

This is a repository copy of *John Locke and the fable of liberalism*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/121796/>

Version: Accepted Version

---

**Article:**

Stanton, Tim orcid.org/0000-0002-8282-9570 (2018) John Locke and the fable of liberalism. *Historical Journal*. pp. 597-622. ISSN: 1469-5103

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X17000450>

---

**Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

## JOHN LOCKE AND THE FABLE OF LIBERALISM

Journal:	<i>The Historical Journal</i>
Manuscript ID	HJ-2017-062.R1
Manuscript Type:	Article
Period:	1600-99, 1700-99, 1800-99, 1900-99, 2000-
Thematic:	Intellectual, Historiographical, Religious, Political, Administrative & Legal, Social
Geographic:	Europe, Continental, Britain, America, North

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

## JOHN LOCKE AND THE FABLE OF LIBERALISM

TIMOTHY STANTON

*University of York*

**ABSTRACT.** *This essay explores the ways in which John Locke was claimed by liberalism and refashioned in its image. It was Locke's fate to become the hero of what I term 'the fable of liberalism', the story liberalism recounts to itself about its origins and purposes. Locke is a pivotal figure—perhaps the pivotal figure—in this story, because he put into currency conceptions which contributed centrally to the emergence and spread of liberal ways of thinking about politics which continue to ramify. It was Locke who established that the legitimacy of a political authority was a necessary condition of obedience to it and that its legitimacy was a product of the consensual route by which it came into existence; it was Locke who established that the route by which it came into existence determined the ends for which it existed and, with these, the scope of its authority. All this was explained in an exemplary way by Locke (the story goes), and he remains the great exemplar for understanding and conducting politics legitimately even today. This essay puts question marks beside the Locke who emerges from this story. It substitutes a new and very different Locke in his place.*

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

## JOHN LOCKE AND THE FABLE OF LIBERALISM\*

TIMOTHY STANTON

*University of York*

### I

‘[A]ll communities tell stories about themselves, about the distinctive nature of their formation and achievements. These stories can have a powerful role in constituting our identities, and so in defining and sustaining our common life’.<sup>1</sup> These words are Quentin Skinner’s, and I take them as my point of departure in this essay. A well-told story has the ability to transform the way we understand ourselves and the world in which we live, shaping it into significance after its own fashion and interpreting it to us authoritatively. We take our bearings from it. It explains, for good or ill, how we came to live and think as we do.

Typically this means building upon a conventional repertoire of stories with which a particular age, a particular civilization, a particular community, is already conversant. But as Skinner notes, this suggests a difficulty, because these stories are ‘subject to endless manipulation... [I]t will always be in the interests of the powerful – rulers and opinion-formers alike – that certain stories should be remembered, and in certain ways, and that other stories should be forgotten. That being so [Skinner continues] it is part of the moral importance of historical study that historians should be ready to engage with these stories and take a critical stance towards them. The role, you might say, is that of bearing witness, ensuring that the stories which define and sustain us are as little as possible imposed upon us in such a way that particular groups or ideals are misleadingly praised, or misleadingly blamed, or unjustly omitted from the record altogether’.<sup>2</sup> This essay is intended in that spirit.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

## II

Liberalism, like many other ‘isms’, implies a story to validate it and to ratify its values, a story which shows that the past was conducted into the present according to its tune. The story may, of course, be told in various ways,<sup>3</sup> but I will be concerned in this essay with the strange and remarkable convergence between the story told by modern liberals and a story told by people of a very different hue in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The result of that convergence is an unsustainable but always widely accepted version of the past – widely accepted because, for different reasons, it suits liberals and their enemies alike.

The story tells of the birth of liberalism somewhere in England in the seventeenth century. Depending upon who tells the story, the father was either Thomas Hobbes<sup>4</sup> or John Locke.<sup>5</sup> Reports differ. There are even dark mutterings that, in fact, they are one and the same person.<sup>6</sup> Either way, the offspring laid the intellectual foundations for a new way of understanding the world, and one which continues to shape our collective political imagination. With the advent of liberalism, so the story goes, human beings became modern men and women, recognisable as such by their equal capacity to choose for themselves how they ought to live, and by their matching opposition to the imposition by authority – whether civil or ecclesiastical – of forms of life and modes of thought that they have not chosen. Thus religion, for one, retired, or was pushed, into private life, and a new epoch of liberal self-government began.

This is the story I have called in the title of this essay ‘the fable of liberalism’.<sup>7</sup> My concern here is with the roles played by John Locke in that story, rather than with the rival stories, groups and ideals over which it may have trampled in the course of its triumphal march.<sup>8</sup> In writing of the ‘fable of liberalism’ I do not mean to disparage liberalism or to suggest that it is simply a trick of the light. Rather, I mean to convey that what I have in view is not quite, or not just, the ideology, or history, or histories, or genealogies, of liberalism, but

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

the conventional stories to which it implicitly appeals, its persuasive ambitions, and its artfulness. I shall be speaking, that is to say, about *fabulae*: about great men and great deeds, and what is told of them, about what is inevitable, about what is the subject of common talk and idle talk, about what is fabricated or false.<sup>9</sup>

The next section of the essay discusses the conventional stories upon which the fable of liberalism builds. The fourth section discusses the emergence of the fable itself. The fifth section draws attention to an historical irony in the way that Locke figures in many versions of that fable today. The sixth section of the essay suggests a different way of thinking about Locke, and one which puts question marks against most modern treatments of Locke and most versions of the fable of liberalism in which he figures centrally. I turn first, then, to the stories upon which that fable draws.

**III**

The fable of liberalism is a successor story to at least two older stories, which for present purposes may be distinguished, rather roughly and readily, as, respectively, the ‘individualism’ story and the ‘democratic intellect’ story. Both stories begin, in their most primitive forms, in the seventeenth century, as reflections, or ruminations, on the thought and experience of the previous two centuries, and both attempt to make sense of the world in which people now find themselves. Both were developed more fully over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the first by Hegel, and then Marx and his followers,<sup>10</sup> the second by Hume, Smith, and Constant among others, reaching an apotheosis in Tocqueville.<sup>11</sup> By the twentieth century, they were firmly entrenched among the repertoire of stories defining recognizable, and perhaps acceptable, accounts of the transition from the medieval or early-modern to the modern world.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

Both tell of two distinct epochs, one lost forever or remorselessly receding from view, the second definitive of the present and the future. Here is the individualism story in outline.

Once upon a time there was a fixed, and natural, order of things into which human beings fitted, which was governed by the form provided by institutions. The individual as such counted for nothing except as a member of his guild, his church, his monastic order, his feudal hierarchy. Within these institutions he found a place where he was wanted and work was found for him. He could devote himself to fulfilling the duties assigned to him by his station in this great organism, within which he found himself lodged; these duties occupied his whole energy and his whole life, and thus the institution acted as the safeguard of the individual's utility and happiness.<sup>12</sup>

Now we live in the epoch of the individual. The conduct of this individual is no longer accommodated to an ideal order of social life embodied in institutions. Instead he strives to sustain a coherence of desires and preferences within a framework of obligations undertaken voluntarily. Self-determination, especially in religious and commercial activities, is his disposition. Individual will generates the institutions through which he chooses to express this disposition. Contracting is the characteristic activity of such an individual. Freedom is his most cherished value.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in its earliest versions – the version one finds, for example, in the writings of Sir Robert Filmer – the story is told as one of wilful individuals breaking out of the prevailing order. The diagnosis is one of breakdown. The new epoch is represented as the hideous parturition of unnatural desires and values which are at once deplorable and dangerously seductive. The problem with freedom, as Filmer remarks testily, is that people like it.<sup>14</sup>

An influential variant of this story is formulated about the idiom of natural law. It goes as follows.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

Once upon a time there was a fixed, and natural, order of things into which human beings fitted, which was governed by an eternal law emanating from God. All creation participated in this law, which directed everything to its final end. Human beings, as rational beings, participated in this law in a distinctive way. Rational reflection on their own natural inclinations and situation generated precepts which directed them to their proper end and their common good.<sup>15</sup>

This epoch is succeeded by the epoch of the modern theory of natural law. This theory is said to originate with Hugo Grotius<sup>16</sup> or, in some renderings, Francisco Suárez.<sup>17</sup> Grotius derives natural law not from an eternal law which expresses God's nature but rather from what suits a being that is both rational and sociable, and without reference to any final end or common good. A rational being desires above all to preserve its own existence. It would therefore live according to rules or laws which enable it to satisfy that desire. A rational being that is also sociable would live according to rules or laws which make living together possible. These rules or laws may be commanded by God but they are binding by reason alone. They would hold even if God did not exist.<sup>18</sup> Self-preservation and living socially are thus the basic prescriptions of natural law.<sup>19</sup> Correspondingly, the individual is the bearer of the powers or freedoms or rights necessary to preserve itself and a secure life in society.

The individualism story, in both versions, sometimes shadows, sometimes intersects with, and is sometimes contradicted by, the story of the democratic intellect. Here is that story in outline.

Once upon a time there was a fixed, and natural, order of things into which human beings fitted, which was governed by the idea of hierarchy. This hierarchy reflected the distinction of ranks of nobility in the souls of men. Greatness of soul was the privilege of an aristocratic few. This few were as the gods. Their deeds evinced a grandeur and excellence at

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

which the many could only marvel. Loyalty, honour, and manliness were their most cherished values. Glory was their highest goal.<sup>20</sup>

In this epoch freedom was experienced as independence from the pettiness, destitution and squalor that was the lot of the many and defined in antithesis to slavery. It endowed its possessor with a sense of liberation from the hierarchical obedience in which the social order consisted and yielded an energy which derived from an affirmation of the self as superior. In exceptional circumstances, that energy could be cultivated by a whole people, such as that of Republican Rome, which judged itself superior to all other peoples and felt that it alone had the right to be independent. Its energy was expended through the incessant aggressive warfare that made Rome glorious.<sup>21</sup>

But nowadays we live in an epoch in which there is no distinction of ranks in the souls of men to which the multiple social ranks correspond. Each individual is independent of an inherited order and free by nature. The equal freedom of all is founded in reason. Reason is a faculty possessed by every human being but, because neither God nor nature discloses definitively to reason how people ought to live, it has no authoritative external referent: people are thrown back upon their own resources and their own reasoning.<sup>22</sup>

The self-reference of reason produces two complementary lines of development: first, of individual judgement, private conscience, and personal responsibility, and, second, of generalized methods of inquiry – sciences – which are turned to the purpose of understanding and transforming the natural world so that its riches may be made available to further human interests, secure human wants, and meet human needs.<sup>23</sup> The energies of freedom are expended differently. The aristocratic longing for glory is replaced by the profit motive and warfare by commerce: ‘among the bulk of the people military courage diminishes [writes Adam Smith disapprovingly]. By having their minds constantly employed on the arts of luxury, they grow effeminate and dastardly’.<sup>24</sup> The modern individual prefers security to

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

glory and desires merely to live a commodious life. Trucking and bartering is his characteristic activity. Equality is his most cherished value.<sup>25</sup>

Subsequent versions of this story, which emphasize the one or the other line of development, fill out this narrative structure in their own way while drawing in varying proportions upon the individualism story, but they tell more or less the same story.

