The Review of Politics 68 (2006), 232–258.
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DOI: 10.1017/S0034670506000106 Printed in the USA

What Does Locke Expect Us to Know?

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Abstract: Locke claims that his moral and political teaching is capable of a fully rational demonstration. It would seem then that Lockean citizens are expected to grasp the rational bases of their regime. But Locke was notoriously vague or incomplete on what the rational demonstration entailed, in matters of theology especially, but in other matters as well. I examine this question in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the *Two Treatises of Government*, and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, and conclude that Locke did not expect most citizens to grasp the full philosophical demonstration of liberalism, but they would understand a simplified version of it. This, however, risks leaving liberal culture in an unsettled state.

The question is more difficult than it appears. Long regarded as a pioneer of the Enlightenment, Locke struggled to free us from the metaphysical obscurantism of Scholasticism and the harmful myths upon which custom has been founded so many times and places. He strove to replace these with a much more transparent philosophy, the philosophy of liberalism, based on what a later generation was to regard as self-evident truths. Since these truths were meant to supplant the myths of ages past, it would be natural to expect that liberal citizens would have a relatively complete understanding of their public philosophy.

Locke's most familiar statements on the subject suggest this, in fact, is the case. In the "Second Treatise of Government," he asserts that the law of nature, which forms the basis of liberalism as he sees it, is "plain and intelligible to all rational Creatures"—as indeed it must be, if it is to be binding.[1] He tells us at the beginning of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that our minds are "very capable" of the knowledge we need to guide our conduct, a point reiterated throughout the work.[2] Yet pessimistic statements are also scattered through Locke's works. The "Second Treatise" finds that

[1]John Locke, "Second Treatise of Government" in *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; originally published in 1690), § 124; cf. § 12; *Questions Concerning the Law of Nature*, trans. Robert Horwitz, Jenny Strauss Clay, and Diskin Clay (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990; originally written in 1663?), 103, 211, 219. Henceforth, the former work will be cited as "Second Treatise," by section number, and the latter as *Questions*, by the page numbers of the edition cited.

[2]John Locke, introduction to *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1995; originally published in 1689), 1.1.5. Assertions to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670506000106 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"the greater part" of mankind fails to observe the natural law in the state of nature, due in part to ignorance of it (§§ 123–24). Locke seems to be almost fond of pointing out that whole societies have gone horribly astray in their understanding of morality (e.g., *Questions*, 145–47, 183–99; *Essay*, 1.3.9–11; "First Treatise," §§ 55–59). Perhaps most pessimistically, he says in his late work *The Reasonableness of Christianity* that "the greatest part [of mankind] cannot know, and therefore they must believe" in the fundamental grounds of morality (146).

Which is it? Can society be put on a footing of knowledge, as the Enlightenment hoped, or must even liberalism rely on tradition and implicit belief, due to the inability of most human beings to grasp rationally the proper principles of morality and politics? At stake is much more than whether intellectual historians properly label Locke as an "Enlightenment thinker." To the extent that Locke is an architect of our society and our conception of justice, it matters a great deal whether his system has easily accessible foundations, and whether, in his view at least, its health depends on those foundations being widely grasped.[3] Is liberal society in jeopardy if its philosophic underpinnings are not widely understood or are misunderstood? Exactly what understanding of liberal principles is the liberal citizen to have, and how much of the philosophy behind them is he to grasp? What knowledge does Locke believe must be disseminated in order for liberal society to function properly?

Just as gravely, our question implicates the fundamental principle of equality on which Lockean liberalism rests. Some Lockean texts, notably the "Second Treatise of Government," suggest that equality is to be accorded only to those who understand and follow the rational-moral law. As Locke famously, and strikingly, suggests in that work, those who egregiously violate natural law have sunk below humanity, and may be treated like wild animals (§§ 8, 10, 11, 16). If this is true,[4] equality itself depends on the attainment of a certain kind of knowledge. The accessibility of this knowledge in principle, and its diffusion in practice, would then be critical not only to the health but to the very legitimacy of liberalism.

the same effect are found at 1.4.12; 2.23.12; 4.10.1; and 4.11.8. Henceforth, this work will be cited as *Essay*, by book, chapter, and section, in the text.

[3]James W. Ceasar, *Liberal Democracy and Political Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 19–25, 40.

[4]There is debate on the point. Some argue that Locke grounds equality on the mere potential for rational-moral behavior. The cited passages from the "Second Treatise" are inconvenient for this interpretation. See the "Symposium on God, Locke, and Equality" in *Review of Politics*, summer 2005, especially the contributions by Waldron, "Response to Critics," 495–513; and Zuckert, "Locke—Religion—Equality," 419–31.

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I propose to examine these questions in several of Locke's works, principally the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which lays out Locke's philosophical claims in their most complete form, and the more practical works *Two Treatises of Government* and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. My theme, like the theme of most of these works, is not political in the narrow sense. We will not be looking at the knowledge required for such things as political consent, or participation, or vigilance against tyranny. These are clearly important, but more fundamental is knowledge of the grounding principles of liberal morality. Regarding this type of knowledge, I believe we will find that Locke is not the Enlightenment figure some take him to be—he is too pessimistic about the average man's capacity or his devotion to the duty of understanding, and he has too great a sense of the difficulties of moral philosophy. However, he does envision a society, and an ethics, rooted in a few moral principles that can be widely understood. These principles are grounded in the simple postulate of equity, the moral consequence of equality.

The Essay Concerning Human Understanding

Our question is important partly because for Locke, morality is fundamentally a question of knowledge. The uncompromising teaching of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is that proper morality is a consequence of proper understanding. Aristotle may have emphasized the role of habituation in morality (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a14–1103b25), but Locke puts knowledge in complete control of the will. Locke admits that habit and improperly schooled appetite may thwart one's knowledge of moral propriety, but he places responsibility for properly forming, or re-forming, habit and appetite squarely on each individual's intellect.[5]

As to the content of moral knowledge, the *Essay* claims that morality is a "demonstrative" science, comparable to mathematics (3.11.16; 4.3.18, 20;

[5]There are some ambiguities, perhaps even difficulties, in Locke's position on this issue. Pressed by critics on the phenomenon of men indulging vice even when they seem to know better, Locke explained in the second edition of the *Essay* that men are responsible for shaping their preferences (or more precisely, their aversions, 2.21.31–40). That is, he reaffirmed a fundamentally rationalist position I put forth in the text. (cf. 2.21.53, 56, 69; "Some Thoughts Concerning Education," in *John Locke on Politics and Education* (Roslyn, New York: Walter J. Black, 1947), 203–388, §§ 33, 38, 200; *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 2, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (1794; reprint, London: Routledge Thoemmes), 321–401, 323–24. Hereafter, the former work will be cited as "Thoughts," by section number in the text, and the latter as *Conduct* by the page numbers of the edition cited. See also Peter Schouls, *Reasoned Freedom: John Locke and the Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 99, 113, 227. Of course, one might still object that all of this supposes a prior commitment to behaving rationally (see Schouls, 109–11; Locke, "Thoughts," § 81).

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4.4.7; 4.12.8). This claim is part of Locke's high-profile attack on the notion of innate ideas (1.2–4; "Epistle to the Reader," xvii). The attack was controversial in Locke's day because innate ideas were widely supposed to be the source of morality; in the form of conscience or direct moral intuition, they were held to provide us with a natural (or supernatural) moral compass.[6] Innate ideas would, indeed, have been a sure, and seemingly effortless, path to moral knowledge, but Locke had rejected them as early as his *Questions Concerning the Law of Nature*.[7] In their place, he offers us a "demonstrative morality," requiring a mental effort of discovery. Since we have no stock of innate ideas, and all our ideas come ultimately from experience (2.1.2), experience is where this demonstration must somehow begin.

What, then, are the ideas that serve as the premises of this demonstration, and what moral conclusions do we draw from them? We may think we have a fairly good view of the outlines of Locke's moral teaching, from his political works especially. But the fact is that neither in the *Essay* nor in any other work did he produce the philosophic demonstration of which he speaks.[8] He never produced a systematic list of its conclusions—the precepts of morality

[6]Locke's contemporary Ralph Cudworth, one of the "Cambridge Platonists," made this argument in a philosophic vein, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, ed. Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; originally published in 1731), 83, but it was also a theological commonplace. See Richard Ashcraft, "Faith and Knowledge in Locke's Philosophy," in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. John Yolton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 194–223, 199; Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 89–92, 101, 106; John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 292.

