather bland.<sup>40</sup> Jolley (1984, 48-9) argues that Leibniz's lack of detailed comment is not a sign of “indifference”, but rather was “probably” a way of helping keep Locke's identity hidden, and thus indirectly a way of helping keep Locke happy, and perhaps inclined to engage with Leibniz. That might possibly be the case, though presumably if Leibniz had written to Burnett about Locke and the *Reasonableness*, Burnett could have managed to avoid showing Leibniz's letter to anyone who did not already know about Locke's role. Similarly, Leibniz might have been trying to withhold an excessively negative judgment about Locke, for fear that it would hinder possible engagement — but without some direct evidence, we are rather close to guessing here.

Another way in which one might think to argue that *The Reasonableness of Christianity* looked suspicious was through association with Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious*, which certainly was frowned upon in many circles. What with Toland's approach of taking ideas from Locke and being more radical, and a certain similarity in the themes of the titles, one might perhaps be inclined to think of *Reasonableness* as Locke's more moderate version of Toland's

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<sup>40</sup> “J'ay lû autres fois le Christianisme raisonnable de cet illustre Auteur et j'applaudis fort à ceux qui reussissent à montrer la conformité de la foy avec la raison. Et, à mon avis, on doit tenir pour maxime qu'estre déraisonnable, c'est la marque de la fausseté en Theologie aussi bien qu'en Philosophie” (G 3.367).

book. But Locke's book and Toland's are of very different sorts. *Christianity not Mysterious* is fairly straightforwardly an epistemological work, one about what belief in a mystery might be, the senses in which it is impossible, etc. Yes there is biblical exegesis involved, but it is closely connected to the epistemological project. *Reasonableness* is not really like that. Consider how it starts out. There is — somewhat epistemically — a concern with what faith is, and for instance a discussion of Abraham's faith. But that is followed by a long discussion of the centrality of the belief that Jesus is the Messiah. This is a very different approach than that of *Christianity not Mysterious*.<sup>41</sup>

#### 2e. Leibniz against a certain sort of book

One of Burnett's main roles as Leibniz's correspondent was to tell him of things that had recently been published in English. In writing back, Leibniz would comment on some of the individual works. But on the occasion I'm concerned with here, he was concerned rather with a trend in the books Burnett was telling him about.

It seems to me that too many books aiming to prove the truth of religion are written in your country. That's a bad sign, and is something that doesn't always have a good effect ... I have often thought, and others have come to agree with me, that preachers should usually avoid this issue, because instead of relieving doubts, they give rise to them. Books in vernacular languages most often have this same effect ... I'd prefer that we concentrated on making the wisdom of God known through physics and mathematics,

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<sup>41</sup> Sullivan says something in the same general line: "A commonly asserted debt [of *Christianity not Mysterious*] has been to Locke, particularly – and mistakenly – to *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Paradoxically, Locke's real legacy, the epistemology of criticism which, under Le Clerc's guidance, Toland extorted from the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, has been denied" (Sullivan 1992, 122). See also Jacob (1969, 311-2).



by revealing more and more of the wonders of nature. That's the real way to convince the profane, and should be the goal of philosophy.<sup>42</sup>

Books that aim directly to prove the truth of religion, especially books in vernacular languages, are a bad idea, largely because they tend to have bad effects. Philosophers should not write such books. Instead, they should aim to reveal the wisdom of God by revealing the wonders of creation. The way to do that is through physics and mathematics — the study of the natural world — not through writing religious works.

What were the books — and who were the authors — Leibniz had in mind when writing this? One useful source is a letter Burnett sent to Leibniz in late 1700 (A 1.19.132).<sup>43</sup> This presents several relevant books and published sermons,<sup>44</sup> including Robert Jenkin's *The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion*;<sup>45</sup> John Richardson's *The Canon of the New Testament Vindicated in answer to the objections of J.T. in his Amyntor*;<sup>46</sup> Stephen Nye's *An historical*

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<sup>42</sup> “Il me semble qu'on écrit trop de livres chez vous pour prouver la verité de la religion, c'est une mauvaise marque, cela ne fait pas tousjours un trop bon effect, et meme on s'accoustume comme aux remedes sans en estre plus emeu. J'ay jugé souvent, et d'autres en sont tombés d'accord avec moy, que les predicateurs se doivent abstenir ordinairement de cette matiere, car bien loin de lever les scrupules, ils en font naistre. Les livres en langue populaire font le plus souvent le même effect. Il ne s'en trouve gueres de la force de celui de Grotius, et s'ils ne sont tres bien faits, ils donnent prise. Je voudrois qu'on s'attachat à faire connoistre la sagesse de Dieu par la physique et mathematique, en decouvrant de plus en plus les merveilles de la nature. C'est là le vray moyen de convaincre les profanes, et doit estre le but de la philosophie” (Leibniz to Burnett, 18 July 1701, A 1.20.185, pp.286-7).

