

LOCKE ON RELIGIOUS ENTHUSIASM AS A FORM OF MADNESS

Prof. Dr. Diego Lucci

American University in Bulgaria

Abstract. In John Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, madness is described as "the association of ideas," which consists in (mistakenly) associating ideas not inherently connected to each other. When criticizing religious enthusiasts for relying exclusively on "immediate inspiration," Locke blamed them for engaging in the "association of ideas." Thus, he considered enthusiasm as a sort of madness. This essay examines Locke's analysis of madness against the backdrop of his "way of ideas," thereby highlighting the specificity of his "ideational" account of madness in light of his theory of knowledge, his concept of faith as "assent," and his notions of reason and revelation, which he regarded as complementing and assisting each other. The essay then concentrates on Locke's view of enthusiasm as a form of madness and, thus, as divergent from "strict Reasoning," which is employed for the purpose of using our understanding properly and directing our conduct appropriately.

Keywords: enthusiasm; faith; Locke; madness; reason; revelation

Introduction

Although he is best remembered as one of the major philosophers and political thinkers of the Age of Enlightenment, the English philosopher John Locke (1632 – 1704) was a physician by education and profession, as he studied medicine at Oxford and then sustained himself by working as a physician for most of his mature life. He lived in a time when the medical sciences were undergoing significant developments:

"Out of dissatisfaction with Scholastic explanations came a desire to explain pathology in terms of underlying structures, rather than in formal terms [...]. The rise of iatrochemical explanations – that is, those integrating chemical theories into medicine – challenged Galenist accounts of the humoral body that had been dominant for a millennium and a half" (Tabb 2023, p. 184).

Psychopathology benefited from these developments, particularly at Oxford, where Thomas Willis wrote and published his influential book of neuropathology, *Pathologiae Cerebri, et Nervosi Generis Specimen* (1667), explaining mental

illness as being caused by mechanical or chemical problems in the brain or the nerves (Willis 1667). However, Locke, while accepting physiological explanations of bodily diseases, and while being familiar with Willis's work, provided an "ideational," and not physiological, account of madness. Examining mental illness in light of his "way of ideas," Locke saw madness as a pathology of ideas, and not of the mental faculties producing ideas. He considered madness as "the association of ideas," which consists in (mistakenly) associating ideas not inherently connected to each other (Tabb 2023).

Being particularly concerned with the spread of self-righteous and zealous attitudes in religious matters, Locke focused his attention on a specific form of madness – namely, religious enthusiasm, which he described as grounded in belief in direct cognitive assistance from God through immediate inspiration (Nuovo 2010; Tabb 2019). Whereas the most famous writing on enthusiasm in Enlightenment England was *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* (1708) by Locke's friend and disciple Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, Locke's chapter "Of Enthusiasm" in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* and his other writings on this subject testify to the extent of enthusiastic attitudes, and to the concerns that enthusiasm provoked among rational theologians, in the late seventeenth – early eighteenth century. Unlike his deistic student Shaftesbury, Locke was a Christian philosopher, or, in other words, "a Christian virtuoso, [...] a seventeenth-century English experimental natural philosopher, an empiricist and naturalist, who also professed Christianity of a sort that was infused with moral seriousness and with Platonic otherworldliness overlaid with Christian supernaturalism" (Nuovo 2017, p. 1). Locke's philosophical, political, and theological works denote a theistic worldview in which God is the Divine Creator and Legislator of the rational, eternal, and universal law of nature. Describing God-given natural reason and divine revelation as mutually assisting and complementing each other, Locke conceived of God's Revealed Word as an infallible and sufficient source of religious and moral truth, but he argued that "it still belongs to Reason, to judge of the Truth of [a proposition's] being a revelation, and of the signification of the Words, wherein it is delivered" (Locke 1975, IV.xviii.8, p. 694). Consequently, he rationally assessed the divine authority of Scripture, which he viewed as "traditional revelation" grounded in the "original" revelations that the authors of the biblical texts had received from God. However, while he did not deny the possibility of original revelation in modern times, he dismissed enthusiasts' claims to immediate inspiration as originating in the "association of ideas," that is, in "madness." Accordingly, he distinguished enthusiasm from his notion of faith as "assent," in an attempt to protect the *true* faith of Christians from the ill-grounded self-delusions of enthusiasts, whose zeal was likely to pervert Christian belief and ethics and, thus, to hinder the pursuit of salvation and lead to antisocial behaviors.

