

From Isolation to Urban Cunningness: A Study of Locke's Labor Philosophy and the Influence of Environment on Cognition in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*

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Abstract

This paper examines the transition from isolation to urban settings in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, analyzing how these shifts engage with John Locke's Labor Philosophy (Locke 1690) and influence the embodiment of cognition in their characters. Utilizing a qualitative literary analysis, this study draws on Locke's theory of labor as a theoretical framework to explore the complex relationship between literature, philosophy, and social theory in shaping individual identities and behaviors during the 17th and 18th centuries. Key questions addressed include the impact of isolation and urbanization on labor perception, property ownership, and the embodiment of cognition within the context of socio-economic factors. The findings suggest that while *Robinson Crusoe* reflects a solitary, Lockean view of labor as tied to property and survival, *Moll Flanders* reveals the urbanization of labor practices, illustrating a more transactional approach to work and identity. This contrast illuminates significant disparities in their engagements with Locke's concept of the "blank slate" and their approaches to labor.

Keywords: Labor philosophy, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, Embodied cognition, Isolation and urbanization.

Introduction

The roots of embodiment theories can be traced back to several philosophical traditions and thinkers, including Plato and Aristotle, each contributing foundational ideas that would later influence the development of embodiment theories. Plato, for example, argued

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for the existence of innate knowledge, suggesting that certain concepts are known to be true but are not learned from experience. Plato's theory of innate knowledge, known as anamnesis or recollection, is a foundational concept in epistemology. In the Meno dialogue, Plato argues for the existence of innate true beliefs rather than innate knowledge (Shepardson, 2024). This interpretation challenges the traditional view of Platonic innatism as involving forgotten knowledge (Scott, 1987). Some scholars propose alternative interpretations, such as pronatalism or content innatism, suggesting that humans are born with innate cognitive contents rather than fully formed knowledge (Bronstein & Schwab, 2019). Plato's theory is unique in focusing on attaining difficult philosophical knowledge, unlike other innate knowledge theories that posit easily accessible innate ideas (Scott, 1987). The concept of innate knowledge continues to be debated in contemporary philosophy and cognitive science, with nativists arguing for domain-specific innate learning mechanisms and concepts, often using the poverty of the stimulus argument originally proposed by Plato (Bulov, 2019). The view that some knowledge must have been acquired before birth, provides an early challenge to the idea of a "blank slate" (Locke, 1690) mind. Aristotle, often credited with the first use of the blank slate metaphor, believed human minds start like blank slates and that experience shapes knowledge and self. Contrary to popular belief, the idea did not originate with John Locke, but he popularized it to reconcile divine determination with individual freedom (Petryszak, 1981).

This idea of the mind as a clean slate, or *tabula rasa*, directly connects to John Locke's later labor theory of value, where human cognition and identity are shaped through interaction with one's environment and labor. The term, derived from Roman wax tablets, refers to the theory that individuals are born without innate mental content (Moshman, 2018). The *tabula rasa* doctrine has been used more as a rhetorical device against which to differentiate positions on human nature, rather than as a substantive theory itself (Duschinsky, 2012). Modern interpretations acknowledge the interplay between genetic factors and environmental influences in shaping human nature (Jones, 2002).

The concept of embodiment emerged from this tradition, evolving through philosophical and cognitive debates to emphasize the role of the body, along with the mind, in shaping cognition and experience. Theories of embodiment reject dualism, which views the mind and body as separate, and instead emphasize that bodily experiences, movements, and sensory feedback are fundamental to how we think, learn, and perceive (Zlatev, 2022). Embodiment theories draw from phenomenological philosophy, particularly the work of Merleau-Ponty, which emphasizes the centrality of the body in thinking and perceiving (Awad, 2022). This interplay between the physical body and cognition offers a framework for analyzing characters like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, whose actions and decisions reflect their embodied experiences in different environments.

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* provide rich narratives for exploring how isolation and urbanization influence labor and cognition through the lens of Locke's labor

theory of value. Locke posited that human labor transforms common resources into private property, with labor itself creating value (Locke, 1690). This philosophy underpins Crusoe's experience of self-sufficiency on the island, where his isolation forces him to apply his labor to nature in order to survive. Crusoe's actions reflect the Lockean idea of labor as a means of transforming his environment into property, internalizing the rationality of commodity society and colonial ideology (Lazarus and Bowers, 2023). His solitude becomes a space for both physical survival and philosophical reflection, linking his labor to Locke's colonial vision of ecological dominion (Schaeffer, 2002).

In contrast, *Moll Flanders* shifts the narrative from isolation to urban environments, where labor is commodified, and individuals must navigate the complex socio-economic forces of 17th-century London. Moll's journey reflects the embodiment of cognition as shaped by urbanization, where economic self-interest drives labor and identity formation (Gill, 2021). Unlike Crusoe, whose labor directly engages with nature, Moll's urban labor reflects a more transactional approach. Her entrepreneurial cunning and social maneuvering in the city reveal a departure from Locke's idealized labor, highlighting instead the commodification of work and its implications for selfhood and agency (Leah, 2021). Moll embodies the cognitive struggle to survive in a world driven by economic individualism, reflecting a society in which labor and identity are intertwined with social status and economic mobility.

