

“Men Being Partial to Themselves”: Human Selfishness in Locke’s *Two Treatises*

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Abstract: Conventional wisdom describes Locke as an “optimist” about human nature; some scholars go further and say that he denied the Christian view that human beings are naturally sinful. But Locke’s works, including the *Two Treatises*, clearly and firmly hold that human nature has a consistent tendency to desire selfishness and evil. Locke’s view of the origin of human sinfulness is unorthodox – he dissents from the traditional doctrine of “original sin” – but on the question of whether human nature is in fact sinful his views are perfectly orthodox, and are in harmony with the Calvinism of the Church of England in his time. Understanding this is crucial to grasping the fundamental problem of the *Two Treatises*, which is the need to cope with humanity’s selfishness. Locke argues that the persistent moral corruption of human nature is the primary reason government exists.

INTRODUCTION

Conventional wisdom describes Locke as an “optimist” about human nature; some scholars go further and say that he denied the Christian view that human beings are sinful. However, Locke’s works, including the *Two Treatises*, clearly and firmly hold that human beings have a consistent tendency toward selfishness and evil. Locke did dissent from the orthodox Christian

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view that the natural sinfulness of all human beings is caused by Adam's sin. However, on the question of whether human beings are in fact sinful by nature, Locke is unambiguously affirmative, unlike Pelagians. Locke's view on this particular point was unorthodox as measured by the standard of orthodoxy that has historically prevailed in most Christian churches in most times and places, including Locke's own. Nevertheless, Locke is only unorthodox on the question of the origin of sinfulness, not on the question of whether humans are sinful. Locke's "unorthodoxy" is thus far less radical than that of Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, or Socinianism, with which Locke is sometimes identified. Understanding Locke's affirmation of sinfulness is crucial to grasping the fundamental problem of the *Two Treatises*, which depicts the institution of government as driven primarily by the need to cope with humanity's natural predisposition to sin.

If the view defended in this article is correct, it will have far-reaching consequences for how we read Locke's political theory, as well as his theological, educational, and other works. Those consequences can only be suggested in an article of this length. Our purpose here is to establish two points. The first is that Locke's view of human sinfulness only differs from the orthodox Christian view on one point, and that this single point of unorthodoxy is not one that can be expected to have important consequences for political theory. The second is that Locke's political theory in the *Two Treatises* relies crucially on the orthodox view that moral corruption is universally present in human nature, such that the *Two Treatises* cannot be understood apart from that view. Adjusting our understanding of the *Two Treatises* and of Locke more broadly to take account of these two points is a task for future scholarship.

The authors of this article disagree on the merits of Locke's critique of orthodox Christianity on the origins of human sinfulness. One of us (Parker) thinks Locke is right that the orthodox view diverges from that of the Bible; the other (Forster) thinks the orthodox position is more biblical than Locke's is. However, while we are divided on the question of whether Locke's critique of the orthodox view is correct or incorrect, we agree that Locke scholars have not yet achieved an accurate understanding of either the content or the significance of Locke's views on human sinfulness and its role in the *Two Treatises*. Locke's unorthodoxy is narrowly confined to a single theological point that has, as far as we can see, no significance for political theory. The important question for political theory is whether human beings are sinful by nature; since Locke affirms this view, and indeed builds his whole political theory upon it, his unorthodoxy on the question of whether human sinfulness arises from Adam's sin is irrelevant to his politics.

THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OR, WHY LOCKE IS NEITHER PELAGIAN NOR SOCINIAN

It is imperative that scholars engage adequately with the history of biblical interpretation before they undertake to evaluate Locke's views of any theological subject. Most Locke scholars are not trained in biblical studies, and Locke scholarship generally either ignores the history and substance of Christian theology or else reduces it to a radically oversimplified caricature. This ignorance is the main reason Locke's affirmations of human sinfulness do not receive sufficient attention. It is also the reason Locke's objection to the orthodox understanding of original sin is mistaken for a broader rejection of Christian doctrine generally.

On the most basic level, "sin" can be defined as a failure to adhere to the moral law, and "sinfulness" as a persistent desire for sin that leads to the commission of actual sins. While theologians have developed more specific and technical definitions of sin (e.g., "the attempt to avoid grace" for Karl Barth, "estrangement from God" for Paul Tillich, "inauthentic existence" for John Macquarrie, "humans' failure to acknowledge their creatureliness" for Reinhold Niebuhr), Locke himself avoids this sort of theological jargon and does not get embroiled in technical discussions. Locke describes sin in terms of the tendency for humans to be shortsighted, self-interested, weak-willed, corrupt, and greedy, and this basic concept will be sufficient for the present purpose.

The seventeenth-century Church of England held two contrasting doctrines about human nature. Humans were the pinnacle of creation, made in God's image, and granted dominion over the earth and its inhabitants; at the same time, however, humans were also intractable in their evil, having deliberately transgressed God's commandment in the Garden of Eden, bringing upon themselves God's eternal wrath and curse. Humans were corrupt through and through and could not, by their own means, achieve or even strive for the moral perfection that God rightly expected of them.¹ This is the Calvinist view of sin, which the Church of England taught and in which Locke was reared: all humans deserve God's condemnation and cannot, by virtue of their own efforts, save themselves from it. Salvation is only possible by God's merciful forgiveness of sin, given not as a response to any merit or initiative on the part of humans, nor with human cooperation or even passive permission, but unilaterally on God's own initiative. Article IX of the Church's *Thirty-Nine Articles* states that every "man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth

always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation."²

For seventeenth-century Anglicans, the source of this bleak scenario was the Fall of humanity, recounted in the book of Genesis. However, the Genesis text itself gives no explicit indication that Adam's transgression infected the rest of humanity with a natural corruption. The narrative of the Fall is part of the text's second account of creation, following the "creation week" account in Genesis 1:1–2:3. This second narrative describes how the Deity made a garden for a man (or '*adam*'), allowing him to eat from every tree of the garden but one; how a talking serpent convinces a newly created woman to eat of the forbidden fruit and to induce her husband to do so; and how some unpleasant consequences followed from this. God condemns both the woman and the man to endure labor (she in childbirth, he in having to work a cursed ground for food), and subsequently expels them from the garden. Neither the word "guilt" nor "sin" appears in the passage, still less the notion of an inherited sinfulness of the human race. In fact, while the Old Testament — particularly the prophetic literature — has a great deal to say about the sinfulness of humanity in general, no mention is ever made of sinfulness being inherited from Adam.

It is only from the second century before common era (BCE) onward, beginning with the late apocryphal books of Ecclesiasticus (180 BCE) and I Enoch (100 BCE), that a "sin and fall" interpretation begins to emerge. Moreover, even here, Adam is generally not depicted as the guilty party. The author of Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Ben Sira, lays the blame for human sinfulness squarely on the woman: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die" (Ecclesiasticus 25:24). The pseudepigraphical book of I Enoch claims that humanity's natural sinfulness originates from the sexual union of the "sons of God" with the "daughters of man" in Chapter 6 of Genesis (I Enoch 6:1–7:3, in Charlesworth 1983).

In the New Testament, the theory of original sin stemming from Adam's transgression was certainly suggested, but by no means given full expression, by Paul. Paul argues that Adam is a type who is followed by Jesus, the antitype. As Adam condemns humanity to death, Jesus restores humanity to life. Paul writes: "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all have sinned. . . . Through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation. . . . Through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (Romans 5:12–19). While the

predominant interpretation of this passage has historically been that the sin of Adam is the cause of the sinfulness of generations to follow, some interpret the passage as only stating that humans are sinful and cannot achieve salvation on their own merits.³ In any case, Paul is less than fully explicit on the point.

