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John Locke on the Naturalness of Rights

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JOHN LOCKE ON THE NATURALNESS OF RIGHTS

By

Peter C. Myers

VOLUME I

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

January

1992

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: LIBERALISM, RIGHTS, AND NATURE

"Next to virtue as a general idea," observes Tocqueville, "nothing is so beautiful as that of rights...No man can be great without virtue, nor any nation great without respect for rights."¹ Tocqueville's estimate of its beauty appears roughly commensurate with the practical power that the idea of rights broadly conceived has manifested over the past few centuries. The proposition that human beings as such possess unalienable rights not only inspired the revolutionary movements that swept North America and western Europe in the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, but in its original, liberal form, it has borne the fruit of unprecedented levels of freedom and prosperity, and in many cases even political stability, in those countries in which it has most firmly taken root. Moreover, in conjunction with the principles of human freedom and equality, it has indeed become in our own century, as its early friends, enemies, and friendly critics alike anticipated,² a standard of political legitimacy recognized

¹Democracy in America 1.2.6, in Mayer ed. 1969, 237-8.

²Thus the doctrine's great pamphleteer Thomas Paine proclaims that "Government founded on a moral theory, on a system of universal peace, on the indefeasible hereditary

virtually worldwide, to which even many of the world's most despotic regimes feel compelled to proclaim their fidelity.

Against the backdrop of its practical successes, therefore, the widespread theoretical suspicion and even contempt that the doctrine of natural and unalienable rights has aroused from its very inception must appear all the more striking.³ In the contemporary literature, the

Rights of Man, is now revolving from west to east by a stronger impulse than the Government of the sword revolved from east to west. It interests not particular individuals, but Nations in its progress, and promises a new era to the human race" ("The Rights of Man" Part 2, in Hook ed. 1969, 227). Cf. Burke's famous lament that "the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded, and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever" (Reflections on the Revolution in France, ed. Mahoney 1955, 86; see also the remarks cited by Strauss 1953, 317-318). Tocqueville, for his part, animated as he says by "a kind of religious dread," claims in the introduction to Democracy in America that "the gradual progress of equality is something fated...it is universal and permanent, it is daily passing beyond human control, and every event and every man helps it along" (Mayer ed. 1969, 12).

³The seminal attacks appear in the works of Rousseau and Hume. See, respectively, Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality, *passim*, On the Social Contract, especially 1.6-8, 2.3-4, 2.7, and Treatise of Human Nature 3.1.1. In his Treatise, Hume supplies what has been taken commonly as the basis for the general charge that natural law doctrines as such are untenable, resting on one or another variant of the "naturalistic fallacy." Thus he observes that "In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with...the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems

clearest indication of this theoretical suspicion and contempt appears in the prevailing intellectual disinclination, evident especially in the most widely discussed and in many respects most ambitious recent reformulations of liberal theory, to engage arguments about rights on the level of their natural foundations.⁴ A similar tendency prevails in much of the mass of post-World War II literature concerning the concept of human rights.⁵ The inevit-

altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it."

⁴Ronald Dworkin, for instance, takes the "abstract right" to equal concern and respect to be "fundamental and axiomatic" or "intuitive" (1977, xv, 180, 182). In the single most widely discussed case, John Rawls presents his principles of justice as constituting an analytically precise description of a prephilosophic "sense of justice," but fails, as several critics have observed, to clarify the origin or nature of this sense (1971, 4, 46, 453-512; cf. Bloom 1977, 648-649; Wolff 1977, 182; Schaefer 1979, 12-18). In his more recent work (1980 and 1985), Rawls stipulates more definitely that his theory applies properly to democratic societies alone. Robert Nozick too admits at least provisionally his incapacity to treat adequately the question of justification, though he derives some comfort from the opinion that his model Locke suffered from a similar incapacity (1974, 9). Even Bruce Ackerman, who rejects intuitionism and presents arguments designed to lead persons of divergent political perspectives to accept his basic principle of neutral dialogue, ultimately confesses that he knows of no mode of neutral argumentation sufficient to defend against all forms of authoritarianism. Assent to his principle as well presupposes a particular understanding of one's "place in the world" (1980, 360-361, 373).

⁵See the bibliography in Martin and Nickel 1978, and the more narrowly focused critical review of the literature in Machan 1980. Important works of recent years include Feinberg 1980; Finnis 1980; Gewirth 1982; Waldron ed. 1984; Donnelly 1985; Meyers 1985; Nickel 1987; Winston ed. 1989.

able result, attempts at grounding rights in the principle of human agency or autonomy notwithstanding,⁶ is a wholly conventionalist view of the origin or basis of rights. The essential difficulty with this view lies in the fact that in its emphasis on the foundational character of the faculty of choice alone, the conventionalist conception of rights leaves unsettled not only the particular manner in which one should choose to exercise one's rights or freedom, but also the nonprudential grounds for choosing to limit one's freedom in accordance with the respect of others' rights. The larger implication is that the historical success of the liberal doctrine of rights must appear in the decisive respect accidental, explainable by reference rather to the particular cultural circumstances of the countries or peoples who espouse it than to any inherent reasonableness in the doctrine itself.⁷

In the remark cited above, Tocqueville unobtrusively raises the essential questions. In suggesting that an ap-

⁶See above all Gewirth 1982, 1-8, 20-30; also Hart, in Waldron 1984, 77-78; Mackie, in Waldron 1984, 175-8.

⁷See Grant 1975, 48-68, who argues ominously that "the very decency and confidence of English-speaking politics," i.e. of the politics of constitutionally limited government and rights in the English-speaking countries, "was related to the absence of philosophy" (68). Cf. Machan's critique of the "non-cognitivist" theories of rights set forth by MacDonald, Melden, Blackstone, and Feinberg, which tend to conceive of rights as merely cultural or linguistic artifacts (1980, 103-107, 112-115). Donnelly's account (1985, 31-43) seems to invite a similar criticism. Cf. also Rapaczynski's expression of his early view of Locke in particular (1987, 14).

preciation of human virtue provides the proper context for praising, for seeing the virtue in, the idea of rights, he implicitly reveals, contrary to the contemporary reliance on the principle of human autonomy, a grave skepticism with respect to our attempts at asserting claims upon or against nature without acknowledging at some point nature's claims upon ourselves. In accordance with that suggestion, the most general premise of the present study is the conviction that, notwithstanding the authentic perplexities that the task involves, no serious attempt at elucidating the foundations of the principle of human rights, of political liberalism in its most successful form, can avoid a confrontation with the question of nature. By attempting to avoid such a confrontation, theorists of liberalism or of rights confine their speech to those already committed to their principles. Explicitly or implicitly, they conceive of assent to those principles as a mere commitment, inherently and necessarily nonrational, and thus incapable of resisting radical challenges. We can understand clearly, however, why powerful majorities or minorities should respect the rights of the less powerful, only by understanding what it is about us that merits such respect, that makes certain rights appropriate to us--only, that is, on the basis of a serious inquiry into the nature and natural condition of humankind.

The present study therefore proceeds ultimately from

an inspiration that is at once theoretical and prescriptive. We hope by pursuing to their theoretical grounds the problematic relations among liberalism, rights, and nature to gain some insight concerning both the general question of political legitimacy and the particular question of the legitimacy of our own form of government. Our focus, however, is historical. The second of our major premises is the contention that we can best explore these problematic relations by focusing on their treatment in the thought of the greatest, most philosophically self-conscious exponent of a liberal theory of natural rights, John Locke. Though this characterization of the core of Locke's theory is not uncontroversial among scholarly commentators, the complexity of the issues involved necessitates that our reasons for viewing Locke as the paradigmatic natural rights theorist emerge mainly in the course of our exposition. Yet in view of the mass of existing literature on Locke's political philosophy, it is necessary here for us briefly to situate the present study in the context of those that have come before it, upon which it attempts to build.

Three general modes of interpretation are noteworthy here.⁸ According to the first, Locke is essentially not a political philosopher, but rather an ideologist. In its less narrowly reductive expressions, this approach is char-

⁸Cf. the earlier reviews of the recent literature in Monson 1971, Aarslef 1969, Zuckert 1975 and 1978. Cf. also the more comprehensive overview in Yolton and Yolton 1985.

acterized by the attempt at situating Locke's thought within a prevailing intellectual climate or community of discourse.⁹ Several of its adherents focus in particular on Locke's partisan political sympathies, presenting his political thought as a rationalization of the interests or sentiments of the Whigs, formulated either as an apology after the fact of the Glorious Revolution of 1688,¹⁰ or before it as an expression of a revolutionary aspiration, especially of the radical wing of the movement.¹¹ A more narrowly reductive, materialist variant of the ideological reading focuses on Locke's economic thinking, presenting Locke as an apologist of an emergent English bourgeoisie and therefore of a system of class domination concealed and

⁹Refraining from "systematic formal criticism," Dunn seeks merely "to elucidate why it was that Locke said what he said, wrote what he wrote, and published what he published in the Two Treatises of Government" (1969, x,6). Cf. Tully's similar declaration of his intention (1980, ix-x). Ashcraft introduces his reading of the historical context of the Two Treatises by offering a general definition of a political theory as "a set of structured meanings that are understandable only in reference to a specified context, wherein the concepts, terminology, and even the internal structure of the theory itself are viewed in relation to a comprehensive ordering of the elements of social life" (1986, 5). Cf. Glat 1981, 20-21.

¹⁰Stephen 1876, I.114,117; Green 1967 (1879), 76; Lamprecht 1918, 3,141; Laski 1920, 29,55; Sabine 1937, 523, 531,535,537; O'Connor 1952, 205. See the discussion in Laslett 1960, 58-61.

¹¹In recent scholarship, the most influential statement of this argument appears in Laslett 1960, 58-79. See also Fox Bourne 1876, I.466 and II.166; Aaron 1955, 270-274; Cranston 1957, 207-208; Gough 1973, 25-26,47-48,138-149; Tully 1980, 53-55; Ashcraft 1980, 37-40, 48-53; Ashcraft 1986, 530-589.

legitimated by its emphasis on formal or jural equality.¹²

A second mode of interpretation, in some instances partially overlapping the first, holds Locke to be a more-or-less traditional exponent of a theologically grounded natural law theory. Again this thesis admits of some variation, deriving especially from the fact that Locke's explication of the concept tends to obscure the traditional distinction between natural law and divine positive law.¹³ Defenders of the natural law interpretation argue that according to Locke, the principles of justice are acts of divine legislation, carry divine sanctions, and are accessible to unassisted reason either through its apprehension of the natural order of creation, or through its capacity to demonstrate the authenticity of a positive revelation. In either case, Locke is according to this view a fundamentally Christian writer, grounding his theory either in Christian revelation or in a version of natural theology that is substantively compatible with and ultimately in-

¹²Seminal in this respect is the work of C.B. MacPherson; see especially 1962, 194-262. Neal Wood (1984) has recently criticized MacPherson's argument as unhistorical, without, however, rejecting its basic premise. Wood's Locke too is an ideologist of a rising English bourgeoisie, a champion of an early agrarian form of capitalism. Alan Ryan rejects the view that Locke's political thought presents a justification of class domination, but agrees with MacPherson in characterizing it as a "bourgeois" theory produced by a "bourgeois mind" (1971, 105). See also Shapiro 1986, 128-148.

¹³Lamprecht 1918, 105-109; Aaron 1955, 265-270; Von Leyden 1954, 51-58; Gough 1973, 4-20; Rogers 1981, 146-149; Colman 1983, 5-7; Shapiro 1986, 100-108.

spired by Christianity.¹⁴

Both these modes of interpretation tend to depreciate the importance of the concept of nature in Locke's political thought. In the ideological reading, this depreciation occurs in the context of a general abstraction from any concern with foundational issues; if no human thought can transcend the particular historical or cultural horizon within which it arises, then it clearly makes little sense to attempt to assess on its merits Locke's claim to present transhistorical principles of justice or political legitimacy.¹⁵ A similar conclusion follows from the reading of Locke as a fundamentally Christian political thinker, a political theologian elaborating the political implications of his faith rather than a philosopher elaborating a conception of politics based upon and testable by rational

¹⁴The most emphatic statement of this view is that of Dunn, who argues that Locke's moral vision can be rendered coherent, if at all, only by reference to an axiomatic, "non-rational" but not "irrational" Christian, Calvinist faith (1969, 249; more generally, 218-228, 245-267). See also Ashcraft 1968, 910; Ashcraft 1969; Gough 1973, 1-26; Johnson 1978; Parry 1978, 12; Yolton 1985, 50, 91. His reading of Locke as a bourgeois or proto-bourgeois ideologist notwithstanding, even Wood affirms that Locke was "unquestionably...a sincere Christian," attempting to elaborate a "Christianized egoism" (1984, 77; 1983, 28, 178). Placing greater emphasis on the grounding of Locke's natural law in natural theology are Singh 1961, 105-118; Aarslef 1969, 105-116; Tully 1980, 34-50; Colman 1983, 42-48, 138-176, 186-192.

¹⁵See especially Wood's critique of the philosophical approach as involving an abstraction from politics (1983, 1-7; 1984, 1-13).

inquiry. His view of the nature of things thus dismissed, Locke could be relevant to us only insofar as we share his faith or his historical-political circumstances.¹⁶ Moreover, even those who appear to take more seriously Locke's claims to lay the foundation of his political thought in a more independently rationalist theology tend to ascribe to Locke's treatment of the concept of nature only secondary importance, and therefore commonly fail to elaborate that treatment in its full, potentially radical significance.¹⁷

¹⁶Some scholars indeed seem to see in a demonstration of Locke's irrelevance to us at least a partial justification of the very enterprise of writing about him. Most emphatic among these is Dunn, who insists on "the intimate dependence of an extremely high proportion of Locke's arguments for their very intelligibility, let alone plausibility, on a series of theological commitments" no longer shared by contemporary societies, with the consequence that Dunn "simply cannot conceive of constructing an analysis of any issue in contemporary political theory around the affirmation or negation of anything which Locke says about political matters" (1969, x-xi). Tully similarly seeks to show that Locke's political thought "is fashioned within a discourse constituted by many conventions and assumptions we no longer share" (1980, x). Even Rapaczynski, who by his own testimony "clearly believe[s] that Locke's ideas are not 'dead' and that Locke has something to 'say' to us," seems to make a decisive concession to the thesis of Locke's irrelevance in observing that Locke's "relevance for us has more to do with helping to explain how we got to where we are in our intellectual predicament than with providing us with definitive answers to the problems we face" (1987, 5).

¹⁷Though he devotes considerable attention to the questions of human nature and the natural human condition in Locke, Lamprecht seems content in the end to view Locke's hedonism as aberrational in the context of his ethical rationalism, or more fundamentally to observe that Locke presents a largely novel, modern epistemology alongside an essentially traditionalist ethical and political teaching (1918, 6, 75-121). His contentment with the thesis of Locke's inconsistency or confusion seems closely related

A third mode of interpretation places the question of nature at the center of Locke's concern. Exponents of this reading argue that personal and pedagogical considerations suggest to Locke the prudence of presenting his theory in a traditional, theological guise, thus partially concealing his deeper intention to present a somewhat modified, liberalized version of the hedonist natural rights theory of Hobbes.¹⁸ In this view, much of the interpretive difficulty of Locke's doctrine of natural law disappears once

to his distrust on principle of the notion of a natural law (75-87). Von Leyden displays a similar contentment, based on a similar mistrust (1954, 43-60, 71-82; 1956, 26-34). Seliger holds that Locke is simply uninterested in explaining the grounds of his claims concerning the law of nature (1963, 337-340). More recently, near the end of a lengthy and thoughtful study, Colman remarks that Locke's apparent rejection of the notion of teleology invites a more formidable objection than does his alleged utilitarianism taken in itself; yet Colman himself seems to treat that objection as an afterthought, sketching the basis of a response to it in scarcely three pages (1983, 240-242). In claiming that Locke's moral rationalism depends upon a "view of nature as rational and purposive" or of "the natural world as a world where everything has its function," Grant (1987, 38-39) is aware of the difficulties that Locke's epistemology and his account of the state of nature may pose for such a view, yet seems uninterested in confronting those difficulties exhaustively. Her intention not to subject Locke to the most radical challenges is perhaps indicated in the fact that she addresses her study to "anyone who does not wish to abandon the premise of liberal theory--human freedom..." (11).

¹⁸See above all Strauss 1953, 165-166, 202-251, and Strauss 1959, 197-220. See also Cox 1960; Goldwin 1972; Zuckert 1974, 1978, and 1979; Mansfield 1979 and 1989, 185-211; Wallin 1984; Pangle 1988. As Cox points out (1960, 21-28), the Straussian reading of Locke as an esoteric Hobbi-
 st represents to a considerable extent a recovery and elaboration of a view set forth by several of Locke's contemporaries, especially John Edwards, Richard West, and Edward Stillingfleet.

one understands that Locke's is most basically a theory of natural rights, and as such requires no superhuman legislator, nor any otherworldly sanction. It claims only hypothetical obligation and finds its basis in a fixed structure of natural human passions or motivations. By virtue of its seriousness about the concept of nature, therefore, Locke's political thought carries potentially great relevance to contemporary concerns. Yet there remains a difficulty in conceiving of it as a viable alternative, deriving not from its rootedness in the realm of history or of faith, but from the substance of Locke's account of politically relevant nature. In accepting the fundamentals of Hobbesian psychology and epistemology, according to this view, Locke renders his thought ultimately incapable of resisting the radical implications of Hobbes' principles, namely the reduction of nature to a realm of nonteleological necessity, leaving human beings to manifest their humanity not by rational conformity with the order of nature, but rather by rebellious, willful, ultimately nihilistic assertions of autonomy.¹⁹

Of these three general approaches to the study of Locke's political thought, the present study is most sympathetic and indebted to the third, in the most fundamental

¹⁹This implication of the "esoteric" Locke is stated in a particularly forceful manner in Wallin 1984, especially 148-158. Cf. Strauss 1953, 248-251; Strauss 1959, 170-173; Strauss 1983, 186-187; Caton 1983, 5-11; West 1988, 3, 21-29.

respect to the seriousness of its general approach to the concept of nature, and therefore to its treatment of Locke as a genuine philosopher, not as an ideologist or a political theologian. In taking seriously Locke's professions of philosophy or his conception of the aim of rational inquiry as knowledge of the nature of things, we implicitly reject the ideological conception of thought as essentially rooted in and bounded by its historical circumstances. In defense of that rejection, it suffices here for us to point out that that conception can and must be turned upon itself in a manner that renders absurd or arbitrary in principle any attempt at interpretation of a historical text, or for that matter of any kind of text or body of data. If we presume the ideological character of thought as such, then we must apply that presumption to our own thought as well, and acknowledge our own reading as no more than the projection of an ultimately inscrutable will, indefensible against any other.²⁰ In the present context, therefore, it seems safest to approach Locke with an attitude of openness to the possibility that Locke is in the end justified in his claims to insight into the nature or natural condition of humankind, and therefore to assess those claims on the basis of the evidence and argumentation that he supplies in their defense. We might well conclude, upon completing

²⁰See Strauss 1959, 26-27, 54-55; Strauss 1983, 177, 183.

such an assessment, that Locke's thought is shaped in important or even decisive respects by historical influences of which he was not fully conscious. The point is that we should assent to such claims as conclusions, or as the most plausible explanations of the otherwise unaccountable presence of errors, ambiguities or omissions on Locke's part, not as premises that serve to foreclose serious inquiry into Locke's intention and the adequacy of his arguments.²¹

The difficulty involved in the reading of Locke as at bottom a political theologian, on the other hand, appears upon consideration of the widely acknowledged inadequacy of the arguments that he presents in defense of his ostensible position.²² So glaring and even curiously emphatic are the incompleteness and inconsistency of these arguments that it

²¹In distinguishing my own from the ideological approach, in other words, I share the opinion of Ruth Grant: "...though it is necessary to know why an author wrote what he did and for what audience (in order to avoid ahistorical errors at the very least), it is also necessary to consider whether what the author says makes sense. Locke himself argues for the necessity of making political and moral arguments and for the possibility of reaching the truth about political principles on the basis of argument. When an author makes his case in the form of an argument, it deserves to be considered for its cogency as an argument, and particularly so in this case" (1987, 10). See also Tarcov: "If...we hope to learn something from Locke, then the verdict of confusion ought to be only our last resort and we had better explore other avenues of interpretation" (1981, 200).

²²For various perspectives on the difficulties in Locke's theological arguments, see Strauss 1953, 202-226; Strauss 1959; Cox 1960, 45-62; Laslett 1960, 92-96, 101, 106; Ashcraft 1969, 203-208, 214-223; Dunn 1969, 94-95, 187-194, and 1984, 65ff, 84ff; Helm 1973; Bluhm et al 1980; Yolton 1985, 76-91, 98.

seems most doubtful that they proceed from mere inadvertency. It seems most likely that the prominence of such arguments in the forms in which Locke presents them represents instead a rhetorical or pedagogical stratagem, that Locke intends them to point his more inquiring readers beyond at least the more dogmatic of his theological assertions. We might add, however, that despite this divergence in approach, the focus of the present study should retain some interest for at least some of those persuaded by the more traditional reading, insofar as Locke's appeals to natural theology, pursued to their logical conclusion, require supplementation by an account of the natural order accessible to the understanding.

Yet to say that we are most sympathetic and indebted to the reading of Locke as an esoteric Hobbesian is not necessarily to endorse that reading without qualification, but only to agree that it contains the deepest and most challenging critique of Locke's political thought. According to the seminal argument of Strauss in particular, the difficulties into which Locke's Hobbesian paternity leads him are both psychological and epistemological in character. Locke's assent to the basic principles of Hobbesian psychology commits him to a conception of human nature so egoistic as to imply a natural disinclination on the part of individuals to perform the acts of civic devotion or sacrifice necessary to sustain any political society. This

apparent disproportion between human nature and the demands of justice at least calls into question the naturalness of the latter.²³ Still more fundamental are the epistemological difficulties. On the basis of Locke's denial of the naturalness of ideas of species or kinds, Strauss reasons that what Locke denominates "the law of nature" or "natural rights" cannot be genuinely natural at all, instead representing nothing more than a mental construct, the mind's imposition of order upon an external world naturally or natively experienced as disorder. Insofar as Lockean epistemology is similar to that of Hobbes, Locke too must choose between reducing humanity and its works to "a mere phantasmagoria,"²⁴ or separating strictly his political theory from his epistemology and thus rendering its basis unclear. For these reasons, according to Strauss, Lockean natural right as a variant of modern natural right culminates in a "crisis."²⁵ Locke can hardly provide for us any

²³Strauss 1953, 237,239,248. Cf. Goldwin: "Can the principle of self-preservation provide the basis for the development of patriotism, public spirit, and especially the sense of the duty to give up wealth and even life in defense of one's country? Locke is profound and comprehensive on the reasons for founding political society, but those reasons turn out to be such that he is prevented by their very character from considering in what direction society should develop after the founding is secure" (1972, 483).

²⁴Strauss 1953, 230,249; Strauss 1959, 178. See also Cox 1982, xliii; Zuckert 1974, 562-563; Miller 1979, 173-181; Wallin 1984, 148-158.

²⁵Strauss 1953, 252.

positive assistance in resolving our contemporary confusions, in this view, because Locke himself is an important progenitor of those confusions.

On the basis of a thorough consideration of Locke's treatments of the problems raised by this formidable challenge, we attempt in the course of the following chapters to defend a partial but significant revision of its main conclusions. In this respect the present study can be characterized perhaps most simply as an application of Tarcov's suggestion of the existence of a "non-Lockean Locke"²⁶ to Locke's treatment of foundational issues. Our general contention is that Locke attempts to correct the tendency of premodern thought to contribute to political immoderation, while avoiding in the decisive respect a surrender to the principle of willfulness that he seems to recognize as the animating principle of pure modernity; his assent to the principles of philosophical modernity is in significant respects more qualified, more genuinely ambiguous, and more prudential than his most powerful critics

²⁶See Tarcov 1983 and also 1984, especially 209-211. Cf. Horwitz 1979, 153-156. The present work bears some similarity also to the work of Rapaczynski (1987, 113-217), whose reading of Locke as an essentially secular thinker whose conception of nature culminates in the principle of moral autonomy indicates his considerable agreement with the Straussian reading, though he rejects outright the imputation to Locke of a Hobbesian nihilism. I am sympathetic to Rapaczynski's attempt at uncovering a more genuinely moral foundation of Lockean politics, but skeptical of his opinion that the modern principle of moral autonomy or self-production can constitute such a foundation.

have maintained. Resisting the absorption of his thought into that of his more radically modern predecessors and successors, we find that while those critics rightly call attention to the difficulties involved in the arguments on which Locke tends to rely in establishing his principles, the presence of a nonexoteric, philosophically serious pre-modern or classical strain in Locke can nonetheless supply the basis for a nonideological, nonprudential, rationalist assent to the Lockean principles of natural rights.²⁷

The development of this argument proceeds within the following sequence of chapters. The second chapter represents an exercise in ground-clearing. Its purpose is to establish the meaning of Locke's doctrine of natural rights and the manner in which he holds certain rights to be unalienable, and then to establish preliminarily the primacy of the concept of nature in his political thought by identifying the difficulties inherent in the prominent alternative foundational arguments that he proposes or appears to propose in the Second Treatise of Government. The third and fourth chapters address the issues raised by Locke's account of natural science, as elaborated mainly in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding. The focus of the third is primarily epistemological, centering on the char-

²⁷For this thesis of the existence of a premodern, Socratic strain in Locke's thought I am indebted to the suggestive discussion in Pangle (1988, 265-275), although I will argue that this Socratic strain is more central to Locke's intention than Pangle seems to hold.

acter and implications of Locke's critique of doctrines of the existence of natural sorts or species and of formal and final causality generated by the premodern or Scholastic teleological science. The fourth addresses the extent to which Locke, in reaction against the latter view, assents to the more modern "corpuscularian," mechanistic or materialist view of nature as a realm of purely nonteleological necessity.

Having argued in the preceding two chapters that a rather flexibly empirical attention to the compilation of "natural history" constitutes the substance of Locke's main approach to natural science, we turn in chapters five and six to consider in its specifically moral and political relevance the account of the natural condition of humankind that Locke constructs by means of this approach. In chapter five we attempt to show how Locke's own somewhat attenuated, modernized teleology yields an account of the state of nature very similar to that of Hobbes. In chapter six we attempt to show, however, that Locke's Hobbesian account represents a self-consciously partial account of the natural condition, that it is best understood within the context of the larger human condition of "mediocrity" or in-betweenness, upon the recognition and respect for which the attainment and preservation of moderate, rational politics depends. We reconsider in conclusion the basis and extent of Locke's divergence from the premodern, especially Pla-

tonic tradition of natural right, explaining the peculiar mysteriousness of the foundations of Locke's political thought as his deliberate response to the rhetorical difficulties that he confronts in consequence of his overriding sensitivity to the fragility of human reason. In the end, the manner in which Locke diverges from the Platonic tradition may well represent a one-sided identification of and response to the enduring dangers to political rationality; yet by laying some emphasis here on the element of that tradition that is preserved in Locke's thought, and therewith on the breadth of the boundaries of that thought, we deny the theoretical, radical character of Locke's divergence, and thus avoid unnecessarily delegitimizing Locke's political thought as a context for attempts at addressing the theoretical problems of political liberalism.

CHAPTER II

LOCKE'S DOCTRINE OF NATURAL RIGHTS: SOME PRELIMINARY CLARIFICATIONS

In the "Preface" to the Two Treatises of Government, Locke describes somewhat ambiguously the general character and purpose of the work. He claims to write in order "to establish the Throne of our Great Restorer, Our Present King William; to make good his Title, in the Consent of the People," and "to justifie to the World, the People of England, whose love of their Just and Natural Rights, with their Resolution to preserve them, saved the Nation when it was on the very brink of Slavery and Ruine" (TT "Preface," 171).¹ The work is then, as many commentators have argued,

¹Throughout the text, we will cite Locke's works as follows. Of the Conduct of the Understanding will be cited as CU, followed by paragraph number. The Correspondence of John Locke (Clarendon, 1976) will be cited as CJL, followed by letter number. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding will be cited as ECHU, followed by book, chapter, and paragraph numbers. A Letter Concerning Toleration will be cited as LCT, followed by page number from the James Tully edition (Hackett, 1983). Questions Concerning the Law of Nature will be cited as LN, followed by question and page numbers from the edition of Robert Horwitz et al. (Cornell, 1990). On the Reasonableness of Christianity will be cited as RC, followed by paragraph number. Some Thoughts Concerning Education will be cited as STCE, followed by paragraph number. The Two Tracts on Government will be cited as either ETG (English tract) or LTG (Latin tract), followed by page number from the Philip Abrams edition (Cambridge, 1967). The Two Treatises of Government will be cited as TT, followed by treatise and paragraph numbers. The re-

an occasional work, written in order to explain and to defend, and probably in large part to encourage a particular political action.² But Locke's description implies that the Two Treatises is more than a merely occasional work. To put it more precisely, it implies that the Two Treatises could not adequately serve its occasional purpose without also transcending that purpose:³ William's accession is justified insofar as it rests upon popular consent, which in turn confers a title to govern only insofar as it represents the English people's entrustment to William of the care of their "Just and Natural Rights." The announced purpose of the Two Treatises is thus not to "rationalize" the events of 1688, but instead to reveal the rationality behind the events, or to justify the events by reference to their conformity with rational principles. Locke implies that the ultimate worth of his defense of a particular set of actions rests upon the soundness of his appeal to natur-

spective editions of The Works of John Locke will be cited as Works 1823, followed by volume and page numbers, or as Works 1877, followed by volume and page numbers. All underlining indicates Locke's original emphasis, unless otherwise noted.

²See, e.g., Lamprecht 1918, 141; Laski 1920, 29; Aaron 1955, 270ff; Cranston 1957, 208; Laslett 1960, 59ff; Gough 1973, 138-144; Ashcraft 1986, 530-591.

³Thus Aaron 1955, 270: Locke's immediate aim of justifying the Revolution "is achieved by securing in turn a great and fundamental political principle, true...in Locke's opinion, for all well regulated communities everywhere and at all times..." Also Seliger 1968, 32; Gough 1973, 138.

al, transhistorical principles of justice, or to political philosophy. He implies that he cannot finally or adequately establish William's legitimacy without also establishing the philosophic foundation of the theory of natural rights.

The general purpose of the present study is to take seriously Locke's literal claim, and therefore to proceed from his appeal to nature to investigate the extent to which he can establish a rational foundation for that appeal. But a clear exposition of the theory of natural rights must precede any assessment of its soundness. Let us then begin at the most general level, with the concept of rights. Despite its prominence in the arguments therein, Locke offers no explicit definition of the concept of rights in the Two Treatises. It is possible, however, to extract from his discussion a general definition of the concept, subsuming a number of more particular modifications. In the most general sense, Locke employs the term "right" to refer to a morally justifiable claim of free disposal over person or goods. Thus, for instance, the general right of liberty in the natural, nonpolitical condition refers to the liberty of "all Men...to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature, without asking leave, or depending on the Will of any other

Man" (II.4; also 8).⁴

Descending from this level of generality, Locke employs the concept of rights in various more particular senses. Thus rights may be wholly personal, subjective claims or properties, for instance, or they may impose relations of obligation between the bearers of rights and others. Understood in the former sense, a right implies no more than the moral permissibility of a given action; a person has a right to perform whatever action is not wrong to perform, though that right imposes no obligation on any other person. The clearest example of this form of right appears in Locke's "strange Doctrine" that individuals in a nonpolitical condition may rightfully punish those they judge to be in violation of the law of nature (II.9; also 7,8,13,16). In such cases, the rightful character of the act of punishment confers no obligation upon another to submit to that punishment. Given the equal rights of all, of accusers and accused alike to judge the law of nature in the state of nature, there could be no obligation to submit to a punishment that one believed to proceed from a faulty judgment.⁵ More characteristic of Locke's account of jus-

⁴See also LN I.101: "...right [jus] consists in the fact that we have a free use of something..." Cf. Hobbes, Leviathan XIV: "...RIGHT, consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear..." (ed. MacPherson 1968, 189).

⁵This is not to imply that according to Locke all judgments in the state of nature concerning the law of nature are equally valid. Such an implication would make nonsense of Locke's doctrine of resistance, and indeed on

tice is a more restrictive conception of rights as engendering interpersonal obligations, as containing notions of reciprocity and respect. In this sense he refers to rights "that all men may be restrained from invading" (II.7), that is, rights that it would be morally wrong or unjust to violate.

More significantly for present purposes, Locke also employs distinctions among kinds of rights according to their respective origins. In this regard, the crucial distinction is between positive or conventional rights and natural rights. A positive or conventional right derives from a declaration of the will of a human or divine authority. Thus political power proper consists, for Locke, in a "Right of making laws...for the Publick Good," conferred upon public officials by the express or tacit consent of the governed (II.3,119,127).

