This can bring clearly to view the true character of the *Essay on the Human Understanding*. It is a work of psychology, and not of ontology. Locke does not investigate the nature and the principle of the understanding, but the action itself of this faculty, the phenomena by which it is developed and manifested. Now, Locke calls the phenomena of the understanding *ideas*. This is the technical term which he everywhere employs to designate that by which the understanding manifests itself, and that to which it immediately applies itself.

Introduction, § 8. "I have used it," he says, "to express whatever is meant by phantasm, notion, species, or whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking..... I presume it will be easily granted me that there are such ideas in men's minds; every one is conscious of them in himself, and men's words and actions will satisfy him that they are in others."

It is very evident that ideas are here the phenomena of the understanding, of the mind, which the consciousness of each one can perceive in himself when he thinks, and which are equally in the consciousness of other men, to judge of them by their words and actions. Ideas are to the understanding what effects are to causes. Hereafter we shall examine the advantages and the disadvantages of this term, and the theory which it involves. For the present, it is sufficient to state it, and to designate it as the very watchword of the philosophy of Locke. For Locke and his whole school, the study of the understanding is the study of ideas: hence the recent and celebrated expression ideology, to designate the science of the human understanding. The source of this expression is in the *Essay on the Human Understanding*, and the ideological school is the natural offspring of Locke.

Here then you see the study of the human understanding reduced to the study of ideas; this study contains several orders of researches which it is important to determine well.* Accord-

* All the distinctions which follow are in the opening discourse of the year 1817, *Classification des questions et des écoles philosophiques*, Vol. 1st, p. 121 of the First Series.

ing to what has been previously said, we may consider ideas under two points of view: we may investigate whether in their relations to their objects, whatever the objects may be, they are true or false; or, omitting the question of their truth or falsity, of their legitimate or illegitimate application, we may investigate solely what they are in themselves and as consciousness manifests them to us. These are the two most general questions which we can propose in regard to ideas, and the order in which it is proper to treat of them cannot be doubtful. It is sufficiently evident that to commence by considering ideas in their relation to their objects, without having ascertained what they are in themselves, is to commence at the end, is to commence by investigating the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the consequences, while ignorant of the principles. It is then necessary to commence by the investigation of ideas, not as true or false, as legitimately or illegitimately applicable to such or such an object, and consequently as being or not being sufficient foundations for such an opinion, for such a belief, but as simple phenomena of the understanding, marked by such or such characters. It is incontestably thus that a true method of observation should proceed.

This is not all, and within these limits there is still matter for two distinct orders of researches.

We can at first study the ideas which are in the human understanding, developed as it now is in the present state of things. The question would then be that of collecting the phenomena of the understanding as the consciousness gives them, and of carefully stating their differences and their resemblances, so as to arrive from step to step to a good classification of all these phenomena. Here is then the first rule of the method of observation: to omit none of the phenomena which consciousness shall attest. In fact, you have over them no right; they exist, and for this sole reason then must they be recognized; they are in reality, in the consciousness, therefore they should be found in the framework of your science, or your science is only an illusion. The second rule is: to imagine none. As you are not to deny

what is, so you are not to assume what is not; you should neither invent nor retrench any thing. To omit nothing, to suppose nothing, such are the two rules of observation, the two essential laws of the experimental method applied to the phenomena of the understanding, as to every other order of phenomena. And what I say of the phenomena of the understanding, I say of their characters; none must be omitted, none supposed: and thus having omitted none and having supposed none, having embraced all the real phenomena, and only the real phenomena, with all their characters, you will have the greatest number of chances for arriving at a legitimate classification which shall comprehend the whole reality, and nothing but the reality, at the exact and complete statistics of the phenomena of the understanding, that is, of ideas.

These statistics being collected, you know the understanding as it now is; but has it always been what it now is? Since the time when its action commenced, has it not undergone many changes? Have these phenomena, whose characters you have with so much penetration and fidelity analyzed and reproduced, always been what they are and what they appear to you? May they not have had at their birth certain characters which have disappeared, or have wanted at first characters which they have since acquired? Hence the important question of the origin of ideas, or the primitive characters of the phenomena of the understanding. When this second question shall be resolved, when you shall know what have been in their birth-place these phenomena which you have studied and know in their actual form, when you shall know what they were and what they have become, it will be easy for you to find the routes by which they have arrived from their first state to their present state; you will easily seize their generation, after having recognized their actual state, and after having penetrated their origin; and it is only then that you will perfectly understand what you are, for you will know both what you were and what you now are, and how you have come from what you were to be what you are. Thus

will be completely known to you, both in its actual state and in its primitive state, and also in its metamorphoses, this faculty of knowing, this intelligence, this reason, this spirit, this mind, this understanding, which is for you the foundation of all knowledge.

The question of the present state of our ideas and that of their origin are therefore two distinct questions, and both are necessary to constitute a complete psychology. So far as psychology has not surveyed and exhausted these two orders of researches, it is ignorant of the phenomena of the understanding, for it does not know them under all their phases; it does not possess their secret. But where should we commence? Is it necessary to commence by recognizing the actual character of our ideas, or by searching out their origin?