In one version, which tends to privilege the first line of development over the second, the first epoch was one of religious homogeneity. A hierocratic institution, the Roman Catholic Church, headed by a great man, the Pope (who, by virtue of his role, was the divinely authorized representative on earth of Christ), interpreted God's word infallibly to all human beings. All were subject to its universal and final authority. The church was the locus for salvation. Conscience was a shared, unifying force.<sup>26</sup>

In the second epoch the person, not the church, is the locus for salvation. There is no interpreter to come between any individual and the scriptures, no ecclesiastical mediation between the individual and God, because, in the final analysis, no one can be certain enough of the truth of any interpretation to give it the sanction of uncontested authority. All are equally capable in principle of forming their own beliefs about it for themselves using their own reason and they can reasonably differ in conscience from one another in their judgements about it.<sup>27</sup> Thus there is religious pluralism.

Being saved depends upon believing sincerely – being ‘in conscience persuaded’<sup>28</sup> – rather than believing truly. Sincere belief is always unforced. Since religion is entirely a matter of such beliefs it is, first of all, an entirely private affair (since people form beliefs for themselves) and, secondly, beyond the scope of political authority (because it is private and because belief cannot be forced). Thus there is freedom of religion.

In another version, which tends to privilege the second line of development, the discoveries of the natural sciences, and the technological advances which they make possible,

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

corrode the certainties of religious belief even as they enable the amelioration of the conditions of destitution and squalor to which the many had once been condemned, and in which they sought consolation in religion and the promise of a better world to come. An epoch in which almost the whole of life was organized around religion as a means to eternal happiness is succeeded by a ‘secular age’ in which religion is considered, if it is considered, with reference to its consequences in the present life.<sup>29</sup> The preoccupation with salvation is replaced with action which is directed at getting ahead in the world and interest is substituted for conscience.<sup>30</sup> There is freedom from want, at least prospectively, and a progressively generalized freedom of thought and action.

Here, then, are two stories, which recount the rise of the modern individual and the replacement of a regime of privilege with a regime of equality, in which privilege, if it exists at all, has been universalized. In the next section of the essay I turn to the sequel to these stories, the fable of liberalism.

**IV**

The fable of liberalism tells a new and different story. It is a fusion and effusion of the two stories I have been describing, which first began to crystallize as late as the 1930s. The intellectual, institutional, and geopolitical forces which converged then to produce it are too many, too various and too complex to be itemized here, but a small constellation only of intellectual currents may be usefully picked out:<sup>31</sup> first, a sense that liberalism as handed down from Mill and from the idealists had become indistinguishable from socialism;<sup>32</sup> second, a felt need to distinguish it from socialism, and from other social and political doctrines then gaining credence and traction across Europe, captivating whole communities, and appealing to the same conventional repertoire of stories – for as Michael Oakeshott

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

pointed out in 1939, even National Socialism asserted ‘complete liberty of creed and conscience’;<sup>33</sup> third, the contributions to that process of émigré scholars fleeing those communities to Britain and the United States;<sup>34</sup> and, fourth, the attractions of an account of liberalism which located its intellectual origins and development there, and which had as its hero an Englishman who was at the same time ‘America’s philosopher’, namely John Locke.<sup>35</sup> These forces resulted in a story in which liberalism became an Anglophone achievement and the constitutive political ideal of modernity.

It is helpful analytically to think of the new story as emerging in and through three overlapping phases of reflection. In the first phase, liberalism is re-examined from the left by liberal Marxists who wish to understand whether, and in what form, it can survive the failure of the capitalist way of life with which it has been associated since the seventeenth century.

A classic instance is provided by Harold Laski’s *The rise of European liberalism: An essay in interpretation* (1936), suggestively re-titled *The rise of liberalism: the philosophy of a business civilization* by its American publishers.<sup>36</sup> Laski stated that ‘liberalism has been, in the last four centuries, the outstanding doctrine of Western civilization’ and gave Locke a starring role in his story as the ‘most representative prophet’ of the modern age.<sup>37</sup> Hobbes appeared briefly as a sort of John the Baptist to Locke, but it was Locke who gave lapidary expression to the political creed of the new capitalist faith: that men of property are the proper rulers of society, that natural rights means the idea that property can be controlled only as it consents to be controlled, that liberty is the obligation of government to refrain from interfering with property rights, and so that the authority of government is a function of consent.<sup>38</sup>

In the second phase, the rise of liberalism is recast as a version of the story of the democratic intellect in which Hobbes, not Locke, is the decisive figure. The writer who did most to craft this version of the story was Leo Strauss. ‘If we may call liberalism that political

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

doctrine which regards as the fundamental political fact the rights, as distinguished from the duties, of man and which identifies the function of the state with the protection or safeguarding of those rights, we must say [Strauss announced] that the founder of liberalism was Hobbes'.<sup>39</sup> Strauss made this statement in 1953, but had laid the groundwork in his text of 1936, *The political philosophy of Hobbes*, which represented Hobbes's philosophy as the organized rejection of aristocratic virtue in favour of a new moral attitude [what Strauss called 'bourgeois virtue'] in which the recognition of the natural equality of all men is the only just self-estimation.<sup>40</sup> This was an equality of natural right, by which was meant the justified (that is, equal) claims of the individual to a secure and commodious life.<sup>41</sup> In the 1936 text Hobbes was described as both 'the father' and 'the founder of modern political philosophy'.<sup>42</sup> By 1953 'modern political philosophy' had become synonymous with 'liberalism'.

In the third phase, the two versions of the story are combined through the assertion of an identity between their leading protagonists. In his highly influential history of political theory of 1937, George H. Sabine informed the first of many echelons of American students and scholars that 'Locke's theory, in all its social and political implications, was as egoistic as that of Hobbes ... the two men fastened on social theory the presumption that individual self-interest is clear and compelling, while a public or a social interest is thin and unsubstantial... Locke set up a body of innate, indefeasible, individual rights, which limit the competence of the community and stand as bars to prevent interference with the liberty and property of private persons'.<sup>43</sup> Sabine suggested that the influence of Locke, 'precisely because it was less aware of its principles, was... more insidious' than that of Hobbes.<sup>44</sup> The insinuation was that Locke was responsible in some way for vast swathes of modern liberal thought.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

Reflection has continued in these terms down to the present day. Strauss gave Sabine's suggestion his own distinctive twist by arguing that Locke was a disingenuous follower of Hobbes, whose ostensible concern with God and natural law was a screen behind which he advanced Hobbes's radically modern and individualistic doctrine of natural right.<sup>45</sup> Strauss's argument has been elaborated in turn with greater nuance by Michael Zuckert, who declared Locke to be the man who 'launched' liberalism,<sup>46</sup> and with greater boldness by Pierre Manent in his *Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme*.<sup>47</sup>

Laski's story was given fresh impetus by his pupil, C. B. Macpherson,<sup>48</sup> who identified Locke's hidden agenda as the unlimited acquisition of property by the capitalist class and his remarks about God and religion as ideological instruments designed to secure the compliance of the irrational masses.<sup>49</sup>

Sabine's observations about the egoistic and radically individualist character of Lockean and liberal political theory have spread into generalized criticisms of liberalism by the disappointed and censorious. Thus Michael Walzer complains that the liberal individual 'exists wholly outside institutions and relationships and enters into them only when he or she chooses or as he or she chooses',<sup>50</sup> while Amy Gutmann imagines a liberal society in which 'no one does more or less than respect everyone else's liberal rights. People do not form ties of love and friendship... This might be a perfectly liberal ... society [she observes] but it is certainly not the best society to which we can aspire'.<sup>51</sup>

Each of these phases of reflection was instigated by thinkers and writers who were not obviously admirers of Locke and who were not overly friendly to liberalism. There is therefore a certain irony in the fact that it was they who did most to shape the paradigm in which not only critics but the modern admirers of Locke and the friends of liberalism have tended to discuss both. In any event, if the fable of liberalism was in the first instance a creation of the opponents of liberalism, it is nevertheless a fable which the proponents of

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

liberalism have eagerly embraced. The consequences of that embrace may be observed in the accumulated mass of writings about liberalism and Locke since the 1950s, in which, taken as a whole, the individual and his rights have tended to dominate the scene and the notion of consent has assumed a supreme importance.

## V

In one way or another, consent plays a central role in most versions of liberalism. Consent is understood to be a necessary condition for political legitimacy, even social legitimacy, because people are said to be naturally free and equal and so cannot rightly become subject to the authority of another except with their own agreement. Government based on consent is the proper mode of government everywhere. The theoretical foundations of this view have been set out explicitly by Jeremy Waldron: ‘liberalism [he informs us] rests on a certain view about the justification of social arrangements …[L]iberals are committed to a conception of freedom and of respect for the capacities and agency of individual men and women, and these commitments generate a requirement that *all* aspects of the social should either be made acceptable or be capable of being made acceptable to *every last* individual … Liberals demand that the social order should in principle be capable of explaining itself at the tribunal of each person’s understanding’.<sup>52</sup> The capacities which demand respect are capacities for morality rooted in autonomy and rationality, or our capacity for choice.