Thus, while the sinfulness of humanity is explicit in scripture, the doctrine of original sin is not. Christians came to adopt the idea of original sin through a historical process of scriptural interpretation and theological debate. Early Christian theologians struggled to formulate a doctrine that would summarize the total teaching of scripture, including both its explicit statements about human sinfulness and what they thought were the unstated implications of those statements. One thing they particularly sought was a scripturally based explanation for the universality of human sinfulness. The Bible certainly maintains that human beings are sinful — not merely that they happen to commit a sin at some point in their lives but that they are all “naturally” sinful; that is, from birth to death they are predisposed toward sin. Theologians naturally sought to provide an explanation for why it would be the case that all humanity is sinful, and the story of disobedience in Genesis seemed like an obvious place to look for such an explanation. Paul’s statements about sin entering the world through Adam, and the many being made sinners through the one man’s disobedience, took on a new significance in light of this investigation, as did other scriptural passages. But drawing out unspoken implications of this kind from the explicit scriptural teaching necessarily involved the use of human judgment, over which sincere Christians could and did disagree.

Eventually, the orthodox position came to be that the doctrine of “original sin” provides an accurate summary of the scriptural view of human sinfulness and its origin. It was Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, who is probably most responsible for articulating the theory of sinfulness and the Fall with which we have become familiar. Augustine argued that Adam’s original sin (*originale peccatum*) was ingrained in human nature and was transmitted, “genetically” so to speak, to future generations of humanity. In this manner, the sin of Adam and its deleterious effects were implanted in all humankind. If all humanity existed potentially in Adam, all humanity participated in his disobedience and was consequently guilty. This was a strong interpretation of Paul’s position. For Augustine, it meant that human beings are corrupt from the beginning and no amount of good works can achieve salvation without the unmerited help of God, or divine grace.⁴

Of course, the history of how the Augustinian position on original sin developed and how it grew to become the orthodox position of Christian churches is a subject that fills volumes. For the present, the important point is simply that the Augustinian understanding did undergo a process of development. Thus, to show that an author deviates from the Augustinian position does not imply that that author is not sincerely attempting to understand and obey the teaching of the Bible. It only shows that the author has come to a different understanding of the Bible from that of Augustine and those who have followed him.

Augustine's doctrine of the inheritance of original sin was opposed most famously by Pelagius, an Irish monk who settled in Rome in about 400. Pelagius denied both Augustine's position of inherited sinfulness and the general biblical doctrine of the inherent sinfulness of humanity. He held that all individuals were able to choose either good or evil at any time, placing the onus of moral responsibility totally on each individual at each given moment. He interpreted humanity's predisposition toward sin as an acquired habituation rather than a flaw in our nature that is present from conception. According to Pelagius, if the individual is not always able to will either good or evil, if sin is unavoidable, then individuals are not responsible for their own sins.⁵ The Pelagian view allowed individual freedom to choose either good or evil at any time, and consequently, discrete individual responsibility for every human evil. Pelagius was thus more Hellenistic than Augustine, insofar as he felt that human beings could attain perfection through natural means; Plato and Aristotle had both taught that humans naturally sought the good and committed evil only out of ignorance. Pelagius also taught that it was possible to live one's whole life without ever sinning, and that some people had actually done so — thus making the salvific work of Jesus ultimately unnecessary. For this and other reasons, Pelagianism was condemned as a heresy at the Councils of Carthage (412, 416, 418) and the Council of Ephesus (431), and Pelagians have been considered outsiders to historic Christianity ever since.

Because of Locke's critique of the Augustinian doctrine that sinfulness is inherited from Adam, some attribute to Locke the "optimistic" view of human nature held by Pelagius, placing Locke decisively outside the ambit of historic Christianity. The Straussian interpretation of Locke, though it does not make Locke look like much of an "optimist," also reads Locke as denying the Christian view that human nature is sinful.⁶ As we shall see in detail below, Locke, unlike the Pelagians, has no problem with the clear and explicit teaching of scripture that humanity

is sinful. He was fully aware of the inherent moral defects in human nature and human reason. It is true that Locke did not attribute humanity's sinfulness to the events described in Genesis, because he thought this would amount to blaming God for humanity's moral deficiencies. But just because Locke does not endorse the Augustinian interpretation of the origin of human sinfulness, it does not follow that he denies human sinfulness altogether. Locke closely follows the biblical texts as he understands them; he comes to the view he does because the Bible is quite explicit that humanity is sinful by nature, but is less so about the origin of that sinfulness (Parker 2004, 111–113).

Although Locke is unorthodox on the origin of human sinfulness, his view of the extent of that sinfulness is more influenced by the Protestant Reformers, such as John Calvin and Martin Luther, than it is by anything like Pelagianism. For Luther and Calvin, God's grace, and not human effort, was the vehicle for salvation, because the Fall had radically distorted the divine image in humanity. Although the various Protestant sects disagreed with one another over such issues as forms of worship, they all tended to agree that humanity was corrupt and could not on its own efforts achieve salvation. As we will see, Locke differed from this view only in that he did not believe that humans inherited their sinfulness from Adam. With the Reformers and against Pelagius, Locke affirms that human beings are radically sinful, such that they cannot attain the standard of moral perfection that God rightly sets for them, and thus the saving work of Christ is necessary if anyone is to be spared from eternal condemnation.⁷

In addition to the charge of Pelagianism, many seventeenth-century Protestants who opposed the Augustinian position on original sin — including Locke, especially after the publication of the *Reasonableness of Christianity* — were tarred with the brush of "Socinianism." This was a movement that began under the theologian Faustus Socinus (1539–1607). Socinianism differed from orthodox Christianity in many respects. It denied: (1) the Trinity, because Socinians thought this concept was not taught in the Bible; (2) predestination and original sin, because this denied moral responsibility; (3) eternal punishment for the wicked, because this was not in accord with the purposes of a just God; and perhaps most importantly, (4) the doctrine of atonement. Christ did not die to absolve humanity's sins, but simply to demonstrate to us that there is life after death, and to provide a moral example. On the Socinian view, the punishment for Adam's sin was that humans became mortal, but Christ's resurrection shows us the certainty of life after death, if only

humans would follow the moral law. Thus, rather than seeing salvation as being offered through God's grace to those whom God chose to receive it, as in Calvinism, Socinians shifted moral responsibility totally onto the shoulders of each individual human being (Wootton 1986, 39–67).

Some Locke scholars today have embraced the same view as Locke's seventeenth-century critics — that anyone who opposes the Augustinian interpretation of the Bible must be a Socinian (Wootton 1989). But to describe Locke as a Socinian is highly inaccurate. Locke may have been sympathetic to some Socinian positions, but on crucial matters such as the pre-existence of Christ, the salvific work of Christ, and the death and resurrection of Christ as a victory over Satan, Locke is clearly far removed from Socinian teachings (Wainwright 1987, 35–43). Locke certainly felt that humans could better themselves by adhering to biblical and moral principles, but an emphasis on self-improvement was far from exclusive to Pelagians and Socinians; the Protestant Reformers, with their Augustinian view of human sinfulness, also emphasized the need for diligent self-improvement. At the heart of Locke's theology is a notion that human beings are shortsighted and inveterate sinners who cannot achieve salvation on their own merits; however diligently they seek to improve themselves, they will never meet the perfect standard God rightly expects of them.

