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A PUZZLE IN THE PRINT HISTORY OF LOCKE'S *ESSAY*

PATRICK J. CONNOLLY

§1. Introduction

In the *Epistle to the Reader* that prefaces Locke's *Essay* he famously declares that he considers himself to be an underlaborer to the great scientific minds of his generation. Here is a portion of this important passage:

The Commonwealth of Learning, is not at this time without Master-Builders, whose mighty Designs, in advancing the Sciences, will leave lasting Monuments to the Admiration of Posterity; But every one must not hope to be a *Boyle*, or a *Sydenham*; and in an Age that produces such Masters, as the Great ——— *Huygenius*, and the incomparable Mr. *Newton*, with some other of that Strain; 'tis Ambition enough to be employed as an Under-Labourer in clearing [the] Ground a little, and removing some of the Rubbish, that lies in the way to Knowledge.¹

The passage has attracted interest from Locke scholars for a number of reasons. First, it offers some perspective on how Locke himself understood the goals and aims of the *Essay*. He does not seek to be a builder of grand systems. Instead, he wants to remove obstacles (e.g. conceptual confusions, abuse of language, adherence to authority) that prevent clear thinking and the advance of knowledge.²

Second, the passage sheds some light on the relationship between the subject matter of the *Essay*, which is largely a *philosophical* book concerned with issues in metaphysics and epistemology, and the exciting developments in natural philosophy

¹ Locke 1975, 9–10. The word 'the' in brackets was initially present but removed in the fourth and fifth editions.

² Of course, Locke was not entirely original in describing himself as an underlaborer. Similar language had been used by authors such as Robert Hooke, Thomas Sprat, Robert Boyle, Joseph Glanvill, and Henry Power. So there is always the possibility that Locke was merely picking up on a common literary trope.

that fascinated Locke throughout his adult life. Locke does not take himself to be offering a natural philosophical theory or program in the *Essay*. But he does see his work as important for and relevant to debates and developments in natural philosophy.

Finally, the passage also gives us a good indication of the sorts of natural philosophical projects of which Locke approved. Many commentators think the list of thinkers Locke gives is instructive and that there are important similarities between these four. And we can note that Locke leaves off a number of thinkers that certainly might have loomed large as potential Master-Builders: Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and William Harvey to name only three.

This short research note will suggest that there may be an additional reason for being interested in this passage. Specifically, the passage seems to present a puzzle about the print history of the *Essay*. Admittedly, the puzzle may turn out to be of little philosophical interest and may not shed a flood of light on the aims and structure of the *Essay*. Nevertheless, it does pose questions that deserve examination. The goal of this piece is to offer a preliminary exploration of the puzzle with the hope that other scholars will be encouraged to consider the relevant questions and will propose answers.

§2. The Puzzle

The puzzle surrounds the line that occurs just before Locke's mention of Huygens: 'an Age that produces such Masters, as the Great ——— Huygenius'. The line is longer than an em-dash and closer to what would now be termed a horizontal bar or quotation dash. The puzzle simply asks *why* there is a line at this point in the text. Had this line only appeared in the first edition of the *Essay* we should perhaps be willing to consider it an accidental occurrence or aberration and give it no further thought. But, in actual fact, the line exhibits considerable longevity.

The following table tracks the appearance of the line in the

English-language editions of the *Essay* published prior to 1800.³ I have been unable to examine the passage in the 1753 London, 1772 Dublin, and 1786 London editions of the *Essay*.⁴ The publisher listed is the first known publisher of the edition, though several editions had second issues with other listed publishers.