<sup>43</sup> This letter is dated 20 October, but was apparently sent with A 1.19.131 in December.

<sup>44</sup> Burnett says “There is come forth within those few months some excellent sermons concerning the truth of Religion against the Atheists, Deists and Scepticks”, then names the pieces by Sharp, Talbot, and Edwards.

<sup>45</sup> Jenkin was a nonjuring fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, who later became master of that college and professor of divinity (ODNB, “Jenkin, Robert (*bap.* 1656, *d.* 1727)”).

<sup>46</sup> Richardson “attended Emmanuel from 1665 to 1669, and had been a fellow of Emmanuel (1674–85) and rector of the college living of North Luffenham, Rutland (1685–1690) when he was ejected as a nonjuror” (ODNB, “Richardson, William (1698–1775)”).

account, and defence [sic], of the canon of the New Testament In answer to Amyntor;<sup>47</sup> Thomas Staynoe's *Salvation by Jesus Christ alone ... agreeable to the rules of reason and the laws of justice ...*;<sup>48</sup> Richard Kidder's *A demonstration of the Messias. in which the truth of the Christian religion is defended, especially against the Jews*;<sup>49</sup> John Sharp's *The reasonableness of believing without seeing a sermon preach'd before the King in St. James's Chappel, on Palm-Sunday, March 24, 1699/700*;<sup>50</sup> William Talbot's *A sermon preach'd ... at St. Bridget's Church, Easter Monday*;<sup>51</sup> John Edwards's *The eternal and intrinsick reasons of good and evil a sermon preach'd at the commencement at Cambridge on Sunday the second day of July, 1699*;<sup>52</sup> and Nathaneal Taylor's *A preservative against Deism shewing the great advantage of revelation above reason, in the two great points, pardon of sin, and a future state of happiness, and A discourse of the nature and necessity of faith in Jesus Christ with an answer to the pleas of our modern Unitarians for the sufficiency of bare morality or meer charity to salvation*.<sup>53</sup> This letter also mentions Gilbert Burnet's book on the Thirty-Nine Articles (Burnet 1699).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Nye was also the 1695 author of *The exceptions of Mr. Edwards in his Causes of atheism against the Reasonableness of Christianity, as deliver'd in the Scriptures, examin'd and found unreasonable, unscriptural, and injurious...*, that is, a defence of Locke's *Reasonableness*. He was also a prominent participant in late-seventeenth-century English debates about the Trinity, and someone whose views Leibniz considered in thinking about those debates. Here see Antognazza (1991; 2008, ch.8).

<sup>48</sup> I suggest this is what Burnett had in mind. The Academy editors list the work of "one Mr Steno" as "nicht identifiziert" (p.284).

<sup>49</sup> Kidder had been bishop of Bath and Wells since 1691.

<sup>50</sup> Sharp was the Archbishop of York, "the only one of the seven churchmen recommended by Burnet to William for bishoprics who was consistently a high-churchman" (ODNB, "Sharp, John (1645?-1714)").

<sup>51</sup> Talbot said that "the bold and daring attempts, which are at this Day made upon our Religion in general, necessarily require something to be said upon to Publick an Occasion, in Vindication of it" (p.1). Talbot had become bishop of Oxford in 1699, and eventually in 1621 became bishop of Durham (ODNB, "Talbot, William (1659-1730)").

<sup>52</sup> This is the same Edwards who wrote against Locke's *Reasonableness*.

<sup>53</sup> Burnett described Taylor as "ane presbeteriane minister of this city", i.e., London (A 1.19.132, p.275).

<sup>54</sup> Gilbert Burnet, who was among other things the bishop of Salisbury, was Thomas Burnett's cousin.

Does Locke's book belong in this company, and thus fall within the scope of Leibniz's argument? I think it does, as we can see by looking at the titles and topics of the books above. That might seem superficial, but it was surely part of what Leibniz was doing. All of these works, like Locke's book, are works published in English, concerned with defending Christianity.