HUMAN SINFULNESS IN LOCKE'S EARLY WRITINGS

The political absolutism of Locke's earliest writing seems to be based on his consideration of the dark side of human nature. Because of the inherent sinfulness of humanity, there must be an elaborate system of authorities to enforce the law and to stem the tide of human corruption. This was the position of the twenty-eight-year-old Locke when he composed his reply to Edward Bagshawe's 1660 work *The Great Question Concerning Things Indifferent in Religious Worship*. Locke's reply, known as the *Two Tracts on Government*, advocated an authoritarian government to curb religious controversies and to regulate human conduct. In the *Tracts*, Locke is fully convinced that human nature is corrupt. He does not explicitly attribute the origin of this corruption to the Fall, but he does discuss the pervasiveness of sin, and sounding at least quasi-Augustinian, writes that "ever since man first threw himself into the pollution of sin, he sullies whatever he takes into his hand, and he that at first could make the best and perfectest nature degenerate cannot fail now to make other things

so too” (Locke 1997, 36). But he goes no further than this, and Locke’s reluctance to bolster his view of human sinfulness with a full Augustinian interpretation of the Fall is striking in light of his attempt throughout the *Tracts* to wrest meaning from scripture. In this sense, Locke displayed from his earliest career the desire to rely not so much on the “expositions of commentators” like Augustine and theologians in the Augustinian tradition, but rather on “what Scripture affords itself,” as he would later put it (Locke 1967, 174).

A similarly ambiguous view of the Fall is expressed in the *Essays on the Law of Nature*, written while Locke was Censor of Moral Philosophy at Christ Church in 1663–64. The *Essays* attempted to discuss the problem of natural law—its existence, its knowability, and its obligations. In these essays, Locke once again describes the sinful state of humanity. He describes how some people who have been “brought up in vice” cannot “distinguish between good and evil” others have “established barbarous habits”; and for others “evil customs have perverted even matters of principle” (Locke 1997, 85). But Locke does not commit himself to a theory concerning the imputation of Adam’s guilt to the rest of humanity. His one explicit reference to the Fall in the *Essays* indicates that it “does not particularly concern philosophers” (in *Political Essays*, 97). Therefore, Locke, at a fairly early point in his intellectual development, firmly held a strong view of the sinfulness of humanity but had decided not to follow traditional wisdom and attribute human depravity and corruption to the Fall, as the Augustinians did.

Locke’s next discussion of the Fall occurred some ten years later, when he decided to translate three essays from the *Essais de Morale* by the Jansenist theologian Pierre Nicole in 1675–76. Nicole, like most Jansenists, argued that humans were weak, incapable of achieving much knowledge or of overcoming their selfish interests, and were therefore in urgent need of God’s grace for salvation. Humans, however, had to try to act as morally as possible for this grace to be effective. In this sense, Nicole differed from the Augustinian position, and emphasized the role that human effort plays in achieving the fruition of God’s grace.

As we will see, Locke’s later writings would always agree with Nicole’s emphasis on the moral weakness of both our wills and our intellects. As Marshall also shows, another aspect of Nicole’s *Essais* that Locke would find very appealing is the idea that human self-interest is a great motivator for the justification of commercial society (Marshall 1994, 177–192). Individuals can be prompted to do all sorts of

“charitable” acts provided they are remunerated for those actions. Enlightened self-interest makes cooperation among competing individuals possible, and the result is a prosperous, though corrupt, society.⁸ According to Nicole, the only way to temper this self-interest is to stress, at the same time, the necessity of loving God and being good to one’s fellow human beings as a means of gaining heavenly reward, and to better secure the peace of the state. This stress on good treatment of one’s neighbors is important to Locke, and surfaces especially strongly in his emphasis on toleration in religious matters (Parker 2004, 50–65).

SINFULNESS AND LOCKE’S VIEWS ON EDUCATION AND TOLERANCE

Locke’s view that humanity is sinful motivated his writings on the need for moral improvement. His famous *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was written primarily to provide a sound epistemological basis for moral and religious thought, not for scientific rationalism.⁹ While Locke’s polemic against “innate ideas” did sound like a kind of Hobbesian relativism to his critics, Locke actually shows that moral truth is discoverable by reason rather than implanted at birth (Yolton 1956, 26–71; Marshall 1994, 292).

If humans do not possess any innate ideas about good or evil, but must instead learn to perceive good and evil through the reason God gives them, education is of considerable importance. The educator must habituate children to virtuous behavior. Proper education provided a safeguard against sin, and more than this, it made one realize one’s full potential as a human being. Thus, Locke was moved to publish *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* in 1693, originally composed in the 1680s in the form of letters to his friend Edward Clarke concerning the education of Clarke’s son.

Locke has no illusions that people are prone to corruption even from earliest childhood. This viciousness often manifests itself in a love of dominion:

I told you before that children love liberty, and therefore they should be brought to do the things [that] are fit for them, without feeling any restraint laid upon them. I now tell you, they love something more, and that is dominion; and this is the first original of most vicious habits, that are ordinary and natural. (Locke 1996, 103).

Locke did not attribute this corruption to the consequences of the Fall, as did many other educators during this time.¹⁰ He does mention Adam, but in a manner that describes the sinfulness of Adam's posterity without taking an Augustinian view of the Fall. "Few of Adam's children," Locke writes, "are so happy as not to be borne with some bias in their natural temper, which it is the business of education either to take off or counterbalance" (Locke 1996, 139). While this statement does not have the same tone as we find in Calvin or Luther, it does indicate a defect in human nature that either all or all but a few — depending on how literally we take Locke's words — will have.

Locke argues that for most people, education will determine the extent to which their natural "biases" will lead them into sinful actions. Though there are a few who are "carried toward what is excellent" by other influences, most people "are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education" (Locke 1996, 1). However, this is less important than it may seem to be for Locke's view of sin. Not only does this view of the importance of education not conflict with the view that humanity is sinful, it does not even conflict with the Augustinian view of the Fall. Some seventeenth-century educators simultaneously stressed the Augustinian view of the Fall and the need to mitigate the consequences of the Fall through education. Among these works were two books — Richard Allestree's *The Practice of Christian Graces, or the Whole Duty of Man* (1659), and *The Gentleman's Calling* (1660) — that Locke had assigned his students to read while he was a tutor at Christ Church in the 1660s (Spellman 1988, 68–69; Spellman 1997, 85).

Locke sees the human personality as a combination of selfish desires, and it is the role of the educator to try to control these desires by educating the child to the life of reason (Locke 1996, 33, 38). One way to do this is to heighten the child's sensibility with the thought of long-term rewards and punishments rather than immediate ones.¹¹ As Locke writes, human nature is "sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness and misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends" (Locke 1996, 17). It was the job of the educator to make sure that the child was to become a responsible adult, complete with an ability to be able to rationally follow God's laws (Locke 1996, 17–18). While Locke does not think humans inherit sinfulness from Adam, he thinks they are similar to Adam insofar as they are sinful. Through education, one can be restored to the reasonableness to which Adam was born.

But if education is so important to combating sinfulness, this might imply the need for a strong authoritarian government to better combat

the sin to which humanity is prone. In fact, this very issue surfaces in Jonas Proast's assault against Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*, which prompted Locke's reply in the *Second Letter Concerning Toleration*, and again in his voluminous *Third Letter on Toleration*, replying to Proast's criticisms of the *Second Letter*. In the original *Letter*, Locke made a case that the magistrate is not entitled to use force in promoting the correct worship or true religion. The magistrate is only to enforce the moral rules governing matters of "civil concernment." Proast, however, argued that the magistrate should enforce religious practices because the waywardness of some individuals would seduce others away from the true religion and into vice. Proast advocates a broad mandate for government to cultivate morality, whereas Locke is more cautious, arguing that it is only appropriate to punish certain kinds of immorality, namely those that are disruptive to the peace and well-being of the community. Matters of religion were better left to the private consciences of individuals than to the magistrate, whose efforts to inculcate morals by force would, more than likely, have the opposite effect (Marshall 1994, 363–373).