Shall we commence with the question of the origin of our ideas? It is doubtless a very curious, very important point. Man aspires to the origin of all things, and especially to that of the phenomena which take place within him; he can be satisfied only after having penetrated thus far. The question of the origin of ideas is certainly in the human mind, it has then its right in science, it must come in its time; but must it come first? At first, it is full of obscurity. Thought is a river which we cannot easily ascend; its source, like that of the Nile, is a mystery. How, in fact, shall we find the fugitive phenomena by which nascent thought is marked? Is it by the memory? But you have forgotten what then passed within you, for you were not aware of its existence. At that time we live and think without paying attention to the manner in which we live and think, and memory does not render up a deposit that we never intrusted to it. Will you consult others? They are in the same perplexity as you. Will you study infants? but who will unfold what passes under the veil of an infant's thought? The deciphering of these hieroglyphics easily conducts to conjectures, to hypotheses. Would you thus commence an experimental science? It is evident that if you start with the question of the origin of ideas, you start with precisely the most difficult question. Now,

if a wise method should go from the best known to the least known, from the most easy to the least easy, I ask whether it should commence with the origin of ideas. This is the first objection; and behold another. You commence by seeking the origin of ideas; therefore you commence by seeking the origin of that of which you are ignorant, of phenomena which you have not studied, and in regard to which you cannot say what they are and what they are not. What origin of them, then, could you find except a hypothetical origin? And this hypothesis will be either true or false. Is it true? Very well; you guessed rightly: but as guessing, even that of genius, is not a scientific process, truth, thus discovered, does not take rank in science, and is still nothing but hypothesis. Is it false? Instead of truth under the vicious form of hypothesis, have you only an hypothesis without truth? Then behold what will be its result. As this hypothesis, that is, this error, will have taken a place in your mind, when you shall come to explain with it the phenomena of intelligence as it now exists, if they are not what they should be to justify your hypothesis, you will not for all that renounce it, and for it you will sacrifice reality. You will do one of two things: either you will deny all ideas which shall not be explicable by your hypothetical origin, or you will arrange them by caprice and for the support of your hypothesis. It was not necessary to choose with so much show the experimental method, in order to wholly falsify it afterwards by putting it upon a route so perilous. Wisdom, good sense, logic, demand therefore that, provisionally neglecting the question of the origin of ideas, we should content ourselves at first with observing ideas as they now exist, and the characters which the phenomena of intelligence actually present in the consciousness.

This done, in order to complete our researches, in order to go to the extent of our powers, to the extent of the wants of the human mind and the demands of experimental questions, we shall ask ourselves, What, in their origin, have been these ideas which we now possess? Either we shall discover the true origin of our

ideas, and experimental science will be achieved; or we shall not discover it, and then nothing will be either lost or compromised. We shall not have attained all truth; but we shall have attained a great part of truth. We shall know what is, if we do not know what was, and we shall always be ready to resume the delicate question of the origin of ideas; whereas, once having wandered into this premature research, a primary error vitiates all subsequent researches, and in advance perverts observation. So the regular order of psychological questions may be fixed in the following manner:

1st, To search out, without any systematic prejudice, by observation alone, with simplicity and good faith, the phenomena of the understanding in their actual state, and as consciousness now presents them to us, by dividing and classifying them according to the known laws of scientific divisions and classifications;

2d, To search out the origin of these same phenomena or ideas by all the means which are in our power, but with the firm resolution not to let what observation shall have given us be wrested from us by any hypothesis, and with our eyes always fixed upon present reality and its incontestable characters. To this question of the origin of ideas is joined that of their formation and generation, which evidently depends upon it, and is, as it were, enveloped in it.

Such are, in their methodical order, the different problems which philosophy embraces. The slightest inversion of this order is full of perils, and may lead to the gravest mistakes. You indeed conceive that if you treat the question of the legitimacy of the application of our ideas to their objects, before understanding well what is the nature of these ideas, what are their actual and their primitive characters, what they are and whence they come, you wander at venture and without a torch into the unknown land of ontology. You again conceive that if, within the very limits of psychology and ideology, you commence by wishing to carry by main force the question of the origin of ideas before you know what they are, and before you have recognized

them by observation, you seek for light in the darkness, which will not yield it to you.

Now, how has Locke proceeded, and in what order has he treated these philosophical questions?

Introduction, § 3. "I shall pursue," he says, "this following method:

"First, I shall inquire into the original of those ideas, notions, or whatever else you please to call them, which a man observes, and is conscious to himself he has in his mind; and the ways whereby the understanding comes to be furnished with them.

"Secondly, I shall endeavor to show what knowledge the understanding hath by those ideas; and the certainty, evidence, and extent of it.

"Thirdly, I shall make some inquiry into the nature and grounds of faith or opinion; whereby I mean that assent which we give to any proposition as true, of whose truth yet we have no certain knowledge: and here we shall have occasion to examine the reasons and degrees of assent."

It is evident that the last two points here indicated are related to one and the same question, the general question of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the application of our ideas to their objects; and this question is here given as the last question of philosophy. It is nothing less than the adjournment of the whole logical and ontological inquiry until after psychology. This is the fundamental character of the method of Locke and the originality of his *Essay*. We entirely agree with Locke in this respect, under this special reservation, that the adjournment of ontology shall not be its suppression.