Both characters—Crusoe and Moll—demonstrate the profound influence of their environments on their labor, identity, and cognition. While Crusoe's isolation emphasizes labor as a form of mastery over nature, Moll's urban experience underscores labor as a socially embedded, commodified activity. This paper aims to explore several key questions: How do the settings of isolation and urbanization influence the characters' perceptions of labor and property in relation to Locke's philosophy? What role does the commodification of labor play in shaping the characters' identities and agency in urban settings? How do these experiences contribute to their embodiment of cognition, particularly in terms of decision-making processes and interactions with their environments?

Interweaving Locke's Labor Theory with 17th-Century Intellectual Paradigms

John Locke's philosophy of labor, primarily articulated in *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), is foundational to classical liberalism and significantly influenced later economic and political thought. Locke's labor theory of property stands out as a key element in his philosophy. Locke's central idea—that labor is the source of property—positions individual labor as the primary means of converting common resources into private ownership. Locke posits that in the state of nature, all resources are common to all; however, when an individual mix their labor with a resource, they appropriate it and establish ownership (Locke, 1988). This notion is compelling in its simplicity but overlooks significant practical concerns. Locke's theory seems to ignore the inequalities inherent in the distribution of labor and access to resources. For example, the unequal starting positions of individuals in society complicate Locke's

idealized view of labor as the pathway to ownership. In many cases, the labor of the underprivileged fails to translate into the acquisition of property, raising concerns about the broader social structures that impact Locke's model. While Locke's labor theory serves as a defense of private property rights, it is vulnerable to critique for failing to consider how systemic inequalities affect individuals' ability to claim property through labor.

Locke also argues that individuals have natural rights to life, liberty, and property, and property rights are derived from one's labor (Locke, 1988). This conception of natural rights is appealing because it links personal effort with personal reward. However, this formulation does not account for how the existing distribution of wealth and power constrains the opportunities available to different individuals. Locke's theory, when applied within the context of modern capitalist economies, reveals its limitations. Workers often do not retain the fruits of their labor; instead, they are alienated from their products in a way that undermines Locke's vision of justly acquired property. This critique, later articulated by Karl Marx, demonstrates a weakness in Locke's theory: it assumes a more equitable starting point than most societies actually offer. In modern economic systems, ownership of property can often be more a function of inherited wealth or exploitation than of individual labor.

Moreover, Locke imposes limits on the acquisition of property, arguing that individuals should only take as much as they can use without waste and leave "enough and as good for others" (Locke, 1988). This proviso, known as the "Lockean proviso," ostensibly offers a safeguard against over-accumulation, but in practice, it lacks mechanisms for enforcement. In the context of industrial capitalism, the unrestricted accumulation of capital by a few individuals or corporations leads to precisely the kind of inequality and resource depletion that Locke sought to prevent. Although Locke's intentions were egalitarian, the application of his theory in unregulated capitalist systems has led to vast disparities in wealth and power. Locke's inability to foresee the structural changes brought by capitalism, particularly in terms of wealth accumulation and environmental degradation, limits the applicability of his theory in contemporary contexts.

Locke also considers labor as the principal source of value, suggesting that most of the value of a product comes from the labor invested in it (Locke, 1988). This idea prefigures later economic theories, such as those of Adam Smith and Karl Marx, who also emphasize the importance of labor in creating value. However, Locke's treatment of labor value remains somewhat underdeveloped compared to these later thinkers. While Locke recognizes that labor adds value to resources, he does not fully engage with the implications of labor exploitation or the role of labor within broader economic structures. For instance, Marx's labor theory of value offers a more nuanced critique of how labor is commodified and alienated under capitalism, a system in which laborers do not necessarily reap the benefits of their efforts. Locke's approach, while pioneering, lacks the depth of later critiques of labor relations in capitalist economies.

Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan* (1651), presents a starkly different view of human nature and society. While Locke sees individuals as capable of reason and cooperation, Hobbes views them as naturally selfish and in constant conflict. Hobbes' state of nature is a state of war, where life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 1996). There is no place for industry, and consequently, no property. Hobbes argues that a powerful sovereign is necessary to enforce peace and order, and thereby enable labor and industry (Hobbes, 1996). In contrast, Locke believes in a more limited government, one that protects natural rights, including property rights. While Locke's vision of limited government resonates with modern liberal values, it raises questions about how property rights can be fairly regulated in the absence of a strong central authority. Locke's reliance on individual labor as the justification for property may work in small-scale, agrarian societies, but in complex modern economies, it is often state intervention that ensures fair labor practices and equitable distribution of resources. In this respect, Hobbes's emphasis on the role of a strong state may be more relevant to addressing the challenges of labor and property in modern societies.