Year	Publisher	Place	Appears As	New Typesetting?
1690 (1689)	Basset	London	—	Yes
1694	Dring	London	-----	Yes
1695	Churchill	London	-----	Yes
1700	Churchill	London	-----	Yes
1706	Churchill	London	-----	Yes
1710	Hills	London	—	Yes
1715- 16	Churchill	London	—	No
1721	Churchill	London	—	Yes
1726	Churchill	London	—	Yes
1731	Bettesworth	London	—	Yes
1735	Bettesworth	London	—	No
1741	Hitch	London	—	Yes
1748	Birt	London	—	No
1753	Birt	London	?	?
1753	Taylor	Berwick	----	Yes
1759	Urie	Glasgow	----	Yes
1760	Browne	London	—	Yes
1765	Donaldson	Edinburgh	—	Yes
1768	Woodfall	London	—	No

³ In compiling a list of editions, I followed Goldie 2005 and, ultimately, Yolton 1998, ch. 3. In addition to English editions I examined nearly all of the eighteenth-century French (illustre *Huygens*), Latin (ingens *Huygenius*), and German (großen Hugen) editions of the *Essay* and could not discover any instances of the line.

⁴ But, regarding the Dublin edition, see Yolton's note at Yolton 1998, 106–107. It is possible that this was never a complete edition, and in any case, it seems the 1777 Dublin edition had identical typesetting.

1772	Saunders	Dublin	?	No
1775	Beecroft	London	—	No
1777	Saunders	Dublin	—	No
1777	Dickson	Edinburgh	—	Yes
1786	Woodfall	London	?	?
1786	Sleater	Dublin	—	No
1788	Rivington	London	—	Yes
1793	Longman	London	—	Yes
1795	Bathurst	London	—	Yes
1796	Longman	London	—	No
1798	Mundell	Edinburgh	Not Present	Yes

The presence of the line in nearly every early printing of the *Essay* offers good reason to take it seriously.

Of course, the first four editions of the *Essay*, the ones published during Locke's lifetime, are the most important here. These are the editions over which Locke exercised personal care. But the fact that subsequent eighteenth century publishers kept the line in the text is also telling. These editors surely had the opportunity to remove the line from the text and their reluctance to do so provides evidence for the claim that the line had some meaning. The line's longevity becomes particularly striking when we take into account the vicissitudes of some of these eighteenth-century editions. Consider, for example, the 1710 6th edition. Existing evidence indicates that Henry Hills was a notorious pirate who frequently issued cheap, unauthorized editions of popular books and sermons.⁵ If the line were entirely meaningless or an obvious error it is not clear why someone as unscrupulous as Hills would retain it. Many later editions also showed little care over the preservation of Locke's punctuation and capitalization. For example, many later editions stop capitalizing the "g" in the "great" that precedes Huygens's name. Yet these editions retain the line.

⁵ See Yolton 1998, 85–86.

The passage under consideration might also raise eyebrows for one other reason. Specifically, Locke uses a latinate form of Huygens's name: Huygenius. The other three authors mentioned in the passage are referred to using their English names. Of course, the other three authors were all Anglophone natives of the British Isles. So this presents one reasonable explanation for why their names would be presented in English, rather than latinized like Huygens's. But why would Huygens's name not be offered in the vernacular?⁶ Locke and Huygens knew one another well and evidence suggests that there was mutual respect between them.⁷ Despite this, Locke's written references to Huygens are relatively sparse. They do show one marked trend, however, which is that Locke seems to have had a preference for referring to Huygens *as* Huygens. The underlaborer passage provides the only use of "Huygenius" in all of Locke's published work and correspondence. I have not had an opportunity to review Locke's manuscripts with complete thoroughness, and certainly if others are able to locate further instances of Locke using a latinized form of Huygens's name it might help to make sense of the puzzle surrounding the underlaborer passage. In the manuscripts I have been able to view, Locke prefers Huygens or Hugens to Huygenius.

Indeed, I have been able to locate only one other instance of Locke using a latinized form of Huygens's name, in this instance 'Hugenius'. This was in a note made in English while Locke was travelling in France.⁸ But we can observe that, in that note, Locke was copying out pendulum measurements from a 1674 piece in the *Journal des Sçavans*. The heading of this piece uses a latinized form of Huygens's name (HVGENII) so Locke may have just been following suit on this occasion. In general, Locke's strong

⁶ In both Dutch and English Huygens was referred to as Huygens.

