



B Examples of Plagiarism

The examples given below should make clear the distinction between dishonest and proper use of source material. If instances occur which these examples do not seem to cover, the student always has recourse to the instructor in his course or any other; very seldom, however, will anything more be needed than his or her own conscience. This material appears in the Harvard University *Handbook of General Education*.

THE SOURCE¹

The importance of the *Second Treatise of Government* printed in this volume is such that without it we should miss some of the familiar features of our own government. It is safe to assert that the much-criticized branch known as the Supreme Court obtained its being as a result of Locke's insistence upon the separation of powers; and that the combination of many powers in the hands of the executive under the New Deal has still to encounter opposition because it is contrary to the principles enunciated therein, the effect of which is not spent, though the relationship may not be consciously traced. Again we see the crystallizing force of Locke's writing. It renders explicit and adapts to the British politics of his day the trend and aim of writers from Languet and Bodin through Hooker and Grotius, to say nothing of the distant ancients Aristotle and the Stoic school of natural law. It sums up magistrally the arguments used through the ages to attack authority ! vested in a single individual, but it does so from the particular point of view engendered by the Revolution of 1688 and is in harmony with the British scene and mental climate of the growing bourgeoisie of that age. Montesquieu and Rousseau, the framers of our own Declaration of Independence, and the statesmen (or should we say merchants and speculators?) who drew up the Constitution have re-echoed its claims for human liberty, for the separation of powers, for the sanctity of private property. In the hands of these it has been the quarry of liberal doctrines; and that it has served the Socialist theory of property based on labor is final proof of its breadth of view.

1. Word-for-Word Plagiarizing

It is not hard to see the importance of the *Second Treatise of Government* to our own democracy. Without it we should miss some of the most familiar features of our own government. It is safe to assert that the much-criticized branch known as the Supreme Court obtained its being as a result of Locke's insistence upon the separation of powers; and that the combination of many powers in the hands of the executive under the New Deal has still to encounter opposition because it is contrary to the principles enunciated therein, the effect of which is not spent, though the relationship may not be consciously traced. The framers of our

¹Charles L. Sherman, **Introduction** to: John Locke, *Treatise of Civil Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York; 1937), pp. xii-xiii.

Declaration of Independence and the statesmen who drew up the Constitution have re-echoed its claims for human liberty, for the separation of powers, for the sanctity of private property. All these are marks of the influence of Locke's *Second Treatise* on our own way of life.

In this example, after composing half of a first sentence, the writer copies exactly what is in the original text, leaving out the center section of the paragraph and omitting the names of Montesquieu and Rousseau where he takes up the text again. The last sentence is also the writer's own.

If the writer had enclosed all the copied text in quotation marks and had identified the source in a footnote, he would not have been liable to the charge of plagiarism; a reader might justifiably have felt that the writer's personal contribution to the discussion was not very significant, however.

2. The Mosaic

The crystallizing force of Locke's writing may be seen in the effect his *Second Treatise of Government* had in shaping some of the familiar features of our own government. That much-criticized branch known as the Supreme Court and the combination of many powers in the hands of the executive under the New Deal are modern examples. But even the foundations of our state—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—have re-echoed its claims for human liberty, for the separation of powers, and for the sanctity of private property. True, the influence of others is also marked in our Constitution—from the trend and aim of writers like Languet and Bodin, Hooker and Grotius, to say nothing of Aristotle and the Stoic school of natural law; but the fundamental influence is Locke's *Treatise*, the very quarry of liberal doctrines.

Note how the following phrases have been lifted out of the original text and moved into new patterns:

1. crystallizing force of Locke's writing
2. some of the familiar features of our own government
3. much-criticized branch known as the Supreme Court
4. combination of many powers in the hands of the executive under the New Deal
5. have re-echoed its claims for human liberty ... property
6. from the trend and aim ... Grotius
7. to say nothing of Aristotle and ... natural law
8. quarry of liberal doctrines

Unlike Example 1, there is really no way of legitimizing such a procedure. To put every stolen phrase within quotation marks would produce an almost unreadable, and quite worthless, text.

3. The Paraphrase

Paraphrase: Many fundamental aspects of our own government are
Original: Many familiar features of our own government are

apparent in the Second Treatise of Government. One can safely
apparent in the Second Treatise of Government. It is safe to assert

say that the oft-censured Supreme Court really owes its existence
that the much-criticized ... Court obtained its being as a

to the Lockean demand that powers in government be kept separate;
result of Locke's insistence upon the separation of powers;

equally one can say that the allocation of varied and widespread
and that the combination of many powers

authority to the President during the era of the New Deal has
in the hands of the executive under the New Deal has

still to encounter opposition because it is contrary to the principles
still to encounter opposition because it is contrary to the principles

enunciated therein ... Once more it is possible to note the way in
enunciated therein ... Again we see the crystal-

which Locke's writing clarified existing opinion.
izing force of Locke's writing.

The foregoing interlineal presentation shows clearly how the writer has simply traveled along with the original text, substituting approximately equivalent terms except where his understanding fails him, as it does with "crystallizing", or where the ambiguity of the original is too great a tax on his ingenuity for him to proceed, as it is with "to encounter opposition ... consciously traced" in the original.

Such a procedure as the one shown in this example has its uses; it is valuable for the student's own understanding of the passage, for one thing; and it may be valuable for the reader as well. How then, may it properly be used? The procedure is simple. The writer might begin the second sentence with: "As Sherman notes in the introduction to his edition of the Treatise, one can safely say..." and conclude the paraphrased passage with a footnote giving the additional identification necessary. Or he might indicate the exact nature of what he is doing directly in this fashion: "To paraphrase Sherman's comment..." and conclude that also with a footnote indicator.

In point of fact, the source used here does not particularly lend itself to the honest paraphrase, with the exception of that one sentence which the paraphraser

copied without change except for abridgement. The purpose of paraphrase should be to simplify or to throw a new and significant light on a text; it requires much skill if it is to be honestly used and should rarely be resorted to by the student except for the purpose, as was suggested above, of his personal enlightenment.

4. The “Apt” Term:

The *Second Treatise of Government* is a veritable quarry of liberal doctrines. In it the crystallizing force of Locke’s writing is markedly apparent. The cause of human liberty, the principle of separation of powers, and the inviolability of private property—all three major dogmas of American constitutionalism—owe their presence in our Constitution in large part to the remarkable *Treatise* which first appeared around 1685 and was destined to spark, within three years, a revolution in the land of the author’s birth, and ninety years later, another revolution against that land.

Here the writer has not been able to resist the appropriation of two striking terms—“quarry of liberal doctrines” and “crystallizing force”; a perfectly proper use of terms would have required only the addition of a phrase: The Second Treatise of Government is, to use Sherman’s suggestive expression, a “quarry of liberal doctrines.” In it the “crystallizing force”—the term again is Sherman’s—of Locke’s writing is markedly apparent.

Other phrases in the text above—“the cause of human liberty”, “the principle of the separation of powers”, “the inviolability of private property”—are clearly drawn directly from the original source but are so much matters of public domain, so to speak, that no one could reasonably object to their re-use in this fashion.

This is an excerpt of pages 22 through 25 of the following document:

THE HONOR SYSTEM

GRADUATE

California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, California

September 6, 2000

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