Hobbes, Locke, and the Theological Foundations of the State of Nature
by
Benjamin Woodfinden

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Political Science

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

© 2017
Benjamin Woodfinden

Abstract

Modernization is commonly understood as a process of secularization, beginning in the fifteenth century, culminating in the relegation of religion to the private sphere. More importantly, this process is understood as an intentional effort by many of the intellectual and political founders of modernity. However, this narrative may be far too simplistic. Modernity, while often understood as a secular project, seems to be inseparable from its theological origins. When closely examined, the thought of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, two founders of modernity, makes clear that the relationship between modernity and religion is far more complicated than the standard secularization narrative suggests. Specifically, the state of nature, which is the foundation for both Hobbesian and Lockean political doctrines, is only understandable in the light of theology.

While both Hobbes and Locke present state of nature scenarios, their states of nature look quite different. The main reason for these differences are the different theological and epistemological bases of both the Hobbesian and Lockean states of nature. Hobbes was heavily influenced by nominalist philosophy, and his God is a distant and arbitrary one. This renders Hobbes's state of nature an ethical vacuum in which life is nasty, brutish and short. Locke's God was far more rational, and closer to the early modern conception of a watchmaker. Through reason, Locke's God, and his commandments, are knowable. Thus, the state of nature is far more ordered and peaceful, because there is a knowable and obligatory natural law even in the original condition.

What this suggests is that the early modern period and the foundations of modernity itself were highly theological, and thus our understanding of modernity as a process of conscious and deliberate secularization needs to be rethought.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Newell for agreeing to supervise this thesis and for his advice and guidance throughout my time as a graduate student at Carleton. I would also like to thank Professor Kellow for agreeing to be the second reader for this thesis. Like Professor Newell, Professor Kellow has been a generous and patient mentor, and I am deeply grateful and thankful for having been given the chance to work under them both while at Carleton. I would also like to extend my thanks to Phil Azzie and Caleb Chaplin for introducing me to political theory and for encouraging me to continue my education. Without Phil or Caleb, I would never have discovered a passion for political theory. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Andrew and Alison, for their unwavering love and support. I could not have asked for better parents.

Table of Contents

1 - Introduction

1.1 – Introduction.....	1
1.2 – Methodology.....	4
1.3 – Literature Review.....	6

2 – The Hobbesian State of Nature

2.1 - <i>Leviathan</i> as Nominalist Political Thought.....	12
2.2 – Nominalism.....	13
2.3 - Hobbes’s Nominalism.....	19
2.4 - Hobbes’s Materialist God.....	26
2.5 - Man’s Passionate Nature and Hobbes’s Passionate Reason.....	30
2.6 - The State of Nature: A State of War.....	35
2.7 - Natural Rights and Natural Laws.....	38
2.8 - Obligation and Coercion in Hobbesian Natural Law.....	43
2.9 - Why the State of Nature is an Ethical Vacuum.....	48
2.10 - The Mortal God.....	52
2.11 - The Nominalist Dilemma: Political Authority built on Psychology.....	55

3 – The Lockean State of Nature

3.1 – The Lockean Dilemma.....	58
3.2 – The Epistemological Foundations of Lockean Morality.....	60
3.3 – Locke’s Pragmatic Scepticism.....	66
3.4 – Certainty and God.....	76
3.5 – Locke’s Christianity.....	83
3.6 – Theistic Hedonism.....	87
3.7 – Reason and the <i>Imago Dei</i>	94
3.8 – Natural Law and Self-Preservation.....	99
3.9 – Natural Law and the State of Nature.....	105
3.10 – God, Reason, and the State of Nature.....	113

4 – Hobbes versus Locke

4.1 – Psychology versus reason as the Basis for Political Order.....	116
4.2 – Self-interest versus the Duty of Preservation.....	119
4.3 – A State of War versus a State of Peace.....	121
4.4 – The State of Nature as an Ethical Vacuum versus a Judicial Condition.....	124
4.5 – Hobbes versus Locke as a Theological Dispute.....	126

5 – Conclusion.....128

6 – Bibliography.....131

1.1 - Introduction

The world we live in today would have been inconceivable to our ancestors. From technology to political discourse, the way we look at the world and the tools that shape our interactions with reality are radically different from anything that came before us. One of the hallmarks of the modern world is the unprecedented secularism that has accompanied modernization. Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God seems truer now than it ever was in his day, with religion having been mostly relegated to the private sphere, viewed as a peculiar oddity practiced by a few eccentric people. This would have been inconceivable to most of our ancestors, who lived in a world described by Max Weber as a "great enchanted garden."

Standard narratives in the history of western philosophy and political thought understand modern secularism to be the result of a long and gradual process of secularization, one that began in the sixteenth century in the aftermath of the devastating Wars of Religion. Major early-modern thinkers like Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke are understood to have consciously divorced their philosophy from religion and theology, and built their ideas on secular principles and premises that weakened the intellectual authority of the Church. However, this narrative is overly simplistic, and close readings of the major works of early-modern political thought can produce very different interpretations. This thesis will argue that instead of being secular thinkers, both Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, two important and influential early-modern English philosophers, are best understood as theistic philosophers. Both Hobbes and Locke built their thought on highly theological foundations, and their ideas are incomprehensible when divorced from their underlying theological basis. If this is true, then it means our understanding of modernity and the origins of secularization needs to be re-examined.

One of the major differences between ancient and modern philosophers is the way in which they understand nature. For classical thinkers, nature can be understood as the end of man. For modern thinkers, nature is understood in relation to the beginnings of man. Both Hobbes and Locke posit a hypothetical original position known as the state of nature. From this state of nature principles about human nature and political legitimacy can be derived. It can also be understood as the pre-political condition of man, an important distinction given that it implies that politics is not natural to man. More fundamentally, the way Hobbes and Locke present the state of nature reverses the classical understanding, and makes the purpose of politics to escape nature, not fulfil or complete it.

However, the state of nature is not a uniform scenario in Hobbes and Locke. While both use the scenario for roughly the same purposes, the state of nature found in *Leviathan* is very different from the one found early in *The Second Treatise*. Understanding the distinctions here will help to explain the differences in the theories constructed on top of this original position. The central contention of this thesis is that the fundamental differences in the Hobbesian and Lockean states of nature are a result of theological differences. The original position of man is an intensely theological question, as it forces us to ask questions about human nature, which is a result of the way we were created, the created world in which we live, and the type of God that created us. The different ways in which Hobbes and Locke understood the nature of God, and of man's relationship to God is reflected in their description of the state of nature.

Hobbes's God is heavily influenced by nominalism, a God that represents pure and irresistible will. This God is arbitrary, distant, and unknowable. Hobbes's state of nature reflects this. Hobbes's state of nature is in practice an ethical vacuum. God is not reflected in the natural order and can only be understood through pure will and commandments. Hobbesian

epistemology is built entirely on the senses, and Hobbes thinks that men fear other men more than God because men are closer and "sensible," while God is not. This restricts God's will (and any natural laws) in the state of nature. While there exists a natural law in the state of nature, there is no coercive force that can make it obligatory, which for Hobbes is a central component of what makes a law an actual law. The absence of an enforceable natural law in the state of nature leads Hobbes to build his political philosophy not on reason, but on psychology and self-interest to escape what is understood as a war of all against all.

Locke's theology works alongside his epistemology, developed in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke's epistemology sets out the limits of human knowledge, what we can know with certainty and what we can know only probabilistically. Through both the senses and abstract reasoning man can know certain things. Man can know God exists, and can infer from this that the world has an order that man is a part of. Because God created man, we can infer that our knowledge can tell us how to live and how to live morally. Using this, man can discover through reason the law of nature, even when he is in the state of nature. This law is not merely a psychological preference for self-preservation, but a moral duty to preserve not only oneself, but all mankind. The existence of a knowable moral and natural law in the state of nature means it is not an ethical vacuum, and leads man out of the state of nature to fulfil, and not escape, our natural moral situation. Locke's state of nature is ultimately one governed by reason in a rational order, created by a knowable and rational God, while Hobbes's state of nature lacks this stability and is governed only by an intuitive fear and desire for self-preservation.

Ultimately, this thesis will help provide a more complete understanding of both Hobbesian and Lockean political thought by exploring in-depth the beliefs that make their respective original positions different. More broadly, if this argument is correct, it helps

contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the development of modernity. While modernity is generally understood to have coincided with an increasing process of secularization, Christianity instead played an important positive role in the process of modernization, and not simply a negative role. Instead of understanding religion, theology, and Christianity as something that modernity was focused on overcoming, religion helped shape the foundational ideas and philosophies that led to this process of modernization in the first place.

1.2 - Methodology

This thesis has two major methodological components, exegetical analysis, and historical contextualization. For both Hobbes and Locke, the primary approach to understanding their thought will be a close and careful reading of primary texts. In using this approach, my hope is that I can understand the texts as the authors intended them to be understood. This approach will not attempt to reduce the thought of Hobbes or Locke to simply being a by-product of their biographical or historical circumstances. Nor will it attempt to read ideas or narratives into Hobbes or Locke. While it is tempting to use the great works of political thought to serve our own ends, an intellectually rigorous approach to political thought consciously tries to avoid this. Great works like *Leviathan* or the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* are complex, which leaves them open to interpretation. However, this should not be misused as an invitation to utilize them for our own agendas. Instead, we should try and understand the original intent and meaning of texts by carefully reading them, regardless of whether the doctrines and ideas are relevant to contemporary political discourse. I hope to accurately capture the original intent of both Hobbes and Locke to help us better understand the intellectual origins of modernity, regardless of how this changes our ability to use Hobbes or Locke in political discourse.

However, no matter how original a thinker or a text is, philosophy is always written in a context. The time and place in which a text is written often does shape the questions asked and answers offered in great works of political thought. Hobbes and Locke both lived in tumultuous times. These circumstances shape their work. Hobbes's concerns with the breakdown of law and anarchy were at least partially a result of having lived through the English Civil War. Locke's concerns about the basis of political legitimacy were closely connected to the debates over the limits of royal power that culminated in the Glorious Revolution in 1688. Historical context will be especially important in Chapter Two on Hobbes. Specifically, the history of nominalism will be discussed to help contextualize Hobbes's nominalism, and shed light on his thought.

In Chapter Two, the only primary text that will be examined will be *Leviathan*. While Hobbes wrote other important works, such as *De Cive* and *The Elements of Law*, Hobbes considered *Leviathan* his magnum opus. While there are some differences between *Leviathan* and Hobbes's other major works, these differences are minor and do not contradict *Leviathan* in any major way. Furthermore, *Leviathan* is Hobbes's most mature work, and because it contains a comprehensive discussion of both epistemology and human nature, *Leviathan* can be understood as a standalone work. Unlike Hobbes, Locke never produced a single work that was a comprehensive description of his entire philosophical project. Thus, Chapter Three will draw on Locke's four major mature works; *The Two Treatises of Government*, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. The *Second Treatise* cannot be analyzed as a standalone work because it cannot be understood without reference to Locke's other major mature works. Locke's state of nature is incomprehensible without an understanding of Locke's understanding of reason and morality, which is presented well in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Furthermore, Locke's understanding of natural law only

makes sense in relation to his understanding of human reason. Thus, my discussion of Locke will reference multiple works, and not simply *The Second Treatises*.