[7]See *Questions*, 133, Question 4. This work was composed perhaps in 1663, some 25 years before Locke's best known works. Locke was greatly impressed with human disagreement regarding the moral law, disagreement that is inconvenient for any theory of innate moral ideas.

Locke's formulations sometimes seem to suggest innateness, when he says, for example, that the natural law is "writ in the Hearts of all Mankind" ("Second Treatise," § 11; cf. *Questions*, 101). But this can be nothing but shorthand for the moral logic by which we discover natural law or, perhaps, the most obvious precepts of natural law.

[8]Ashcraft, "Faith and Knowledge," 219; Ruth W. Grant, *John Locke's Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 26 n; John Dunn, *Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 65; Robert Horwitz, introduction to *Questions Concerning the Law of Nature*, by John Locke, trans. Robert Horwitz, Jenny Strauss Clay, and Diskin Clay (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 22–28; Thomas Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 197–98; E. S. de Beer, ed., *The Correspondence of John Locke*, vol. 4 of 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 110–13, 767—68, 786–87.

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or natural law—as Hobbes, for example, had done.[9] As to its premises, we are almost equally in the dark. Some things about them are abundantly clear. According to the *Essay*, the basis of morality is the rational "pursuit of happiness" (2.21.50, 52, 59, 60);[10] the law of nature is the path to happiness (*Questions*, 153, 197). Indeed, it would have to be: happiness, according to Locke, is the only conceivable motive not only of human nature but of any rational nature.[11] Further, this happiness is reducible to pleasure (2.21.42, 55, 62). In essence, according to Locke, morality can only be expected of rational creatures if it brings them pleasure—their own personal pleasure (2.27.18).

If our moral demonstration is only an elucidation of the path to pleasure, it would seem that very few will have difficulty either discovering or following it. But there is a catch. The pursuit of happiness aligns with morality only when tethered to a rational view of true, as opposed to chimerical, happiness: "[T]he highest perfection of intellectual nature lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness," taking care "that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness" (2.21.51; cf. 2.20.2; 2.21.52, 56, 60). Untutored appetite, far from leading to morality and true happiness, is the greatest obstacle to it.[12] In fact, our true duty is to suspend desire until we have deliberated properly upon real happiness and determined which path will most likely take us there (2.21.47–53, 67; *Thoughts*, § 33). Intrinsic to the moral deduction Locke wishes us to perform, then, is a rational vision of human happiness. But now Locke's guidance becomes vague again. Aristotle, too, made true or rational happiness the touchstone for morality (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b22–1098a20), but Locke follows Aristotle's lead only partially, at best. He sounds more like Hobbes when he endorses the variability of human desire or taste. Individuals get happiness in varying and idiosyncratic ways; these differing appetites lead to different views of happiness and, hence, of good and evil (1.3.6; 2.21.42, 54–55).

> Hence it was, I think, that the philosophers of old did in vain inquire, whether *summum bonum* consisted in riches or bodily delights, or

[9]John W. Yolton, *Locke and the Compass of Human Understanding: A Selective Commentary on the 'Essay'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1970), 172; Michael S. Rabieh, "The Reasonableness of Locke, or the Questionableness of Christianity," *Journal of Politics* 53, no. 4 (November 1991): 933–57, 941; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 14–15; cf. "Second Treatise," § 12.

[10]See also Peter Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass: Locke and the Struggle for Political Rationality* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 49.

[11]*Essay* 2.21.33, 41, 52, 62; John Locke, "Of Ethics in General," in *The Life and Letters of John Locke, with Extracts from His Journals and Common-Place Books*, ed. Peter King (New York: Lenox Hill, 1972), 311. Henceforth, this essay will be cited as "Ethics," by page numbers in the King edition. See also Nathaniel Culverwell, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001; originally published in 1652), 42.

[12]*Essay*, 1.3.13, 2.21.52–56; *Questions*, 169; *Thoughts*, §§ 33, 38, 107.

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> virtue, or contemplation? And they might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best relish were to be found in apples, plums, or nuts; and have divided themselves into sects upon it. For as pleasant tastes depend not on the things themselves, but their agreeableness to this or that palate, wherein there is great variety; so the greatest happiness consists in the having those things which produce the greatest pleasure, and in the absence of those which cause any disturbance, any pain. Now, these to different men are very different things (2.21.55).

Though this may disqualify Locke from being a Peripatetic, we should be wary of making him a relativist. Though some may prefer apples to nuts, none seems to relish hemlock: nature still sets a limit to the range of tastes (1.3.3; 2.10.3). Similarly, Locke elsewhere excludes certain tastes as true or legitimate paths to happiness and, thus, as morally acceptable. Such vices as drunkenness and profligacy, though driven, no doubt, by certain views of happiness, are not eligible paths to it, as a due consideration would infallibly establish (2.21.35; 2.32.17). Those who indulge in such vices do not simply follow idiosyncratic taste but violate "the eternal law and nature of things" (2.21.56). They should have conformed their taste to "the true intrinsic good or ill that is in things" (2.21.53; cf. 69, 4.4.9).

Once again, the ball is in our court. It is our responsibility to develop the knowledge that produces moral action, based on a view of happiness that is latitudinarian but not relativistic. But what exactly is this view? Unfortunately, aside from such obviously self-destructive vices as drunkenness and such obvious virtues as self-control or rationality, Locke gives little idea in the *Essay* of the proper or improper interpretations of happiness. Perhaps he hopes to avoid the controversy that a novel moral teaching would bring, by speaking only vaguely of "virtue," "duty," and "rational self-mastery," without further specification. But his reticence makes our task more difficult. What view of happiness is the correct one, and what is the morality that serves it? Evidently, they are not views of Aristotle; but how not, and why not? We might, like Aristotle, approach this question through the concept of human nature. As Locke says elsewhere, our true happiness is manifestly the happiness that best suits our nature (*Questions*, 169; cf. *RC*, 112). In the *Essay*, Locke even specifies the concept of human nature that must underlie moral demonstration, or at least the characteristic of man that makes him subject to moral law: man as a "corporeal, rational Creature" (3.11.16). This is richly suggestive, but Locke remains virtually silent in the *Essay* on how we are to use this concept to derive morality.

In the end, the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which lays the foundation of Locke's moral philosophy, leaves us with a curiously incomplete picture of the details of morality and of the intellectual avenue to its discovery.[13] More than one of Locke's correspondents urged him to flesh

[13]Compare Horwitz, introduction to *Questions*, 26; Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass*, 232, 248.

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out the scant moral teaching of the work, to which Locke was wont to reply that the *Essay*'s purpose was to show how our ideas are gotten, not what those ideas are or should be.[14] More pertinently, he confessed that he did not know if he was capable of bringing his "demonstrative morality" to fruition (*Correspondence* 4: 524; cf. 111–12, 786–67). Clearly, it concerns us to know why. Locke's doubts seem to have centered, in large part, on the problem of theology.

Religion and Morality

The most complete synopsis that Locke provides in the *Essay* of his intended moral demonstration lays it out in this fashion:

> The idea of a Supreme Being, infinite in power, goodness, and wisdom, whose workmanship we are, and on whom we depend; and the idea of ourselves, as understanding, rational beings, being such as are clear in us, would, I suppose, if duly considered and pursued, afford such foundations of our duty and rules of action as might place morality amongst the sciences capable of demonstration (4.3.18; cf. *Questions*, 133).

Aside from the remarkably tentative tone of this passage, the most striking thing about it is its dependence on God. Throughout the *Essay*, Locke insists that morality depends on a divine legislator and enforcer, that it cannot exist without divine rewards and punishments. To cite just two statements, he says that the "true ground of morality" can only be "the will and law of a God, who sees men in the dark, has in his hand rewards and punishments" (1.3.6); and that these rewards and punishments must consist of "some good and evil that is not the natural product and consequence of the action itself" (2.28.6; cf. 1.3.12–13; 2.28.4–5). This is a position Locke reiterated in a variety of works, public and private, over the course of his career.[15] For Locke, natural law is a species of divine law.

Locke had his reasons for resting morality on a theological foundation. First is the principle, stated in the *Essay*, that morality must bring us happiness. Yet, as moralists have always acknowledged, moral action sometimes infringes upon individual happiness. A moral life might generally be a happier life, but this cannot be guaranteed. In cases where it is not, are we still obligated to it, on Locke's terms? Locke's liberal morality minimizes

[14]James Tyrell raised this objection on behalf of "some thinkeing men at Oxford" (Locke's *Correspondence*, vol. 4, 101; Locke's reply, 110–13; William Molyneux echoed the complaint, ibid., 508, 729).