One could perhaps try to argue that Locke's book does not belong with the others because it is about the reasonableness, not the truth, of Christianity. But aside from whether that is a fair representation of what Locke was doing, several other works above are concerned with showing that Christianity is reasonable. Moreover, repeated publication of books arguing that Christianity is reasonable would surely be a trend as liable to Leibniz's criticism as the repeated publication of books arguing that it is true.

Leibniz does suggest a loophole of books being very well done (see n.42 above). But much as he thought well of Locke, he does not seem to have been inclined to praise the *Reasonableness*, never mind to the extent that would be required to fit this exception. He does go on to suggest another acceptable approach, involving the history of languages, but this does not apply to Locke's approach either.<sup>55</sup>

What we find here, then, is a Leibnizian reason for criticizing the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, which has little to do with the details of its arguments, or with the presentation or perception of it as a Socinian (or otherwise dubious) work. Leibniz's argument applies just as well to perfectly orthodox works, whatever exactly they may be. It is a criticism of publishing a certain sort of book, even if what is said in it is both orthodox and well argued.

Interestingly, and unusually, Burnett pushed back against Leibniz's criticism, and wrote in defence of the habit of writing books in English defending the truth of religion:

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<sup>55</sup> "Cependant il ne faut point negliger aussi la Theologie revelee dont la preuve se sert de l'histoire et des langues" (A 1.20.185, p.287).

But I would like to reply this time (despite rarely seeing the need to discuss any differences with you) that, despite all you say, we should not omit to instruct our people, and to silence the opponents of Christianity, by this method [of writing these books]. I grant that if we were in Denmark, or some other country where preachers are used to persuading people by [various other methods] ... reasoning about the truth and evidence of religion would not be necessary. But our people really want to be persuaded and convinced before they believe.<sup>56</sup>

In some places, Burnett allows, such books might not be necessary. But “our people” require a different approach.<sup>57</sup>

Leibniz’s responded to that defence in a letter to Burnett of 24 February 1702 (A 1.20.467, p.811):

You admit to me that the books written in such great numbers in English to prove the truth of religion are a bad sign, in that they show that religion has many enemies.

Whether these books are useful and proper for converting these enemies is another

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<sup>56</sup> “Dans la Vôtre, Vous remarquez ingenieusement que c’êt une mechante signe qu’on ecrit tant des livres pour prouver la religeon chretienne dans la langue vulgaire. Mais je veux repliquer pour cette fois (rarement trouvant necessité d’entrer en aucun raisonnement sur aucun different avec Vous) qu’on ne doit pas laisser d’instruire nos gens, et de silencér les adversaires par cette methode là, non obstant tout ce que Vous craignez. J’avoue si nous êtions en Danmark ou quelque autre pais où les predicateurs sont accoutumés de persuadér le peuple alla s[u]eure de son visage, en frappant la chaise, en combattant avec les passiones obstinées des homes, par des passiones contraires ou plutôt par la force, et la multitude des simples paroles animés avec zele et prolongès alla mesure d’un horloge à poudre, le raisonnement sur la verité et l’evidence de religeon ne seroit si necessaire; Mais nos gens veulent bien être persuadès et convaincus devant qu’ils veulent croire” (Burnett to Leibniz, 2 September 1701, A 1.20.247, pp.404-5).

<sup>57</sup> I take it that Burnett principally has in mind people in London, or maybe England more broadly. I also note that though Burnett rarely argued about the matters he reported to Leibniz, he did engage in debate with Trotter about religious matters. Consider for example the discussion in Burnett’s letter to Trotter of 9 December 1704 (Trotter 1751,185-7): “you will never understand [religion] truly and surely by any method so well, as by reading Scripture ... You will find there how few things are required to be believed ... You find fault with *Geneva* very unjustly” (185-6).

question, of which you are a better judge than I, given your experience, for you know the people, and know if there are many who have been touched or persuaded. I have often remarked that these books have served as guides for the enemies of religion. Those who cannot find their own [anti-religious] books have sought their arguments in the books that refute them, without going to the bother of reading the refutations. I know someone who used the book of St. Cyril against the Emperor Julian in this way.