1.1 – Literature Review

Immediately following the publication of their major works and continuing to the present day, the theological implications and origins of Hobbesian and Lockean thought has generated much debate. While the status of God in *Leviathan* intersects with a variety of aspects of Hobbes's thought, including the status of reason, natural law, obligation, and covenants, scholarship on the role that theism plays in *Leviathan* can be split into three main camps. The first major camp is the traditional camp, which considers Hobbes, or his work at least to have been atheistic and entirely divorced from religious doctrines. The second camp is a middle ground that understands Hobbes as a heterodox Christian. The third camp defends the view that Hobbes was an active and orthodox Christian, and that there is an explicit and sincere Christianity on display in *Leviathan*.

My interpretation of Hobbes falls roughly in the second camp, defending the position that Hobbes's work is built upon a necessary and serious theism, but not necessarily any specific form of Christianity. While I am arguing that theism plays an active role in Hobbes's doctrines, I leave open the question of Hobbes's actual religious beliefs. I offer an interpretation of Hobbes as a Christian materialist not to argue for any specific Christianity found in *Leviathan*, but to show that materialism does not automatically lead to atheism. Furthermore, nominalism does not imply any specific denominational or doctrinal commitments, merely a certain view of God that is just as compatible with deism as it is Christianity.

The traditional camp understands Hobbes and *Leviathan* to be atheistic either in its intent or its implications. The main proponent of this interpretation was Leo Strauss in *Natural Right and History*. Strauss argues that Hobbes religious overtures were insincere at best, and that his doctrine of self-interest is atheistic in its implications.¹ Michael Oakeshott defends a similar position in *Hobbes on Civil Association*.² Quentin Skinner also attacks theistic understandings of Hobbes by attacking the Taylor-Warrender thesis and F.C Hood's *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes*. In keeping with standard Cambridge School approaches, Skinner attacks theistic interpretations of Hobbes primarily by arguing that the strong reaction by Hobbes's contemporaries to *Leviathan* is the strongest evidence of his atheism. Furthermore, both Strauss and Oakeshott understand Hobbes's state of nature to be an ethical vacuum, one in which only self-interest and psychology can be used to justify the creation of the commonwealth.

The second major camp is a middle ground between the first and third camps, and understands Hobbes to be a heterodox Christian. A prominent defender of this position is Richard Tuck, who defends the "Christian atheism" of Hobbes in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*.³ Tuck argues that Hobbes is some sort of deist, but combines this with support for a civil religion. Defenders of this position focus on Hobbes's insistence that the Church must be under the authority of the Sovereign, and that the Sovereign is the final interpreter of correct and incorrect religious doctrines and practices.

The third major camp understands Hobbes and *Leviathan* to have been in the orthodox Christian tradition. The Taylor-Warrender thesis, advocated by A.P Taylor and Howard

---

¹ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

² Michael Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1975).

³ Richard Tuck, "The Christian Atheism of Thomas Hobbes," in *Atheism from the Reformation to Enlightenment*, ed. by Michael Hunter and David Wootton, 111-130 (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1992).

Warrender in *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* defend this position.⁴ This interpretation stresses that the natural laws in *Leviathan* are divine laws, and thus that God is the basis for obligation in Hobbes. This position has also been defended by F.C Hood in *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes*⁵ and more recently by A.P Martinich in *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*.⁶ Most recently, Michael Gillespie, who is heavily indebted to Martinich, has interpreted Hobbes as a nominalist Christian thinker. Specifically, Chapter seven of *The Theological Origins of Modernity* argues for the importance of nominalism in understanding Hobbes and the emergence of modernity.⁷ However, it could be argued that the Christian materialism of Hobbes defended by Gillespie would place him more in the second camp. Gillespie's emphasis on the importance of nominalism in understanding *Leviathan* is especially important in my own interpretation.

My interpretation of Hobbes reconciles the position of Strauss and Oakeshott that understands the state of nature to be an ethical vacuum and the laws of nature to be rooted in self-interest with the theistic interpretations that understand the natural law to be the divine law and thus not simply rooted in self-interest. Hobbes's nominalist theism renders the state of nature a practical ethical vacuum, but it is because of the theism in *Leviathan*, and not its absence that this is the case. The dark picture painted by Strauss and Oakeshott of the state of nature is essentially correct, while the stable picture painted by some of the theistic interpreters like Warrender does not fully capture the nature of the theism present in *Leviathan*.

---

⁴ Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

⁵ F.C Hood, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

⁶ A.P Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁷ Michael Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

Just like Hobbes, Locke has generated an enormous amount of scholarship. Most scholars accept the sincerity of Locke's theistic and religious beliefs and many scholars see Locke as a primarily Christian thinker.⁸ It is primarily Strauss and his students who have questioned the sincerity of Locke's religious beliefs. In *Natural Right and History* Strauss characterizes Locke as a hedonist just like Hobbes who roots his doctrines in pleasure, pain, and self-interest. Furthermore, Locke undermines his own theism (deliberately) by rendering certain aspects of theology, like the afterlife, beyond reason.⁹ Michael Zuckert makes a similar argument in *An Introduction to Locke's First Treatise*, arguing that Locke deliberately constructs a strawman of Filmer's actual argument in *Patriarcha* to assert the supremacy of reason over revelation.¹⁰ In *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* Thomas Pangle makes a similar argument about the rationalistic basis of Lockean philosophy.¹¹

However, most scholars accept the sincerity of Locke's theism. But, this does not mean that there is a consensus about how to understand Locke's theism in relation to the rest of his thought. Some scholars understand Locke's theism to be central to very specific parts of his philosophy. In *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought* Jeremy Waldron argues that the Lockean conception of human equality, which is still relevant even today is heavily rooted in the Christianity that animates his work.¹² In *A Discourse on Property: John Locke and his adversaries* James Tully shows how God is central to Locke's

---

⁸ See for example Jeremy Waldron, James Tully, John Dunn, Richard Ashcraft and Greg Forster.

⁹ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

¹⁰ Michael Zuckert, "An Introduction to Locke's First Treatise," *Interpretation*. Vol. 8, no. 1 (January 1979), 58-74.

¹¹ Thomas Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

¹² Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

theory of property, and how Locke's conception of man as God's workmanship is crucial in understanding man's relationship with God.¹³ Waldron and Tully both emphasize that God is a central, and not simply complimentary component of Locke's thought. Similarly, in *John Locke: His Harmony Between Liberty and Virtue* Donald Devine argues that Strauss's characterization of Locke as a hedonist is inaccurate because Locke harmonizes natural desires with God's will. This idea of the Lockean harmony between virtue and happiness, and Tully's emphasis on the workmanship understanding of man play an important role in Chapter Three.

Other scholars emphasize the role of God not only in specific aspects of Locke's thought, but in the entirety of Locke's philosophical project. For some scholars, this ultimately challenges the coherence of Locke's thought. In *The Political Thought of John Locke* John Dunn emphasizes the centrality of God in Lockean philosophy and how God is central to Locke's understanding of reason, morality, and natural law. But, because God is so central to Locke's thought, and Dunn is sceptical of Locke's arguments for God's existence, Dunn questions the relevance of Locke today in a pluralistic and post-Christian society.¹⁴ Many scholars from the Cambridge school share similar conclusions to Dunn about the relevance of Locke, but argue that this is because we must keep Locke's political and epistemological thought separate. This ultimately makes his political philosophy incoherent as it is built on unproven or incorrect assumptions about human nature and the natural world.¹⁵

Other scholars depart from this, and think that Locke's philosophy is internally coherent, precisely because of the central role that God plays in Lockean philosophy. In *Locke's Two*

---

¹³ James Tully *A Discourse on Property: John Locke and his adversaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

¹⁴ John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

¹⁵ Peter Laslett, "Introduction" in *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Treatises of Government Richard Ashcraft emphasizes the central role of God in Locke's formulation of epistemology, reason, morality, and natural law. Ashcraft thinks that Locke's earlier work, *Essays on the Law of Nature* is essentially consistent with his later work and helps to further develop Locke's natural law theory.¹⁶ In *John Locke's Politics of Moral Consensus* Greg Forster argues that Locke's philosophy is at its core rooted in a theism that is minimal and basic enough that all theists, not just specific Christian sects can accept. This is Locke's attempts to solve the problem of religious pluralism, and build a minimal theory of politics that allows people to live together despite having fundamentally different worldviews. Forster especially emphasizes that the pragmatic epistemology proposed by Locke in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* provides the basis for this minimal politics, and that this epistemology at its core rests on theistic foundations.¹⁷ Both Ashcraft and Forster defend Locke's philosophy as internally coherent and emphasize the interconnectedness between Locke's epistemology, moral philosophy, and political thought. God is central to these different aspects of Locke's thought.

My interpretation of Locke will fall between the positions of Dunn and Forster. God is central to Locke's entire philosophy, and Locke's political philosophy cannot be separated from his epistemological thought. Specifically, Tully's Lockean conception of man as God's workmanship and Forster's characterization of Locke's epistemology as a limited scepticism play an important role in my interpretation. Not only is Locke's theism sincere, it is necessary to make sense of Locke's political thought. This does not mean that his ideas are necessarily correct. Furthermore, Dunn is correct in asserting that the Christianity of Locke's thought calls into question his relevance in today's pluralistic and post-Christian moral and religious landscape.

---

¹⁶ Richard Ashcraft, *Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

¹⁷ Greg Forster, *John Locke's Politics of Moral Consensus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

2.1 – *Leviathan* as Nominalist Political Thought

Leviathan is a foundational text in modern political thought, and there are a wide range of interpretations of the work. As Hobbes's most mature work, *Leviathan* can be understood as a self-sufficient and standalone work because it contained not only a political doctrine but also an epistemology and an account of human nature. Not only is this evident from reading the text, but it is also a claim that Hobbes himself made.¹⁸ The exegetical approach to *Leviathan* here will attempt to offer an original interpretation that reconciles the Straussian and the Taylor-Warrender interpretations of Hobbes by showing how despite *Leviathan* being a work in which God plays an important theoretical role, man's original condition is still understood as an unstable ethical vacuum indistinguishable from a state of war. At the core of this interpretation will be an emphasis on the nature of Hobbes's God and the influence of a school of thought on Hobbes known as nominalism. Nominalism helps us understand why the theism of *Leviathan* renders the state of nature such a dark and nasty place.

The state of nature and the original condition of mankind in *Leviathan* is influenced by Hobbes's nominalist understanding of God, the created world, and man's relationship to God. The nominalist God of Hobbes is one that represents pure, irresistible will. This God is arbitrary, distant, and unknowable. Hobbes's state of nature, out of which he tries to construct a theory that legitimizes political power, reflects this. Hobbes's state of nature is identical to a state of war. God is not reflected in the natural order and can only be known through direct revelation. Hobbesian epistemology is built entirely on the senses, and Hobbes thinks that men fear other men more than God in the state of nature because men are closer and "sensible," while God is not. While there is a natural law in the state of nature, which is identical to the divine law, the

---

¹⁸ Glen Newey, *Hobbes and Leviathan* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 66.

key to any law is the possibility of enforcement. Laws are obligatory, but for this to be the case there must be a coercive force that makes the law obligatory and binding. Because God is not present or knowable in any direct way in the state of nature, the natural law is essentially non-existent because it lacks the coercive force needed to make it obligatory. This renders the state of nature an ethical vacuum. Because of the absence of God in the state of nature, Hobbes constructs a worldly alternative to God, the Leviathan, which he calls a 'mortal God' because of its irresistible power. But, the absence of an enforceable natural law and man's passionate nature leads Hobbes to build his political philosophy on an appeal to self-interest and psychology, not because there is no natural law but because there is no enforceable natural law. All of this is a consequence of Hobbes's nominalism.