This paper examines Locke's analysis of madness against the backdrop of his "way of ideas," thereby clarifying his concept of "madness" as "the association of ideas" in light of his theory of knowledge, his notion of faith as "assent," and his views on reason and revelation, which he saw as complementing and assisting each other. The paper then concentrates on Locke's description of enthusiasm as a form of madness (or "association of ideas") divergent from "strict Reasoning," which is employed for the purpose of using our understanding properly and directing our conduct appropriately. The paper draws, in particular, on Locke's chapter "Of Enthusiasm" in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* and other writings concerning this subject, mainly the manuscript "Immediate Inspiration" (1687). Examining Locke's notion of enthusiasm as a form of madness against the background of his "way of ideas," and with a focus on his concepts of knowledge, faith, reason, and revelation, this paper stresses the specificity of Locke's "idea-tional" account of madness, in a time when physiological (or at least "hybrid") accounts of mental disease were emerging and spreading fast, at least among physicians.

"Madness" in Locke's "Way of Ideas"

Having rejected innatism, Locke argued in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* that experience is the only source of ideas, which we receive through two "fountains" – namely, "sensation," or experience of the external world, and "reflection," or experience of the internal operations of the mind. He distinguished between "simple" ideas (which are the ideas of the qualities of external objects and of the operations of our mind) and "complex" ideas (that is, the ideas of substances, modes, and relations). Simple ideas are "received" in experience through sensation or reflection. Complex ideas are then formed in the mind by combining two or more simple ideas into a compound. While being agnostic about the ontological constitution of substances and the nature of modes and relations, Locke argued that "some of our ideas have a natural correspondence and connexion one with another: it is the office and excellency of our reason to trace these, and hold them together in that Union and Correspondence which is founded in their peculiar Beings" (ibid., II.xxxiii.5, p. 395). Accordingly, he defined knowledge as "the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas" (ibid., IV.i.2, p. 525). He described knowledge as admitting of three degrees – that is, intuitive, demonstrative, and sensitive knowledge. In intuitive knowledge, the mind "perceives the agreement or disagreement of two ideas *immediately by themselves*, without the intervention of any other" (ibid., IV.ii.1, pp. 530 – 531). We have intuitive knowledge of the existence of thinking in us and of the existence and identity of ideas in our minds. Demonstrative knowledge proceeds by inference or reasoning. We have demonstrative knowledge of mathematics and God's existence. Finally, sensitive knowledge consists in knowledge of the existence of finite things

based on sensory experience (ibid., IV.ii.1–15, pp. 530 – 538). However, in Book II, Chapter 33 of the *Essay*, which Locke titled “Of the Association of Ideas,” and which he added to the fourth edition of his masterpiece in the year 1700, he wrote:

“There is another connexion of ideas wholly owing to chance or custom. Ideas that in themselves are not all of kin, come to be so united in some men’s minds, that [...] the one no sooner at any time comes into the understanding, but its associate appears with it” (ibid., II.xxxiii.5, p. 395).