The first point remains, which is wholly psychological, and occupies the greatest part of the work of Locke. He therein declares that his first inquiry will be that of the origin of ideas. But in that there are two radical errors in regard to method: 1st, Locke treats of the origin of ideas before having sufficiently studied these ideas; 2d, he does more; he not only puts the question of the origin of ideas before that of the inventory of

ideas, but he entirely neglects this last question. It was already venturing much to put one question before the other; for it was seeking at the outset an hypothesis, with the exception of afterwards confronting the hypothesis with reality; but what will this amount to when even this chance of return to truth is interdicted, when the fundamental question of the inventory of our ideas and of their actual characters is wholly omitted?

This is the first error of Locke. He recognizes and proclaims the experimental method; he proposes to apply it to the phenomena of the understanding, to ideas; but not having sufficiently fathomed this method which was then in its infancy, he has not discerned all the questions to which it gives rise; he has not arranged these questions in due order; he has misconceived and omitted the most important experimental question, the observation of the actual characters of our ideas; at the very outset he has fallen into a question which should have been adjourned, the obscure and difficult question of the origin of our ideas. What, therefore, will be the result? Either Locke will hit upon the true origin of our ideas by a sort of good fortune and divination, at which I should rejoice; but however true it may be in itself, this origin will be demonstrated to be true, will be legitimately established only on this condition, that Locke should subsequently demonstrate that the characters of our ideas are all, and in their whole extent, explicable and explained by the origin supposed. Or indeed Locke will be deceived: but, if he is deceived, an error of this kind will not be a particular error concentrated upon a single point and without influence upon the rest; it will be a general error, an immense error, which will corrupt, even at its source, the whole of psychology, and thereby the whole of metaphysics. In order to be faithful to his hypothesis, to the origin which he shall have assigned to all ideas without understanding them fully, he will be obliged to sacrifice all ideas which shall refuse to be referred to this false origin. The falsity of the origin will be extended even to the actual state of the intelligence, and will conceal from the eyes of consciousness

itself the real characters of our ideas; hence, from applications to applications, that is, from aberrations to aberrations, the human understanding and human nature will be more and more misconceived, reality will be destroyed, and science perverted.

Such is the rock; it was necessary to point it out. We know not whether Locke has been wrecked upon it; for we know not yet what he has done, whether he has had the good fortune to divine correctly, or whether he has had the fate of most diviners and of those who start at venture upon a route which they have not measured. We suppose ourselves now to be ignorant of it, we shall subsequently examine it; but we are already able to remark, that it is in great part from Locke that, in the eighteenth century, in his whole school, comes the systematic habit of placing the question of the origin and the generation of ideas at the head of all philosophical researches. In metaphysics, this school is preoccupied with inquiring what are the first ideas which enter into the mind of man; in morals, the actual state of man's moral nature being neglected, what are the first ideas of good and evil, which arise in man considered in the savage state or in infancy, two states in which observation is not very sure and may easily be arbitrary; in politics, what is the origin of societies, of governments, of laws. In general, it searches for right in fact, and philosophy is reduced for it to history, and to history the most obscure, that of the first age of humanity. Hence the political theories of this school, often opposite in their results, yet identical in the method which presides in them. Some, plunging into ante-historical or anti-historical conjectures, find at the origin of society the empire of force and conquerors: the first government which history presents to them is despotic; therefore the idea of government is the very idea of despotism. Others, on the contrary, in the convenient obscurity of the primitive state, think they perceive a contract, reciprocal stipulations, and titles of liberty which despotism subsequently caused to disappear, and which the present time should re-establish. In either case, the legitimate state of society is deduced from its first form, from that

form which it is almost impossible to find, and the rights of humanity are at the mercy of a venturous erudition, at the mercy of an hypothesis. Finally, from origin to origin, the true nature of man has even been sought for in the most absurd geological hypotheses: the last term of this deplorable tendency is the celebrated work of Maillet, *Telliamed*.*

To recapitulate, the most general character of the philosophy of Locke is independence; and here, with all the necessary reservations, I openly rank myself under his banner, if not side by side with the chief, at least side by side with his followers. As to method, that of Locke is the psychological or ideological method, for the name is of little consequence; and here again I declare myself of his school. But, as he did not sufficiently fathom the psychological method, I accuse Locke of having commenced by an order of researches which necessarily puts psychology on the road of hypothesis, and deprives it more or less of its experimental character, and here I differ from him.

Let us understand at what point we are in this examination. We have seen Locke upon a perilous route; but has he had the good fortune, in spite of this bad choice, to arrive at the truth, that is, at the veritable explanation of the origin of our ideas? What, according to him, is this origin? This is the foundation of the *Essay on the Human Understanding*, the system to which Locke has attached his name. This will be the subject of our future lectures.

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* On the dangers into which, in all these orders of researches, the question of origins, prematurely undertaken, throws us, see especially Vol. 3 of the first Series, Lecture 7, p. 260, etc.