Lettres sur les Anglais (III)

Lettre sur M. Locke

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VolumeEditors:
Antony McKenna, Gianluca Mori

Author:
Voltaire

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Letter 13 of Voltaire’s Lettres sur les Anglais discusses Locke and the question of the soul. The first version of this text, the Lettre sur M. Locke — which we present in this volume — was suppressed in 1733 because of its quasi-materialist implications which put the whole publication at risk, and was duly replaced by the toned-down version that we now know as letter 13. However, Voltaire took up the original Lettre again in 1736 and developed the comparison between man and animal, suggesting that there existed an essential link between the organisation of bodies and their cognitive properties. The Lettre escaped Voltaire’s control and was circulated both in manuscript and printed form throughout the eighteenth century and was to play a role in the emergence of materialist thought at the heart of the French Enlightenment.

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