In other words, ideas can become linked in the mind in such a way that having one idea immediately leads to the forming of another idea, even though the two ideas are not inherently connected with each other. And these ideas become linked in the mind because they have been experienced together on numerous occasions. Therefore, such connections between ideas are generated not by the use of the active powers of the mind (that is, discerning, compounding, and judging) but, instead, by chance, habit, or a strong passion. The linking of ideas not inherently connected to each other is what Locke calls “the association of ideas,” that is, “madness.” For Locke, not only phobias and philiias but also beliefs, including political as well as religious beliefs, can be generated by way of association, thereby hindering humans “from seeing and examining” while leading them to “applaud themselves as zealous Champions for Truth, when indeed they are contending for Error” (ibid., II.xxxiii.18, pp. 400 – 401). Locke considered madness to be particularly dangerous because (while “Idiots make very few or no Propositions, and reason scarce at all”) mad people, by associating ideas, “make wrong Propositions, but argue and reason right from them” (ibid., II.xi.13, p. 161). Moreover, being a rational theologian who regarded natural reason and divine revelation as complementing and sustaining each other, and being a prominent advocate of religious toleration, Locke was very concerned with the spread of religious enthusiasm, which he distinguished from faith proper and he depicted as a form of madness. According to Locke, faith is not a mode of knowledge. For Locke, to know is to determine that a thing is true on the basis of intuition, demonstration, or sensation, while to give assent is to take a thing to be true on the basis of information received from a credible source. He indeed defined faith as “the Assent to any Proposition, not thus made out by the Deductions of Reason; but upon the Credit of the Proposer, as coming from God, in some extraordinary way of Communication” (ibid., IV.xviii.2, p. 689). Thus, as Nicholas Wolterstorff has noted, for Locke faith “consists in believing things on the basis of one’s belief that they have been revealed by God rather than on the basis of the premises of some demonstration” (Wolterstorff 1994, p. 190). When examining the scope of rational investigation, Locke divided “propositions” into three categories:

“1. *According to Reason* are such Propositions, whose Truth we can discover, by examining and tracing those *Ideas* we have from *Sensation* and *Reflexion*; and by natural deduction, find to be true, or probable. 2. *Above Reason* are such

Propositions, whose Truth or Probability we cannot by Reason derive from those Principles. 3. *Contrary to Reason* are such Propositions, as are inconsistent with, or irreconcilable to our clear and distinct *Ideas*” (Locke 1975, IV.xvii.23, p. 687).

Locke thought that the Scriptures contain many things “according to reason,” including the God-given, eternally valid, universally binding, and inherently rational law of nature. However, he argued that the Bible also reveals things that are beyond rational comprehension but do not contradict “the plain and clear Dictates of Reason” (ibid., IV.xviii.6, p. 694). In this regard, he explained:

“There being many Things, wherein we have very imperfect Notions, or none at all; and other Things, of whose past, present, or future Existence, by the natural Use of our Faculties, we can have no Knowledge at all; these, as being beyond the Discovery of our natural Faculties, and above *Reason*, are, when revealed, *the proper Matter of Faith*. [...] These [...] being beyond the Discovery of *Reason*, are purely Matters of *Faith*; with which *Reason* has, directly, nothing to do” (ibid., IV.xviii.7, p. 694).

An eminent example of revealed things “above reason” (which are undiscoverable by natural reason although not necessarily unconceivable or incomprehensible to reason) is an afterlife with reward and punishment (ibid., IV.xviii.7, p. 694; Marko 2023, pp. 215 – 256). Thus, for Locke, God-given natural reason and divine revelation are mutually sustaining and complementary. Divine revelation comes in where unassisted reason cannot reach, but only natural reason can verify the divine origin of a revelation:

“*Reason* is natural *Revelation*, whereby the eternal Father of Light, and Fountain of all Knowledge communicates to Mankind that portion of Truth, which he has laid within the reach of their natural Faculties: *Revelation* is natural *Reason* enlarged by a new set of Discoveries communicated by God immediately, which *Reason* vouches the Truth of, by the Testimony and Proofs it gives, that they come from God” (Locke 1975, IV.xix.4, p. 698).

