

On the scholastic background of the Lockean concept of the knowing subject

Sauli Salmela

University of Tampere – Finland

Abstract

Locke is an important figure to curriculum theory. His philosophy is a common starting-point for both the German and Anglo-American traditions. It has been usual to take Locke for an example of the “early modern” thinkers, which implies his having done something more or less radically new when compared to his predecessors. In this paper I show, that many of his central ideas related to the knowing subject originate in medieval Aristotelian philosophy, as the paradigm of which I use Aquinas.

The study of curriculum history is a welcome counterbalance to the postmodern trend of denying all “grand narratives”, such as religions, philosophical systems and science offering “objective” knowledge about the “real world” or the “rational subject”. This, of course, results in both moral and epistemological relativism.¹ However, if one wants to be postmodern he at least should have an idea of the modernity he thinks he does not belong to or criticizes. Until quite recently it has been common to think that modern philosophy and modernity has its origins in the 16th or 17th century. From the point of view of history of ideas it is usually said to have begun with René Descartes (1596-1650) in France or with Francis Bacon (1561-1626) in England. Before modern times, it has been said, there was the Renaissance, and before that the Middle Ages.

The use of the word “modernity” clearly implies that there is a break between medieval and post-medieval or modern thinking, and each possesses characteristics which the other does not. Philosophers like Descartes and Bacon were certainly convinced that they were making

a new start, and there was a sharp division between “the old” (and “wrong”) and what they themselves were doing. Their most important target was Aristotle, whose philosophy, especially his teachings on logic and metaphysics, they saw as an impediment to the advance of knowledge. Bacon declares in his *New Organon*: “It is futile to expect a great advancement in the sciences from overlaying and implanting new things on the old; a new beginning has to be made from the lowest foundations, unless one is content to go round in circles for ever, with meager, almost negligible, progress”.²

The more we study the Middle Ages, the more we find this view exaggerated. Instead of a split or a sudden and abrupt transition and awakening there can be seen continuity between medieval and modern thought. Firstly, many of the modern phenomena could not have taken place without medieval innovations. One example of this is the rise of the experimental science in the 17th century. Without the nominalist philosophy of the early 14th century there would not have emerged such skeptical attitude toward man’s possibilities of gaining certain knowledge of the world, and due to that, need of experimental and empirical study. Within the traditional Aristotelian natural philosophy there was no demand for experimental study: the world was supposed to have an eternal, conceptual structure, and it could be grasped and learned completely just by reading certain books carefully.

Secondly, many of the metaphysical assumptions and postulates of the medieval times were transmitted to the modern times, such as the concept of God, and that of substance, ontological realism, correspondence

theory of truth, theories of cognition including descriptions of the faculties of mind to name but a few. The “new” theories were largely assembled with materials borrowed from philosophy’s past, from ancient schools and from Aristotle himself.

Thirdly and closely related to the previous, a great deal of the conceptual framework of medieval Aristotelian scholasticism was still being widely used in the University of the 17th century. The new corpuscularianism and mechanical philosophy of nature had not become a serious alternative to substitute for the Aristotelian tradition, which had dominated the educated opinion through most of the previous millennium in Europe.³

John Locke (1632-1704) is considered one of the most prominent representatives of modern times and new experimental natural philosophy, that is to say, science. He is also known to have been opposed to the Latin-speaking Aristotelian scholasticism. He openly expressed his dislike toward disputations, Aristotelian logic and reading classical authors in Latin and Greek. “The only philosophy then known at Oxford was the Peripatetic, perplexed with obscure terms and stuffed with useless questions”, Locke is reported to have said.⁴ Locke has also been considered a representative of the modern interpretation of the concept of the knowing subject. It is true the Cartesian self-conscious subject was something new, indeed, when compared to the traditional view of the age, but in many respects Locke is not that modern a thinker after all, and his philosophy has its roots deep in scholastic Aristotelian philosophy of the medieval times. As a matter of fact, the big epistemological picture of Locke resembles a lot of that of Thomas Aquinas (1224-74).