This is clearly a reworking of Locke’s idea of consent as Waldron or indeed Rawls understands it: ‘A legitimate regime [declared Rawls] is such that its political and social institutions are justifiable to all citizens – to each and every one – by addressing their reason … government can be founded only on the consent of free and equal, and reasonable and rational persons’.<sup>53</sup> On this view, no revealed religion can justify a public presence: that is why religion is, and must be, a private affair of the individual. Locke’s reputation as the

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

canonical philosopher of liberalism rests on the belief that, in two classic texts, *Two treatises of government* and *A letter concerning toleration*,<sup>54</sup> he showed that these positions, like two little sisters, must always go hand-in-hand.

In *Two Treatises*, so the story runs, he supplied an account of the state as arising from the consent of all its members individually.<sup>55</sup> In *A letter concerning toleration* he is said to have given an account of religion as ‘essentially a private matter’.<sup>56</sup> The accounts are bound together by the claim that it would be ‘irrational to consent to a government that claimed a right to enforce a particular path to heaven, since that path might prove abhorrent to our conscience’,<sup>57</sup> and we have a ‘nonforfeitable right of conscience’.<sup>58</sup> Every individual follows his or her own conscience as he or she sees fit.

Both accounts, we are duly told, are ‘deeply individualistic’,<sup>59</sup> but the account of religion ‘reflects [even] more radical individualist principles’ than that of the state.<sup>60</sup> That account is individualistic enough: taken literally, the view that all aspects of a political and social order must be made acceptable to every individual invites a doubt that any political or social order could emerge as legitimate by its lights. A. John Simmons presses this point in an interpretation of Locke’s views on rights, political obligation and consent which shows that contemporary governments lack legitimacy and are in principle unworthy objects of allegiance<sup>61</sup> – a suggestion, one might add, with which no Straussian would be likely to quibble, except publicly.

I have said that there is an irony in the fact that the fable of liberalism is a creation of the opponents of liberalism. There is a further irony, which I wish to explore briefly in the next section of this essay. That irony is a historical one. It is that the Locke described and celebrated in the fable of liberalism is almost indistinguishable from the figure extracted in horror from Locke’s writings almost immediately after his death by the nonjuror Charles Leslie and the third earl of Shaftesbury, and dismissed a little later by David Hume. Leslie

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

was so very important in shaping the subsequent reception of Locke in the eighteenth century that I begin with him.

## VI

Leslie was a polemicist of malicious genius who made it his mission to show to the world why Locke's assumptions and the explanations that followed upon them were a self-deconstructing individualist nightmare – and a blasphemous one to boot. Locke and his successors had [Leslie wrote] 'Disolv'd all *Government in Heaven, or on Earth*' and so were '*Guilty of the Very Sin of Lucifer*', of rebelling against God and what God had laid down.<sup>62</sup>

In a sustained attack conducted in the pages of his periodical *The Rehearsal*, Leslie discussed, with mounting incredulity, a social order organized on Lockean lines, in which the ties which bound children to fathers, wives to husbands, servants to masters, subjects to rulers, and worshippers to ecclesiastical authority were products of contract or consent. The idea that these institutions depended on the consent of every constituent member, and had no authority otherwise, was so preposterous that Leslie found it difficult to believe that Locke could really have meant what he wrote.<sup>63</sup> For if he meant what he wrote, it would be man, not God, who was the true creator of the world in which people lived and moved and had their being.

Leslie thought that Locke's views would prove fatal to the religion and government of England. In defence of both, Leslie presented a revivified version of divine right patriarchy, and was drawn into a sustained and bitter controversy with Benjamin Hoadly, bishop of Bangor, an avid proselyte for Locke's views.<sup>64</sup> In response to one of Hoadly's attacks, Leslie revealed just how far the danger posed by Locke's ideas extended in his eyes. 'The Sum of the Matter', Leslie wrote, 'is this, I think it most Natural that Authority shou'd Descend, that is, be Derived from a Superiour to an Inferiour, from God to Fathers and Kings; and from Kings and Fathers to Sons and Servants: But [Locke] wou'd have it, Ascend,

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

from Sons to Fathers, and from Subjects to Sovereigns; nay to God Himself ... And the Argument does Naturally Carry it all that Way. For if Authority does Ascend, it must Ascend to the Height'.<sup>65</sup> as Leslie saw it, the Lockean style of explanation eviscerated all that it touched, for it suggested that everything should not only be understood as beginning with the individual, but as being constituted by individual will and agreement, by individual choice, and so constituted by individuals themselves, even unto God himself: 'Who *Makes* can *Unmake!* The *Inherent* and *Radical* POWER is still in ME!'<sup>66</sup> All that was solid melted into air.

Leslie's Locke was a liberal in the sense of the word emphasized by John Henry Newman, that is to say, someone who made 'the mistake of subjecting to human judgment' matters which 'are in their nature beyond and independent of it, and of claiming to determine on intrinsic grounds the truth and value of propositions which rested for their reception simply on' an external and higher authority.<sup>67</sup> Leslie discovered the source of Locke's mistake in what he represented as Locke's root assumption: that there *was* no authority higher than the individual himself, because 'I alone am king of ME'.<sup>68</sup> It was this assumption that made Locke a supremely dangerous thinker.

The phrase 'I alone am king of ME' has the sense, if not the inflection, of John Stuart Mill's definition of individual sovereignty: 'over himself, over his own mind and body, the individual is sovereign'.<sup>69</sup> The belief that Locke subscribed to such a view – often termed self-ownership – is widely held today,<sup>70</sup> which no doubt helps to account both for the hypothesized existence of a tradition of what has been called 'Johannine liberalism' which runs from Locke through Mill into Rawls, and for the power attributed to consent in this tradition.<sup>71</sup>

Leslie borrowed the phrase 'I alone am king of me' from a scene in the play *Almanzor and Almahide, or the Conquest of Granada*, by Locke's schoolfellow John Dryden. 'I alone

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

am King of me', the character Almanzor is made to say. (He has just finished murdering somebody):

I am as free as Nature first made man,  
'Ere the base Laws of Servitude began,  
When wild in woods the noble Savage ran'.

His interlocutor Boabdelin replies

Since, then, no pow'r above your own you know,  
Mankind shou'd use you like a common foe,  
You should be hunted like a Beast of Prey;  
By your own law, I take your life away.

Almanzor immediately ripostes,

My laws are made but only for my sake,  
No King against himself a Law can make'.<sup>72</sup>

The allusions to Hobbes's philosophy in these lines are unmistakable, and the unspoken insinuation is clear enough: Locke is the heir of the monster of Malmesbury.<sup>73</sup>

Where Leslie was merely insinuating, Shaftesbury was explicit. Shaftesbury had been Locke's pupil almost from infancy, but in *Several letters written by a noble Lord to a young man at the university* (1716), written in 1709, he penned a well-known passage which charged Locke with completing the work of Hobbes: "TWAS Mr. LOCKE, that struck the

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

home Blow: for Mr. HOBBES'S Character and base slavish Principles in Government took off the Poyson of his Philosophy. 'TWAS Mr. LOCKE that struck at all the fundamentals, threw all *Order* and *Virtue* out of the World, and made the very *Ideas* of these... *unnatural*, and without Foundation in our Minds'.<sup>74</sup> As the *Characteristicks* went on to demonstrate, the fundamentals in question related to a view of man as inherently sociable rather than solitary and selfish. At issue was whether civil society was the product merely of self-interested agreement and self-incurred obligations, outside of which there was no obligation on anyone to behave honestly or sociably – a position Shaftesbury thought ‘ridiculous’ – or whether it was a product primarily of sentiment and instinct.<sup>75</sup>

A more sophisticated version of this line of inquiry was explored by David Hume. Hume placed Locke with Hobbes ‘among the moderns ... who maintained the selfish system of morals’,<sup>76</sup> and he read Locke as carrying this system into his political theory. Thus, on Locke’s account, as Hume paraphrases it, ‘*All men ... are born free and equal: Government and superiority can only be establish’d by consent: The consent of men, in established government, imposes on them a new obligation, unknown to the laws of nature. Men, therefore, are bound to obey their magistrates, only because they promise it; and if they had not given their word, either expressly or tacitly, to preserve allegiance, it wou’d never have become a part of their moral duty*’.<sup>77</sup> Famously, Hume went on to propose an alternative account of the grounds of allegiance to government and reserved some of his most withering scorn for the idea that consent was either a necessary or a sufficient condition of legitimate government.<sup>78</sup> If it were, Hume points out, there would be no legitimate government in the history of the world.<sup>79</sup>

My purpose in drawing attention to this irony is not to claim that these three eighteenth-century critics of Locke suggested the outline for all modern reflections, but rather to make what must surely seem an equally obvious point: that there is more than one sense in

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

which the fable of liberalism tells us what we already know. Leslie discovered in Locke what he already knew, that the whigs were dangerous fanatics, just as Shaftesbury discovered what he already knew, just as Strauss and Waldron in their way discovered what they already knew. They all knew, as we know, that Locke was a proponent of a politics of consent, of rights wielded against government, of a radical moral individualism, because they and we are the inheritors of stories which captivate *because* they tell us what we already know, stories which made it natural for them to talk about him as they did and to locate him in relation to others as they did and which make it seem natural for us to follow their lead. My aim in the final sections of this essay is to sketch the outlines of a different story and to propose an alternative paradigm through which to think about Locke. The difference with my story is, first, that it is mine,<sup>80</sup> and, second, that it is true.<sup>81</sup>

**VII**

At the heart of my story is the claim that, for Locke, humanity is defined not by the freedom to choose, but by the freedom to love. The capacities which demand respect are not those of autonomy, but capacities to follow a law which commands us both to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Because reason and choice are so central to what Locke has in mind in writing along these lines, it has proved almost irresistible to assimilate him to a paradigm of consent, but choice means something quite different in this setting, and so too does freedom. In the space that remains I will indicate how and why it does so.