"Natural right" for Locke is a somewhat more ambiguous and difficult concept, subsuming two further modifica-

Locke's own principle would reveal the propagation of that doctrine to be an act of criminal irresponsibility, in that Locke holds the subversion of a legitimate government (i.e. by a false allegation of its violation of the natural law) to be "the greatest Crime...a Man is capable of" (II.230). The crucial point is this: Locke maintains that, though it is in principle possible to arrive at objective judgments concerning the application of the laws of nature, there is nonetheless an equal right among persons to render their own judgments. Though some may be better judges than others, it is nonetheless unwise, in Locke's view, to presume sufficient disinterest on the part of such persons to justify ascribing to them a natural right, exclusive of or superior to that of others, to judge the dictates of the natural laws. Contrast Coby 1987, 10-13.

tions of its own. In the most general sense, a right is natural in Locke's conception in that it is a property of persons in their natural, nonpolitical condition. Among natural rights thus understood, some are alienable, their retention being incompatible with the existence of political society; the individual right to execute the law of nature in the state of nature once again provides an example (II.128,130). Others appear to be unalienable, their retention being not only compatible with, but even necessary to the existence of political society proper. An unalienable right by definition could not be rationally surrendered; no act of rational consent could oblige a human being to accept a condition in which he or she were denied the exercise of the right in question. To make such a surrender would mean to lower oneself beneath the jural level of humanity. An unalienable right would be natural, therefore, also in the more restrictive sense that its possession would be of the nature or essence of a human being.

This sort of right, the natural and unalienable right, constitutes the object of the present investigation. Locke seems throughout the Second Treatise to imply a conception of unalienable rights, and some such conception would seem ultimately indispensable for his stated design

of promoting limited, fiduciary government (II.149).⁶ If governmental authority derives solely from the rational consent of the governed, and if that authority is in its nature limited, it would seem to follow that there must be some limit to the surrender or transferral of rights to which a rational person could agree, in the act of constituting political society. We must hasten to concede, however, that Locke never quite speaks explicitly and unambiguously of unalienable rights, and that this fact, to say nothing of others, may cause thoughtful readers to doubt that he ultimately holds any rights to be truly unalienable.⁷ It is necessary then immediately to identify and to define the rights that constitute the core of Lockean justice, and in the process to ascertain in what sense, if at all, Locke conceives of those rights as unalienable.

⁶Locke seems to imply a theory of unalienable rights at II.23,129,131,135,137,149,164,168,172.

⁷In addressing the question of unalienable rights, I will concentrate on the specific difficulties that arise in connection with each of the rights in the Lockean triad. It is possible also to raise the question in more general terms, however, by calling attention to Locke's occasional usage of the term "property" to comprehend the rights of life, liberty, and estate, or property narrowly conceived. Elsewhere in the Second Treatise, he defines property in a somewhat elusive manner as that which "without a Man's own consent...cannot be taken from him" (193), causing the reader to wonder whether property as such, material possessions as well as personal rights, can be surrendered by an act of consent. What then becomes of these rights, according to Locke, upon the formation of political society? In what respects can or must political society accommodate, as it were in its midst, a continuation of the natural condition? For various perspectives, see Kendall 1941, 65-79, and Kendall 1966; Cox 1960, 106-123; Glenn 1984; Coby 1987.

THE LOCKEAN TRIAD

In his most famous and influential formulations, Locke typically refers to a triad of rights, to the rights of life, liberty, and estate or possessions, "which I call by the general Name, Property" (II.123; also 135,137), as constituting the core of his theory of justice.⁸ Let us examine these rights in the order in which he typically presents them. In the purely natural condition, the right

⁸This triad may not constitute a complete enumeration of the natural rights that Lockean governments are obliged to preserve. At II.209, for instance, Locke mentions "perhaps" the endangerment of "Religion" along with that of "Estates, Liberties, and Lives" as a legitimate cause for resistance. He suggests more definitely in A Letter Concerning Toleration that accusations against the churches as nurseries of faction "would soon cease, if the Law of Toleration were once so settled, that all Churches were obliged to lay down Toleration as the Foundation of their own Liberty; and teach that Liberty of Conscience is every mans natural Right..." (LCT 51; also 55, and Works 1823, 127). Given the extreme difficulty of identifying what remains of liberty in a society whose government has the authority to compel belief concerning salvation, this statement in the Letter must reflect Locke's genuine opinion of the existence of a natural right of conscience, alienable only to the extent required by society's legitimate civil concerns. His reluctance consistently to include this right among the more prominent natural rights presented in the Second Treatise seems then to reflect an intention on his part to de-emphasize religion or conscience as a primary motive or reason for the formation of political society. He seems to see in the assertion of an absolute right of conscience a threat to the preservation of civil society greater even than that of an absolute right of self-preservation, and therefore treats that right as merely one among the numerous possible expressions of human agency, protected insofar as its exercise bears an essential relation to agency in general, but not necessarily fundamental in itself to the human pursuit of happiness.

of life signifies the right of self-preservation, or, somewhat more broadly expressed, the right of an individual "to do whatsoever he thinks fit for the preservation of himself and others within the permission of the Law of Nature" (II.128).⁹ Moreover, Locke proclaims in conjunction with this right a correlative obligation not to take the life of an innocent person (II.16). Upon joining political society, one surrenders only partially the purely natural right or "power" of self-preservation, only "so far forth as the preservation of himself, and the rest of society shall require" (II.128,129; also 87). This ambiguous qualification may appear to preserve the status of the right of life as unalienable, at least insofar as it implies that even within the bounds of political society, where the governmental executive power is not immediately present to defend members against acts of aggression, individual members retain the right to judge and to defend themselves against such acts:

...the Law, which was made for my Preservation, where it cannot interpose to secure my Life from present

⁹It is noteworthy that throughout the Second Treatise Locke employs both "rights" and "powers" in reference to self-preservation and to the punishment of criminals in the state of nature. (Cf. paragraphs 7,8,11 with 87-88,127-130,171.) This terminological ambiguity need signify no more, however, than that the efficacy of rights in the natural condition depends decisively upon the claimant's power, thus underlining the need for conventional means to provide more general security. In particular, it need not imply that the distinction between assertions of right and assertions of power in the state of nature is in principle meaningless. Cf. Coby 1987, 9 n.15, and passim.

force...permits me my own Defence, and the Right of War, a liberty to kill the aggressor, because the aggressor allows not time to appeal to our common Judge, nor the decision of the Law, for remedy in a Case, where the mischief may be irreparable (II.19; also 176,207).¹⁰

Locke's apparent conception of the right of self-preservation as unalienable raises, however, a potentially serious difficulty. One is forced to question whether Locke can consistently maintain that this or any other right is unalienable, in view of his apparent insistence that the advent of political society effects a fundamental alteration of the obligations of the consenting individuals.

The great end of Mens entering into Society, being the enjoyment of their Properties in Peace and Safety, and the great instrument and means of that being the Laws establish'd in that Society...the first and fundamental natural Law, which is to govern even the Legislative it self, is the Preservation of the Society, and (as far as will consist with the publick good) of every person in it. (II.34)

In constituting political society, individuals create a powerful means for their preservation; in a single act they exercise and fortify their right of self-preservation. As a necessary condition of that fortification, they oblige themselves to preserve the society that will preserve them. But the logic apparent in Locke's account of this process should not obscure the fact that the individual agents are

¹⁰As Goldwin points out, this means in effect that states of nature and of war may commonly occur even within the bounds of a functioning political society (1976, 126-128).

thus effecting a radical change in their juridical condition. In the state of nature, according to Locke's most extreme formulation, everyone "is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his Station wilfully; 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" (II.6). In this formulation, what Locke commonly presents as a right appears as an obligation to preserve oneself;¹¹ the natural "Law of Self-Preservation" is "Fundamental, Sacred, and unalterable" (II.149). The law of nature or reason thus appears to embody commands or precepts radically divergent in their substantive practical implications, according to whether it applies to the state of nature or to the political condition, the condition "of all Commonwealths" (II.134).

In considering these apparently divergent implications, one cannot avoid wondering how Locke's assertion of a social obligation, an obligation to preserve society even if it costs one's own life, can be compatible with a con-

¹¹According to Pangle's reading, Locke implies in this passage an individual obligation not to risk one's life for the preservation of others (1988, 160). This is a possible reading, but not the only possible reading of the text in question. Locke maintains that individuals have an obligation not to quit their stations willfully, or arbitrarily, but he leaves unclear precisely what it would mean to sacrifice one's life willfully or arbitrarily. He does not necessarily deny that in some circumstances, the sacrifice of one's own life could be rational as opposed to willful, and therefore does not necessarily claim that to sacrifice one's life for the preservation of another is to violate the law of nature.

ception of the fundamental natural rights as unalienable. The basic objection can be stated briefly as follows. Locke holds that the natural law obligation to preserve society encompasses a non-absolute obligation to preserve "every person" in society, only "as far as will consist with the publick good" (II.134; also 159). According to this qualification, those whose preservation is not consistent with the public good have, at best, no absolute right to preservation. Now, it is evident that Locke does not refer here to criminals as the "persons" whose preservation is inconsistent with the public good; criminals, according to Locke, by aggressing against others' property or preservation, forfeit their unalienable rights and thus in effect their jural status as persons.¹² He seems rather to refer to those innocent persons who may be called upon to sacrifice their lives for the preservation of the society as a whole. Elsewhere in the same chapter, he insists emphatically upon the rightfully absolute power of military commanders over soldiers: "the Preservation of the Army, and in it of the whole Common-wealth, requires an absolute

¹²The effect of a criminal action, according to Locke, is to declare oneself "to quit the principles of Human Nature," and therefore to justify one's treatment by others as a beast. The "Criminal...may be destroyed as a Lyon or a Tyger, one of those wild Savage Beasts, with whom Men can have no Society nor Security" (II.10,11; also 16,172,181, 182,228). The fact that such forfeiture may in some cases be partial or temporary (II.24,159,178) does not alter Locke's conclusion that cases of extreme, incorrigible criminality entail an effectively total forfeiture of jural personhood.

Obedience to the command of every Superiour Officer, and it is justly Death to disobey or dispute the most dangerous or unreasonable of them" (II.139). But would not submission to such a power constitute a surrender of one's right to judge the conditions of one's own preservation and to act in such manner as to secure those conditions? Does not Locke's insistence on the legitimacy of such absolute power directly contradict his assertion that the right of life is an unalienable right?

One cannot reasonably deny that membership in political society, according to Locke, confers upon individuals obligations that may transcend and even conflict directly with the principle of self-preservation narrowly understood. Upon assuming full membership¹³ in a Lockean political society, individuals cannot retain an absolute right in all cases to do whatever may be necessary for their own preservation. Understood in such terms, an unalienable right of life would indeed destroy the moral basis of

¹³It appears that individuals must become full or "perfect" members, i.e. through rendering their express consent to the societal or governmental authority, in order to acquire the strict obligation to preserve the society. For according to Locke only the member in the strict sense "is indispensably obliged to be and remain unalterably a Subject" of the commonwealth. Those who render only their tacit consent are subjects only insofar as they find it "convenient to abide for some time," and would therefore have the option of emigrating in the event of a war (II.119-122). See also Grant 1987, 128-136.

national defense.¹⁴ From this it need not follow, however, that such membership strictly requires an act of total alienation, or that Locke cannot consistently speak of unalienable rights. The following considerations can serve to indicate both the complexity of the issue and the extent to which it is capable of resolution.

In first addressing this question, we must bear in mind above all Locke's constant insistence on the fiduciary character of political power, or on the fact that, as a condition of governmental legitimacy, the natural law obligation to preserve society and its members "is to govern even the Legislative it self" (II.134; also 139,142,149, 195,221,222). Government derives its proper authority from the act of alienation or transferral inherent in the consent of its subjects, and therefore possesses no power that individuals may not rightfully exercise in the state of nature (II.135). One significant implication of this principle is that government, itself in a state of nature in relation to other governments, has no right to wage an aggressive war. An act of aggression against another government and community would clearly constitute an assertion of "Power beyond Right, which no Body can have a Right to" (II.199). The event of an unjust war would then raise an

¹⁴The charge that Locke effects precisely such a destruction is stated or implied by Vaughan 1925, 196ff.; Goldwin 1972, 483-484; Pangle 1988, 211-212. See the discussion in Chapter VI below, pp. 338-343.

interesting question concerning both Locke's doctrine of resistance and by implication also his conception of the right of self-preservation. Notwithstanding the fact that the aggressor government does not directly or designedly offend its own subjects or citizens, according to Locke's explanation of tyranny the act would appear at least in the strict sense sufficient to dissolve the legitimacy of the government and the obligations of the subjects.¹⁵

Locke does not explicitly draw this conclusion. He does maintain, of course, that should a government wage such a war unsuccessfully, it would be subject to rightful conquest by the offended power. But he is quick to add that even the authority of just conquerors is limited, if only in the respect that it can cover only "those, who have

¹⁵Bearing in mind, of course, that acts of resistance or revolution require for Locke judgments of prudence as well as of abstract right, one may well doubt that Lockean subjects would be in many cases inclined to judge their governments illegitimate on the sole basis of actions taken against other communities. Judgments of how to respond to injustices perpetrated by one's own government must in any event be tempered by an assessment of the likelihood of replacing that government with another less unjust, and especially so in the extreme case in which actions taken to unsettle one's own government might serve only to facilitate subjection to a vengeful foreign conqueror. Thus the Lockean subject might commonly see the advantages of muting his protests, of observing his obligations to the rest of humankind, in other words, "only when his own Preservation comes not in competition" (II.6). Perhaps implicit in Locke's insistence that "a long train of Abuses" is required for the dissolution of a government, or that the people should often bear even "Great mistakes in the ruling part," is a recognition that the natural executive power of the people includes a power to pardon certain criminal actions taken by their government (225; also 210).

actually assisted, concurr'd, or consented to that unjust force...Over the rest of the People, if there were any that consented not to the war...he has no Power" (II.179,196). Once again, Locke fails or declines to elaborate what it might mean for subjects or citizens to withhold consent from an unjust war, but it is nonetheless significant that he even mentions explicitly the possibility. However forceful his insistence on the rightfully absolute power of military commanders, Locke quietly calls attention to a significant qualification of that power, implicit in the unalienable right of the members of political society to judge the justice or injustice of a governmental act of war.

Moreover, even in the case of a just or defensive war, where the obligation of individuals to risk and even to sacrifice their lives in defense of the community is not in itself in question, Locke's assertion of the virtually unbounded authority of military commanders seems implicitly to admit of a similar qualification. According to its own natural law obligation, the legislative power--and therefore its agent the military power--must preserve every individual member of the society "as far as will consist with the publick good," or "as much as possible" (II.134, 16; also 159). Without imposing upon Locke an excessively literal reading, it is possible to infer from this that there are limits to the proper authority of military com-

manders even in the context of a just war, and that such authority would not comprehend the gratuitous sacrifice or squandering of soldiers' lives. Nor, it would seem, could it justify a grossly partial or unequal distribution of those sacrifices that are truly obligatory; the justness of the surrender that individuals make upon entering political society consists in part in the fact that "the other Members of the Society do the like" (II.130). On the basis of these inferences, we can conclude that although members clearly have no categorical or absolute right, according to Locke, to avoid sacrificing their lives in defense of the commonwealth, they do retain the right to judge whether life-threatening commands are issued nonarbitrarily--that is, impartially and according to reasonable military necessity. We can conclude more generally, therefore, that the unalienable right of life must signify not an absolute right to preserve one's life, but rather an absolute right to judge whether the power that may claim disposal over one's life is an arbitrary or a legitimate power.¹⁶ By "a Law antecedent and paramount to all positive Laws of men," the members of political society have "reserv'd that ultimate Determination to themselves...to judge whether they have just Cause to make their Appeal to Heaven. And this

¹⁶Grant, 1987, 131-132.

Judgment they cannot part with..." (II.168).¹⁷ Locke's insistence upon the rightfully absolute power of civil government represents not an affirmation, but to the contrary a denial that governmental power is inherently arbitrary or without moral limit. The foundation of Locke's doctrine of justice is the principle that individuals possess by nature certain unalienable rights: "A Man...cannot subject himself to the Arbitrary Power of another" (II.135).¹⁸

¹⁷Similarly, the fact that the right to judge the legitimacy of governmental power rests immediately with "the People," and therefore with "the Majority" (168; also 95-99), does not imply that the individual's alienation of rights to society or to the majority is absolute. Locke clearly holds that the oppression of individuals or minorities activates a right of resisting, and therefore that majorities as well as governments are in principle capable of injustice. He simply doubts as a practical matter that such resistance could be effective, if a majority (or at least a substantial minority) fails to support it (168, 208).

¹⁸One might object that this conclusion depends upon an abstraction from Locke's very emphatic demand for soldiers' "absolute" or "blind Obedience" to even or especially "the most dangerous or unreasonable" command, on penalty of hanging "for the least Disobedience" (II.139). In view of the fact that such blind obedience would be simply irreconcilable with an unalienable right of judging questions of legitimacy--upon which Locke insists with equal emphasis--I am inclined to view the demand for unconditional military obedience as an instance of deliberate rhetorical extremism on Locke's part, intended to underline the absolute seriousness with which the members should regard their obligation to defend the community. There can be no questioning, of course, that in his acute sensitivity both to the strength of the desire for self-preservation (I.86,88) and to the dangerous propensity for partiality that distorts individuals' judgments of their own cases (II.13), Locke seeks to avoid creating the impression that individuals are free to make minute particular calculations as to whether their personal sacrifices would decide the outcome of a given military engagement, or whether governmental demands for personal sacrifice fall in an absolutely

The status of the right of life as unalienable may yet appear questionable, however, in the light of its relation to the natural right of liberty, which Locke also presents as unalienable. "The Natural Liberty of Man," as Locke explains it, "is to be free from any Superior Power on Earth, and not to be under the Will or Legislative Authority of Man, but to have only the Law of Nature for his Rule" (II.22; also 4,123). The "Liberty of Man, in Society," on the other hand, "is to be under no other Legislative Power, but that established, by consent, in the Commonwealth..." Such liberty consists then in the liberty "to follow my own Will in all things, where the Rule [of a legitimately established legislative power] prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will of another Man" (II.22).

The practical or constitutional corollary of this principle of liberty is Locke's constant insistence upon the consent of the governed as a necessary condition of governmental legitimacy: "And this is that, and that only, which did, or could give beginning to any lawful Government

equal or random manner on all fit members of society. I believe that in this uncompromising assertion of military obligation, Locke intends not to deny the unalienable right to judge questions of legitimacy, but rather to guide the manner in which that judgment is exercised. He asserts quite forcefully that members must accept their obligation in circumstances of military necessity to risk or even sacrifice their lives in defense of the community, while he indicates more quietly (in regard to this specific issue) that no one need feel obliged to submit to the truly arbitrary, wanton, gratuitous squandering of human life.

in the World" (II.99).¹⁹ Locke may seem, however, to hold only an extremely loose conception of consent, apparently implying that at least where the freedom to emigrate is guaranteed, the mere fact of one's presence, let alone residence in a given territory is sufficient to constitute a declaration of presumptive or tacit consent to the authority governing that territory.

And to this I say, that every Man, that hath any Possession, or Enjoyment, of any part of the Dominions of any Government, doth thereby give his tacit Consent, and is as far forth obliged to the Obedience to the Laws of that Government, during such Enjoyment, as any one under it; whether this his Possession be of Land, to him and his heirs for ever, or a Lodging only for a Week; or whether it be barely travelling freely on the Highway; and in Effect, it reaches as far as the very being of any one within the Territories of that Government. (II.119)

Whatever may be the difficulties inherent in this doctrine of consent,²⁰ they do not justify the conclusion that, natural rights rhetoric notwithstanding, Locke sets forth an ultimately conventionalist, perhaps Hobbesian account of the right of liberty. The crucial test of the unalienable character of this natural right consists in a consideration of whether, as a practical matter, it can be violated by government so as to activate a right of resistance on the part of subjects; it would be superfluous or

¹⁹Also II.15,87,95,104,106,112,117,119-122,134,171,175,192,198,227.

²⁰See especially Hume, "Of the Original Contract" (ed. Aiken 1948, 356-372); also Dunn 1969, 126-147; Gough 1973, 52-79; Zvesper 1984; Grant 1987, 122-128.

practically meaningless to speak of a natural, unalienable right that can never be violated and therefore need never be defended. Hobbes, of course, holds that there is no unalienable right of liberty, and therefore that no claim to liberty could ever serve as a sufficient justification for an act of resistance. The basis of this doctrine is his denial that the distinction between commonwealth by institution and commonwealth by acquisition carries any practical significance; since coercion is consistent with consent, all governments in the world, one way or another, govern with the consent of their subjects.²¹ But unlike Hobbes, Locke strongly denies the compatibility of coercion with consent (especially II.176,186), and is therefore able to hold that there is indeed a distinct right of liberty whose violation can serve as a sufficient justification for resistance.

One could perhaps infer this even from his account of tacit consent, insofar as the mere presence of an individual in a given territory could conceivably constitute a tacit declaration of consent only if it resulted from a meaningful choice. A government that denied the freedom of emigration could not be presumed to bear the consent of its subjects. Would it therefore rule arbitrarily and illegitimately? However that might be, the practical significance

²¹Leviathan, chs. 14,19,20,21,29, "A Review, and Conclusion" (ed. MacPherson 1968, 198, 239-240, 251-257, 261-270, 369-370, 718-722).

of the right of liberty need not rest on mere inference. In his discussion of the nature and consequences of governmental usurpation, Locke describes a pure usurpation as "a kind of Domestick Conquest," which effects "a change only of Persons, but not of the Forms and Rules of the Government" (II.197). He maintains further that such an act is sufficient in itself to dissolve governmental legitimacy, irrespective of whether the government is guilty of any actual violence against its subjects' persons or property:

Whoever gets into the exercise of any part of the Power, by other ways, than what the Laws of the Community have prescribed, hath no right to be obeyed, though the Form of the Commonwealth be still preserved; since he is not the Person the Laws have appointed, and consequently not the Person the People have consented to. (II.198; also 134,141,192,196,212,214-218).

This is not to deny that subjects may elect in some cases not to exercise their right of resistance against a usurper. Rational Lockean action is seldom a matter of strict adherence to the theoretical doctrine of legitimacy, but often depends in addition on prudential judgment. Subjects may very well, and usually do, choose to legitimate the power of a usurper, even of a conqueror, by a declaration of consent (II.20,178,192,198). But what is primarily significant for the present discussion is that governmental legitimacy requires meaningful consent; that Locke provides at least one class of examples illustrating the failure to meet that requirement; and that in the event of such failure subjects are clearly within their rights to resist the

power of government on the ground of liberty alone.

The implication that Locke's affirmations of an unalienable right of liberty are not merely rhetorical leads us in turn, however, to consider the relation between the right of liberty and the right of life, and therewith to confront in another form the question of the status of these rights as unalienable. Understood in the sense indicated, the right of liberty as unalienable would seem to be capable, at best, of an uneasy coexistence with that of life. To assert a right of liberty distinct from that of self-preservation would mean, as illustrated above, to assert a right to resist the power of a government held to be illegitimate on grounds of pure (nontyrannical) usurpation. It would thus mean to assert the right to risk one's life in defense of one's liberty, even in the absence of any clear or immediate danger to one's own preservation. The case of a pure usurpation would thus appear to render questionable the proposition that both self-preservation and liberty are natural and unalienable rights. Let us assume a case in which a usurper steadfastly refused to provide an opportunity for popular consent. It would seem that in response to such a usurpation, subjects could choose to defend liberty for its own sake, thereby risking their lives, or they could choose self-preservation, thereby failing to assert their right to free government, to government by the consent of the governed. But how, in

such a case, could they exercise both rights simultaneously? And if they could not, could Locke maintain that both rights are unalienable? Do the rights of life and liberty constitute the bases of alternative doctrines of natural rights in Locke's thought, rather than elements of a single doctrine?²²

It seems clear that Locke refuses to subordinate the right of liberty to that of self-preservation. At the same time, he denies that the right of liberty can be understood to be simply independent of the right of self-preservation.

For I have reason to conclude, that he who would get me into his Power without my consent, would use me as he pleased, when he had got me there, and destroy me too, when he had a fancy to it: for no body can desire to have me in his Absolute Power, unless it be to compel me by force to that, which is against the Right of my Freedom, i.e. make me a Slave. To be free from such force is the only security of my Preservation: and reason bids me look on him, as an Enemy to my Preservation, who would take away that Freedom, which is the Fence to it... (II.17; also 18,23).

Locke seems thus to deny that there is an authentic tension between the rights of self-preservation and liberty. The right of liberty, according to this statement, is a corollary of the right of self-preservation. In the absence of liberty, preservation cannot be secure. Locke insists, in effect, that the members of political society act according to the suspicious, defensive presumption that, with respect to their own well-being, the will of a nonconsensual ruler is "inconstant, uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary" (II.22), and

²²Cf. Grant 1987, 88-98; Pangle 1988, 262-265.

therefore that they regard any threat to their liberty as containing in itself a direct threat to their preservation. He thus resolves or avoids a tension between the two rights not by reducing the right of liberty to the status of a means to self-preservation, but rather by enlarging his conception of the latter so that it comprehends the defense of liberty as well as that of mere life. Self-preservation, according to Locke, evidently means preservation of oneself in freedom; if it referred to the preservation of mere, biological life, then it would be absurd to demand, in circumstances presenting no immediate threat to their biological survival, that individuals risk their lives in order to preserve them. Such a demand appears to Locke not as paradoxical or absurd, but to the contrary as a dictate of rationality, only in the light of his enlarged conception of self-preservation.²³

The natural right of property requires a bit more elaboration, inasmuch as Locke employs the term "property"

²³Indeed Locke at one point goes so far as to suggest somewhat ambiguously that in extreme, desperate circumstances, it may be rational not only to risk, but actually to sacrifice one's life in the name of liberty. Should a slave find that "the hardship of his Slavery [note that Locke refers specifically to the hardship of slavery, of unfreedom, not to the merely physical hardship of labor] out-weigh the value of his Life, 'tis in his Power, by resisting the Will of his Master, to draw on himself the Death he desires" (II.23). Cf. Windstrup 1981, 171-174; Glenn 1984; Coby 1987, 8-9. For further discussion of the rationality, in Lockean terms, of both the acts of alienation and the assertions of unalienable rights that Locke appears to insist upon, see chapter VI below, pp. 338-385.

to refer, even in its more narrow signification, to both the object and the act of appropriation. Locke speaks of a natural right of property as consisting in "a private Dominion, exclusive of the rest of Mankind" (II.26), over a particular resource in the natural, prepolitical condition. This particularized property right derives from the act of mixing one's labor with any portion of nature's common, unappropriated resources, subject to the limitations imposed by the law of nature. Everyone has by nature "Property in his own Person," in the "Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands" (II.27). The act of mixing that labor with any portion of nature's commons effects an extension of the sphere of one's personal property or dominion.

In this way, the right of property as applied to a particular object derives from and depends upon a more basic right of property as appropriation, upon a prior right of mixing one's labor with a portion of nature.²⁴ One has a natural right thus to mix one's labor and appropriate, according to Locke, in that such a right is necessary to one's preservation. But Locke insists that this appeal to self-preservation, which justifies and therefore circumscribes the right of appropriation, must not be understood restrictively. The law of nature does not imply

²⁴Cf. Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins and Foundation of Inequality, Part Two (ed. Masters 1964, 158).

that appropriation is permissible only to the extent necessary to preserve mere life. Rather, inasmuch as "preservation" in this context comprehends more broadly the "Support and Comfort" as well as the maintenance of biological life, the law of nature according to Locke permits and indeed even requires appropriation of as "much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils" (II.25, 26,31). The natural right of property "in the Beginning" signifies most fundamentally the right to appropriate from the natural commons whatever one can use without endangering the preservation of others (II.27,31,33,36,46).

In considering the fate of the property right in the wake of the advent of political society, let us conceive of property first as ownership of a particular object. Locke holds that the earliest, most basic function of government with respect to this right is to settle claims "which Labour and Industry began" (II.45; 38,50), claims that pre-date government. But it is clear that such claims of property in particular goods cannot exemplify an unalienable right of property; it is clearly within the proprietors' rights to alienate such claims by consent, whether partially to government in the payment of taxes, or wholly to others in private contractual exchanges (II.138,140).²⁵

²⁵Moreover, to read Locke's claim of an unalienable right of property as referring only to particular properties acquired in the state of nature and carried over into civil society would be to make nonsense of its allegedly universal character. For if Locke does not assume that

What is unalienable in the natural right of property must therefore inhere in its more basic form as a right of appropriation. Yet this right too seems to undergo serious modification in the transition to civil society. After the advent of civil society, the right of property or estate can no longer derive directly from the act of laboring in the natural commons;²⁶ within the bounds of an established community, all land is either the private property of individuals or is "the joint property of this Countrey, or this Parish" (II.35), and therefore can be appropriated only by consent, or in conformity with the positive law. This modification of the original right of appropriation applies particularly to "some parts of the World, (where the Increase of People and Stock, with the Use of Money) had made Land scarce" (II.45), or where "the Invention of Money... introduced (by Consent) larger Possessions, and a Right to them" (II.36). For this reason Locke emphasizes that only in the past, "in the first Ages of the World," the "Law Man

everyone in the state of nature succeeds in acquiring a significant portion of property, then such a narrow reading of the content of this right would serve to validate C.B. MacPherson's well-known objection that at least the Lockean property right applies not universally but instead only to a particular class, to the relatively few "Industrious and Rational" acquirers (II.34). See MacPherson 1962, 236-251.

²⁶Locke does refer to "the Ocean" as "that great and still remaining Common of Mankind" (II.30), implying that the original mode of appropriation is not entirely a thing of the past.

was under, was rather for appropriating" (II.35,36).²⁷ The members of civil society, especially those of an advanced or fully civilized society, can in most cases appropriate no longer directly from nature, but instead only by means of contractual exchanges. The original law of appropriation "would still hold" if the invention of money had not "introduced (by Consent) larger Possessions, and a Right to them" (II.36, emphasis supplied; also 45,50,85).

This mediation of the right of appropriation by mutual consent or contract, by agreements whose validity, interpretation, and enforcement depend upon positive law, clearly indicates the conventional aspect of that right in the context of civil society. Locke appears even to stress this conventionalism, in declaring that "in Governments the Laws regulate the right of property, and the possession of land is determined by positive constitutions" (II.50; also 42,45,138). It would be incorrect to infer, however, that the right of appropriation in civil society is wholly or even decisively conventional. In the original condition of common ownership, "Man (by being Master of himself, and Proprietor of his own Person, and the actions or Labour of it) had still in himself the great Foundation of Property" (II.44); and notwithstanding his usage of the past tense,

²⁷Also II.32,37,38,44,45,46,51. On this point, as well as in the following general discussion of the Lockean property right, I am indebted most heavily to the works of Strauss and Pangle. On the particular point, see Strauss 1953, 237-238; Pangle 1988, 161-164.

it is evident that in Locke's view, individuals in contemporary civilized society still do have in themselves the foundation of property, indeed to a much greater extent than they did in the beginning. Human labor constitutes the great foundation of property, for Locke, not in its primitive expression as a gathering faculty, but rather in its more mature, revealing expression as the faculty that produces or creates material wealth. Labor "makes the far greatest part of the value of things, we enjoy in this World" (II.42), according to Locke, above all by virtue of its capacity, through the application of "Invention and Arts" (II.44), to multiply its own productive powers. Thus conceived as the power to produce value, human labor is the fundamental property that creates all more particular forms of property. Irrespective, therefore, of the availability of any natural commons--irrespective of the ultimate consequence of the liberation of individuals' acquisitive faculties, introducing "larger Possessions, and a Right to them"--everyone upon entering political society possesses at least this property, and at least this much is government charged with the task of preserving.

For the preservation of Property being the end of Government, and that for which Men enter into Society, it necessarily supposes and requires, that the People should have Property, without which they must be suppos'd to lose that by entering into Society, which was the end for which they entered into it, too gross an absurdity for any Man to own (II.138; also 40).

Possessing this natural property in their own labor

power, individuals become members of political society in order to secure governmental protection for the development and the rational disposal of that labor power. Still, it is necessary to consider how in this context individuals can convert their personal property in their labor power into forms of property more directly useful for their preservation and comfort, and to consider the nature of government's obligation to promote or assist this process of conversion. There can be no doubt that Locke views the contractual exchange of one's labor power for a wage as compatible, at least in ordinary cases, with the right of disposal over one's own person and labor.²⁸ "Their Persons are free by a Native Right, and their Properties, be they more or less, are their own, and at their own dispose..." (II.194; also 2,28,29,77,85). But the question arises whether or to what extent this right of self-disposal is subject to rational limitation. In his account of human-kind's original alteration of the natural condition of common (purely potential) ownership, Locke appears to imply an ordinary conjunction of the productive powers of labor, such as they were, and its acquisitive powers. In the "first Ages," in other words, when laboring consisted predominantly or exclusively in gathering, one ordinarily produced and acquired in a single act. But in the context

²⁸See the effective refutation of Tully's argument to the contrary (1980, 135-154) by Neal Wood (1984, 73-92).

of civil society, this appears at least in many cases no longer to hold true. The "Servant" or wage-laborer, or indeed anyone who is not self-employed, who is able to apply labor power only to materials owned by another, acquires not immediately in the act of producing, but instead only mediately, with the level of acquisition in such cases determined by the contractually established level of rent or wages (II.194).

The question then arises concerning the degree to which Lockean justice permits persons with property only in their own labor power to alienate their native "Title to the product of [their] honest Industry." In his brief discussion in the First Treatise of the right and duty of charity, Locke recognizes that economic inequalities may give rise to relationships no less coercive in their effect than those based on inequalities in more direct forms of power.