In the *History of Philosophy* Frederick Copleston writes: “Locke combined the empiricist thesis that all our ideas originate in experience with a modest metaphysics. And if

there were no Berkeley and no Hume, we might be inclined to look on Locke’s philosophy as a watered-down form of Scholasticism, with Cartesian elements thrown in, the whole being expressed in a sometimes confused and inconsistent manner.”⁵ Copleston was not the first to notice that many of Locke’s basic assumptions are not that far from what the Aristotelian tradition had been proposing since the time of the Greeks. As a matter of fact even Leibniz likened Locke to Aristotle and himself to Plato in his book *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding* in 1704. For some reason or another it seems no one has really taken this question up.

These philosophical issues are of essential importance for curriculum theory, because all education has the learner and knowing subject as its starting-point. As a clear example of this one may recall Herbert M. Kliebard’s description of four “interest groups” or educational reform movements of the 20th century America with distinct views on the concept of the knowing subject.⁶ What seems to be of particular interest is that all the different interpretations Kliebard presents can be shown to be resulting from the ferments of the centuries of 1300-1600 when the so-called modern subject and rationality is usually said to have been born. However, in the recent times the post-modern philosophy has denied there being any humanity or essence or other core common to all people. This, of course, poses problems for education, too, for unless we share an idea of the subject we are about to educate there can be no general theory of education. That being intolerable, we need to counterbalance the situation by studying the historical backgrounds of curriculum theory and philosophy of education. It is not possible to see the future without seeing the past at the same time.

I begin with considering Locke’s importance in curriculum history. After that I

proceed to discussing the question about medieval Aristotelian aspects in Locke's philosophy.

On Locke's importance to curriculum theory

There have been two "super-discourses" or "mega-paradigms" in the field of education from about the 20th century on. One is the German Bildung or Didaktik theory, and the other is the Anglo-American Curriculum tradition.⁷ These two traditions have shaped curricular thinking in many countries across the World. John Locke is a central figure for both of these traditions.⁸ When making Locke's thinking explicit it is necessary to resort to medieval philosophy. The philosophy of Locke opens vistas to many directions. In addition to being a common basis for American and German educational theories, there culminate many ideas with origins in the Medieval or Ancient times (regarding virtues, faculty psychology, empiricism etc.) in Locke. This can also be shown by taking a look at the curricula of Locke's University of Oxford of the 17th century with text-books largely made by Spanish Jesuits passing on the Thomism and Aristotelian tradition of the (late) scholasticism.⁹

In this paper I consider four important traits in Locke's philosophy influential on curriculum theory. They are individualism, rehabilitation of Epicurean ethics, associationist psychology and empiricism. They merge, or act in concert. All these ideas, however, can be traced back to the scholasticism of the 13th and 14th century or even further. I try to say something about each of these.

Locke's views on ethics were based on his individualist concept of human being. He did not consider man as example or fulfiller of some universal humanity common for mankind, such as Plato's transcendental idea – or Aristotelian immanent species supported by Aquinas. The origins of individualism can be

found in the beginnings of the 14th century resulting from the nominalist ideas put forward by William of Ockham (1285-1347), who maintained that every existent is individual through itself. Before Ockham, John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) had taught a doctrine, according to which an individual is a common nature with a formally distinct individuating difference (lat. *haecceitas*, "thisness"). One remarkable motivation for philosophically legitimating individuality sprang up from religion: it had to be assured that God could know each and every individual instead of knowing universal human nature common for all people only.

Individualism was basically an ontological view denying that universals and classes are real and assigning reality to particulars only. After Locke there was emphasized a sense of uniqueness in individualism. For example Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) in Germany put their emphasis on individuality, on that which makes an individual unique and distinguishes one individual from another. This was also an important ingredient in the thought of John Stuart Mill (1806-73). Moreover, it was not uncommon among them to stress the unique individuality of nations and cultures.