According to Locke people *are* naturally free and equal, but emphatically not because they are each sovereign over themselves. God, who is sovereign over all of them, has ‘given [to each of them]...an Understanding to direct his Actions’ and ‘a freedom of Will, and liberty of Acting, as properly belonging thereunto, within the bounds of that Law he is

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

under'.<sup>82</sup> As Locke goes on to emphasize, 'The *Freedom* then of Man and Liberty of acting according to his own Will, is *grounded on* his having *Reason*, which is able to instruct him in that Law he is to govern himself by, and make him know how far he is left to the freedom of his own will'.<sup>83</sup> With Locke, law, and especially divine law, not reason as such, and not sentiment at all, is the ruling normative force. Reason is a capability of knowing those '*those Laws whereby he is then bound to guide his Actions*'.<sup>84</sup> What makes all men naturally free and equal is that they are all of them subject to natural law and that they are all possessed of the capabilities needed to grasp and follow it. Should a creature which in every other particular looks like monkey evince those capabilities, it is a man by Locke's definition.<sup>85</sup>

Natural law makes mankind all members of one community, community implying their being under one law.<sup>86</sup> What does this law require? In his disputation on natural law, Locke identified, amongst others, duties for all human beings to love and preserve themselves, to love their neighbours and to console them in their distress, to preserve and relieve the needy, and to love and revere God and worship Him publicly.<sup>87</sup> Our sentiments towards our fellow men may vary, but the duty of love towards them does not. It appears in *Two treatises* as a natural duty, and Locke uses it to generate from a duty of self-preservation a duty to preserve all.<sup>88</sup> We can add that it becomes clear why Locke would speak in the first treatise of charity giving a title to 'so much out of another's Plenty, as will keep [anyone] from extream want',<sup>89</sup> for charity means love, and civil society is an expression and product of love.<sup>90</sup>

Religious society was, likewise, a requirement of love. As Locke pointed out in his 'Defence of nonconformity', the 'great businesse of Religion is to glorifye God'.<sup>91</sup> This went beyond private devotion to public worship 'in Communion with some society' for [he continued] 'the actions of a private solitary life cannot reach to all the instances & purposes of religion', and these included 'the publick worship of God'. The 'solitary recesses of a

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

retired man' were insufficient, Locke went on, because people recognized that 'their duty to honour, & worship the God they served' implied 'publick acts of devotion', 'owneing to ye world thereby that Diety by solemne acts of worship to whom they payed the internal acts of veneration in their hearts'.<sup>92</sup> Religious societies are thus requirements of natural law, being integral to the performance of the natural duty to worship publicly. There is a choice involved in joining one church rather than another by assenting to the claims around which it is constituted, but not a choice of whether to worship. Each religious society is tied together by bonds of love and demands reciprocal acknowledgement from every other as the organized expression of the love of God, our neighbours, and ourselves, freely given.<sup>93</sup> That is what Locke means by toleration, so that toleration, too, implies love.<sup>94</sup>

But what is love? In a journal note of 1676, Locke describes it as 'the principal and first of all passions', to be distinguished from desire because, properly speaking, it 'never embraces any object as serviceable to some other purpose'. That is to say, love truly takes as its object only what is desirable and valuable in itself and is expressed in our affinity with what is loved rather than in any extrinsic relationship to it. Correspondingly, Locke construes it as a 'sympathy of the soul' and the 'union of a mind' with what ought to delight it.<sup>95</sup> Human beings, to his mind, were distinguished by the capacity, or more precisely the duty, to choose the appropriate objects of their love. Let Locke speak for himself: 'All men have a stock of love laid up in them by nature w<sup>ch</sup> they cannot forbear to bestow on some thing or other[.] We should there for take care to choose fit & worthy objects of our love least like women that want children the proper objects of their affection we grow fond of little dogs & munkeys'.<sup>96</sup> For Locke, this meant loving God, one another and ourselves as we ourselves were loved, the ideal expressed in the golden rule which epitomized in its turn the duties of natural law.<sup>97</sup>

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

So much of love – what of freedom? If not in freedom of choice, then in what does Locke understand freedom to consist?

The answer to this question is best taken in three parts. First, and perhaps paradoxically, freedom is dependency on God. In a note on law from 1693, Locke writes that ‘[t]he originall and foundation of all Law is dependence. A dependent intelligent being is under the power & direction & dominion of him on whom he depends’.<sup>98</sup> Human beings can never escape from a state of dependency. The question for Locke is simply whether it is a dependency which binds us to what decays and dies or dependency on a higher power that makes it possible for us to be what we were made to be and which, little by little, guides us towards what we were made to be, the image of God: ‘If therefore Men in this Life only have hope; if in this Life they can only enjoy, ’tis not strange, nor unreasonable, that they should seek their Happiness by avoiding all things, that disease them here, and by pursuing all that delight them... Men may chuse different things, and yet all chuse right, supposing them only like a Company of poor insects, whereof some are Bees, delighted with Flowers, and their sweetness, others, Beetles, delighted with other kinds of Viands, which having enjoyed for a season, they should cease to be, and exist no more for ever’.<sup>99</sup> In the proper use of their faculties, and by obedience to God’s commands, people form themselves in His image.<sup>100</sup>

It is, secondly, freedom as the acknowledged weakness of human beings, a weakness that does not think to stand on the basis of each his own resources alone but rather also on those from God. It is a weakness that is free from the self in its self-regarding manifestations, the self-gratification and self-assertion which Locke calls ‘license’.<sup>101</sup> License means acting as if one is independent and subject to no law but one’s own will. It is the mode of conduct characteristic of wild beasts. And Stuart monarchs.<sup>102</sup>

It is, thirdly, the freedom of a decisive commitment made – the distinguishing feature of Christian liberty as Locke understood it – of having made the great choice which

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

relativizes and determines all other choices, of receiving Christ for our king and ruler and professing ourselves his subjects. ‘As Men [Locke writes] we have God for our King, and are under the Law of Reason: [but] as Christians, we have *Jesus the Messiah* for our King, and are under the Law revealed by him in the Gospel. And though every Christian, both as a *Deist* and a *Christian*, be obliged to study both the Law of Nature and the Revealed Law... yet in neither of these laws, is there to be found a Select Set of Fundamentals distinct from the rest which are to make him, a *Deist* or a *Christian*.<sup>103</sup> Both reason and the Gospel, in Locke’s view, disclosed the same requirements of mutual love.<sup>104</sup>

**VIII**

My aim in this essay has been to explain how a particular story about Locke and his relation to liberalism rose to prominence and came to enjoy a hegemonic position, and then to tell a different story about Locke. All stories, I have suggested, have meaning for us in proportion to what we already know and this story is no different: it has meaning for me because of what I already know.

Nearly fifty years ago, in a classic article published in this journal, John Dunn suggested that an improper paradigm was responsible for a great deal of misunderstanding when it came to Locke’s political theory, and he showed how that paradigm had misled scholars to mistaken conclusions about the argument and structuring assumptions of *Two treatises of government*.<sup>105</sup> In an essay published as recently as 2013 in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, and destined to become a classic, Ian Harris shows the same process in operation with respect to Locke’s *Letter*.<sup>106</sup> I have tried in this essay to show how that paradigm arose, how it could have so captivated the minds of so many modern commentators, and to propose an alternative to it.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

My story has some of the makings of a fable. There are animals, after all – little dogs, monkeys, bees, and beetles – and so perhaps there should also be a moral. The moral of this story is not that Locke is not a liberal (though I see little ground to think that he was)<sup>107</sup> or that his ‘liberalism is... not the same as modern secular liberalism’,<sup>108</sup> or that modern secular liberalism requires Christianity to brace its foundational principles.<sup>109</sup> My moral is a broader one, if scarcely an original one, yet it is nevertheless an appropriate one in context, for it brings me back to my original point of departure, to the idea that to bear witness well we must ensure that the stories which define and sustain us are as little as possible imposed upon us.

Some stories are so omnipresently pervasive that, even when proposing alternatives, we do so in terms which are set by them and so we remain captive to them, even as we imagine ourselves free from their thrall. Like the poor, they are always with us.<sup>110</sup> The moral of my story is that it is altogether more difficult than is sometimes asserted to divest ourselves of the ‘easy assumptions’ [as one writer puts it] that predetermine ‘what we think an argument of a certain sort *must* be like’.<sup>111</sup> It is necessary to add that the same writer assumes with some ease that ‘moral individualism’ is ‘crucial to Locke’s moral and political theory generally’ and is duly flummoxed by the absence of the ‘*explicit* Christian argument’ he was expecting ‘for the specifically individualist way in which [Locke] understood man’s relation to God’s commission and God’s purposes’.<sup>112</sup> Yet Locke, so far from thinking principally in terms of the individual, mentions him hardly at all in either *Two treatises* or the *Letter*. Those texts are concerned, in their different ways, with the origins, extent, and ends of societies to which, as Locke saw it, human beings *must* belong if they are to perform the duties, including duties to love, which, while incumbent upon them all – each and every one – bind all of them together and reflect their dependence upon each other and upon the God who, in His wisdom and love, created them.<sup>113</sup>

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

To see things as the proponents of arguments saw them: that really *is* the challenge.<sup>114</sup>

It is the challenge which, however inadequately, I have endeavoured to meet in this essay.

---

Timothy Stanton, Department of Politics, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD, United Kingdom. Email: tim.stanton@york.ac.uk

\* An earlier version of this essay was given as the third Balzan-Skinner lecture, delivered at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities (CRASSH) at the University of Cambridge. I should like to express my deep thanks to Quentin Skinner and the Balzan Foundation for endowing the Balzan-Skinner fellowship which I held at CRASSH; likewise to the director of CRASSH Simon Goldhill for making me feel so welcome during my tenure of the fellowship, and to Michelle Maciejewska and all the administrative staff for the hard work of organising and advertising the lecture and associated colloquium. It is a pleasure to thank John Robertson and Mark Goldie for their encouragement, advice and support in planning the colloquium, and Mark and John Dunn for their words of introduction before the lecture. I should also like to thank my fellow participants in the colloquium – Jeffrey Collins, John Perry, and Sarah Mortimer – and the audience for contributing so much to its success. Especial thanks are due to Jon Parkin for stepping in to ventriloquize when illness prevented the fourth participant in the colloquium, Ian Harris, from delivering his contribution in person. For their help and kindness during my time in Cambridge I am very grateful to Duncan Bell, Annabel Brett, Christopher Brooke, Duncan Kelly, Paul Sagar and Ruth Scurr. For comments and improving suggestions to the argument across different versions of the essay I am indebted to John Dunn, Ian Harris, James Harris, Alan Kahan, Quentin Skinner, and an anonymous reviewer for this journal. For permission to quote from Locke's manuscripts in the Lovelace Collection of papers owned by Bodleian Libraries,

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

University of Oxford, I wish to thank the Keeper of Special Collections, Dr. Chris Fletcher. I took up the Balzan-Skinner fellowship in 2012, when my elder son Owen was not yet two and my wife Fran was pregnant with our second child, James, who was born in the week that the lecture was originally due to have been delivered. Without her love, patience, and support, then and now, this essay could not have been written. I dedicate it to all three of them with all my love.