Locke's argument for toleration displays the importance of his view that our awareness of human sinfulness must never lead us to negate human moral agency — each person has not just the right, but the duty, to judge religious matters for himself. Failure to do so is contempt for God:

All the life and power of true religion consist in the inward and full persuasion of the mind; and faith is not faith without believing. Whatever profession we make, to whatever outward worship we conform, if we are not fully satisfied in our own mind that the one is true and the other well pleasing unto God, such profession and such practice, far from being any furtherance, are indeed great obstacles to our salvation. For in this manner, instead of expiating other sins by the exercise of religion, I say, in offering thus unto God Almighty such a worship as we esteem to be displeasing unto Him, we add unto the number of our other sins those also of hypocrisy and contempt of His Divine Majesty (Locke 2003, 219).

With more than a little optimism, Locke thought that the truth of Christianity would prevail by the force of its reasonableness, and that there was no need for a magistrate to interfere to preserve it. Proast was more pessimistic, thinking that forceful inculcation of religion and virtue were necessary because human sinfulness made them reluctant to embrace truth. As Harris suggests, Proast's language here is

Augustinian, implying that in their own nature humans are not capable of accepting true religion (Harris 1994, 290–300). While Locke agreed that humanity is sinful, he based his views of toleration and limited government on the idea that people must nonetheless be treated as moral agents who are capable of understanding right and wrong (if only they will use their reason) and of doing right (if only they will follow it). Reason needs to be fostered to become fully mature, but if we treat people as though they were unable to obey their reason, we end up denying human moral agency and reducing human beings to animals.

LOCKE'S MATURE THEOLOGY: AGAINST BOTH AUGUSTINE AND PELAGIUS

Locke's questioning of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin was to become explicit in his central theological work, the *Reasonableness*. Locke begins the work by placing "Adam's fall" at the very center of Christian theology:

It is obvious to anyone who reads the New Testament that the doctrine of redemption, and consequently of the gospel, is founded upon the supposition of Adam's fall. To understand, therefore, what we are restored to by Christ, we must consider what the scriptures show we lost by Adam (Locke 1999, Section 1).¹²

Locke critiques two alternative views: the Augustinian view that Adam's sin is imputed to all humanity and causes their moral corruption, and the Deistic view, an essentially Pelagian outlook that would render Christ's work unnecessary.

Locke rejects the first alternative on grounds that it minimizes human culpability or personal responsibility, and thus strikes at "the foundations of all religion." Locke objects to the idea that "all Adam's posterity [are] doomed to eternal infinite punishment for the transgression of Adam, whom millions had never heard of, and no one had authorized to transact for him, or be his representative" (Locke 1999, 1). Citing Romans 2:6, Locke emphasizes that God will render unto each "according to his deeds" (Locke 1999, 6).

To show why the second alternative is inadequate, Locke turns to the scriptural account of Adam's punishment. The Deists held that "there was no redemption necessary, and consequently that there was none . . . and so made Jesus Christ nothing but the restorer and preacher of pure natural

religion, thereby doing violence to the whole tenor of the New Testament” (Locke 1999, 1). Locke denies this view, arguing that all human beings are sinful and need redemption from their sins, which is provided by Christ’s work and is made available through faith in Christ. Citing Romans 3:20–23, Locke affirms that every human being is sinful: “All having sinned come short of the glory of God.” He goes on to defend Christianity against the accusation that its staunchly negative assessment of the moral state of humanity sets the bar unreasonably high:

Perhaps it will be demanded, “Why did God give so hard a law to mankind that, to the apostle’s time, no one of Adam’s issue had kept it? As appears by Rom. 3 and Gal. 3:21, 22.” Answer: It was such a law as the purity of God’s nature required, and must be the law of such a creature as man, unless God would have made him a rational creature and not required him to have lived by the law of reason (Locke 1999, 13–14).

Locke’s affirmation of universal human sinfulness clearly distinguishes Locke’s view from the Pelagian one. Less obviously, his defense of God’s right to require absolute moral perfection from human beings sets him apart from the “semi-Pelagians” who tried to salvage a form of Pelagianism after it was first condemned as a heresy. The semi-Pelagians, who were condemned themselves at the Council of Orange in 529, held that sinners could work to improve themselves, with God’s help, to the point where they were good enough to meet with God’s approval. Locke defends the orthodox view that a person who has once sinned has lost his chance of earning God’s favor on his own merits. On this view there can be no hope of saving ourselves from our own sins by moral improvement — if we sin even once, God can justly condemn us no matter how good we subsequently become.

Why, then, does Locke assert that Adam’s disobedience is central to the gospel of redemption in Christ, if he disagrees with the Augustinian view that the Fall is the ultimate source of all sin? Locke argues that by his sin, Adam lost immortality and paradise, both of which had been bestowed upon him at his creation but were contingent upon his perfect obedience to God’s law in the garden:

What Adam fell from . . . was the state of perfect obedience, which is called Justice in the New Testament, though the word, which in the original signifies Justice, be translated Righteousness; and by this Fall he lost paradise, wherein was tranquility and the Tree of Life, *i.e.*, he lost bliss and immortality (Locke 1999, 2).

The loss of immortality and paradise are the two things that Locke sees accruing to the rest of humanity as a result of Adam's fall. Had Adam been obedient, all humanity would have been born immortal and living in paradise; as it is, all are born mortal and in a fallen world. This is another point on which Locke's view can be seen to clearly diverge from Pelagianism; Pelagius taught that humanity was always mortal and that death is not a punishment for sin. Locke argues that there is no injustice in God's withholding immortality and paradise from Adam's posterity as a result of Adam's sin, since they were never entitled to receive these blessings in the first place. Even the temporary life of human beings in this fallen world is "his gift, they owe it to his bounty, they could not claim it as their right, nor does he injure them when he takes it from them" (Locke 1999, 6).

For Locke, redemption in Christ is a restoration of the blessings of immortality and paradise that were denied us as a result of Adam's sin. What we gain from Christ, an eternal life of happiness, is exactly what Adam lost — not just for himself but for all humanity — by sinning.

But this is not the whole story; if it were, our own sinfulness would not be a factor in our need for redemption. Locke argues that while Adam's sin kept us from naturally inheriting the blessings of immortality and paradise from Adam, our own sins are the reason we need redemption in Christ before those blessings can be restored to us. Locke observes:

It appears to be the unalterable purpose of the divine justice that no unrighteous person, no one that is guilty of any breach of the law, should be in paradise; but that the wages of sin should be to every man, as it was to Adam, an exclusion of him out of that happy state of immortality, and bring death upon him. (Locke 1999, 10).

For Locke, then, there is a real sense in which every human being is in Adam's place — not in the Augustinian sense that every human being "sinned in Adam" when Adam first sinned, but in the sense that every human being, when he himself first sins, personally experiences the same exclusion from God's favor that Adam suffered, an exclusion that he cannot redress by his own efforts. The difference is that Adam began in a state of immortality and in paradise, while later humanity inherits from Adam a state of mortality and a fallen world (Parker 2004, 61).

Locke also affirms, contrary to both Pelagianism and Socinianism, that Christ's work is necessary to our salvation. He writes that Jesus was "laying down his life for others" (Locke 1999, 176). Locke does not

develop any explanation of the nature of Christ's saving work, either in the *Reasonableness* or elsewhere in his published works.¹³ However, the absence of a theory describing *how* Christ's work brings about salvation for us is not the same as a denial *that* Christ's work is necessary to bring about salvation. Given Locke's strong aversion to metaphysical speculation about matters that are above human reason, it is well within character for Locke to believe that Christ's work can save sinners without his being able to explain how (Forster 2005, 152–159).