2.2 - Nominalism

Christian theology is diverse, and there are many different approaches to building Christian doctrine, approaches that often agree on very little. The approach that Hobbes uses, which will be referred to as nominalism, is one that arises directly as a reaction against scholasticism, the dominant approach to Christian theology and philosophy for much of the Medieval era. While it was increasingly under attack even before the Reformation began, the scholastic approach had dominated the Christian intellectual landscape for centuries. Aquinas's synthesis of faith and reason, of Aristotle and Scripture, was seen in the centuries after Aquinas's death as a truly complete Christian understanding of the world.

By the Late-Medieval and Early-Modern Era many, including Hobbes, had started to turn against and reject this approach entirely. Furthermore, Hobbes thought that scholasticism was not only false, but dangerous as well. The dangers of scholasticism are made clear in Part IV of

Leviathan where they are included as in the “Kingdom of Darkness.” At the beginning of Part IV, Hobbes says that the Kingdom of Darkness is “the Kingdome of Satan” and that “the Kingdome of Darknesse, as set forth in these, and other places of the Scripture, is nothing else but a confederacy of deceivers, that to obtain dominion over men in this present world, endeavour by dark and erroneous doctrines, to extinguish in them the Light, both of Nature, and of the Gospel; and so disprepare them for the Kingdome of God to come.”¹⁹ Comparing these schools and thinkers to Satan is a devastating indictment, and reveals how much Hobbes loathes and fears such beliefs. It is out of this rejection of scholasticism we can gain a crucial understanding of the Hobbesian God, who is an arbitrary and distant figure. It is this God that helps make the Hobbesian state of nature so dark and volatile.

Hobbes’s rejection of scholasticism and much of classical philosophy is built on nominalism. Nominalism is not a perfect term, as it encompasses a diverse group of thinkers who were not in agreement on very much. While commonly referred to as nominalists, philosophers like Peter Abelard, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham and Gregory of Rimini have many differences and disagreements.²⁰ However, there are some basic ideas that unite these thinkers, and it is these ideas that can be understood as providing some unifying basis for what is referred to as nominalist thought. There are four major aspects of nominalism that will be examined here: a rejection of realism and the idea of universals, an understanding of God’s will that liberates him from any necessity or restrictions, a shift towards a voluntarist understanding of morality and a rejection of the possibility of true knowledge about God or natural theology. There is

---

¹⁹ *Leviathan*, Part IV, Chapter 44.

²⁰ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), 68.

strong textual evidence in *Leviathan* that Hobbes affirms and accepts these beliefs, and thus that his work is very much an exploration of the political implications of nominalism.

Scholasticism was built on a belief in universals. This belief in extra-mental universals is known as realism. These universals are ultimately the most real parts of creation, and individual beings are just particular instances of universals. Nominalism was at its core a rejection of these universals. All real being was particular and universals were thus no more than mental fictions. Words do not point to universals but are just convenient descriptive tools. Creation is not teleological or rational, the only way to gain any insights about God was through revelation or mystical experience. Nominalism grew out of a reaction against the growth of Aristotle within the Church. As dominant as scholasticism was at its peak, many were unhappy with this synthesis of Aristotle with Christian doctrine as it was pagan, and filtered through Islamic sources that had brought it to Europe in the first place. Specifically, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham pushed back against Aristotelianism within the Church.

Of all the nominalists mentioned, Ockham is the most important because he was one of the first to explore the implications of this rejection of realism in epistemology and theology. Ockham attacked realism in two distinct ways. Firstly, Ockham attacks one of the main implications of realism. If there is such a thing as universals, it essentially means that universals must exist in a distinct mode of existence from those things we see and observe in the world. This is because for universals to exist they must exist simultaneously in many different places. The universal of dog must simultaneously exist in all the various dogs that exist. Ockham thinks this is false, because a particular thing can only exist in one particular instance. This makes the existence of universals both impossible and absurd.²¹ Secondly, Ockham undermined realism by

---

²¹ Meyrick Carre, *Realists and Nominalists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 108.

arguing that God could not create universals because it would undermine his omnipotence. If he did create universals he would not be able to destroy any particular instance of it without destroying the universal itself. This means he could not damn any one human being without damning the whole race. For nominalists, the lack of universals makes everything radically individual, a unique creation by God himself. God alone creates and sustains everything. The only necessary being is God; all other beings are contingent and dependent upon his will.²²

This leads to a second and important aspect of nominalist thought, a re-evaluation of the nature of God's power and will. Scholastic understandings of God's will frequently discuss it in terms of necessity. God is restricted by his own nature and universals, which are a basic part not just of the created order, but of reality itself. This poses immediate and obvious challenges to God's omnipotence, and creates the potential for a Euthyphro style dilemma concerning the nature of God's power. If God is necessarily restricted by fundamental conditions of reality that seem to exist independent of his will, then it becomes hard to defend God as truly omnipotent because he too seems to be a product of a pre-existing order. Ockham defends God's absolute omnipotence by denying that God has an essential nature to which he is bound. Ockham rejects the view held by Aquinas that the created world in which we live is the one that was rationally and metaphysically necessitated by God's own nature. The world is solely a product of the absolute power of the divine will, and thus could have been different. The world itself is conditional and dependent upon the Divine will, and is in no way necessary. It could have been created differently, or not at all. Any restrictions on God are entirely self-imposed and completely voluntary, hence the term 'voluntarism.'²³

---

²² Gillespie, 20-24.

²³ McGrath, 75-76.

Ockham can hold this position because he has already eliminated one of the main restrictions on God's will, universals and essences. Thus, in the initial conditions prior to the created order God is under no prior restrictions other than those which he chooses to impose on himself. This makes God's power absolute. Where this becomes important in relation to Hobbes is the transformation of divine power from being essentially rational to becoming fundamentally arbitrary, as it is simply based on the Divine will, and not on any essence, nature or necessity that makes God's power ordered. Divine power becomes self-justifying and self-referential.

This has some important implications for morality and natural law, and leads not only to theological, but also ethical voluntarism. If God has an essential nature which shapes his actions and the created order, then morality is also a reflection of God's essential nature and the natural order. This allows for a teleological understanding of morality and natural law in which right and wrong, good and bad, can be understood in terms of natural ends, because God is reflected in the natural order. Goodness, which on the realist view is also a universal, is a derivative of God's essential nature. But if universals don't exist, and God has no essential nature, then morality must be severed entirely from the natural order and instead become wholly dependent upon Divine will. While scholastics had an approach to morality whereby God understands morality in terms of his own nature, nominalists take an entirely voluntarist approach.²⁴ What is good is what God wills because God wills it. This has profound implications for natural law, and helps us contextualize and understand Hobbes's radical rejection and reconstruction of natural law.

The final basic idea associated with nominalism has profound theological implications as it cripples the project of natural theology. On nominalism, God becomes almost entirely incomprehensible. This is not a new move in theology. Apophatic theology, which emerged in

---

²⁴ McGrath, 80-81.

the second century and is associated with early Christians like Tertullian believes that God is unknowable and can only be described in terms of what he is not. For scholastics, while God transcends creation, he was reflected and could be understood through nature and creation. Philosophy was fundamentally capable of understanding the world and human life, as reason has access to the order in the world that reflects the purpose of God.²⁵ This led to the rise and dominance of what came to be known as natural theology. Because God was reflected in the natural order, reason could access truths about God by reflecting on nature, and not simply through revelation. The anti-realist position of nominalists like Ockham undermines this. Because words are just descriptive tools created by the mind to describe and categorize particular things, ideas cannot be understood to actually exist as anything other than mental constructs. Ockham defended a proto-empiricist epistemology, whereby our knowledge comes from observance and experience of particulars, and not from any a-priori access to universals or abstract knowledge.²⁶ Thus, our ideas about God are inherently flawed and defective, because they are not based on any direct experience or apprehension of God, as our finite minds are incapable of directly apprehending God. Furthermore, language itself, given that it is a limited descriptive tool, is incapable of describing God in complete terms.²⁷

This makes God incomprehensible and unknowable. While we might be able to know of God, knowledge about him is extremely limited. God's will also becomes unknowable aside from direct revelation. Reason cannot simply reveal the divine will or our natural moral duties, and thus restricts the scope and power of rationally accessible natural law. God's unknowability, and the

---

²⁵ Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 20.

²⁶ Carre, 110.

²⁷ Carre, 116.

limitations of natural theology and natural law render God far more distant and radically separate from humanity.

Not only does God become a more arbitrary figure, the natural world itself becomes much less ordered. A world which is radically dependent upon, but separate from the divine will becomes arbitrary, dark, and scary because it lacks the stability provided by a God whose nature is woven into and revealed in the natural order. The rise of nominalism and a variety of historical occurrences like the Black Death shattered the scholastic view of a harmonious and ordered world made by God for man. These four interconnected characteristics of nominalism radically reshape theology, and play a key role in Hobbes's thought.

2.3 - Hobbes's Nominalism

Hobbes accepts and affirms all four of the aspects of nominalist thought outlined in the previous section. As we will see, this has profound implications for understandings of the natural and political world. *Leviathan* contains numerous explicit references to nominalist ideas. Once this becomes clear, it becomes easier to see how the political teaching in *Leviathan* is in part a response to the nominalist revolution.

On multiple occasions Hobbes attacks realism. Unsurprisingly, Hobbes's discussion of speech in Chapter IV contains many nominalist ideas. Hobbes agrees with thinkers like Ockham in saying that words are nothing more than descriptive tools:

“Of Names, some are Proper, and singular to one onely thing; as Peter, John, This Man, This Tree: and some are Common to many things; as Man, Horse, Tree; every of which though but one Name, is nevertheless the name of divers particular things; in respect of all which together, it is called an Universall; there being nothing in the world Universall but Names; for the things named, are every one of them Individual and Singular. One Universall name is imposed on many things, for their similitude in some quality, or other accident.”²⁸

---

²⁸ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 4.

This is a very standard Nominalist understanding of the nature of words. Everything in the world is radically particular, and while we may use words to describe things that are similar, they are ultimately still different particular things and not simply manifestations of the same identical universal. Words are simply descriptive tools, when we use words that have a collective application, like the word for any species, we are simply using a word to describe a group of things that possess descriptive similarities, not knowable identical essences.

In Part IV Hobbes launches another attack on the doctrine of universals by attacking the idea of essences, closely related to the idea of universals on an Aristotelian view. Chapter XLVI is called "Of Darkness from Vain Philosophy and Fabulous Traditions." This direct attack is aimed at all those "vain philosophies" that have come before, including Aristotle. Hobbes says "now to descend to the particular Tenets of Vain Philosophy, derived to the Universities, and thence into the Church, partly from Aristotle, partly from Blindnesse of understanding."²⁹ According to Hobbes, substance and essence are the same thing, "And because the Universe is all, that which is no part of it, is Nothing; and consequently No Where. Nor does it follow from hence, that Spirits are Nothing: for they have dimensions, and are therefore really Bodies."³⁰ Hobbes description of the nature of language, and his rejection of essentialism make clear that epistemologically Hobbes is an anti-realist and falls within the nominalist camp.