[15]See the early *Questions*, 101-3, 205-7; "Thoughts," §§ 136, 139; John C. Higgens-Biddle, ed., *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; originally published in 1695), 154. Henceforth, this work will be cited as *Reasonableness.* From Locke's private writings, see *Ethics*, passim.

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the conflict between morality and personal happiness, but it does not eliminate this problem entirely. If happiness is our goal, divine reward and punishment are necessary to bring it fully into line with morality (cf. *Essay*, 1.3.13). Second is Locke's philosophical conviction that morality can exist only by a legislating will. This might have been a consequence of Locke's devotion to science, as he understood it. To many of the pioneers of modern natural science, mechanistic and nonteleological nature required some form of direction from outside. In particular, if material nature is devoid of intrinsic moral content, morality must be imposed from outside of it, by supernature.[16] This is the position Locke adopts, consciously positioning himself against others, from the classical philosophers, to Hugo Grotius, to his own contemporaries, the "Cambridge Platonists," who understood the moral law to be intrinsic to nature.[17] This accounts not only for Locke's insistence on finding a supernatural legislating will, but his concern to rebut materialism, the view that there is no spiritual substance, as a dangerous doctrine (*Essay* 2.23; 4.3.6; 4.10; 4.12.4; *Thoughts*, § 192).

On this understanding, knowledge is still what we require for morality, but now it is knowledge of apparently quite a different order. We must establish the existence of god—not any god, but a providential, rewarding and punishing god. Then, we must determine his will, to know where morality and happiness reside. For if happiness is our goal, eternal reward and punishment will easily outweigh any pleasure we might experience in this life.

[16]See James Tully, "Editor's Introduction," in *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law*, by Samuel Pufendorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) xiv–xxxvii, xvii; Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, vol. 1 of *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Belknap, 1977; originally published in 1593), 1.3.4; Samuel Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law*, trans. Michael Silverthorne, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; originally published in 1673), 1.2.2, 1.3.10. Isaac Newton, Locke's younger contemporary, believed that the overall structure of nature was a creation of divine providence, that is, that material nature obeyed rational laws only because God had decreed it so. God had not only set the universe in motion, but periodically he needed to refresh that motion (Issac Newton, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, vol. 34 of the *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1952; originally published in 1687), 1–372, 369–72; *Optics* (id, 373–544 [originally published in 1704]), pp. 540–43. See also Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), chap. 1.

[17]See Hugo Grotius, prolegomena to *The Law of War and Peace*, trans. Francis W. Kelsey (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1925; originally published in 1625), 13; Ralph Cudworth, *Treatise*, 122–24; Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 88, 107; Michael P. Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994), 188; Steven Forde, "Natural Law, Theology, and Morality in Locke," *American Journal of Political Science* 45, no. 2 (April 2001): 396–409, 398. cf. *Essay* 2.28.10–11.

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Many of Locke's statements regarding the knowledge we require for morality center on these theological points (v. *Questions*, 159; *Conduct*, 342, 354, 360; and the passage from the *Essay* at the head of this section). Yet—and here is the difficulty—Locke never produced the requisite theological proof, and he explicitly acknowledged the fact, at least to friendly critics.[18] This is one reason, perhaps the chief reason, why Locke's "demonstrative morality" remained incomplete. He seems never to have gotten beyond the tentative or suppositional proof cited at the head of this section. Clearly, this presents a grave problem for our inquiry: If even the philosopher fails to provide the theological grounding that morality needs, morality itself would appear to fail, or at least fail of the basis in knowledge that we seek.

This problem has led some to argue that Locke's claims regarding theology are only a rhetorical cover for a nontheistic teaching;[19] it has led others to conclude that Locke ultimately retreated to revelation to shore up his moral project.[20] For the reasons given above, I believe Locke's theological claims to be sincere. The second view relies largely on the late work, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. But Locke continued to issue revised editions of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* during the same period that *The Reasonableness of Christianity* was published, replete with strong statements in favor of rational theology. Over an even longer term, he proceeded to develop his moral philosophy despite the acknowledged lack of a theological proof. In short, Locke did not behave as though the lack of this proof stymied his overall moral project.[21]

Clearly, Locke would have preferred a flawless proof of God's existence. We should, perhaps, credit him when he suggests that the strong probability of a providential God, short of demonstrative proof, suffices for purposes of

[18]See Locke, *Correspondence* 4: 110–13, 729, 786–87. This point is relied upon by Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 202-3, 206, 207; Dunn, *Locke*, 30, 84–85; Grant, *John Locke's Liberalism*, 25–26; Pangle, *Spirit of Modern Republicanism*, 197–98; Horwitz, introduction to *Questions*, 25–26; Marshall, *Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*, 384–87; and Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations of John Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 94–95. See also *Reasonableness*, 148. James Tully believes that Locke has a complete proof: *A Discourse on Property: John Locke and his Adversaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 35–43, but in the correspondence cited above, Locke appears to deny it.

[19]This argument is made by Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 212–14; Thomas Pangle, *Spirit of Modern Republicanism*, 201–3; and Michael Rabieh, "The Reasonableness of Locke," 95, among others.

[20]This position is espoused by Dunn, *Locke*, 68; *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the "Two Treatises of Government"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 187–88; Marshall, *Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*, 322, 388, 441, 453; Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality*, 103–5.

[21]See Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality*, 96–97.

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our conduct.[22] Indeed, his repeated claim in the *Essay* is that probability is all we have to guide us in "the greatest part of our concernment," that is, the affairs of life (4.14.2; cf. 1.1.5; 4.3.6; 4.12.10; 4.18.2; 4.20.1). These statements should not be taken lightly, for once again they tie Locke to the new science. Earlier centuries—and overly enthusiastic moderns, like Descartes—might have aspired to certainty, but an honest empiricism had to confess its limits. By Locke's time, the scientific movement had seriously pondered the limits of empirical knowledge and had largely reconciled itself to the view that our knowledge of the world can be no more than probabilistic.[23] Our grasp of nature and of many other things, including, quite possibly, religion, could attain to "moral certainty," but were not susceptible to absolute proof. However, a sufficiently high degree of probability could qualify as knowledge.[24] If science can attain to no more than probability in its grasp of the workings of nature, perhaps that will suffice for theology as well.

Whatever the reason, the lack of a certain proof of a providential God did not deter Locke from producing a fairly robust natural theology over the course of his career. The sketch from the *Essay* quoted at the head of this section is one of many passages in that work touching on natural theology. There are sometimes extensive sallies into natural theology in *Questions Concerning the Law of Nature* (question 5 *et passim*), *Of Ethics in General* (311–12), the *Two Treatises of Government*, and even *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (13, 133, 142, 147, 149). But the most systematic foray into natural theology, and the one that seems best to epitomize Locke's approach to the subject, is that of the "First Treatise of Government."

The opening premise of this theology is that God placed in man "a strong desire of Self-preservation, and furnished the World with things fit for Food and Rayment and other Necessaries of Life" (§ 86). From this state of affairs, according to Locke, we can infer a divine directive: "God, I say, having made Man and World thus, spoke to him, [that is] directed him by his Senses and Reason … to the use of those things, which were serviceable for his Subsistence" (ibid.). In sum, "Reason, *which was the voice of God in him*," taught man that in following the inclination to self-preservation he followed God's will (ibid.). Our reason tells us that we do God's will when we follow

[22]*Essay*, 2.21.70, 4.14.2, 4.17.23. Locke does claim to possess a flawless proof of the existence of a god (Essay 4.10), but morality requires proof of a legislating, rewarding and punishing god, and an immortal human soul. Here, Locke seems to believe probability must suffice (cf. *Essay*, 4.3, "Note"; 4.14; *Correspondence* 4: 110–13; Zuckert, "Locke—Religion—Equality," 423 n.

[23]Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, chap. 1–2.

[24]Ibid. As examples of (mere) probabilities that, nevertheless, cannot rationally be doubted, Locke offers the "fact" that a man named Julius Caesar lived in ancient Rome, and the proposition that the regular creation of animals out of brute matter could not be a product of chance without intelligent design (*Essay*, 4.20.15; cf. *Essay*, 4.16.5–9; 4.20.1, 7–15).

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our strongest appetites and provide for ourselves in this world—when we pursue our happiness rationally. We may have no innate ideas of good and evil, but reason draws moral-theological conclusions from the situation in which we are placed in this world.