In his posthumously published *Paraphrase and Notes on Paul's Epistles*, Locke expands his critique of both the Pelagian view that human beings are not inherently sinful and the Augustinian view of original sin. The *Paraphrase and Notes* represents, in some respects, the culmination of Locke's thinking on some of the most extraordinarily difficult biblical texts. For Paul, Locke observes, the flesh itself is not inherently sinful, but it is susceptible to the forces of sin. This sin manifests itself in the recalcitrant nature of human beings, who are unable to obey God and follow the law. Human evil, for Paul, is an inability to accept our weak sinful natures and to arrogate to ourselves a divine position. However, Locke argues, what Paul says Adam lost was immortality, and his transgression did not stain the rest of humanity with sin. On the other hand, now that human beings are frail and mortal, the human inclination to sin is too great to be overcome by mere effort of will. Locke sees Adam as an archetype of humans who continue to sin and who are unable to save themselves (see Locke's paraphrase of Gal. V.16, 17 c-d). Locke argues that when Paul attributes the death of all human beings to Adam, he is using metonymy to reverse the cause and effect:

There [I Cor 1 5:22] he says, "As in Adam all die," which words can not be taken literally, but thus: that in Adam all become mortal. The same he says here but in other words, putting, by a no very unusual metonymy, the cause for the effect, *viz.*, the sin of eating the forbidden fruit for the effect of it on Adam, *viz.*, mortality, and in him, on all his posterity. A mortal father, infected now with death, being able to produce no better than a mortal race . . . But that neither actual nor imputed sin is meant here or ver. 19 (note to Locke's paraphrase of Romans 5:12).

In other words, Locke thinks that Paul uses a figure of speech when connecting Adam's sin with later humanity.

Locke's view of sinfulness does sound very different from what we are accustomed to hearing from Christian theologians, since the Augustinian

view of inherited sinfulness has long been the predominant one. But Locke's view is clearly neither Pelagian nor Socinian, because he affirms that all human beings are sinful and can only be saved by God's grace, not their own works. If Locke is unorthodox, it is only in rejecting a connection between our sinfulness and Adam's sin; his unorthodoxy is thus far less radical than that of either Pelagius or Socinus.

SINFULNESS AND LOCKE'S WAY OF WRITING IN THE *TWO TREATISES*

The sinfulness of humanity plays a central role in the *Two Treatises*. This fact is not widely recognized in part because Locke avoids using theological language, such as the word "sin," to describe it. The word "sin" and its derivatives ("sinned," "sinful," etc.) do not appear anywhere at all in the *Second Treatise*. They do appear in six passages of the *First Treatise* (see I.42, I.44, I.47, I.59, I.118, and I.125), but in none of the six cases does the concept of sin play any important role in the discussion. For example, on the duty to preserve the lives of others as well as oneself, Locke writes that "it would always be a sin in a man of any estate to let his brother perish for want of affording him relief out of his plenty" (I.42). Clearly, this sentence involves no serious engagement of the theological concept of sin and its consequences; the word "sin" comes in tangentially, almost by accident. In the *Two Treatises* Locke provides no analysis of the concept of sin, identified as such, or its role in shaping the foundations of the political order. Yet, as we will see, the universal presence in human nature of a desire for evil (that is, humanity's sinfulness) is crucial to Locke's main argument in the *Two Treatises*. He just doesn't use the word "sin" to describe it.

To understand why Locke minimizes the use of words like "sin" when describing the sinfulness of humanity, it is necessary to quickly lay out some observations about Locke's general method of writing in the *Two Treatises*. A full defense of these observations on Locke's method would require more space than we have in this article, but they provide the necessary context for our interpretive case, so we must present them without fully defending them. Both of us have defended this view of Locke's methods in the *Two Treatises* more fully elsewhere (Forster 2005, 220–225; Parker 2004, 100–103; see also Forde 2001, 402–403, 408).

Throughout the *Two Treatises*, Locke goes to unusual lengths to avoid invoking any sectarian, theological, or philosophical dispute that is not

strictly necessary to his argument. To maximize the appeal of his message and the scope of his audience, Locke bends over backward time and again to avoid saying anything that would appear to affirm Protestantism or Catholicism, Anglicanism or Puritanism, innatism or anti-innatism, religious toleration or religious compulsion, etc. This is not to say that Locke always avoids taking controversial positions; sometimes, in order to make the case against political absolutism and for the right to rebellion, Locke has to come down on one side or the other of some tangentially related issue (e.g., how to interpret scriptural teachings about marriage). But wherever he can avoid doing so, he does. For example, the *Two Treatises*' famous statement that reason teaches the natural law to all humanity would have sounded very appealing to readers who believed in innate moral ideas, and Locke shrewdly says nothing that would prevent the innatist from reading the passage as an affirmation of his position. Of course, we know that Locke hated innatism, but the original reader would not have known this (after all, the *Two Treatises* were published anonymously). In fact, Locke's strategic ambiguity in this passage is so successful that some modern scholars, who know perfectly well that Locke was anti-innatist, have read this passage as an affirmation of innatism (Myers 1998, 39–41; Aarsleff 1969, 129–131).

This intentional deflection of all controversies not essential to the argument at hand forces Locke to sacrifice a certain amount of philosophical thoroughness. This helps explain why so many Locke scholars believe they have found contradictions and inconsistencies in passages of his writings that are not really contradictory or inconsistent.¹⁴ Locke is not at all a sloppy or self-contradictory thinker, but if he has acquired that reputation, it is partly his own fault for valuing expedience over intellectual transparency. On the other hand, given the extremely fractious state of English politics in 1689, the use of ambiguity to maximize one's potential audience had very clear advantages. It is doubtful whether the *Two Treatises* could have achieved the colossal influence it did as quickly as it did if it had not been written in this politically shrewd way. If Locke was more interested in securing toleration for the persecuted and freedom for the oppressed than he was in philosophical meticulousness, we need not consider this a defect. Locke stands in the tradition of political thought aimed more at producing practical results than a comprehensive body of philosophical analysis — a tradition in which he stands alongside thinkers as diverse as Augustine, Machiavelli, and Rousseau, over against more systematic thinkers like Aristotle, Aquinas, and Hobbes.

One of the most important ways Locke avoids involving himself in any unnecessary disputes is by minimizing his use of theological terms. While he does talk about God and the Bible quite a lot, he generally avoids — where he can — the use of terms whose meaning and significance are subjects of religious dispute. This is so important because, as Locke explains at some length in the *Essay*, theological language is one of the most important battlegrounds on which religious disputes are fought. Every group has its own body of theological jargon, including not only different words but (far worse) different uses and meanings for the same words. Locke argues that one reason groups develop separate bodies of jargon is to take unfair advantage of the ambiguities of language. Differences in terminology can be exploited by each side to make the other side's ideas appear false, while insulating its own ideas from rational scrutiny (Parker 2004, 45–50). Locke writes in the *Essay* of the “artificial ignorance, and learned gibberish” that prevail “in these last ages, by the interest and artifice of those who found no easier way to that pitch of authority and dominion they have attained” (III.10.9; see also III.10.12).

It follows that if a person uses religious jargon, he cannot avoid becoming a participant in religious disputes. Any use of theological language therefore provides an opening for religious partisans to drag in controversies that are otherwise irrelevant to the topic at hand. Since Locke was eager to avoid raising these quarrels lest he alienate his audience, he had to avoid theological language where he could.

It was especially important for Locke not to introduce theology when describing humanity's natural tendency toward evil, because just how deep the moral rot in human nature goes was a point of particularly sharp religious dispute in his time. Protestants held that humanity is so sinful that its only hope is to be saved “by grace alone, through faith alone,” and for this reason rejected the whole Catholic system of penance and purgatory. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, argued that humanity was still capable of acquiring moral merit (in a qualified sense) through the church's sacramental system. Meanwhile, an equally bitter dispute had arisen among Protestants over just how salvation “through faith alone” takes place. The Church of England was predominantly Calvinist, holding that humanity is so sinful that even the faith by which a person is saved is brought about by a unilateral act of God's grace, to which the believer contributes nothing. However, in their effort to keep all English Protestants united in one church, the Anglicans had made significant concessions to accommodate Arminianism, the view that saving faith is a cooperative effort to which

both God and the believer contribute. These compromises were one of the major points of dispute between the Anglicans and their major rivals, the Puritans — who got their name from their desire to “purify” the church of all theological compromise.