The nature of God's power and the role that will plays in divine action is another important nominalist idea, one that Hobbes accepts. For Hobbes, the divine will has no restrictions or limitations. The following passage is illustrative of this in two ways. Firstly, it makes clear that God is completely omnipotent and thus has total foreknowledge of all things that will happen in

---

²⁹ *Leviathan*, Part IV, Chapter 46.

³⁰ *Leviathan*, Part IV, Chapter 46.

the future. Secondly, it makes clear that God's power is not restricted because he can make omnipotence compatible with human liberty:

“Liberty and Necessity are Consistent: As in the water, that hath not only Liberty, but a Necessity of descending by the Channel: so likewise in the Actions which men voluntarily doe; which (because they proceed from their will) proceed from Liberty; and yet because every act of mans will, and every desire, and inclination proceedeth from some cause, which causes in a continuall chaine (whose first link in the hand of God the first of all causes) proceed from Necessity. So that to him that could see the connexion of those causes, the Necessity of all mens voluntary actions, would appeare manifest. And therefore God, that seeth, and disposeth all things, seeth also that the Liberty of man in doing what he will, is accompanied with the Necessity of doing that which God will, & no more, nor lesse. For though men may do many things, which God does not command, nor is therefore Author of them; yet they can have no passion, nor appetite to any thing, of which appetite Gods will is not the cause. And did not his will assure the Necessity of mans will, and consequently of all that on mans will dependeth, the Liberty of men would be a contradiction, and impediment to the omnipotence and Liberty of God. And this shall suffice, (as to the matter in hand) of that naturall Liberty, which only is properly called Liberty.”³¹

Like all Nominalists, Hobbes wants to emphasize the absolute omnipotence of God and deny that his actions and power is restricted by anything other than his own will. God's foreknowledge and omniscience is a necessary consequence of this. But, further emphasizing God's absolute power, he is still able to make men free despite having absolute foreknowledge of what will happen. Human freedom and God's omniscience seem difficult to reconcile, but because God has complete and absolute power, he can ensure that both coexist. While this may not be a satisfying answer to the nature of human freedom in a theistic world, it is sufficient on a nominalist understanding of God and reality.

A subtler illustration of this absolute power is in Hobbes doctrine of miracles. Hobbes says that "a miracle, is a work of God, (besides his operation by the way of Nature, ordained in the Creation,) done for the making manifest to his elect, the mission of an extraordinary Minister for

---

³¹ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 21.

their salvation. And from this definition, we may inferre; First, that in all Miracles, the work done, is not the effect of any vertue in the Prophet; because it is the effect of the immediate hand of God; that is to say God hath done it, without using the Prophet therein, as a subordinate cause."³² Hobbes understands miracles to be seemingly inexplicable occurrences that do not seem part of the laws of nature, but given God's omnipotence they were still "built into the system" when God created the world. Everything in the world is wholly dependent on God's will, but they do not necessarily possess the causal regularity that would be expected from the scholastics God. Miracles are a complete act of will, brought about by God's power despite how seemingly antithetical or contradictory they are to the rules that govern the universe. Like everything in the world, miracles are just the arbitrary will of a radically separate God. This is a very mechanistic understanding of the nature of miracles, stemming from Hobbes's materialism and his nominalism. This idea will become clear later when discussing God's will and power in relation to the natural law. For Hobbes, obligation is ultimately a direct result of the irresistible power of a coercive force, the ultimate of which is God.

Furthermore, in *Leviathan* Hobbes reveals a strong preference for theological voluntarism, in opposition to the scholastic alternative. In his discussion of natural law in Chapter XV Hobbes makes clear that the only way any natural law or obligation is anything more than a theorem is if it is commanded by God:

“These dictates of Reason, men use to call by the name of Lawes; but improperly: for they are but Conclusions, or Theoremes concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defence of themselves; whereas Law, properly is the word of him, that by right hath command over others. But yet if we consider the same Theoremes, as delivered in the word of God, that by right commandeth all things; then are they properly called Lawes.”³³

---

³² *Leviathan*, Part III, Chapter 37.

³³ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 15.

The laws of nature, which are central to Hobbes's understanding of what we are obliged to do, are only laws because they are the will of God. Without being the will of God these laws would be nothing more than theorems and thus lack any obligatory or binding power. Right before saying this in Chapter XV, Hobbes further underlies his nominalism by marshalling his anti-realism against anything other than a voluntarist understanding of morality. Hobbes makes clear that there is no universal trait that can be called "goodness" and that these concepts are simply understood in terms of relation to particular appetites and aversions:

"For Morall Philosophy is nothing else but the Science of what is Good, and Evill, in the conversation, and Society of mankind. Good, and Evill, are names that signifie our Appetites, and Aversions; which in different tempers, customes, and doctrines of men, are different: And divers men, differ not onely in their Judgement, on the senses of what is pleasant, and unpleasant to the tast, smell, hearing, touch, and sight; but also of what is conformable, or disagreeable to Reason, in the actions of common life. Nay, the same man, in divers times, differs from himselfe; and one time praiseth, that is, calleth Good, what another time he dispraiseth, and calleth Evil."

For scholastics and realists, goodness is a universal that actions and individuals 'possess.' When an action is good, it possesses goodness, which has a universal and definite form, the same goes for a person who is called good. Again, Hobbes can only understand the world in terms of particulars and relations between particular things. By rejecting this, and understanding morality solely in terms of God's will, Hobbes is adopting a clear version of ethical voluntarism.

Finally, for Hobbes there is no possibility of knowledge about God. In Chapter III Hobbes says "Whatsoever we imagine, is finite. Therefore there is no Idea, or conception of anything we call Infinite. No man can have in his mind an Image of infinite magnitude; nor conceive the ends, and bounds of the thing named; having no Conception of the thing, but of our own inability. And therefore the Name of God is used, not to make us conceive him; (for he is Incomprehensible; and his greatnesse, and power are unconceivable;) but that we may honour

him."³⁴ Language cannot express, and the mind cannot conceive of universals given that they are infinite and our minds are finite. Because God is an (the only) infinite Being, we are incapable imagining or conceiving of him. The word God is a finite representation that allows us to honour him, but does not give us any information about him. This makes God incomprehensible.

Hobbes repeats this assertion in Chapter XII when he says that "therefore, men that by their own meditation, arrive to the acknowledgement of one Infinite, Omnipotent, and Eternall God, choose rather to confesse he is Incomprehensible, and above their understanding; than to define his Nature."³⁵ Ockham and other nominalists had already admitted that knowledge of God was impossible given the limitations of speech and the human mind, the most men could hope for was simply knowledge of God through representation.³⁶ God allows us to say that he "exists" because this is how God describes himself in scripture when he calls himself Yahweh, or "I am that I am" in Exodus. But, knowledge of God is only possible through direct revelation, either through authoritative scripture or an unmediated, experiential interaction directly with God.

Hobbes understands and accepts that because of God's incomprehensibility, natural theology becomes impossible and accepts that religious knowledge can only come directly from God: "when God speaketh to man it must be either immediately; or by mediation of another man to whom he had formerly spoken by himself immediately."³⁷ For Hobbes, God cannot speak to man indirectly through the world, he can only do so through direct experience and interactions with men. Furthermore, at no point does Hobbes make arguments that could be understood as falling within the realm of natural theology. Part III and IV of *Leviathan* makes theological arguments, but ones based solely on Scripture. This is the strongest evidence that Hobbes rejects

---

³⁴ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 3.

³⁵ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 12.

³⁶ Gillespie, 33.

³⁷ *Leviathan*, Part III, Chapter 32.

the possibility of natural theology. This is one of the reasons Hobbes is forced to discuss natural law in a way very different from traditional natural law theorists like Aquinas. Hobbes's view is not unique or unorthodox, most of the leading reformers, including Luther, thought that God could only speak to men through revelation, and not nature.³⁸

A God about which nothing can be known becomes a distant God. This is radically different from the God of scholasticism, about whom much is revealed through natural reason. This is important, because it shows that Hobbes does develop an understanding of God within *Leviathan*, one that is like the distant, arbitrary and terrifying God of Luther. Far from being, anti-theological, *Leviathan* is explicitly theological and spends serious time building a doctrine of God. The God of nominalism is not one that endows the world with telos or divine reason, it is a God that creates and directly sustains the world, but does so in an entirely arbitrary fashion. This God allows creation to unfold in a mechanistic and not teleological way. Hobbes explicitly defends this kind of God in Chapter XII: "For he that from any effect hee seeth come to passe, should reason to the next and immediate cause thereof, and from thence to the cause of that cause, and plunge himselfe profoundly in the pursuit of causes; shall at last come to this, that there must be (as even the Heathen Philosophers confessed) one First Mover; that is, a First, and an Eternall cause of all things; which is that which men mean by the name of God."³⁹ This distant and arbitrary God is one that plays a crucial role in shaping the Hobbesian state of nature, and Hobbes's attempt to escape it. Without understanding the nominalism that undergirds much of *Leviathan* it would be easy to misinterpret the Hobbesian interpretation of the state of nature and natural law.

---

³⁸ Gillespie, 118.

³⁹ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 12.

2.4 - Hobbes's Materialist God

Many scholars would have difficulty accepting this interpretation of Hobbes because it is built on the assumption that *Leviathan* is in some sense a theistic work. Many scholars reject this, and think the doctrines Hobbes puts forward imply an anti-religious, even atheistic intent. The purpose of this section is not to show that Hobbes was an orthodox Christian, but to show that Hobbes's materialism does not automatically make him an atheist. This will be done by discussing why atheism in its more modern form is inconceivable and unrecognizable to atheism as it was understood in the 16th century. Furthermore, the form of Christian materialism defended here in *Leviathan* would seem to be more compatible with a complete understanding of what Hobbes says about man, the state of nature and natural law. More broadly, this interpretation uses a type of inference to the best explanation form of reasoning, arguing that a theistic interpretation of Hobbes is the one that makes the most sense of the entirety of *Leviathan*.

Today atheism is understood as a rejection of the existence of God. It is a doctrine often associated with philosophical materialism and naturalism. However, it is a mistake to think that the word has always had this meaning. Historically, accusing someone of atheism did not necessarily mean accusing someone of not believing in God. Instead, the term was often used as an insult for anyone who held heterodox theological views. As Christianity began to spread in ancient Rome, Christians were often accused of being atheists because they rejected any notions of a divine emperor, and because they rejected the existence of any God besides their own. In Hobbes's day it was very common to brand anything not seen as conventional Christianity as atheism. Indeed, two opposing sides in theological debates would often accuse each other of atheism. Elizabeth I, James I, Charles I and Sir Walter Raleigh are just a few examples of individuals accused by their opponents of being atheists. John Milton in *Paradise Lost* refers to

fallen angels as atheists. Furthermore, accusations of atheism often accompanied charges of 'Papism' and hidden Catholicism. This suggests that atheism in Hobbes's day was not what we understand it to be today.⁴⁰ While many of Hobbes's contemporaries accused him of atheism, including the Bishop John Bramhall and Henry Hammond, this should not be misunderstood as evidence that Hobbes's work was clearly atheistic in the way that we understand it to be. The more plausible understanding of the accusations of atheism directed towards Hobbes by his contemporaries is that they grasped that they grasped the radicalness of his doctrines.