While admitting to revealed things above reason, Locke maintained that only through the rational assessment of all relevant evidence can the divine origin of such revealed things be proven:

“*Reason* must be our last Judge and Guide in every Thing. I do not mean, that we must consult Reason, and examine whether a Proposition revealed from God can be made out by natural Principles, and if it cannot, that then we may reject it; But consult it we must, and by it examine, whether it be a *Revelation* from God or no: And if *Reason* finds it to be revealed from God, *Reason* then declares for it, as much as for any other Truth, and makes it one of her Dictates” (ibid., IV.xix.14, p. 704).

In *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and its two vindications (published, respectively, in 1695 and 1697), Locke followed the anti-Trinitarian leader Faustus Socinus and the Remonstrant theologian and lawyer Hugo Grotius in arguing that the divine origin of Scripture is denoted by several factors, such

as the consistency of Old Testament Messianic prophecies with their fulfillment recounted in the New Testament, the excellence of Christ's moral and salvific message, and Christ's miracles (Locke 1999, pp. 47 – 50, 56 – 57, 142 – 147; Locke 2012, pp. 35, 156 – 162, 185 – 186; Socinus 1588; Grotius 1627; Nuovo 2011, pp. 53 – 73; Nuovo 2017, pp. 220 – 225; Lucci 2021, pp. 58 – 67). Locke saw the Bible as “traditional revelation,” which he distinguished from “original revelation” in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*:

“I say, *Traditional Revelation*, in distinction to *Original Revelation*. By the one, I mean that first Impression, which is made immediately by God, on the Mind of any Man, to which we cannot set any Bounds; and by the other, those Impressions delivered over to others in Words, and the ordinary ways of conveying our Conceptions one to another” (Locke 1975, IV.xviii.3, p. 690).

While describing Scripture as “traditional revelation,” Locke was confident that the authors of the biblical texts had received “original” revelations from God:

“[T]he holy Men of old, who had *Revelations* from God, had something else besides that internal Light of assurance in their own Minds, to testify to them, that it was from God. They were not left to their own Perswasions alone, that those Perswasions were from God; But had outward Signs to convince them of the Author of those Revelations. [...] *Moses* saw the Bush burn without being consumed, and heard a Voice out of it” (ibid., IV.xix.15, p. 705).

Thus, according to Locke, “outward Signs” play a critical role when assessing the divine origin of original revelations, which cannot be claimed merely on the basis of immediate inspiration.

Enthusiasm as Madness

The above-quoted passage about the “outward Signs” of divine revelation is taken from Book IV, Chapter 19 of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, titled “Of Enthusiasm” and added by Locke to the fourth edition of the *Essay* in 1700. There are, however, previous instances of Locke's belief in the divine origin of the revelations received by Moses and other biblical prophets. For instance, the example of the burning bush is also present in a manuscript set of comments on “Immediate Inspiration,” which Locke wrote in 1687 to criticize the Quaker Robert Barclay's justification of “inward and immediate revelation” (Locke 2002, pp. 37 – 41; Barclay 1686). In this manuscript, Locke stated:

“For as there were need of signes to convince those they were sent to, that the prophets were messengers sent from god, soe there was need also of some signe some way of distinction where by the messenger him self might be convinced that his message was from god. Thus god spoke to *Moses* not by a bare influence on his minde, but out of a bush all on fire that consumed not” (Locke 2002, p. 40).

Locke wrote both this manuscript set of notes on “Immediate Inspiration” and the later chapter “Of Enthusiasm” to question enthusiasts', and particularly Quakers',

claims to immediate revelation – a topic he had already addressed several times in his correspondence, drafts of the *Essay*, journal notes, and other private writings between the mid-1650s and the early 1680s (Locke 1990, p. 71; Locke 1936, pp. 114 – 125; Anstey 2019; Boespflug & Pasnau 2022). He also wrote on enthusiasm in the manuscript “Scriptura Sacra,” composed in 1692, after the manuscript “Immediate Inspiration” but before the chapter “Of Enthusiasm” (Locke 2002, pp. 42 – 43). Locke did not deny in principle the possibility of original revelation in post-biblical and modern times. In fact, he clarified in “Immediate Inspiration” that “there may be such an inspiration (which noe body can deny that considers an omnipotent agent & author of us & all our facultys which he can alter & enlarge as seems good to him)” (ibid., p. 40). He reaffirmed this opinion in “Of Enthusiasm”:

“I am far from denying, that God can, or doth sometimes enlighten Mens Minds in the apprehending of certain Truths, or excite them to Good Actions by the immediate influence and assistance of the Holy Spirit, without any extraordinary Signs accompanying it” (Locke 1975, IV.xix.16, p. 705).

However, Locke was wary of contemporary claims to immediate revelation, since he believed that humanity, particularly in post-Biblical and modern times, lives in a “state of mediocrity,” as he observed in the manuscript “Study,” composed in 1677 and published in Peter King’s *Life of John Locke* (King 1829, pp. 90 – 133; Yeo 2003). In this manuscript, Locke indeed wrote that “[w]e are here in the state of mediocrity: finite creatures, furnished with powers and faculties very well fitted to some purposes, but very disproportionate to the vast and unlimited extent of things” (Locke 1829, p. 105). In this “state of mediocrity,” it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between true and false inspiration, especially if one relies exclusively on an “inner light” or “internal perception,” as enthusiasts do (Nuovo 2010). By following this “internal light,” enthusiasts persuade themselves to be “under the peculiar guidance of Heaven in their Actions and Opinions,” regardless of what the senses and evidence commonly show to humankind, as Locke maintained in the chapter “Of Enthusiasm” (Locke 1975, IV.xix.5, p. 699). But, as he observed in the manuscript on “Immediate Inspiration,” this “internal light” does not prove the divine nature of the revelations claimed by enthusiasts, and it provides no ground to persuade others, “this internal perception being a thing impossible to be made knowne to any but he that has & feels it” (Locke 2002, p. 39). Moreover, “[s]uch inspirations can be of noe use either for direction or counsel since they cannot be distinguished from illusions” (ibid., p. 37). Even putting forward the evidence of miracles to support claims to immediate revelation is problematic, because miracles ought to be verified by rational appraisal and by considering the context of their occurrence.

Enthusiasts’ critical mistake, according to Locke, is to hold experience-based reasoning in low regard. This mistake is grounded in the wrong assumption that God provides humanity with direct cognitive assistance. This assumption leads religious

enthusiasts to adopt a “wrong Principle so apt to misguide them both in their Belief and Conduct,” as Locke stated in “Of Enthusiasm” (Locke 1975, IV.xix.8, pp. 699 – 700). The meaning of this passage can be appreciated properly if one connects it with Locke’s censure of “[p]ropositions that are not in themselves certain and evident, but doubtful and false, taken up for principles” (ibid., IV.xx.7, p. 711). These words are part of the chapter following “Of Enthusiasm” – that is, Book 4, Chapter 20, “Of wrong Assent, or Errour.” In the case of enthusiasts, the wrong principle on which they base their opinions and conduct is their inexplicable “internal perception.” But reliance on merely an “inner light” entails circular reasoning because, as Locke observes in the chapter “Of Enthusiasm” in the *Essay*, “this Light, they are so dazled with, is nothing, but an *ignis fatuus* that leads them continually round in this Circle. *It is a Revelation, because they firmly believe it, and they believe it, because it is a Revelation*” (ibid., IV.xix.10, p. 702).