Hugo Grotius, a Dutch jurist and philosopher, predates Locke but also explores ideas about natural law and property in *On the Law of War and Peace* (1625). Grotius, like Locke, believes in natural law and natural rights (Grotius, 2005). However, his justification for property is based more on social contract and mutual consent rather than labor (Grotius, 2005). While Locke's emphasis on labor offers a more individualistic justification for property rights, Grotius's focus on social contracts allows for a broader consideration of collective agreements and the role of society in determining property ownership. This approach may offer a more adaptable framework for contemporary issues of property and labor, where legal and social conventions often play a more significant role in property rights than individual labor. Locke's theory, while powerful in its defense of individual rights, does not fully account for the social dimensions of property that Grotius and later thinkers highlight.

Similarly, Samuel Pufendorf, a German philosopher, builds on Grotius's ideas in works such as *On the Duty of Man and Citizen* (1673). Pufendorf acknowledges the social aspects of property, arguing that property rights arise from social agreements and customs (Pufendorf, 1991). While Locke's labor theory focuses on the individual's relationship with nature, Pufendorf's recognition of the social context of property offers a more comprehensive understanding of how property rights function in society. In modern economies, property is not just the result of individual labor but is shaped by laws, customs, and social institutions. Locke's theory, by not fully accounting for these factors, may oversimplify the complexities of property ownership in developed economies, where legal frameworks and societal agreements play an essential role.

Richard Cumberland, a contemporary English philosopher, offers a more utilitarian approach in *De Legibus Naturae* (1672). Cumberland emphasizes the common good and the role of natural law in promoting social harmony and welfare (Cumberland, 2005). He views property in terms of its utility for society, rather than individual labor. Property rights, according to

Cumberland, should be structured to maximize overall happiness and well-being (Cumberland, 2005). This perspective provides a valuable critique of Locke's individualistic approach to property. While Locke's labor theory is focused on individual rights, Cumberland's utilitarianism highlights the need to consider the broader social impact of property rights. In this light, Locke's theory may appear somewhat narrow, as it does not adequately address the potential social consequences of unfettered property accumulation.

Locke's philosophy of labor and property is distinctive in its emphasis on labor as the primary means of appropriating resources and justifying property rights. This contrasts with the views of his contemporaries, who either focus more on social contracts (Grotius, Pufendorf) or the need for strong sovereign power to ensure order (Hobbes, 1651). Locke's ideas laid the groundwork for later liberal thought, influencing economic theories about labor and value and shaping modern understandings of property rights. However, his theory's applicability to modern economies—characterized by complex social, legal, and economic structures—can be questioned. While Locke's theory offers an empowering vision of labor and ownership, its limitations become evident when confronted with the realities of wealth concentration, social inequality, and labor exploitation in capitalist societies.

Cartographies of Isolation: *Robinson Crusoe's* Labor and Self-Sufficiency

In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the protagonist's depiction of isolation vividly portrays the challenges he faces and his transformation over time on a desolate island following a shipwreck. Defoe's detailed descriptions highlight both the harshness and fertility of the environment. For instance, Crusoe recounts, "I walked about on the shore, lifting up my hands, and my whole being, as I may say, wrapped up in the contemplation of my deliverance" (Defoe, 1719, p. 75). Initially, Crusoe must overcome the most basic challenges of survival—securing food, water, and shelter. He reflects on this when he says, "I had no clothing to cover me, nor anything to eat or drink" (Defoe, 1719, p. 49), a clear indication of the struggle he faced during his early days of isolation.

Over time, Crusoe's resourcefulness enables him to create a rudimentary shelter, cultivate crops, and domesticate animals. As he notes, "I sowed my corn, and began to domesticate a few wild goats, and to enclose some grounds to keep them in" (Defoe, 1719, p. 98). These achievements symbolize his progression from vulnerability to self-sufficiency as he transforms the island into his domain, consistent with John Locke's concept of deriving value through one's own labor. Crusoe's reflection, "I was lord of the whole manor; I had neither rival nor competitor" (Defoe, 1719, p. 107), underscores this transformation and the agency he gains through labor.

Crusoe's isolation not only tests his physical resilience but also fosters introspection. He ponders deeply about his situation, stating, "I began to look upon the world as a thing remote, which I had nothing to do with" (Defoe, 1719, p. 114). Removed from societal distractions,

Crusoe confronts existential questions, particularly around fate and providence, as seen in his meditation: "I had been delivered, and I ought to reflect that in this terrible condition, I was singled out to be spared" (Defoe, 1719, p. 137). These solitary reflections allow him to explore philosophical issues concerning selfhood, identity, and his place in the world.