A stronger argument for Hobbes's atheism is that his doctrines seem to necessitate atheism. Specifically, his materialism seems to imply atheism. But, this is a charge that assumes theism and materialism are by necessity incompatible. There have been theologians and philosophers who have been called Christian materialists. The early Church father Tertullian defended an understanding of God as a corporeal entity.⁴¹ Similarly, Mormonism today still holds to an understanding of God as a corporeal being. *Leviathan* presents a God like that of Tertullian. Thus, Hobbes's materialism should not automatically be thought to imply his atheism.

This should help us regard with scepticism the suggestion that any discussion of God in *Leviathan* can simply be dismissed as disingenuous. The God of *Leviathan* is a materialist God. When discussing the idea of "spirit" in scripture, he defends a position that understands spirit to refer to a material object. Hobbes says:

"The Word Body, in the most generall acceptation, signifieth that which filleth, or occupyeth some certain room, or imagined place; and dependeth not on the imagination, but is a reall part of that we call the Universe. For the Universe, being the Aggregate of all Bodies, there is no reall part thereof that is not also Body; nor any thing properly a Body, that is not also part of (that Aggregate of all Bodies) the Universe....And according to this acceptation of the word, Substance and Body, signifie the same thing; and therefore Substance Incorporeall are words, which

---

⁴⁰ A.P Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 19-21.

⁴¹ A.H Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 1989), 168.

when they are joined together, destroy one another, as if a man should say, an Incorporeall Body."⁴²

This passage could be interpreted as implying Hobbes's atheism because he explicitly rejects the possibility of incorporeal entities, which is how God is traditionally understood. However, what Hobbes is doing here is laying the groundwork for a materialist conception of God. Hobbes says that a spirit is in some way to be understood as a body, which occupies a physical space within the universe. Hobbes implies here that God himself is also a body. Recall that for Hobbes God is unknowable, so as strange and paradoxical as this might seem, the limited and finite mind simply is not able to fully comprehend God, and this might simply be the closest we can come to doing so. Furthermore, in Chapter XXXIV Hobbes refers to a passage in Genesis in which "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the Waters."⁴³ He goes on to argue that this passage makes clear that God was moving, and that the only things that can move are material bodies. Thus, God must be a body.

Further evidence of Hobbes's theistic materialism comes from his unique theology. Hobbes thinks that materialism is a basic doctrine within Christian thought. In line with this materialism, Hobbes rejects the idea of an immortal soul as a pagan importation from the Greek philosophy into Christian doctrine. Chapter XXXVIII features an extensive discussion of the nature of the afterlife, which Hobbes considers to be not a spiritual place where souls go, but a physical and material place:

"That the dead are raised, even Moses shewed, at the bush, when he calleth the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the Dead, but of the Living; for they all live to him." But if these words be to be understood only of the Immortality of the Soul, they prove not at all that which our Saviour intended to prove, which was the Resurrection of the Body, that is to say, the Immortality of the Man. Therefore our Saviour meaneth, that those Patriarchs were Immortall; not by a property consequent to the essence, and

---

⁴² *Leviathan*, Part III, Chapter 34.

⁴³ *Leviathan*, Part III, Chapter 34.

nature of mankind, but by the will of God, that was pleased of his mere grace, to bestow Eternall Life upon the faithfull.⁴⁴

Hobbes makes clear that the immortality of soul is not a doctrine found in scripture, and that no immortality is offered to man in scripture. The Bible contains little to suggest man has a soul separate from his body, but on the other hand seems to suggest that man is an entirely physical creature and that his soul and his body are inseparable. The Bible promises not eternal disembodied existence, but a physical resurrection of the body. Regardless of the sincerity of Hobbes's Christianity, his defence of a physical, material resurrection is strong evidence that Hobbes did not see his materialism as in conflict with theism.

Hobbes elaborates on the nature of immortality, arguing that Christianity emphasizes the bodily, physical resurrection of the dead. Hobbes tells us that the eternal life promised by Christ is one that comes with the resurrection of the body after the final judgement: "Therefore where Job saith, man riseth not till the Heavens be no more; it is all one, as if he had said, the Immortall Life (and Soule and Life in the Scripture, do usually signifie the same thing) beginneth not in man, till the Resurrection, and day of Judgment; and hath for cause, not his specificall nature, and generation; but the Promise. For St. Peter saies not, "Wee look for new heavens, and a new earth, (from Nature) but from Promise."⁴⁵ Hobbes does not think that we immediately gain eternal life upon death, but that this must wait until the return of Christ and judgement. The promise of Jesus is not some disembodied experience, but a physical resurrection of the body and a new Kingdom in which God rules. This is a physical place, with bodies, even if those bodies are of a different form than our current ones as the new resurrected body of Jesus would suggest. Taken together, what all this should suggest is that Hobbesian

---

⁴⁴ *Leviathan*, Part III, Chapter 38.

⁴⁵ *Leviathan*, Part III, Chapter 38.

materialism should in no way be thought to automatically imply atheism, and that Hobbes can also be understood as a theistic materialist.

2.5 - Man's Passionate Nature and Hobbes's Passionate Reason

Hobbes can be understood as a system builder; his philosophy is constructed from the ground up. Thus, part one of *Leviathan* is entitled “Of man.” Importantly, Hobbes’s entire political doctrine starts with and is built upon his account of human nature. In Chapter XIII Hobbes tells the reader that “it may seem strange to some man that has not well weighed these things that Nature should thus dissociate and render men apt to invade and destroy one another; and he may therefore, not trusting to this inference made from the passions, desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by experience.”⁴⁶ Leading up to Chapter XIII, which is the first chapter dealing explicitly with the state of nature, Hobbes has constructed an understanding of human nature that is thoroughly materialistic and mechanistic. Out of this, the state of nature is presented as “an inference from the passions,” confirmed by experience. This section explains Hobbes’s account of human nature, which helps explain why the state of nature is such a dangerous place, and why Hobbes thinks that in the absence of an enforceable natural law we can still be convinced to abandon our natural freedom.

In the Introduction to *Leviathan* Hobbes tells us that he will look inward to discover the nature of man:

“for the similitude of the thoughts and passions of one man to the thoughts and passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself and considereth what he doth, when he does think, opine, reason, hope, fear etc. and upon what grounds, he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts and passions of all other men upon like occasions. I say that similitude of passions, which are the same in all men,

---

⁴⁶ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13.

desire, fear, hope etc, not the similitude of the objects of the passions, which are the things desired feared, hoped etc;”⁴⁷

Honest self-reflection allows individuals to understand the passions and desires that motivate them. But, this will give men knowledge not only of themselves, but of others as well. This is because Hobbes understands men as essentially being machines, telling the reader that "life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within."⁴⁸ Hobbes makes it clear that humans, just like all other life forms, are organic machines. This means that we all operate mechanically and in the same fundamental ways. Machines that are constructed identically operate almost identically, human beings are no different. This means we can make large-scale predictions about human behaviour, given that man is essentially just like any other organism that will respond to stimuli in predictable ways.

The first few Chapters detail in depth how our senses, imagination, reason, and the passions operate, and it is this detailed account of the human machine that Hobbes uses to explain the basic operating laws in the human psyche upon which he can build his political doctrines. Hobbes begins by laying out the foundation of his epistemology, the senses. Sensory experience forms the basis for all our knowledge and experience. Hobbes claims that “the origins of them all [thoughts], is that which we call sense; (for there is no conception in mans mind, which hath not at first, totally or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense). The rest are derived from that original.”⁴⁹ So, all our knowledge is derived from sensory experience. None of our thoughts are a-priori, they are dependent upon and derived from experience. The primacy of the senses has two important consequences. Firstly, this means that all our passions and desires are ultimately rooted in the sense, and not in some sort of pursuit of higher ideals. Hobbes makes

---

⁴⁷ *Leviathan*, Introduction.

⁴⁸ *Leviathan*, Introduction.

⁴⁹ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 1.

this explicit: “for there is no such *Finis ultimus* nor *Summum Bonum* as is spoken of in the Books of the old moral philosophers.”⁵⁰

This has one more important consequence. Because all our knowledge is rooted in the senses, and the senses form the basis of our passions, the most fundamental of all our passions, fear, is very much an experiential fear. Thus, while men may fear “powers invisible,” like God, their primary fears are ones that are closer and more direct, ones that come from the senses. In the beginning of Part Two, Hobbes tells us that “that natural condition of warre, which is necessarily consequent (as hath been shewn) to the the natural passions of men, where there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tye them by fear of punishments.” Shortly after Hobbes makes clear again that “the Multitude sufficient to confide in for our Security, is not determined by any certain number, but by comparison with the Enemy we feare; and is then sufficient, when the odds of the Enemy is not of so visible and conspicuous moment, to determine the event of warre, as to move him to attempt.”⁵¹ Men fear what they can see more than what they cannot see because their knowledge is always sensory. Since God is not sensible, but other men are, men naturally fear other men more than they fear God. As will be discussed later, this is one of the fundamental reasons why Hobbes does not think the natural law has any obligatory force in the state of nature, because the coercive force behind it (God) is not sensible. This also fits well with a nominalist conception of God. Because God is not sensible, and knowledge is derived from the senses, God is essentially unknowable.

In Chapter V, Hobbes details an important consequence of his reductive epistemology, a scepticism about the scope and power of human reason. Hobbes provides an explicit definition of reason, claiming that “which is meant by this word Reason, when wee reckon it amongst the

---

⁵⁰ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 11.

⁵¹ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 17.

Faculties of the mind. For Reason, in this sense, is nothing but Reckoning (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon, for the Marking and Signifying of our thoughts.”⁵² For Hobbes, reason is essentially instrumental, it helps us figure out the consequences of our actions. Hobbes does not conceive of reason as a mental capacity of man that allows him to access some independent realm of truth, it merely helps him put together the “traynes” of thought that lead us to induce consequences. Later Hobbes adds that reason is subjective,⁵³ even if it is still a consequence of the same mechanistic outputs. Every man reasons for himself, and thus trusts his own reason. Differing experiences or education may lead me to different rational conclusions, which means reason is not universal and will not lead us all to the same conclusions. Thus, men cannot rely on their reason to solve all their problems. Hobbes thinks human reason is good enough to show men that it is in their self-interest to seek peace and escape the state of nature, but the Hobbesian account of nature as rooted in the passions means it is at best a compass to guide our desires, and not a force that compels us to do certain things as it does for someone like Locke, or Kant. Reason is simply a tool that helps us figure out what to do to fulfil our desires and avoid our fears. Hobbesian reason is best understood as passionate reason, or reason rooted in the passions. This presents an instant dilemma for Hobbes in constructing his political doctrines. We cannot reason our way out of the state of nature, we can only prudentially use reason to realize it is in our self-interest to leave the state of nature. Thus, when Hobbes claims natural laws are knowable through reason, what he is saying is that we can piece together enough to know that it is in our self-interest to endeavour peace.

This leads to perhaps the most important part of Hobbes’s account of human nature, his depiction of man as a passionate creature. Chapter VI details the various passions present in man.

---

⁵² *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 5.

⁵³ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 7.