<sup>1</sup> Quentin Skinner, ‘The place of history in public life’, *History & Policy* policy papers, no. 35, December 2005: <<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-35.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> Skinner, ‘The place of history’. For three contrasting accounts of the importance of stories of this kind, compare Michael Oakeshott, ‘History is a fable’, in *What is history? and other essays*, ed. L. O’Sullivan (Exeter, 2004), pp. 32-44; Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Epistemological crises, dramatic narrative and the philosophy of science’, *The Monist*, 60 (1977), pp. 453-72; and Bernard Williams, ‘Life as narrative’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 17 (2007), pp. 305-14.

<sup>3</sup> See Duncan Bell, ‘What is liberalism?’, *Political Theory*, 42 (2014), pp. 682-715, repr. in *Reordering the world: essays on liberalism and empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2016), ch. 3, and compare Herbert Samuel, *Liberalism: an attempt to state the principles and proposals of contemporary liberalism in England* (London, 1902); L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (London, 1911); Guido de Ruggiero, *The history of European liberalism*, trans. R. G. Collingwood (Oxford, 1927); Frederick Mundell Watkins, *The political tradition of the West: a study in the development of modern liberalism* (Cambridge, MA, 1948); Harry K. Givertz, *From wealth to welfare : the evolution of liberalism* (Stanford, CA, 1950); J. Salwyn Schapiro, *Liberalism: its meaning and history* (Princeton, NJ, 1958); Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and vision: continuity in Western political thought* (Boston, MA, 1960), pp. 286-351; André Vachet,

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

*L'idéologie liberale : l'individu et sa propriété* (Paris, 1970); D. J. Manning, *Liberalism* (London, 1976); Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., *The spirit of liberalism* (Cambridge, MA, 1978); John Dunn, *Western political theory in the face of the future* (Cambridge, 1979), ch. 2, passim; Anthony Arblaster, *The rise and decline of Western liberalism* (Oxford, 1984); John Gray, *Liberalism* (Minneapolis, MN, 1995); Jörn Leonhard, *Liberalismus: Zur historischen Semantik eines europäischen Deutungsmusters* (Munich, 2001); P. J. Kelly, *Liberalism* (Cambridge, 2005); Domenico Losurdo, *Controstoria del liberalismo* (Rome, 2005); Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller Jr., and Jeffrey Paul (eds.), *Liberalism: old and new* (Cambridge, 2007); Alan Ryan, *The making of modern liberalism* (Princeton, NJ, 2012); James Alexander, 'The major ideologies of liberalism, socialism, and conservatism', *Political Studies*, 63 (2014), pp. 980-94; Edmund Fawcett, *Liberalism: the life of an idea* (Princeton, NJ, 2014); Michael Freeden, *Liberalism* (Oxford, 2015); Steven Wall, ed., *The Cambridge companion to liberalism* (Cambridge, 2015). Additional literature will be identified at appropriate points as the essay advances.

<sup>4</sup> For Hobbes as a liberal, see (in chronological sequence) John Austin, *The province of jurisprudence determined* (London, 1832), pp. 276-80ff; A. E. Taylor, *Hobbes* (London, 1908), pp. 91-92 and compare Andrew Seth, *English philosophers and schools of philosophy* (London, 1925), p. 73; David Gauthier, *The logic of Leviathan* (Oxford, 1969); John Rawls, 'The idea of an overlapping consensus' (1987), in Samuel Freeman, ed., *Collected papers* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 421-48, at p. 442f (distinguishing 'the Hobbesian strand in liberalism'); Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, 1991), xxxiv-xlv; Richard Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes: skepticism, individuality, and chastened politics* (Newbury Park, CA, 1993); Alan Ryan, 'Hobbes's political philosophy', in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge companion to Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 208-45, at p. 237; Quentin

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

Skinner, *Liberty before liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998), esp. ch. 2; Jonathan Israel, *Radical enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity* (Oxford, 2001); David van Mill, *Liberty, rationality and agency in Hobbes's Leviathan* (Albany, NY, 2001); A. P. Martinich, 'Hobbes's reply to republicanism', in Luc Foisneau and George Wright, eds., *Nuove prospettive critiche sul Leviatano di Hobbes* (Milan, 2004), pp. 227-39, at p. 228; Vickie B. Sullivan, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the formation of a liberal republicanism in England* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 105; J. Judd Owen, 'The tolerant Leviathan: Hobbes and the paradox of liberalism', *Polity*, 37 (2005), pp. 130-48, Richard Tuck, 'Hobbes and democracy', in A. S. Brett, James Tully, with Holly Hamilton-Bleakley, eds., *Rethinking the foundations of modern political thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 171-90; L. Jaume, 'Hobbes and the philosophical sources of liberalism', in Patricia Springborg, ed., *The Cambridge companion to Hobbes's Leviathan* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 199-216; Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and republican liberty* (Cambridge, 2008); S. Adam Seagrave, *The foundations of natural morality: on the compatibility of natural law and natural rights* (Chicago, IL, 2014); Noel Malcolm, 'Thomas Hobbes: Liberal illberal', *Journal of the British Academy*, 4 (2016), pp. 113-136.

<sup>5</sup> For Locke as a liberal, see Joseph Vialatoux, 'La philosophie libérale de Locke', in *Philosophie économique : études critique sur le naturalisme* (Paris, 1932), pp. 117-56; J. L. Stocks, 'Locke's contribution to political theory', in *John Locke: Tercentenary Addresses* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 3-13, at 7: 'Probably it is historically correct to describe Locke's *Civil Government* as the first adequate formulation of the principles of the Liberal State'; W. A. Orton, *The liberal tradition: a study of the social and spiritual conditions of freedom* (New Haven, CT, 1945), pp. 108-14; Hans Kelsen, 'Foundations of democracy', *Ethics*, 66 (1955), pp. 1-101, esp. pp. 86-90; Martin Seliger, *The liberal politics of John Locke* (London, 1968);

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*


---

Dante Germino, *Modern Western political thought: Machiavelli to Marx* (Chicago, IL, 1972), ch. 5 ['Locke and the origins of modern liberalism']; Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public man, private woman: women in social and political thought* (Princeton, NJ, 1981), pp. 108-27; Eldon J. Eisenach, *Two worlds of liberalism: religion and politics in Hobbes, Locke, and Mill* (Chicago, IL, 1981), part 2; Ruth W. Grant, *John Locke's liberalism* (Chicago, IL, 1987); Steven M. Dworetz, *The unvarnished doctrine : Locke, liberalism, and the American revolution* (Durham, NC, 1990); Peter C. Myers, *Our only star and compass: Locke and the struggle for political rationality* (Lanham, MD, 1998); Lucien Jaume, *La liberté et la loi: les origines philosophiques du libéralisme* (Paris, 2000); John Rawls, *Lectures on the history of political philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA, 2007), pp. 103-73; Samuel Salzborn, *Der Staat des Liberalismus : die liberale Staatstheorie von John Locke* (Baden-Baden, 2010); Jeffrey Collins, 'The early modern foundations of classic liberalism', in George Klosko, ed., *The Oxford handbook of the history of political philosophy* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 258-281; John Perry, *The pretenses of loyalty: Locke, liberal theory, and American political theology* (Oxford, 2011); Richard J. Arneson, 'Locke and the liberal tradition', in Matthew Stuart, ed., *A companion to Locke* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 528-45, esp. 542-45. That it is by now almost a cliché to refer to Locke in these terms is elegantly exposed by Mark Goldie, 'Mary Astell and John Locke', in W. Kolbrener and M. Michelson, eds., *Mary Astell: reason, gender, faith* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 65-85, at p. 65, dramatizing a contrast between 'Mary Astell, "the first English feminist," and John Locke, "the father of liberalism"'.

<sup>6</sup> The classic statements being Leo Strauss, *Natural right and history* (Chicago, IL, 1953) and C. B. Macpherson, *The political theory of possessive individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford, 1962). For an early comment, see Isaiah Berlin, 'Hobbes, Locke, and Professor Macpherson', *The Political Quarterly*, 35 (1964), pp. 444-68, at 461f: 'Hobbes is a ravening

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

wolf who looks like one. Locke is a...wolf in medieval, natural law, sheep's clothes'. As Berlin went on to observe, 'This puts Mr. Macpherson into paradoxical proximity to...Strauss and his followers: if Hobbes and Locke turn out to be bedfellows, so are those who (from very opposite corners) so regard them'.

<sup>7</sup> For an earlier and suggestive use of this phrase, see Joshua Mitchell, 'Religion and the fable of liberalism: The case of Hobbes', *Theoria*, 115 (2008), pp. 1-16.

<sup>8</sup> For one such, see Skinner, *Hobbes and republican liberty*, pp. 211-16 and, at length, Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen, eds., *Republicanism: a shared European heritage* (2 vols., Cambridge, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> For the classical genres of *fabulae*, see Diomedes, *Ars grammatica*, 1.489.23-491.3 in Heinrich Keil, ed., *Grammatici latini* (volume 1, Leipzig, 1857). See also Augustine, *Soliloquia*, bk 2, ch. 11, §19, in J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 32 (Paris, 1875), col. 894: 'siquidem est fabula compositum ad utilitatem delectationemve mendacium [‘... a *fabula* is a falsehood composed for benefit or delight’].