Scripture, when Locke cites it in these contexts, becomes a mere echo to the rational teaching (e.g., "First Treatise," §§ 41, 86; "Second Treatise," §§ 25, 31). The scriptural charge to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) is interpreted by Locke as a simple statement of God's intention that mankind prosper materially. According to Locke, this principle "contains in it the improvement too of Arts and Sciences, and the conveniences of Life" ("First Treatise," § 33). It is scarce an exaggeration to say that the whole theology of the *Two Treatises* (indeed, the moral teaching of the *Treatsies* in general) is an extended gloss on "be fruitful and multiply," thus understood. This principle tells us, among other things, of our right to property, to all "the Food and Rayment, and other Conveniencies of Life" we can extract from nature ("First Treatise," § 41; cf. "Second Treatise," §§ 25–26). Not only our desire for preservation but our appetites for comfort and convenience are, in effect, divine directives. Reflecting on these, we conclude, according to the "First Treatise," that God confers a universal right to preservation on individuals, and he makes the prosperity and happiness of the human race the fulcrum of morality.

Proceeding in this way, of course, virtually guarantees that theology and liberal morality will always be in concord. We should note, however, that some suppositions are required for this to work as a theology. First and foremost, perhaps, is that reason is God's voice, and it is an inerrant source of guidance, if used properly. Locke implicitly rejects the view of some theologians that human reason is sufficiently clouded by original sin that we must rely on grace or inspiration for proper understanding.[25] Conversely, there can be nothing ineffable about God's will or his plan for mankind; it is accessible through mundane, even pedestrian, reasoning.[26] Further, not only our reason but our nature as a whole must be free from the corruption of original sin; otherwise, our appetites could hardly be a guide to God's design.[27] Finally, the rational pursuit of happiness in this life must also be the path to happiness in the next. Locke's God is the God of liberalism: His moral law directs us to happiness and prosperity in this world. As the *Essay* tells us, happiness is our motive; Locke's God acknowledges this and makes use of it. Indeed, he put the desire of happiness in us precisely to be our guide.

[25]Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 76, 83; Marshall, *Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*, 127, 194; Schouls, *Reasoned Freedom*, 194.

[26]Thomas Pangle, *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), Ch. 2.

[27]See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 216; Dunn, *Political Thought of John Locke*, 23; Marshall, *Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*, 193–202; Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass*, 187–88.

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Locke adhered to these theological principles throughout his life, however bold they might seem in the face of various Christian orthodoxies.[28] Indeed, they follow the script of his philosophical empiricism flawlessly. That empiricism, as laid out in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, entails that the mind derives all its ideas, including moral ideas, by rational deduction from concepts rooted in sense perception. The "First Treatise" simply applies this procedure to theological reasoning. Yet, paradoxically, this mode of proceeding renders theology as a distinct science almost superfluous. We discover god's will in the same way we discover the general rules of morality, by empirical reasoning. Divine legislation and enforcement may be crucial to morality—natural law and divine law may be one—but their content is discovered by a purely empirical reflection upon the prerequisites of our happiness. Natural/divine law is little more than the principle of human happiness, conceived as divinely ordained and commanded—"be fruitful and multiply," liberally understood. The only knowledge we need in order to discern God's plan is knowledge of the natures with which we are endowed and of the position we occupy in the world.[29]

For that reason, however, the theological line of thought does not advance our inquiry very far. It merely brings us back to the need for a rational account of human happiness, and for this, we must reason about experience, not *ab initio* about God, or scriptural revelation. When Locke speaks of a duty all men have to investigate theology as the lynchpin of morality,[30] he means not the rational demonstration of the existence of God, which he himself did not provide, but the type of theology depicted above, which he did provide. Proper theological notions are important to Locke's citizens partly because religious misconceptions are a potent source of false moral teachings (cf. *Thoughts*, § 139). Citizens must learn that reason repudiates the absolutist God of Robert Filmer, the intolerant God of many of Locke's compatriots, and the austere deity of the severest Christian sects. Locke's theology performs the vital service of cementing, indeed sanctifying, a proper understanding of human happiness. It rather presupposes that view than discovers it.

[28]These basic principles seem remarkably well formed even in the early *Questions* (153, 167–69, 197).

[29]Cf. Nathan Tarcov, *Locke's Education for Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 187; Grant, *John Locke's Liberalism*, 25. This is not to suggest that Locke denied the possibility of revelation. He allows that revelation may be accepted on points "above reason," or where reason can form only conjectures (*Essay*, 4.18.7–9). However, revelation can never contradict certainties of sense or reason (4.18.5–6); reason must always certify the genuineness of revelation, even for one who seems to hear the direct voice of God (4.16.14). The determinative principle is that "reason is natural revelation," and "revelation must be judged by reason" (*Essay*, 4.19.4, 14).

[30]"Men, therefore, cannot be excused from understanding the words and framing the general notions relating to religion, right" (*Conduct*, 342; cf. *Essay*, 4.20.3, 4.17.24).

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We come closer to a proof of this view of happiness, and thus to Locke's "demonstrative morality," in works like the "Second Treatise of Government."

The Second Treatise of Government

The opening of the "Second Treatise" appears to give us the very thing we have been looking for—a rational derivation of morality or natural law. Moreover, the derivation seems to be remarkably easy. Chapter 2 of that work presents us with what appear to be three parallel derivations of the natural law. First, "Reason, which is that law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions" (§ 6). There follows a theological argument based on god as creator and master: we are not to abuse god's handiwork. The third argument, like the first, relies on natural equality: creatures with similar faculties cannot be supposed to have any such subordination among them as would allow any to "destroy" another (ibid.). All these lines of thought lead to the conclusion that we are bound by one fundamental principle of natural law: "Every one as he is *bound to preserve himself*, and not to quit his station willfully; so by the like reason when his own Preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, *to preserve the rest of Mankind* . . ."(ibid.).

The central derivation, based on divine ownership, clearly resonates with Locke's theological concerns (recall, once again, the moral/theological demonstration sketched at the head of the previous section, *Essay*, 4.3.18). However, it is not overtly relied on in the rest of the "Second Treatise" and, indeed, seems at odds with the postulate of human self-ownership on which Locke's pivotal doctrine of property rests, among other things ("Second Treatise," § 27). A number of ways of resolving this tension have been proposed,[31] but the interpretation of Lockean theology proposed above suggests a relatively simple resolution: Divine ownership of man—and of nature—is necessary to support God's authority to impose morality on the whole; but what God decrees, as reason teaches us, is human self-ownership (and ownership of nature), for all practical worldly purposes (§§ 25–27).

The other two derivations of natural law (and, indeed, the theological one as well) at the opening of the "Second Treatise" rest on a single, simple syllogism: from the fact of equality, we conclude that we are to respect the rights of others. This fulfills the requirement for "demonstrative morality" envisaged by the *Essay:* reason discovers a moral principle on the

[31]See, e.g., Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass*, 50, 248; Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality*, 79; Zuckert, *New Republicanism*, 242, 264, 276, 287; *The Natural Rights Republic: Studies in the Foundation of the American Political Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 179.

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basis of ideas drawn ultimately from sense experience. Fact becomes value: the material fact of equality leads to the moral rule of equity, equal treatment.[32] The theological background is necessary to give this natural fact moral weight, making it a "moral fact."[33] But the logic itself is purely rational. Moreover, we note, the logic is easily grasped, without being innate. Natural law, thus understood, is, indeed, as Locke says, nothing more than "*reason* and common Equity" (§ 8), almost a kind of moral common sense. This common sense is so basic according to Locke, so central to our humanity, that no one can renounce it without sinking to the level of the beasts (§§ 8, 10, 11, 163, 172).

The case of property is illustrative. Do we not all understand immediately that the fruit I have picked in the state of nature becomes mine by the act of picking—that while anyone might have picked it before me, it is unjust to take it from me once I have gathered it?[34] Surely we do, which confirms Locke's assertion that the natural law is "intelligible and plain" to all who consult reason (§ 12; cf. §§ 6, 124; *Essay*, 4.4.9). This law is made easier still by the minimal demands it makes on us. Though the natural law charges each of us to *"preserve the rest of Mankind"* as far as possible (§ 6), Locke conspicuously refrains from interpreting this as any kind of charitable duty. Our first duty is to ourselves, and we are to care for the collective preservation only when our own "comes not in competition." Even when it does not, the duty to preserve mankind is limited to a duty not to harm others. All three derivations of natural law, even the theological one, agree on this strikingly minimalist outcome (ibid.).[35]

[32]Compare Michael Zuckert, "Do Natural Rights Derive from Natural Law? Aquinas, Hobbes, and Locke on Natural Rights," in *Launching Liberalism: On Lockean Political Philosophy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas. 1996), 169–200, 178, 194. There is an important question concerning the foundations of human equality in Locke. Clearly, rationality makes us equal; but that leaves several questions unanswered. I will say something on this issue below (see note 52, and text).