Locke’s criticism of the logical fallacies that underlie enthusiastic belief has led Locke scholar Victor Nuovo to conclude, correctly, that “Locke imagined enthusiasm, in contrast to authentic divine inspiration, to be a kind of madness, a fixation of the mind upon a religious belief motivated wholly by passion and hence not dependent upon reason” (Nuovo 2010, p. 141). That Locke saw enthusiasm as a sort of madness is confirmed by the similarities between the two chapters “Of Enthusiasm” and “Of the Association of Ideas,” both of which were added by Locke to the fourth edition of the *Essay* in 1700, as I have noted above. Examining Locke’s drafts for these additions to the *Essay* in the manuscript “MS Locke e. 1” (which is now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford), Kathryn Tabb has convincingly argued that these two chapters are part of a unified effort and are linked to each other by Locke’s strong interest in madness, which developed parallel to his consideration of religious enthusiasm between the 1670s and his last decade (Tabb 2019). The chapter “Of the Association of Ideas” indeed contains the following statement:

“This wrong Connexion in our Minds of *Ideas* in themselves, loose and independent one of another, has such an influence, and is of so great force to set us awry in our Actions, as well Moral as Natural, Passions, Reasonings, and Notions themselves, that, perhaps, there is not any one thing that deserves more to be looked after” (Locke 1975, II.xxxiii.9, p. 397).

In this regard, the chapter “Of Enthusiasm” shows that religious enthusiasm provides a good example of madness, because “in effect it takes away both Reason and Revelation, and substitutes in the room of it, the ungrounded Fancies of a Man’s own Brain, and assumes them for a Foundation both of Opinion and Conduct” (ibid., IV.xix.3, p. 698). Enthusiasm, according to Locke, is a sort of madness in that it is “founded neither on Reason, nor Divine Revelation, but rising from the Conceits of a warmed or over-weening Brain”; and these conceits, “when got above common Sense, and freed from all restraint of Reason, and check of Reflection,” are “heightened to Divine Authority, in concurrence with our own Temper and

Inclination” (ibid., IV.xix.7, p. 699). Therefore, enthusiasm, relying on claims to immediate inspiration, entails the risk of antinomianism – that is, the opinion that a sort of divinely given “superiority” takes priority over ordinary moral rules and, thus, may inform the faithful’s conduct. This opinion is obviously likely to lead enthusiasts to engage in antisocial conduct and, hence, to become socially dangerous, besides hindering their salvation (Wolterstorff 1996, pp. 118–122; Lucci 2021, pp. 17 – 19, 206 – 208).

Briefly, irrational drives, not reason, lead enthusiasts to claim divine inspiration. For Locke, however, assent to anything, including the status of a revelation as divine, ought to be based on rational assessment, as I have explained above. Locke was aware of the limits of natural reason, which he compared to a “dim Candle” in the chapter “Of Enthusiasm” (Locke 1975, IV.xix.8, p. 700; Jolley 2003). Nevertheless, in Book I of the *Essay*, Locke’s comparison of natural reason with a candle aims at affirming the aptness of reason to serve purposes that “may be of use to us”:

“We shall not have much Reason to complain of the narrowness of our Minds, if we will but employ them about what may be of use to us; for of that they are very capable: And it will be an unpardonable, as well as Childish Peevishness, if we undervalue the Advantages of our Knowledge, and neglect to improve it to the ends for which it was given us, because there are some Things that are set out of the reach of it. It will be no Excuse to an idle and untoward Servant, who would not attend his Business by Candle-light, to plead that he had not broad Sunshine. The Candle, that is set up in us, shines bright enough for all our Purposes” (Locke 1975, I.i.5, pp. 45 – 46).

A few lines below in the *Essay*, Locke further clarified his position on this issue with the following words:

“Our Business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our Conduct. If we can find out those Measures, whereby a rational Creature put in that State, which Man is in, in this World, may, and ought to govern his Opinions and Actions depending thereon, we need not be troubled, that some other things escape our Knowledge” (ibid., I.i.6, p. 46).