<sup>10</sup> Compare G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the philosophy of right*, ed. A. W. Wood and trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, 1991), §§121-23, 144-49, 185R, 187, 206R, and 268, and idem, *Lectures on the philosophy of world history: Introduction: Reason in history*, trans. and ed. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 34-43; Karl Marx, *Early political writings*, trans. and ed. J. O'Malley, with R. A. Davis (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 4-6, 18-47, 73-80, 95-96, and David Leopold, *The young Karl Marx: German philosophy, modern politics, and human flourishing* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 133-49. For broader discussion, see Alain Renaut, *The era of the individual: a contribution to a history of subjectivity*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise and F. Philip (Princeton, NJ, 1997)

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*


---

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. David Hume, ‘Of civil liberty’ and ‘Of the rise and progress of the arts and sciences’, in *Political essays*, ed. K. Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 51-77; Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, with W. B. Todd (2 vols., Oxford, 1976), I, pp. 28-29 and idem, *The theory of moral sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford, 1976), pp. 9-66; Benjamin Constant, ‘The spirit of conquest and usurpation’ and ‘The liberty of the ancients compared with that of the moderns’, in *Political writings*, ed. B. Fontana (Cambridge, 1988), esp. p. 53, pp. 307-28; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. E. Nolla, trans. J. T. Schliefer (4 vols., Indianapolis, IN, 2010), IV, pp. 987-94. See Mitchell, ‘Religion and the fable’, pp. 2-5.

<sup>12</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *Speculum mentis, or, the map of knowledge* (Oxford, 1924), p. 23. See also F. M. Powicke, *The Christian life in the middle ages, and other essays* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 1-30, 74-91; idem, *Ways of medieval life and thought* (London, 1949), pp. 130-48, esp. p. 134; Walter Ullmann, *The individual and society in the middle ages* (London, 1967), esp. pp. x-xi and lectures 1 and 2; idem, *Principles of government and politics in the middle ages* (London, 1961), pp. 215-34; M. Kempshall, *The common good in late medieval political thought* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Minogue, ‘Locke, Kant, and the foundations of liberalism’, in Martyn P. Thompson, ed., *John Locke und Immanuel Kant: Historische Rezeption und gegenwärtige Relevanz* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 269-83, at p. 274. For an original and instructive account of continuity and change across these two epochs, see A. S. Brett, *Changes of state: nature and the limits of the city in early modern natural law* (Princeton, NJ, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and other writings*, ed. J. P. Sommerville (Cambridge, 1991), p. 2: ‘the common people everywhere embrace [freedom] as being most plausible to flesh and blood, for that it prodigally distributes a portion of liberty to the meanest of the

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*


---

multitude, who magnify liberty as if the height of human felicity were only to be found in it – never remembering that the desire for liberty was the cause of the fall of Adam’.

<sup>15</sup> Paradigmatically, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, ed. T. Gilby (60 vols, Cambridge, 1963-80), XXVIII, Ia IIae, q. 93. See more generally Odon Lottin, *Le droit naturel chez S. Thomas d’Aquin et ses prédecesseurs* (Bruges, 1931), and more narrowly M. P. Zuckert, *Natural rights and the new republicanism* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), p. xv: ‘In the beginning, all the English were Christian Aristotelians’.

<sup>16</sup> See *A historical and critical account of the science of morality*, section xxix, prefixed to Barbeyrac’s translation (into French) of Samuel Pufendorf’s *De jure naturae et gentium*, English edn, *The law of nature and nations* (London, 1729). Compare Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the history of ethics* (London, 1896), pp. 160-63; Heinrich Rommen, *Die ewige Wiederkehr des Naturrechts* (Leipzig, 1936), ch. 3; and Richard Tuck, ‘The “modern” theory of natural law’, in Anthony Pagden, ed., *The languages of political theory in early-modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 99-119.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Tierney, *The idea of natural rights* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1997), p. 50; Francis Oakley, *Natural law, laws of nature, natural rights* (New York, 2005), p. 69. For Suárez on natural law, see James Gordley, ‘Suárez and natural law’, in B. Hill and H. Lagerlund, eds., *The philosophy of Francisco Suárez* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 209-29.

<sup>18</sup> Hugo Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis* as *The rights of war and peace*, ed. R. Tuck (3 vols., Indianapolis, IN, 2005), i, Preliminary discourse, xi, pp. 89-90. On which, see M. B. Crowe, ‘The “impious hypothesis”: a paradox in Hugo Grotius’, *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 38 (1976), pp. 379-410.

<sup>19</sup> Grotius, *The rights of war and peace*, i, Preliminary discourse, vii-viii, pp. 82-86.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*


---

<sup>20</sup> Compare Montesquieu, *The spirit of the laws*, ed. A. M. Kohler, B. C. Miller and H. S. Stone (Cambridge, 1989), I.3-4, pp. 22-25; Alexis de Tocqueville, *On the state of society in France before the Revolution of 1789*, trans. H. Reeve (London, 1873), pp. 136-37; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York, 1969), I, §2.

<sup>21</sup> Tocqueville, *On the state of society*, pp. 147-48. See Mitchell, 'Religion and the fable', pp. 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Tocqueville, *On the state of society*, p. 170. Cf. Pierre Manent, *Tocqueville et la nature de la démocratie* (2nd edn., Paris, 1993), pp. 13-29 and Pierre Rosanvallon, 'L'histoire du mot démocratie à l'époque moderne', in M. Gauchet, P. Manent, and P. Rosanvallon, eds., *La pensée politique, I: Situations de la démocratie*, (Paris, 1993), pp. 23-26

<sup>23</sup> While distinguishing the story of the democratic intellect from the individualism story, I would wish to underline the interrelations between them at this point especially. It may be that the two lines of development identified here are better seen as flowing out of the individualism story through the 'modern' theory of natural law, perhaps (as Barbeyrac speculated) from Francis Bacon into Grotius. I am obliged to Alan Kahan for correspondence which highlighted a need for clarification of this matter.

<sup>24</sup> Adam Smith, *Lectures on jurisprudence*, ed. R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, and P. G. Stein (Oxford, 1978), p. 540. Compare Montesquieu, *The spirit of the laws*, IV.20, p. 338.

<sup>25</sup> As recounted in Albert O. Hirschman, *The passions and the interests* (Princeton, NJ, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. Summerfield Baldwin, *The organization of medieval Christianity* (New York, 1929), pp. 43-44; Max Weber, *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (London, 1930), pp. 116-17.

<sup>27</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Augustine and Protestantism' [1930], in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, ed. J. Kohn (New York, 1994), pp. 24-27, esp. p. 27: 'With increasing secularization,

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

religious self-reflection before God lost its meaning. There was no longer an authority to confess to, and religious self-reflection therefore became simply reflection on one's own life'.

<sup>28</sup> See Edward G. Andrew, *Conscience and its critics: Protestant conscience, Enlightenment reason, and modern subjectivity* (Toronto, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> For which, see at length Marcel Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde* (Paris, 1985), and, at even greater length, Charles Taylor, *A secular age* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> As memorably brought to life in Parsons's translation of Weber, *The protestant ethic*, pp. 160-83.

<sup>31</sup> Some of these currents flowed into intellectual streams from other sources of scholarship and were carried forward in the tidal surge of 'modernization theory' that came to dominate the social sciences after World War II. Modernization theory consolidated the two stories I have been discussing into a two-stage history of humanity, in which human beings liberate themselves from the shackles of an inherited order. Its watery outlines, drawn from Karl Mannheim, are discernible in Laslett's early work on Filmer and more thickly present in e.g. Louis Hartz, *The liberal tradition in America* (New York, 1955). For an overview, see Dean C. Tipps, 'Modernization theory and the comparative study of societies: a critical perspective', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 15, 2, (1973), pp. 199-226. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to make this connection explicit.

<sup>32</sup> Thus we find V. I. Lenin complaining, as early as 1905, that the 'name "socialist"... has... been appropriated by supporters of English bourgeois liberalism ("We are all socialists now", said [Sir William] Harcourt'). See *Two tactics of social-democracy in the democratic revolution* (Moscow, 1977), p. 127.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Oakeshott, *The social and political doctrines of contemporary Europe* (Cambridge, 1939), p. xxii.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*


---

<sup>34</sup> E.g. Carl Joachim Friedrich, whose *Constitutional government and politics* (New York, 1937), was intended as ‘a wheelbarrow of stuff’ (p.xvi) toward the defence and abutment of the constitutional order. For émigré anxieties about liberalism at this time, see John G. Gunnell, *Imagining the American polity: political science and the discourse of democracy* (University Park, PA, 2004), pp. 200-17.

<sup>35</sup> Merle Curti, ‘The great Mr. Locke: America’s philosopher, 1783-1861’, *Huntington Library Bulletin*, 11 (1937), pp.107-51.

<sup>36</sup> Harold J. Laski, *The rise of European liberalism: an essay in interpretation* (London, 1936), repr. as *The rise of liberalism: the philosophy of a business civilization* (New York, 1936). For discussion, see Isaac Kramnick, ‘Liberalism, Marxism, and the Enlightenment: the case of Harold Laski’, in Bernard Yack, ed., *Liberalism without illusions: essays on the liberal theory and political vision of Judith N. Shklar* (Chicago, IL, 1996), pp. 138-48.

<sup>37</sup> Laski, *European liberalism*, p. 9, p. 98.

<sup>38</sup> Laski, *European liberalism*, pp. 107-15. For Hobbes, see pp. 86-87 and compare idem, *The foundations of sovereignty, and other essays* (New York, 1921), pp. 17-24.

<sup>39</sup> Strauss, *Natural right and history*, pp. 181-82.

<sup>40</sup> Leo Strauss, *The political philosophy of Hobbes: its basis and genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Oxford, 1936), pp. 50-51, 120-23.

<sup>41</sup> Strauss, *The political philosophy of Hobbes*, pp. 118-19. Compare Eric Voegelin, *The new science of politics* (Chicago, IL, 1952), pp. 180-82.

<sup>42</sup> Strauss, *The political philosophy of Hobbes*, pp. 156-57.