[33]*Cf.* J. Budziszewski, *The Resurrection of Nature: Political Theory and the Human Character* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 24–25, 43–44; Karl Olivecrona, "Appropriation in the State of Nature: Locke on the Origin of Property," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 2 (1974): 211–30; reprinted in John Dunn and Ian Harris, eds., *Locke*, vol. 1 of the *Great Political Thinkers* (Lyme, CT: Edward Elgar, 1997), 314–32, 219; Tully, "Editor's Introduction," xvii.

[34]§ 28; Essay, 4.4.9. See also Cicero *de Finibus* 3.20.67; Karl Olivecrona, "Locke's Theory of Appropriation," *Philosophical Quarterly* 24 (July 1974): 220–34; reprinted in John Dunn and Ian Harris, eds., *Locke*, vol. 1 in the Great Political Thinkers (Lyme, CT: Edward Elgar, 1997), 224.

[35]This is striking especially since Locke prefaces his derivation of natural law with a passage from Richard Hooker, who derives a principle of "mutual Love" from equality (via a remarkably Hobbesian logic, § 5; *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 1.8.7). In Locke's "Second Treatise," we all have a right to provide more active or charitable forms of assistance to others—we have the power to enforce the natural law on

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Is this, then, the answer for which we have been looking? Is this natural law what Locke expects us to know in order to be good citizens and responsible moral agents? It is syllogistic, easy to understand, and undemanding. But there are problems, suggested first by the fact that the law fails in the natural state, rather spectacularly so, as "the greater part" of mankind proves to be "no strict Observers of Equity and Justice" (§ 123). It concerns us to know the reasons for this failure, and in particular whether it is related to the law's cognitive demands. This turns out to be at least partly the case. First, though it is limited to a "no harm" principle, Locke's natural law is more demanding than was Hobbes's, for example. In Hobbes's state of nature, every man had a right to every thing, so that there was no duty to respect another's right (*Leviathan*, chap. 14). For Locke, there is a duty to respect the "Life, Health, Liberty, [and] Possessions"of others, even outside society (§ 6). Though I may prefer my preservation when it is threatened, equity at other times forbids me from pursuing my own good at the expense of others. What I learn when I consult reason is that others have as much right as I, which I am bound to respect.

This is where the cognitive failure comes in. As Locke says, the law of nature may be "plain and intelligible to all rational Creatures; yet Men being biassed by their Interest, as well as ignorant for want of study of it, are not apt to allow of it as a Law binding to them in the application of it to their particular Cases" (§ 124; cf. § 13). As a result, Locke goes so far as to say that the state of nature effectively lacks a "settled, known *Law*" (ibid.). Both ignorance and bias are blamed for this failure. If we mark Locke's precise words, it is not that men in the state of nature have failed to grasp the content of the natural law per se; rather, they fail to acknowledge its applicability to their own cases. Men may recognize breaches of equity in others, but fail to apply it fairly, or perhaps even to recognize it, in their own cases. It seems that their "lack of study" amounts to a lack of reflection on the reciprocity demanded by the law more than a failure to grasp its fundamental principle. We might say that men fail to take the law to heart, though this is presented by Locke squarely as a failure of rationality.

It is almost as though most men in the state of nature both know and do not know the fundamental law of morality. In the *Essay*, we recall, morality was essentially a matter of knowledge—to know the good is to do the good. Yet such knowledge might fail if incomplete in the manner just suggested. The natural law could then be easily known in a sense, even widely recognized in the state of nature, and still widely violated there. In another

others' behalf—but this is not a duty (§§ 7–13). Of course, sovereign power, once instituted, has positive duties rooted in natural law to serve the general good (§ 159), but for individuals in the natural state, duty is limited to the principle of no harm, according to the "Second Treatise."

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context, Locke says that government remedies this situation partly by providing a means by which those who "mis-cite, or misapply" the law may "be convinced of their mistake" (§ 136). In this case, civil law seems as much a vehicle for instruction as chastisement. A man may grasp the basic principle of equality, and perhaps even its moral corollary, equity, and yet fail to rise to the objective or third-party perspective that reason as equity requires. Men easily, nay greedily, accept the liberal postulate that their right constitutes the heart of morality; the demand that they recognize the same in others is less welcome. For Locke, the resulting moral failure is a failure of understanding.

Property, once again, illustrates the point. The natural law of property in chapter 5 of the "Second Treatise" is relatively undemanding. It requires only that we not harm others; neither charity nor any kind of duty to share with the needy appears to have any place in it.[36] Yet, says Locke, a fundamental divide opened up in the state of nature itself between those who obeyed the command to respect property and those who did not. The former, as Locke famously says, were "Industrious and Rational," the latter "Quarrelsom and Contentious" (§ 34). Industry, the accumulation of property by labor, and respect for the property of others—these represent the rational, and moral, response to the situation we are placed in by nature. If the fundamental principle of morality is the preservation of all mankind, the Industrious and Rational serve it first by providing for themselves, then by respecting the property of others. Or rather, they are able to respect the property of others because they accumulate their own. Under the natural condition of penury that Locke describes, respect for the rights of others requires providing for oneself. In this way, the natural law of the "Second Treatise," though a mere principle of no harm, does impose a rather stringent discipline. It provides for the general preservation by charging each individual with his own care and by demanding equity. The law of nature is the law of industrious self-reliance, not only out of self-interest but out of a duty to respect others.

This would help explain why the law might fail despite being almost self-evident. But this raises some potentially serious problems. In the first place, the law's failure might jeopardize Locke's foundational principle of equality. According to the "Second Treatise," those who fail to abide by the law of nature have essentially renounced humanity and may be treated like wild beasts (§§ 8, 10, 11, 16). God, says Locke, gave the earth to the industrious and rational and not to the quarrelsome and contentious (§ 34). The conclusion appears inescapable that equality and right must be earned,

[36]This is striking, especially in light of the remarks on charity in the "First Treatise," § 42. See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 248; Pangle, *Spirit of Modern Republicanism*, 144; John Dunn, "Justice and the Interpretation of Locke's Political Theory," *Political Studies* 16, no. 1 (February 1966): 68–87. Some earlier doctrines of property had a charitable principle built into them, making Locke's silence even more striking. See Aquinas *Summa Theologica* II-II Q 66, A7; Grotius, *Law of War and Peace*, 193.

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and that some unspecified but apparently large proportion of humanity fails to earn it in the state of nature.[37] Can the diffusion of moral knowledge, perhaps under civil conditions, correct this problem sufficiently to vindicate liberal equality? We will better be able to address this question at the conclusion of this essay.

A different problem appears when we compare the account of moral knowledge in the "Second Treatise" with what we learned in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. According to the argument of the *Essay*, rational individuals are motivated by their own happiness exclusively (*Essay*, 2.21.33, 41, 52, 62). The heart of morality, accordingly, was a proper understanding of personal happiness. Equity, or respect for others, as a moral duty was not a theme. By contrast, equity is the heart of morality in the "Second Treatise," and the true or rational understanding of happiness is a secondary theme, at best. This is partly a consequence of the different aspects of morality emphasized in each work. The *Essay* focused more on the self-regarding virtues of rational discipline, while the "Second Treatise of Government" is necessarily more concerned with social and political morality. Needless to say, it is easier to connect morality to personal happiness in the case of the self-regarding virtues.

Put in the terms of our question, these two works seem to demand different sorts of knowledge as the heart of morality. The *Essay* assigns us the duty of developing a rational understanding of personal happiness, while the "Second Treatise" requires an understanding of the rational demands of equity. It is by no means clear that these are the same, or even that they are fully compatible. Equity, even as minimally as the "Second Treatise" construes it, might conflict with the individual's pursuit of happiness. On the understanding of the *Essay*, this would seem to make it irrational. In fact, the "Second Treatise" never fully explains why rational individuals, as depicted in the *Essay*, should obey natural law. To bring the two works together, we would need knowledge of how respecting the rights of others serves personal happiness.