I wish that all the books defending religion resembled those of Mr. Grew and Mr. Ray, which show the wisdom of God in nature. I have asked for them to be sent to me on the basis of the description you gave.<sup>58</sup>

This largely repeats Leibniz's previous thoughts on the issue, but does add one new idea. There is a particular way these books can be bad: in presenting and refuting arguments against Christianity, they can serve as a readily available source of those anti-Christian arguments. Again, Leibniz emphasizes, there is a better way to write about religion: by showing the wisdom of God in nature.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Leibniz to Burnett, 24 February 1702, A 1.20.467, p.810. "Vous m'avouerez que les livres qu'on fait en si grand nombre en langue vulgaire chez les Anglois pour prouver la verité de la religion, sont un mauvais signe en ce qu'ils marquent qu'elle a beaucoup d'adversaires. Si ces livres sont utiles et propres à les convertir, c'est une autre question, et vous en pourrés mieux juger que moy, par experience, puis que vous connoissés les gens, et pouvés savoir s'il y en a eu beaucoup qui en ont esté touchés ou persuadés. J'ay souvent remarqué que ces livres ont servi d'interpretes aux ennemis de la religion et que ceux qui n'ont pas pu trouver leur livres mêmes, ont cherché leur argumens dans ceux qui les refutoient, sans se mettre en peine de lire les refutations. J'ay connu une personne qui en a usé ainsi à l'égard du livre de S. Cyrille contre l'Empereur Julien. Leibniz refers to Grew (1701) and Ray (1691).

"Je voudrois que tous les livres pour la Religion ressemblassent à ceux de M. Grew et de Mons. Ray, qui monstrent la sagesse de Dieu dans la nature; j'ay mis ordre qu'on me les envoie sur la description que vous m'en faites".

<sup>59</sup> One might ask how the author of the *Theodicy* could argue like this. More generally, how could someone as engaged with religious matters as Leibniz was argue like this? This might in part be a matter of intended audience, such that it is one thing to write some remarks on these issues, another to discuss them, yet another to publish them, and another again to aim at a wide audience. That still leaves us with the *Theodicy*, which might well seem to aim at a wide audience.

To conclude then, there was something that Leibniz found problematic about Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, and he presented and discussed an objection in the Burnett correspondence. But Leibniz's objection is not about the views expressed in Locke's book. Locke's views, for all that is said here, could be perfectly orthodox by Leibniz's lights: it would still be a bad thing to be publishing them in this way. Locke's alleged Socinianism, or any other alleged unorthodoxy or dubiousness of his religious views, is not the issue here.

### 3. Conclusion

To conclude, I want to return to two questions with which I began. Reflecting on Jolley's reading, I asked whether it was true that, in this correspondence with Burnett, Leibniz learned about Locke in a primarily theological context. Secondly, did Leibniz, in this correspondence, learn of Locke and his English context in a way that made him suspicious of Locke's religious views?

The context in which Burnett presented Locke to Leibniz was not primarily theological. The correspondence was not primarily about theological writings, and the works of Locke that appeared were on a variety of topics, including money, education, and politics. The presentation of Locke is also different in tone from that of the undeniably controversial John Toland. Both Burnett and Leibniz were definitely, though not immoderately, critical of Toland. Their treatment of Locke was different. Though Burnett did report that some wished Locke would do more to distance himself from dubious characters such as Toland, he did not endorse that

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Various distinctions suggest possible answers here: between natural and revealed theology, or between defending religion against its absence and defending certain views in religion, or between writing such a book poorly and writing it well. Still, it is not easy to think of Leibniz as someone who was content merely to show the wonders of God through showing the wonders of nature.

criticism himself, thought it was a mistake to suspect Locke of Socinianism, and recommended esteem for Locke.

Burnett did not intend to present Locke as a theologically suspicious character. The opposite, indeed — he acknowledged such criticisms, but thought they were mistaken. Perhaps, someone might suggest, Leibniz got the impression from his correspondence with Burnett that Locke was a theologically suspicious character, despite Burnett's efforts to the contrary. We cannot definitively rule this out, but there is an alternative, plausible explanation of why Leibniz came to regard Locke as theologically suspect. Moreover, this is textually well supported. Leibniz came to be suspicious about some of Locke's views — views with some religious significance, as they were about the nature of the soul — because of what he read in the *Essay* and exchange with Stillingfleet. That is, Leibniz's suspicion was not based on the context in which he learned about Locke's work, but on what Locke said in his books.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were presented at conferences at the University of South Florida, the University of Aberdeen, and Dartmouth College. I thank the audiences on all three occasions for helpful discussions, and Mogens Lærke for his comments on the Aberdeen presentation. My thanks also to Antonia LoLordo and three anonymous referees for their comments.

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