But, Hobbes ultimately reduces all our actions, or what he calls endeavours to three major passions; appetite, desire and aversion. Hobbes tells us “This Endeavour, when it is toward something which causes it, is called appetite, or desire; the later, being the generall name; and the other, oftentimes restrayned to signifie the Desire of Food, namely Hunger and Thirst. And when the Endeavour is fromward something, it is generally called aversion.”⁵⁴ All human action is in some way a manifestation of desire or aversion. He continues his account in Chapter VIII by discussing how intellectual virtues are themselves rooted in the passions. Hobbes makes a distinction between two types of virtue: natural wit and acquired wit. Natural wit is simply a consequence of experience. Acquired wit is more complex than this, and is best understood as reason that we develop through speech. Differences in the passions are for Hobbes the reason men have different wits. The most fundamental of these is “the Passions that most of all cause the differences of Wit, are principally, the more or lesse Desire of Power, of Riches, of Knowledge, and of Honour. All which may be reduced to the first, that is Desire of Power. For Riches, Knowledge and Honour are but several sorts of Power.”⁵⁵ The passions ultimately make man a power-seeking creature. This is crucial to the Hobbesian state of nature, which after all is an “inference from the passions.”

Hobbes’s man is a creature whose knowledge is rooted entirely in sensory experience. This limits the power of reason, and makes men fear things visible more than anything else. It also makes man a creature who in following his passions and attempting to fulfil his desires while avoiding his aversions, is essentially a power-seeking creature. This account of human nature forms the basis for Hobbes’s state of nature.

---

⁵⁴ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 6.

⁵⁵ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 8.

2.6 - The State of Nature: A State of War

Leviathan first builds an account of man, before proceeding to an account of man's natural condition, the state of nature. Unsurprisingly, Hobbes's account of man has an immediate and direct impact on his account of the state of nature. Man's passionate nature means that in everything he does he either seeks to fulfill desires or avoid aversions. This is something continual and unending. Hobbes tells us that "the object of mans desire, is not to enjoy once onely, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire."⁵⁶ Because our pursuit of power is in service of this end, Hobbes famously claims that there is "a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death. And the cause of this, is not alwayes that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more."⁵⁷ Hobbesian science and mechanism understands the world as characterized by motion, humans are no exception to this. There is no equilibrium that our passions tend towards, they instead make us perpetually restless and are stilled only by death. Most importantly, Hobbes makes clear that no matter how much power man attains, he will always be driven to acquire more. It is not difficult to see how this instantly makes man's natural condition unstable, further increasing our restlessness and attempts to acquire power.

Hobbes's state of nature also has one more foundational characteristic that is rooted in his account of man and power; the natural condition is one of natural equality. Hobbes begins Chapter XIII, which outlines man's natural condition, by stating:

"Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there bee found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind

---

⁵⁶ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 11.

⁵⁷ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 11.

then another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himselfe any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe.”⁵⁸

Despite differences in natural gifts and talents, all men are equal because ultimately all men can kill and be killed. Our pursuit of power is grounded in this fear, because it is grounded in our passions. Because we can all equally be killed, we all equally fear violent death. The fear and danger this causes makes us pursue more power, which makes us more fearful and thus pursue more power. This shapes men’s behaviour in the state of nature. Hobbes identifies three ways in which the pursuit of power and our natural fear leads to conflict:

“So that in the nature of man, we find three principall causes of quarrel. First, Competition; Secondly, Diffidence; Thirdly, Glory. The first, maketh men invade for Gain; the second, for Safety; and the third, for Reputation. The first use Violence, to make themselves Masters of other mens persons, wives, children, and cattell; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other signe of undervalue, either direct in their Persons, or by reflexion in their Kindred, their Friends, their Nation, their Profession, or their Name.”⁵⁹

Competition is for goods that we want or need, all of which are in short supply in the state of nature. Competition puts us in direct conflict with one another, and makes us enemies. The motivation here is not simply greed, but insecurity. Scarcity is a fundamental characteristic of the state of nature, especially of the things required for what Hobbes calls “commodious living,” which is another one of the driving passions (the other being fear of violent death).⁶⁰ The most important scarce good is security. This leads to diffidence, by this Hobbes means that no one feels secure and will consequently pre-emptively attack others out of fear of being attacked first.

---

⁵⁸ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13.

⁵⁹ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13.

⁶⁰ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13.

Thirdly, glory also leads to conflict. This is perhaps the most problematic of all causes of conflict, and thus Hobbes devotes all of Chapter X to understanding the variations of this desire, whether it be honour, recognition or vain-glory.

Based on this, Hobbes is forced to conclude that “Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man. For warre, consisteth not in Battell onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known.”⁶¹ The state of nature is identical to a state of war. This is a crucial component of the Hobbesian state of nature. Importantly, Hobbes makes clear that the state of nature is one in which “men live without a common power.” This is a fundamental point about the state of nature, it is one in which there is no coercive power that restricts human freedom.

Our natural condition, in which there is no common power, is a dark place. In perhaps the most well known passage from *Leviathan* Hobbes describes the state of nature as dangerous, bleak, and nasty:

“Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”⁶²

Our natural condition is dangerous, violent, and thoroughly unpleasant. Its undesirableness, while a consequence of human nature, is the main reason man can be compelled to leave it even

---

⁶¹ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13.

⁶² *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13.

when he is under no direct obligation to do so. The role that God plays in the state of nature is yet to be discussed, but there are still some important theological characteristics that can be drawn out. The state of nature is about the relationship between man and man, and not between man and God. This is necessary based on Hobbes's epistemology. Our knowledge is purely sensory in the state of nature, which means God is absent (being non-sensible). This is the other important theological characteristic implicit in this description. God is absent from the picture in Hobbes's descriptive account of the state of nature. If *Leviathan* is essentially a work of nominalist political thought, this is not a surprise. But, while God is absent from a descriptive account of the state of nature, he is not absent from a normative account. At this point, it should be clear that the state of nature is dark and nasty, and that it is this way because of Hobbes's account of human nature.

2.7 - Natural Rights and Natural Laws

The state of nature outlined so far is a purely descriptive one, but for Hobbes the state of nature also has normative components. This normative side helps complete the picture of the Hobbesian state of nature. The first major normative component to the Hobbesian state of nature is its normative limitations. Hobbes affirms what has come to be known as the naturalistic fallacy, or the is-ought problem. It is impossible to derive values from facts about the world. While this is often associated with David Hume, *Leviathan* grapples with this problem long before *A Treatise of Human Nature*. This is very much a modern problem, and is something that only becomes an issue with the decline of scholasticism. Nominalism is very much responsible for this. On a scholastic understanding of the world, nature is endowed with ends and purposes that allow us to make value judgements based on natural and plainly knowable facts. Good and

bad are tied up to ends, meaning that deviation from these ends have moral implications. But, on nominalism the natural world is emptied of this natural reason. Things in the world no longer participate in the good or have any innate purpose, instead they are pure particularities, the manifestation of matter in motion. This has radical consequences, ones that Hobbes understood and attempted to deal with.

Hobbes affirms in Chapter XIII that the dark picture he paints of the state of nature is not by nature “bad.” Hobbes tells us that “the Desires, and other Passions of man, are in themselves no Sin. No more are the Actions, that proceed from those Passions, till they know a Law that forbids them; which till Lawes be made they cannot know.”⁶³ All the passions and desires in the state of nature that make it such an unstable and dangerous place cannot simply be condemned as morally bad. This is because there is nothing naturally good or bad about any action or outcome. Hobbes affirms this on multiple occasions in *Leviathan*. When discussing the passions in Chapter VI, Hobbes states that “for these words of Good, evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the Person of the man (where there is no Common-wealth;).”⁶⁴ There is nothing inherent in the passions that make them good or bad. Goodness is not an entity that actions or agents possess. Nature, and the “nature of objects” are devoid of moral meaning. Hobbes later repeats this assertion, arguing that “Good, and Evill, are names that signifie our Appetites, and Aversions; which in different tempers, customes, and doctrines of men, are different.”⁶⁵ This is not a proclamation of moral relativism, but it is a rejection of classical understandings of good and

---

⁶³ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13.

⁶⁴ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 6.

⁶⁵ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 16.

evil. There is nothing inherent in the nature or outcome of anything that necessitates automatic moral facts. This is important because it means that Hobbes's descriptive account of human nature and our natural condition does not have any inherent normative value. Hobbes makes this explicit at the end of Chapter XIII: "To this warre of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be Unjust. The notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice have there no place. Where there is no common Power, there is no Law: where no Law, no Injustice."⁶⁶ In the state of war, there is no such thing as right or wrong, justice or injustice. Thus, Hobbes must turn elsewhere to make normative assertions about the state of nature.

Hobbes description of man's amoral natural condition in Chapter XIII is more than simply an affirmation of voluntarism. He argues that the passions only have normative value once a law is established. This leads directly to Hobbes's account of natural right and natural law. Hobbes ends Chapter XIII by hinting at a possible solution to the amoral nature of man's natural condition: "And Reason suggesteth convenient Articles of Peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These Articles, are they, which otherwise are called the Lawes of Nature."⁶⁷ Hobbes proceeds in the next two chapters to discuss the laws of nature, which are central to understanding Hobbes's Nominalist political thought.⁶⁸

In Chapter XIV Hobbes begins by discussing the distinction between natural rights and natural laws. The distinction here is important, because rights are only meaningful in connection to laws. Natural rights are also a problem for Hobbes, because natural rights are part of what make the state of nature so dangerous. Hobbes defines rights as "the right of nature, which

---

⁶⁶ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13.

⁶⁷ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13.

⁶⁸ It is easy to be misled here by thinking Hobbes is saying we can simply reason our way out of the state of nature. Given the limited nature of Hobbesian reason, reason can do no more than tell us what actions will best produce the consequences that help us fulfil our desires and avoid our aversions.

Writers commonly call Jus Naturale, is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto.”⁶⁹ Put simply, humans have the freedom to do whatever they themselves deem necessary to ensure self-preservation. The key to a natural right is freedom. Hobbes says that “By liberty, is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of externall Impediments: which Impediments, may oft take away part of a mans power to do what hee would; but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgement, and reason shall dictate to him.”⁷⁰ Hobbes gives a simple definition of liberty, defining it as the absence of external impediments that would limit the ability of an individual to act in whatever way they deem necessary. This liberty is entailed in man’s natural right to act in accordance with his own will for his own preservation.

Hobbes’s definition of natural rights, which all individuals have in the state of nature is obviously problematic. Having a right to anything deemed necessary for one’s own preservation includes the right to harm or kill others. This leads to serious conflict, because everyone possesses this right. Hobbes makes sure to point this out: “And because the condition of Man, (as hath been declared in the precedent Chapter) is a condition of Warre of every one against every one; in which case every one is governed by his own Reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemyes; It followeth, that in such a condition, every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body.”⁷¹

---

⁶⁹ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 14.

⁷⁰ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 14.

⁷¹ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 14.