However vague the *Essay* may have been on happiness per se, it did provide an infallible link between personal happiness and morality, through divine enforcement of natural law. The "Second Treatise" gives barely a hint of this. God is sometimes identified as the source of natural law, but more often, the law and its grounding are spoken of without him.[38] In his discussion of the enforcement of natural law, Locke does not so much as mention the possibility of divine enforcement.[39] The "First Treatise" provides a theology

[37]This is a contested point. See notes 4 and 32, above, and note 52, below.

[38]Compare §§ 8, 135 with §§ 6, 7, 16, 63, 124–8; cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 214, 223.

[39]§§ 7–13; cf. § 125. This set of problems has led some interpreters of Locke to assert that he does not believe in natural law—perhaps not even in morality—using it only as rhetorical cover (Zuckert, *New Republicanism*, chap. 7–9; Pangle, *Spirit of Modern*

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that dovetails with the "Second Treatise," but it is equally silent on the otherworldly rewards and punishments that the *Essay* asserts to be necessary to bring morality in line with individual happiness. Its centerpiece is the notion that our desires for preservation and comfort are divine endowments (§§ 86–88). However, the "First Treatise" does not make clear how this could be the foundation of a duty to preserve all mankind, even in the minimal sense of the "Second Treatise." The result is that in the *Two Treatises*, natural law remains partially unsupported, only imperfectly linked to the happiness of each and, thus, to the moral anchor of the *Essay*.

The "Second Treatise" does not fully embody the knowledge Locke expected liberal citizenship to rest on, insofar as he requires the other-regarding virtue of equity. This is especially worrisome when we consider that the "Second Treatise," of all Locke's works, stands most at the foundation of modern liberalism. The account of morality provided there is almost Kantian: we are to respect others because reason-as-equity demands it. But Locke the individualist and hedonist cannot be a Kantian; his moral law needs motivation in personal happiness.[40] For this, we might be better advised to look in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Like the "Second Treatise," this work is highly practical, but its focus is on morality at the individual, not the social, level. It cannot avoid addressing the motivation of the individual.

Some Thoughts Concerning Education

Some Thoughts Concerning Education initially seems to worsen the problem of knowledge and moral motivation. Echoing the "Second Treatise," it maintains that "the preservation of all mankind, as much as in him lies ... is everyone's duty, and the true principle to regulate our religion, politics, and morality by" (§ 116). But while the "Second Treatise" drew from this a mere principle of no harm, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* teaches a more benevolent or charitable morality.[41] The work's moral education culminates in a trait or collection of traits called "good breeding," whose basis is

Republicanism, 197–205). For arguments more along the lines pursued here, see Grant, *John Locke's Liberalism*, 22–26; Forde, "Natural Law, Theology, and Morality in Locke."

[40]Obligation and motivation are not the same thing for Locke, but, given his psychology, they are inseparable. See *Essay*, 1.1.13; 2.7.3–4; 2.21.41–56, 70; 2.28.5–8.

[41]I do not suggest that the two works are inconsistent. We might note, for example, that the pivotal section of the "Second Treatise" (§ 6) is framed in terms of duty rather than right. It may be that the "Second Treatise" limits itself to the minimal morality that liberal government can enforce on individuals, while *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* embodies morality in its full extent (cf. Marshall, *Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*, 293–98). This, of course, would raise very interesting questions about what "liberal morality" is.

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an active concern for the well-being of others. All the while, it accepts the fundamental postulate that happiness or pleasure is the motive of human action (§§ 54, 115, 143). It solves the problem of moral motivation by identifying the life of sociable virtue as the happy life, with remarkably little reliance on theology in particular.

The treatment of justice and property displays the distinctive approach of this work and the distinctive problems it poses (§ 110). Since there are no innate ideas, as the *Essay* argues, children begin with no notion of justice. An understanding of the "just measures of right and wrong," Locke asserts, comes only with "improved reason and serious meditation" (ibid.). The idea of justice, in particular, presupposes the concept of property, itself a complex and abstract idea (ibid.; cf. *Essay*, 4.3.18). In every way, it seems, children lack the intellectual foundations for an appreciation of justice. Yet, Locke warns, natural self-love may make them rapacious before justice comes within their mental grasp. This is the dilemma of Lockean moral education: undue self-love is an innate principle of action, but the moral restraints on it, in particular equitable treatment of others, must be learned (*Thoughts*, §§ 33, 45, 200; *Essay*, 1.3.13). The problem draws almost Biblical language from Locke: "Covetousness, and the desire of having in our possession and under our dominion more than we have need of, being the root of all evil, should be early and carefully weeded out" (ibid.). The way to do this, according to Locke, is not to teach justice, but liberality, a "readiness to impart to others" (ibid.). This is induced initially by making sure the child always gains by it, but the goal is not to make him mercenary. Rather, Locke intends the child to develop genuine "good nature," whereby he may "take pleasure . . . in being kind, liberal, and civil, to others" (ibid.).

Against the backdrop of the "Second Treatise," it is striking both that Locke takes so censorious a view of the desire for possessions and that he chooses to teach liberality as the antidote to it. The reason is not simply the intellectual inaccessibility of justice; liberality suits the more socially benevolent, even charitable, approach to virtue Locke takes in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Justice, as respect for the possessions of others, may be identified with the minimal or "no harm" interpretation of Locke's basic moral principle. Liberality, on the other hand, belongs to a more expansive view—concern for the "preservation of mankind" as a more active service to others. It is clear that Locke wants his pupil to have liberality as well as justice, that he believes a proper moral education includes both.

Locke's educational procedure suggests, interestingly, that charitable "good nature" is more accessible to children than the (more cerebral?) virtue of justice. It also suggests, just as interestingly, that Locke believes justice in its narrow or negative interpretation to be untenable. As we noted earlier, even the narrow, "no harm" principle is founded on respect for others of a type that Hobbes, for example, did not require. Locke

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sounds like Hobbes when he says that if a child persistently refuses to respect the property of others, he is to have something of his own taken away, to show how little advantage he is likely to gain from theft, "whilst there are in the world stronger and more men" than he (ibid.). But once again, Locke does not want to put virtue on this mercenary footing. His true aim is to develop an "ingenuous detestation" of injustice in the child. This detestation, he says, will be a better foundation for justice than "any considerations drawn from interest" (ibid.). It seems that justice itself is not adequately grounded, at least in a psychological sense, if it is left as a mere principle of (mutual) advantage. Locke's education grounds it, instead, in liberal good nature. Locke blends justice and liberality in the mind of the child, both of them proceeding from good will toward others rather than precise calculations of *meum* and *tuum*.[42]

This is well and good, but we still need to know the rational basis of this more generous understanding of justice and how it can be squared with Locke's wider theory of human motivation. Public esteem can help bring pleasure and virtue into alignment, and thus, motivate virtue. Locke's education does rely upon it heavily (e.g., §§ 56, 93, 110, 185; cf. *Essay*, 2.28.12). However, reputation alone cannot solve the problem. Public praise does not always follow merit, nor can it be the true standard of morality (*Essay*, 2.28.11; *Thoughts*, § 61). Above all, for our purposes, it cannot provide the epistemological basis of virtue that we seek (knowledge of what brings honor in Peru, for example, only leads Peruvians astray: cf. First Treatise," § 57). We need to identify the knowledge that motivates Locke's pupil to virtue.

In the "Second Treatise," we recall, natural law emerged from the principle of equality, transformed into the moral precept of equity. Knowledge of human equality led (in principle) to equitable treatment of others. A similar logic is visible in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Locke is very keen to develop a proper appreciation of equality in his pupil. Initially, the love of dominion, "the first original of most vicious habits that are ordinary and natural," must be very carefully forestalled (§ 103). If not, social rank and wealth will conspire to produce a host of vices in Locke's privileged

[42]Compare the fragment *Venditio*, where Locke suggests that the rules of morality in property go beyond the bare demands of justice (reprinted in Dunn, "Justice and the Interpretation of Locke's Political Theory," 84–87; cf. Marshall, *Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*, 293–98, 324; Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 103.

It is striking that Locke's education in general seems less keen on inculcating individual right as the basis of morality than humane goodwill. Rights are spoken of, and creating a kind of manly self-assertion is one goal of the education (§§ 110, 186; 46, 50, 73, 115, 141). But more emphasis is placed by Locke on the need to confine self-assertion (§§ 43, 103, 109, 143), and solicitude for others seems to be based more on "goodwill" than on seeing them as rights-bearers.