So if Locke avoids using words like “sin” to describe the sinfulness of humanity, it isn’t necessarily because he rejects the Christian view that humanity is in fact sinful. We will see below that the *Two Treatises* strongly affirms human sinfulness. A more plausible explanation for Locke’s avoidance of religious terms is that he did not want to raise deeply controversial questions about the how and why of sinfulness that were totally unnecessary to his argument and would have served only to drastically restrict his potential audience.

SINFULNESS IN THE *TWO TREATISES*

While Locke did not describe sin in theological terms in order to minimize his contact with these religious controversies, the sinfulness of humanity is a key part of his argument that he repeatedly affirms in the *Two Treatises*. Locke explicitly writes that: (1) human beings have a universal tendency to prefer the satisfaction of their desires over obedience to moral law, which is to say, a universal tendency to prefer evil over good; (2) this tendency arises from a moral defect in human nature; and (3) as a result, wicked actions are ubiquitous in human history.

These three affirmations decisively foreclose any contact between Pelagianism and the argument of the *Two Treatises*.

Probably the most explicit affirmation of all three of these positions comes during the extended diatribe against absolutism in Chapter 7 of the *Second Treatise*, “Of Political or Civil Society.” The main argument in this section is that absolute monarchy is actually not a form of political or civil society at all, and is really no more than a continuation of the state of nature, because the absolute monarch and his subjects have no common judge on earth between them. As part of this case, Locke asserts that the main problem with the state of nature — the threat of arbitrary violence — is actually exacerbated rather than alleviated under absolute monarchy. The subject is “exposed to all the misery and inconveniences that a man can fear from one, who being in the unrestrained state of nature, is yet corrupted with flattery and armed with power” (II.91). The very next sentence states the reason why the prospect of arbitrary violence from an absolute monarch is to be feared more, not less, than the prospect of arbitrary

violence from one's neighbors in the state of nature: "For he that thinks absolute power purifies men's bloods, and corrects the baseness of human nature, need read but the history of this, or any other age to be convinced of the contrary" (II.92). There follows a description of the various ways in which the power and trappings of the throne exacerbate the "baseness" that was already present in the monarch's "human nature."

This sentence — "he that thinks absolute power . . . corrects the baseness of human nature, need read but the history of this, or any other age to be convinced of the contrary" — affirms all three positions identified above. People are "base," or evil; their wickedness inheres in "human nature"; and the fruits of this evil are clearly visible in "any age" of history. And this sentence is not a digression or even a tangential observation; the danger posed by the inherent wickedness of human nature is a crucial part of the case against absolutism in Chapter 7.

Locke makes essentially the same argument earlier in the *Second Treatise*, where he lays out the case that "in the state of nature, everyone has the executive power of the law of nature." He anticipates the objection that "it is unreasonable for men to be judges in their own cases, that self-love will make men partial to themselves and their friends. And on the other side, that ill nature, passion, and revenge will carry them too far in punishing others." Locke responds with an inspired Judo move — he refutes this objection by wholeheartedly agreeing with it: "I easily grant that civil government is the proper remedy for the inconveniences of the state of nature, which must certainly be great, where men may be judges in their own case." You are right, Locke says, it certainly is unreasonable for men to be judges in their own cases, precisely because of their self-love, partiality, ill nature, passion, and revenge. That is why people leave the state of nature for civil government. "But I shall desire those who make this objection, to remember that absolute monarchs are but men," subject to the same self-love, partiality, ill nature, passion, and revenge as the rest of us, and the absolute monarch "has the liberty to judge his own case" (II.13).

Other passages in the *Two Treatises* affirm human sinfulness just as clearly. Chapter 11 of the *First Treatise*, "Who Heir?" makes Locke's famous argument that any supposed absolute monarchy of Adam cannot be relevant for politics today because Adam's heir(s) cannot be identified. He introduces the subject by pointing out that:

The great question which in all ages has disturbed mankind and brought on them the greatest part of those mischiefs which have ruined cities,

depopulated countries, and disordered the peace of the world, has been, not whether there be power in the world, nor whence it came, but who should have it (I.106).

Having reminded us of the manifold evils of political history, he goes on to remind us where those evils come from:

The skill used in dressing up power with all the splendor and temptation absoluteness can add to it, without showing who has a right to have it, will serve only to give a greater edge to man's natural ambition, which of itself is but too keen (I.106).

Robert Filmer's absolutism is not only wrong, it is dangerous — because it whets the appetite of our lust for power, which is “natural” in humanity.

In another passage, Locke affirms human sinfulness in replying to Filmer's argument that fathers have traditionally been recognized as having absolute power over their children. Filmer had pointed to the acceptance of infanticide in some ancient cultures; Locke counters, in Sections 56–59 of the *First Treatise*, that human history is so tainted by evil that we cannot use simple historical precedent as a guide to right and wrong. The reason he gives for this record of depravity is that human psychology is inherently broken:

The imagination is always restless and suggests variety of thoughts, and the will, reason being laid aside, is ready for every extravagant project; and in this state, he that goes farthest out of the way, is thought fittest to lead, and is sure of the most followers; and when fashion hath once established what folly or craft began, custom makes it sacred, and 'twill be thought impudence or madness, to contradict or question it (I.58).

While “reason” shows us right from wrong, “the imagination” restlessly draws us toward wrong, and “the will . . . is ready for every extravagant project.” Earlier, Locke has affirmed “reason” as “the image of God,” placed in man by his creator (I.30). Now he introduces the darker side of the picture — humans have a natural tendency to resist the voice of the divine image within them.

There is one section in the *Two Treatises* that may appear at first glance to run against human sinfulness, but in fact affirms it. In Chapter 8 of the *Second Treatise*, “Of the Beginning of Political Societies,” Locke must wrestle with one of the most formidable objections to natural-right and social contract theory: the observation that primitive governments are

patriarchal. If democracy and laws protecting individual rights are a relatively recent development, how can one argue that they are the natural or universal basis of government? Locke's response in this very important but widely neglected chapter is to argue that primitive peoples consent to tribal patriarchy, because under primitive social conditions that form of government is best suited to preserving society and its members.

In the course of making this argument, Locke paints a decidedly positive picture of primitive societies. He writes that "the Golden Age (before vain ambition, and *amor sceleratus habendi*, evil concupiscence, had corrupted men's minds into a mistake of true power and honor) had more virtue, and consequently better governors, as well as less vicious subjects" (II.111). Some might take this passage to be attributing the wickedness of human political history to the corruptions introduced by advanced society.¹⁵ This would be inconsistent with affirming the sinfulness of human nature, since the sinfulness would be attributed not to our nature, but to our social conditions. On this view, human nature as such would be pure.

But it is clear from the preceding account, particularly in Sections 107 and 108, that Locke has something very different in mind. According to Locke, human wickedness remains largely undeveloped in primitive societies, not because people in those societies are not sinful, but because the harsh conditions of primitive life give their sin very little opportunity to work itself out on the social level. If everyone is an impoverished dirt farmer, and can only effectively exercise ownership over the amount of land that he personally is able to cultivate, there will be little opportunity to seize and keep much property from others. When people have little power to commit wicked deeds, they will not commit them often, and hence they will not need all the elaborate mechanisms that are needed to restrain wickedness in modern society: "The equality of a simple, poor way of living confining their desires within the narrow bounds of each man's small property made few controversies, and so no need of many laws to decide them" (II.107). Under such impoverished conditions, protection against foreign invasion is the only serious threat to life, liberty, and property:

Thus we see, that the kings of the Indians in America, which is still a pattern of the first ages in Asia and Europe, whilst the inhabitants were too few for the country, and want of people and money gave men no temptation to enlarge their possessions of land, or contest for wider extent of ground, are little more than generals of their armies (II.108).