The main influence of Locke on curriculum theory is, perhaps, that education, teaching and learning are being viewed from a psychological viewpoint. There are at least two significant Lockean ideas related to this. Firstly, Locke re-introduced the principle of pleasure into ethics: It is uneasiness that motivates us and puts us into action. In *Essay* we read: "This uneasiness we may call, as it is, desire; which is an uneasiness of the mind for want of some absent good. All pain of the body of what sort so ever, and disquiet of the mind, is uneasiness."¹⁰ This view was made famous by

Epicurus (341-270), a notable proponent of the ancient atomic theory, and revived in the Renaissance through the writings of Lucretius (95-54) and Diogenes Laërtius (2nd – 3rd century). In the early 17th century the Frenchman Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) made the ancient theory of atoms acceptable as both a scientific and a religious theory. Epicurean ideas became widely known after 1650's when the works of Lucretius and Gassendi appeared in English.

Applications of the idea that all action is for the sake of the agent's pleasure or advantage, appeared in American behaviorist psychology as Thorndike's "law of effect" and later it shows in Skinner's ideas of reinforcement/extinction of emotions and behavior.¹¹ Consider these two quotes, the first being from Locke, the second from John B. Watson:

I may say that of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education.¹²

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors.¹³

Locke did think it is possible to condition behavior but he rejected training through extrinsic motivation and warned about physical punishment. Instead of conditioning children are to be educated. Instead of appealing to their desires and aversions their faculty of reason is to be strengthened and their capacity to resist their desires increased.

Aristotle taught much in the same way: the end of education – and the end of life as well – is intellectual activity in accordance with

virtue. There are irrational (or vegetative), appetitive and rational human powers.¹⁴ Education is a process for developing the appetitive (habits) and rational powers (intellect). First and foremost education is the acquisition of moral and intellectual virtue, for education should promote a sound development of the appetitive and rational powers: "the function of man is an activity of soul in accordance with, or not without, rational principle".¹⁵ The intellectual virtue is the primary goal, for it means perfecting the highest and essential human faculty, which makes human nature to be what it is, "since intellect more than anything else is man".¹⁶ Locke, of course, did not approve Aristotle's metaphysical premises but agreed with the conclusion.

Another Locke's idea important for curriculum theory is the associationist psychology according to which all mental phenomena and processes result from our combining simple ideas we acquire through the senses or introspectively "by reflection". So, our thinking is "association of ideas" and can be described in mechanistic terms. Locke did not only have impact on "anti-mentalist and objectivist" behavioral psychology studying only behavior and functions one can observe. Locke's psychology influenced "mentalist and subjectivist" theories as well, especially German structuralism towards the end of the 19th century with Wilhelm Wundt in the lead.

Structuralism can be defined as psychology as the study of the elements of consciousness. Hermann Ebbinghaus made the study of learning and memory quantitative and experimental. Many Americans went to Leipzig to study with Wilhelm Wundt and brought this new experimental and associationist psychology to the United States, where it took a more functional flavor. In response to structuralism, an American perspective emerged under the influence of thinkers such as Charles Darwin and William James. American psychology grew

rapidly and many experimental laboratories were founded in the last two decades of the 19th century.¹⁷ One important German figure was Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), who embraced Wundt's structuralism and tried to translate it into mathematical terms and create "mechanics of the mind" according to the scientific model laid by Newton. Herbart's scientific pedagogy was the first internationally received system of education, successful in almost every civilized country, although only after Herbart's death in 1841.

John Locke's empiricism connects him to the Aristotelian scholasticism in an explicit way. Empiricism was also to be the epistemological basis of logical positivism – and later logical empiricism – as a scientific paradigm, which produced such ideas as behaviorism denying the phenomena not directly observable. Elements of Locke's empiricism can easily be found in Locke's educational writings. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* Locke describes the child as "white paper, or wax, to be molded and fashioned as one pleases" but the context suggests some caution. Locke says each child has "an original temper" or "character", which "God has stamped" and "may perhaps be a little mended but can hardly be totally altered and transformed into the contrary".¹⁸

Locke had a great impact on both German and American philosophy. In the 18th century a great deal of British empiricism was being translated to German in a relatively short time. Among the most influential of the British besides Locke were David Hume (1711-76), Thomas Reid (1710-96) and lord Kames (Henry Home, 1696-1782). Such German Bildung-theorists as Herder and Georg Friedrich Meier (1718-1777) took in ideas from British philosophy and Locke, of course, too. Later Locke's and Herders's influence passed on to Humboldt and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and hermeneutic philosophy in general. During

the past decades there has emerged in the study of curriculum theory an interest in "starting a dialogue" between German Didaktik and American Curriculum traditions and their cultural differences in understandings of teaching, schooling and the teaching profession. John Locke is one common starting-point for both traditions.¹⁹

Next I shall take up some examples of how Locke's philosophy can be seen in relation to Aquinas's scholastic Aristotelian philosophy.