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pupil. Locke takes great care to inculcate the principle of human equality in the face of social hierarchy. The presence of household servants, for example, provides a constant temptation to the natural love of dominion (§§ 104, 117), but the child must not be suffered to "lose the consideration of human nature in the shufflings of outward conditions" (§ 117). Accustoming him to civil treatment of "inferiors and the meaner sort of people," says Locke, is by itself a way of instilling "sentiments of humanity" into the child (ibid.). These are Locke's true goal. He discourages cruelty to animals on similar grounds: it leads too easily to cruelty to one's fellow human beings. In this context, Locke makes the expansive pronouncement that "the preservation of all mankind" should be "everyone's persuasion, as indeed it is everyone's duty" (§ 116).

Locke's moral education bends every effort to instill the belief—or knowledge, rather—that human beings are equal. His procedure suggests, moreover, that once this knowledge is well seated, it will mature naturally into the moral principle of equity—that anyone who truly grasps the fundamental principle of equality will abhor and abstain from treating others unjustly. This assumption accords with the "Second Treatise," in which equality became equity almost by elision, and where it is implied that those who defy the law of nature have simply not taken the principle of equality sufficiently to heart. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, the moral principle of equality matures into the virtue of civility (§ 117). Civility, moreover, is not merely an ethic of "no harm." It is a "respect and good will to all people,"[43] a "sweetness of mind" (§ 66), even a "compassionate and gentle" attitude toward others (§ 117). One of its expressions, clearly, is the spirit of liberality that Locke wove into his pupil's view of property. As in the case of liberality, Locke is adamant that this attitude must be sincere and not calculating. "Affectation" is to be avoided at all costs (§§ 66, 143). Locke's moral education seeks to form an individual imbued with a "general good will and regard for all people," an "internal civility of the mind" (§ 143)—an actively benevolent social creature.[44]

Locke's repeated emphasis that true social virtue stems from a sincere regard for others distances him from the Hobbesian argument that civility or complaisance is grounded in the narrowest kind of self-concern.[45] It takes him beyond the essentially negative interpretation of moral duty that dominated the "Second Treatise." If equity is the fundamental principle of Lockean morality, it seems that principle can be construed in more or less expansive fashion. But, once again, this only makes our question more

[43]§ 67; cf. § 143, Tarcov, *Education for Liberty*, 195.

[44]Locke's intimate Damaris Masham wrote in 1704 that he had thought civility a much more important duty than was generally realized and that he had recommended essays of Pierre Nicole as a source on the subject (Marshall, *Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*, 179).

[45]See *Leviathan* chap. 14–15; cf. Tarcov, *Education for Liberty*, 138–40, 142, 210.

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urgent: will knowledge of equality really give Locke's pupil the more expansive virtue we now have in view? Furthermore, how will this virtue serve his own happiness, as it must in order to be rational? Locke does strive sedulously to inculcate the basic principle of equality and acts as though moral behavior will be its natural outgrowth. To be sure, the child is instructed in religion, much along the lines of the "First Treatise," and reads (judiciously) from the Bible for instruction in "morality" (§§ 136, 159, 185). Similarly, he pursues some philosophical study in "ethics" (Cicero, Grotius, Pufendorf, §§ 185–86). Nonetheless, Locke emphasizes that the child's moral understanding comes principally from the "knowledge of *virtue*" he has attained "more by practice than rules" (§ 185). In the case of the other-regarding virtues, all seems to bottom in an ingenuous acknowledgment of human equality and its moral consequences.[46]

Since these consequences—the virtues of equity—now include a sincere concern and a more active benevolence for others, linking this morality with personal happiness and pleasure becomes a delicate task. Again, the expectation of divine rewards is invoked (§ 61), but the education relies remarkably little on this, considering its prominence in Locke's philosophical elaboration of morality. Good reputation is a further inducement (e.g., §§ 56, 61, 110, 185). But most important, judging from its place in Locke's moral education, is the pleasure Locke believes a properly formed human being takes simply from serving and gratifying others. This is a note he sounds at every important juncture where other-regarding virtues, like liberality and civility, are his theme. His discussion of good breeding is the culmination. Good breeding represents the summit and completion of Locke's moral education. It is essentially civility, expressed through the manners conventional to a given time and place (§ 143). Breeding is something added to virtue, or a graceful way of expressing virtue in society, and its importance to Locke's education comes from the fact that it facilitates the taking of pleasure from social intercourse. As Locke strikingly confesses, the virtues themselves can bring more pain than pleasure to their possessor without the social "gloss" that good breeding provides (§ 93). And, lest we forget, "Power and riches, nay virtue itself, are valued only as conducing to our happiness" (§ 143). The man of good breeding is beloved and esteemed because he gives happiness to others, but in the process, he also secures his own. He takes genuine pleasure in pleasing others; he delights in conversation and social intercourse in and of themselves (§§ 143–45). Needless to say, his delight must be genuine and not affected for this to work. Locke's pupil has learned to "love and respect other people"; good breeding expresses this in socially appropriate ways (§ 145). The man of

[46]Of course, Locke expects a complex and nuanced moral understanding to be developed from this root: "[A]s their capacities enlarge, other rules and cases of justice, and rights concerning Meum and Tuum, may be proposed and inculcated" (§ 110). But the root remains the same.

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good breeding, Locke concludes, has "the true art of living in this world, and being both welcome and valued everywhere" (§ 143).

Good breeding, and the other-regarding virtues it crowns, approaches sociability without abandoning Locke's individualist and hedonist premises.[47] The cultivation of these traits may require curbing some parts of our nature, but they clearly have a *point d'appui* in others. Despite the natural inclination to dominate and covet, children can learn to derive "more pleasure" from complaisance, liberality, and civility (§§ 109, 110). It is in the nature of Lockean individuals to find happiness in a certain kind of benevolent social intercourse. In fact, by the lights of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, it seems that Locke would regard the purely negative or Hobbesian interpretation of moral duty, as a bare principle of no harm, to be not only insufficient for the happiness of society but insufficient for the happiness of the individual. Civility and the rest of the social virtues are not only compatible with individual happiness but instrumental to it.[48] In the terms of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, then, we should have to say that this is Locke's vision of human happiness and the proper cultivation of the rational nature. The knowledge on which it relies is two-fold. At the foundation is the knowledge that men are equal and knowledge of the resultant moral corollaries. However, on top of this, the man of good breeding knows that a life of socially benevolent virtue is the most pleasant life. In the case of the pupil of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, he knows this more from experience than from study, but the empirical mode of knowledge is not one that Locke would disparage.

Conclusion

The man of good breeding is the culmination of Locke's moral education, but he is not a philosopher. He certainly has not plumbed the depths of the "demonstrative morality" that Locke the philosopher finds the true basis of morals. But he does grasp key elements of it. He presumptively fulfills the duty Locke imposes on him to arrive at a reasoned understanding of morality. He must have the knowledge that Locke expects of liberal citizens. Considering him in the light of Locke's other writings will help us resolve some of the puzzles with which this essay began.

We have learned that moral enlightenment might be both easily accessible and a rare achievement. Demonstrative morality in the full sense is very difficult to complete—the more so since it requires a full rational theology—while

[47]See Nathan Tarcov, "A 'Non-Lockean' Locke and the Character of Liberalism," in *Liberalism Reconsidered*, eds. Douglas MacLean and Claudia Mills (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), 130–40, 131, 136; Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass*, 113, 123, 159.

[48]cf. Locke, in King, *Life and Letters of John Locke*, 307.

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its basic moral teaching and even parts of its rational demonstration are easily grasped. Individual rights and the self-regarding virtues of acquisitive happiness are easily understood, as are the outlines of the theology that supports them, the theology of the *Two Treatises of Government*. As for the more demanding, other-regarding virtues, the logic of equality/equity constitutes the core of their rationale, and this is surely within the grasp of all who will but "study" it in a fairly minimal sense ("Second Treatise," § 6). Indeed, its rudiments are accessible to children (*Thoughts*, § 81). Still, since the requisite logic must be developed by the individual's reason and requires more discipline to heed than do the self-regarding virtues, it could be widely neglected under certain circumstances. Of course, whole eras of history would have been blind to key parts of the moral truth, as would profound philosophic minds, so long as they did not acknowledge the fundamental principle of human equality. Finally, individuals who did not have the kind of upbringing given Locke's pupil in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* might not come to his moral awareness. To the question, "What does Locke expect us to know?" the answer would then be that, ideally, we would grasp the full philosophical elaboration of his demonstrative morality; but in practice, the simpler logic of equity and civility and of their place in human happiness, would suffice, in tandem with acceptable notions of divinity.