As Justice gives every Man a Title to the product of his honest Industry, and the fair Acquisitions of his Ancestors descended to him; so Charity gives every Man a Title to so much out of another's Plenty, as will keep him from extream want, where he has no means to subsist otherwise; and a Man can no more justly make use of another's necessity, to force him to become his Vassal, by with-holding that Relief, God requires him to afford to the wants of his brother, than he that has more strength can seize upon a weaker, master him to his Obedience, and with a Dagger at his Throat offer him Death or Slavery. (II I.42)

Locke's condemnation of the practice of thus taking advantage of the necessitous seems unmistakable, as does by implication also his denial that such manipulation could

create any obligation on the part of its object. All the more mysterious, then, is the immediate sequel, wherein he appears to minimize considerably the implication of the preceding paragraph. He intended in the latter, he seems to declare now, only to argue that the practice of such manipulation by the wealthy

would not prove that Propriety in Land...gave any Authority over the Persons of Men, but only that Compact might; since the Authority of the Rich Proprietor, and the Subjection of the Needy Beggar began not from the Possession of the Lord, but the Consent of the poor Man, who preferr'd being his Subject to starving. (I.43; emphasis added.)

It is necessary to observe that Locke does not thus imply a judgment of the legitimacy of such subjection, but only that, if it were legitimate, that legitimacy would derive from compact or consent, not from the prior inequality of ownership. Nonetheless, this equivocation concerning what is, in any event, a severely limited duty of charity²⁹ compels us to question whether Locke holds all such contracts valid and thus mutually obligatory, regardless of the real inequalities that may underlie them. It compels us to question, therefore, whether the natural right of property according to Locke reappears in the context of civil society as nothing more than an absolute right of individual freedom of contract, or even, as MacPherson

²⁹Strauss 1953, 236-237, 246-248; Tarcov 1984, 141-149; Pangle 1988, 143-144, 161-162, 169. For contrary views, see Dunn 1969, 204-228; Tully 1980, 131-154. Seliger (1968, 173-179) seems to occupy a middle ground.

charges, as an ultimately absurd unalienable right to alienate one's freedom.³⁰

In exploring the basis of this charge, one can hardly deny that after a certain point in the evolution of civil society, according to the account in the Second Treatise, the natural law command to leave enough and as good in common for others is in its strict sense superseded by the advent of conditions making it rational to appropriate beyond what is of direct use for oneself and one's family. This does not mean, however, that Locke attempts to justify unlimited individual appropriation without regard for its social consequences. The spirit of the old sufficiency limitation persists, of necessity, in the context of Lockean civil society. It is plain in Locke's view "that Men have agreed to disproportionate and unequal Possession of the Earth" (II.50; also 36). Such agreement or consent is by definition a rational act; it would make no sense to claim that an irrational creature could make a binding agreement, or that a rational creature could incur an obligation by an irrational agreement. "[No] rational Creature can be supposed to change his condition with an intention to be worse" (II.131). The agreement among human beings or among "the Civiliz'd part of Mankind" (II.30) to drop the strict sufficiency limitation and accept the consequent widening of material inequality could not be a valid agree-

³⁰MacPherson 1962, 246.

ment unless it held forth a reasonable promise of improved conditions for all. Locke holds that the reasonableness of this promise is already evident in a comparison between conditions in his own country, in which land is for the most part privately (and unequally) owned, and those in America, whose resources remain in general unimproved: "a King of a large fruitful Territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day Labourer in England" (II.41). The implication is that according to Locke, no government or political-economic regime can claim legitimacy that promotes or permits the systematic impoverishment of its members.

It is in keeping with this principle that Locke stresses the importance, but also the limitations, of the principle of freedom of contract as constitutive of the property right of individuals in civil society. The amelioration of the natural condition of material scarcity or penury depends upon the rational application of the potentially immense productive powers of human labor (II.32,40-44). But the natural condition offers at best incomplete incentives for individuals to develop significantly the productive powers inherent in their own labor. Therefore "the increase of lands and the right employing of them is the great art of government;" Locke declares it proper to the rational, or indeed "wise and godlike" prince "by established laws of liberty to secure protection and incur-

agement to the honest industry of Mankind against the oppression of power and narrowness of Party" (II.42). More specifically, given that human beings are unequal in their capacities and inclinations to labor productively, it is the task of a Lockean government to protect and encourage the activity of the productive, or "Industrious and Rational" portion of humanity (II.34), and by implication to promote the enlargement of that class. To be sure, the fulfillment of this task as Locke understands it will require on the part of government a considerable respect for the principle of freedom of contract, insofar as that principle facilitates the mobility and the rational employment of labor and capital according to the laws of the market. It will require the protection of profits gained through the productive investment of fairly acquired capital, but it will require no less urgently the countervailing protection of the individual laborer's "Title to the product of his honest Industry" (I.42). It will require that the contract between laborer and employer preserve, not sunder the connection between the laborer's productive and acquisitive powers. The "spirit of capitalism" does indeed find an early expression in the Two Treatises,³¹ provided that it be understood as the spirit of a rationally regulated capitalism. The power of government, as Locke repeatedly in-

³¹Strauss 1953, 246. Cf. also MacPherson 1962, 194-262 with Seliger 1968, 141-208.

sists, is to be employed for "the Regulating and Preserving of Property" (II.3, emphasis added; also 120,139).³²

From all this it is evident that Locke's account of justice in political society neither requires nor permits the total alienation of one's natural right of property or appropriation, whether by the fundamental social contract or by particular agreements among the members. Whatever the ambiguity of his discussion, Locke does in the final analysis indicate sufficiently his insistence upon transcending the bare principle of individual freedom of contract in order to effect a more meaningful guarantee of the right of property or appropriation for all members of civil society. The right of nature persists within civil society as the right to develop one's capacity for "honest industry," one's productive-acquisitive faculty,³³ and therefore to judge the legitimacy of government according, among other criteria, to its performance in protecting the development of this faculty against its coercion, mutilation or exploitation by others.

³²See I.41, where Locke rejects absolute monarchy as incompatible with the "the great Design of God, Increase and Multiply..." It would be unreasonable, in view of this design, to make humankind "depend upon the Will of a Man for their Subsistence, who should have power to destroy them all when he pleased..." It would seem that conformity with the same design would require Locke to condemn as well such relationships of absolute dependence and willfulness when they involved not rulers and subjects, but instead private owners and laborers in civil society.

³³The term is Strauss' (1953, 246).

Seen in this light, the prominence that Locke accords the conventional aspect of property rights in civil society appears intended to underline the need for caution on the part of subjects who may appeal to such rights in judging the dissolution of governmental authority.³⁴ He considers it prudent to counsel such caution in view of the consideration that, although government is indeed obliged to promote material improvement through the protection and encouragement of honest industry, the principles that govern its attempts at fulfilling that obligation tend to be prudential and variable in nature, belonging to the "art of governing men" rather than to the more theoretical doctrine of governmental legitimacy.³⁵ Locke seems to advise subjects to suffer quietly a certain degree of innocent

³⁴If so, Locke's treatment of this issue could be seen as part of a more general attempt at stressing the limited potential of the doctrine of unalienable individual rights for unraveling the social fabric. Cf. note 20 above, and also his disclaimer concerning the power of the doctrine in cases of "manifest" but isolated "Acts of Tyranny," II.208: "For if it reach no farther than some private Mens Cases, though they have a right to defend themselves, and to recover by force, what by unlawful force is taken from them; yet the Right to do so, will not easily ingage them in a Contest, where they are sure to perish; it being as impossible for one or a few oppressed Men to disturb the Government, where the Body of the People do not think themselves concerned in it, as for a raving mad Man, or heady Malecontent to overturn a well-settled State..."

³⁵"Politics contains two parts very different the one from the other, the one containing the original of societies and the rise and extent of political power, the other, the art of governing men in society" ("Some Thoughts Concerning Reading and Study For a Gentleman," in Axtell, ed., 1968, 400). See Tarcov 1984, 5-7.

governmental bungling in economic matters, and to take as a violation of trust only a willful, deliberate, systematic assault on their capacities or opportunities honestly to improve their material conditions. The ultimate, nonconventional, if necessarily somewhat imprecise standard for Lockean subjects to judge the question of legitimacy lies in whether government acts "to destroy, enslave, or designedly to impoverish the Subjects" (II.135).

THE QUESTION OF FOUNDATIONS

Having thus defined the core triad of rights that substantiate Locke's doctrine of justice, we can now begin to address questions more directly pertinent to our inquiry, questions concerning the basis of the doctrine. How can Locke justify his claim that justice consists in the securing of life, liberty, and property, insofar as is possible, for all? By what virtue or by what dispensation do human beings merit the protection of these rights? Why, according to Locke, do we merit the protection of these rights and not others? How are we capable of knowing the answers to these questions? To this partial enumeration one could add many other questions of at least equal difficulty. It is best to begin, however, by considering the various suggestions that Locke makes concerning the basis of his doctrine, immediately upon introducing it in the Second Treatise.

The first such suggestion appears to constitute less an argument, in the strict sense of the term, than a preemptive proposition that no genuine argument is necessary for the establishment of the natural rights doctrine. Locke begins by presenting the principles of political justice or legitimacy as corollaries of his understanding of the natural condition of humankind: "To understand

Political Power right, and derive it from its Original, we must consider what state all Men are naturally in..." (II.4). More precisely, he presents those principles as corollaries of the fundamental principle of natural human freedom and equality: "...Reason...teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that all being equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions" (II.6). Concerning the basis of this principle of natural freedom and equality itself, he offers the following:

there being nothing more evident, than that Creatures of the same species and rank promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without Subordination or Subjection... (II.4)

What is initially noteworthy in this brief, ambiguous remark is that in using the phrase "nothing more evident," Locke may appear to rest the principle of equal natural rights on a self-evident proposition, a proposition known intuitively to be true. That he intends at least to present this appearance is more strongly evident in the immediate sequel, wherein he offers rhetorical support for his claim by appealing to the authority of "the Judicious Hooker," who according to Locke regards the principle of natural human equality "as so evident in itself, and beyond all question..." (II.5).³⁶

³⁶See also II.11, where Locke appears to go beyond the principle of intuition or self-evidence to imply that knowledge of at least one of the precepts of natural right is

The suggestion, however, that Locke's doctrine of natural rights is or could be grounded in a self-evident principle of natural equality, or for that matter in any self-evident moral principle, involves several insuperable difficulties. The first appears in the fact that, throughout the Essay Concerning Human Understanding and especially in its first book, Locke launches a thorough and systematic attack on a very closely related argument. In the wake of this attack, it is very difficult to see how the case for natural rights could be sustained on the basis of an appeal to a moral intuition, and similarly difficult to believe that Locke could intend such an appeal as the basis of his most serious argument; he nowhere offers a defense of the principle of moral intuitionism against the arguments with which he himself assails it.

The outlines of the relevant portions of this attack are as follows. The Essay's chapter entitled "Of the Degrees of Our Knowledge" contains an explanation of the concept of self-evidence or intuition. Intuitive knowledge, in Locke's understanding, carries the highest degree of certainty of which the mind is capable. It is "irresistible;"

or was innate in human beings; as the story of Cain and Abel illustrates, in Locke's reading, the proposition that there is a natural right to punish or even to destroy criminals was written, at least at that time, "so plain... in the Hearts of all Mankind." On innatism as the basis of knowledge of Lockean natural right, see Laslett 1960, 94-95. On self-evidence as the basis, see Yolton 1958, 479-482, 487-489; White 1978, 10-59. For an argument similar to the one presented here, see Zuckert 1987, 329-334.

it "forces itself immediately to be perceived...and leaves no room for Hesitation, Doubt, or Examination" (ECHU 4.2.1). Intuitions are simply and immediately compelling. Insofar as we are rational, we assent to them upon recognition, as soon as we grasp the meanings of the relevant terms. They neither require nor allow any ratiocinative defense or justification; a claim of intuition is in effect a claim that a given proposition is beyond argumentation, that one must simply recognize it and assent to it. Therefore, to assert that a self-evident proposition constitutes the foundation of morality or justice would be to assert that the foundation of morality or justice is unquestionable.

Locke argues that assertions of this kind are above all false; useless if not false; and in any event dangerous. They are false in that it is hardly absurd, but to the contrary perfectly possible and sensible to inquire concerning the reasoning underlying any moral proposition: "I think, there cannot any one moral Rule be propos'd, whereof a Man may not justly demand a Reason: which would be perfectly ridiculous and absurd, if they were innate, or so much as self-evident" (ECHU 1.3.4; emphasis partly supplied). From those who would yet maintain a doctrine of unquestionable moral principles, Locke demands a clear specification of the criteria whereby we could identify a given proposition as properly intuitive or self-evident.

In view of the absence of precisely such criteria, he raises an objection fatal to the practical utility of the doctrine of innate principles, and by implication no less fatal to that of the doctrine of self-evident moral truths:

...if it be the privilege of innate Principles, to be received upon their own Authority, without examination, I know not what may not be believed, or how any one's Principles can be questioned. If they may, and ought to be examined, and tried, I desire to know how first and innate Principles can be tried; or at least it is reasonable to demand the marks and characters, whereby the genuine, innate Principles, may be distinguished from others; that so, amidst the great variety of Pretenders, I may be kept from mistakes, in so material a point as this...From what has been said, I think it is past doubt, that there are no practical Principles wherein all Men agree; and therefore none innate. (1.3.27; also 1.3.14,20,26,27)

The absence of validating criteria points, moreover, to the peculiar dangerousness of assertions of unquestionable moral principles, lying in their peculiar susceptibility to authoritarian abuse. Locke is acutely sensitive in this respect to the potential implications of both intuitionism and innatism, as applied to morality: "Nothing can be so dangerous, as Principles thus taken up without questioning or examination; especially if they be such as concern Morality, which influence Men's Lives, and give a bias to all their Actions" (ECHU 4.12.4).³⁷ It is of the greatest practical importance that moral principles be rationally defensible; to accord any moral principles a privileged exemption from the requirement of rational sup-

³⁷On the authoritarian implications of the principle of self-evidence or intuition, see White 1978, 14-20.

port would be to invite the degeneration of moral discourse into sheer arbitrariness, into a mere contest of opposing wills. Underlining the practical urgency of this danger, according to Locke, is the fact that "great numbers are ready at any time to seal with their Blood" the principles they most cherish (ECHU 1.3.27, also 26): a state of theoretical or intellectual war tends to culminate in a state of actual war, of war in the most literal sense.

Moreover, the difficulties inherent in Locke's initial suggestion extend beyond those general difficulties that beset any claim to intuitive knowledge of moral principles. An additional problem concerns his specific, if still somewhat ambiguous assertion of the principle of natural moral equality. In his initial formulations concerning the ground of his doctrine of political legitimacy, Locke leaves it unclear whether he means that there is nothing more evident than the fundamental fact of human species equality, or instead that there is nothing more evident than that the principle of natural moral equality is an implication of that fundamental fact, however the latter be established.³⁸ Whatever his intention on that point, it is evident that the power of intuition alone is

³⁸Cf. II.4, where Locke appears to hold that there be "nothing more evident" than the inference of natural moral equality from the given, more basic fact of species equality, with II.5, where Locke attributes to Hooker the more ambiguous opinion that "This equality of Men by Nature" is "so evident in it self, and beyond all question..."

insufficient to establish the truth of either proposition. If we take for granted that there is such a thing as the human species, then we are indeed committed to assent to some conception of human equality, as contained already in the definition of what is human. But why should we take this for granted? In response to the proposition that human species equality is a self-evident truth, one might reasonably ask: Equal in what respects? By what criteria, by reference to what common properties or faculties, are we to define what is human? Moreover, even if we were in possession of an adequate definition of the species, the proposition of natural human moral equality might not necessarily or self-evidently³⁹ follow. We would be required to ask further: Of what moral significance are those common, defining properties or faculties? How are we to decide whether human beings constitute a single species, in the morally most decisive respects?

Surely no intuition, but instead only the most careful, exhaustive empirical investigation can provide for us the answers to such questions. Locke's own somewhat cryp-

³⁹Locke applies the notion of intuition to all propositions whose truth or falsity is immediately perceptible; thus it can apply not only to the first principles of reasoned arguments, but also to any proposition appearing anywhere in the course of a given argument, so long as it follows immediately from its previously established premises. "Now, in every step Reason makes in demonstrative Knowledge, there is an intuitive Knowledge of that Agreement or Disagreement, it seeks, with the next intermediate Idea, which it uses as a Proof" (ECHU 4.2.7).

tic reference to "Creatures of the same species and rank promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same faculties" (II.4) appears to confirm this conclusion. Knowledge of those "advantages" and "faculties" simply does not arise intuitively, but must be acquired through empirical investigation. In order to know the law of nature, one must consult "Reason," or become "a Studier of that Law" (II.6,12).⁴⁰ In this way, a careful consideration of Locke's initial suggestion of intuition or self-evidence as the mode of knowledge proper to the principles of justice leads to the conclusion that the justification of those principles requires an argument of an altogether different order.

Almost immediately after making that initial suggestion, Locke does indeed offer an additional and radically different suggestion, although in this case too he seems initially to abstract from and yet ultimately to imply the need for an empirically grounded account of human nature. He indicates the main thrust of this alternative foundational argument as follows:

For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent, and infinitely Wise Maker; All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the World by his order and about his business, they are his Property, whose Workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's Pleasure. (II.6)

According to this argument, the status of human beings as

⁴⁰Strauss 1953, 225; Colman 1983, 178.

God's workmanship and therefore God's property imposes on each a set of obligations that can be summarized as the corollaries of the basic duty to preserve oneself and, subject to certain qualifications, to preserve the rest of humankind as well (II.6). Natural rights must then derive from human beings' obligations as God's creatures; we can surrender our natural rights only to the extent that we thereby enhance the preservation of ourselves or of society or of the rest of humankind, because our lives and persons are not our own property, but are only entrusted to us by God.

This "workmanship thesis" rests apparently upon a considerable body of textual evidence,⁴¹ and in the opinion of several scholarly commentators expresses Locke's deepest, authentic intention with respect to the foundation of morality and justice.⁴² Neither in the Second Treatise nor in any other work, however, does Locke present a systematic, detailed elaboration of the claim that the principles of justice derive from the status of human beings as God's workmanship. Instead he forces his readers to construct or to reconstruct the relevant arguments, insofar as it is possible, out of the partial or fragmentary suggestions

⁴¹See I.30,53,86; II.6,56,79; ECHU 4.3.18, 4.13.3.

⁴²The most elaborate statement of this argument appears in Tully 1980, especially 3-4, 34-51. See also Laslett 1960, 106; Colman 1983, 187-190; Shapiro 1986, 96-108; Ashcraft 1987, 35-47.

that he scatters throughout his works. The following are the basic issues involved in that claim. If Locke would prove that divine workmanship or creation is the basis of natural rights, then he must demonstrate not only that God exists, but also that God has created and legislated for humanity, and that the securing of natural and unalienable rights constitutes the fulfillment of God's legislative design.⁴³ Locke must demonstrate the manner and the substance, at least with respect to the question of justice, of God's revelation of His intentions for human beings.

In his various discussions of the matter, Locke considers two possible modes of divine revelation. God could reveal His intentions either directly, by a positive, immediate declaration of His will to a particular person or persons at a particular historical moment, or indirectly, through an order or logic inherent in His creation and in principle apprehensible by rational persons at all times and places.⁴⁴ On the basis of a somewhat selective, imperfectly literal reading of the Lockean corpus, one could receive the impression that Locke holds God's intentions to

⁴³See the description of the law of nature at LN I.101, V.159, VIII.211. Cf. Strauss 1953, 202-204; also Strauss 1959.

⁴⁴For Locke's discussion of positive revelation, see especially ECHU 4.18, where he uses the term "revelation" to refer exclusively to acts of particular, immediate, historical revelation. Elsewhere, however, Locke makes no strict separation between revelation and natural knowledge; see, for instances, ECHU 4.19.4, and CU 23.

be adequately revealed or rationally accessible through either of these possible modes of communication. With regard to the first, for instance, Locke occasionally proclaims the truth or the authenticity of Christianity as the positive revelation of God's will,⁴⁵ and proclaims similarly that the New Testament contains or provides the ground for the true morality.⁴⁶ With regard to the second, Locke proclaims in his earlier as well as his later works that God's intentions are indeed accessible to the mind unassisted by any positive revelation, whether through an order manifest in his creation⁴⁷, or more simply as implicit in the related facts of the existence of an intelligent God, and human dependence on that God.

As several commentators have observed,⁴⁸ however, Locke fails to provide demonstrative support for either of these claims, despite his own insistence on the need for such support. With respect to the former, for instance, he insists that revelation be subjected to the test of reason,

⁴⁵ECHU 3.9.23; RC 237,239,240; Works 4.96, 6.144-45, 356,424.

⁴⁶Works 1823, 3.296; STCE 185; RC 239-245.

⁴⁷Cf. LN I.95-97: "there is nothing in all this world so unstable, so uncertain that it does not recognize authoritative and fixed laws which are suited to its own nature." Also RC 143; ECHU 1.2.25, 2.1.15, 2.7.4, 2.10.3.

⁴⁸Cf. Strauss 1953, 202-226; Strauss 1959; Cox 1960, 45-62; Laslett 1960, 92-96,101,106; Ashcraft 1969, 203-208, 214-223; Dunn 1969, 94-95,187-194, and 1984, 65ff,84ff; Helm 1973; Bluhm et al 1980; Yolton 1985, 76-91,98.

that it is both possible and necessary to distinguish authentic from inauthentic claims to revelation: "Whatever GOD hath revealed, is certainly true; no Doubt can be made of it. This is the proper Object of Faith: But whether it be a divine Revelation or no, Reason must judge..." (ECHU 4.18.10; also 4.16.14, 4.18.6, 4.19.3,10,14; von Leyden 1954, 275-277). How then can reason make this judgment? Locke observes that "the holy Men of old, who had Revelations from GOD, had something else besides that internal Light of assurance in their own Minds, to testify to them, that it was from GOD." This "something else" consisted in the "outward Signs," the "visible Signs" or miracles that they were given in order to persuade themselves and others of the authenticity of God's message (4.19.15; also Works 1823, 7.135,138). How then can reason identify the truly miraculous, or distinguish authentic miracles from other forms of "extraordinary Signs" (4.19.16)?⁴⁹

At this point Locke becomes quite elusive. He breaks off his discussion of the relation between reason and faith without even confronting directly the question concerning the authentication of miracles, excusing himself only with the strikingly unhelpful addendum that he is

⁴⁹A complete discussion of the issue of miracles would address also a prior question, namely, whether or how one could establish confidence in the actual occurrence of an extraordinary event, let alone in its miraculous character. For Locke's somewhat ambiguous statements on this question, see ECHU 4.15.6,4.16.9,10,13,14.

far from denying, that GOD can, or doth sometimes enlighten Mens Minds in the apprehending of certain Truths, or excite them to Good Actions by the immediate influence and assistance of the Holy Spirit, without any extraordinary Signs accompanying it. But in such Cases too we have Reason and the Scripture, unerring Rules to know whether it be from GOD or no...Where Reason or Scripture is express for any Opinion or Action, we may receive it as of divine Authority... (4.19.16)

In other words, Locke concludes the Essay's discussion of reason and faith by claiming either that we should simply assume the divine authority of Scripture, that is, assume the truth of the proposition whereof he has encouraged us to demand a reasoned demonstration, or that we should recognize the divine authority of any proposition for which reason is "express," although he provides for us no satisfactory explanation of how reason can authenticate the specific claim of Scriptural revelation.⁵⁰

⁵⁰In "A Discourse of Miracles" (1702), Locke offers a loose or permissive definition of a miracle as "a sensible operation, which, being above the comprehension of the spectator, and in his opinion contrary to the established course of nature, is taken by him to be divine" (ed. Ramsey 1958, 79). He justifies the permissiveness of this definition at least in part on utilitarian grounds: a more strict definition of miracles as "operations contrary to the fixed and established laws of Nature," or, stricter yet, as "such divine operations as are in themselves beyond the power of all created beings," would mean that "the use of them would be lost, if not to all mankind, yet at least to the simple and illiterate (which is the far greatest part)..." Since "the philosophers alone, if at least they can pretend to determine" the (physical) laws of nature, and no one can determine the extent of the power of the beings created above humankind but beneath the level of God, Locke doubts "whether any man learned or unlearned, can in most cases be able to say of any particular operation...that it is certainly a miracle" (86). Against the related objections that the more permissive definition relativizes miracles and therefore invalidates them as

Let us turn then to consider the basis of Locke's alternative claim that divine revelation is accessible in principle to all rational creatures through an order or logic inherent in God's creation. At times Locke suggests in this vein the possibility of an apparently simple, almost entirely nonempirical deduction, holding that the bare fact of creation by an intelligent God can suffice as the basis of a demonstration of God's intentions (ECHU 4.3.18, 4.13.3). We can construct or reconstruct the outlines of this argument as follows. Human beings possess an intuitive awareness of our own existence and intelligence; human existence is not eternal, but had a beginning; if it is impossible that intelligent could evolve from unintelligent being, then it follows ultimately that human beings

testimony of divine revelation, he contends that "the carrying with it of a greater power than appears in opposition to it" can serve as "a sufficient inducement" to identify "any extraordinary operation" as a miracle (82). In cases in which miracles are alleged to attest opposing or contradictory "missions," in other words, the truth lies with the manifestation of the greater supernatural power. But this response itself raises a number of difficult questions. How are we to judge cases in which there is no direct opposition, or none at all, between "extraordinary operations"? In cases wherein there is such opposition, is the mere fact of superior power sufficient to establish divinity, or is a certain minimum degree of power required? How does one judge precisely the degrees of power exhibited? Would not such judgment itself presuppose knowledge of the power of nature's resistance to supernatural forces, and thus presuppose knowledge of the laws of nature? Locke directly addresses none of these questions, commenting only that "perhaps" the authentication of miracles by their apparent superior power, "as it is the plainest, so it is also the surest way to preserve the testimony of miracles in its due force to all sorts and degrees of people" (86).

must be the creatures of an eternal being of superior power and intelligence, which we may call "God" (4.10.2-7); because human beings are created by and dependent upon God, human beings are God's property, subject to his dominion and obliged to obey His commands (I.52-54; II.56); an intelligent God could only have created intelligently, purposively; therefore human beings are obliged to preserve themselves and their species, or not willfully to destroy themselves or others (II.6). The fundamental natural law and right of preservation would thus derive from the fact of God's creation.

Once again, however, one might question the completeness of this reasoning. From the bare premise of God's purposive creation, how much can we really infer concerning the substance of God's purposes or commands? In elaborating the obligation of self-preservation, Locke indicates that each is bound "not to quit his Station wilfully" (TT II.6); but how does the principle of workmanship alone aid us in determining what constitutes willfulness or arbitrariness in the eyes of God? Locke's own reasoning concerning the case of animals calls attention to the question. God is no less Creator of the "inferior creatures" than of human beings. But Locke maintains unambiguously that human beings may rightfully destroy any inferior creature "where some nobler use, than its bare Preservation calls for it" (II.6; also I.85-87). Is it then inconceivable that a su-

premerely intelligent and wise Creator could intend for human beings as well some "nobler use" than their bare preservation? The argument from the fact of purposive creation appears thus incomplete, in leaving unclear the full content of God's intentions or commands for human beings, or the specific end in view of which natural rights are to be protected.

It is perhaps in view of this incompleteness that Locke immediately supplements or elaborates the workmanship argument by calling attention again to the basis of natural jural equality; human beings are by nature equal in rights, Locke now states, by virtue of the unity and dignity of the species, "being furnished with like Faculties," and "sharing all in one Community of Nature" (II.6). He thus again prompts the reader to ask: What specifically are these "like Faculties," these "same advantages of Nature?" Why does the sharing in them constitute human beings, in the juridically decisive respect, "Creatures of the same species and rank" (II.4)? How are God's intentions or commands for human beings revealed in the order of creation, in the nature and natural condition that God provides us?

Having reached these questions, we have travelled a full circle, in a sense, in order to come to a preliminary conclusion. The initially divergent paths onto which Locke guides his readers in the search for the basis of justice do converge, but prematurely, short of the ultimate desti-

nation. Through a careful examination of the "workmanship" argument as well as of the apparent appeal to self-evidence, we come finally and inescapably to confront the question of nature. Whether one begins with philosophy or theology, or inclines toward the primacy of rights or of law, Locke renders it impossible fully or adequately to understand the substance of his theory of justice without understanding what, finally, is the nature to which he holds the rights of life, liberty, and property appropriate.⁵¹

⁵¹Cf. in this respect the work of Geraint Parry, who argues that Locke's political theory can and must be understood apart from its "theological substructure." The basis of this argument is the opinion that "Neither Locke's theology nor his epistemology entails his political conclusions" (1978, 13). The basis of the present attempt at abstracting, to a considerable extent, the substance of Lockean justice from Lockean theology is the opinion that that very theology invites such an abstraction. As Mansfield puts it, Locke "leaves one trail for the sceptical and another for the pious, the latter more plainly marked but leading in circles, so that eventually the pious will have to follow the sceptics' trail if they wish to get anywhere" (1979, 29). See also Strauss 1953, 202-230; Strauss 1958; Zuckert 1979; Colman 1983, 6,177-186; Pangle 1988, 131-171.

CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM OF NATURAL SCIENCE I:

NATURE AND EMPIRICISM

We have seen how Locke's foundational suggestions in the Second Treatise converge ultimately in an invitation to his readers to regard human species equality as the decisive factual or empirical basis of the principle of natural human jural equality. In keeping with that work's characteristic abstraction from any serious, thematic treatment of foundational issues, however, Locke again declines to trouble its readers with any attempt at elaborating the concept of human species equality or defending the jural principle that he derives from it.¹ We are forced to return to the Essay Concerning Human Understanding in order to explore the foundations of the arguments adumbrated in the Second Treatise.

Yet precisely herein lie the serious difficulties. Having refused until death to acknowledge his authorship of the Two Treatises, Locke has left us no explicit statement of his view of the two works' relation to one another. In introducing the Essay, however, he does claim that his

¹See chapter VI below, note 118 and accompanying text.

basic purpose of inquiring "into the Original, Certainty, and Extent of humane Knowledge" is an essentially moderate one: "If we can find out, how far the Understanding can extend its view...we may learn to content our selves with what is attainable by us in this State" (1.1.2,4). More particularly, he claims that his account in no way implies the insufficiency of human knowledge for governing our "great Concernments"; it in no way involves a repudiation of the notion of natural law (1.1.5; also 1.3.13; 2.28.11). From virtually the moment of the Essay's publication to the present day, critics have expressed skepticism concerning such claims. Commentators of widely varying interpretive approaches have agreed, particularly with respect to the question of the natural law, that the relation between the Two Treatises and the Essay is problematical. As we have indicated in the preceding chapter, much of this discussion focuses on the adequacy of Locke's establishment of the requisite theological foundations for such a law. But surely that issue is no more problematic than the two works' respective treatments of the concept of nature. Some scholars concerned with the relationship between the two works have argued explicitly or implicitly that the Essay's empiricist epistemology entails a radically destructive analysis of all claims to knowledge of natural species, and therewith undermines the Second Treatise'

undefended claim to such knowledge.² If this is true, then viewed in the light of its treatment of natural science thus understood, it is not only unsurprising that, as again several commentators have observed,³ the Essay fails to elaborate and indeed barely mentions the concept of natural law. The argument of the Essay would culminate in the destruction not only of natural law as law, but more broadly of any doctrine of morality or justice that claims a foundation in nature. What Locke gives with one hand, he seems to take away with the other. To Peter Laslett's well known judgment that "The Essay has no room for natural law" (1960, 94), we would be required to add that the Essay has no room for natural rights either.

It would be fruitless to deny that a substantial body of textual evidence can be adduced in support of the conclusion that Locke in the Essay not only fails to defend but indeed undermines his own doctrine of natural rights. The aim of the present work is nonetheless to contest that conclusion, and by reassessing the evidence and the argumentation that seem to support it, to advance a somewhat more sympathetic interpretation of Locke than those most influential among contemporary scholars. In this and the

²Strauss 1953, 230,249; Von Leyden 1956, 26-27; Laslett 1960, 92-98; Dunn 1969, 22-26, 80-83; Miller 1979; Wallin 1984; Pangle 1988, 206-209; West 1988, 3,21-29.

³Lamprecht 1918, 80ff; Laslett 1960, 94-95; Von Leyden, 1954, 13, and 1956, 26.

chapters that follow it, we will attempt to show that the author of the Essay is neither a radical conventionalist nor simply confused, but rather a proponent of a moderate, constructive, genuinely empirical epistemology that is consistent with a probabilistic defense of natural rights. As we hope also to show, however, it is in the nature of Locke's presentation that his ultimate moderation comes to sight most clearly through a thorough consideration of his apparent extremism. In order adequately to establish our own interpretation, therefore, it is necessary for us first to do justice to the contrary readings by presenting the relevant textual evidence in its most challenging forms. We will begin by reconstructing in detail the Essay's empiricist account of natural science, especially with a view toward elaborating the most extreme, corrosive consequences for morality that that account could entail.

THE ESSAY'S DESTRUCTIVE EMPIRICISM

In his "Epistle to the Reader," Locke announces with notable apparent modesty⁴ his intention to perform in the Essay only a critical, preparatory task. With considerable emphasis, he renounces any aspiration to the attainment of "the true Knowledge of Things," declaring himself content instead to attempt nothing more than a preparation for true philosophy thus understood: "'tis Ambition enough to be employed as an Under-Labourer in clearing ground a little, and removing some of the Rubbish, that lies in the way to Knowledge" (Nidditch ed. 1975, 10). Let us then begin at the beginning of the work, with the most prominent piece of ground-clearing. Locke devotes the Essay's first book to an elaboration of its most famous argument, namely his refutation of the doctrine of innatism according to which "there are in the Understanding certain innate Principles; some primary Notions...as it were stamped upon the Mind of Man, which the Soul receives in its very first Being..." (1.2.1). He maintains to the contrary that no notions or principles are inborn, that the understanding is at birth or prior to experience wholly unfurnished, "white Paper, void of all Characters..." (2.1.2; also 1.2.15). In its

⁴Cf. Aaron 1955, 74-82; Mandelbaum 1964, 52; Wood 1983, 2,41-64; Nidditch 1985, xviii; Pangle 1988, 133,269-270.

original unfurnishment or unprovidedness it is like the earth as a whole, and its subsequent development, also like that of the earth as a whole, consists in a process of cultivation. The seeds or "materials" employed in this process of mental cultivation, the basic building-blocks of knowledge, Locke calls "ideas." Somewhat loosely defined,⁵ "idea" in Locke's usage refers to "whatever is meant by Phantasm, Notion, Species, or whatever it is, which the Mind can be employ'd about in thinking" (1.1.8).