Watered-down version of scholasticism?

The philosophy of Locke cannot be understood unless considered in relation to the Aristotelian tradition prevailing in the curricula of the universities of the 17th century. In a nutshell, Locke wants to abandon metaphysics altogether whereas for Aquinas metaphysics was the starting-point of everything. It happened, however, that Locke – like everyone necessarily does – needed some fundamental ontological presuppositions to base his philosophy on, and regarding these Locke turned skeptical.

In this paper it is not possible to examine closely all the different aspects there is to Locke's medieval background. So, I content myself with presenting a list of the essential points including things I think are common for both Aquinas's and Locke's theories of cognition. Then I try to say something general to make the list understandable. At least the following ideas of Aquinas seem to be present in the Lockean concept of the knowing subject:

- Basic ontological presuppositions: God-postulate, ontological realism (supposing the extra-mental world independent of the perceiver/knower), correspondence theory of truth, postulation of some substrate as an unchanging core lying under the perceivable and changing qualities of material things

- Human being as knowing subject is autonomous.
- Human being is by nature a political animal. “God having designed Man for a sociable creature, made him - - under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his own kind.”²⁰
- Empiricism (or sensibilism): *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu.* (“Nothing is in the intellect without being prior in sense.”)
- Cognition is a natural (biological) and causal process.
- There is no innate knowledge.
- Representational realism (indirect realism)
- The working of the human intellect can be explicated by analyzing its acts and operations.
- Aristotelian terminology and concepts.

Aquinas and Locke have empiricism in common. They repeat what Aristotle said in the first book of *Metaphysics*: “it is through experience that men acquire science and art”.²¹ And it is through the senses that men acquire experience: “Nothing is in the intellect without being prior in sense”. Or, to quote Arthur Schopenhauer, “This is the true meaning of the doctrine ascribed to Aristotle: *Nihil est in intellectu nisi quod antea fuerit in sensu.* It is likewise the sense of Locke's philosophy that made an epoch in philosophy for all time by finally starting the serious discussion of the question of the origin of our knowledge”.²² In short: there is no innate knowledge, says Locke, and Aquinas had thought the same 400 years earlier.

But there is, to be exact, difference between Aquinas and Locke in this issue. In the 20th and 21st century the standard way of categorizing early modern thinkers has been dividing them into rationalism and empiricism. To articulate the difference between Aquinas and Locke we need another conceptual distinction. Instead of speaking of “rationalism”

and “empiricism” it is more illustrative to speak of “sensibilism” and “intellectualism”. According to the sensiblist view – this is the how Wayne Waxman puts it – “all our ideas/perceptions/representations originate in being perceived and have no existence independently of their immediate presence to consciousness in perception”. Intellectualism is the negation of sensibilism. It means that concepts, mental structures or faculties constitutive of intellection do exist prior to their being perceived in sensation”.²³ In other words, sensibilism denies that we have the “pure intellect” Kant spoke of. Locke exemplifies sensibilism whereas Aquinas is more of an intellectualist.