Urban Entanglements: Labor and Socioeconomic Navigation in *Moll Flanders*

In contrast to the isolated environment of *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* is set against the vibrant backdrop of 17th-century London, a bustling urban landscape teeming with life, commerce, and social stratification. Defoe masterfully portrays the city's fast-paced nature and Moll's opportunistic navigation through it. Moll describes London as "the center of all the trade and commerce of the kingdom" (Defoe, 1722, p. 112), emphasizing the opportunities available for those with the wit and determination to seize them. As she moves through the city's streets, she encounters individuals from all walks of life, from wealthy merchants to impoverished beggars, each representing the diverse and hierarchical structure of urban society.

The urban environment provides Moll with numerous opportunities for social mobility and economic gain. Moll's reflections on her circumstances reveal her resourcefulness and determination to rise above her station: "I dressed up myself as well as I could in what my good friend had given me, and I appeared in the best figure I was able" (Defoe, 1722, p. 58). With charm and cunning, Moll maneuvers through the social strata, leveraging her relationships to advance her financial interests. The city becomes a stage for her entrepreneurial ventures, where she engages in various schemes to achieve financial independence, a theme central to her character. As she notes, "I had a great many trades besides that of thieving, for I carried on the old trade of pawnbroking" (Defoe, 1722, p. 146), illustrating her relentless pursuit of economic self-sufficiency.

However, Defoe also portrays the moral complexity of London, a place rife with deception and vice. Moll frequently reflects on the city's darker aspects, admitting, "the city is full of frauds and cheats, and we are all pushed upon dangerous methods for getting a livelihood" (Defoe, 1722, p. 102). The moral ambiguity of urban life is evident as Moll becomes enmeshed in criminal activities, from theft to fraud. Unlike Crusoe's isolated domain, where he is the sole ruler, Moll must navigate a social world marked by interdependence and social complexity. She frequently relies on others to survive, stating, "I depended wholly on my wits and my industry" (Defoe, 1722, p. 82), highlighting her dependence on social relationships for both survival and advancement.

This urban environment, while offering opportunities for social mobility, also exposes Moll to the risk of exploitation and moral compromise. As she reflects on her past, Moll acknowledges the perils of city life: "The wickedness of the great town and the general looseness of the people filled me with horror" (Defoe, 1722, p. 167). Her journey through

London reveals the double-edged nature of urban existence, where individuals are constantly balancing self-interest against societal expectations. This dynamic reflects John Locke's theory of social recognition and mutual dependence, illustrating the interconnectedness of individuals within the social fabric, where success is often contingent on navigating the moral gray areas of society.

Labor and Identity Formation: Contrasting Isolation and Urbanization

As John Locke aptly observes, "Every man has a property in his own person. This nobody has any right to but himself. The labor of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his" (Locke, 1988). This assertion underscores the inherent rights and responsibilities associated with labor. John Locke's concept of a blank slate, also known as "empty words," is briefly mentioned in his essay "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding" (Cusack et al, 2020). The concept of a blank slate, or "*tabula rasa*," as articulated by John Locke, is a philosophical notion that suggests the human mind at birth is a blank slate without any pre-existing ideas or knowledge. According to Locke, all knowledge comes from experience and sensory perception. This idea is central to the empirical approach to understanding human knowledge and cognition, which posits that individuals acquire knowledge through their experiences and interactions with the world. (Maden, 2021)

John Locke's Labor Philosophy (Locke, 1690), when applied to the characters of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, illuminates significant disparities in their approaches to work. *Robinson Crusoe* epitomizes the concept of honest labor as he diligently toils to survive and flourish on the deserted island. This resonates with Locke's perspective that labor is not only the foundation of property but also a pathway to self-improvement. Crusoe's labor is propelled by the imperative of self-sufficiency and the aspiration to ameliorate his circumstances. As he reflects, "I spent whole days in covering the tops of trees with reeds, laying them parallel to one another at about four inches distance, so that they might the better support my weight" (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* 97). His endeavors demonstrate a pragmatic approach to labor, driven by the necessity of his isolation and his desire for self-improvement.

Conversely, *Moll Flanders* resorts to deceitful means to earn a livelihood, diverging from Locke's principles. Her engagement in dishonest practices underscores a departure from ethical conduct, highlighting the moral ambiguity inherent in her actions and their repercussions on both personal growth and societal dynamics. While *Robinson Crusoe's* labor is characterized by its integrity and driven by pragmatic necessity and aspirations for self-betterment, *Moll Flanders's* labor takes on a different complexion marked by deception and exploitation. Moll's choice to engage in dishonesty, particularly through the commodification of her sexuality for financial gain, stands in stark contrast to Crusoe's ethos of honest toil. This distinction accentuates the moral and ethical dimensions of their respective labor practices, illustrating the divergent motivations and consequences associated with their

actions. Moll's actions reflect her desperate circumstances, as she rationalizes, "I had now lived almost eight years in this country, when my necessity, as it were, drove me to the dreadful necessity of stealing for my livelihood" (Defoe, *Moll Flanders* 68). In contrast, Crusoe's labor is driven by a sense of duty and self-reliance, as he reflects, "My island was now peopled, and I thought myself very rich in subjects; and it was a merry reflection which I frequently made, how like a king I looked" (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* 117).