According to the fundamental principle of Locke's empiricism, the human understanding can possess ideas and hence propositions not through any kind of innate inscription, but only through experience or acquisition. More specifically, according to Locke, the twin "Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the Ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring," are the mental experiences of sensation and reflection (2.1.2). Sensation, as Locke initially defines it, is the perception or observation of external objects, whereas reflection is perception of the internal operations of one's own mind (2.1.2-5,24; also 2.9).

Yet these initial definitions, especially that of sensation, require an immediate and crucial modification. Viewed from a perspective of epistemological realism or common sense, among the most arresting claims of Lockean

⁵On the ambiguities in Locke's usage of this term, see especially Ryle 1968 (1933), 16ff. Cf. Greenlee 1977; Colman 1983, 76-83.

empiricism is the contention that we do not immediately perceive objects as such, but instead only collections of discrete ideas. What Locke calls our "substance" ideas, our ideas of things or objects existing external to and independent of the understanding, are not objects of our original or immediate perceptions (1.4.18), but instead are mental constructions. While we might commonly or uncritically believe that we perceive directly a human being, for instance, what we actually perceive directly, according to Locke, is a number of discrete ideas: a certain figure, various colors, perhaps a certain texture, the capacities of animation and speech, and so forth. At the root of this contention lies Locke's crucial distinction between simple and complex ideas. Simple ideas in Locke's account are truly the basic building blocks or "the Materials of all our Knowledge" (2.2.2). They are "unmixed" or "uncompounded," incapable of analysis into any other, simpler ideas, and hence incapable of definition; the understanding can neither create nor destroy them (2.2.1,2; also 3.4.4,7,11). They are the only "givens," the only objects of direct perception, the understanding's only immediate points of access to the external world.

By means of this distinction, Locke extends and refines his analogy between the original human material and intellectual conditions, or between the activities of laboring and thinking. Out of the basic materials of simple

ideas, we make complex ideas: "Ideas thus made up of several simple ones put together, I call Complex." Thus according to Locke the understanding not only perceives simple ideas, but also "labors" upon them, employs its powers of combining, comparing, and abstracting "either to unite them together, or to set them by one another, or wholly separate them," in order to make further ideas (2.12.1). By its own industry, the understanding progresses from simplicity to complexity, from a condition of relative scarcity to an abundance of ideas, virtually infinite in number and endless in variety (2.12.3; 2.1.2). "Man's Power," declares Locke, is "much-what the same in the Material and Intellectual World" (2.12.1; also 2.2.2).

The decisive question here concerns just how far Locke wishes to extend the analogy between thinking and laboring. A careful reading of the all-important fifth chapter of the Second Treatise reveals that the productive power of human labor as Locke there conceives it is not only quantitatively immense, but also nearly exclusive. The activity of human laboring, the production of value out of nature's provision, constitutes in other words a virtual creation ex nihilo: "Nature and the Earth furnished only the almost worthless Materials, as in themselves" (II.43; also 32,37,38,41,42,45).⁶ The radically creative character

⁶Cf. Strauss 1953, 235-249; Goldwin 1972, 460-470; Zuckert 1979, 71-74; Mansfield 1979, 30-32; Tully 1980, 116ff; Wood 1984, 51-67; Pangle 1988, 141-145, 161-167.

of labor in this description indicates clearly enough what is suggestive and troubling in this assimilation of thinking to material labor. Locke readily grants, of course, that just as we "can do nothing towards the making the least Particle of new Matter," so too "it is not in the Power of the most exalted Wit, or enlarged Understanding ...to invent or frame one new simple Idea in the mind..."

(2.2.2). But of what significance is this concession, in light of his insistence in the Second Treatise (37,40-43, 48) that nature contributes to the process of production virtually nothing of real value, that virtually everything of value must be of human creation, must be a product of human labor? Precisely what is the worth of nature's provision to the human understanding? To what extent, according to the argument of the Essay, does the external world depend for its orderliness upon the creative powers of the human understanding or the human mind? It is obvious that a world consisting in a mere aggregation of discrete simple ideas would be an unintelligible and therefore uninhabitable world, and would thus correspond to the unimproved material world the Second Treatise describes as "waste." Is this the world that, according to the Essay, the understanding originally or naturally confronts? Does nature provide no significant guidance or discipline for our attempts at rendering an orderly, intelligible external world?

The answer to such questions lies in Locke's account of the process by which we construct complex ideas. All complex ideas, in Locke's scheme, are either modes, substances, or relations. Modes are complex ideas that refer not to independently existing things, but instead to the qualities or attributes or modifications of such things. As Locke defines them, they are "such complex Ideas, which however compounded, contain not in them the supposition of subsisting by themselves, but are considered as Dependences on, or Affections of Substances" (2.12.4). Substance ideas are ideas that refer to independently existing things; they are "such combinations of simple Ideas, as are taken to represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves" (2.12.6). Ideas of relation derive from the power of the understanding to "carry any Idea, as it were, beyond it self...to see how it stands in conformity to any other" (2.25.1). Indeed Locke seems to imply that these ideas are virtually indistinguishable from the exercise of that power; ideas of relation consist in "the consideration and comparing one Idea with another" (2.12.7).

Locke's discussion of our ideas of substances reveals most fundamentally his estimate of the worth of the natural provision and therefore of the true character and extent of human knowledge. That is to say, inasmuch as this discussion above all constitutes the basis of his critique of the notion of natural species or kinds and therewith of the

possibility of a strict science of nature, it underlies his often-repeated judgment of the natural and in important respects irremediable darkness and narrowness of the understanding.⁷ For the same reason, it would seem to imply his most fundamental philosophical challenge to the theory of natural rights. According to Locke's argument, we form the most general idea of substance, the idea of "pure Substance in general" (2.23.2), in a kind of mental reflex, in an ordinarily unconscious response to our perception of discrete simple ideas. Just as we are unable to conceive of an effect independent of a cause, an action or passion independent of an agent or patient, or an adjective independent of a noun, so also we are unable to imagine "how these simple Ideas can subsist by themselves." We therefore "accustom ourselves, to suppose some Substratum, wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result..." (2.23.1). When we perceive a simple idea of color, or of solidity, or of pleasure or pain, for instance, we find it necessary to suppose the existence of some being or thing that feels the pleasure or pain, or that bears the quality of solidity or of the given color. Similarly, in forming complex ideas of particular substances, we commonly notice

⁷Locke describes the understanding as a "dark room," as "not much unlike a Closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left" (2.11.17), as "narrow" (2.23.28), with its reach falling "exceeding short of the vast Extent of Things" (1.1.5), and so forth. See also CU 43, Works IV.359,361.

that several simple ideas seem to "go constantly together," to coexist over time, and we consequently suppose that such ideas are somehow ontologically or necessarily united, that they exist as common qualities of a single object (2.23.1). More importantly, we observe not only particular sets of coexisting ideas, but also patterns of coexistence. By "collecting such Combinations of simple Ideas, as are by Experience and Observation of Men's Senses taken notice of to exist together," we form not only ideas of particular substances, but also ideas of "particular sorts of Substances" (2.23.3; also 2.23.6,7,8, 2.31.6, 3.3.13, 3.6.1). We form ideas of spiritual substances in the same way that we form ideas of corporeal substances (2.23.5).⁸

Locke refers to our formation of substance ideas as a supposition, even as a merely customary supposition. We make this supposition because we can only conceive of the simple ideas in our experience in relative terms--as somehow "depending" on, or "inhering" or "resting" or "subsisting" in, or "flowing" from, or being "produced" by something else, something more real or fundamental in nature (e.g. 2.23.1,2,3,6,8). The variety of his language notwithstanding, it is clear that Locke is describing a cause-effect relation; we conceive of a given substance as the seat of efficient causation, the cause of both the exist-

⁸But cf. 4.3.6, and the discussion in chapter IV below, pp. 187-205.

ence and the coexistence or union of simple ideas (2.23.6). Thus "rightly considered," simple ideas become present to our perceptions by virtue of "nothing but [the] Powers" inherent in substances "to produce those Ideas in us" (2.23.7). "Power," as Locke explains,

being the Source from whence all Action proceeds, the Substances wherein these Powers are, when they exert this Power into Act, are called Causes; and the Substances which thereupon are produced, or the simple Ideas which are introduced into any Subject by the exerting of that Power, are called Effects. (2.22.11)

Locke uses the terms "real constitution," "internal constitution," and "real essence" to refer to the causal entity that, as we suppose, constitutes the existential foundation of our ideas of substances. He allows that it is "past Doubt, there must be some real Constitution, on which any Collection of simple Ideas co-existing, must depend" (3.3.15). But in order for our ideas of substances to be truly more than mere suppositions of the existence of "something...I know not what" (2.23.2,15), we must be able to identify the specific real constitutions or essences that underlie those ideas. We must be able to identify the specific causal relationships that make ontologically necessary the unions of particular sets of ideas in substances or sorts of substances (2.31.6). And this, according to Locke, we simply cannot do. Even if we had access to a comprehensive accounting of all the qualities and properties of a given substance, we could not then be certain of the status of any quality as causally "primary," and hence

could not acquire knowledge of the real essence of the substance in question, for the simple reason that we are incapable of knowledge of cause-effect relations.

In the brief chapter devoted specifically to these relations, Locke explains that we acquire ideas of cause and effect as inferences from the observation "that several particular, both Qualities, and Substances begin to exist; and that they receive this their Existence, from the due Application and Operation of some other Being" (2.26.1). He indicates in the immediate sequel, however, that such inferences are in the strictest sense illegitimate; they are "experimental" rather than "scientific," insofar as we conceive these ideas "without knowing the manner of that Operation" whereby one being brings into existence a new quality or substance (4.3.26; 2.26.2). If we do not know the manner of such operations, then for all we know, what we are observing may be no more than accidental associations. We are "destitute of Faculties to attain" knowledge of "the internal Constitution, and true Nature of things" (2.23.32), in that we are incapable of genuine knowledge of causation. This incapacity in itself is sufficient basis for Locke's conclusion that a genuine science of nature is necessarily beyond the reach of the human understanding.⁹

⁹Cf. 4.3.29: "The Things that, as far as our Observation reaches, we constantly find to proceed regularly, we may conclude, do act by a Law set them; but yet by a Law, that we know not: whereby, though Causes work steadily, and Effects constantly flow from them, yet their Connexions

But the difficulties we confront in attempting to construct ideas of substances and sorts of substances according to patterns in nature are not limited to our ignorance of causal relations. Absent knowledge of their causal cores, according to Locke, we can acquire "no other Idea of those Substances, than what is framed by a collection of those simple Ideas which are to be found in them" (2.23.3). This means that our ideas of substances are necessarily "inadequate," in that they can never provide more than a "partial, or incomplete representation of those Archetypes to which they are referred" (2.31.1,6). They are necessarily inadequate in that it is simply impossible to render a comprehensive accounting of all the qualities or properties of any given substance; "whatever Collection of simple Ideas [the mind] makes of any Substance that exists, it cannot be sure, that it exactly answers all that are in that Substance" (2.31.13; also 2.31.10, 3.6.19, 3.9.13, 4.6.14).

Moreover, at least in most cases they are inadequate in a more practically troubling respect. Locke presents his destructive analysis of our ideas of substances with

and Dependancies [sic] being not discoverable in our Ideas, we can have but an experimental Knowledge of them. From all which 'tis easy to perceive, what a darkness we are involved in, how little 'tis of Being, and the things that are, that we are capable to know...as to a perfect Science of natural Bodies, (not to mention spiritual Beings,) we are, I think, so far from being capable of any such thing, that I conclude it lost labour to seek after it."

the explicit intention of discrediting the Aristotelian-scholastic doctrine of natural sorts or species,¹⁰ according to which not the human understanding but instead "Nature," as Locke puts it, "sets the Boundaries of the Species of Things," generating particular beings to partake in one of a finite number of real essences "and so become of this or that Species" (3.6.30, 3.3.17; also 3.3.9; 3.6.14,24; 4.6.4). He insists that in order for this doctrine to be true, the boundaries between species of natural beings must be perfectly clear and precise, or in other words, that each member of the species manifest constantly and invariantly all the properties essential to that species: "it is as impossible, that two Things, partaking exactly of the same real Essence, should have different Properties, as that two Figures partaking in the same real Essence of a Circle, should have different Properties" (3.3.17).¹¹ In Locke's view, the manifest difficulty with this doctrine lies in the fact that, quite apart from the problem of determining which among a set of shared quali-

¹⁰On Locke's view of scholasticism, see especially Gibson 1917, 182-204.

¹¹Cf. 2.19.4, where, in denying that thinking is the essence rather than the action of the soul, Locke holds that "the Operations of Agents will easily admit of intention and remission; but the Essences of things, are not conceived capable of any such variation." See also 3.6.8.

ties or powers are properties and which mere accidents,¹² many particular members of what we take to be the same species manifest with a considerable degree of variance the qualities or powers supposedly definitive of those species; nature's productions very often simply do not fall within the precise boundaries of our species ideas.

Professing, for instance, an intention to show the probability that there exist "more Species of intelligent Creatures above us, than there are of sensible and material below us," Locke offers a provocative statement or restatement¹³ of the traditional conception of earthly creation as a great chain-of-being:

All quite down from us, the descent is by easy steps, and a continued series of Things, that in each remove, differ very little one from the other. There are Fishes that have Wings, and are not Strangers to the airy Region: and there are some Birds, that are Inhabitants of the Water...There are Animals so near of kin both to Birds and Beasts, that they are in the middle between both...There are some Brutes, that seem to have as much Knowledge and Reason, as some that are called Men: and the Animal and Vegetable Kingdoms, are so nearly join'd, that if you will take the lowest of one, and the highest of the other, there will scarce be perceived any great difference between them; and so on

¹²Thus 3.9.17: "...no one can shew a Reason, why some of the inseparable Qualities, that are always united in nature, should be put into the nominal Essence, and others left out."

¹³On Locke's employment of the concept of the great chain of being, cf. Lovejoy 1966 (1936), especially 67-98, 227ff with Yolton 1970, 33, and 1985, 109ff. Lovejoy implies that Locke's employment of the principle of the plenitude of creation points to the undermining of the doctrine of natural species, while Yolton sees in it an affirmation of natural species distinctions, the apparent continuity of their boundaries notwithstanding.

til we come to the lowest and the most inorganical parts of Matter, we shall find every-where, that the several Species are linked together, and differ but in almost insensible degrees. (3.6.12)

The appropriate metaphor for this conception of the natural order would seem to be less a great chain than perhaps a braided rope of being, whose "segments" upon close observation blend imperceptibly one into another. Seemingly with a certain eagerness, Locke describes the "frequent Productions" of--what we commonly call, employing our conventional species classifications--"Monsters, in all the Species of Animals, and of Changelings, and other strange Issues of humane Birth" (3.3.17; 3.6.22ff, 4.4.13ff).¹⁴ Moreover, in illustrating the errant or anarchic character of nature's processes of production, he places special emphasis on the difficulties manifest in any attempt at defining human beings by reference to some supposed natural species or real essence. We commonly identify human beings

¹⁴Most commentators seem to accept Locke's earnestness in transmitting these accounts, though some also share the judgment of the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury that these passages reveal an oddly 'credulous Mr. Locke' (Quoted in Harrison and Laslett 1971, 29; cf. Mackie 1976, 87-88). Such stories do seem to hold a certain fascination for Locke, but it is not clear that he assents to them quite so credulously as is commonly believed. At 3.6.23, for instance, he states conditionally that "if History lie not, Women have conceived by Drills" (emphasis supplied). And in the immediately preceding paragraph he draws attention in a somewhat more pointed manner to the questionable authority of his source: "There are Creatures, as 'tis said, (sit fides penes Authorem, but there appears no contradiction, that there should be such) that with Language, and Reason, and a shape in other Things agreeing with ours, have hairy Tails..." (3.6.22).

by reference both to a common shape or figure and to the possession of certain common faculties, pre-eminently rationality (2.12.6; 3.3.10; 3.6.3,26; 4.4.16; 4.6.15; 4.7.16; 4.17.1; Works 1823, 4.74,378). But according to Locke these qualities do not constantly and invariantly coexist in nature's production. "There are Naturals amongst us, that have perfectly our shape, but want Reason, and some of them Language too" (3.6.22). Conversely, there are also cases of beings innately or naturally disfigured to the point of being virtually unrecognizable as human, yet unquestionably in possession of rationality. Such was the "Abbot of St. Martin," who as a child "was very near being excluded out of the Species of Man, barely by his Shape," despite his possession of "such Parts, as made him," upon their development, "capable to be a Dignitary in the Church" (3.6.26). Nor is Locke willing to concede that we can reliably determine who or what is by nature human by reference to the fact of generation; "for if History lie not," he reports, "Women have conceived by Drills; and what real Species, by that measure, such a Production will be in Nature, will be a new Question" (3.6.23). At times Locke seems simply and categorically to deny that any scheme of classification could account neatly for all of nature's productions, leaving no particular instances to straddle or permeate species boundaries. He certainly insists that "there is no such thing made by Nature, and established by

Her amongst Men," as "precise and unmovable" species-boundaries. The latter are "made by Man, with some liberty" (3.6.27; also 3.5.9).

However commonly or even in a sense naturally we may employ it,¹⁵ the scholastic presumption that our ideas of substances and species adequately represent an order inherent in nature according to this account manifests an epistemological false-consciousness. Because the real essences or "substantial forms" supposedly uniting members of species are in fact "wholly unintelligible" to us (3.6.10), it is clear in Locke's view "That our distinguishing Substances into Species by Names, is not at all founded on their real Essences" (3.6.20). Instead, our ideas of species can refer intelligibly only to "nominal essences," to abstract ideas formed of necessarily incomplete collections of coexisting simple ideas (3.6.7,9,21,24; 2.31.8,13; 3.3.9). Thus what we may presume to be natural appears, on closer analysis, to be primarily conventional in origin. These abstract ideas or nominal essences "are made by the Mind, and not by Nature: For were they Nature's Workmanship, they could not be so various and different in several Men, as experience tells us they are" (3.6.26). Locke's analysis culminates in the demand that we surrender as "wholly use-

¹⁵Though we "know nothing" of the real essences of things, declares Locke, yet "there is nothing more ordinary, than that Men should attribute the sorts of Things to such Essences" (2.31.6; also 3.10.21). Cf. Zuckert 1974, 562.

less" and even pernicious our aspiration to classify things according to their real, natural essences as opposed to the nominal essences that are the products of our own understandings (3.3.17; also 2.31.8, 3.3.13, 4.6.4, 4.4.17).¹⁶

From all this it appears that Locke's assimilation of thinking to laboring is quite thorough indeed. Leo Strauss summarizes the effects of this teaching as follows:

From now on, nature furnishes only the almost worthless materials as in themselves; the forms are supplied by man, by man's free creation. For there are no natural forms, no intelligible "essences"...There are, therefore, no natural principles of understanding: all knowledge is acquired; all knowledge depends on labor and is labor. (1953, 249).

Surveying the damage thus wrought by Locke's critique of the doctrine of natural species, one must wonder how the Second Treatise' natural rights theory can possibly endure

¹⁶Locke's rejection of the doctrine of natural species may appear to rest on ontological as well as epistemological grounds. "'Tis true," he concedes, "every Substance that exists, has its peculiar Constitution, whereon depend those sensible Qualities, and Powers, we observe in it" (3.6.13). But this apparently refers to real constitutions as the bases only of the attributes of particular beings, not of the properties shared by all the members of a common species or kind; he repeatedly affirms that "All Things, that exist, being Particulars..."General and Universal, belong not to the real existence of Things; but are the Inventions and Creatures of the Understanding" (3.3.1,11; also 3.3.6, 4.7.9, 4.17.8). Inasmuch, however, as he holds that "the principium Individuationis...is Existence it self, which determines a Being of any sort to a particular time and place incommunicable to two Beings of the same kind" (2.27.3), it is difficult to know the extent to which Locke takes the particularity of all things as decisive against the possibility that nature makes things with common species essences. A discussion of a different version of the argument that Locke's critique is ontologically oriented appears in chapter IV below, pp. 161-186.

such a direct assault upon its foundations. Eugene Miller comments more specifically that "Rousseau is noted for having blurred the line between the human and the subhuman, but Locke pushes at least as far as would his successor the argument against a natural ground for fixing this line" (1979, 177). How can we know human beings as the subjects or proprietors of natural rights, if we cannot know with any degree of reliability what a human being by nature is?

THE DEMONSTRATIVE SCIENCE OF MORALITY

In view of the foregoing critique of natural species and natural science, we may find all the more ominous the fact that the design of the Essay seems to indicate a deliberate attempt on Locke's part to avoid the appearance of a thematic or primary concern with questions concerning morality. It is no wonder, as John Colman observes, that scholars have often viewed the Essay's discussions of ethical issues "as merely an intellectual by-product of the pursuit of [Locke's] major scientific interests" (1983, 1).¹⁷ For not only does Locke decline in his brief account of the history of the Essay to disclose the fact, noted by his friend James Tyrrell, that the "very remote" subject of the discussion that originated the Essay concerned 'the Principles of morality, and reveal'd Religion' (ECHU "Epistle to the Reader," 7; Nidditch ed. 1975, xix), he also organizes the work so as to indicate a virtually complete abstraction from moral questions. Not a single chapter heading in the entire Essay announces a direct concern with moral issues; the discussions of morality that do arise are commonly presented as peripheral to or merely illustrative

¹⁷Similarly, Wood complains of a tendency among most students of the Essay "to overlook the fact that Locke wrote not only for the sake of technical philosophic analysis but also to help men act more effectively in the world of practical affairs" (1975, 71; also 1983, 1-7).

of the main topic under consideration.¹⁸

In fact, however, Locke by no means completely submerges his concern with moral questions in the Essay. In its introductory chapter, he corrects to some extent the impression one might receive from its dedication and table of contents; he admits that an intention to show that "our Business here is not to know all Things, but those which concern our Conduct...was that, which gave the first Rise to this Essay concerning the Understanding" (1.1.6,7). Moreover, unquestionably cognizant of the unsettling inferences that some might draw from his epistemological arguments, he subsequently reassures his readers that the work in no way undermines the foundations of morality. "Morality is the proper Science, and Business of Mankind in general; (who are both concerned, and fitted to search out their Summum Bonum,)..." (4.12.11). Properly directed, the "Candle, that is set up in us, shines bright enough for all our Purposes" (1.1.5). Indeed, Locke goes so far as to insist that the argument of the Essay not only does not destroy the foundations of morality, but to the contrary establishes them more securely than ever before.

¹⁸The most striking example of this appears at 2.21.72, where Locke expresses a hope that he "shall be pardon'd this Digression" into the question of human liberty, which occupies virtually the whole of the Essay's single longest chapter. See also 2.28.4-17. Nidditch refers to Locke's "ironic masking of his priority of concern with conduct over scientific inquisitiveness" (1975, xviii).

...I am bold to think, that Morality is capable of Demonstration...wherein I doubt not, but from self-evident Propositions, by necessary Consequences, as incontestable as those in Mathematicks, the measures of right and wrong might be made out, to any one who will apply himself with the same Indifferency and Attention to the one, as he does to the other of these Sciences. (3.11.16; 4.3.18)

Let us then explore the grounds for this remarkable proposition. Locke's suggestion of an analogy between ethics and mathematics rests decisively on the contention that the main constituents of moral discourses are not the ideas and names of substances, but rather those of modes, in particular mixed modes, and relations.

To conceive rightly of Moral Actions, we must first take notice of them, under this two-fold Consideration. First, As they are in themselves each made up of such a Collection of simple Ideas. Thus Drunkenness, or Lying, signify such or such a Collection of simple Ideas, which I call mixed Modes...Secondly, our Actions are considered, as Good, Bad, or Indifferent; and in this respect, they are Relative, it being their Conformity to, or Disagreement with some Rule, that makes them to be regular or irregular, Good or Bad: and so, as far as they are compared with a Rule, and thereupon denominated, they come under Relation. (2.28.15)

Of primary importance in this regard are the complex ideas that Locke calls "mixed modes." As Locke defines it, a mixed mode (in distinction from a simple mode) is a mode "compounded of simple Ideas of several kinds," such as, for example, the idea of "Beauty, consisting of a certain composition of Colour and Figure, causing delight in the Beholder" (2.12.5). Mixed modes supply "the greatest part of the Words made use of in Divinity, Ethicks, Law, and Politicks, and several other Sciences" (2.22.12). Like

ideas of substance, they are general, standing for "sorts or Species of Things" (3.5.1). They enable us to classify (among other things) kinds of actions: "...Power and Action make the greatest part of mixed Modes" (2.22.12). They are the complex ideas by which we define such concepts as (to use Locke's examples) justice, sacrilege, adultery, murder, and parricide, among innumerable others. (See ECHU 3.5 passim.) In addition, and in contrast to substances, mixed modes are formed "very arbitrarily, made without Patterns, or reference to any real Existence" (3.5.3). They are formed, that is, without any necessary supposition that their constituent ideas constantly coexist, or indeed have ever coexisted in the world external to the mind. They have "no particular foundation in Nature" (3.5.10). They consist in "fleeting, and transient Combinations of simple Ideas, which have but a short existence any where, but in the Minds of Men" (2.22.8). They are essentially no more than hypothetical constructs or definitions. With regard to the idea of murder, for instance, Locke asks rhetorically: "For what greater connexion in Nature, has the Idea of a Man, than the Idea of a Sheep with Killing, that this is made a particular Species of Action, signified by the word Murder, and the other not?" (3.5.6). In the mass of ideas, or of more-or-less transient associations of ideas that the world presents to human perception, the action of killing claims many objects in addition to human

beings (and, we might add, is performed as well by many subjects or agents other than human beings). The formation of the complex idea to which we refer the name "murder," the combining of the ideas of killing and innocence and human being, is therefore a free act of the understanding, an act of abstraction no more compelled by the desire to represent faithfully an external order than would be the formation of any of the other literally innumerable possible combinations of ideas that our experience suggests to us. When we frame an idea of stealing, or of murder, we are in effect positing that if or when someone takes another's property without the latter's consent, or if or when someone intentionally kills an innocent human being, we will consider in combination all the simple ideas that are constituents of such an action, forming a single complex idea of that kind of action and attaching to it a single name.

More fundamentally, Locke argues that the fact that "this sort of complex Ideas may be made, abstracted, and have names given them, and so a Species be constituted, before any one individual of that Species ever existed" puts beyond doubt the essentially arbitrary or voluntary character of their formation (3.5.5). For those who see in Locke an authentic moral-political radicalism, this point is of decisive significance. The arbitrary or hypothetical character of mixed-mode ideas implies that the names of

mixed modes function not merely as designations of particular actions, but are in an important sense constitutive of particular actions: "in mixed Modes...it is the Name that seems to preserve those Essences, and give them their lasting duration" (3.5.10, also 11).¹⁹ As Locke explains it in his own terminology, this means that our "complex Ideas of Modes, being voluntary Collections of simple Ideas, which the Mind puts together, without reference to any real Archetypes... are, and cannot but be adequate Ideas" (2.31.3). Because they are themselves archetypes, not ectypes or "copies" (2.31.12ff.), and thus are not intended to represent "things really existing," the distinction between real and nominal essences is irrelevant to them (3.3.18). Since they are nothing but products of the understanding, mixed-mode ideas are in principle perfectly definable (3.11.15); indeed in a sense our definitions of them must be perfect definitions, must be "not capable of any Deformity, being made with no reference to any thing but [themselves]" (2.30.4). It is ultimately for this reason, according to Locke's argument,

...that moral Knowledge is as capable of real Certainty, as Mathematicks. For Certainty being but the Perception of the Agreement, or Disagreement of our Ideas; and Demonstration being nothing but the Perception of such Agreement, by the Intervention of other Ideas, or Mediums, our moral Ideas, as well as mathematical, being Archetypes themselves, and so adequate, and complete Ideas, all the Agreement, or Disagreement, which we shall find in them, will

¹⁹Cf. Aronson and Lewis 1970, 195-196; Miller 1979, 178-184.

produce real Knowledge, as well as in mathematical Figures.
(4.4.7)

To the extent that the terms of moral propositions consist in the names of mixed modes and relations, of ideas that are perfectly, precisely definable, it is in principle possible to construct a deductive or demonstrative system of ethics. Ethical science would then involve simply the settling of the relevant definitions, the formulation of rules to designate particular sorts of actions as right or wrong, virtuous or vicious, and the judgment of individual cases to determine the character of actions and their conformity with the relevant rules.

Furthermore, in anticipation of the objection that it would be absurd to conceive of an ethical system without also conceiving of the subjects of its rules, and therefore that the presence of substance ideas in any ethical system is unavoidable, Locke maintains that the "Names of Substances, if they be used in them, as they should, can no more disturb Moral, than they do Mathematical Discourses." In moral discourses conducted in a fully self-conscious manner, the natures or definitions of substances are "not so much enquir'd into, as supposed." In employing the concept of "Man" as a being "subject to Law," for instance, Locke argues that

We mean nothing by Man, but a corporeal Rational Creature: What the real Essence or other Qualities of that Creature are in this case, is no way considered. And therefore, whether a Child or Changeling be a Man in a physical Sense, may amongst the Naturalists be as

disputable as it will, it concerns not at all the moral Man, as I may call him, which is this immoveable unchangeable Idea, a corporeal rational Being. (3.11.16)

We may frame arbitrarily the relevant substance idea, in other words, merely by gathering together the qualities constitutive of moral agency or personhood, in abstraction from whether such qualities actually characterize beings existing in nature. It would seem then that in an act of resignation in the face of the impenetrable mysteriousness of our substance ideas, Locke is forced to construct in the Essay a doctrine of morality upon a foundation wholly different from that supposed in the Second Treatise. Thus he argues that the darkness or narrowness of human understanding, however frustrating to our aspiration toward a complete, genuine science of nature, constitutes in the end no truly serious incapacity, in that it does not incapacitate us for moral knowledge. We might even experience a recognition of this unilluminable darkness as liberating; Locke professes to regard moral inquiries as "most suited to our natural Capacities" (4.12.11), as ultimately more fruitful than discourses in "natural Philosophy" (3.11.17), precisely because they require, according to this argument, no such nonhypothetical, natural foundation.²⁰

²⁰Among "the main ideological objectives of the Essay," writes Tully, is "to prove the potential certainty and scientific status of moral and political knowledge and to illuminate its superiority over knowledge of the natural world" (1980, 26; see in general 8-34). Cf. Grant 1987, 12-51.

This suggestion of the possibility of a demonstrative science of ethics raises questions that have troubled virtually all those who have commented on it.²¹ If we may leave aside for the moment the general question of the unity or coherence of Locke's thought, of particular importance here is the question of the foundation of the proposed mixed-mode morality. With respect to the formation of moral ideas and names, Locke claims that "what liberty Adam had at first...the same have all Men ever since had" (3.6.51). In principle, in other words, we are all in a mental state of nature, a state of "perfect Freedom" to frame moral ideas as we will; in stark contrast to his apparent conception of nonhuman or physical nature as a realm of pure determinacy, Locke may seem to conceive of the natural human condition as one of perfect freedom or of free creativity. But like the state of nature described in the Second Treatise--in fact these two states of nature are in some sense the same--this condition of perfect mental freedom is an untenable condition. Absent any regulating principle, such liberty would engender a condition "like

²¹The most common objections focus on the trifling character of the propositions that could be generated in such a system, on the incapacity of a purely definitional system of ethics to provide an adequate account of moral obligation, and, as we will see presently, on the tendency of such a system to collapse into relativism. Cf. Gibson 1896, 38,50; Lamprecht 1917, 76,78; Von Leyden 1954, 55; Aaron 1955, 262-4; Ashcraft 1969, 210ff; Gough 1973, 8; Parry 1978, 3; Miller 1979, 181; Milton 1981, 140; Dunn 1984, 65ff,84.

that of Babel" (3.6.28), inevitably involving precisely the inconveniences that move rational human beings to quit the state of nature in the Second Treatise' account.²² Locke imagines an interlocutor rendering the objection as follows:

...if moral Knowledge be placed in the Contemplation of our own moral Ideas, and those, as other Modes, be of our own making, What strange Notions will there be of Justice and Temperance? What confusion of Vertues and Vices, if every one may make what Ideas of them he pleases? (4.4.9)

Mindful of the claim that our moral definitions are in the decisive respect the products of the understanding, made "very arbitrarily," one must ask in the spirit of the Two Treatises: Who frames and who authorizes these definitions? According to what standards, or in pursuance of what ends, are they made? In the Essay's discussion of moral relations, Locke observes that the "Laws that Men generally refer their Actions to, to judge of their Rectitude, or Obliquity, seem to me to be these three. 1. The Divine Law. 2. The Civil Law. 3. The Law of Opinion or Reputation..." (2.28.7). Of the three as Locke describes them here, only the divine law can facilitate judgments concerning which actions are "in their own nature right and wrong"; the contents of the others are in the decisive respect relative to "the several Nations and Societies of

²²Cf. TT II.13,20,123,125,127,128. Colman observes that "much of Locke's text does leave him open" to the objection that he "has given an account of an essentially private language" (1983, 110; 107-137).