Aquinas’s theory of cognition rests on metaphysical premises. Especially central is the concept of species. In the medieval Aristotelian cognition theory, a *species* is somehow a representation of the thing cognized, between the external object and the mind. The external object is material but the grasp of the mind is not. External objects are particular but the mind contemplates universals. By means of the *species*, the act of cognition and the object of cognition can come together. There are three kinds of species: species in the air or other media between object and percipient (*species in medio*), species in the sense organs (*species sensibiles*) and species in the intellect (*species intelligibiles*). All cognition, says Aquinas, takes place “through some species of the cognized thing in the cognizer”.²⁴ Cognition was thought to be a causal process, a causal chain of species, each one generated by the one before it, linking external object and the knower.²⁵ External things are not simple but composite, they are composed of matter and form, Aquinas teaches exactly like Aristotle did. The human intellect has the power to abstract universal natures of things from the sense-data and produce universal concepts, and, after concepts have been produced, propositions

joining and separating these concepts. It is not possible to isolate epistemology from metaphysics or vice versa. Knowing is a special way of being. “It is not the stone that is in the mind, but the form [*species*] of the stone”, Aquinas says borrowing his expression from Aristotle.²⁶

Locke rejects the species-based metaphysical theory altogether and speaks about ideas instead. Locke's philosophy can be crystallized in three words: it is a theory of ideas. The most central concept in his whole philosophical system is the concept of the idea, which Locke borrowed from Descartes. John Carriero, interesting enough, points out, that according to Aquinas “the Latin *forma* is the term traditionally used to translate the Greek *idea*. So the term idea carries with it overtones of a thing's structure.” Carriero sees “that this overtone continues with Descartes, so that for him, too, an *idea* is some form or structure – some ‘reality’ – existing objectively in the mind”.²⁷ This supports the opinion about the scholastic background of the most essential concept in Locke's philosophy.

The essential features of Locke's theory of ideas are as follows:

- Idea stands for whatsoever is the object of the understanding, when a man thinks.” Locke uses the word idea to “express whatever is meant by phantasm, notion, *species* or anything the mind can be employed about in thinking. (*Essay* I.i.8)
- All ideas come from experience. There is no innate knowledge. The mind is a “white paper, void of all characters”, as Locke says. (*Essay* II.i.2)
- Experience can be external or internal. External experience means sensory experience which gives us ideas of sensation, Locke says. External things cause ideas in our minds. (*Essay* II.i.25)

- Another source of experience is reflection. When the mind reflects on its own operations, there come to be ideas of these operations in the understanding. This is the reason of our calling Locke an empiricist: whatever we are thinking, we are thinking of ideas, and every one of these ideas comes from experience and no idea comes from the understanding. And so we have ideas of yellow, red, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter and the like, but also do we have ideas of perception, thinking, doubting, believing and reasoning. (*Essay* II.i.2-5)
- The basic unit of our thinking is a simple idea, in the reception of which the understanding is passive. It is like the mirror in that it cannot refuse to have or alter what has been imprinted in it. (*Essay* II.i.25)

From these principles one could conclude that there must be a “veil of ideas” between our minds and the external world. If the immediate objects of our consciousness are ideas, how can we be sure there is anything behind those ideas? As is well known, George Berkeley said we can't. Locke, however, was not skeptical about there being extra-mental reality. Today we say that Locke's theory of ideas is an example of representational realism. It means the immediate objects of our knowledge are not external things but ideas received from experience instead. Another name for representational realism is indirect realism. In his *Introduction to Epistemology* Jonathan Dancy describes it in the following way:

Locke's theory of perception is a classic instance of indirect realism. - - Locke held that there is a double awareness, each with its own object. The internal object, which he called the idea, is perceived and the external object, the material thing, is seen. In perceiving an idea, then, in favorable cases we are seeing a material thing. So there is a

double awareness, one for the internal and one for the external object.²⁸

Aquinas's *species*-based theory of cognition can be interpreted in much the same way. Aquinas says the *species* is not what we perceive (*id quod*) but it is that by which (*id quo*) we perceive external things.²⁹ Of course, there are different interpretations of Aquinas's theory but I think we can justifiably consider both Aquinas and Locke to be representational realists. Their views are not exactly the same, though. For Aquinas to know means that the metaphysical nature inherent in the external thing exists in a different way in the intellect at the same time during the act of knowing. In other words, the one and qualitatively the same metaphysical nature exists in "two places" at the same time, and, in a way, the external thing "is" in the intellect. Locke does not support this kind of metaphysics but only says external things have powers to produce ideas in us, and how this happens simply is beyond our comprehension.