These two passages from Book I of the *Essay* shed light on Locke’s attitude to enthusiasts, who, in his eyes, behaved as “idle servants” because of their unwillingness to employ their rational capabilities. In the chapter “Of Enthusiasm,” Locke depicted religious enthusiasts as lazy people who preferred to claim immediate revelation instead of engaging in “strict Reasoning”:

“Immediate *Revelation* being a much easier way for Men to establish their Opinions, and regulate their Conduct, than the tedious and not always successful Labour of strict Reasoning, it is no wonder, that some have been very apt to pretend to Revelation, and to persuade themselves, that they are under the peculiar guidance of Heaven in their Actions and Opinions, especially in those of them, which they cannot account for by the ordinary Methods of Knowledge, and Principles of Reason” (ibid.,

IV.xix.5, pp. 698 – 699).

Moreover, the above-quoted passages from Book I of the *Essay* call attention to the limits and, at the same time, the *powers* of natural reason. In those passages, Locke implies that a much brighter “light” than human reason can be conceived of (and this “light” is, of course, divine reason). However, human beings must be satisfied with the “Candle-light” of natural reason, which “shines bright enough” for purposes relevant to human knowledge and conduct. Relying on an alleged “inner light,” while disregarding the guidance of reason and failing to employ our mental powers, is actually likely to lead to the association of ideas, or, in other words, to madness.

Conclusion

Locke provided an ideational account of madness compatible with, and indeed embedded in, his empiricist epistemology. For Locke, madness consists in associating ideas not inherently connected to each other. Accordingly, enthusiasm, as a form of madness, is nothing but an irrational fixation of the mind, resulting from the persuasion to have received direct cognitive assistance from God – a persuasion that prevents enthusiasts from employing their understanding to reason properly, to direct their conduct appropriately, and to pursue their salvation effectively. Therefore, Locke’s account of madness diverges from the physiological explanations of mental disease that were emerging and spreading fast in the late seventeenth century, as is proven by the success of Thomas Willis’s aforementioned book, *Pathologiae Cerebri, et Nervosi Generis Specimen*.

Locke, however, was not alone among early Enlightenment English philosophers in attributing the causes of religious enthusiasm (which was widely perceived as a mental disorder) to flaws in reasoning. For instance, the Cambridge Platonist Henry More’s *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1656), although offering a “medicalizing” account of “false” enthusiasm as resulting from the occultation of reason by natural causes, still traced the deep roots of enthusiasm to wicked choices made by free human beings, given More’s belief in free will (More 1656; Leech 2008). Moreover, a few years after Locke’s death, his disciple Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, although associating religious enthusiasm with melancholy (which was widely considered as the main cause of enthusiasm in humors pathology), still described superstition, dogmatism, and intolerance as the main factors behind the spread of Christian enthusiasm (Shaftesbury 1708, pp. 80 – 82; Wolf 1988; Glauser 2002). When commenting on contemporary enthusiasts such as the French Prophets or *Camisards*, Shaftesbury went so far as to maintain that many of them were artificially inspired and were thus hypocritical, while others were manipulated into self-delusion (Shaftesbury 1708, pp. 41 – 44, 68 – 73). And he argued that, while persecution furthered enthusiasm because of enthusiasts’ “Spirit of Martyrdom,” tolerance would help to extinguish it (*ibid.*, pp. 32 – 33, 41 – 42).

Briefly, Locke's considerations on enthusiasm as a form of madness are emblematic of an attitude that was still widespread among English philosophers of the early Enlightenment, who tended to attribute the causes of enthusiasm and, generally, of mental disease to mistakes in reasoning or social factors, thereby failing to appreciate the physiological roots of mental illness, which, conversely, a physician such as Thomas Willis attempted to identify. However, Locke's account of enthusiasm and the association of ideas is still valuable in that, albeit underestimating the physiological factors behind "madness," it offers a detailed analysis of some symptoms of mental disease, particularly of the flawed process of reasoning typical of religious enthusiasm.

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✉ **Prof. Dr. Diego Lucci**
ORCID iD: 0000-0001-9640-3821
American University in Bulgaria
Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
E-mail: dlucci@aubg.edu