Natural rights necessarily make the state of nature a state of war. Thus, natural equality and liberty entails an existence that is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Natural laws are different from natural rights. Hobbes defines natural rights as “a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved.”⁷² What makes natural laws different from natural rights is that they entail obligation. They tell us what we cannot do, rather than what we can do. Thus, instead of giving us the freedom to do whatever is necessary for self-preservation, natural laws restrict us from doing things that endanger our self-preservation. While there are nineteen laws in total, all of Hobbes’s natural laws stem from the first and second laws. The first and fundamental law of nature, according to Hobbes, is “a precept, or generall rule of Reason, That every man, ought to endeavour Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of Warre.”⁷³ Flowing from this, the second law of nature “that a man be willing, when others are so too, as farre-forth, as for Peace, and defence of himselfe he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himselfe.” For as long as every man holdeth this Right, of doing any thing he liketh; so long are all men in the condition of Warre.”⁷⁴ Natural rights result in a state of war, but through our reason (which is simply a by-product of the passions) we can learn that giving up our rights and giving up our liberty is conducive to self-preservation.

---

⁷² *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 14.

⁷³ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 14.

⁷⁴ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 14.

However, as Hobbes has already stated, the difference between a right and a law is that a law is obligatory. This means that for a law to be a law, there must be no choice in the matter. It is not simply enough to think that natural law for Hobbes is rooted in self-interest. While reason and self-interest might teach us about the laws of nature, they have no obligatory power that compels us to accept them. Hobbes understands this and makes it clear, “right, consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear; Whereas law, determineth, and bindeth to one of them: so that Law, and Right, differ as much, as Obligation, and Liberty; which in one and the same matter are inconsistent.”⁷⁵ The crucial distinction here is that a law is only a law if it is in some way obligatory. Thus, the key to understanding Hobbes’s doctrine of natural law is understanding his theory of obligation. For now, we can see that the state of nature is completely amoral (this is consistent with his voluntarism) and that natural rights leads us into a state of war, while natural law somehow leads us out of it.

2.8 - Obligation and Coercion in Hobbesian Natural Law

We are now ready to turn to the central aspect of Hobbes’s political thought, his theory of obligation. It is here that the nominalism and theism implicit throughout his work become clear. So far it is clear that Hobbes’s account of the state of nature is based on his account of human nature, but that the state of nature itself is absent of any normative content, and that human reason can only tell us what is in our self-interest, but not what is “right” or “just.” In the state of nature we have natural rights, and these natural rights are distinguished from natural laws in that rights are concerned with human liberty, while laws are necessarily concerned with restraint and impose obligations on human action. The key to a natural law is its obligatory nature. But, if man

---

⁷⁵ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 14.

can discover natural law through his “passionate” reason then why is the state of nature still a state of war? Surely the obligatory and knowable nature of the natural laws compels men to seek peace and give up their natural rights, leading naturally to the creation of the Commonwealth? Hobbes makes clear that this is not how man’s interaction with the natural law works. This transforms our understanding of Hobbes’s political doctrines. For Hobbes, obligation is only possible when it exists alongside coercive power. Coercive power is what truly makes something obligatory, because it is coercive power that makes an obligation non-optional, and thus obligatory. Hobbes makes this point repeatedly, and it is because of this that natural law has limited power in the state of nature.

Hobbes introduces a distinction in Chapter XV that helps us understand the limited obligatory power of natural laws, the difference between *in foro interno* obligations and *in foro externo* obligations. *In foro interno* obligations are internal obligations to the individual, best understood as an obligation in conscience. *In foro externo* obligations are external obligations, where obligation is rooted in other people or force. Hobbes says that “The Laws of Nature oblige in Foro Interno; that is to say, they bind to a desire they should take place: but In Foro Externo; that is, to the putting them in act, not alwayes...and whatsoever Lawes bind In Foro Interno, may be broken, not onely by a fact contrary to the Law but also by a fact according to it, in case a man think it contrary.”⁷⁶ While the laws of nature are obligatory in conscience, this is because they prudentially help us achieve our desires. Thus, if we want our desires to be fulfilled and aversions to be avoided, we are “obliged” to follow the laws of nature. But, these laws are not binding in “security,” meaning that they can still be ignored because there is no coercive force that makes them obligatory. In other words, while our desires are best served by following the

---

⁷⁶ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 15.

laws of nature, there is nothing that stops us from doing things that are contrary to our interests, and there is nothing inherent in the laws of nature in the state of nature that makes us obey natural laws regardless of whether we want to obey them or not.

This is important, because on Hobbes's understanding of our natural desires and passions, there is nothing inherently good or bad about these passions, they are "in themselves no sin." Hobbes can only appeal to our conscience to make us follow natural laws out of self-interest and prudence, but not out of duty. For men to be compelled to act in any way, there must be a coercive power: "without the feare of some coeerceive Power; which in the condition of meer Nature, where all men are equall, and judges of the justnesse of their own fears cannot possibly be supposed."⁷⁷ Obligation is the opposite of liberty in that liberty entails freedom while obligation entails duty. There is no liberty when something is obligatory, you have no choice other than to obey. On multiple occasions Hobbes illustrates his argument by describing the uselessness of words without swords. At the beginning of Part II Hobbes claims that "And Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all. Therefore notwithstanding the Lawes of Nature, (which every one hath then kept, when he has the will to keep them, when he can do it safely,) if there be no Power erected, or not great enough for our security; every man will and may lawfully rely on his own strength and art, for caution against all other men."⁷⁸ Hobbes uses this metaphor again in Chapter XXI, stating that "the Lawes are of no power to protect them, without a Sword in the hands of a man, or men, to cause those laws to be put in execution."⁷⁹ Without a physical coercive force, obligation is non-existent because in a very practical sense, nothing exists that prevents people from acting or

---

⁷⁷ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 15.

⁷⁸ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 17.

⁷⁹ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 21.

behaving contrary to duty. If individuals have the liberty to act in ways inconsistent with what is compelled by the duty in question, then the duty is not actually obligatory it is voluntary, and thus not actually in any practical sense a duty. A law is obligatory only when there is a physical power in place that can compel people to follow an obligation regardless of their desires. Hobbes constantly emphasizes that coercion is a necessary condition for obligation, and that the obligatory nature of the natural law depends on coercion. All these examples make two things clear. Firstly, that obligation, law, and coercion are inseparable and coercion are closely connected to one another. Secondly, that without coercion there is no obligation, and that in man's natural condition natural laws have no coercive (and thus obligatory) force.

While Hobbes makes abundantly clear how vital coercive power is to obligation and the natural law, his discussion of covenants makes clearer still how vital coercion is to any sort of obligation. Some scholars have tried to make Hobbes's covenantal theory the central component that ties together his political thought.⁸⁰ However, covenants have the exact same enforcement issue as natural laws in *Leviathan*. Chapter XIV includes an extensive discussion of covenants and contracts. When men follow the second law of nature, and agree to give up their rights, the transfer of these rights to an artificial man is done so through a contract, or covenant. A covenant is simply a contract made where one or more parties accept (*in foro interno*) to follow a future obligation. The key to a covenant is that it implies future agreement. A contract is merely an exchange that is obligatory only if the contract is active (such as while the exchange of goods is still going on) and ends once the terms of the contract are met.⁸¹

---

⁸⁰ See for example Franck Lessay's "Hobbes Covenantal Theology and its Political Implications" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*.

⁸¹ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 14.

However, even though a covenant is how we get a Commonwealth, neither a covenant or contract has any binding power until a coercive force exists. Hobbes makes this claim multiple times in his discussion of covenants. He states that “The force of Words, being (as I have formerly noted) too weak to hold men to the performance of their Covenants.”⁸² He repeats this point shortly after, saying “But because Covenants of mutuall trust, where there is a feare of not performance on either part, (as hath been said in the former Chapter,) are invalid; though the Originall of Justice be the making of Covenants; yet Injustice actually there can be none, till the cause of such feare be taken away; which while men are in the naturall condition of Warre, cannot be done. Therefore before the names of Just, and Unjust can have place, there must be some coercive Power, to compell men equally to the performance of their Covenants.”⁸³ Again, he says “For the question is not of promises mutuall, where there is no security of performance on either side; as when there is no Civill Power erected over the parties promising; for such promises are no Covenants.”⁸⁴ Hobbes’s discussion of covenants is illuminating. He makes clear that obligation can only arise from coercion, and that without a coercive power (which is how he defines the state of nature) obligation is non-existent. This is true of both natural laws and covenants. Without coercive power, psychology and self-interest are the only options to try and compel people to obey natural laws and covenants, but this produces no obligation, just a preference. But, Hobbes’s emphasis that the natural laws are concerned with obligation and that natural rights are concerned with liberty means that he does not simply view natural laws as preferences. Their obligatory nature is rooted in the irresistible origins of natural laws – God. Therefore natural laws are theoretically obligatory, but not in the state of nature.

---

⁸² *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 14.

⁸³ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 15.

⁸⁴ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 15.

2.9 - Why the State of Nature is an Ethical Vacuum

That Hobbes thinks coercion is an underlying condition of obligation, and thus the natural law is indisputable. But, this does not necessarily show that the natural law has no power in the state of nature. It is only by looking at the voluntarism and nominalism implicit in Hobbes's development of the natural law that it becomes clear that the natural law lacks obligatory power in the state of nature. For Hobbes, natural law and divine law are identical, and natural laws are obligatory because they are God's will. Thus, for Hobbes the obligatory and coercive power of natural laws is rooted in the irresistible will of God. However, because God is absent from the state of nature, the natural law lacks any coercive or obligatory force, rendering the state of nature an ethical vacuum.

The final paragraph of Chapter XV is one of the most important passages in *Leviathan*. Hobbes makes clear that the only reason natural laws can be called laws is because they reflect God's will:

“These dictates of Reason, men use to call by the name of Lawes; but improperly: for they are but Conclusions, or Theoremes concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defence of themselves; whereas Law, properly is the word of him, that by right hath command over others. But yet if we consider the same Theoremes, as delivered in the word of God, that by right commandeth all things; then are they properly called Lawes.”⁸⁵

Natural laws are the same thing as divine laws. This understanding of natural law is not like the scholastic understanding, where natural laws reflect God's will as it is woven into the natural order. Hobbes's understanding of the natural law is a nominalist one; natural law is God's direct will. If they were not God's will, they would not be laws, they would merely be “theorems” about what is conducive to our appetites and aversions. This also means that on Hobbes's understanding of natural law, God is in some way involved in making laws obligatory. Hobbes

---

⁸⁵ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 15.

understands obligation as the central aspect of what makes natural laws actual laws, and thus God must create an obligation.

But, this still does not explain why natural laws are obligatory. Hobbes later answers this question with the standard nominalist position. Natural laws are obligatory because they are God's will, which is obligatory because it represents sheer irresistible will. In his theological exposition in the latter half of *Leviathan* Hobbes states that "The Right Of Gods Sovereignty Is Derived From His Omnipotence The Right of Nature, whereby God reigneth over men, and punisheth those that break his Lawes, is to be derived, not from his Creating them, as if he required obedience, as of Gratitude for his benefits; but from his Irresistible Power."⁸⁶ This is as clear cut of an example of voluntarism (and nominalism) as could be expected. Voluntarism defines morality solely in terms of Divine will, and makes it arbitrary by making it purely self-referential. Natural laws reflect God's irresistible will, and are therefore obligatory. So, Hobbes's doctrine of natural law is entirely rooted in a nominalist conception of God.

But, this nominalism, while making natural laws obligatory and thus laws, also renders the natural laws impotent in the state of nature. Recall that for Hobbes, obligation only exists when there is a coercive power present to ensure that obligation is not optional. But nominalism strips God of any coercive power in the state of nature. Nominalism makes God distant and unknowable, and makes knowledge of God through natural theology very limited.

