

---

## John Locke's 'Of the Conduct of the Understanding'

Tom Stoneham<sup>1</sup>

Though childless himself, Locke had a lifelong interest in education, taking personal responsibility for overseeing the education of Frank Masham, the son of Damaris Masham. He wrote several long letters of advice on the matter, as well as the short book 'Some Thoughts concerning Education', but his most influential contribution in the first few centuries after his death was the posthumously published 'Of the Conduct of the Understanding'. Begun in 1697 and originally intended to be a new chapter in the *Essay* (presumably for Book IV). Instead it was included in the *Posthumous Works* of 1706, the complete works of 1714, and printed as a single work in 1741 and many times thereafter, and in several translations, until the late 1800s, when it seemed to fall out of fashion as a pedagogic guide and became an object of antiquarian interest.

In this talk I want to reverse that trend and again consider the work as it was originally intended: a practical guide to education for the readers of the *Essay*. In particular, I want to consider the insights it may offer for one intent on designing a curriculum in Philosophy. I shall explore his understanding of individual differences, his views about the role of mathematics in general education, and his conception of the difference between superficial and deep learning.

---

<sup>1</sup> University of York