Men in the World" (2.28.10). Locke thus insists upon preserving some notion of a true law against which all human laws may be measured, and thus resists endorsing outright the relativistic proposition that there can be no measure of right and wrong or of virtue and vice save the various definitions proceeding from the "different Temper, Education, Fashion, Maxims, or Interest of different sorts of Men..." (2.28.11).²³ Yet in this insistence upon the "eternal and unalterable nature of right and wrong," he may seem merely to reproduce the conundrum with which he left the readers of the Second Treatise. The "Divine Law" is promulgated, he repeats, "by the light of Nature, or the voice of Revelation" (2.28.8).²⁴ If, as we have shown above,²⁵ he fails to explain how we can prove the authenticity of a claim to revelation, and if he believes that knowledge of nature is beyond the grasp of the human understanding, then how does he propose to defend the distinction between the rational and the actual in morality, between the true, divine or natural law and the purely human,

²³See Locke's response to this objection of Lowde, appended as a footnote to ECHU 2.28.11, and also his letter to Tyrrell of 8/4/90.

²⁴See also ECHU 4.3.18 and 4.13.3, where Locke suggests that the notion of an intelligent Creator is sufficient to serve as a first principle in a demonstration of a nonrelative system of ethics.

²⁵See ch. II above, pp. 69-72.

conventional laws?²⁶

Locke observes that in actuality we tend to construct moral ideas neither wholly arbitrarily or without reason, nor to represent "the truth and extent of Things," but rather according to "the use of common Life," or to serve our own convenience (3.5.7, 2.28.2).²⁷ This appears to mean no more than that in framing or acquiring such ideas and rules, we rely upon the common usages of our respective communities (2.2.9, 3.5.15).²⁸ What is significant here, however, is that Locke at times appeals to common usage not only as the actual standard, but also as "the Rule of Propriety" (3.9.8; also 2.30.4), as the proper or rational

²⁶Grant appears ultimately to rest her case for the "reasonable and serious" character of Locke's defense of the possibility of demonstrative moral knowledge upon the fact that we are the "workmanship of the Supreme Being" whose will the law of nature expresses; yet she concedes that "A great deal more would have to be said and demonstrated before Locke's position could be considered a complete and persuasive ethical theory," and that "Locke's theological claims particularly require further argument" (1987, 26,48).

²⁷Cf. Miller's observation that "Locke's position is not far from the view that language is 'practical consciousness'" (1979, 181).

²⁸Thus Locke affirms the practical primacy of both the civil law and the law of opinion relative to the divine law. The civil law "no body over-looks," just as "no Body, that has the least Thought, or Sense of a Man about him, can live in Society, under the constant Dislike, and ill Opinion of his Familiars"; whereas the "Penalties that attend the breach of God's Laws, some, nay, perhaps, most Men seldom seriously reflect on" (2.28.9,12). On the significance of Locke's estimate of the great power of the desire for esteem to bind individuals to their fellows and to their communities, see Tarcov 1984, 101-107, 137-141; Pangle 1988, 221-229.

standard for regulating the formation of moral ideas and rules. "For Words, especially of Languages already framed, being no Man's private possession...Men...must also take care, to apply their Words, as near as may be, to such Ideas as Common Use has annexed them to" (3.11.11). On the basis of this apparent belief in the adequacy of common usage as a regulatory standard, Locke the moral philosopher might superficially appear to be an ancestor of Edmund Burke, in espousing a form of moral conservatism rooted in the conviction that there is wisdom embodied in the tested traditions of various communities, and that therefore moral innovations are generally to be eschewed. He does caution that "in Places, where Men in Society have already established a Language amongst them, the signification of Words are [sic] very warily and sparingly to be alter'd" (3.6.51; also 4.4.10).

As a moment's reflection shows, however, from this apparent assertion of the adequacy of common usage arises the central difficulty in Locke's account of a "demonstrative" ethical science. That we form moral ideas and words according to our convenience means that we do so more-or-less self-consciously according to perceived need or desire. But if our ignorance of species essences is insuperable, then it would be impossible for us to frame such ideas on the basis of a universal or natural standard of needs or desires. Locke admits that common usage is at

best relative to communities or cultures and that it therefore provides "but a very uncertain Rule...a very variable Standard" for the regulation of moral discourse (3.11.25; also 3.9.8). If the standard of common usage is ultimately relativistic, then its regulatory capacity is ultimately illusory; reliance upon the radically conventional standard of common usage could resolve none of the problems proceeding from the unregulated construction of moral ideas, because it could provide no means of adjudicating the differences between opposing ethical systems. Insofar as our formation of substance and species ideas is arbitrary, our formation of moral ideas must be arbitrary as well. It is true, of course, that Locke distinguishes common or civil from philosophic usage (3.9.3), and thereby suggests the possibility of improving upon the former by appealing to the latter. Given, however, that mixed-mode ideas "have no certain connexion in Nature; and so no settled Standard, any where in Nature existing, to rectify and adjust them by" (3.9.5), it would seem to follow that this improvement can consist in no more than an analytical clarification of the moral ideas in common use, involving no critical assessment of their basic content (3.11.11ff.). If Locke indeed holds that the decisive difference between civil and philosophic usage of moral language consists merely in the superior precision or exactness of the latter (3.9.3), then Locke must affirm the necessarily conven-

tional or historical character of all moral discourse, civil and philosophic alike.²⁹

At this point it would seem that the Essay's ostensibly reassuring moral conservatism reveals itself to be merely the decent drapery of a profound radicalism lying at the heart of Locke's adoption of the standard of common usage.³⁰ His apparent counsel of deference to the accepted usages of one's community dissolves upon contact with his apparent affirmation of the basic conventionalism of those usages. What authority can be claimed for a body of common usage that "reduces it self at last to the Ideas of particular Men" (3.11.25)?³¹ Locke's account of a demonstrative science of ethics culminates, according to this argument, in a renewal of the paradoxical Hobbesian partnership of authoritarianism and revolutionary radicalism. If Locke conceives of moral and political science as a matter of pure, arbitrary definition, does he not then reduce that science to a counsel of submission to the authority of the most powerful definer? And if the basis of that authority

²⁹Absent a convincing argument for the existence of a legislating God, according to Ashcraft, Locke's proposal of a demonstrative science of ethics must sink into a "morass of total relativism" (1969, 211). Cf. Parry 1978, 34.

³⁰Cf. Strauss' objection to the ostensible conservatism of Burke (1953, 311-323).

³¹Cf. 3.11.12: Immediately after recommending a deference to common usage, Locke excepts those who "in the Improvement of their Knowledge, come to have Ideas different from the vulgar and ordinary received ones..."

is purely conventional, consisting decisively in the power of the defining or commanding will, then could there be any motive or ground for submitting to it, other than the timidity of those who believe themselves insufficiently powerful to command? Conversely, would not a purely definitional, conventional political science thus embolden the rebellious or revolutionary aspirations of all those sufficiently proud or rash to believe themselves capable of commanding?

The argument of the Essay thus reveals, in this view, the deeply radical significance of Locke's conception in the Second Treatise of the natural condition as a condition of waste or unprovidedness,³² and of his corollary description of the law of nature as "unwritten, and so nowhere to be found but in the minds of Men" (TT II.136).³³ Notwithstanding Locke's ostensible reassurances, it would seem that the constructive activity of Lockean humanity as homo faber is if anything more prominent in the sphere of morality than in that of physical nature.³⁴ Applied in the

³²For Pangle Locke's critique of innatism or his affirmation of the mind's natural unprovidedness thus amounts to a "denial of all moral first principles" (1988, 176ff). Cf. Vaughan 1925, 139,163ff; Wallin 1984, 155-156.

³³Cf. Strauss 1953, 226-230.

³⁴Thus a younger Locke observes that the laws of nature are "hidden and unperceived," akin to wealth "which has been hidden in the darkness" and "must be excavated with great labor" (LN I.111; II.135). On the Lockean human being as homo faber, see Wood 1983, 34,157ff. On the related concept of workmanship as the central principle of

former sphere, Locke's apparently modest counsel that we rest "in a quiet Ignorance of those Things...beyond the reach of our Capacities" (1.1.4) loses altogether its appearance of modesty. All law is purely human or positive law; no person's or party's definition of justice can be said to be intrinsically superior, truer, than another's. In Jeffrey Wallin's forceful distillation of the significance of this teaching, according to Locke's Essay "the discourse of politics, hitherto naively thought to be constituted by disputes over justice and the common good, can be better understood as a battle of wills regarding the question of whose mental image of justice is to prevail" (1984, 154).³⁵ The naked essence of Lockean politics, viewed in the light of this reading of the Essay, is nothing but will-to-power.

Lockean morality, see Tully 1980, 3,22-42,109ff,121ff.

³⁵See also Strauss 1953, 248-251; Zuckert 1974, 561-563; Miller 1979; West 1988, 21-29.

THE DEFENSE OF NATURAL HISTORY

In attempting to formulate a response to this reading, it is worthwhile for us to begin by noticing what we might call the strikingly "anti-Lockean" character of the teaching thus attributed to Locke. In the light of this reading of the Essay, the philosopher with a reputation perhaps unsurpassed as a teacher of rational liberty and of resistance to arbitrary power appears instead to deny that any particular conception of justice could be superior in truth or rationality to any other, and thus to espouse the most unrestrained moral and political willfulness. The same Locke who insists against the evils of extreme partisanship that "there cannot be a more dangerous thing to rely on" than "the Opinion of others" (ECHU 4.15.6; also 4.12.4), and who warns that it is no "small power it gives one Man over another, to have the Authority to be the Dictator of Principles..." (1.4.24), nonetheless proposes a science of ethics that would have the effect of reducing all conceptions of justice to expressions of pure partisanship, and thereby provides theoretical support for assertions of absolute and arbitrary power. The same Locke who affirms that "civil government is the proper remedy for the inconveniences of the state of nature" (TT II.13) also effectively undermines the distinction between the natural

and political conditions by implying that in the latter no less than in the former, the cardinal virtues are force and fraud. The argument of the Essay according to this view undermines virtually all the principles Locke professes to hold dear, all the principles that he has gained enduring honor by publicly defending.

Those who find in Locke's work such fundamental and flagrant inconsistencies tend to explain them in either of two ways. The more traditional, mainstream explanation holds that Locke is simply confused; as John Dunn expresses it, Locke's thinking is "profoundly and exotically incoherent" (1969, 29). Similar is the opinion of Peter Laslett, who concludes sweepingly that "all thinkers are inconsistent," and who nonetheless finds the case of Locke extraordinary: "Locke is, perhaps, the least consistent of all the great philosophers" (1960, 103, 95). Some commentators imply further that Locke is not only confused, but is also aware of and embarrassed by his confusions; Wolfgang Von Leyden believes, for instance, that Locke's failure to elaborate fully his proposed science of ethics reflects the fact that he was at a loss to do so (1954, 74-75), while Dunn more recently argues that after a series of abortive attempts at such an elaboration, Locke in hopeless resignation simply gave up this aspiration by 1694 (1984, 66,

84).³⁶ Pursuing this reading still further, Laslett even suggests that the contradictory relation between the Essay and the Two Treatises "may have been one of the reasons why Locke was unwilling to be known as the author of both books" (95).

The alternative account, recovered³⁷ and made prominent in recent years by Leo Strauss, explains the difficult relation between the Essay and the Two Treatises by reference to a more coherent intention on the part of Locke to address those works to distinct audiences:

Above all, the accepted interpretation does not pay sufficient attention to the character of the Treatise; it somehow assumes that the Treatise contains the philosophic presentation of Locke's political doctrine, whereas it contains, in fact, only its "civil" presentation. In the Treatise, it is less Locke the philosopher than Locke the Englishman who addresses not philosophers, but Englishmen. (Strauss 1953, 220-221)³⁸

But if the Essay presents the truth underlying the civil presentation of the Treatise, then it would seem to follow that the latter's accounts of natural laws and natural

³⁶A somewhat milder statement of the thesis that Locke's failure to elaborate fully his proposed ethical science reflects an incapacity on his part appears in Parry 1978, 33ff.

³⁷The suspicion that Locke is a self-concealed follower of Hobbes and Spinoza was widespread in the 1690s and beyond. See Works 1823, 4.471 for Locke's response to Stillingfleet's charge to this effect. Cf. idem 8.420-421. For a more general accounting of the charges leveled against the Essay by Locke's contemporaries, see Yolton 1956, especially 144-166; also Cox 1960, 19-28.

³⁸For Locke's distinction between civil and philosophic discourse, cf. ECHU 3.9.3,8,15, with TT II.52, and I.109. See also Zuckert 1974.

rights are alike merely civil or exoteric, that the Essay's apparent demolition of ontologically based theories of morality or justice represents Locke's authentic intention: "In a word, the law of nature is 'a creature of the understanding rather than a work of nature'; it is 'barely in the mind,' a notion, and not 'in the things themselves'" (1953, 229-230).³⁹ The implication seems to be that in place of the Locke of the traditionalists--muddled even to the point of tragedy (Dunn 1984, vi-vii), but well intentioned and thus comparatively benign--we confront according to the Straussian reading a positively perverse and even nihilistic Locke, a Locke inspired by an insight into the "demonism of values," whose public rejection of political willfulness paradoxically represents in itself nothing more than a self-conscious assertion of political willfulness.

As we proceed in elaborating a somewhat different view of Locke, we will have occasion to acknowledge the considerable merits of each of these readings; at present, however, in beginning to lay the foundation for that alternative view, it is necessary to point out some possible difficulties. Of the more traditional critics, for in-

³⁹Strauss' references are to ECHU 3.5.12. See also West 1988, 3,21-29; Wallin 1984; Miller 1979. On the basis of the natural law, Tully also reads the Two Treatises in the light of the Essay, but he stops short of drawing the nihilistic conclusion implicit in the Straussian reading. In his view, Locke's employment of the language of natural law is based upon a self-conscious historicism that circumscribes moral discourse by "the constitutive and regulative ideas of a given culture" (1980, 22-30).

stance, we might question the likelihood that a thinker who is sufficiently competent to elaborate a thoroughgoing, radical critique of the old Aristotelian-Scholastic epistemology and natural philosophy could be at the same time incapable of seeing that that critique dissolved the foundation of his own ethical and political thought.⁴⁰ Or, furthermore, if he were aware of such an inconsistency, how likely is it that a writer so evidently fastidious about his published work as Locke⁴¹ would not attempt to correct it? And finally, if for whatever reason Locke desired to advance a doctrine of natural law that he knew he could not defend, how likely is it that this desire could overpower his respect for the truth in the writing of one work, but not the other?

The esotericism thesis renders a subtler and more philosophically formidable Locke, one far less captivated by intellectual fashion or custom than the Locke of the traditionalists. Yet here too questions linger. Of these the most significant concerns whether the attribution to Locke of a fundamentally nihilistic epistemology can render an adequate account of Locke's moral and political intentions as they are manifested both in his writings and in his more direct engagements. In view of the facts that he

⁴⁰Cf. Strauss 1953, 220: Locke's alleged inconsistencies "are so obvious that they cannot have escaped the notice of a man of his rank and his sobriety."

⁴¹See Laslett 1960, 19-22, 164.

not only presented himself as the great enemy of all governmental authoritarianism and willfulness; that he not only explicitly recognized that the power to define moral rules implies the power to dominate; but also, and above all, that he placed himself in mortal danger in the service of the cause of rational liberty; is it not strange to suggest that Locke believed, deep down, that justice is wholly definitional or conventional, or that there is ultimately no ground for any distinction between legitimate and illegitimate government or between rational and irrational consent? In view of such facts, we might well wonder whether the proponents of the esotericism thesis in the end view Locke as a fully self-conscious nihilist or instead merely find in his work a nihilistic strain that points not to a coherent intention, but only to a deeper inconsistency than the traditionalists allege--an inconsistency that proceeds fundamentally not from a half-hearted embrace of the teaching of Hobbes, perhaps tinged with a Christian bad conscience, but rather from a nearly whole-hearted adoption of that teaching and therewith of its own peculiar difficulties.⁴²

⁴²Though he seems at several points to imply such a charge, Strauss does not openly accuse Locke of harboring a nihilistic intention. On the other hand, he does not overtly accuse Locke of inconsistency, but one might easily infer such a charge from the fact that in the matter of the natural law, according to Strauss, Locke "followed the lead given by Hobbes" (1953, 221), whom Strauss accuses of fundamental inconsistencies of his own (1953, 267-281; 1959, 182, 191, 196). This ambiguity has marked some of the writ-

It is by no means impossible, of course, that Locke's political thought really does suffer from confusion at one level or another, or that Locke really was a nihilist who by some unaccountable intention espoused exoterically a relatively moderate but ultimately groundless doctrine of natural rights liberalism. The present reconsideration originates less in a certainty of the erroneousness of such readings than in a kind of principled caution with respect to their endorsement. Nathan Tarcov maintains that "If... we hope to learn something from Locke, then the verdict of confusion ought to be only our last resort and we had better explore other avenues of interpretation" (1981, 200). To this we might add that this relegation of the "verdict of confusion" to the status of an interpretive last resort should apply equally well to the verdict of Lockean arbitrariness. Therefore, we come once again to raise the question: Is there no reasonable alternative to believing that the mature Locke's career-long devotion to the cause of free government proceeded from a mere personal or partisan idiosyncrasy, that it represented, whether he

ing on Locke by Strauss' students or followers as well. Thus Miller refers to the "enormous" difficulties in the attempt at finding in Locke a coherent account of natural law (1979, 187), and Hiram Caton views Locke's teaching as an incoherent attempt at diluting the implications of the philosophy of power that is the defining element of modernity (1983, 8-9); while Wallin and Thomas West clearly emphasize Locke's role as a progenitor of nihilism, and appear to attribute to him a higher degree of self-consciousness as such (Wallin 1984, especially 153-157; West 1988, especially 22,26).

understood it or not, a mere irrational "commitment"? Abundant textual and bibliographic evidence establishes clearly Locke's awareness of the diversity of moral conceptions, both theoretical and historical, among thinkers and actual communities, and thus of alternatives to his own conception.⁴³ Moreover, there is no evidence to indicate either that he believed in the short-term or long-term inevitability of victory for the doctrine of just government that he espoused, or that such a consideration might have influenced him, had he so believed. Does this not suggest that Locke chose, and thus preferred to espouse his particular doctrine of justice? And if so, then what are the grounds for this choice?⁴⁴ Why or in what sense did

⁴³For some comparatively benign, theoretical examples of such diversity, see ECHU 1.3.5, 4.12.4. Some of the more spectacular and grotesque examples appear in ECHU 1.3.9,10,13; TT I.54-60; LN IV.145-151, VII.177-201. See more generally the bibliographic information in Harrison and Laslett 1971.

⁴⁴It would not yet do justice to the element of choice in his espousal of (what we now know as) political liberalism merely to establish somehow, in modification of the arguments of MacPherson and Wood, that Locke intends to rationalize the interests of an ascendant capitalist class. If it is the effect of his epistemology to deny in principle that a "capitalist" conception of justice could be any more defensible than any other conception of justice, then his espousal of such a conception must again reduce ultimately to a mere idiosyncrasy, or to a failure to reflect upon the accidental character of his association with that class. Pangle suggests intriguingly that Locke's political thought does indeed proceed from an intention to advance the interests of a particular class, but that the class in question comprises the philosophers; yet even this intention, according to Pangle, remains arbitrary at least from the point of view of Locke's reader, in that Locke fails or declines to render an account of the experience of the

Locke apparently believe that he could erect a defensible doctrine of justice or legitimacy on the basis of his understanding of nature or of human knowledge?

In reassessing the significance of Locke's critical analysis of our ideas of species, it is useful for us to begin with a partial concession. It is no part of the present purpose to deny, in the face of the plain words of his text, that Locke does emphatically reject the old doctrine of natural species. The question of interest here concerns not the fact that he does this but rather his broader intention. Locke places great emphasis on his critique, elaborating it with unusual vigor; he gives the impression that he considers its rejection to be of great importance. If in fact he intends to create such an impression, then in order for us to understand the precise nature, scope and (possible) limitations of his critique, we must understand why he believes it important to render this critique, what purpose he intends it to serve.

Locke believes he shall be pardoned for dwelling so long on the question of essences, "because the Faults, Men are usually guilty of in this kind, are not only the greatest hinderances of true Knowledge; but are so well thought of, as to pass for it" (3.5.16). As this remark indicates, the faults with which Locke is concerned neither originate in nor are limited to the scholastic philoso-

phers. Nonetheless, the manner in which these influential faults constitute such profound hindrances of the advancement of learning comes most clearly into view when we consider his critical analyses of the doctrines of substance and natural species in the context of his more general critique of the teachings of Scholasticism. Like his predecessors Bacon and Hobbes,⁴⁵ Locke is uncompromising concerning the pernicious general influence of the scholastic "Men of Argument" (3.11.3) over the universities of the day. Moreover, he maintains that the errors of the latter concerning species and essences ultimately represent only particularly important instances of the fundamental error of the scholastic philosophy. In holding "that the several Species of Substances had their distinct internal substantial Forms; and that it was those Forms, which made the distinction of Substances into their true Species and Genera" (3.6.10), Locke's scholastics hold that there exists a direct correspondence between the (properly cultivated) understanding and the external, natural world. They hold that natural species essences not only exist, but are in principle perfectly intelligible to us; our names and definitions of various kinds of substances constitute perfectly adequate representations of the order of things articulated in nature. In this respect like those who

⁴⁵Cf. Leviathan chs. 8,46,47; "The Great Instauration"; The New Organon, I, I-XXXVII (in Anderson 1960).

possess only a purely prescientific or commonsense understanding of the world, they erroneously "suppose their words to stand also for the reality of Things" (3.2.5; also 2.13.18, 3.9.5, 3.10.14ff., 3.11.6, 4.4.17, 4.7.15; CU 29).

It is not difficult to see why Locke blames this supposition, however benign it may be in its everyday manifestations, for the obstruction of scientific progress.

For in treating their names of substances and species as though they were authorized by nature itself, or in Locke's terminology as though they were themselves "archetypes" and not "ectypes" or copies, the scholastics must render themselves obtuse to the need to refine or correct their definitions by reference to empirical reality. The result of their fundamental error is then a particularly dogmatic attempt at grounding natural science in "the bare Contemplation of...abstract Ideas" (4.12.9), or in a barren, abstract rationalism according to which the careful deduction of the consequences of applying one's "maxims" or "principles" to one's received substance or species ideas can somehow yield genuine knowledge of nature (4.7.11ff., 4.8.9ff.). Given the natural variations among different individuals' substance and species ideas, a conception of natural science as nothing but a body of deductions based upon the application of maxims to those ideas is bound to produce considerable dispute or dissensus. Moreover, by virtue of its very abstraction, or of the fact that its

supposed discoveries proceed purely from deductive reasoning, the scholastic natural science tends to carry an unreasonable expectation of demonstrative certainty as its proper yield. Given further, therefore, this demand for certainty that is a concomitant of any deductive science, it follows that the scholastic natural science will produce virtually infinite and endless disputes, in direct proportion to its tendency to inflate the dogmatic "confidence of mistaken Pretenders to a knowledge that they had not" (3.8.2; also 3.6.49, 3.10.21). Its likely culmination, according to Locke, will be its own collapse into a "perfect Scepticism" or an extreme epistemological willfulness (1.1.7; 3.10.22).⁴⁶

What we are suggesting is that Locke fashions his critique of the methods and doctrines of the scholastics with a view toward preparing a remedy for what he takes to be their more pernicious consequences. For such a disease

⁴⁶Nor should this account of the generally pernicious effects of the scholastic teaching obscure its potential for producing more particular evils as well. Locke fears that to be overly assured of the adequacy of one's idea of humanity, for instance, is to be tempted all too often to use that idea to define out of humanity beings deficient in one quality or another. We mentioned in the preceding chapter his account of the alarming case of the eminently rational Abbot of St. Martin, whose native disfigurement brought him as a child "very near being excluded out of the Species of Man" by those entrusted with his care (3.6.26). At least a part of Locke's intention is clearly to insist, on grounds of compassion or "humanitarianism," that our ideas of species and of the human species in particular are far from precise enough to provide a basis for deciding questions of entitlement to baptism, let alone of life or death (3.6.27, 3.11.20, 4.4.14ff.).

as Locke diagnoses, an assertion of the insuperable arbitrariness of all our claims to knowledge of the external world would surely constitute a highly peculiar remedy. The present contention is rather that the therapeutic purpose he intends it to serve limits the destructive character of his critique; Locke's critique becomes fully intelligible only if we take seriously his stated intention thereby to remove the greatest hindrance of the acquisition of "true knowledge" and to prevent the collapse of science into "perfect Scepticism." It is in the context of his complaints against the philosophers of the schools that we should understand the profession of modesty or moderation with which he introduces the Essay. Repudiating as the product of an intellectual vice the indiscriminating scholastic demand for certainty in all fields of inquiry, Locke cautions that "we shall then use our Understandings right, when we entertain all Objects in that Way and Proportion, that they are suited to our Faculties...and not peremptorily, or intemperately require Demonstration, and demand Certainty, where Probability only is to be had..." (1.1.5). Similarly, with reference to the closely related quality of abstraction in the scholastic natural science, Locke objects to the practice of "some Philosophers" who would "believe [their] Reason (for so Men improperly call Arguments drawn from their Principles) against their Senses" (4.20.10; also 4.3.16).

The implication is that Locke's critique of the scholastic doctrines of substance and natural species is governed by an intention not to assert a new and possibly more virulent form of arbitrariness in place of the older form, but instead to facilitate a defense of empirical, probabilistic reasoning as the basis of a genuine science of nature. Having denied the possibility of a strict, demonstrative natural science on grounds essentially the same as those supporting his rejection of the doctrine of natural species, Locke hastens to add that he "would not therefore be thought to dis-esteem, or dissuade the Study of Nature" (4.12.11). The impossibility of demonstrative certainty concerning the necessary relations among some ideas does not imply the futility of such study; it merely means that as compared to inquiries such as mathematics that involve ideas that are the mind's own creations or archetypes, the proper study of nature differs in its methods and in the type of knowledge or assent that it can produce. "We must therefore...adapt our methods of Enquiry to the nature of the Ideas we examine, and the Truth we search after" (4.12.7).⁴⁷ As Locke understands it, we confront in the object of his critique the paradox of a doctrine of natural species and by extension of natural science that leads its adherents away from nature, away

⁴⁷Ryle holds that Locke's major contribution to philosophy lies in his division of the sciences (1968 [1933], 38). Cf. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 1094b.

from the proper objects of inquiry for a true science of nature. He therefore insists repeatedly on the need to return to "the Fountains of Knowledge, which are in Things themselves" as the proper remedy for the hyper-rationalist scholastic abuses (3.11.5; also 3.10.22,25; 3.11.24,25; 4.4.16,18; 4.8.10).⁴⁸ The proper method of inquiry into the world of nature involves not abstract deductive reasoning about names, but rather inductive, probabilistic reasoning based upon the careful accumulation of "Experience," or "Observation" (4.12.12, also 14; 4.3.16).⁴⁹ Choosing to employ the contemporary usage, Locke calls this method "Natural History."

Let us consider more carefully Locke's defense of the legitimacy and utility of probabilistic reasoning in the natural sciences. In view of the fact that we cannot be certain of cause-effect relationships, the basic question appropriate to the sort of natural science of which we are capable concerns the degree of confidence with which we are entitled to make experimental or inductive judgments. In his discussion "Of the Degrees of Assent," Locke affirms

⁴⁸On the revolt of the early modern empiricists or proponents of the new "experimental philosophy" against the scholastic "orgy of rationalism," see Whitehead 1925, 12-24, 57ff. On Locke's critique as an instance of this revolt, see Mandelbaum 1964, 7-8, 53ff; Yolton 1969, 188-193; 1970, 44-75, especially 54ff; Squadrito 1979, 28-29, 126.

⁴⁹On Locke's insistence upon probabilism over against certainty as the standard of assent proper to the natural sciences, see Yolton 1969, 189ff; also Shapiro 1983, 3-73.

that in several degrees "Probability...carries so much evidence with it, that it naturally determines the Judgment," so that assent that falls short of certainty can nonetheless rise decisively above mere "Belief" or "Conjecture" (4.16.9). In the lowest of such degrees, Locke observes that with respect to "things that happen indifferently...when any particular matter of fact is vouched for by the concurrent Testimony of unsuspected Witnesses, there our Assent is...unavoidable." Providing still firmer ground is the corroboration of our own Experience by "many and undoubted Witnesses." The testimony of "History giving us such an account of Men in all Ages; and my own Experience..confirming it," for instance, the truth of the proposition "that most Men prefer their private Advantage, to the publick" is extremely probable (4.16.8,7).

Finally, Locke describes the "first...and highest degree of Probability" in terms that make clear its great significance for his account of natural science. When "the general consent of all Men, in all Ages, as far as it can be known, concurs with a Man's constant and never-failing Experience in like cases," Locke holds that we can with virtually perfect assurance make judgments concerning particular matters of fact. Probabilities of this degree reach "so near to Certainty, that they govern our Thoughts as absolutely, and influence all our Actions as fully, as the most evident demonstration" (4.16.6; also 4.20.15ff.).

Even if we do not observe the particular events, we can "put past doubt" the propositions that fire warmed someone and melted lead and that a piece of iron sank in water and floated in mercury, because they conform with our constant experience and are never controverted. In striking contrast to his emphasis in rejecting the naturalness of species, Locke maintains here that on the basis of such evidence we can infer that in the highest probability it is in the nature of fire and lead so to behave. When we find certain occurrences "always to be after the same manner," as in the cases of "the stated Constitutions and Properties of Bodies," we infer "with reason" that they represent "the regular proceedings of Causes and Effects in the ordinary course of Nature." This, observes Locke, "we call an Argument from the Nature of Things themselves" (4.16.6).

To what extent does this account of probabilistic assent involve a concession to some form of the argument for the naturalness of species? Several commentators argue either that Locke does not deny the existence of natural species,⁵⁰ or more positively that Locke ultimately "admits that there are natural kinds" (Mackie 1976, 88; Colman 1983, 124).⁵¹ We must acknowledge that Locke's formulation

⁵⁰Cf. Gibson 1917, 199-201; Aaron 1955, 204; Yolton 1970, 32-33.

⁵¹Colman plainly misreads ECHU 3.10.21 as a statement in support of the existence of natural species, but he need not rely on this passage alone. As Mackie points out, Locke provides stronger support for this reading at 3.3.13,

may suggest an element of hesitation or ambiguity; to say "we call" this an argument from the nature of things is clearly less emphatic than to say "this is" an argument from the nature of things. Still, the textual and biographical evidence is substantial in support of the opinion that Locke is sincere in his defense of probabilistic assent to propositions concerning the properties of things in nature. In considering the issue somewhat pragmatically, he clearly believes that such assent is indispensable in the management of everyday living. A complete rejection of arguments "from the Nature of Things" or of any empirically grounded, probabilistic judgment would be not merely unwise, in Locke's view, but in fact simply impossible to maintain consistently. Let us consider, for instance, a certain vegetable or a piece of meat, bearing a certain color, texture, flavor, and a known (plant or animal) origin. Let us assume further that in all or virtually all previously observed instances, such qualities have been coincident with a nutritional quality. Must our ultimate ignorance concerning the relevant real essence produce in us a reasonable doubt of the nutritional quality of the vegetable or meat before us? Locke's answer is firmly rooted in common sense:

and especially at 3.6.36,37. Similar denials that Locke effects a radical distinction between the real and nominal essences of substances appear in Yolton 1956, 139; 1970, 32-34; Von Leyden 1969, 229; Squadrito 1978, 41-59.

He that in the ordinary Affairs of Life, would admit of nothing but direct plain Demonstration, would be sure of nothing in this World, but of perishing quickly. The wholesomeness of his Meat or Drink would not give him reason to venture on it: And I would fain know, what 'tis he could do upon such grounds, as were capable of no Doubt, no Objection. (4.11.10; also 1.1.5, 4.2.14, 4.10.2, 4.11.2,3,4,8, 4.14.1; King 1830, 324)

More important for present purposes than its role in ordinary affairs, however, is the function of Locke's defense of probabilism in preserving the possibility of a science of nature. Locke's seriousness on this point too is corroborated biographically both by his fellowship in the Royal Society, and by the fact that he not only praised, but to one degree or another actively collaborated in research with the "Master-Builders" Boyle, Sydenham, and Newton, all of whom were exponents of an experimental, probabilistic natural science.⁵² But would it be any less difficult to conduct the research in pursuance of such a science than to manage one's ordinary concerns, in the absence of at least a tacit, hypothetical supposition of the existence of real essences or natural species? It is difficult to see, for instance, how the chemist in Locke's example who wishes to experiment with gold or sulphur would

⁵²The first Secretary of the Royal Society, Henry Oldenburg, describes its purpose as follows: 'It is our business, in the first place, to scrutinize the whole of Nature and to investigate its activity and powers by means of observations and experiments; and then in course of time to hammer out a more solid philosophy and more ample amenities of civilization' (Quoted in Hunter 1981, 37). On Locke's collaborations with Boyle and Sydenham, see Cranston 1957, 88-93. On the relationship between Locke and Newton, see especially Rogers 1969 and 1978.

acquire a sample for the experiment without employing a hypothetical conception of what the substance under investigation is, or without an idea of a set of coexisting qualities to which its name refers. (See 4.6.8ff.; also 3.6.8). Locke does of course grant the necessity of such a conception, while clearly insisting that the idea in question constitutes merely a nominal, not a real essence. The point here, however, is that this nominal essence would be of no help whatsoever in designing the experiment unless one could reasonably suppose that certain ideas or qualities necessarily, naturally coexist--unless one could reasonably suppose, that is, that the nominal essence represents, however imperfectly, a real species essence in nature. In the end it seems simply impossible to conceive of a science of nature in any form absent a belief in the possibility of making judgments concerning the nature of things. The fact that he takes seriously the possibility of such a science would seem unavoidably to constitute on Locke's part a quiet acknowledgment of the limits of a strict empiricism, or to put it another way, of the indispensability and hence reasonableness of adopting as a condition of all further knowing a certain epistemic faith in the ultimate orderliness or lawfulness of nature.⁵³

⁵³Cf. Whitehead's observation that "there can be no living science unless there is a widespread instinctive conviction in the existence of an Order of Things, and, in particular, of an Order of Nature" (1925, 5).