⁷ See Anstey 2011, 220.

⁸ See Locke 1953, 160, which quotes from Ms. Locke f. 2, p. 215.

preference does seem to be for ‘Huygens’ over ‘Huygenius’.⁹ So the form of Huygens’s name offers an additional reason to be curious about the passage.

§3. Possible Explanations

Did Locke intend for the line to be in front of Huygens’s name? If so, what work did he intend it to do? Given the importance of the passage, these questions seem worthy of attention. There currently exists no known manuscript copy of the *Epistle to the Reader*.¹⁰ And this passage is not mentioned in any of Locke’s letters to his publishers. So we have no direct evidence that could help to answer the above questions. But three possibilities suggest themselves. First, Locke intended for the line to be present in the printed text. Second, Locke did not intend for the line to be present in the printed text, but the manuscript used to set the type for the first edition of the *Essay* contained the line and it was faithfully reproduced in the type. Third, Locke did not intend for the line to be present in the printed text and there was no line included in the manuscript delivered to the publisher. On this third possibility, the line would have been introduced at some stage in the typesetting process by the printer or typesetter. This short piece will use these three possibilities to structure a search for possible explanations. It is hoped that others might have more insight and will be able to suggest either alternative possibilities or variations on those considered here.

3.1 Possibility #1

Perhaps it is the case that Locke intended for there to be a line preceding Huygens’s name. On one way of looking at the issue, this seems to be the most likely explanation for the line’s presence.

⁹ And this seems to fit with the general preference of authors writing in English at the time. A search for ‘Huygenius’ in EEBO turns up no results. A search on ECCO does offer results, but use of ‘Huygenius’ is still relatively rare.

¹⁰ Yolton 1998, x: ‘It is unfortunate that no copy-texts of Locke’s publications as printed survive. There are three drafts of the *Essay*...none of them printer’s copy’. See also Locke 1975, xiv–xv.

Locke did admit to being ‘too lazie, or too busie’ to make certain improvements to the *Essay*, but surely he might have reviewed and approved galley sheets.¹¹ So it could have been removed from the first edition. More to the point, if Locke did not want the line in front of Huygens’s name he surely would have excised it from subsequent editions. We know that he did make revisions to the *Epistle* between editions. Notably, he added paragraphs to the end of the *Epistle* informing his reader about important changes. Less notably, but more importantly for current purposes, Locke also made a number of changes to the body of the text of the *Epistle*. As noted above, Locke even removed a word from the very passage in question. Instructing the printer to eliminate the line should have been a small matter.

So it might be easy to conclude that Locke wanted the line to be in the text. But this would make the line all the more puzzling. Simply put, it is tremendously difficult to see what work the line could be doing and why Locke might have consciously included it.

In 21st century English, there are familiar conventions that surround lines of this sort; they tend to be used either for redaction or self-interruption. In cases of redaction they allow the reader to read a message which is not actually printed: “D--- it all to h---” or “the Earl of Bo—— is a fool”. I find it very hard to see what Locke might intend to be redacting in this sentence, though perhaps those with more knowledge of Huygens will be able to provide candidate ideas. In cases of self-interruption, the author has some reason for attempting to introduce a pause in the sentence. She could be intending to pause for dramatic effect prior to some big reveal. She could pause in order to re-route the sentence and take it in another direction. Or she could pause to separate out two distinct thoughts. But again, I find it very difficult to parse the sentence under consideration in any of these ways. There is simply no apparent need for Locke to pause at that stage in that sentence. So these familiar conventions do not seem to apply.

¹¹ It is unclear whether Locke did this for the first edition, but we know he did for the second. See Samuel Manship to Locke, 10 March 1694, Letter #1718. Locke 1976–, V, 29. More generally, it was his usual practice to fastidiously review proof copies. See Locke 1975, xxiv.