Primitive government had “more virtue” because there was “no temptation” to most political evils. When the temptation arose, we are left to conclude, it was eagerly pounced upon — and what does that say about humanity’s inherent moral corruption?

Nor should we read too much into Locke’s comments on the effect of “vain ambition” and “evil concupiscence.” Notice that Locke does not describe the Golden Age as a time before vain ambition and evil concupiscence existed. Rather, he describes it as a time before vain ambition and evil concupiscence had corrupted our minds with the false doctrine of political absolutism. Vain ambition and evil concupiscence were still present in people’s hearts, but did not yet have the opportunity for social development. Even the use of the word “concupiscence” — a rare appeal to explicit theological jargon — implicitly commits the *Two Treatises* to the view that human beings are born with a natural tendency toward sin.

SINFULNESS AS THE BASIS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE *TWO TREATISES*

We have already seen how Locke relies on the natural sinfulness of human beings in some of his arguments against absolutism. However, sinfulness plays an even more fundamental role in his political theory than this alone would indicate. According to the *Two Treatises*, sinfulness is, properly speaking, the only reason government exists. Of course, people would have differences of opinion and divergent interests even if they were not sinful, but because they are sinful these differences cannot be peacefully managed without government.

In Chapter 9 of the *Second Treatise*, “Of the Ends of Political Society and Government,” Locke states three reasons why people would choose to give up their freedom in the state of nature and create a government. They are worth quoting in full:

First, there wants an established, settled, known law, received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right and wrong, and the common measure to decide all controversies between them. For though the law of nature be plain and intelligible to all rational creatures, yet men being biased 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.

Secondly, in the state of nature there wants a known and indifferent judge, with authority to determine all differences according to the established

law. For everyone in that state being both judge and executioner of the law of nature, men being partial to themselves, passion and revenge is very apt to carry them too far, and with too much heat, in their own cases, as well as negligence and unconcernedness, to make them too remiss in other men's.

Thirdly, in the state of nature there often wants power to back and support the sentence when right, and to give it due execution. They who [have] by any injustice offended, will seldom fail, where they are able, by force to make good their injustice; such resistance many times makes the punishment dangerous, and frequently destructive, to those who attempt it (II.124–126).

So the three problems Locke attributes to the state of nature are: (1) Although people know the natural law perfectly well in the abstract, when it comes time to apply it to particular cases they often fail to acknowledge it. (2) Even in cases where the applicability of the law is established, judgment and execution are not always properly carried out. (3) Even where applicability, judgment, and execution are properly carried out, they will be resisted, making the process dangerous and uncertain. And the reasons Locke gives for these problems are: (1) Human beings are biased by their [self-]interest. (2) Human beings are partial to themselves. (3) Those seeking to enforce justice do not always possess sufficient strength. These are the three reasons government exists, according to Locke.

The reasons for the first two problems are effectively indistinguishable from “human beings are sinful.” So the first two problems with the state of nature are really just two different aspects of the problem of humanity's sinful nature. Even the third problem with the state of nature is implicitly connected to sinfulness. Earlier in the *Second Treatise*, Locke has said (by way of favorably contrasting the state of nature to absolute monarchy) that in the state of nature “if he that judges, judges amiss . . . he is answerable for it to the rest of mankind” (II.13). In theory, the collective strength of “mankind” ought to be deployed against offenders in the state of nature, just as it is in civil society. But in fact it is not. Why not? The only apparent reason is that the first two problems (disagreement over the applicability of the natural law and imperfection in judgment and execution) hinder cooperative social action against injustice. The third “problem” seems to be redundant with the first two problems, which in turn are just two different

aspects of the problem of sinfulness. Human sinfulness is the ultimate root of all the problems that drive humanity from the state of nature into civil society (Parker 2004, 142–43; Forster 2005, 225–230, 239–251).

It appears from this pivotal section of the *Two Treatises* that for Locke the answer to the question “Why do we have government?” is something like “Because without it we cannot reliably settle disputes over justice.” And the reason he thinks we cannot reliably settle disputes over justice in the state of nature is something like “Because our moral judgment is impaired by our natural selfishness.”

In a line that comes not long after the passage quoted above, Locke declares that it would never be necessary to leave the state of nature “if not for the corruption and viciousness of degenerate men” (II.128). Taken out of context, this line appears to be attributing the need for government only to the wickedness of some individuals—the “degenerate men” who commit crimes. However, from the foregoing it should be clear that Locke is referring not to the “corruption and viciousness” of some people, but of all people. As we have seen, not only does the offender refuse to apply the natural law to himself, but the offended party cannot be trusted to do justice in his own case because he is subject to “passion and revenge.” Not only the offender but the victim suffers from impaired moral judgment arising from the self-interested bias of his sinful nature. The “degenerate men” referred to in this passage are not a subset of humanity, but all humanity.

The natural next question, of course, is, “Why does establishing a government solve the problem of our naturally impaired moral judgment?” Locke’s answer is that when people enter civil society, they give up their right to pass judgment in cases of justice involving themselves. What passes from the individual to the government is not simply the right to use force, but the right to judge where and how to use it — that is, the right of moral judgment. This is clear enough from Locke’s description of the transaction:

In the state of nature, to omit the liberty he has of innocent delights, a man has two powers. The first is to do whatsoever he thinks fit for the preservation of himself and others within the permission of the law of nature. . . . The other power a man has in the state of nature is the power to punish the crimes committed against that law. Both these he gives up when he joins in a . . . political society, and incorporates into any commonwealth, separate from the rest of mankind.

The first power, *viz.*, of doing whatsoever he thought fit for the preservation of himself and the rest of mankind, he gives up to be regulated by laws made by the society, so far forth as the preservation of himself and the rest of that society shall require. . . . Secondly, the power of punishing he wholly gives up, and engages his natural force (which he might before employ in the execution of the law of nature, by his own single authority, as he thought fit) to assist the executive power of the society, as the law thereof shall require (II.128–130).

In the state of nature he may do “whatsoever he thinks fit” to uphold the law of nature in general (the first power), and in particular cases of injustice (the second power) he may “employ” his “natural force” “by his own single authority, as he thought fit.” In other words, in all matters pertaining to the natural law he may exercise his own judgment. But when he enters civil society he “gives up” the power “of doing whatsoever he thought fit,” and he “engages,” or commits, himself to use force “as the law . . . shall require” rather than “as he thought fit.” He has given up the right to judge right and wrong for himself, at least where interpersonal disputes over justice are concerned.

This delegation of moral judgment is, of course, limited. The power to judge interpersonal disputes is placed in the government in trust, and where government abuses that trust it forfeits it, just as any trustee forfeits his trust if he abuses it. And in order to determine whether the trust is being abused, subjects must exercise their own moral judgment. So the subjects retain the right of moral judgment in this one case — the case of government’s right use of its trust — and delegate all other moral judgments in cases of justice to the government. This scheme obviously creates some delicate problems for Locke, as he must map out precisely where the boundaries of moral judgment between ruler and subject lie. While there is no space to go over this here, one of us has done so already elsewhere (Forster 2005, 251–258).

CONCLUSION

Locke affirms that humanity is sinful by nature, but denies that the sin of Adam causes this sinfulness. Locke’s unorthodoxy on the latter point has been far more noticed than his orthodoxy on the former point. Locke’s views on these two issues have thus been treated in almost precisely the reverse of their real importance for political thought — it is his

views on the sinfulness of humanity, not his views on the connection of that sinfulness to Adam, that are relevant for politics. This can be clearly seen in the *Two Treatises*, where Locke's affirmation of the orthodox view of sinfulness plays a key role in the very foundations of his justification for political order.