Alongside his emphatic arguments for the purely suppositional or hypothetical character of substance ideas and for the false, useless, and pernicious character of the doctrine of natural species, Locke yet insists that we do not and should not form our ideas of substances and kinds simply arbitrarily.⁵⁴

But though these nominal Essences of Substances are made by the Mind, they are not yet made so arbitrarily, as those of mixed Modes...the Mind, in making its complex Ideas of Substances, only follows Nature; and puts none together, which are not supposed to have an union in Nature...For though Men may make what complex Ideas they please, and give what Names to them they will; yet if they will be understood, when they speak of Things really existing, they must, in some degree, conform their Ideas to the Things they would speak of: Or else Men's Language will be like that of Babel; and every Man's Words, being intelligible only to himself, would no longer serve to Conversation, and the ordinary Affairs of Life... (3.6.28)

And the same necessity of conforming his Ideas of Substances to Things, without him, as to Archetypes made by Nature, that Adam was under, if he would not wilfully impose upon himself, the same are all Men ever since under too. (3.6.51)

If the premodern doctrine of natural species or sorts were completely groundless, then an epistemological willfulness in determining or imposing order in the external world would be unavoidable. That Locke insists with respect to our ideas of the species of substances that it is possible and necessary to correct our definitions by reference to

⁵⁴As Grant points out (1987, 36), when Locke uses the term "arbitrary" to describe the manner in which we form some of our complex ideas, he generally means something like "non-necessary" as opposed to "unreasonable" or "willful." Cf. ECHU 3.4.17 and 3.5.3 with 3.5.6,7.

the standard of nature, that "to define their Names right, natural History is to be enquired into; and their Properties are, with care and examination, to be found out" (3.11.24; also 3.9.11, 4.4.12), would seem to indicate, unless he were guilty of the grossest self-contradiction, that he does not intend his critique to imply a total, root-and-branch rejection of that doctrine. If our definitions of substance and species names were wholly and necessarily conventional, products of purely arbitrary agreements, then how could they be capable of correction or refinement by reference to a standard in nature?

It would seem that this appeal to nature or natural history as the measure of our definitions is tantamount to an admission on Locke's part that the doctrine of natural species has at least a partial basis in experience. As Locke explains it, this basis lies in the fact that "Nature in the Production of Things, makes several of them alike: there is nothing more obvious, especially in the Races of Animals, and all Things propagated by Seed" (3.3.13; also 3.4.17; 3.6.30,36,37). Locke concedes not only that there are phenomenal likenesses among things in nature, but also that these phenomenal likenesses probably represent internal or ontological likenesses: "Nature makes many particular Things, which do agree one with another, in many sensible Qualities, and probably too, in their internal frame and Constitution..." (3.6.36). The probability that some

causal necessity lies beneath the considerable degree of order manifest in the natural world provides the legitimate basis of our arguments "from the Nature of Things."⁵⁵ This does not necessarily mean that Locke resurrects in a different form the doctrine of natural species. He does not and cannot concede the legitimacy of any probabilistic inference of the adequacy of our ideas, constructed out of phenomenal likenesses, as representatives of real essences themselves; for our ignorance of the real essences or internal constitutions of things coupled with the virtually infinite number of ideas that may constantly coexist in a given substance render it at least as a practical matter impossible that our species ideas could adequately represent the things to which we refer them.⁵⁶ It is for this

⁵⁵Ayers maintains that "Locke's recognition of natural resemblances is not a concession of any kind in the argument against natural species," and accordingly that Locke's insistence on the possibility of correcting our species definitions expresses merely his desire for greater precision in our construction of nominal essences (1981, 257,264-266). Once again, however, it seems to me wholly mysterious how Locke could insist that the "Properties" of species "are, with care and examination, to be found out" (3.11.24), i.e. how he could believe in the possibility of refining our nominal essence ideas by observation unless he acknowledges the possibility that nature produces things in kinds, with constantly coexisting qualities in common.

⁵⁶An exception appears at 3.6.37, where Locke states that species essences are "of Man's making," and not never, but "seldom adequate to the internal Nature of the Things they are taken from." Because Locke provides no example of a species idea that is adequate to the internal nature of its referent, it is difficult to explain this exception. At no point, however, does he elaborate any of its possible implications or modify the thrust of his critique on this basis.

reason that Locke urges us to give up the aspiration toward final, complete knowledge of natural species essences. But the resemblances or "similitudes" of things do make it possible for us to make more-or-less rough judgments concerning the likelihood that a given set of similar natural beings are constituents of a natural species whose precise boundaries are unknown to us, and they also make it possible for us to judge the adequacy of our species ideas relative to one another, according to their greater or lesser accounting of coexisting ideas (3.6.31, 4.6.13). Nothing in Locke's argument prevents us, for instance, from judging on the basis of our observation of the regular coexistence in certain beings of the ideas or qualities of "Life, Sense, spontaneous Motion, and the Faculty of Reasoning" (3.3.10) that such beings are very probably members of a common natural species. The real difficulty that moves Locke to emphasize the conventional element of species definition concerns not the existence of an "ordinary course of Nature," but rather the fact that nature seems "very liberal of these real Essences" (3.6.32), or as Mackie puts it, that nature "supplies far more [similitudes among things] than we use" (1976, 136).⁵⁷

⁵⁷Locke's eager references to the irregularities of nature's production--once again, "sit fides penes Author-
em"--for the most part represent only especially striking instances of the fact that nature produces a virtual infinity in number and degrees of resemblances among particulars. The key to settling the boundaries among species lies in selecting which of these resemblances it is impor-

However firm, therefore, may be Locke's refusal simply to resurrect the doctrine of natural species on the basis of his defense of probabilism and natural history, it is clear that the resemblances or "similitudes" among nature's productions provide the proper foundations for our formation of substance and species ideas, and by implication for the empirically oriented improvement of natural science. Locke's suggestion that it is possible and desirable to correct experimentally our substance or species definitions seems based upon a conception of the relation of nominal to real essences as asymptotic, such that through diligent experimentation and observation, we are entitled to hold our nominal essences as ever-closer, if always imperfect, approximations of their corresponding real essences.⁵⁸ Therefore, the fact of our ultimate uncertainty about the existence of necessary combinations or repugnancies among ideas or qualities in nature does not liberate us from any natural discipline in the formation of these ideas. Indeed to the contrary, Locke reasons, it underlines the need for such discipline: "our Ideas of Substances... must not consist of Ideas put together at the

tant or useful for us to select and denominate as species (cf. 3.6.38). As again Mackie observes, it is this selectivity that above all constitutes the element of human workmanship in the construction of species ideas (1976, 136). To the problem of the grounds for selecting and ranking species, especially as it applies to the human or moral species, we will return in chapters V and VI.

⁵⁸Cf. Colman 1983, 124-125.

pleasure of our Thoughts," but "must be such, and such only, as are made up of such simple ones, as have been discovered to co-exist in Nature." Thus formed on the basis of careful attention to "Experience and observation," our ideas of substances, "though not, perhaps very exact Copies" of things in nature, "are yet the Subjects of real (as far as we have any) Knowledge" of them" (4.4.12).⁵⁹

We are now in a position to summarize, to draw some more general conclusions, and to dispel at least some of the obscurity with which Locke admittedly treats the issue of our classifications of substances (3.6.43). To repeat, Locke clearly holds that the doctrine of natural species is useless as an explanation of how we actually classify natural substances; he clearly holds that we are ultimately ignorant of real natural essences, and clearly wants at least to render questionable the existence of such essences. But if we consider this critique in abstraction from its intended object, or from Locke's opinion of the importance in delivering it, then we are unable to explain his defense of a natural science based upon natural history or

⁵⁹According to this reading, Locke's own intention comes fairly close to the epistemological moderation that Wallin views as an anti-Lockean element in the thought of Madison. Affirming according to Wallin the naturalness of error in the study of both nature and politics, Madison yet contents himself with proclaiming our ignorance of "only the precise delimitations of natural and human things," and thus disposes of "both naive certitude and radical skepticism, the theoretical antecedents of a politics of the will" (1984, 161-163).

of the credibility of probabilistic arguments from "the Nature of Things" other than by reference to his own confusion or to a purely rhetorical intention on his part. The suggestion here, however, is that the ambiguities or even apparent inconsistencies in Locke's critique of natural science do not compel us to conclude either that he is simply confused in this matter or that he is an esoteric teacher of a radical epistemological conventionalism or willfulness. In this view his apparent inconsistency and radicalism are best explainable by reference to a third alternative, namely that they actually proceed from a consistent, moderate and constructive intention that appears most clearly in the light of his objections to the pernicious consequences of the methods and doctrines of scholasticism. That Locke employs his apparently radical arguments in the service of an overarching moderate intention appears most likely when we view those arguments in the context of his more general objection to the arbitrariness implicit in the scholastic doctrine of natural species and in its entire conception of natural science.

Locke believes it important to discredit the scholastic account of classification for much the same reason that he believes it important to reject their doctrines of innatism: the claim that nature authorizes as perfectly adequate our ideas of species, like the claim that it inscribes in our minds propositional knowledge at birth,

encourages us to hold those ideas dogmatically and arbitrarily, as though they were simply self-validating and required no empirical measurement. Given this belief, it would be obvious folly for Locke to argue for a radical disjunction between nominal essences and real essences, such that our construction of species ideas were wholly liberated from any empirical foundation. We contend that he does not so argue, and that recognizing the ultimate kinship between the extreme alternatives of the scholastics' naive naturalism and a radical conventionalism, he seeks to clear a middle ground. Locke's rejection of certainty as the appropriate criterion of assent in the natural sciences implies a denial that the basis of classification is an all-or-nothing proposition. That we cannot be certain of the precise natural grounds for our classifications of substances does not compel us to embrace a thoroughgoing conventionalism. On the basis of his defense of probabilistic assent, Locke seeks to promote a more genuinely empirical science of nature. He therefore fashions his critique of the doctrine of natural species so as to emphasize that such a science is both necessary and possible--necessary because nature's provision to the understanding is imperfect, thus forcing us to labor to gain knowledge that is in the far greater part neither intuitive nor obvious, and possible because nature provides the foundations for our efforts at classification, thus ensuring that

those efforts need not collapse into arbitrariness as a result of our ignorance of real essences.

Central to the ambiguity in Locke's argument is his conception of the proper general basis of our classifications as partly natural and partly conventional. Species ideas, to repeat once more, are "the Workmanship of the Understanding, but have their foundation in the similitude of things" in nature (3.3.13; also 3.4.17; 3.6.30,36,37).⁶⁰ Given his apparent estimate of the influence of the uncritical naturalism that he opposes, it makes sense for Locke to emphasize strongly the element of conventionalism or laboring in the acquisition or construction of human knowledge.⁶¹ We can thus understand his insistence on the understanding's alienation from, or at best mediated acquaintance with the external world of nature; his insistence on the inadequacy of our nominal essences, based on natural, phenomenal likenesses, relative to real essences; and even his occasional denigrations of probabilistic assent, of even the results of "wary Observation" as more-or-less sophisticated guesswork, amounting "only to Opinion" and lacking that "certainty, which is requisite to Knowledge"

⁶⁰Cf. Locke's more general observation that human knowledge is "neither wholly necessary, nor wholly voluntary" (4.13.1).

⁶¹Yolton aptly observes that "So important was it for Locke to deny the possibility of a science of nature in the rational sense of 'science'--in order to show the need for a careful experimental science of nature--that he takes frequent opportunity of stressing the point" (1969, 189).

(4.6.13; also 4.2.14, 4.3.14, 4.12.10, 4.15.4). Acting on the principle that a sense of desire or uneasiness stimulates industry (2.21.34; STCE 126), Locke seeks to unsettle our ideas in order to stimulate more careful inquiry. Somewhat paradoxically, he occasionally denigrates probabilism because his very defense of probabilism requires it; for in seeking to prevent the dogmatic reification of our ideas, to maintain the sense of their openness and incompleteness that is necessary to any serious empirical inquiry,⁶² it is important for Locke to maintain clearly in view both the requisites of perfect knowledge and the extent to which we fall short of attaining it.⁶³

⁶²For this reason I believe that Ayers overstresses the significance of Locke's insistence on the precision of species boundaries as "an extremely important and explicit principle of his philosophy" (1981, 256). As we have seen, it is true that Locke cites nature's apparent imprecision in defining species boundaries as an important reason for doubting the doctrine of natural species; and it is also true that at several points he insists upon precision in defining such boundaries as a requisite of clarity in communication. But just as Locke refuses simply to divorce nominal essences from real essences or from their patterns in nature, so he must also insist that we regard our nominal species definitions as somewhat open-ended, balancing the desideratum of clear communication with that of scientific advance. See ECHU 4.6.6-10.

⁶³I am thus inclined to disagree mildly with the judgment of Margaret Osler, who sees in Locke's thought a reflection of the "crisis" in seventeenth-century philosophy of science, and more particularly an unresolved tension between its inheritances of Cartesian rationalism and the empiricism of Boyle and Newton among others. Thus according to Osler, Locke's "intellectual crisis" consists in the fact that though "he recognized that certainty was no longer a possible or appropriate ideal for empirical science," he nonetheless "continued to regard certainty as the earmark of genuine knowledge" (1962, 10-11). My own

Moreover, Locke hopes by teaching us to "moderate our Perswasions" (1.1.3) not only to stimulate inquiry, but also to move us in our "fleeting state of Action and Blindness...[to] be less imposing on others" (4.16.4; also 4.14.2). He intends by his emphasis on the conventional element of our species constructions to provide a sobering reminder of the naturalness of human error, of the insuperable uncertainty that darkens so many of the objects of human inquiry, and therewith of the need for toleration and compromise in the pursuit of intellectual consensus. At the same time, he remains sensitive to the danger of overvaluing consensus as such, at the cost of losing sight of the ultimate goal of rational consensus, and therefore does not in the final analysis espouse an extreme epistemological conventionalism. In denying that natural science can be a strict demonstrative science and thus affirming its ultimately hypothetical character, Locke does not affirm the total arbitrariness of our conceptions of the world external to the mind, and does not deny that some hypotheses or some conceptions of that world are truer, or more probably true, than others (4.12.13). One must "not make his own Hypothesis the Rule of Nature...For no definitions,

view is that while Locke does hold certainty superior to probability as a general mode of knowing, his intermittent application of it to natural science represents not a more-or-less confused response to a surrounding crisis, but rather an intention to preserve the salutary modesty that accompanies a sense of the limits of a probabilistic natural science.

that I know, no Suppositions of any Sect, are of force enough to destroy constant Experience" (2.1.21,19; also 4.8.10). In espousing a qualified, moderate conventionalism, in insisting that our species ideas properly conceived do not represent perfectly definable real essences, but rather derive from the imperfect likenesses observable in nature, Locke seeks only to replace an abstract, hyper-rationalist, barren natural science with one solidly grounded in a genuine empiricism. He counsels not arbitrariness, but to the contrary an unprecedentedly disciplined investigation of the "natural history" of things. He values most highly not consensus as such, but instead rational consensus based upon common sense observation refined by experimental science. He intends his moderate conventionalism not to promote peace at the price of truth, but rather to promote "Truth, Peace, and Learning" together (3.5.16). He destroys only in order better--less arbitrarily--to construct. Having promised at the outset of the work to perform a critical, destructive, ground-clearing operation that would remove "the Rubbish, that lies in the way to Knowledge," Locke subsequently and less prominently declares it his intention "in the future part of this Discourse...to raise an Edifice uniform, and consistent with it self, as far as my own Experience and Observation will assist me..." (1.4.25; also 1.4.23).

CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEM OF NATURAL SCIENCE II:

THE CORPUSCULARIAN HYPOTHESIS

It may seem consistent with the Essay's empiricist agnosticism concerning cause-effect relations in particular and natural science in general that Locke at several points renounces any intention to pursue "Physical Enquiries" into the natures of the mind, of the ideas in its perception, and by implication of the objects that those ideas represent (2.8.22; also 1.1.2, 2.8.4, 2.21.73). If we are correct, however, in attributing to Locke a relatively loose, permissive empiricism that recognizes the propensity of mere data-gathering to produce "nothing but a heap of crudities" (CU 13), and thus recognizes the legitimacy of probabilistic assent to experientially well grounded, partial hypotheses concerning the natures of things that exist external to the mind, then there is in principle no reason for a strict renunciation of such inquiries. There is no reason, in other words, for Locke to insist upon a strict segregation between the "empirical" and the "rational," or more precisely between "the 'historical' (or descriptive) and the philosophical (or explicative)" in the study of

nature.¹ If Locke's defense of the historical study of nature encourages us to infer from the ordinarily observable similarities among things their probable ontological kinship as members of the same species, then why would it not encourage us to go further, if we could, and to pursue hypotheses concerning the causal relations among things, in order to place our judgments on the firmest ground possible?

In order to gain a full understanding of Locke's account of natural science, it is necessary for us to draw forth the affirmative implication that lies within his apparently modest description of his own task as that of a mere "Under-Labourer." For it is clear that Locke's professed modesty is the modesty of a fellow-traveler in an intellectual revolution, consisting only in an admiring acknowledgement that this revolution has been spearheaded by others,² that his role consists in consolidating its gains and perhaps in preparing its further advance. Both his professed preparatory intention and his acknowledgment of the "Builders" of the sciences imply a belief in the

¹Romanell 1958, 316, quoted approvingly by Givner 1962, 345. Cf. the distinction between the problems of classification and of explanation in Woolhouse 1971, 81-95.

²In addition to the corpuscularian masters to whom he refers in the Essay's dedication, Locke acknowledges the influence of the "justly admired" Descartes, to whom he bears "the great obligation of my first deliverance from the unintelligible way of talking of the philosophy in use in the schools in his time..." (Works 1823, 4.48).

possibility and indeed at least the partial actuality of philosophy or philosophic knowledge. Thus Aaron holds that while Locke's own analytical work represents in itself no more than "a preliminary concern," it derives its justification as a preparation for the advance of true philosophy, exemplified in Locke's view in the "synthetical" works of masters such as Newton, Boyle, and Sydenham (1955, 74-75). Yolton argues similarly that Locke's main objective in the Essay is "not to extend our knowledge of things but to show us some of the ways of doing so, even to explain how Boyle, Newton, Sydenham were extending human knowledge." Locke's achievement is to give "a philosophical foundation for the new science" (1970, 16,75; also 1969, 183). Corroborating and lending focus to this reading is the fact that the Essay's treatment of explanatory natural science contains much more than exposures of errors and agnostic renunciations of the possibility of a complete, demonstrative science. In particular, and often with notable apparent confidence, Locke moves beyond his indefinite description of particular substances as something "supposed, I know not what" (2.23.15), permitting himself not only to suppose the existence of causally primary qualities that inhere in the real essences or internal constitutions of material substances, but also to offer somewhat more specific descriptions of their natures as causal agents. In offering such descriptions, Locke endorses what he calls the "corpuscu-

larian Hypothesis, as that which is thought to go farthest in an intelligible Explication of the Qualities of Bodies" (4.3.16; also STCE 193). Thus it is the view of numerous commentators that in his specific capacity as underlaborer, "Locke set himself the task of developing in a coherent, systematic and rational way what he took to be the fundamental tenets of the corpuscularian philosophy..." (Harre 1964, 93).³

Those who adopt this view commonly hold also that Locke's endorsement of the corpuscularian hypothesis and his insistence on the historical method of natural science are of a piece, or more precisely that the latter derives from the former.⁴ The question arises, however, as to whether these two elements of Locke's treatment of natural science are in the end mutually compatible. In the very process of facilitating his defense of the possibility of a partial science of nature against formidable epistemological objections, Locke's relatively permissive empiricism may

³In the words of Peter Alexander, "the 'lasting monument' of the master-builders which most impressed Locke was the corpuscular philosophy," especially in the form in which Robert Boyle proposed it (1977, 63-64). Givner (1962, 340-42, 346) and Mandelbaum (1964, 1-15) claim that Locke simply presupposed or accepted without questioning the truth of the corpuscular theory. Cf. in general Yolton 1970, 5-43; Woolhouse 1971, 91-101, 111-114; Curley 1972; Laudan 1977.

⁴Thus Givner claims that "Boyle's corpuscular hypothesis was the assumption on which Locke based his belief that language cannot represent the real nature and structure of things..." (1962, 340). Cf. Alexander 1977, 66.

open itself to at least equally formidable ontologically oriented objections. Can Locke espouse the corpuscularian hypothesis without thereby negating even the partial intelligibility of nature upon which his defense of natural history and experimental philosophy depends? In the final accounting, what is destroyed in the course of the revolution with which Locke associates himself, and what constructed?

The purpose of the present chapter is to examine, again with particular reference to the problem of species, the relation between Locke's defense of the descriptive method of natural history and his apparent endorsement of the corpuscularian theory as the foundation of an explanatory science of nature. We will begin with a brief overview of that theory, and then present two arguments purporting to show that the consequence of assent to that hypothesis would be indeed to render impossible a consistent, intelligible account of nature. Finally, in responding to these arguments, we will attempt to show that while Locke's apparent assent to this hypothesis is by no means free from difficulty, he does not endorse it in a manner that commits him to the ultimately nihilistic implications that some commentators find in it.

The corpuscularian hypothesis as Locke employs it represents an attempt at explaining "the Nature of Sensation" (2.8.22) and therewith "the Qualities of Bodies" (4.3.16). Our perceptual experience contains a tremendous

diversity of ideas, of shapes, colors, sounds, tastes, odors, textures, motions, and so forth. In seeking an explanation of this experience, we wonder what real beings in nature correspond to these ideas. In Locke's formulation, we wonder what qualities in nature produce these ideas; "Quality," as he defines it, refers generally to "the Power to produce any Idea in our mind" (2.8.8). Our natural or initial response to such wondering, according to Locke, is simply to posit a power or quality to correspond to each of our ideas; our idea of the shape of a red ball is then produced by its quality of roundness, for instance, as our idea of its color is produced by its quality of redness. But this for Locke is merely to restate the question, not to explain or render intelligible the nature of sensation or of bodies. When we consider further the question concerning how bodies produce ideas in us, we must conclude that it is "manifestly by impulse, the only way which we can conceive Bodies operate in" (2.8.11). Our experience requires us to suppose the existence in nature of no more causal qualities than those necessary to a body's capacity to act by impulse, by direct physical contact, on other bodies.⁵ The corpuscularian theory holds that all material objects or "natural Things...have a real,

⁵Cf. Mackie 1976, 18-20, on the economy of postulated qualities. According to Aaron, "primary qualities are just the concepts which the scientist of the seventeenth century found it necessary to presuppose if his science was to be possible" (1955, 125-126).

but unknown Constitution of their insensible Parts, from which flow those sensible Qualities, which serve us to distinguish them one from another" (3.3.17). These insensible parts or "Corpuscles," as the primary constituent parts of all externally existing objects or "Bodies," are "the active parts of Matter, and the great Instruments of Nature" (4.3.25). When we perceive objects at a distance, according to this theory, "'tis evident some singly imperceptible Bodies must come from them to the Eyes, and thereby convey to the Brain some Motion, which produces these Ideas, which we have of them in us" (2.8.12).

This corpuscularian hypothesis, by virtue of its explanation of the production of sensory ideas by impulse, yields a perplexing distinction between two kinds of qualities or powers, which Locke designates "primary" and "secondary" qualities.⁶ Corpuscles are "active," according to Locke, manifesting "active powers,"⁷ in that their "primary" or "real qualities" represent the causal bases of all the ideas that such objects present to our perceptions. In

⁶A brief discussion of the history of these terms appears in Aaron 1955, 121ff. For a more extended discussion of the forms in which this distinction appears in the works of various early modern scientists, see Burt 1932, 67-71, 83-90, 115-121, 130-134, 180-184.

⁷Cf. 2.21.2: "Power thus considered is twofold, viz. as able to make, or able to receive any change: The one may be called Active, and the other Passive Power." But see 2.21.4, 72, and 2.23.28, for the suggestion that active power may be an attribute only of "Spirits" or thinking beings, not of material substances.

the most fundamental sense, primary qualities are causally primary; and if (efficient) causation occurs by impulse, it follows that primary qualities "are utterly inseparable from the Body, in what estate soever it be" (2.8.9). They are qualities without which a thing could not conceivably have bodily existence, and therewith a capacity for communicating motion by impulse. Hence the primary qualities include the "Bulk, Figure, Number, Situation... Motion, or Rest," and "Texture" of objects or their constituent parts (2.23.28,10).⁸ Secondary qualities are then causally secondary or epiphenomenal, and are qualities without which a thing could conceivably have bodily existence. Examples include colors, tastes, sounds, and odors (2.8.10,13, and passim).

There is a certain ambiguity in Locke's description of secondary qualities. We have noticed his definition of qualities as powers, which would seem to imply a certain equivalence between secondary and primary qualities as merely different forms of quality or power. Yet he also at times implies a distinction between qualities and powers, such that only primary qualities exist as real qualities or properties of things as they are in themselves, while secondary qualities are in strict usage not qualities at all,

⁸Locke's specifications of the particular primary qualities tend to vary; I have here presented an inclusive listing of those qualities that he commonly, though not invariantly, refers to as "primary." Cf. especially 2.8.9-26 and 2.23.8-19,30-32.

but only powers (2.8.10,13-17; 2.23.8-10; 2.31.2).⁹ We will return to the significance of this ambiguity; but whatever the proper terminology, the basis of Locke's distinction seems to lie in his peculiar usage of the relative concept of resemblance (2.8.7,15,22,25). A thing or substance manifests a primary quality or power, according to Locke, when it produces an idea that resembles its causal ground, or that resembles a quality without which a thing cannot be conceived to have a material or bodily existence. A thing manifests a secondary quality when it produces, by virtue of its possession of primary qualities, an idea that does not resemble any primary quality. The significance of this usage of "resemblance" has provoked considerable controversy among commentators;¹⁰ but a few examples may pro-

⁹Jackson (1929; cf. Mandelbaum 1964, 19-20) thus regards the distinction between primary and secondary qualities as a distinction between qualities and powers, while Curley (1972, 443-445, 450-454) explains it in terms of a difference between two forms of power. For Curley, Locke's ambiguity on this point proceeds from the genuine difficulty in rendering a precise definition of "quality." While I do not discount the difficulty Curley describes, I believe that this ambiguity reflects a more fundamental tension in Locke's thought, of which Locke is well aware, between natural science and common sense. See below, pp. 179-186.

¹⁰The following questions provide the substance of much of the controversy. Is Locke referring to the primary qualities of observable objects, or of insensible particles? Do the primary qualities in question resemble their ideas as "determinates" (e.g. a particular shape) or "determinables" (e.g. shape in general)? How, in any event, is it possible to compare an idea with a quality existing in nature, if only ideas are present to our minds? For various answers to such questions, see the discussions in Jackson 1929; Aaron 1955, 116-127; Mandelbaum 1964, 16-

vide sufficient clarification for present purposes. Suppose that the actual shape or texture of a thing were decisive in determining our idea of its shape or texture; we could then say that there is a kind of family resemblance between an idea and its determining quality. Suppose, on the other hand, that by virtue of its shape or texture, a thing could produce in us an idea of its color or taste; we could then say that there is no such resemblance between the idea in question and its determining quality. Mackie's explanation perhaps provides as much clarity as Locke's discussion permits:

Essentially what he must be claiming is that material things have, for example, shapes which are determinations of the same determinable or category, shape in general, as are the shapes seen, felt, or thought of...The contrast that Locke is drawing is with, for example, colors. It is not that we sometimes make mistakes about colors...but that even under ideal conditions...colors as we see them are totally different... from the ground or basis of these powers in the things that we call coloured. (1976, 14)¹¹

Locke readily acknowledges that however useful this account may be in resolving some of the apparently puzzling facts in our ordinary perceptual experience (2.8.19,20,21), the distinction between primary and secondary qualities remains in some sense unintelligible; in particular, "we can by no means conceive how any size, figure, or motion of

28; Yolton 1970, 47-49, 130-131; Mackie 1976, 13-27.

¹¹Similar explanations of Locke's concept of resemblance appear in Mandelbaum (1964, 16-30) and in Curley (1972, 450-454).

any Particles, can possibly produce in us the Idea of any Colour, Taste, or Sound whatsoever; there is no conceivable connexion betwixt the one and the other" (4.3.13; also 2.8.14,25, 4.3.28).¹² It is due to this inconceivability that we tend reflexively to posit real qualities in things that correspond directly to our ideas of secondary qualities. The implication of Locke's distinction, however, is that the peculiar appearance of secondary qualities as somehow essentially or qualitatively distinct from ideas of primary qualities derives in the decisive respect not from the causally primary qualities themselves, but instead from the manner in which we experience them. As we experience them in the richness and diversity of their appearances, as we ordinarily conceive them by reference to the seemingly nonmaterial aspect of their existence, secondary qualities depend decisively upon a relation or interaction between object and perceiver (cf. 2.21.3), or between the minute, insensible parts of objects and our own sensory organs. The existence of such apparent "qualities" as sweetness as a particular taste or buzzing or ringing as a particular

¹²Thus in Leibnitz' New Essays On Human Understanding, Theophilus suggests the replacement of the distinguishing criterion of resemblance with that of intelligibility: "when a power is intelligible and admits of being distinctly explained, it should be included among the primary qualities, but when it is merely sensible and yields only a confused idea it should be put among the secondary qualities" (II.viii.10). As we will see, however, even the relation between primary qualities and their corresponding ideas is scarcely more intelligible, according to Locke, than relations involving secondary qualities.

sound depends no less than the existence of pleasure or pain (2.8.16) upon the presence of a perceiver whose sense organs interact with certain primary qualities so as to produce the ideas in question. In the absence of such a perceiver, such "qualities" would exist not as the colors, sounds, tastes or smells proper to our ordinary sense experience, but instead only as the peculiar motions of variously constituted insensible corpuscles; they would "vanish and cease," as Locke puts it, "and [be] reduced to their Causes, i.e. Bulk, Figure, and Motion of Parts" (2.8.17; also 2.8.23, 2.23.11, 4.6.11).

Locke's account of the corpuscularian theory and of its application to the process of perception has received considerable attention from professional philosophers in particular, many of whom have found it fraught with serious difficulties. Inasmuch as we too seek, like Locke, to avoid entanglement in extended "Physical Enquiries," however, it is beyond our present purposes to attempt to resolve or even to explicate all such difficulties. Our purpose in presenting this brief description is to provide the context for raising some very troubling questions concerning the apparently destructive implications of Locke's account of the relation of secondary to primary qualities. In either or both of two ways, assent to the corpuscularian theory might be destructive of the possibility of a coherent account of nature as an intelligible order: it might imply a

direct negation of nature itself as mere chaos or flux, and it might imply a more indirect negation of the human understanding's capacity to comprehend anything external to itself. We turn now to a more detailed consideration of each of these possible difficulties.

CORPUSCULARIANISM AND COMMON SENSE

Whatever their compatibility in other respects, it is possible to argue that there is at least in one important respect a kinship between Locke's empiricist critique of the doctrine of natural species and his employment of the corpuscularian distinction between primary and secondary qualities. According to Michael Zuckert, the common root of these two branches of Locke's thought is an intention to effect a "radical break with the common-sense understanding" of the world, an understanding that was expressed and refined especially in traditional or premodern philosophy's doctrines of natural species and natural virtues and vices (1974, 562). Locke makes no attempt to deny that at least on one level, his doctrines must appear strange to people of ordinary common sense. After all, we do not commonly believe that we directly perceive only ideas of coexisting qualities and not things, or that the qualities that we observe in things are in reality no more than "mechanical Affections of the minute parts" of those things (4.3.26). But there is far more to it than this. Zuckert's contention is not merely that Lockean philosophizing requires what all philosophizing requires, namely a refusal to accept uncritically the reports of common sense or the opinions common (or for that matter not so common) to one's

society. It is rather that Locke knowingly effects a radical and dangerous break with common sense. Zuckert holds for instance that Locke's corpuscularian teaching, in conceiving of secondary qualities as perceiver-dependent, ultimately reduces them to a status of unreality or mere subjectivity. As opposed to primary qualities, which inhere necessarily in the "internal Constitution, and true Nature of Things" (2.23.32; also 2.8.9,15,17,23), secondary qualities are merely relational or "imputed," but not in the things themselves (2.8.22; also 14,18,19).¹³ And given that in our ordinary experience, secondary qualities are nonetheless "those, which...serve principally to distinguish Substances one from another, and commonly make a considerable part of the Idea of the several sorts of them" (2.23.8; also 2.8.22,26), it follows, according to Zuckert, that the doctrine of the unreality of secondary qualities must have a radically unsettling effect. Whatever the mischiefs generated by the abusive subtlety of scholastic

¹³Zuckert's reading is similar to that of Gibson on this point: "Behind the theory, as Locke understood it, lay the metaphysical assumption that the qualities which really belong to a substance must belong to it 'in itself,' apart from any relation in which it stands to anything else, including our organs of sense and the perceptions which are mediated by them...On the other hand, any apparent characteristics of a thing, which it possesses at one time but not at another, cannot be attributed to the thing as it is 'in itself,' but are merely indications of accidental and temporary relations in which it stands to other things, or to our minds" (1917, 101). Cf. Mandelbaum: "...ordinary perceptual experience, while useful in all the concerns of life, does not for Locke reveal the nature of material objects as they are in themselves" (1964, 40).

philosophers who "proved," as Locke charges, that snow was black (3.10.10), they did not go so far as did Locke himself, "who proved not that snow was black but that it has no color at all" (1974, 562). In overreaction against the dogmatic naturalism of the scholastics, Locke seeks in this view not to refine or to deepen the ordinary, reflexive way in which we experience the world, but instead to discredit it as fundamentally misleading or illusory. The ambiguities that mark so much of Locke's presentation should not surprise us, inasmuch as they proceed from an awareness that such a fundamental break effected overtly and unambiguously would tend to be destructive of the ends of civil society (ibid., 563).