Robinson Crusoe States "I dug several large holes in the ground, in places where I observed the water came from, and into these holes I went, not so much to find water as to cool my blood, which was then in a violent ferment" (41). Crusoe's actions exemplify Locke's concept that labor transforms natural resources into property. By investing his physical effort in digging holes to access water, Crusoe effectively asserts his ownership over this essential resource. Locke argues that individuals acquire property rights through the application of their labor to the common resources of nature. In this context, Crusoe's labor serves as a tangible manifestation of his claim to the water sources on the island, thereby aligning with Locke's theory of property acquisition (Locke, 1988). The act of engaging in productive activity not only fulfills immediate practical needs but also provides a sense of purpose and agency in the face of adversity. This resonates with Locke's broader view of labor as essential to human flourishing. Locke contends that labor is not merely a means of acquiring material wealth but also a source of intrinsic satisfaction and fulfillment.

In addition, Crusoe's labor reflects Locke's belief in the transformative power of human agency in shaping the environment. Locke asserts that through labor, individuals improve upon nature, thereby increasing the utility and value of natural resources. Crusoe's strategic approach to digging wells to access water exemplifies this idea of transformative labor. By altering the landscape and harnessing natural resources for his benefit, Crusoe demonstrates humanity's capacity to exert control over its surroundings and adapt them to suit its needs, thereby fulfilling Locke's vision of labor as a catalyst for human progress and self-actualization. Crusoe's endeavor to craft an umbrella underscores his resourcefulness and determination to adapt to the challenging conditions of the island. "I spent a great deal of time and pains to make an umbrella; I was indeed in great want of one, and had a great mind to make one." (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* 85) These lines highlight Crusoe's proactive approach to problem-solving, as he recognizes the need for protection against the elements and takes it upon himself to fashion a solution.

Firstly, the fact that Crusoe spends "a great deal of time and pains" on making the umbrella emphasizes the laborious nature of his efforts. Crafting an umbrella from scratch would require significant skill and patience, especially given the limited resources available to him on the island. Crusoe's willingness to invest considerable time and effort into this task reflects his resilience and determination to address his needs, even in the face of adversity. Besides that, Crusoe's motivation to make an umbrella suggests a pragmatic response to the environmental challenges he faces. The island's climate likely exposes him to harsh sun, rain,

and other inclement weather conditions, making protection from the elements essential for his well-being. By taking the initiative to create an umbrella, Crusoe demonstrates his practical ingenuity and foresight in addressing his immediate needs for shelter and comfort. Additionally, Crusoe's decision to make an umbrella himself rather than simply wishing for one or lamenting its absence highlights his self-reliance and independence. Rather than passively resigning himself to his circumstances, Crusoe takes proactive steps to improve his situation through his own labor and ingenuity. This self-sufficiency is a recurring theme throughout the novel, reflecting Crusoe's determination to assert control over his environment and secure his survival through his own efforts.

"I spent the first part of my time after I was set up in a very different posture, and in very different circumstances, from what I had ever done before, for I set up for a gentlewoman, upon the fortune I had acquired by my former trade, and was the wife of a gentleman." (Defoe, *Moll Flanders* 109). These lines highlight *Moll Flanders'* strategic maneuvering to ascend the social ladder through deceitful means. By stating that she "set up for a gentlewoman, upon the fortune I had acquired by my former trade," Moll reveals her intention to mask her dubious past and present herself as a respectable member of society. This suggests a deliberate effort on her part to conceal her involvement in dishonest labor, such as thievery and deception, in order to gain acceptance and respectability in her new social position.

Moll's transition from a life of dishonest labor to a perceived status of gentility underscores the transformative power of social perception and self-presentation. Despite her questionable background and past activities, Moll endeavors to project an image of refinement and respectability in her newfound role as the wife of a gentleman. This transformation is not merely superficial but involves a calculated effort to manipulate others' perceptions of her and to secure her social and economic advancement through deceptive means. Flanders' success in establishing herself as a gentlewoman also highlights the hypocrisy and moral ambiguity inherent in the society depicted in the novel. Despite her history of dishonest labor and criminality, Moll is able to navigate the social hierarchy and gain acceptance among the upper classes through deception and manipulation. This underscores the pervasive influence of social status and the willingness of individuals like Moll to exploit it for their own gain, even at the expense of honesty and integrity.