<sup>43</sup> George H. Sabine, *A history of political theory* (New York, 1937), pp. 528-29.

<sup>44</sup> Sabine, *A history of political theory*, p. 529.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

<sup>45</sup> Strauss, *Natural right and history*, pp. 202-51. This argument was made before the publication of Locke's *Essays on the law of nature*, ed. W. von Leyden (Oxford, 1954), the contents of which present significant obstacles to it; but its proponent was undeterred. See, subsequently, 'Locke's doctrine of natural law', in his *What is political philosophy? and other studies* (Glencoe, IL, 1959), pp. 197-220.

<sup>46</sup> Michael P. Zuckert, *Launching liberalism: on Lockean political philosophy* (Lawrence, KA, 2002)

<sup>47</sup> Pierre Manent, *Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme: dix leçons* (Paris, 1987), trans. Rebecca Balinski as *An intellectual history of liberalism* (Princeton, NJ, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> For the relationship between the two, see Peter Lamb and David Morrice, 'Ideological reconciliation in the thought of Harold Laski and C. B. Macpherson', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 35 (2002), pp. 795-810.

<sup>49</sup> Macpherson, *The political theory of possessive individualism*, pp. 220-38.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Walzer, 'Liberalism and the art of separation', *Political Theory*, 12 (1984), pp. 315-30, at p. 324.

<sup>51</sup> Amy Gutmann, 'Communitarian critics of liberalism', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 14 (1985), pp. 308-22, at p. 320. A survey of similar positions is supplied in Ronald Beiner, *What's the matter with liberalism?* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1992), ch. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Jeremy Waldron, 'Theoretical foundations of liberalism', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 37 (1987), pp. 127-50, at p. 128 and p. 149 respectively. Emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> Rawls, *Lectures*, p. 13, p. 107.

<sup>54</sup> John Locke, *Two treatises of government*, ed. P. Laslett (Cambridge, 1988) and *Epistola de tolerantia/A letter on toleration*, trans. J. W. Gough, and ed. R. Klibansky (Oxford, 1968).

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*


---

<sup>55</sup> See Rawls, *Lectures*, pp. 124-25. Compare e.g. A. John Simmons, *On the edge of anarchy*.

*Locke, consent and the limits of society* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), pp. 206-7; Richard Ashcraft, *Locke's Two treatises of government* (London, 1987), pp. 8-9: Locke posited 'the natural right of every man to give his personal consent to the government as a condition of his definition of political society'.

<sup>56</sup> 'General introduction' [by the editors] to John Locke, *An essay concerning toleration and other writings on law and politics, 1667-1683*, ed. J. R. Milton and Philip Milton (Oxford, 2006), p. 32. Compare e.g. John Marshall, *Locke, toleration and early Enlightenment culture* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 538 (Religion is 'a private affair of the individual'); Sarah Mortimer, 'Religion and Enlightenment', in Richard Whatmore and Brian Young, eds., *A companion to intellectual history* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 345-57, at p. 350 (Locke makes Christianity 'a private matter').

<sup>57</sup> 'Introduction' [by the editor] to John Locke, *A letter concerning toleration and other writings*, ed. Mark Goldie (Indianapolis, IN, 2010), p. xiii. Compare Lee Ward, *John Locke and modern life* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 234, for 'rational consent underlying [Locke's] accounts of political obligation and religious communion'.

<sup>58</sup> Ward, *John Locke and modern life*, p. 234.

<sup>59</sup> Milton and Milton, 'General introduction', p. 32.

<sup>60</sup> Ward, *John Locke and modern life*, p. 235.

<sup>61</sup> A. John Simmons, *Justification and legitimacy: essays on rights and obligations* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 102-121. To be clear, Simmons's view is that this removes any strong moral presumption in favour of obedience to, or compliance with, existing states, not that it entails a strong moral imperative to oppose or eliminate them.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

<sup>62</sup> Charles Leslie, *The Rehearsal*, no. 58 [Sat. Sept 1 to Sat. Sept. 8, 1705], in *A view of the times, their principles and practices* (5 vols., London, 1750), I, p. 355.

<sup>63</sup> See e.g. Leslie, *The Rehearsal*, no. 38, I, p. 232 (Locke confutes himself, his account of popular government ‘*nonsense* and an *impossibility*’), I, p. 234 (Locke’s ‘stupid *notions* still *prevail*, still *bewitch* this wretched nation’), I, p. 235 (his ‘*senseless stuff* and ‘*silly sayings*’ about government); *The Rehearsal*, no. 49, I, p. 302 (demonstrably ‘*impossible*’), *The Rehearsal*, no. 55, I, p. 333 (Locke’s arguments would not ‘pass from a *school-boy*... Besides the utter *contempt* of, and *burlesquing* the *holy scriptures*’); *The Rehearsal*, no. 59, I, pp. 359-60 (Locke accused of ‘*deceit*’), I, p. 364 (and of ‘*romance, contradiction*, and *impossibility*’); *The Rehearsal*, no. 109, II, p. 214 (‘*weakness* and *contradiction*... prov’d upon him’). On Locke and Leslie, see John Dunn, ‘The politics of Locke in England and America in the eighteenth century’, in John W. Yolton, ed., *John Locke: problems and perspectives* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 45-80, esp. pp. 63-65.

<sup>64</sup> For Hoadly, see William Gibson, *Enlightenment prelate: Benjamin Hoadly, 1676-1761* (Cambridge, 2004), esp. ch. 5 and, for details of the controversy, Andrew Starkie, *The Church of England and the Bangorian controversy, 1716-1721* (Woodbridge, 2007).

<sup>65</sup> Charles Leslie, *The finishing stroke. Being a vindication of the patriarchal scheme of government* (London, 1711), p. 87.

<sup>66</sup> Leslie, *The Rehearsal*, no. 14, I, p. 86.

<sup>67</sup> Wilfrid Ward, ed., *Newman’s Apologia pro vita sua, the two versions of 1864 & 1865. Preceded by Newman’s and Kingsley’s pamphlets* (Oxford, 1913), p. 493. See, in this connection, J. A. Langford, *The old liberals and the new: A tract for the times* (Birmingham, 1886) and *Essays for the people. Two prize essays by W. T. H. and W. V. K. Young*,

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*


---

*respectively on liberalism in England, and its demoralising effects on our national religion and liberties* (London, 1881).

<sup>68</sup> Leslie, *The Rehearsal*, no. 14, I, p. 86.

<sup>69</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On liberty*, ch.1, in his *Collected works*, ed. John M. Robson *et al.*, (33 vols., London, 1963-95), XVIII, p. 224.

<sup>70</sup> See Rawls, *Lectures*, p. 107: ‘In Locke...legitimate government can be founded only on the consent of free and equal...persons, ...all being...equally sovereign over themselves’. Compare e.g. Alan Ryan, ‘Self-ownership, autonomy, and property rights’, *Social Philosophy & Policy*, 11 (1994), pp. 241-58; Seagrave, *The foundations of natural morality*, ch. 2 (‘Self-consciousness, self-ownership, and natural rights’); Jeremy Waldron, *The right to private property* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 398-412; Zuckert, *Launching liberalism*, p. 194: ‘The foundation or ground of rights, is, according to Locke, self-ownership’; and, among libertarians, Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, state and utopia* (New York, 1974), p. 172; Michael Otsuka, ‘Self-ownership and equality: a Lockean reconciliation’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 27 (1998), pp. 65-92; Jeffrey Paul and Ellen Frankel Paul, ‘Locke’s usufructuary theory of self-ownership’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 61 (1980), pp. 384-95.

<sup>71</sup> See Perry, *The pretenses of loyalty*, pp. 5-9, 204-16.

<sup>72</sup> John Dryden, ‘Almanzor and Almahide, or, The conquest of Granada, The first part’, Act I, scene i, lines 207-15, in *The works of John Dryden* (20 vols., Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1978), XI, p. 30.

<sup>73</sup> On Dryden and Hobbes, see Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: The reception of the political and religious ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England 1640-1700* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 302-4.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

<sup>74</sup> [Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury], *Several letters written by a noble Lord to a young man at the university* (London, 1716), p.39.

<sup>75</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of men, manners, opinions, times* (3 vols., Indianapolis, IN, 2001), I, pp. 68-69: ‘TIS ridiculous to say, there is any Obligation on Man to act sociably, or honestly, in a form’d Government; and not in that which is commonly call’d *the State of Nature*’. See p. 72 for ‘that social Love, and common Affection, which is natural to Mankind’. For Locke and Shaftesbury, see Tim Stuart-Buttle, ‘Shaftesbury reconsidered: Stoic ethics and the unreasonableness of Christianity’, *Locke Studies*, 15 (2015), pp. 163-213.

<sup>76</sup> David Hume, *An enquiry concerning the principles of morals*, ed. T. L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 1998), p. 165.

<sup>77</sup> David Hume, *A treatise of human nature*, ed. D. F. Norton and M. Norton (Oxford, 2000), 3.2.8, p. 347.

<sup>78</sup> Hume, *A treatise*, 3.2.9, pp. 353-54; idem, ‘Of the original contract’, in *Political essays*, pp. 186-201, esp. p.189: ‘Were you to preach, in most parts of the world, that political connexions are founded altogether on voluntary consent...the magistrate would soon imprison you, as seditious, for loosening the ties; if your friends did not before shut you up as delirious, for advancing such absurdities’.

<sup>79</sup> Hume, ‘Of the original contract’, pp. 189-90.

<sup>80</sup> See R. G. Collingwood, ‘The nature and aims of a philosophy of history’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, new series, 25 (1924-1925), pp. 151-74, at pp. 171-2: ‘The world of every historian is limited by the limits of his knowledge...Any two historians will find that they share a large number of interests, of problems, of beliefs, but that each has a number of problems, urgent for himself, which for the other are wholly non-existent... Each historian

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*


---

sees history from his own centre, at an angle of his own: and therefore he sees some problems which no other sees, and sees every problem from a point of view, and therefore under an aspect, peculiar to himself.' My interest in Locke was ignited and cultivated by the teaching of Ian Harris, who (typically) directed me to John Dunn's seminal work, *The political thought of John Locke* (Cambridge, 1969) rather than to his own monograph, *The mind of John Locke* (Cambridge, 1994). In giving central place to Locke's (natural) theology, readers will recognize this essay's debt to both works, even as it implicitly dissents from some of the conclusions drawn there, as e.g. the conclusion that 'the key to Locke's moral vision lies...in the traditional conception of the calling' (Dunn, *The political thought of John Locke*, p. 245).