According to Locke, thinking means joining and separating these simple ideas. Now there raises the question: does this organizing of ideas happen systematically and in a regular way? If it does, maybe we could make a theory out of it. How could we do that, and which method should we use? Introspection is the answer. This means the justification and beginning of the associationist psychology and of the introspective method and the psychological paradigm called structuralism.

Both Aquinas and Locke were of the opinion that intellect should be the guide and conductor of man. They did not see the role of reason in the same way, however. Aquinas shared Aristotle's conception of the world as understandable with its objective structure man's reason is naturally capable of comprehending. From that it followed that the goal of reasoning is truth. Actualizing one's

intellectual capacities is also a moral obligation. Living the good life means the kind of living that concentrates on actualizing man's essential qualities, the differentiating of which is rationality. So, what the "right reason" (*recta ratio*) should do is to reach for and find out the metaphysical structure of the world, and when that has been done, reason has been perfected and complete and it has reached its end. The Truth (*Verum*) and the Good (*Bonum*) are, medieval philosophers thought, "transcendental terms" which means they refer to entities which transcend the boundary between any two categories (in the Aristotelian sense) and are coextensive with being (*ens*). The end of the reason is Truth and the end of the will is the Good, and after all they fall together, or unite. Being equals to Truth which equals to Good.

During the 14th century the Aristotelian natural philosophy and world-view had to give way to the "modern way" (*via moderna*). The rise of nominalist philosophy meant abandoning the traditional assumption of the world with an eternal, necessary and knowable metaphysical structure. Intellectual perfection or actualization of the reason could not be considered the end of thinking any more. The role of reason had to change. The reason became instrumental. It became means and method to forming beliefs and acquiring "true" - or rather true-like, that is probable information about the world. So, the Lockean reasonableness means arranging and dealing with ideas that have their origins in experience, be it via sense-organs or by reflection.

To Conclude

From the view of curriculum theory, Locke was a follower of the scholastic Aristotelian tradition in that like Aquinas Locke spoke up for the idea of man as an autonomous knower and learner. Knowing and learning happens in a natural way and there are no supernatural conditions or need for asceticism

or other requirements one has to meet in order to gain knowledge. The intellectual illumination comes from within us, not from outside. This obviously was an essential postulation of the Enlightenment with Immanuel Kant's slogan *sapere aude*, meaning "you are able to think for yourself, do not believe what the authorities say but open their claims to question". How our thinking actually happens, Locke does not say because he thinks it is something we cannot know. Using the terminology of today we could say Locke did not stick to materialism regarding the mind-body problem. It is possible that matter can think, Locke says, but would also be possible for God to somehow "super-add" thinking ability to matter.

The big epistemological picture of Locke, however, resembles a great deal of that of Aquinas. The main difference lies in their attitudes to metaphysics in explicating how knowing, learning and other mental phenomena take place. But otherwise they think much in the same way. In times of Aquinas there was no epistemology separated from metaphysics. The "epistemological turn" was to take place not until some four centuries later. These philosophical issues are of essential importance for curriculum theory, because all education has the learner and knowing subject as its starting-point. For example, Herbert M. Kliebard in *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* describes four "interest groups" or educational reform movements of the 20th century with distinct views on the concept of the knowing subject.³⁰

Furthermore, both Locke and Aquinas emphasized that the aim of education is self-control, which means that the intellect or our rationality conducts our behavior and controls the impulses resulting from our will and appetite. Of course, Locke and Aquinas did not think exactly the same about this, for Aquinas held an intellectual determinist position, according to which the intellect determines the will, whereas Locke adhered to nominalism and

did not approve any metaphysical suppositions about any real and distinct faculties of the soul determining each other. But despite of this difference both accentuated the role of morality as the goal of education process. "Morality is the proper science and business of mankind of general", Locke says.³¹

In a way both Aquinas and Locke present us with a secular picture of education. The child is not born with ideas of God or moral truths. The child does not possess innate moral goodness but the education may turn the self-centered infant into the virtuous man. To use a peripatetic expression, the child is "potentially good". The educator's business is – Locke says – "to set the mind right, that on all occasions it may be disposed to consent to nothing but what may be suitable to the dignity and excellency of a rational creature".³² Like Aquinas, Locke thinks it is possible to have demonstrative certainty about moral ideas, but let us leave discussing Locke's "moral epistemology" to another occasion.