But why, we might ask, would the undermining of this understanding of common sense and its doctrines of natural virtues and vices have such an effect? Could not the transcending of common sense thus understood prepare the acquisition of a new, more adequate, more critical or scientific understanding of an essentially orderly natural world, one that contained its own doctrine of natural virtues and vices? The radicalism that Zuckert finds in Locke's most serious teaching consists in its capacity to undermine not merely our ordinary conception of the world, but in fact any possible conception of an orderly natural world. In order to see the depth of the question raised here concerning the relation of Lockean philosophy or science and com-

mon sense, therefore, it is necessary for us to consider a bit further the implications of Locke's apparent conception of the world that lies behind what is present in our ordinary experience.

Writing with a more immediate concern for the problems of technical philosophy than for those of morality or politics, Michael Ayers nonetheless implicitly supports Zuckert's contention. Ayers indeed pushes the thesis of Lockean radicalism nearly to its limits, arguing that Locke at least at times is willing to carry the principle of the natural fluidity or anarchy of species boundaries to truly nihilistic extremes. He argues more specifically that Locke's rejection of the doctrine of natural species or kinds is "much more metaphysical, and less dependent on any assumption about meaning, than modern writers suggest" (1981, 249). Locke's rejection of that doctrine follows directly, in other words, from his acceptance of the corpuscularian ontology. The crucial premise of Ayers' reading is that in seeking an explanation of natural phenomena in terms of material and efficient causation, Locke adopts the mechanistic conception of matter characteristic of the seventeenth century's "New Philosophy," and thus holds that matter is the only universal nature: "there are no specific or substantial forms, only the different shapes, sizes, motions, etc. of particular quantities of matter..." In this mechanistic world, there really is no great chain of

being, for there are no links to compose such a chain; nature's production must be anarchic not only across species, but even over time for particular individuals. Locke's reduction of nature to its causal core means not only the banishment of secondary qualities from the realm of nature, but also the discrediting of the fundamental commonsense notion of a plurality of natures: "all differences are differences of degree, and everything is in principle indefinitely mutable" (1981, 250,258,255, also 263). In the light of this assumption regarding the nature of matter appears the true, radical significance of Locke's observation that

All Things that exist, besides their Author, are all [sic] liable to change; especially those Things we are acquainted with, and have ranked into Bands, under distinct Names or Ensigns. Thus that, which was Grass to Day, is to Morrow the flesh of a Sheep; and within a few days after, becomes part of a Man..." (3.3.19; also 2.26.1).

According to Ayers' reading, Locke holds that change is the pervasive, predominant fact of natural existence. The natural chaos manifests itself in the fact of mortality or perishability--and this means not only in the fact that natural beings, living beings in particular, are subject to regular cycles of generation and decay, but most clearly and powerfully in the fact of natural predation. What is normal, in this view, what best indicates the character of the natural condition, is that natural beings metabolize one another. For what reason can we hold it any more nat-

ural, any more in accordance with nature's intention, that the stuff of which we are made should exist in the form of speaking, rational beings, rather than, say, as minerals in the soil or as flesh in the teeth of some other predatory animal?¹⁴

This understanding of the significance of the fact of change or perishability becomes more accessible when we view it, once again, in the context of Locke's critique of scholasticism. For the scholastic or premodern doctrine, the fact of material things' perishability need not pose much of a difficulty. By explaining that things possess a common species membership by virtue of partaking somehow in a common "substantial form," the adherents of this view could conceive of the essential change or perishing of a thing as a transformation, as a cessation of its partaking in its previous form, without considering such change a danger to the existence of the form or the principle of classification itself. But upon rejecting as "wholly unintelligible" this appeal to some mysterious formal cause, Locke reasons that we could gain a clearer understanding of the question of species distinctions in nature by recasting it in terms of material and efficient causation: What material and efficient causes make it necessary that certain qualities constantly coexist--to the extent

¹⁴As Locke makes clear, we should count our fellow humans among the natural predators, in the most literal way. See TT I.56-59; ECHU 1.3.9.

that they do--or that nature regularly produces certain distinguishable forms or kinds of things? The essences of things are to be conceived not as ideal forms, but instead as "internal constitutions," as physical and probably corpuscularian entities.¹⁵ The fact of physical change or perishability therefore creates a difficulty for this conception in that it seems to imply that the essences themselves are perishable. The fact that such physical constitutions are subject to change would seem to imply that the observable coexistence of qualities is not strictly necessary at all, and therefore that there are no real essences in nature, neither of species nor of individuals.

According to other commentators, a still more general observation subsequently confirms the nihilistic implication of Locke's view of natural science. The preceding examples of natural flux can be taken also to illustrate more generally the principle of the ultimately contingent existence of all natural or nondivine beings, or of their dependence for the integrity of their beings upon myriad environmental conditions that are wholly or mainly beyond their own control. "For we are wont," observes Locke,

to consider the Substances we meet with, each of them, as an entire thing by it self, having all its Qualities in it self, and independent of other Things; overlooking, for the most part, the Operations of those invisible Fluids, they are encompassed with; and upon whose

¹⁵On the distinction between real essences as substantial forms and real essences as corpuscularian constitutions, see Woolhouse 1971, 91-98, 101-114.

Motions and operations depend the greatest part of those qualities which are taken notice of in them... Things, however absolute and entire they seem in themselves, are but Retainers to other parts of Nature, for that which they are most taken notice of by us. (4.6.11)

Gibson comments that "Such reflections clearly require the rejection of the conception of material things as self-contained substances, each with an essence from which all its properties and operations flow..." (1917, 199).¹⁶ The contingent character of our natural condition as Locke here describes it is perhaps more pervasive and profound than we are capable of realizing. For we depend for the integrity of our being not merely on our freedom from the earthly dangers of starvation, exposure, disease, and predation of one sort or another, but more radically upon cosmic conditions such as the relative positions and motions of the earth and the sun, and perhaps others of which we are unaware.¹⁷ How would the material or chemical constitution of

¹⁶Gibson goes on to observe that "Locke refrains from drawing so revolutionary a conclusion," explaining that the "conception of essence, like that of substance...is clearly a presupposition which Locke has never thought of calling in question" (1917, 199, 198). Aaron notes "the curious relativism" of ECHU 4.6.11-12, but does not elaborate his view of the significance of these passages (1955, 204). Cf. also Von Leyden (1968, 159): Although "advanced by Locke almost as an afterthought," the doctrine in question is "remarkable" in that it draws very near "to Spinoza's doctrine of God or Nature as the only substance of which all particular things or persons are modifications."

¹⁷Cf. again 4.6.11: "...perhaps, Things in this our Mansion, would put on quite another face, and cease to be what they are, if some one of the Stars, or great Bodies incomprehensibly remote from us, should cease to be, or move as it does."

human beings behave, what "powers" it would manifest, given a radically altered cosmic environment? From the perspective of this principle of contingency, it would appear at least probable that there are as many "human natures" as there are possible environments for them, or alternatively, that our experience of a finite plurality of stable natures rests ultimately upon a mere prejudice, a groundless faith that those earthly and cosmic conditions favorable to their existence are somehow more "natural" than those unfavorable. And if we take into consideration the fact that these conditions too "are all liable to Change"--that there have been, and for all we know could be again, very long periods of time in which no life at all, let alone intelligent life existed on earth or perhaps anywhere else in the universe--then we must raise the question of flux or mutability from the earthly to the universal level. Taking a general view of things, perhaps we should simply say then that nature itself is nothing other than a ceaseless, aimless, universal process of creation and destruction.¹⁸

Far from placing it on a firmer foundation, therefore, according to this reading Locke's adoption of the corpuscularian or mechanist principle compels him to dispense entirely with the supposition of the existence of a plurality of real natural essences and to conceive of an utterly chaotic natural world, a world radically in flux in

¹⁸Cf. Nietzsche, The Will To Power aph. 1067.

which any of a virtually infinite number of possible configurations of matter or energy could become actual at any moment. In this view, in the wake of his adoption of the corpuscularian hypothesis, Locke's professed intention to advance the experimental improvement of our knowledge of nature must ultimately collapse into absurdity. Whatever order or lawfulness nature may manifest to our unimproved senses is ultimately a mere semblance, an illusion that serves at best to conceal the dangerous truth about the human condition. The human race is by nature no more than another link in an unbroken food chain; or, truer still, human beings are as all other natural beings, no more than accidental and fleeting configurations of matter-in-motion, doomed to a fate of endless, meaningless mutation. Nature thus understood can no more provide guidance for us in our search for moral principles or valuations than it provides, absent any improvement by human labor, for our safety and comfort. The ontologically oriented critique thus returns us in the end to the conclusion of the epistemologically oriented critique: the idea of "nature" as a governing order, however necessary to our well-being, represents at bottom an act of self-deception, a projection of the human will.¹⁹

It seems, therefore, that in considering the implica-

¹⁹Cf. 1.3.14: "Morality and Mechanism," Locke remarks somewhat cryptically, "are not very easy to be reconciled, or made consistent."

tions of Locke's employment of the corpuscularian theory, we come to face a by-now familiar alternative. If we concede that the fact of change or mutability does indeed pose a genuine difficulty for Locke's attempt at reformulating the problem of classification in corpuscularian or mechanistic terms, must we then concede too that Locke's employment of that theory admits of no moderate treatment of the problem? Does Locke's employment of the corpuscularian hypothesis commit him to accept the nihilistic conclusion we have described? If he refuses to accept that conclusion, must we conclude that Locke's thinking on the crucial question of natural science is ultimately incoherent?

With respect first to the question of Locke's intentions, it is worthwhile once again to take note of the strangeness of the implications of the doctrine his critics ascribe to him. "There is no doubt something wrong with Locke's view," Ayers observes, "since there does seem to be something more than physically odd in the supposition that a horse should become a cow" (1981, 270). To this we might add that something seems at least equally wrong with the proposition that only imperishable, indestructible things can have natures. We do not suggest that proving a given doctrine "strange" or contrary to common sense can suffice to prove that Locke could not espouse it; Locke repeatedly acknowledges that some of his doctrines must appear strange

or contrary to ordinary habits of thinking.²⁰ But the fact remains that Locke himself does not explicitly draw the nihilistic conclusion from his discussion of natural science. We have noted in the previous chapter his acknowledgments of the possible existence of real natural essences (3.6.30,36,37), his affirmative references to the "ordinary course of Nature" (4.16.6; also 2.26.2,4; 4.6.13; 4.3.28; TT II.60), and to the possibility of gaining partial but reliable knowledge of "the Reality of Things" or of "the several sorts of natural Bodies" through a careful accounting of their observable characteristics (3.10.25; 3.11.25; also 2.11.15; 3.10.22; 3.11.5,24; 4.4.16,18; 4.8.10). To these we now add the fact that not even from his discussions of the fact of change and the principle of contingency does Locke explicitly derive the extreme conclusions that some commentators find implicit in them.

From his discussion of change, for instance, Locke explicitly derives only the somewhat ambiguous conclusion that the "Doctrine of the Immutability of Essences, proves them to be only abstract Ideas" (3.3.19). The fact of change may mean no more than that real, corpuscularian constitutions or essences cannot be "ingenerable, and incorruptible." As Locke presents it here, it need not mean

²⁰In addition to the passages discussed above concerning the intuitive difficulty of the distinction of primary from secondary qualities, see ECHU 2.27.27; 3.6.38; also TT II.9,13,180.

that there are no real essences, or that the existence of the internal constitutions of things is so unstable as to afford no legitimate basis for our constructions of essence and species ideas. His explanation of the significance of the principle of contingency is similarly restrained. Stated somewhat reductively, that principle amounts to a reminder that in conceiving of the natures of humans and other earthly beings, we must take as a premise the presence of certain environmental conditions that bring forth and sustain those natures in their ordinarily observable modes of existence, growth and development. Our ideas of nature thus proceed from a perspective--anthropocentric in its focus on those qualities accessible to our sensory capacities, geocentric in its presumption of the normality of the present material, climatic and atmospheric conditions of the earth, and perhaps as well comprehending the present constitution of the whole solar system or even the galaxy in which the earth is situated. Given the limits inherent in any perspective however broadly conceived, it follows that our knowledge of the natures of things is very incomplete, "that we have very imperfect Ideas of Substances." This is the conclusion Locke draws from his discussion of contingency: We should "put an end to all our hopes of ever having the Ideas of their real Essences" (4.6.12). He never states or implies that our environment really is radically unstable or mutable--that there is any

significant likelihood that the atmosphere could suddenly become unbreathable, for instance, or that there could occur a sudden alteration in the proximity of the earth to the sun. In accordance with this apparent confidence in the regularity of the course of nature, he affirms the reasonableness of experimentally framing our conceptions of earthly natures by reference to those forms of being that the earth's normal environmental conditions bring forth.

As we will see still more clearly in the following chapter, Locke indeed holds that the natural condition is in very important respects one of unprovidedness for human beings. Our intent here is only to point out that he does not claim that this natural unprovidedness is so extreme as to negate the legitimacy of conceiving of normal conditions for the existence, growth and development of natural beings. But if Locke himself does not draw the extreme conclusions that some commentators draw from his employment of the corpuscularian theory, then it becomes necessary for us to reconsider the manner and degree of his assent to that theory.

We recall that Locke claims to find the corpuscularian account useful for explicating the "Nature of Sensation" (2.8.22)" and the Qualities of Bodies" (4.3.16). It is quite clear, however, that he does not believe that that theory in the form in which he finds it contains any finally adequate explanation of these phenomena, and there-

fore that his assent to it in its present form is at best provisional; for him it is merely that theory "which is thought to go farthest" toward an adequate account.²¹ Locke's assent rests to a considerable extent upon the fact that we can only conceive of bodies operating on us, or presenting to us ideas of their qualities, "by impulse" (2.8.11). He never attempts a corpuscularian explanation of the real essence of any particular substance, subsequently acknowledging not only that we have no comprehension of the the specific processes in which primary qualities produce secondary qualities (4.3.12ff),²² but also

²¹Cf. STCE 193: "...the Modern Corpuscularians talk, in most Things, more intelligibly than the Peripateticks, who possessed the Schools immediately before them." We should not disregard the context of this remark, i.e. a discussion of what should be "taught a Young Man as a Science," inasmuch as Locke may be especially concerned to stress the limitations of materialist explanations to a youthful (or parental) audience. He does take care, albeit briefly, to recommend the study of "Metaphysicks" or "Spirits," to be gleaned from "a good History of the Bible" (190), as a preface to the study of natural philosophy. Cf. Bluhm et al. 1980, 437. Nonetheless I believe that the evidence present in works intended for more learned audiences, notably the Essay, confirms that the opinion Locke expresses here concerning the adequacy of the corpuscularian theory reflects his most serious thinking. My own discussion of the limits of his assent to that theory draws heavily from the discussions in Yolton 1970, 56-64, and Wilson 1979.

²²In his "Examination of P. Malebranche's Opinion of Seeing All Things in God," Locke reiterates his opinion of our ultimate ignorance of the process of perception: "Impressions made on the retina by rays of light, I think I understand; and motions from thence continued to the brain may be conceived, and that these produce ideas in our minds, I am persuaded, but in a manner to me incomprehensible...The ideas it is certain I have...but the manner how I come by them, how it is that I perceive, I confess I under-

that even the manner in which bodies communicate motion to each other is wholly mysterious to us (2.23.28).²³ Most important, however, is the consideration that in order for it to be truly useful in explaining the qualities and properties of both individual substances and species essences, the corpuscularian theory would have to provide an explanation not only of the causal relations between primary and secondary qualities, but also of the coherence, or the relatively stable union, of the insensible particles that constitute observable bodies. And here again, the corpuscularian theory notwithstanding, we "can as little understand how the parts of Body cohere, as how we our selves perceive, or move" (2.23.25; cf. 2.23.23-27). Locke thus summarizes the natural phenomena that resist any corpuscularian explanation:

...the coherence and continuity of the parts of Matter; the production of Sensation in us of Colours and Sounds, etc. by impulse and motion; nay, the original Rules and Communication of Motion being such, wherein we can discover no natural connexion with any Ideas we

stand not" (Works 1877, II.421-422).

²³In connection with the claim that a nonimpulsive sensation is inconceivable to us, it is therefore useful to bear in mind Locke's denial that the inconceivability of a given proposition can in itself justify assent to its contrary (4.3.6, 4.10.19). Indeed this is especially pertinent for the inconceivability of action at a distance, in view of the fact that the phenomenon of gravity seems precisely to contradict this principle. Locke holds the corpuscularian hypothesis useless for explaining gravity (STCE 192; "Elements of Natural Philosophy," Works 1877, II.474), and admits in his controversy with Stillingfleet that Newton's work has convinced him to discard the opinion that bodies can operate only by impulse (Works 1823, 4.467-8).

have, we cannot but ascribe them to the arbitrary Will and good Pleasure of the Wise Architect. (4.3.29)

Locke's failure to endorse the more extreme implications of a strict reading of the corpuscularian theory appears directly related to his estimate of its limited explanatory power. Most fundamentally, his merely qualified assent to that theory is consistent with his professed openness to the possibility that real species essences exist in nature. The key to this openness is his agnostic reserve in conceiving of the nature of matter. He does concede that in "speaking of Matter, we speak of it always as one, because in truth, it expressly contains nothing but the Idea of a solid Substance, which is every where the same, every where uniform." But this does not entitle us to make inferences about the real world of nature, because it merely means that matter as we thus conceive it is a pure abstraction: "...since Solidity cannot exist without Extension, the taking Matter to be the name of something really existing under that Precision" can produce nothing but disputation and obscurity (3.10.15).²⁴ In Locke's conjecture, although "our general or specifick conception of Matter makes us speak of it as one thing, yet really all

²⁴The difficulty in conceiving of matter as a pure abstraction may account for the differences between the Essay's definition and the following, with which Locke begins his more introductory "Elements of Natural Philosophy": "Matter is an extended solid substance; which being comprehended under distinct surfaces, makes so many particular distinct bodies" (Works 1877, II.472).

Matter is not one individual thing" (4.10.10); matter exists in the world only in particularized parcels that combine and recombine with one another in mysterious ways to produce an enormous diversity of transient yet relatively stable and regular forms of existence. The abstract conception of the unity or sameness of matter may enable us easily enough to account for the element of flux or mutability in the physical world; but so long as we cannot account as well for the facts of cohesion and continuity, for the order and stability amid the flux, we will remain ignorant of "the Substance of Body" (2.23.30; also 4.3.22).²⁵

It appears then that Locke draws no sweeping conclusions concerning the degree of mutability in physical bodies or the existence or nonexistence of real essences in nature, because in his view we simply do not know enough about whatever is the fundamental stuff of which natural bodies are composed to infer with any reliability its capacity to assume an infinite diversity of forms or con-

²⁵Ayers agrees that in contrast to Descartes, Hobbes, and Boyle, Locke is agnostic concerning the nature of matter, yet remains convinced of its reality: "Hence material substance is extension for Descartes, but something we know not what for Locke" (1981, 250). It seems to me that since the notion of substance-in-general, unlike that of particular substances, is necessarily a pure abstraction, the reasoning that Ayers attributes to the "New Philosophers" and to Locke amounts to this: Suppose the fundamental sameness of things in the world, and the conclusion of radical mutability is inescapable. But for Locke the fundamental sameness or difference of things is precisely what is in question; the procedure that Ayers attributes to Locke amounts to simply supposing a problem out of existence.

figurations, let alone its likelihood at any given moment to undergo spontaneous, radical mutation. The most we can say is that we are ignorant of anything that necessarily prevents natural beings from undergoing such mutations (3.6.22; 4.3.10). Locke does not assume the truth of the corpuscularian theory in its current form and then infer from it the nonexistence of real essences in nature, nor does he employ it to absolutize the sway of change or transience, to the dogmatic exclusion of the phenomena that indicate a degree of order in the world. Contrary to the imputation of an nihilistic ontology, it seems to be the case that its incapacity to explain the degree of observable order in nature, most clearly represented by the relative cohesion and continuity of things,²⁶ is of major importance in preventing Locke's assent to the corpuscularian theory in more than a qualified and provisional manner.

One further clarification is required. We have argued that Locke's assent to the corpuscularian theory does

²⁶Cf. Yolton 1970, 85: "Cohesion seems to have held the secret of nature for Locke, in the sense that only with that could our knowledge of body cease in any way to be observational and become conceptual." It seems doubtful that knowledge of cohesion in itself could facilitate the method of "deducing from essences" that Yolton is here concerned to explicate. However that may be, my own suggestion is that knowledge of cohesion does hold an important part of the secret of nature for Locke, but in the sense that it could lay bare the ground of the fact that things are manifestly not so radically mutable as the mechanist thesis narrowly conceived would lead us to expect; that Locke regards such knowledge as a desideratum indicates that he takes seriously the degree of stability or order that is manifest in our ordinary observation.

not compel him simply to assume a natural chaos, but instead is qualified in a manner that permits him to retain an openness to the existence of a ground for whatever degree of orderliness his inquiries into natural history may reveal to him. The fact remains, however, that even thus qualified, his assent commits him to the view that, whether the basic causal entities are the corpuscles that he describes or instead "something yet more remote from our Comprehension" (4.3.11), the causal ground for whatever order exists among natural bodies must lie in their internal, physical constitutions. He must then accept some form of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. What requires clarification is the status of the secondary qualities. In what sense does Locke assert the unreality of such qualities, in contrast to primary qualities? If the real essences or internal constitutions of things are in principle inaccessible to the human understanding, and if the secondary qualities of observable objects provide the basis of our ordinary classifications of such objects, then does Locke's assertion of the unreality of such qualities imply that in his view we are radically alienated from the truth about the natural or external world? Does Locke indeed hold, as we have seen some commentators charge, that whatever order may exist in the real world, the world of secondary qualities that appears to our common senses or to our prescientific understandings is essential-

ly subjective or illusory?

Occasionally though not consistently, Locke does identify the "true Nature of Things" with their "internal Constitution" or causal core (2.23.32; also 2.23.29). If this internal constitution consists in those qualities "which every Thing has within it self, without any relation to any thing without it" (3.6.6), then it would seem to follow that secondary qualities, which depend for their peculiar existence upon the presence of a perceiver, constitute no part of the real nature of things. Yet in his description of secondary qualities, Locke does not simply deny their reality or assert their mere subjectivity, nor does his notion of the nature of a thing as the nonrelational "thing in itself" strictly require it of him. He says that secondary qualities "in truth are nothing in the Objects themselves, but Powers to produce various Sensations in us..." (2.8.10, 14-24; emphasis supplied). Leaving aside the question whether primary qualities, which are after all themselves powers as well, are by nature any less relational than secondary qualities, we need only reformulate the status of secondary qualities in order to show that they too can be thought of as nonrelationally, constantly present in bodies. If we conceive of secondary qualities as powers or dispositions in things to produce certain sensations in beings like us, i.e. beings possessing certain sensory organs, then we can think of such pow-

ers or dispositions as constantly present in things even in the absence of any particular perceiver. Thus Curley holds that although Locke has not achieved a sufficiently sophisticated dispositional theory, his occasional apparent suggestions of the unreality of secondary qualities represent inconsistencies that are not essential to his doctrine (1972, 464,440).²⁷

In fact such a conception seems implicit in Locke's frequent references to the possibility and necessity of gaining some partial acquaintance with the natures of things through a careful accounting of their observable characteristics. As Yolton observes, the "phrase, 'the nature of things themselves,' which runs throughout the Essay, almost never means 'the internal constitution of objects'...It refers to the objects of observation" (1970, 124). Observable properties or secondary qualities can then be included in the nature of things as well as the primary qualities of insensible corpuscles. But if Locke's

²⁷Curley distinguishes "individual" powers, or "the capacities of individual objects, or classes of objects, to affect or be affected by a given individual object," from "sortal" powers, or the powers of individuals or classes of objects "to affect or be affected by all individual objects of a certain kind." Sortal powers, unlike individual powers, can be regarded as intrinsic to their objects (447-449). My argument is that without naming it, Locke does in fact make use of the distinction Curley describes; the ambiguity in his usage of it derives not from his failure to grasp it, but rather from his awareness of the difficulty involved in employing a concept of dispositional qualities for the purpose of defining precisely a given substance or kind.

corpuscularianism permits him to distinguish the nature of an object from the causal ground of its properties, then why does he sometimes identify the two?

With this question we return to the fundamental purpose of Locke's account of natural science. By occasionally identifying the "true Nature" of a thing with only its internal constitution and primary qualities, and therewith calling attention to the (merely) dispositional reality of its secondary qualities, Locke calls attention to the fact that the secondary qualities or observable properties of things are in principle infinite in number. For this reason it is not possible to define a natural substance with perfect adequacy and precision by reference only to its observable properties, and therefore it would seem to make sense for Locke to restrict his conception of the nature of a thing to the finite number of qualities inhering in its causal core. But the fact that according to Locke the knowledge of the causal core required for a perfect definition is inaccessible to us implies that there must be a further reason for him to make this identification. We concluded the preceding chapter with the observation that Locke's intention to defend the historical, probabilistic study of nature against the arid, dogmatic rationalism of the scholastics requires him not only to defend the possibility of empirically based judgments concerning the natures of things, but also to maintain in view

the requirements of a strict, demonstrative science of nature in order to preserve a salutary sense of the necessary imperfection of our knowledge. The ambiguity under present consideration appears to proceed in part from the same design; Locke's hypothetical description of a real corpuscularian essence from which we could deduce a thing's properties (4.3.25) represents an elaboration of the unattainable requisites of a perfect, demonstrative science of nature. The fact that knowledge of this "true Nature" is in principle unattainable compels us to classify things historically or descriptively rather than scientifically, while the recognition that only such knowledge is perfect prevents us from reifying our own classifications as finally adequate. A single principle seems to govern the major ambiguities of both Locke's epistemology and his ontology: Only through a sense of the ultimate hiddenness of nature can we gain what knowledge of nature we are capable of.²⁸

But this application of the corpuscularian theory does not simply reiterate Locke's epistemological argument for a sense of openness with respect to our classifications of things in nature; it carries a further implication for the manner in which we should pursue our historical inquiries. If secondary qualities do not inhere "in" things as a fixed number of constantly manifest, wholly nondisposi-

²⁸Cf. LN I.111; II.135; CU 3.

tional or nonrelational qualities, then their number and character must be functions of changing environmental conditions (4.6.11). Moreover, if they are epiphenomena of the primary qualities that Locke describes, it would follow that their number and character are functions especially of changes in their physical environments. We can then understand Locke's identification of the true natures of things with their corpuscularian constitutions as primarily intended not to call into question the reality or naturalness of secondary qualities, but rather to stimulate active experimentation aimed at the discovery of new properties in things as the most productive mode of historical inquiry. The attitude of openness he recommends toward our classifications reflects not only our merely probabilistic knowledge of the relation between observed properties and real essences, but also a conception of natural things as harboring undiscovered powers whose discovery, like those of "that one contemptible mineral" iron, must bring us closer to the truth of nature, and for all we know may produce in the process incalculable practical or material benefits. By encouraging us continually to expand the sphere of the observable, as it were to force to the surface qualities hidden by nature from our unimproved senses, the corpuscularian hypothesis facilitates the simultaneous improvement of "Knowledge and Plenty," that is, of know-

ledge and power (4.12.11).²⁹

²⁹Thus it seems to me to miss the point to object, as Yost does, that Locke is uninterested in hypotheses concerning sub-microscopic events because he holds that we can only classify things and formulate hypotheses of causal relations by reference to observables (1951, especially 120-130). The very concept "sub-microscopic" is relative to the power of our instruments of observation; without hypotheses concerning originally sub-microscopic events, there could have been no reason to attempt to bring some of those events into the sphere of human observation and control. Yolton similarly stresses the "middle path" that Locke follows in his estimate of the utility of hypotheses, arguing that Locke conceives of the specific value of hypotheses only as means of explanation, not of discovery (1970, 68, 57-75). Contrast Laudan 1977.

THE FREEDOM OF THE MIND

To this point we have conceived of the danger that Locke's reductionistic corpuscularianism poses for the commonsense intelligibility of nature as lying in the doctrine of the uniformity of matter and the illusory or radically mutable character of its modifications. But it is possible to begin by acknowledging the relative stability of natural beings and yet discover a similar potential danger in the principle of reductionism itself. Let us take Locke at his word, and accept as genuine his professed admiration for the accomplishments of the corpuscularian "Master-Builders" in advancing the natural sciences. Let us thus attribute to him the belief that nature is ultimately lawful and intelligible, and that its physical operations can best be discovered through historical inquiry, complemented or completed by experiments designed to bring us closer to the primary qualities of its primary constituents, whatever they might be. As we have noted, Locke appears to express enthusiasm about such a conception in the anticipation that it will facilitate advances not only in knowledge as such, but also in "profitable Knowledge" or technology (4.12.12). It is not difficult to see how a conception of physical nature as matter-in-motion, as a realm of sheer determinacy ruled solely by laws of mater-

ial and efficient causation, can facilitate great advances in human power over nature, by enabling human beings to manipulate nature's processes of material and efficient causation. By conceiving of the properties of things as "powers" and testing hypotheses concerning their causal bases, we are able to make nature's powers our own. But we might well wonder whether this is not ultimately a Faustian bargain. For questions inevitably arise concerning the status of human beings in the corpuscularian theory. Are human beings to be included among the "bodies" whose behavior that theory seeks to explain? If so, can we conceive of other natural bodies as mere manipulable matter-in-motion without thus conceiving of ourselves as well? Must we conceive as mere powers, as epiphenomena of the primary qualities of our own insensible constituent particles, not only those qualities whereby we are perceptible to others, but also the powers whereby we ourselves perceive and reflect upon ideas? Can we adequately explain the human phenomena of consciousness, of reason and volition, merely by reference to material and efficient causation?

At this point the ontological and epistemological questions merge. To assert that the mind itself is a mere epiphenomenon of the material or bio-chemical structure of the brain would be to imply that thought can be determined decisively only by its internal conditions, by the material constitution of the brain, and not by the external reality

that it attempts to comprehend. This would indeed be to imply that all thought is subjective, or in other words that we are incapable of genuine knowledge of any kind, whether of secondary or of primary qualities. It would be to imply that we are inescapably imprisoned in a kind of perceptual solitary confinement, in a condition of solipsism or privacy such that there is no common world intelligible to our common senses. It would then be beside the point to protest that the epiphenomenal character of secondary qualities does not in itself imply their unreality or subjectivity; asserted in this comprehensive manner, the principle of reductionism inherent in the corpuscularian theory would ultimately efface the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, and therewith render wholly unintelligible its own foundation and that of any other theory as well.

The ultimate question raised by Locke's employment of the corpuscularian hypothesis concerns the freedom of the mind. In keeping with what Aaron calls the Essay's "severely practical" orientation (1955, 77), or its aspiration to serve at once the causes of "Truth and Usefulness" (ECHU "Epistle to the Reader," Nidditch ed. 1975, 9), Locke expresses an interest in the freedom of the mind less for its own sake than for its function in facilitating freedom

of action,³⁰ and, as we will see, for its relevance to important theological issues. Notwithstanding the fact that his extended treatment of this issue does not appear in the context of an explicit discussion of morality--to repeat, no chapter title in the entire Essay announces a direct concern with morality--it is clear that Locke regards the issue as fundamental to morality. It can suffice for the moment to recall that the vital connection of freedom of thought and moral action is already manifest in his working definition of "moral Man," of the proper subject of law or morality, as "a corporeal rational Creature" (3.11.16). What we seek, therefore, is Locke's explication of this concept of "moral man," or of the relation between our corporeal and rational qualities. We need to know how or to what extent we can explain our mental experiences of thinking and willing by reference to the nature of the mind, or

³⁰Cf. 2.22.10: "For Action being the great Business of Mankind, and the whole matter about which all Laws are conversant, it is no wonder, that the several Modes of Thinking and Motion, should be taken notice of..." We have noted above (chapter III, p. 99 n.17) the complaints of some scholars concerning a general scholarly tendency to devote insufficient attention to the moral-practical significance of the Essay. Pangle agrees that the Essay is of great political importance in its own right, and even argues that in a sense its major defect consists in its insufficiently philosophic orientation; Locke's apparent emphasis of the primacy of action to thought signifies a failure or refusal to account for the specifically philosophic eros (1988, 212ff). In this and the following chapters, I will argue that though Locke evidently refuses in public to elevate philosophizing to the summit of human experience, he does not deny in principle the possibility of a truly free mind or a pure desire for truth.

of the substance in which those powers inhere.