<sup>81</sup> That is to say, it sets out what Locke actually presupposed in the course of his thinking as opposed to what he did not. I do not claim that it exhausts what is true. See Collingwood, 'The nature and aims', p. 172, continuing directly from the passage cited above: 'No one historian, therefore, can see more than one aspect of the truth; and even an infinity of historians must always leave an infinity of aspects unseen.' For presuppositions, see idem, *An essay on metaphysics* (Oxford, 1940), pp. 21-57. A fuller discussion of the methodological commitments which underpin this peremptory assertion is offered in Timothy Stanton, 'Logic, language and legitimation in the history of ideas: a brief view and survey of Bevir and Skinner', *Intellectual History Review*, 21 (2011), pp. 71-84.

<sup>82</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, II.vi.58, p. 306.

<sup>83</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, II.vi.63, p. 309.

<sup>84</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, II.vi.61, p. 309; compare II.vi.57, p. 305.

<sup>85</sup> John Locke, *An essay concerning human understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), III.xi.16, p. 517: 'For were there a Monkey, or any other Creature to be found, that had the use of Reason, to such a degree, as to be able to understand general Signs, and to deduce

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

Consequences about general *Ideas*, he would no doubt be subject to Law, and, in that sense, be a *Man*, how much soever he differ'd in Shape from others of that Name'.

<sup>86</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, II.ii.6, p. 271.

<sup>87</sup> Locke, *Essays on the law of nature*, no. 7, p. 194.

<sup>88</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, II.ii.5, p. 270. On which, see Ian Harris, 'Locke on justice', in M. A. Stewart, ed., *English philosophy in the age of Locke* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 46-85, esp. pp. 64-69.

<sup>89</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, I.iv.42, p. 170.

<sup>90</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, II.viii.101, p. 334.

<sup>91</sup> John Locke, 'Defence of nonconformity' (1681-2), Bodleian MS. Locke c. 34, pp. 19, 23, 76-77. For this document, see Timothy Stanton, 'The name and nature of Locke's "Defence of nonconformity"', *Locke Studies*, 6 (2006), pp. 143-72.

<sup>92</sup> Locke, 'Defence of nonconformity', pp. 76-77.

<sup>93</sup> Locke, 'Defence of nonconformity', p. 23, for the 'great ends of religion to be attain'd onely in societyes' – the edification of their members, the public worship of God, and the propagation of truth – 'one of these [the second] containing my duty to God the other [the third] to my neighbour, & the other [the first] to my self'. See p. 108, for Christians uniting 'into one body & Society by the Common tyes of charity brotherly love & kindnesse' as 'their duty'; p. 148, for 'Love to one another' as the bond of, and the bond between, these 'separate communions'. See also 'Pacifick Christians' (1688), Bodleian MS. Locke c. 27, fo. 80, and compare John Dunn, 'From applied theology to social analysis: the break between John Locke and the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Rethinking modern political theory: essays 1979-1983* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 55-67, at p. 61, for the Lockean church as 'a tissue of... friendship'.

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*


---

<sup>94</sup> Ian Harris, ‘John Locke and natural law: free worship and toleration’, in Jon Parkin and Timothy Stanton, eds., *Natural law and toleration in the early Enlightenment* (Proceedings of the British Academy, 186: Oxford, 2013), pp. 59-105, at pp. 82-87.

<sup>95</sup> John Locke, ‘Pleasure and pain. The passions’ (1676), Bodleian MS. Locke f. 1, pp. 325-47, printed (from Locke’s shorthand) in *Essays on the law of nature*, pp. 265-72, at pp. 266-67. For an interesting discussion of the implications of this position, see Patricia Sheridan, ‘Locke’s latitudinarian sympathies: an exploration of sentiment in Locke’s moral theory’, *Locke Studies*, 15 (2015), pp. 131-62.

<sup>96</sup> John Locke, ‘Amor’ (1679), Bodleian MS. Locke d. 1, p. 57

<sup>97</sup> Matt. 7:12. See John Locke, *The reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. J. C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford, 1999), pp. 123-24 and compare *Two treatises*, II.ii.5, p. 270 and II.vii.93, p. 328, there expressed as ‘Love of Mankind and Society, and such a Charity as we all owe one to another’.

<sup>98</sup> John Locke, ‘Law’ (1693?), Bodleian MS. Locke c. 28, fo. 141.

<sup>99</sup> Locke, *An essay*, II.xxi.55, pp. 269-70.

<sup>100</sup> The ‘image of God’ has at least two aspects in Locke. In the first place, it refers to an assumed similarity between man and God in the make of their intellects. In the second place, it refers to a destiny which extends beyond the present life into immortality. See respectively Locke, *Two treatises*, I.iv.31, p. 162: ‘God makes [man] *in his own Image after his own Likeness*, makes him an intellectual Creature... For wherein soever else the *Image of God* consisted, the intellectual Nature was certainly a part of it, and belong’d to the whole species’, and *The reasonableness of Christianity*, p. 113-15, esp. p. 115: ‘we shall, at the Resurrection ... after [Christ’s] *Image*, which is the *Image* of the Father, become Immortal’. On the first, going beyond Locke, see Edward Craig, *The mind of God and the works of man*

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

(Oxford, 1987), and Jeremy Waldron, ‘The image of God: rights, reason, and order’, in J. Witte Jr. and F. S. Alexander, eds., *Christianity and human rights* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 216-35.

<sup>101</sup> See Locke, *Two treatises*, II.ii.6, p. 270.

<sup>102</sup> Locke, *Two treatises*, II.xviii.199-200, pp. 399-400, II.xix.228, pp. 416-17.

<sup>103</sup> John Locke, *A second vindication of the reasonableness of Christianity*, in *Vindications of the reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. V. Nuovo (Oxford, 2012), p. 71.

<sup>104</sup> Locke, *A letter*, p. 64. See *Essays on the law of nature*, no. 4, pp. 156-58 and ‘Defence of nonconformity’, p. 23 respectively for duties to God, one’s neighbour, and oneself, at once cognoscible by sense experience and reason and ‘plainly set downe in Scripture’.

<sup>105</sup> John Dunn, ‘Consent in the political theory of John Locke’, *Historical Journal*, 10 (1967), pp. 153-82.

<sup>106</sup> Harris, ‘John Locke and natural law’, *passim*.

<sup>107</sup> The central point in Locke’s political theory is that man owes everything to God. The liberal assumes, by contrast, that ‘the fundamental debt is the one owed to the self’. See Alexander, ‘The major ideologies’, p. 986.

<sup>108</sup> Mark Goldie, ‘Introduction’ to Locke, *A letter*, p.xiii.

<sup>109</sup> Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and equality: Christian foundations in Locke’s political thought* (Cambridge, 2002). Readers must judge whether any were located.

<sup>110</sup> Matt. 26:11. The same point might be made by observing just how idiosyncratic and difficult to assimilate to existing regimes of thought appear those accounts of modern European intellectual history in which liberalism is disregarded as a distraction or discounted as an irrelevance. Compare J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and religion* (6 vols., Cambridge, 1999-2015) and Michael Oakeshott, *On human conduct* (Oxford, 1975), esp. ‘On the

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*


---

character of a modern European state', in conjunction with his *Lectures in the history of political thought* ed. T. Nardin and L. O'Sullivan (Exeter, 2006). Pocock expressed himself about Locke and liberalism in characteristically stimulating terms in 'The myth of John Locke and the obsession with liberalism', in *John Locke*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock and R. Ashcraft (Clark Library Lectures, 1980), pp. 1-24.

<sup>111</sup> Waldron, *God, Locke, and equality*, p. 20.

<sup>112</sup> Waldron, *God, Locke, and equality*, p. 206, p. 215. Waldron seeks to explain away that absence as indicative of a strategy 'on Locke's part to avoid unnecessary controversy' (p. 216), a strategy which, if it existed, was conspicuously unsuccessful. Compare Mark Goldie ed., *The reception of Locke's politics* (6 vols., London, 1999), esp. 'Introduction', I, pp. xxx-xlix and I and II generally; and, for an alternative explanation, Timothy Stanton, 'Christian foundations; or some loose stones? Toleration and the philosophy of Locke's politics', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 14 (2011), pp. 323-47.

<sup>113</sup> The germ of the mature position is evident in John Locke, 'Lex na[tur]a' (1678), Bodleian MS. Locke f. 3, pp. 201-2: 'God having given man *above other creatures of this habitable part of the univers* a knowledg of himselfe w<sup>ch</sup> the beasts have not, he is thereby under obligations wch the beasts are not, for knowing god to be a wise agent he cannot but conclude y<sup>t</sup> he has that knowledge & those facultys w<sup>ch</sup> he findes in himself above the other creatures given him for some use & end. If therefor he comprehend the relation between father and son & finde it reasonable that his son whom he hath begot (only in pursuance of his pleasure without thinkeing of his son) & nourishd should obey love & reverence him & be gratefull to him, he cannot but finde it much more reasonable y<sup>t</sup> he & every other man should obey & rever love & thank the author of their being to whom they owe all that they are. If...he findes it reasonable that his children should assist & help one another & expects it from them as

*Locke and the fable of liberalism*

---

their duty will he not also by y<sup>e</sup> same reason conclude that god expects y<sup>e</sup> same of all men one to another. If he findes that god has made him & all other men in a state wherein they cannot subsist without society & has given them judgm<sup>t</sup> to discerne what is capeable of preserveing y<sup>t</sup> society can he but conclude that he is obligeid & y<sup>t</sup> god requires him to follow those rules w<sup>ch</sup> conduce to y<sup>e</sup> preserveing of society'.

<sup>114</sup> See Quentin Skinner, 'Introduction: Seeing things their way', in *Visions of politics, vol. I: regarding method* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 1-7.