Despite her mother's former status as a gentlewoman, she is now forced to work hard for her survival. "I knew as well as he did that my mother was a gentlewoman, though she was fallen into such poverty as obliged her to work very hard for her bread." (Defoe, *Moll Flanders* 19) These lines reveal *Moll Flanders'* recognition of her mother's descent from a higher social status into poverty. This acknowledgment underscores the theme of social mobility and the precariousness of status in the society depicted in the novel. It suggests that Moll's upbringing was characterized by a downward social trajectory, potentially influencing her later involvement in less-than-honest means of earning a living as a means of upward mobility. This highlights the harsh realities of life faced by *Moll Flanders* and her family, particularly

the necessity of working hard for survival in the face of poverty. This struggle for survival sets the stage for Moll's later engagement in dishonest labor as a means of securing her own financial security and social advancement. It suggests that Moll's upbringing in poverty and her observation of her mother's struggles may have influenced her willingness to resort to less-than-honest means to improve her own circumstances. It also hints at the cyclical nature of poverty and deception within *Moll Flanders'* family and society at large. Moll's acknowledgment of her mother's descent into poverty despite her former social status suggests that the family may have resorted to dishonest labor or other morally dubious activities in an attempt to alleviate their financial hardships. This cycle of poverty and deception becomes ingrained in Moll's psyche and influences her own decisions and actions as she navigates the social hierarchy in pursuit of her own goals.

Crucially, the discrepancy between *Robinson Crusoe's* honest labor and *Moll Flanders's* dishonesty extends beyond mere pragmatic considerations to encompass broader societal implications. While Crusoe's labor contributes to his individual flourishing and the cultivation of his island domain, Moll's actions perpetuate social injustice and exploitation, entrenching systemic inequities. Thus, the contrast between their labor underscores not only the ethical complexities inherent in their choices but also the broader societal dynamics shaped by differing attitudes towards work and morality. Moll's engagement in dishonest practices reflects her compromised moral compass, as she rationalizes, "I found myself under a necessity of going back to my former profession of thieving" (Defoe, *Moll Flanders* 255). In contrast, Crusoe's labor is imbued with a sense of purpose and dignity, reflecting his commitment to self-improvement and moral integrity.

Toiling Bodies, Reflecting Minds: The Nexus of Cognition and Environment

Embodied cognition theorists argue that the mind is not separate from the body but is instead intimately connected to it. They suggest that sensory experiences, motor actions, and bodily states play a crucial role in shaping how we think, perceive, and understand the world around us. "The embodied cognition approach is now central to cognitive science" (Varela et al, 2017, p. 6). It emphasizes the significance of this perspective in understanding human cognition. Each discipline offers a unique perspective on the nature of mind and cognition, reflecting its specific concerns. "The future of cognitive science remains uncertain, but its impact has already been profound and is likely to continue" (Varela et al, 2017, p. 4-5).

In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the protagonist's cognition is profoundly influenced by his interaction with his isolated island environment. Crusoe's experience in this setting leads to his profound adaptation to the challenges he faces. He states, "I had never handled a tool in my life; and yet, in time, by labour, application, and contrivance, I found at last that I wanted nothing but I could have made it, especially if I had had tools" (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* 73). This highlights Crusoe's embodiment of cognition, as he learns to utilize his physical capabilities to overcome obstacles on the island. Crusoe's statement underscores the

transformative power of his isolation on the deserted island. Initially inexperienced in practical skills, Crusoe's encounter with the challenges of survival prompts a profound cognitive shift. Through labor, application, and ingenuity, he not only learns to adapt but thrives in his newfound environment. This transformation reflects the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity, as Crusoe demonstrates an innate capacity for learning and problem-solving.

By the same token, Crusoe's ability to learn and adapt highlights the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environment. Isolated from civilization, Crusoe's cognition is shaped by the demands of his surroundings. His statement reveals a deep understanding of the importance of practical skills and resourcefulness in his quest for survival. By embracing labor and innovation, Crusoe not only sustains himself but also thrives, demonstrating the profound impact of environmental context on human cognition. Furthermore, Crusoe's embodiment of cognition extends beyond mere survival to a mastery of his environment. Through labor and contrivance, he not only meets his basic needs but also acquires a sense of agency and control over his surroundings. This sense of empowerment is evident in his assertion that he could have made anything he needed with the right tools. Crusoe's ability to manipulate his environment reflects a cognitive flexibility and adaptability that are essential for survival in challenging circumstances.

"Thus, I lived mighty comfortably, my mind being entirely composed by resigning to the will of God, and throwing myself wholly upon the disposal of his providence" (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* 81). It reveals a profound transformation in Crusoe's cognitive processes as a result of his isolated environment. Crusoe's statement reflects his deep engagement with his surroundings and the ways in which his physical interactions with the island shape his cognition. His mention of resigning to the will of God and relying on divine providence highlights the integration of his spiritual beliefs with his everyday experiences, suggesting that his cognitive processes are influenced by his embodied understanding of faith. Further, Crusoe's adaptation to the challenges of island life requires extensive sensorimotor learning and skill acquisition, as he engages in activities such as building shelter, hunting, and farming. These embodied experiences contribute to his cognitive development by enhancing his problem-solving abilities and environmental awareness. Plus, Crusoe's navigation of the island's terrain fosters a deep spatial understanding and cognitive mapping, enabling him to efficiently navigate his surroundings and make informed decisions. His bodily reactions to emotional experiences, such as loneliness and gratitude, serve as somatic markers that influence his emotional regulation and decision-making processes.