This brings us to a remote but intriguing possibility. Perhaps there existed some convention regarding these lines in seventeenth century England which is no longer commonplace. Put differently, Locke may have intended to convey something about Huygens to his readers by including the line prior to his name. If such a convention did exist and could serve to explain the line, it would be worth uncovering for what it might teach us about Locke's attitudes toward Huygens. It is very much hoped that those with better understandings of seventeenth century linguistic conventions or those more familiar with the life, work, and reception of Huygens will be able to offer further thoughts.

3.2 Possibility #2

A second possibility is that the manuscript delivered to the printers contained a line in the underlaborer passage but that Locke did not intend for the line to be reproduced in the printed text of the *Essay*. It is relatively easy to see how a line may have been present in the manuscript used to typeset the *Essay*. A number of possible scenarios present themselves. One commonplace in early modern manuscripts was to draw a line connecting the end of one line of text with the beginning of another. This would serve to indicate that the author did not want a paragraph break between the two lines of text.¹² So perhaps in the manuscript one line ended with '...as the Great' and the next started with 'Huygenius, and the incomparable...'¹³

Alternatively, each of the master-builders is referred to by surname alone. Perhaps Locke initially meant to refer to Huygens by both given name and surname and decided at the last moment to use only his surname for the sake of consistency. Another possibility stems from the fact that Newton is the only master-builder given a title (the incomparable *Mr.* Newton). Perhaps

¹² I am very grateful to Jacqueline Broad for informing me about this convention.

¹³ This possibility is made less likely by the fact that we have no evidence that Locke ever used this type of convention. No clear examples of him employing it survive. On the other hand, none of the manuscripts Locke sent to printers survive. So it is hard to definitively rule out this possibility.

Locke initially meant to refer to Huygens using a title as well before thinking better of it. Much more intriguingly, perhaps Locke intended to mention some other figure before changing his mind and listing Huygens instead. Far less intriguingly, the pen may have just slipped and created a line or a word may have been written so illegibly it needed to be crossed out. Even assuming the manuscript delivered to the publishers was a fair copy, likely made by Brownower rather than Locke himself, one of these explanations might be sufficient to account for the presence of a line in the manuscript. Even fair copies could contain imperfections.

But the simple fact is that whoever typeset the *Essay* must have been used to working from manuscripts which may have been messy and which may have had lines in the text. He or she must have had a good sense for what was meant to be included as opposed to what was an error, a slip of the pen, or an unintended mark. So, unless the line was *meaning bearing* for the typesetter it is not obvious that it would have been included.¹⁴

More importantly, on this supposition it becomes very difficult to explain why the line is present in every edition published during Locke's lifetime. After Molyneux pointed out a number of printing errors in the first edition of the *Essay*, Locke expressed his gratitude at the opportunity to correct them: 'The faults of the press are, I find upon a sedate reading over of my book, infinitely more than I could have thought; those that you have observed I have corrected, and return you my thanks'.¹⁵ More generally, Locke seems to have been a tremendously careful editor of his works, paying meticulous attention and demanding changes to even small formal features of the printing like capitalization and italicization.¹⁶ And it is easy to imagine him taking special care

¹⁴ I borrow the very useful language of 'meaning bearing' from Hunter 2007.

¹⁵ Locke to Molyneux, 28 March 1693, Letter #1620. Locke 1976–, IV, 665. See also his comments to Edward Clarke on the printing of his *Two Treatises*. Locke to Clarke, 12 March 1694, Letter #1719, in *ibid.*, V, 30. See Yolton 1998, viii–xi for similar comments from Locke and some brief discussion.