Ian Westbury has recommended "starting a dialogue" between Didaktik and Curriculum traditions, for they are concerned with the same set of issues:

- teaching and learning goals,
- the topics and contents that follow,
- organizational forms and teaching and learning methods and procedures,
- teaching and learning media,
- prerequisites, disturbing factors, and unintentional auxiliary effects, and
- the ways in which learning results and forms can be controlled and evaluated.³³
-

Westbury believes both traditions can offer each other insights and knowledge especially in those areas where each tradition has its own shortcomings. Curriculum theory can teach the Didaktik tradition about the relation of school and society and about

educational planning. Didaktik tradition can, in its turn, help the curriculum theory toward issues of “teaching as a reflective practice” and thinking about teaching.³⁴ Prior to dealing with any of Westbury’s issues, anyhow, it is necessary to make explicit the way we consider and define the concept of the knowing subject in the core of curriculum theory. Studying John Locke’s philosophical backgrounds is basic research, which in turn makes possible a deeper understanding when comparing these traditions.

References

- Aristotle, *Aristotle in twenty-three volumes*, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1980 (1933).
- Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle I-II*, the revised Oxford Translation, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton University Press, 6th printing with corrections, 1995 (1984).
- Autio, Tero (2006), *Subjectivity, Curriculum and Society: Between and Beyond the German Didaktik and Anglo-American Curriculum Studies*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, New Jersey.
- Carriero, John (2009), *Between two Worlds. A Reading of Descartes’s Meditations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.
- Copleston, Frederick (1993-), *A History of Philosophy, Volumes I – IX*, Doubleday, London and New York (1946).
- Dancy, Jonathan (1985), *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, UK.
- Doll, William E. (1993), *A Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum*, Teachers College Press, New York and London
- Horlacher, Rebecca (2004), “Bildung – a Construction of a History of Philosophy of Education”, *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 2004/23, p. 409-426.
- Kliebard, Herbert M. (2004), *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958*, third edition, RoutledgeFalmer, New York and London.
- Kraye, Jill (2008), “British Philosophy Before Locke”, in *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, edited by Steven Nadler, Blackwell Publishing, p. 283-297.
- Locke, John (1975), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Edited with a Foreword by Peter H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Locke, John (1996), *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, edited and with introduction by Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis.
- Liotard, Jean-Francois (1984), *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester University Press, Manchester (*La condition postmoderne*, 1979).
- Palmer, Joy (ed.) (2001), *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education. From Confucius to Dewey*, advisory editors Liora Bresler and David E. Cooper, Routledge, London and New York.
- Pasnau, Robert (1997), *Theories of Cognition in the later Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne.
- Rutherford, Donald (2004) (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur (1966), *The World as Will and Representation. In two volumes*, translated by E. F. J. Payne, Dover, New York (1819, 1844, 1859)
- Sheenan, Paul (2004), “Postmodernism and Philosophy”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, edited by Steven Connor, Cambridge University Press, p. 20-42.
- Spangler, Mary Michael (1998), *Aristotle on Teaching*, University Press of America, Lanham.

Thomas Aquinas (1882), *Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P.M.*

Waxman, Wayne (2005), *Kant and the Empiricists – Understanding Understanding*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Wertheimer, Michael (1970), *A Brief History of Psychology*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.

Westbury, Ian & Hopmann, Stefan & Riquarts, Kurt (eds.) (2000), *Teaching as a reflective practice. The German Didaktik Tradition*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, New Jersey.

¹ I talk about “postmodernism” rather loosely and roughly in a Lyotardian (1984) sense, as “incredulity towards metanarratives”. According to Lyotard it is not possible to ground thinking in transcendental, ahistorical, universal principles. The death of the grand narrative means birth of the local narrative. Lyotardian thinking is closely related to Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. In the posthumous *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) Wittgenstein sees language as motley of many different practices or “language games”, which are irreducible to a single basic pattern. Language is seen as anthropocentric: its meanings are based on human praxis instead of universal, absolute meanings. Yet, “postmodern” can mean many different things, and it may be impossible to give one accurate definition of it. See e.g. Sheenan 2004 and Doll 1993,4-10

² *New Organon* I.31, quoted in Rutherford 2006,11. The title in Latin, *Novum organon* in itself is, of course, an allusion to Aristotle, whose logical works were known as the *organon*, ‘instrument’.