Crusoe affirms "My island was now peopled, and I thought myself very rich in subjects; and it was a merry reflection which I frequently made, how like a king I looked" (117). In these lines, we can discern the profound influence of the environment on Crusoe's cognition, particularly in relation to John Locke's Labor Philosophy and the concept of the blank slate. Crusoe's assertion that his island is now "peopled" and his comparison of himself to a king underscores

the significant role of his environment in shaping his perception of self and identity. This reflects Locke's philosophy that individuals are shaped by their experiences, with Crusoe's isolated island serving as the primary context for his labor and cognitive development. This highlights Crusoe's sense of ownership and authority over his environment, suggesting a transformation in his self-concept and agency as a result of his solitary existence. Also, Crusoe's reference to feeling "rich in subjects" suggests a shift in his understanding of wealth and prosperity, influenced by his isolation and the labor required to sustain himself on the island.

Similarly, Crusoe's struggle to adapt is evident in his attempts to create tools and vessels from natural materials. He reflects, "I applied myself to make a basket, but all the twigs I could possibly twist for the purpose were so brittle, I could not make anything of it" (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* 89), and "I was a great while contriving how to make earthen vessels, which indeed I wanted sorely; but this was a difficulty much harder to me than all the rest" (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* 91). These quotes demonstrate Crusoe's embodiment of cognition as he grapples with the physical limitations of his environment and learns through trial and error.

In contrast, in *Moll Flanders*, the protagonist's cognition is shaped by her experiences in the bustling urban environment. Flanders' actions are influenced by the sensory and social stimuli of city life. She describes moments of confusion and realization, stating, "I acted the mad part to the life, I behaved as if I had lost my senses indeed; sometimes, as if I had quite lost my memory, and knew not where I was, or what I had been doing; and so I would sit and cry like a fool, when I thought nobody saw me" (Defoe, *Moll Flanders* 87). These lines from depicts a moment where the protagonist, Moll, adopts a strategy of feigning madness as a coping mechanism in response to the challenges and pressures she faces in urban life. By pretending to have lost her senses and memory, Moll attempts to escape from the overwhelming sensory input and societal expectations that surround her. This behavior reflects Moll's deep psychological struggle and the lengths to which she is willing to go to protect herself emotionally. Along with that, Moll's admission that she would "sit and cry like a fool" when she thought nobody saw her adds a layer of vulnerability to her character. Despite her outward attempts to appear indifferent or detached, Moll's emotional anguish is evident, suggesting a profound internal conflict. This moment of vulnerability humanizes Moll, underscoring the complexity of her character and the depth of her emotional experience.

In the case of *Moll Flanders*, the transition from isolation to an urban setting introduces new challenges and pressures that negatively impact her labor and cognitive processes. "I had now lived almost eight years in this country, when my necessity, as it were, drove me to the dreadful necessity of stealing for my livelihood." (Defoe, *Moll Flanders* 68) We can see a significant shift in the protagonist's engagement with labor and cognition as a result of their urban environment. The quote highlights Moll's desperation and the dire circumstances that compel her to resort to stealing for survival, marking a stark departure from her previous

experiences in isolation. While Crusoe's isolation on the deserted island provided him with opportunities for self-sufficiency and resourcefulness, Moll's experience in the urban setting is characterized by socioeconomic constraints and exploitation, which limit her agency and autonomy. This transition reflects a divergence from Locke's labor philosophy, which emphasizes the individual's right to the fruits of their labor and the pursuit of self-improvement. In the urban environment, Moll's labor is commodified and devalued, leading her to engage in morally dubious activities out of necessity. This negative impact on Moll's labor and cognition is further exacerbated by societal prejudices and structural inequalities inherent in the urban setting, which constrain her opportunities for economic advancement and personal growth.

More to that, Flanders undergoes a cognitive shift as she confronts her circumstances, stating, "I began to use my endeavors, at first as if I had not known where I was, or what had happened to me, but after a while, I acted as if I was awakened from a dream, and I began to see my miserable condition" (Defoe, *Moll Flanders* 78). These lines highlight Flanders' embodiment of cognition as she navigates her changing perceptions and understanding of her situation. This quote captures a pivotal moment in Moll's cognitive evolution as she grapples with her circumstances and begins to confront the reality of her situation. Initially, Moll describes her state of confusion and disorientation, expressing a sense of detachment from her surroundings and a lack of awareness regarding her own predicament. This initial response reflects Moll's attempt to shield herself from the harsh realities of her situation, perhaps out of fear or denial.

