

Dorothea's Lockean impressions through the lens of Joseph Raz

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Abstract. The natural interpretation is that Dorothea's early impressions of Edward Casaubon, in terms of John Locke, are illusory. But I draw attention to Joseph Raz's suggestion that it is the status of Locke which is mistaken, though I favour the natural interpretation.

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From house to house I would knock

For the best undergraduate essay on Locke

Chapter 2 of *Middlemarch*: an as yet unmarried Dorothea is dining with some others, including Edward Casaubon. Poets at a previous dinner are being rated. Who was number one and who number two? Dorothea does not feel at ease:

She wondered how a man like Mr Casaubon would support such triviality.

(1871-2: chapter 2)

But what sort of man is he? We are informed of more of the contents of her mind:

His manners, she thought, were very dignified; the set of his iron-gray hair and his deep eye-sockets made him resemble the portrait of Locke. He had the spare form and the pale complexion which became a student; as different as possible from the blooming Englishman of the red-whiskered type represented by Sir James Chettam. (1871-2: chapter 2)

I presume a "natural" reaction to this material, at least after reading more of the book, if not at this very point, is: she is overrating Casaubon. He is no Locke! (Possibly the man with the poet ratings would be better at this.)

But Joseph Raz, in his obituary for the legal philosopher H.L.A. Hart, suggests a different perspective. He tries to place Hart in relation to some great names, telling us of:

...the need to struggle with the richer and subtler works of Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Hume, Kant or Hegel. But jurisprudence languishes when it is studied independently of general philosophy. Hart rescued jurisprudence in English by re-establishing its lifeline to general philosophy. Arguably apart from his work (together with Honoré) on causation he has not contributed greatly to general philosophy. But his writings in philosophy of law join those of Hobbes and Bentham as the major contributions in English to that subject. (1993: 156)

What about Locke? Raz's omission suggests a very different assessment, which is "Dorothea is right to regard Edward Casaubon as on the same level as Locke. Locke's level is not that high." But I find the assessment strange. It is worth registering as a very different perspective to the one I regard as natural, suggested by someone whose opinion is highly relevant, but at present I personally am not convinced by Dorothea's understanding of Casaubon or Locke or relations between the two.

It is also worth noting that the Razian assessment does not regard Dorothea as mistake-free. Even if she is right to regard the two as on the same level, she does not realize what level it is. There is an argument of interest to do with this matter.

1. Locke's level is ten out of ten.
2. Edward Casaubon's level is ten out of ten.

Therefore:

3. Their levels are the same.

The conclusion is correct from this Razian perspective – their levels are the same – but both premises involved are false. But Dorothea was justified by testimony for the Locke rating premise and perhaps there was some nineteenth century appearance-character assessment

system which supported the Casaubon rating premise.¹ At that time, the premises were justified. And the inference is valid, assuming a rating system that applies across fields, so the conclusion was justified. It is also true from the Razian perspective but nevertheless probably not knowledge from this perspective, when arrived at this way, owing to erroneous premises in the pathway. Elaborating the perspective somewhat, we find that it rejects not just the traditional status accorded to Locke but also the traditional analysis of knowledge as justified true belief (see also Turri on Gettier cases, 2014: 74).

References

Eliot, G. 1871-72. *Middlemarch*. Accessed on 4th February 2020 from:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/145/145-h/145-h.htm>

Raz, J. 1993. H.L.A. Hart (1907-1992). *Utilitas* 5 (2): 145-156.

Turri, J. 2014. *Epistemology: A Guide*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

¹ There is a question of whether Dorothea herself is better understood as arguing as follows: Locke's level is ten out of ten; Edward Casaubon's level is the same as Locke's; therefore Edward Casaubon's level is ten out of ten.