Present purposes do not require a complete elaboration of Locke's account of these mental phenomena; the following chapter will include a more detailed discussion in particular of his account of volition. Here it is essential only to indicate briefly Locke's view that we do not experience our mental faculties as epiphenomena of any prior or more fundamental cause. There are two general data of common experience that cast doubt on this application of the doctrine of epiphenomenalism. The first consists in the fact that however hidden to us may be the comprehensive truth concerning the order of nature, and however natural among human beings may be a condition of dissensus on many issues, our fundamental epistemological experience is not one of solipsism or privacy. The clearest indication of this lies in the fact that we "seldom mistake...the Use and Signification of the names of simple Ideas," which "carry a very obvious meaning with them, which every one precisely comprehends, or easily perceives he is ignorant of..." (3.9.18).³¹

³¹Cf. 2.32.15: "I am nevertheless very apt to think, that the sensible Ideas, produced by any Object in different Men's Minds, are most commonly very near and undiscernibly alike." Moreover, on this opinion of the objectivity of secondary qualities depends to a considerable extent Locke's strong suspicion that "the greatest part of the Disputes in the World, are...meerly Verbal, and about the Signification of Words" (3.11.7; also 3.9.16ff). As Wood observes, according to Locke "Conflict among men comes not so much from the contradictory testimony of the senses as it does from the fictional fabrications of the intellect"

The second of these data consists in our more direct experience of mental faculties as the conditions of agency. Near the beginning of the Essay's longest chapter, Locke explains his twofold conception of power: "Active" power, "which is the more proper signification of the word Power," is the power to effect change, and "passive" power is the power to receive it (2.21.2,3,4). Through sensation well considered, we can gain clear and abundant ideas of passive powers. Given, on the other hand, that there are "but two sorts of Action, whereof we have any Idea, viz. Thinking and Motion," ideas of active powers seem to derive mainly if not exclusively, and much more clearly, from "reflection on the Operations of our Minds" (2.21.4; 2.23.28ff.). Reflecting on our mental experience, we find more particularly that we have a power to abstract from our present concerns, enabling us to frame general conceptions of happy or well-lived lives (2.11.11, 2.21.51,56,61); that we have a power to suspend the present determination of our wills in order to consider present alternatives in relation to our general conceptions of happiness (2.21.47,52,71); and that we have a power to reflect on and to adjust these conceptions of happiness, even self-consciously to refocus our desires, in accordance with new thoughts or experiences (2.21.45,46,53,69). By these means we can guide our voli-

(1975, 68). In the following chapter, we shall discuss in more detail Locke's doctrine of the naturalness of dissensus among human beings.

tions by thought, and can therefore begin sequences of events (2.21.5,7). We thus experience ourselves as free, self-mastering, self-determining beings, the owners of our actions (2.21.15,48ff.,53).

Locke appeals repeatedly to our ordinary reflective experience, to "every one to observe in himself" (2.21.38; also 2.21.7,32,35,36,44,47,53,69) to see whether his account is accurate. He remains, that is, more-or-less on the level of commonsense experience; nowhere in this discussion does he attempt a corpuscularian explanation of volition or of the thought that guides it. We need to determine why this is so. Perhaps he simply excludes such an attempt from the subject matter of the Essay; we have seen that Locke at times disclaims any concern with ontological issues. In the Essay's introductory chapter, he declares more specifically that he

shall not at present meddle with the Physical Consideration of the Mind; or trouble my self to examine, wherein its Essence consists, or by what Motions of our Spirits, or Alterations of our Bodies, we come to have any Sensation by our Organs, or any Ideas in our Understandings; and whether those Ideas do in their Formation, any, or all of them, depend on Matter, or no. These are Speculations, which, however curious and entertaining, I shall decline, as lying out of my Way, in the Design I am now upon. (1.1.2)

It would seem that we should look upon such disclaimers with considerable suspicion, however, in view of the perfectly obvious fact (which he readily acknowledges) that in elaborating the corpuscularian hypothesis and the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, Locke does to

some extent engage in "Physical Enquiries" and thus violates his stated delimitation. The exception is necessary, as we have seen, in order for Locke to render somewhat more intelligible the nature of sensation and the qualities of bodies. Why then could not a similar exception be made in order to clarify the nature or qualities of the mind? Just as Locke employs the corpuscularian hypothesis as the most plausible interpretation of the nature or cause of ideas that we experience in sensation, why does he not employ it to provide a similar interpretation of ideas that we experience in reflection? Why or in what sense does he find it necessary to distinguish between material and spiritual substances (2.23.5, 23-32, 36)?

In fact Locke does at several points consider the propositions that the soul could be a material entity and that thought could be a power or attribute of matter. On the basis of these considerations, it is perhaps safest for us to conclude that in the end he gently urges upon his readers a position of agnosticism on the issue of the nature of the mind, as in his suggestion that whoever will "look into the dark and intricate part of each Hypothesis, will scarce find his Reason able to determine him fixedly for, or against the Soul's Materiality" (4.3.6; also 2.23.28ff., 2.27.17, 27).³² Such agnosticism may not be

³²Such remarks would appear to complicate Aaron's opinion that Locke simply "accepts the usual dualism, the 'two parts of nature,' active immaterial substance and

altogether evenhanded, however, inasmuch as Locke does not seem to believe that his audience most urgently requires an openness to the possible truth of the immaterialist thesis; to advance the position of agnosticism on this issue requires him first and foremost to show the nonabsurdity of the materialist view. It is not impossible then that this profession agnosticism is merely provisional, that Locke is actually a materialist of a certain sort. In any event, in order to facilitate such a spirit of openness, he proposes to replace the distinction between material and immaterial beings with that between cogitative and incogitative beings (4.10.9).³³

passive material substance" (1955, 142; also 104-105, 143). Still, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Locke accepts some kind of dualism, reflecting a qualitative difference between cogitative and incogitative natures. Gibson holds that although Locke "begins by taking for granted the current categories for interpreting the real," he employs them less rigidly than does Descartes: "In place of two substances from whose clearly defined essences the whole of their further determinations are conceived as deducible, body and mind are only knowable as objects of a partial and therefore imperfect existence" (1917, 226, 224-5). Cf. Alexander 1977, 75-76.

³³Wilson argues that Locke offers no good reason for adopting even as a matter of probability the opinion of the immateriality of the mind or the soul: "Locke does ascribe sensation and even 'thought' to animals; yet he shows no inclination to attribute immaterial souls to them. It seems to follow that on Locke's principles thought not only can inhere in a corporeal subject but in many cases actually does" (1979, 145; also 150). Similarly, Ayers attributes to Locke the opinion that thought is a "perfection" no different in kind from animal or vegetable life (1977, 247); Pangle suspects, along with Locke's vigilant contemporary the Reverend Edmund Stillingfleet, that Locke denies the existence of any noncorporeal substance (1988, 209; Works 1823, 4.5ff., and passim). The fundamental distinc-

Adopting the latter distinction would carry the benefit of directing our attention to what seems to be the real issue for Locke, which is not the substantive nature of the soul, but rather the status of its power of thought. And on this issue Locke seems to speak more definitely. He claims to accept the possibility that the soul or the mind could be a material substance, only on the assumption that the power of thinking could inhere in matter by virtue of a divine superaddition; matter "is evidently in its own nature void of sense and thought" (4.3.6).³⁴ Thus rejecting the possibility that thinking could be a natural power of or could arise as it were spontaneously from "senseless Matter" (4.10.5), he rejects with some emphasis the relevance of the corpuscularian hypothesis for explaining mental phenomena.

For it is as impossible to conceive, that ever bare

tion would then seem to be not between cogitative and incogitative, nor even between animate and inanimate, but simply between living and nonliving beings.

³⁴The notion of superaddition in the Essay seems to correspond to the Second Treatise' notion of an "appeal to heaven," in its application to cases beyond rational decision. In attempting to explain how the motions and collisions of bodies can produce perceptions, e.g. of pleasure or pain, "we are fain to quit our Reason, go beyond our Ideas, and attribute it wholly to the good Pleasure of our Maker" (4.3.6; also 2.8.13, 4.3.28,29, 4.10.10, STCE 192). Cf. Bluhm et al.: The notion of 'God' for Locke simply "refers to natural causes as yet unknown to science" (1980, 437). In what follows, however, I shall argue that whatever Locke seriously thinks of the principle of superaddition, it is most likely that he doubts the capacity of human science ever to explain materially or reductionistically the phenomena of the mind.

incogitative Matter should produce a thinking intelligent Being, as that nothing should of it self produce Matter...Divide Matter into as minute parts as you will...vary the Figure and Motion of it as much as you please...and you may as rationally expect to produce Sense, Thought, and Knowledge, by putting together in a certain Figure and Motion, gross particles of Matter, as by those that are the very minutest, that do any where exist...So that if we will suppose nothing first, or eternal; Matter can never begin to be: If we suppose bare Matter, without Motion, eternal; Motion can never begin to be: If we suppose only Matter and Motion first, or eternal; Thought can never begin to be. (4.10.10; also 16)

It is true that even this apparently definitive statement, occurring in the midst of a discussion "Of Our Knowledge of the Existence of a GOD," comes not without a measure of Locke's characteristic ambiguity. He argues in effect that matter could not of its own power generate intelligence, because it is impossible for us to conceive how matter could generate intelligence. But at the close of the discussion, he raises and does not directly answer an objection to this mode of inference. "We cannot conceive how any thing but impulse of Body can move Body," he observes, "and yet that is not a Reason sufficient to make us deny it possible, against the constant Experience, we have of it in our selves, in all our voluntary Motions, which are produced in us only by the free Action or Thought of our own Minds" (4.10.19; also 4.3.6). We cannot infer from the inconceivability of a proposition either its falseness or the truth of the contrary proposition. So it would seem, then, that we cannot infer the immateriality of the soul from the fact that we cannot conceive of its material-

ity, nor can we infer the impossibility of matter naturally generating thought from the fact that we cannot conceive of its possibility.³⁵

Upon considering the implications of this denial of the legitimacy of inferences from the principle of inconceivability, therefore, we come to confront the possibility that our experience of mental freedom or agency, however "constant," may be nonetheless illusory. Why is it legitimate for us to interpret volition as an active, initiating power, as a capacity to interrupt a causal sequence of events and begin a new one? If it is possible that our thinking and volition are reducible to materialist causes, then how do we know that a self or a unitary source of our actions even exists? How do we know, that is, that the claim of self-dominion does not represent at bottom an act of usurpation or covetousness on the part of whichever of a number of competing wills or desires happens to gain a kind of mental hegemony, thus producing a mere illusion of freedom or personhood similar to our uncritical attribution of ontological primacy to secondary qualities?³⁶ In the pen-

³⁵Bluhm *et al.* argue that this rejection of inferences from the principle of inconceivability constitutes one among several indications that Locke intends the argument in ECHU 4.10 to serve a merely exoteric purpose (1980, especially 419-423). This may well be the case; but on this principle, we might also infer the nonphilosophic character of Locke's corpuscularian explanation of sensation.

³⁶Cf. Nietzsche's conception of the "'soul as social structure of the drives and affects'...Willing seems to me above all something complicated, something that is a unit

ultimate section of the chapter "Of Power," immediately following the close of his discussion of human liberty, Locke remarks that "Grammar, and the common frame of Languages" may lead us sometimes to mistake for active powers what are really passive powers, as in the case, for instance, of a so-called "act" of perception (2.21.72). What justifies the opinion that these mistakes are limited in number, or that not all of our "actions" ordinarily conceived are really semblances of passions?

It may seem at times that despite the fact that his own arguments give rise to them, Locke's response to such questions is simply dismissive. With respect to the fundamental question of our knowledge of our own existence, he repeats the Cartesian argument that "If I doubt of all other Things, that very doubt makes me perceive my own Existence, and will not suffer me to doubt of that," and adds that "He that can doubt, whether he be any thing, or no, I speak not to, no more than I would argue with pure nothing, or endeavour to convince Non-entity, that it were something" (4.9.3, 4.10.2; also 4.3.6). But in fact Locke does have something more to say to the skeptic on this point. His argument against the reduction of intelligence to purely materialist causes derives not simply from the commonness of our apparent experience to the contrary, nor

only as a word..." (Beyond Good and Evil, aphorisms 12, 19).

from the inconceivability of a reductionistic materialism, but more compellingly from the absurdity of its consequences. Locke recognizes that among the consequences of a conception of thought as an epiphenomenon of "the accidental unguided Motions of blind Matter" would be that "Freedom, Power, Choice, and all rational and wise thinking or acting will be quite taken away" (4.10.17), would be revealed as merely illusory. A comprehensively reductionist materialism would thus yield the opinion that certain configurations of matter-in-motion produce by their very motions a process of conscious cognition that somehow contains an illusory experience of its own independence. The fact that an epiphenomenal or caused process could somehow come to consider itself as a self, as an agent or active power independent of any causation, must then signify that it is ignorant or oblivious of its own causal bases. The absurdity in this appears upon consideration of the implication that this ignorance or obliviousness is necessary, that it cannot be overcome. Let "this thinking System be all, or a part of the Matter of the Universe," reasons Locke, "it is impossible that any one Particle, should either know its own, or the motion of any other Particle, or the Whole know the Motion of every Particular; and so regulate its own Thoughts or Motions, or indeed have any Thought resulting from such Motion" (ibid.). Let us suppose that thought does thus reduce to the motion of parti-

cles, and suppose further that it presently achieves self-consciousness, such that it loses its semblance of independence and becomes aware of its material bases. It would thus become aware not only that those material bases had hitherto produced an illusion of independence, but that they are also producing the present reductionist proposition. On what grounds could we conclude that the content of the present thought is any less illusory?³⁷ Unless we wished simply to assume that the present moment were somehow privileged to provide a revelation of the true grounds of intelligence--unless, that is, we wished to make a pure leap of faith, utterly without rational or experiential foundation--we would have to concede that the present thought could be no less illusory than its predecessors, that for all we know there may be some other causal entity producing the illusion of material or corpuscularian causality, and so forth in an infinite regress. To become conscious of a possible causal ground of thought is necessarily to doubt not only the possibility of any correspondence between mind and world, but also the reality of that ground itself; to attempt to explain thought or intelligence as a mere accidental effect or epiphenomenon of nonintelligent

³⁷Locke raises a similar question at ECHU 4.11.8: "But yet, if any one will be so sceptical, as to distrust his senses...and therefore will question the Existence of all Things, or our Knowledge of any thing: I must desire him to consider, that if all be a Dream, then he doth but dream, that he makes the Question; and so it is not much matter, that a waking Man should answer him."

causes is to commit oneself to an endless search for the ever-elusive nature of those causes (cf. 4.10.19). To embrace such an explanation and all its consequences would therefore present the remarkable spectacle of thought denying its own possibility, by tracing its existence to a nonintelligent cause whose existence as cause remains at bottom purely conjectural.³⁸ Than this, Locke maintains, "there can be nothing more absurd" (4.10.16).³⁹

Granting the extreme unlikelihood that a seventeenth-century writer with Locke's sensitivity to the prevailing climate of opinion would openly and straightforwardly pub-

³⁸In this respect Locke's argument can be viewed as a continuation of his rejection of the theory of innatism, present here in a much more radical form. Just as he objects to the notion of dispositional innatism that certain principles or propositions can be naturally inscribed in our minds of which we are yet unaware, so too he objects to the more radical notion that our thought can be determined by principles or causes of which we can never be adequately aware (cf. ECHU 1.2).

³⁹I believe that Locke is in this decisive respect in agreement with the following statement by Harry V. Jaffa: "While plants, and animals other than man, may without self-contradiction be conceived as forms which are epiphenomena of some more fundamental sub-human reality, man cannot be so conceived. Intelligence cannot be regarded as a by-product of unintelligence. The 'what' of man, his self-consciousness...cannot be conceived as the effect of an unintelligent cause. For in that case man's intelligence would, like the secondary qualities, be regarded as an illusion, corresponding as it would to nothing in a reality outside man's brain. But the doctrine of an unintelligent primary reality, being itself a product of man's brain, would also have to be regarded as an illusion. The doctrine that man, the intelligent being, is 'caused' by an unintelligent first principle, cannot then escape self-contradiction. Intelligence is an irreducible reality" (1957, 61). Cf. Lowenthal 1978, 96.

lish arguments certain to provoke accusations of materialism or atheism, we have attempted to remain open to the possibility that Locke's rejection in this context of a materialist explanation of thought does not represent his most serious thinking on this issue. Having thus considered the relevant evidence, however, we conclude nonetheless that Locke fails to present a corpuscularian explanation of mental phenomena not out of considerations of mere prudence, but instead because he believes that no such attempted explanation could succeed in rendering those phenomena intelligible. Whatever his ultimate opinion concerning the substantial nature of the mind or soul, or concerning the reality of the distinction between material and spiritual substances, Locke does not go so far as to counsel an openness to the question of the reduction of thought to material and efficient causation. Indeed he believes that he can safely counsel an openness with respect to the former question precisely because neither possible resolution need carry the destructive consequences of the reductionist principle. It is "not of such mighty necessity to determine one way or t'other" the question of the substantial nature of the mind (and is therefore a waste of intellectual labor to try), according to Locke, because "All the great ends of Morality and Religion, are well enough secured, without philosophical Proofs of the

Soul's Immateriality" (ibid.; also 2.27.17).⁴⁰

The corpuscularian hypothesis may very well be the basis of a true explanation of the behavior of bodies, Locke seems to hold, but if it is to be usefully applied to the thoughts and actions of human beings, it must be able to account for the facts that we do not experience the world as solipsists and that we are able somehow to reflect upon and therefore to exercise influence over the conditions of our own thinking and action. If the corpuscularian hypothesis or something like it is to be comprehensively true, in other words, it must be true in such a way as to respect the essentially irreducible character of the powers of the mind. Locke declines to offer a corpuscularian explanation of thinking and volition because he simply has no clear idea of what such an explanation might involve; mind and body do not necessarily belong to two separate or wholly distinct worlds, but are related and conjoined in some mysterious way that defies any simple reduction of one

⁴⁰It is true that in the immediate context Locke is concerned to show that one can discard this doctrine of immateriality without thereby discarding the doctrine of the soul's immortality, which supports our sense of moral obligation by placing before us the prospect of reward or punishment in an afterlife. (Cf. 1.3.6: "...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, and Power enough to call to account the Proudest Offender.") But in referring not merely to one, but to all the great ends of morality, he implies that the notion of human agency, indispensable for any notion of obligation, would be similarly undisturbed by the doctrine of the materiality of the soul or the mind.

to the other (2.23.28). We can proceed best in this area, Locke implies, by simply analyzing and attempting to render an internally consistent account of our own and others' mental experiences, not by attempting to force such experiences into conformity with a preconceived hypothesis. There can be no doubt that as a problem, the problem of the relation between mind and body or between the cogitative and incogitative parts of nature survives Locke's philosophizing. The point here is not to suggest that he succeeds in resolving the issue, but rather that there is virtue in his agnosticism. In respecting the legitimacy of the problem in this relation, Locke refuses to reduce matter to mind or vice versa, and refuses also to posit their radical separation; rather he simply insists that a successful resolution must account satisfactorily for all the relevant phenomena present in our common experience.

CONCLUSION: NATURAL SCIENCE AND NATURAL HISTORY

We have seen in these past two chapters that Locke's conception of the proper method for the study of nature is twofold. Against the scholastics' abstract rationalism, he insists strongly on a historical or descriptive approach, while in his awareness of the uselessness or even absurdity of a totally naive empiricism, he retains a clear interest in explanatory hypotheses. We have been concerned in the present chapter to ascertain whether Locke's employment of one such hypothesis, the corpuscularian hypothesis, has the effect of undermining the possibility of a genuinely historical approach to the phenomena, or to "the nature of things themselves." We have found that while he seems to view corpuscularianism as the most intelligible account available of certain kinds of natural phenomena, he is clearly aware of its deficiencies; as Margaret Wilson puts it, Locke's various qualifications of his assent amount to an acknowledgement "that most of what goes on in the world is incomprehensible from the point of view of Boylean mechanism" (1979, 149). He does not believe it capable of fully explaining the natures of material substances or bodies, nor does he find in it any justification for conceiving of nature comprehensively in terms of matter- or bodies-in-motion. Therefore his employment of it does not

commit him to an endorsement of the extreme and even dangerous implications that some commentators allege. That he assents to it at all proceeds in large part from his general sense of the superior intelligibility of explaining the behavior of observable bodies by reference to the motions of their fundamental constituents,⁴¹ rather than by obscure references to their substantial forms or occult qualities. But the point is that Locke neither offers nor endorses any systematic, comprehensive explanation of natural phenomena; he employs the corpuscularian theory in a moderate, somewhat pragmatic manner, as a hypothesis useful both in providing partial explanations of the phenomena gathered in natural histories and in suggesting promising directions for further experimentation. By this we do not mean to suggest that Locke's qualified assent to a corpuscularian or mechanistic natural science is perfectly benign, carrying no dangers whatsoever. We mean to suggest only that such dangers as this assent may carry do not proceed from dogmatism, or from any procedure of excluding a priori certain phenomena from consideration.

The moderate manner in which Locke employs the cor-

⁴¹Locke's assent to the corpuscularian theory seems to involve less an acceptance of its details than an agreement with the general principle of explaining physical events by the motions of insensible particles. The spirit in which Locke accepts the corpuscularian account of perception appears in his confession that "I understand not" how we perceive, "though it be plain motion has to do in the producing" of sensory ideas (Works 1877, II.10; also 14).

puscularian hypothesis, and in addition his assessment of both the promise and the essential danger of the new natural science are rather strikingly illustrated in a remarkable digression occurring within his discussion "Of Our Complex Ideas of Substances." Having elaborated again the hypothesis that the observable qualities of material substances have their causal bases in the primary qualities of the insensible corpuscularian constituents of those substances, Locke digresses, apparently to sound a note of reassurance. The corpuscularian theory calls to our attention the inadequacy of our faculties for the genuinely scientific study of nature, insofar as we would require "Microscopical Eyes" or senses "much quicker and acuter" than those naturally given us, in order to "penetrate... into the secret Composition, and radical Texture of Bodies" (2.23.12). But perhaps we should not lament our deficiencies in this respect; Locke seems to reassure us that the possession of senses improved in the manner he describes would be "inconsistent with our Being, or at least well-being in this part of the Universe," in that in all probability it would overwhelm us with sensory minutiae, undermining our capacity to make the ordinary identifications and distinctions whereby we order our daily lives. We should therefore rest secure in the belief that the "infinite wise Contriver of us...hath fitted our Senses, Faculties, and Organs, to the conveniences of Life, and the

Business we have to do here" (ibid.).

Yet in the immediate sequel he cleverly qualifies this affirmation of the providedness of our natural mental condition, proposing now that only "in our present State," i.e. one wherein we possess "unalterable Organs," would the possession of sense organs thus improved be of no advantage to us. What we would find disorienting would not be our perception or knowledge of ordinarily insensible particles as such, but rather a condition in which we could perceive only the primary qualities of microscopic bodies, without any conception of them as constituents of the larger bodies manifest in the world of common or unimproved sense experience. Faced with the choice of living exclusively either in the world of improved or the world of unimproved sense experience, it would therefore be rational for us to choose the latter. But Locke is not content simply to let the matter rest here. Immediately after illustrating the disadvantages of living exclusively in a world of improved sense experience, he proposes an "extravagant conjecture" according to which, like angels assuming bodies, we could alter our organs of perception so as "to suit them to [our] present Design." What wonders might we discover, he continues enthusiastically, if we could view at our pleasure "the Figure and Motion in the minute Particles of the Blood, and other juices of Animals, as distinctly as...at other times, the shape and motion of the Animals them-

selves"--if we could pass at pleasure between the worlds of minute particles and of observable objects, or between the worlds revealed to our improved and to our unimproved senses (2.23.13)? Now, however "wild a Fancy" it may be with respect to the "Beings above us," Locke's conjecture is clearly not at all extravagant as applied to human beings. The microscopes of the late seventeenth century were already capable of "augmenting the acuteness of our Senses" to a degree sufficient to bring to sight a world of ordinarily hidden phenomena, often strange or incongruous from the perspective of the unimproved senses; and Locke explicitly imagines the advent of far more powerful microscopes, and perhaps by implication also that of similarly powerful instruments for the augmentation of other senses (2.23.11,12).⁴² In such means we already possess to a considerable extent the power of "Spirits" to alter our perceptive organs, and thereby, so it would seem, to pass at pleasure to and from the worlds of improved and unim-

⁴²Locke seems thus to believe it in principle possible for us actually to observe the basic constituents of physical reality: "...if that most instructive of our Senses, Seeing, were in any Man 1000, or 100000 times more acute than it is now by the best Microscope...he would come nearer the Discovery of the Texture and Motion of the minute Parts of corporeal things; and in many of them, probably get Ideas of their internal Constitutions" (2.23.12). Cf. Yolton 1970, 45-46. We should note that this does not necessarily contradict his denials of our capacity for knowledge of real essences; the decisive distinction is between observing the constituent corpuscles of a given internal constitution and being able to deduce observable properties from their qualities.

proved sense experience.

In thus referring to the wonders that artificially improved perceptions might manifest to us, and by implication to the greater comprehension of nature that they might facilitate, Locke expresses clearly the promise that his "extravagant conjecture" holds forth. We might complete this expression by recalling his emphasis of the close relation between "Knowledge and Plenty," or of the technological dimension of the promise of modern science (4.12.11). What we should not overlook in this, however, is the significance of his acknowledgment of the danger. Because nature reveals itself at best only partially to our unimproved senses, the task of the natural historian must involve not simply the faithful recording of experiences, but further the augmentation of our senses, in order to raise to the level of phenomena things or events that lie beneath or beyond those ordinarily perceptible. In order to expand our knowledge of nature, we must to some extent transcend our commonsense experience. For Locke the danger lies in the fact that an attempt to do so completely, to live exclusively in a world of microscopic corpuscles or perhaps things "yet more remote from our Comprehension" (4.3.11), would be an attempt to live "in a quite different World from other People" (2.23.12), and would be wholly disorienting. Locke's hopefulness concerning the scientific value of enlarging our sensory capacities and gaining

admittance into a world of hitherto hidden phenomena is anchored by a recognition that at the close of the day, as it were, we must return home to live in the prescientific world of common sense experience. It is anchored, in other words, by an acknowledgment of the reality of the prescientific world. The possession of the unalterably acute senses in Locke's digression is the equivalent of the hypothetical supposition of the exclusive reality of insensible corpuscles and their primary qualities. To make this supposition is in effect to suppose the banishment of human beings with their ordinary sensory organs from the real world.⁴³ But natural science in Locke's view must be natural science for human beings, for beings constituted as we are; our artificial enhancements of our sensory endowments and our hypotheses concerning insensible corpuscles are useful insofar as they render the natural world, the world in which we must live, more intelligible to us and therefore more manipulable by us. There can be no doubt that Locke finds the corpuscularian hypothesis partially useful, perhaps necessary but not sufficient, for the achievement of these aims; but it is crucial that having once resolved the ordinarily observable bodies of the universe into minute particles, the modern scientist must somehow put

⁴³Cf. Hannah Arendt's description of the demand of modern science for "the renunciation of an anthropocentric or geocentric world view." The "miracle of modern science" consists in the fact that "the purging was done by men" (1968, 265,269). Cf. Burt 1932, 89-90.

them back together. The physicist's concern with explanation must somehow be reconciled with the concern of the taxonomist.⁴⁴ Once again, in maintaining that the proper basis of natural science lies in natural history or in a careful observation of "the nature of things themselves," Locke urges observation at both levels of reality; he does not imply that nature appears exclusively at the corpuscular level.

In this respect Locke's critics on this issue may well be justified in finding a danger to common sense implicit in this conception of natural science. For the simple reason that so much of the relevant data lie outside the realm of our ordinary experience, inherent almost by definition in Locke's "extravagant conjecture" or in the modern enterprise of experimental natural science is the unpredictability of its results; no matter how sound the hypothesis, surely the attempt at observing hitherto unobservable data must with some frequency produce surprises, thereby generating further questions and directions for further research, calling forth the invention of ever-more powerful instruments of observation and measurement, enabling scientists in turn to uncover further surprises, with the whole process continuing ad infinitum. It is diffi-

⁴⁴Whitehead implies that in his greater empirical concern for issues of classification over mathematical explanation, Locke stands in relation to Descartes and Newton roughly as Aristotle stands in relation to Pythagoras and Plato (1925, 43-44). Cf. Givner 1962.

cult to say how seriously Locke regards the possibility that the discoveries of the new natural science could ultimately render our ordinary experiences, and in particular those responsible for our belief in the natural foundations of our species classifications, less rather than more intelligible. In suggesting our ability to imitate the "Spirits" who can pass at pleasure between the worlds of science and common sense, he seems to assume that whatever we discover through the augmentation of our natural senses will be compatible with what we know through ordinary experience, will leave our ordinary world intact. Viewing this suggestion from a contemporary perspective, surveying the yield of the intervening three hundred years of intellectual laboring, we might perceive in Locke's enthusiasm a measure of naivety, in proportion to the difficulties involved in reconciling with common sense experience the many perplexing and paradoxical discoveries of contemporary natural science.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Thus Arendt writes concerning the contemporary consequences of this enterprise that scientists' "most cherished ideals of necessity and lawfulness...were lost when the scientists discovered that there is nothing indivisible in matter, no a-tomos, that we live in an expanding, non-limited universe, and that chance seems to rule supreme wherever this 'true reality,' the physical world, has receded entirely from the range of human senses and from the range of all instruments whereby their coarseness was refined. From this, it seems to follow that causality, necessity and lawfulness are categories inherent in the human brain and applicable only to the common-sense experiences of earth-bound creatures" (1968, 273). It is certainly fair to wonder whether Locke could have conceived in such terms the "quite different World" that he believed

The danger thus inheres in the possibility that, Locke's apparent confidence to the contrary, we may not be able to regain our commonsense orientation, once we begin to ponder the significance of the discoveries we make by adopting the perspective of the microscope or telescope or any other instrument for detecting things ordinarily imperceptible. This danger is not a peculiar product of Locke's philosophy, and in struggling with the specific contemporary instances of the problematic relation between natural science and common sense experience, we can expect little assistance from Locke's texts. But the purpose here is not to suggest that Locke is capable of resolving the problem inherent in this relation, but instead to emphasize more fundamentally the significance of his insistence on the necessity of reconciling the findings of natural science with the reality of the commonsense, prescientific world. If Locke suggests no resolution of this difficult relation, neither does he adopt a priori any set of explanatory principles that would render such a resolution impossible.

Locke explains as follows his understanding of the proper employment of hypotheses:

...my Meaning is, that we should not take up any one too hastily...till we have very well examined Particulars, and made several Experiments, in that thing which we would explain by our Hypothesis, and see whether it will agree to them all; whether our Principles will carry us quite through, and not be as inconsistent with one Phenomenon of Nature, as they seem to accommodate,

we would gain access to through modern natural science.

and explain another. And at least, that we take care, that the name of Principles deceive us not, nor impose on us, by making us receive that for an unquestionable Truth, which is really, at best, but a very doubtful conjecture, such as are most (I had almost said all) of the Hypotheses in natural Philosophy. (4.12.13)⁴⁶

Locke's extravagant conjecture indicates that he employs the corpuscularian hypothesis not as a dogma but as a genuine hypothesis, to be assented to or rejected in proportion to its usefulness in explaining, not explaining away, the data of our ordinary experience. Within the perspective of that hypothesis as Locke understands it, it would appear that the natural facts of intelligence and of the plurality of natures must either be denied or accepted as simply inexplicable. It is to Locke's credit that he chooses the latter, although his apparently pragmatic distrust of comprehensive, systematic explanations of the natural world may not be itself entirely free of difficulty. What is essential is that hypothetical or explanatory natural science for Locke must aspire to be the completion of natural history, or of certain fields of natural history. It cannot be its replacement.

Finally, having thus elaborated Locke's defense of an experimental, probabilistic natural science rooted in a "historical, plain method" of studying nature, we can reformulate the question of ultimate interest for our study

⁴⁶For a still more emphatic condemnation of the misuse of hypotheses in natural philosophy, see Locke's fragment "De Arte Medica," in Fox Bourne 1876, I.222-227.

as a whole. Of what relevance is this defense of a natural science grounded in natural history to Locke's teaching concerning morality and justice? The argument in defense of Locke's epistemological moderation remains inconsequential in the most important respect, at least until we have gained a clearer idea of the relation between the abstract idea of "moral man" and actual, natural human beings as Locke is able to observe them in the course of his own natural-historical inquiry. If Locke holds that partial but reliable knowledge of nature is indeed accessible to the human understanding, to what extent does he hold that such knowledge can be enlisted in support of a teaching of morality or justice? What remains, therefore, for us to consider are the relations between the Essay's account of natural science and its proposed demonstrative science of ethics, and between each of these and the Two Treatises' theory of natural rights.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL SHEET

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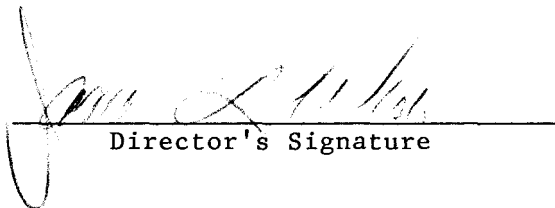
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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D.

December 7, 1991



Director's Signature