Tangential support for this interpretation appears in the moral outlook of Locke's heirs. Liberal citizens today, when asked why they do not steal or cheat, why they respect the rights of others even when they could take advantage with impunity, are likely to say simply because doing otherwise would not be fair. The moral logic is hardly sophisticated, but it is essentially Locke's principle of equity. That is, they believe wholeheartedly in the principle of equality, and from it they draw the moral conclusion that they cannot fairly claim for themselves any advantage they do not accord to others. If they add religious arguments, they rely on a god who endorses Lockean equity, including equal rights for those who believe differently than they. They do not typically make Hobbesian calculations regarding long term advantage in their moral lives; they are moved rather by a sincere belief in equity and an "ingenuous detestation" of injustice (*Thoughts*, § 110). Moreover, they are likely to take this moral principle beyond the ethic of no harm into some form of social benevolence. Locke's claim would be that they are listening to their reason in this, and to that extent, theirs is a rational morality.

This morality is certainly more rational than the one that preceded it, which, in Locke's view, was led astray by erroneous first principles, by jargon, and superstition. Of course, it is not fully rational if citizens simply suppose the foundational principle of equality (and divinity) rather than deriving it philosophically from some more fundamental premises, such as the concept of man as a corporeal, rational creature. To this degree, it would be accurate to say that the morality of Lockean citizens rests on

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implicit belief rather than rational knowledge.[49] Locke did not expect liberal citizenship to be fully enlightened. Education to citizenship has been a subject of debate in recent years among liberal theorists, including whether the education of liberal citizens must be "philosophical," in the sense of creating fully critical thinkers.[50] When Locke speaks strongly of the duty we each have to consider religion and morality aright, he seems to suggest it must. But Locke does not, in practice, hold us to so high a standard, partly because of the extreme difficulty of establishing moral principles on a truly philosophical level. In his view, the education of a typical liberal citizen properly stops something short of this, without abandoning the ideal of rationally held beliefs. It may dispense with a fully critical assessment of all its assumptions, but neither will it be simple indoctrination. It will create citizens whose morality is more rational than was ever the case before, though in Locke's view it is too much to ask that it be fully rational, in the philosophical sense.[51]

This bears as well upon a controversy among Locke scholars concerning the status of Locke's egalitarianism. Equality is a foundational principle for all liberalism, but much depends upon the precise grounding of that principle. For Locke, human equality is clearly grounded in rationality ("Second Treatise," chap. 2, 3; *Essay*, 4.3.18, 4.18.11). The question is whether the bare capacity for rationality makes us equal or if equality is contingent upon individuals developing that capacity properly. In terms of our question: Are human beings equal regardless of whether they develop the knowledge that makes them moral?[52] If developed moral knowledge is required, the foundational principle of equality would seem to be in jeopardy. Yet Locke's language in the "Second Treatise" suggests just this. A criminal in the state of nature, he says, who has failed to heed the moral teaching of reason, has effectively "quit the Principles of Human Nature" (§ 8). He may be treated as a "noxious Creature" (§ 8), and may even be "destroyed as a *Lyon* or a *Tyger*" (§ 11). It appears, in other words, that

[49]Thus Nathan Tarcov concludes, in his study of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, that Locke grounds virtue more on habit and shame than reason, even for adults (*Education for Liberty*, 108, 149). I find a more rational core to Locke's citizen virtue, but the picture is nuanced.

[50]The foremost champion of this position is Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). Her argument has been challenged by William Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chap. 11; and Ruderman and Godwin, "Liberalism and Parental Control of Education," *Review of Politics* 62 (Summer 2000): 503–29, among others.

[51]cf. Galston, *Liberal Purposes*, 243–44.

[52]Jeremy Waldron has argued recently that the mere capacity for abstraction, which all share, suffices for Lockean equality. Others have problems with this interpretation, as do I. See Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality*, 75–83, 143–45; and the "Symposium on God, Locke, and Equality," *Review of Politic*, summer 2005.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670506000106 Published online by Cambridge University Press

violators of the moral law have forfeited their equality, their title to equal right; equality, in some sense, must be earned. In the same context, Locke reiterates that the teachings of reason are plain to all who devote any study to it. The account presented here of what this study requires may help explain the juxtaposition: an adequate understanding of the law of nature may be gained by grasping the simple logic of equity/equality, which is simple, indeed. Any who fail to appreciate and heed it have closed their eyes to a truth that is practically staring them in the face. They have legitimately forfeited their right.

If this simplified logic, rather than a full-blown demonstrative morality, is the foundation that Locke intends liberalism to rest on in practice, it could create certain other problems. If the philosophical basis of equality is not fully plumbed, for example, it could lead to confusion about what its moral corollary, equity, requires, in its remoter applications.[53] As the history of liberalism has demonstrated, the moral principle of equity can lead to widely differing understandings of justice, from the libertarian to the redistributionist. John Rawls famously made egalitarian fairness the root of justice and drew from it some consequences that seem distinctly non-Lockean.[54] Though latter-day liberals like Rawls make no claim to be strict followers of Locke, part of the confusion over basic concepts in the liberal tradition might be traceable to Locke, if it was part of his intention to bequeath to us only a partially rational or enlightened morality. In the end, the susceptibility of liberal political culture to such a range of interpretations—and to endless contestation over them—may partly be attributed to the simplified moral argument Locke bequeathed to his heirs.[55]

A related problem is revealed by one widely recognized pathology of liberal morality, the tendency for self-centered assertions of rights to

[53]cf. Galston, *Liberal Purposes*, 243; Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass*, 41; Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality*, 47.

[54]John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), chap. 1 et passim; Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass*, 138; Zuckert, "Big Government and Rights: Locke, Rawls, and Liberalism," in Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism*, 311–30.

[55]Michael Zuckert traces the moral principle of equity or reciprocity in Locke to the nature of the rights claim as an exclusive property claim per se: the individual's claim of such rights compels him logically to recognize the like claim in others (Zuckert, *New Republicanism*, 277–78; "Aquinas, Hobbes, and Locke on Natural Rights," 195–96; cf. Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass*, 169). This derivation is obviously similar to the one I find in Locke. The "Second Treatise" and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* suggest to me that the derivation I am describing, based on bare equality instead, is the one Locke expects individuals to use in their moral reflections (indeed, property claims imply reciprocity only on the supposition of equality). This logic seems more accessible, but it would be more vulnerable to Rawlsian and other deformations than one rooted in property and consequently liberty. We might find perverse confirmation of the thesis proposed here in the vulnerability of Lockean culture to these deformations.

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overwhelm the principle of responsibility to others.[56] In this instance, Locke's very concern with equity shows his awareness of the problem. He uses equity to incorporate respect for others into even the minimal, no harm interpretation of natural law, in contradistinction to Hobbes. In his educational treatise, he inculcates a still more socially benevolent equity, under the guise of civility and good breeding. These reconcile individual happiness and the social good, but the question has legitimately been raised whether such sociable virtues arise spontaneously in a "Lockean culture" and whether they are strong enough to counter this culture's egoistic tendencies.[57] Locke's answer seems to be partly that the virtues of equity are, indeed, a natural outgrowth of a culture of equality. I suggested earlier that the generality of liberal citizens does, in fact, exhibit these traits. But the very lengths to which Locke must go to inculcate these traits in his educational treatise give one pause. Religion is an important bulwark for these principles, as Locke asserts in many contexts, and as contemporary cultural critics often point out. However, Locke seems to go out of his way in the more practical works we have looked at to provide a nonreligious foundation for morality, rooting it mostly in mundane interests of various kinds.[58] This gives us a teaching more apt for the secular world that grew up in the wake of Locke, but it may not be sufficiently stable or secure in this configuration, practically as well as theoretically. One wonders, for example, whether the joys of civility and good breeding will really suffice to win over the "Quarrelsom and Contentious" of the "Second Treatise," who exemplify the antisocial tendencies of human nature and who have failed to take the simple logic of equity to heart (§ 34). However great these joys may be for those who are brought to them or reason their way to them, they may be a precarious way to reconcile personal pleasure and the social good for an entire culture.

[56]See Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse*. (New York: the Free Press, 1991), 14, 34 et passim.; Galston, *Liberal Purposes*, chap. 12.

[57]Galston, *Liberal Purposes*, chap. 11; Berkowitz, *Making of Modern Liberalism*, xiii, 6.

[58]Forde, "Natural Law, Theology, and Morality in Locke," 400, 403, 408; cf. Pangle, *Spirit of Modern Republicanism*, 201–5.

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