¹⁶ See Locke 1975, xxii–xxiii.

with the *Essay* given its unusual status as a work Locke published with his name affixed to it. Something like the line prior to Huygens's name would almost certainly have caught his eye. Peter Nidditch's verdict is as follows:

The contents (apart from printers' errors), in wording *and form*, of the successive editions of the *Essay* that were published while Locke was alive *can and should be regarded as having had his approval at the relevant time*. What Locke thus approved is not to be identified in every detail with what he (or an amanuensis) had written for publication, for the compositors introduced some minor alterations in formal respects; *but in general these would not have been retained without Locke's consent*.¹⁷

If the considerations above are correct, then given the level of control that Locke exercised over even very small formal features of the production of his books it seems most likely that he intended for the line to be present in the text. And this, in turn, suggests that the line had some meaning that readers of the *Essay* would have been able to pick up on. That being said, it is hoped, again, that those with a greater understanding of the history of printing and seventeenth century typography might be able to offer alternative hypotheses or shine further light on the matter.

3.3 Possibility #3

A final possibility is that Locke did not intend for there to be a line in the passage and that the manuscript delivered to the publishers did not contain a line. The line may have been entirely a creation of the typesetter or printer.¹⁸ While this is certainly a possibility, a number of considerations make it seem unlikely.

First, it is very difficult to find a reasonable explanation for why the line would have been typeset if the manuscript did not call for

¹⁷ Locke 1975, 1. Emphasis added. On li Nidditch argues that 'the printers of the first four Editions of the *Essay* did not on their own account tend to make formal changes other than occasional very minor ones'. See also Yolton 1998, viii–xi.

¹⁸ For detailed discussion of the extent to which formal features of seventeenth century texts are due to printers rather than authors and some consideration of the *Essay* in this light see Locke 1975, xlvi–lii.

it. One obvious possibility is that the typesetter made an error of judgment in the spacing of the relevant line in the chase and so was forced to insert the line as a correction. This, however, seems unlikely. The rest of the volume is relatively handsomely set and printed. It does not contain any similar errors. Additionally, there were a number of other technologies available for correcting errors of this sort. Simply put, the typesetter ought to have used blank spaces rather than a line. The rest of the *Epistle* is nicely justified, meaning that the typesetter must have been adding small pieces of blank type between words anyway.¹⁹ Adding in additional spacing ought to have been fairly easy. So it is not immediately obvious why the printer would have inserted the line.

Second, this third possibility might explain how the line came to be in the first edition of the *Essay*, but it does a poor job of explaining the line's longevity. Locke, as noted above, would have had the opportunity to remove the line from subsequent editions. And, as discussed above, many of the eighteenth-century publishers of Locke's work were less than painstaking in their efforts to preserve Locke's exact text. Yet the later editions of the *Essay* uniformly retain the line. This makes the line's survival through so many original type settings notable. And, again, it pushes us to consider the idea that the line might have had some meaning for early readers of the *Essay*.

§4. Conclusion

This short essay has focused on a puzzle in the print history of Locke's *Essay*. Why is there a line prior to Huygens's name in nearly every edition of the *Epistle to the Reader*? Broadly speaking, there are two sorts of answers to this question. First, the line could be purely adventitious, added in as a mistake and contributing nothing to the meaning of the text. This is certainly possible but it seems unlikely given the line's persistence through so many editions of the *Essay*. Second, the line could have been an intentional feature of the text that held some significance for its author and his readers. But it is difficult to see, at least for this

¹⁹ For a very brief overview of the relevant printing technology see Hunter 2007, 26.

author, what possible meaning the line could have had. So it may be the case that neither sort of answer seems *prima facie* very plausible and neither seems markedly superior to the other. But until we are able to rule out the second sort of answer, curiosity alone should suffice to provoke interest in the line and in the work that Locke may have meant it to do. My hope is that the preliminary work done here will provide an opportunity for others to pursue that interest.²⁰

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²⁰ I would like to acknowledge the help I received in discussions with Jacqueline Broad, Steven Galbraith, and Georgianna Zielger. And I would also like to thank the editor of *Locke Studies* and an anonymous referee; this piece benefited a great deal from their feedback and suggestions for improvement.