

The Very Human Ideot:
Locke's *Essay*, Darwin's *Descent*,
and the Disruptive Power of Intellectual
Disability

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Acknowledgements

Ideas are peculiar 'things': from where do they come, of what, if anything, are they made, how do we realise them, can we share them? The 'idea' for this thesis has no ordinary moment that I am aware of, but I do thank the people with intellectual disability, and/or mental illness, their families, and the professional, research and support staff with whom I have spent my own professional life. They are the source of many of the questions, and moments of inspiration, that led me to this project.

Investigating the function of intellectual disability in the disparate work of John Locke and Charles Darwin was never going to be an easy task, readily placed in an academic department. I thank Professor Stephanie Hemelryk Donald for having the courage to take on the initial supervision of a topic which was outside her own domain, but which she considered worthwhile, and which she pushed me, with due academic rigour and personal enthusiasm, to pursue across a range of disciplines. Professor Donald left the University of Technology, Sydney, and at that point I was fortunate to move to supervision of Dr Peter Caldwell, whose prodigious memory was both astounding and inspiring. Sadly, Dr Caldwell soon retired: Professor Andrew Jakubowicz was kind enough to step in, and to provide some stimulating commentary from the disability studies perspective.

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Texts used and citation method:

John Locke and Charles Darwin each produced a large number of publications. Darwin's publications in particular have had many editions. In order to avoid bulky, intrusive citations, at the same time as making clear which work, and which edition I am referring to, I have adopted the following in-text citation method.

All references to the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* are, unless otherwise specified, taken from the scholarly edition edited by Peter Nidditch, published in 1975. In order not to interrupt the text with long citations, I have used the form, Book: Chapter: Section (1.2.2, for Book 1, Chapter 2, Section 2, for example), with no other appellation or date. All references in this form refer to the *Essay*.

In the body of this thesis, references to Locke's other works are cited with an abbreviated title, edition date, page number, rather than the more traditional author, date, page number: for example, (*Reasonableness* 1824: 213).

Darwin's works are now all available in authoritative editions on the magnificent Darwin website: <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>. I have preferred the last editions prepared by Darwin, of *The Descent on Man* (1882), and of the *Origin* (1876). There are fewer editions of *The Expression of Emotions*; I have used the 1872 edition. All Darwin's work are cited as per Locke's other works above; that is, Title: Date: Page. For example, (*The Descent* 1882: 31).

All abbreviations are the obvious ones:

Essay Concerning Human Understanding (*Essay*)

Two Treatises of Government: In the Former, The False Principles and Foundation of Sir Robert Filmer, And His Followers, are Detected and Overthrown (*Two Treatises*)

Some Thoughts Concerning Education (*Some Thoughts*)

The Reasonableness of Christianity (*Reasonableness*)

The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex (*The Descent*)

The Expression of Emotions of Emotions in Man and Animals (*The Expression*)

On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life (*Origin*)

These and other abbreviations are generally also noted in text.

Contents

Introduction: are idiots human?.....p. 1

Motivation for research – the questions to be raised and responded to – notes re terminology and referencing.

Methodology.....p. 13

The objects of study: the *Essay*, *The Descent*, and *The Expression of Emotions* – the importance of the evidence in these texts – the current state of play; Foucault and the contingent nature of intellectual disability, social constructionism and the British Social Model of disability, the history of intellectual disability to date – the tools of analysis; intellectual disability as an interrogatory term – statement of method.

Chapter 1: The *Essay*: background, response, idiots within.....p. 39

The *Essay*, general background and reception - the references to idiots, naturals, changelings, monsters and fools - the typography of idiots – contemporary response to the evidence from people with intellectual disability - recent response; the work of C. F. Goodey and James Buickerood - chapter conclusion: idiots have a significant role as evidence in the *Essay*.

Chapter 2: The historical background to Locke's idiots.....p. 61

The idiot-natural /artificial-fool distinction in pre- and early-modern thought - idiocy in legal terms and discussion - in medical discourses - in popular culture - in domestic discourses - pre- and early-modern notions of changelings and monsters - chapter conclusion: idiocy had meaning and significance in the pre- and early-modern periods.