Nonetheless, as time passes, Moll undergoes a significant cognitive shift, characterized by a heightened awareness and a newfound clarity of perception. She describes this transformation as akin to being "awakened from a dream," suggesting a sudden realization or epiphany regarding her miserable condition. This awakening marks a crucial turning point in Moll's journey, as she begins to see her circumstances with greater clarity and understanding. Not to mention, Moll's use of the phrase "use my endeavors" implies a deliberate and concerted effort on her part to come to terms with her situation and take control of her own destiny. This proactive stance reflects Moll's agency and resilience in the face of adversity, as she actively engages with her circumstances rather than passively accepting them. Likewise, Moll's cognitive shift underscores the dynamic nature of human perception and understanding. Her evolving awareness of her situation highlights the fluidity of cognition and the capacity for individuals to adapt and grow in response to changing circumstances. This process of self-reflection and self-awareness is essential for Moll's personal development and eventual redemption throughout the novel.

Unlike Robinsons experiences of isolation where he relied solely on his own resources. Moll's urban environment necessitates a renegotiation of her understanding of agency and autonomy. "I saw no remedy for it but to go to my governess, and lay open the whole affair to her." (Defoe, *Moll Flanders* 74) In these lines, Moll acknowledges her inability to resolve a

problem independently and instead decides to seek assistance from her governess. This decision reflects a shift in her embodied cognition, influenced by the complexities of urban society. This highlights Moll's recognition of the need to navigate complex social dynamics and seek external guidance, indicating a reliance on social networks and authority figures for support and direction. In this way, the urban environment shapes Moll's embodied cognition by necessitating adaptations in her decision-making processes and understanding of agency, reflecting the influence of societal norms, economic constraints, and moral dilemmas inherent in urban life.

Withal, Flanders' decision-making process is influenced by her environment, as she reflects, "I sat down by a fire in my own chamber, resolving to see what would be the issue of it" (Defoe, *Moll Flanders* 95). In this quote from "*Moll Flanders*," Moll's decision-making process is depicted as a thoughtful and deliberate contemplation of her circumstances within the context of her urban environment. The act of sitting down by a fire in her own chamber suggests a moment of introspection and reflection, where Moll takes the time to assess her situation and weigh her options before making a decision. This deliberate approach to decision-making highlights Moll's embodiment of cognition, as she actively engages with her environment and considers the potential outcomes of her actions. Along with that, the choice of setting – Moll's own chamber with a fire – adds depth to the analysis. The warmth and comfort of the fire contrast with the uncertainty and complexity of Moll's situation, underscoring the juxtaposition between inner contemplation and external reality. Moll's decision to seek solace and clarity in this familiar environment reflects her desire for stability and security amidst the chaos and unpredictability of urban life.

What is more, Moll's resolve to "see what would be the issue of it" demonstrates her pragmatism and adaptability in the face of uncertainty. Rather than acting impulsively or rashly, Moll takes a measured approach to decision-making, patiently waiting to observe the consequences of her actions before committing to a course of action. This strategic mindset reflects Moll's resourcefulness and resilience, as she navigates the challenges of her environment with careful consideration and foresight. In addition to this, Moll's decision to reflect on her options within the confines of her own chamber suggests a sense of agency and autonomy in her decision-making process. Despite the constraints imposed by her urban surroundings, Moll asserts control over her own destiny by actively engaging with her circumstances and making informed choices based on her own values and priorities.

In both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, the protagonists' cognition is profoundly influenced by their interaction with their respective environments. Crusoe's experience on the isolated island leads to his profound adaptation and embodiment of cognitive skills necessary for survival, while Flanders' actions in the urban environment are guided by sensory experiences and social pressures. These examples underscore the importance of considering how sensory experiences and bodily states influence cognitive processes, as exemplified in the characters of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparison between the labor of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, contextualized within John Locke's Labor Philosophy and the concept of the blank slate, illuminates significant disparities in their approaches to work. Crusoe embodies the principles of honest labor, driven by self-reliance and a commitment to self-improvement, while Flanders' engagement in deceitful practices reflects a departure from ethical conduct and a compromise of moral integrity. This distinction extends beyond pragmatic considerations to encompass broader societal implications, highlighting the divergent motivations and consequences associated with their actions. On top of that, the embodied cognition of the protagonists is profoundly shaped by their respective environments. Crusoe's adaptation to the challenges of the isolated island fosters a pragmatic and resourceful approach to problem-solving, while Flanders' experiences in the urban environment necessitate adaptations in her decision-making processes and understanding of agency. These examples underscore the importance of considering how sensory experiences and bodily states influence cognitive processes, as exemplified in the characters of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*.

Future Recommendations

An eco-critical approach to Locke's labor theory could yield new insights into how literature engages with environmental ethics. This research could focus on how literary characters' relationships with nature and labor reflect or challenge Locke's ideas about property and ecological dominion.

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