³ See e.g. Krays 2008.

⁴ Woolhouse 2007,18.

⁵ Copleston, *History* IV,26.

⁶ Kliebard 2004.

⁷ On Bildung see Horlacher 2004; Westbury & Hopmann & Riquarts 2000, 57-125.

⁸ Autio (2006) has paid attention to this. He sketches a theoretical line from Reformation through Descartes, Locke, Kant (1724-1804) and Herbart (1776-1841) up to the American curriculum theory reaching its top in Ralph Tyler’s rationale in the 1950’s. Autio’s theoretical position resembles a great deal of William Doll’s (1993), who emphasizes the significance of Descartes in what comes to the change in the understanding of the role of reason in the 17th century, too.

⁹ Author 2011

¹⁰ *Essay* II.xxi.31

¹¹ Autio 2006, 98; Wertheimer 1970,107.

¹² *Thoughts* § 1

¹³ Watson, John B., *Behaviorism*, Norton, New York, 1924

¹⁴ *EN* I.13,1102a5-1103a10

¹⁵ *EN* I.7,1098a8-17; *Pol.* VII.13,1332b5-11

¹⁶ *EN* II.1,1103a14-15; X.7,1178a1-8; *Pol.*

VII.15,1334b14-28. Aristotle on education and teaching see e.g. Spangler 1998.

¹⁷ Wertheimer 1970,89-90

¹⁸ *Thoughts* §§ 48,66,216

¹⁹ Westbury & Hopmann & Riquarts 2000; Autio 2006

²⁰ *Essay* III.i.1

²¹ *Met.* I.1,981a2

²² Schopenhauer 1966b,82

²³ Waxman 2005, 3-5

²⁴ *I Sent.* 36.2.3sc

²⁵ Pasnau 1997,14

²⁶ “*Lapis non est in anima, sed species lapidis*”. See *ST* Ia, q.76, a.2 ad 4; Ia, q.85, a.2 c; *de An.* III.8,431b28-432a2

²⁷ Carriero 2009, 19. In Q.D. de veritate (q.3, a.1) Aquinas says we may translate “ideas” into “forms” or “species”: “sicut dicit Augustinus - -, ideas Latine possumus vel formas, vel species dicere, ut verbum ex verbo transferre videamur.”

²⁸ Dancy 1985,166

²⁹ *ST* Ia, q.85, a.2

³⁰ Kliebard (2004, 1-25) says, after the status quo of the *mental disciplinarianism* based on [Christian] Wolffian psychology there emerged in the 1890’s century four movements: the *humanists* (with e.g. Charles W. Eliot), the *developmentalists* (G. Stanley Hall), the *social efficiency educators* (Joseph Meyer Rice) and

the *social meliorists* (Lester Frank Ward). In addition to these Kliebard mentions John Dewey, who did not belong to any of them but was “hovering over the struggle” (p. xix).

³¹ *Essay IV.xii.2*

³² *Thoughts § 31*

³³ Westbury & Hopmann & Riquarts 2000,16

³⁴ The curriculum tradition is organizational: teachers as employees of the school system are expected to “implement” the system’s curricula. They are “conduits” of the system’s curriculum decisions. In the German model, teachers are guaranteed professional autonomy. They are free to teach without the state curriculum (Lehrplan) controlling the teacher’s own approach to teaching. The state curriculum only lays out prescribed content for teachers to interpret and to “give life”. Didaktik is not centered on the task of directing and managing the work of system of schools or of selecting a curriculum for this school or this district. Instead Didaktik provides teachers with ways of considering the essential questions what, how and why around their teaching of their students in their classrooms. These are the core issues at the heart of a reflective practice of teaching (p. 17).