The role of Locke's view of sinfulness must not be exaggerated, however. Locke does not suggest that people will always choose evil over good; the *Two Treatises* consistently exhibit an expectation that individuals will often seek to do what they sincerely believe is right, in addition to sometimes doing wrong. The point is not that the desire for evil always triumphs over the desire for good in our inner struggles, but that the desire for evil is always present, and hence the inner struggle between good and evil is always taking place, and the human potential for evil must therefore always be taken into account. Nor does Locke's political theory imply that government must, or even can, be built upon self-interest of its members, as in Hobbes. Locke acknowledges that the existence of government does in fact serve people's self-interest, and that (human nature being what it is) this is a help to maintaining it. But there is no suggestion that self-interest, as distinct from a desire for justice, is the sole motivation that drives people out of the state of nature and into civil society. Locke does not even say which of the two motives he considers the more important.

This reading of Locke naturally raises a multitude of issues that can only be suggested here. It helps resolve, for example, the appearance of contradiction that has sometimes been noted between Locke's exultant invocations of the universal light of reason and his unsparing evaluations of human wickedness. In his famous statement that reason teaches the natural law of peace and justice to all mankind who will but consult it, the words "who will but consult it" bear a stronger weight than many Locke scholars seem to appreciate. Locke's concern for limits on governmental, familial, and other forms of authority takes on a new light when read in terms of his concern for the sinfulness of those who wield authority. The moral foundations of his theory of property rights, rooted in his concern for the preservation of life, become more obvious; the individual's right to be secure in his property is one of his most important safeguards against the predatory instincts of his neighbors. This reading of Locke also further complicates efforts to appropriate Locke's political theory apart from its deeper religious and philosophical roots; the fundamentals of Locke's politics depend on his relatively pessimistic anthropology. Other significant consequences of the reading of Locke defended above are not hard to think of, though space limitations

prevent us from addressing them. Our reading of his theological, educational, and other works will naturally be affected along with our reading of his politics. We look forward to seeing how future scholarship comes to terms with these issues.

NOTES

1. See further Spellman 1988, 8–10. The doctrine of human depravity is commonly associated with the Protestant reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin. Calvin is somewhat more optimistic about the human condition, suggesting that even corrupt humans are capable of a certain degree of virtue (see *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I.3.3). Nevertheless, his general emphasis is on the depravity of humanity (Williams 1927, 431–32). The Calvinist idea of the depravity of human nature had a profound impact on the Reformation in England (Spellman 1988, 26–28; Schouls 1992, 194; Parker 1996).

2. See also articles X, and XI of *The Thirty-Nine Articles*.

3. For a discussion of the view that Paul does not endorse the doctrine of original sin, see Cranfield 1985, 112–115. Most of Paul's rabbinical contemporaries did not have a doctrine of original sin stemming from Adam (see Sanders 1977, 114f).

4. See especially *City of God*, chapter XIV, sections 10–28.

5. The Augustinian/Pelagian controversy is obviously more complex than can be dealt with here. For further discussion of the controversy see Williams 1927, 332–347; Tillich 1968, 122–131; Frend 1984, 673–683; Chadwick 1986, 107–112; and Spellman 1988, 15–20.

6. The Straussians hold that Locke follows Hobbes' view of human nature, which we usually think of as a "pessimistic" view of human nature; however, Hobbes' view makes human psychology essentially amoral, which is inconsistent with the Christian view that it is essentially sinful. Pangle links the Straussian view of Locke to the view that Locke denies human sinfulness (Pangle 1988, 165; see also Foster 1997, 201–202).

7. Locke's rejection of original sin does not imply a rejection of redemption, since he affirms human sinfulness. While he may have balked at endorsing the theory of atonement developed by Anselm and adopted by the Calvinists (for which he was criticized by Edwards), he still saw the need for salvific work of Jesus. Throughout the history of Christianity, various atonement theories have been presented by such thinkers as Athanasius, Augustine, Abelard, and Aquinas, so Locke's reservations about the theory adopted by the Church of England do not make him "unchristian" so much as "unorthodox." On disputes over the atonement in medieval theology see Viladesau 2006.

8. David Wootton notes how Locke reuses Nicole's argument in the *Second Treatise* (Wootton 1986, 74–75).

9. For an opposing view, see Schouls 1992. Locke, however, describes the purpose of the *Essay* in quite humble terms: "If by this enquiry into the nature of the understanding, I can discover the powers thereof; how far they reach, to what things they are in any degree proportionate, and where they fail us, I suppose it may be of use, to prevail with the busy mind of man, to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension; to stop, when it is at the utmost extent of its tether; and to sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things, which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities" (I.1.4; see also I.1.6; IV.14.2 and the discussion above). Far from being a manifesto for scientific rationalism, the idea for the *Essay* occurred, according to Locke's friend James Tyrrell, during a meeting of five or six friends in the winter of 1671, where the discussion centered on "religion and morality" (see Cranston 1985, 141). Ashcraft writes that "Locke wrote the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in order to secure the great ends of religion and morality" (198), and see also Forster 2005, 46–50.

10. See the discussion in Spellman 1988, 121–126. Spellman goes too far, however, in his argument that "these men shared with Locke the Broad-Church understanding of the consequences of the Fall: a natural proneness to evil which could and ultimately must be checked through the forces of moral education" (123). Locke does stress the malleability of human behavior in *Some Thoughts*, and the possibility that vice can at least be held in check through proper education, but he is reluctant to specify an originary moment to vice, something that his contemporaries did not feel the same compunction about.

11. See also the *Reasonableness* where Locke writes, "the view of heaven and hell, will cast a slight upon the short pleasures and pains in this present state; and give attractions and encouragements to virtue, which reason, and interest, and the care of our selves, cannot but allow and prefer. Upon this foundation, and upon this only, morality stands firm, and may defy all competition" (1999, 245).

12. For ease of reference, citations to Locke's major works will be made by section numbers rather than page numbers from a particular edition.

13. Higgins-Biddle 1999, making the case for an orthodox Locke, points to occasions in Locke's private manuscripts where he described Christ's death as a "payment" for human sin, saying that it "satisfied" God's justice and that it was "a full and satisfactory ransom for our sins." However, Higgins-Biddle admits that "there is insufficient evidence to determine his Christology or theory of atonement." (lxxii-lxxiii).

14. The primary culprits here, of course, are Leo Strauss (1953), Peter Laslett (1960), and John Dunn (1969); for more extensive citations see Forster 2005.

15. See MS Locke, c. 28, fol. 113v (in Locke 1997, 320–321) where Locke writes: "Man was made mortal, put in possession of the whole world, where in the full use of the creatures there was scarce room for any irregular desires but instinct and reason carried him the same way and being neither capable of covetousness or ambition when he had already the free use of all things he could scarce sin. God therefore gave him a probationary law whereby he was refused from one only fruit, good wholesome and tempting in itself." Once he ate the fruit, however, Adam condemned humans to the loss of the potential for immortality, and exile into a harsher world: "so that now he [Adam] and in him all his posterity were under a necessity of dying and thus sin entered into the world and death by sin . . . By this sin Adam and Eve came to know good and evil, i.e., the difference between good and evil, for without sin man should not have known evil . . . And when private possessions and labor which now the curse on the earth had made necessary, by degrees made a distinction of conditions it gave room for covetousness, pride and ambition, which by fashion and example spread the corruption which has so prevailed over mankind." These passages also suggest a relationship between sin and prosperity, but that relationship is a contingent rather than a necessary one.

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