Chapter 3: Ideocy and anti-nativism.....p. 87

Nativism in the seventeenth century - Locke's arguments against nativism - the dismissal of idiots in the responses to the *Essay* - the importance of 'all mankind' in the evidence in Book 1 - idiocy as key evidence in 'all mankind' - chapter conclusion: idiots have a significant function.

Chapter 4: Idiots, changelings and monsters in knowledge acquisition and species delimitation.....p. 115

The evidentiary strategy in Book 2 of the *Essay* - idiots (and children) as evidence for the delineation of cognitive process - idiocy and the inevitable dullness of Man - the challenge of changelings and monsters - the evidence from changelings and monsters; replaceable by other examples? - chapter conclusion: the natural imperfections of humankind.

Chapter 5: Locke's Humankind.....p. 144

The *Essay*: an exercise in plurality – the challenge of the *Essay's* human (plural) – Person in 'Of Identity and Diversity' revisited - the diversity of Locke's Man-Human - chapter conclusion: a diverse human is central to the *Essay*.

Chapter 6: The Enlightenment return to the universal human.....p. 174

Locke's influence in the long eighteenth century - human nature, human understanding - the remnant diversity in Enlightenment humankind - perfectability, measurement, and the increasing marginalisation of people with intellectual disability - education, classification, a place in theory lost for those with disability - nature and monsters in the Enlightenment - secular Man, theories of generation, and the body - chapter conclusion: human nature, without diversity.

Chapter 7: Idiocy in the nineteenth century, Darwin's *Descent* and *Expression of Emotions*.....p. 201

The rise of social statistics - normalisation, classification, medicalisation - phrenology, craniometry and intelligence - other forces of the nineteenth century - Darwin's idiots, biological determinism, and human value - Darwin's background - the origin of *The Descent* and *The Expression of Emotions* - references to idiocy in Darwin's theory of evolution - idiocy in *The Expression of Emotions* - idiocy in *The Descent of Man* - monsters in *The Descent* - the function of idiots and monsters in the theory of natural selection; missing links - idiots and incorrect analogies - chapter conclusion: a Darwinian, dying-at-the-edge species.

Chapter 8: Darwin's very limited Man.....p. 237

Darwin's Man - is Darwin's Man ever a woman? - a child, an older person? - could Darwin's Man have a disability? - be black? - negative selection: the function of people with (supposedly) vestigial characteristics - Darwin's Man: civilised, compassionate, perfectible - the question of eugenics - Darwin's legacy: eugenic Man – idiots demonstrate that Darwin was wrong - chapter conclusion: Darwin's depleted humankind.

Conclusion: the very human idiot.....p. 275

The advantages of Locke's humankind – the very human idiot – where to from here?

Appendix: Who are people with intellectual disability?.....p. 288

Reference List.....p. 296

Abstract

Innate maxims, John Locke declared in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), cannot exist because children and people with intellectual disability (whom he called ideots) do not show evidence of knowing such maxims. This thesis argues that, for very good reason, ideots were Locke's prime evidence against the then current belief that God implanted, pre-birth, maxims and principles that became the basis of all human knowledge. Teasing out the differences Locke made between ideots, changelings and monsters, this thesis also discusses the contribution of people with disability to Locke's argument that species, such as Man/human, are, like the words that represent them, largely conventional rather than natural, essential or immutable. One hundred and seventy years after Locke, Charles Darwin published his work on evolution in humans. He, like Locke, included repeated references to people with intellectual disability in *The Descent of Man* (1871), and its companion piece, *The Expression of Emotions* (1872). This thesis argues that the motivation and effect of Darwin's inclusion of people with intellectual disability were vastly different from Locke's, both in relation to people with intellectual disability themselves, and, importantly, to the understanding of who should, and should not, be included in the species, human, particularly over the longer term. Darwin has been regularly criticised for the use of analogy rather than evidence; in this thesis I argue that his use of people with intellectual disability was indeed analogy, and fallacious analogy at that. Whether or not Darwin himself approved of eugenics, what he left us with was effectively an 'eugenic man' – a single, male, adult as the measure of who it is could, and should, survive. This thesis concludes that a recuperation of the diverse humankind that Locke considered in the *Essay* is an intellectual, and social, imperative.