The incomprehensibility of God is a central nominalist doctrine and is a doctrine affirmed numerous times in *Leviathan*.⁸⁷ Hobbes rejects the possibility of knowledge of God because he is an infinite being, while "No man can have in his mind an Image of infinite magnitude; nor conceive the ends, and bounds of the thing named; having no Conception of the thing, but of our

---

⁸⁶ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 31.

⁸⁷ See Section 3.3.

own inability. And therefore the Name of God is used, not to make us conceive him; (for he is Incomprehensible; and his greatnesse, and power are unconceivable;)"⁸⁸ He continually affirms this idea, saying "a man may conceive there is a cause of them, which men call God; and yet not have an Idea, or Image of him in his mind"⁸⁹ and again that "they can never have the imagination of any thing answering to them: And therefore, men that by their own meditation, arrive to the acknowledgement of one Infinite, Omnipotent, and Eternall God, choose rather to confesse he is Incomprehensible, and above their understanding."⁹⁰ Because God is incomprehensible, it is impossible for man to know what God's will is in the state of nature. The theology laid out by Hobbes in the second half of *Leviathan* is an affirmation of this, as it builds a theology based solely on revelation. However, this is only possible once man escapes the state of nature and there exist authorities that can interpret revelation.⁹¹ In the state of nature knowledge of God is impossible, thus God becomes an absent figurehead whose irresistibility is limited.

Hobbes's God is not present in the state of nature because he is distant and because he is not "visible." This invisibility means that the state of nature is missing the only force that could make the natural law obligatory. Hobbes states "that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent (as hath been shewn) to the naturall Passions of men, when there is no visible Power to keep them in awe, and tye them by feare of punishment to the performance of their Covenants, and observation of these Lawes of Nature."⁹² God's irresistible power is irrelevant in the state of nature because God's absence restricts its irresistibility. Because God is not directly present in man's natural condition, he is resistible. Man can choose to ignore God's

---

⁸⁸ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 3.

⁸⁹ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 11.

⁹⁰ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 12.

⁹¹ See especially Chapter 36 where Hobbes discusses how to recognize true and false revelation.

⁹² *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 17.

will. This is especially true because “the passions of men, are commonly more potent than reason.”⁹³ An easy objection here would be to assume that fear of punishment in the afterlife is enough to make God’s will irresistible in the state of nature. Hobbes rejects this, based on his nominalism because he rejects the possibility of natural knowledge of the afterlife. Knowledge of a judgement after death can come only through revelation: “There be some that proceed further; and will not have the Law of Nature, to be those Rules which conduce to the preservation of mans life on earth; but to the attaining of an eternall felicity after death...But because there is no naturall knowledge of mans estate after death;”⁹⁴ In man’s natural condition, knowledge of the afterlife is not possible because the power of revelation is restricted. There is nothing in the state of nature that can compel man to obey God’s will and the natural laws.

This is the central dilemma of Hobbes’s political thought. The state of nature is a moral and ethical vacuum. Human nature and equality, which give rise to our natural rights render the state of nature a state of war. This state of war cannot be condemned as evil because there is no such thing as good or evil in the state of nature. Furthermore, the lack of a coercive power in the state of nature, including the absence of God means that natural laws are not truly laws because they lack the obligatory power that a law must necessarily have. Anything goes in the state of nature. Men are free to act however they please, and there is no standard by which men can be judged or held accountable for their actions. This is a war of all against all, an ethical vacuum in which life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. All of this is rooted in Hobbes’s nominalist conception of God. His voluntarism renders God’s pure and irresistible will as the only source of moral authority, but his nominalism also forces him to reject the possibility of natural knowledge about God and thus knowledge of God’s will in the state of nature. The bleak picture painted by

---

⁹³ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 19.

⁹⁴ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 15.

Hobbes of the state of nature is a consequence of the nominalist revolution in philosophy.

Leviathan can be understood as a radically innovative work of political philosophy because it is the first major work to grapple with the consequences of nominalism in political philosophy.

2.10 - The Mortal God

Hobbes was fully aware of the limitations imposed on him by nominalism, and attempts to offer a solution. Recognizing that natural laws only come into affect once there is a coercive force that makes obligation non-optional, Hobbes builds what he calls the “mortal God” that acts as a substitute for the Immortal God. This mortal God is the Leviathan, and possesses the irresistible power of God and thus the power to make natural laws binding. Hobbes’s nominalism helps explain why he chose to use the imagery of a Biblical monster to represent the sovereign, and why Hobbes thinks the power of the sovereign must be absolute.

Hobbes proclaims that “This is the Generation of that great Leviathan, or rather (to speake more reverently) of that Mortall God, to which wee owe under the Immortall God, our peace and defence. For by this Authoritie, given him by every particular man in the Common-Wealth, he hath the use of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is inabled to forme the wills of them all.”⁹⁵ Many readings interpret this as Hobbes replacing God with a secular figurehead, and thus as evidence of Hobbes’s anti-religious intentions. However, the Mortal God can be understood as a necessary substitute for God in a world in which God is absent and distant. This Mortal God is still itself subject to the irresistible power of the “Immortal God,” but acts as a sort of steward and representative of God’s irresistible power in place of the absence of the Immortal God. Hobbes makes clear in the passage that the Mortal

---

⁹⁵ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 18.

God possesses irresistible will because it has the power to force the will of all men to obey the sovereign and the natural laws. Because the Mortal God leaves men no choice other than to obey its will, it creates a real obligation.

At this point, the emergence of obligation leads to the establishment of the natural law as real laws. Hobbes makes this clear, stating that natural laws only come into affect with the creation of the sovereign because this creates the obligatory force needed to make laws binding:

“The Law of Nature, and the Civill Law, contain each other, and are of equall extent. For the Lawes of Nature, which consist in Equity, Justice, Gratitude, and other morall Vertues on these depending, in the condition of meer Nature (as I have said before in the end of the 15th Chapter,) are not properly Lawes, but qualities that dispose men to peace, and to obedience. When a Common-wealth is once settled, then are they actually Lawes, and not before; as being then the commands of the Common-wealth; and therefore also Civill Lawes: for it is the Sovereign Power that obliges men to obey them.”⁹⁶

The sovereign does not make natural laws, it creates the obligatory power that is missing in the state of nature. Without a coercive basis, natural laws are just theorems. With the creation of the sovereign the enforcement of natural laws becomes possible, and thus natural laws become obligatory and binding. But, this cannot happen in the state of nature because there is no force in the state of nature capable of acting as an irresistible enforcer of the laws. Thus, natural laws only exist once man has escaped the state of nature.

Hobbes describes the Leviathan as an “artificial man,” and on this understanding of Hobbes this makes sense. In the Introduction Hobbes tells us that “For by Art is created that great Leviathan called a Commonwealth, or state, (in latine Civitas) which is but an Artificiall Man”⁹⁷ He reaffirms this in Part II, saying that “But as men, for the atteyning of peace, and conservation of themselves thereby, have made an Artificiall Man, which we call a Common-

---

⁹⁶ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 26.

⁹⁷ *Leviathan*, Part I, Introduction.

wealth;”⁹⁸ God is the only naturally irresistible entity. God is irresistible simply because God is God. Natural equality means no individual possesses an irresistible will. All men can kill and be killed, so no man can compel others to obey him. Thus, an artificial and irresistible man must be created, the Mortal God. Since no natural man possesses this trait, the irresistible man must be artificial. The artificial nature of the sovereign also illustrates that obligation does not exist in the natural condition, it only arises artificially once man is under the authority of the sovereign.

This understanding of Hobbes also helps make sense of his decision to compare the sovereign to the Leviathan. The Leviathan is a sea monster found throughout the Old Testament in Job, Amos, Isaiah, and the Psalms. The most detailed description of Leviathan is found in Job 41: “It makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment. It leaves a glistening wake behind it; one would think the deep had white hair. Nothing on earth is its equal, a creature without fear. It looks down on all that are haughty; it is king over all that are proud.”⁹⁹ This description of Leviathan fits well with the picture Hobbes wishes to paint of the Mortal God. Because Leviathan is a Biblical monster, it is easy to understand why this could be pointed to as evidence of Hobbes attempting to replace Christianity with his own philosophy. However, in Job 41 the Leviathan is described as having no equal and having the capacity to subject “all that are proud.” The Leviathan is an irresistible force that compels men to obey and submit. This is exactly what the Mortal God is designed to do, possess irresistible force. The imagery of the Leviathan makes clear Hobbes’s intention for the Mortal God. Hobbes’s sovereign seems absolute and tyrannical to the modern reader. While this is not an unfair description, a sovereign of this nature is necessitated by the problem to which it is responding. If there is no irresistible force in the state of nature to make natural laws obligatory, then the only

---

⁹⁸ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 21.

⁹⁹ Job 41: 31-34.

solution is to artificially construct an entity so overwhelming that men have no choice other than to submit. The Mortal God is Hobbes's solution to the political challenge of nominalism.

2.11 - The Nominalist Dilemma: Political Authority built on Psychology

The great dilemma of Hobbesian political thought is now clear. While some scholars attribute Hobbes's emphasis on self-interest as a deliberate attempt to move away from Christian conceptions of political legitimacy, the reality is that Hobbes is forced out of necessity to turn to self-interest to justify his political theory. Because there is no normative basis for making judgements and distinctions in the state of nature, and because natural laws only become obligatory once an irresistible Mortal God is established, the only way to escape the state of nature is by appealing to our desires, preferences, passions, and self-interest. In other words, Hobbes is forced to build political legitimacy on psychology.

Recall that for Hobbes, natural laws oblige in conscience, but only because "these laws, they oblige only to a desire." Hobbes can appeal to our self-interest, because most of us seek and desire self-preservation: "The finall Cause, End, or Designe of men, (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which wee see them live in Common-wealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby."¹⁰⁰ Because of this, it is possible to build a commonwealth out of consent. Hobbes repeatedly emphasizes that the Commonwealth is founded upon the consent of man: "The Greatest of humane Powers, is that which is compounded of the Powers of most men, united by consent, in one person, Naturall, or civill, that has the use of all their Powers depending on his will; such as is the Power of a Common-wealth."¹⁰¹ He repeats this shortly

---

¹⁰⁰ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 17.

¹⁰¹ *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 10.

after, saying “the Sovereigne Power constituted over them by their own consent”¹⁰² and later that “the Sovereigne Power is conferred by the consent of the People assembled.”¹⁰³ Hobbes does not view consent as an inherent moral good. Instead, Hobbes appeals to consent because he has no other option. Since men cannot be compelled by duty or obligation to accept the authority of the sovereign when they are in the state of nature, he aims to convince men that their self-interest is best served by giving up their natural rights and entering the commonwealth. But, there is nothing binding or obligatory about this. Consent is rooted in liberty, like natural rights. To freely consent, one must be able to freely choose. If men have no choice other than to join the commonwealth, then the authority of the Commonwealth is not truly based on consent.

Many interpretations of Hobbes have tried to argue that the practical necessity of the natural laws is what gives them their normative force.¹⁰⁴ Man is compelled to seek peace based on his reason because he desires peace and security, and fears violent death. The problem with this is that facts about the world have no normative force on Hobbes’s view. Hobbes does not think that our passions have any normative value, and affirms what has come to be known as the fact-value distinction.¹⁰⁵ Just because following the natural laws is conducive to our preferences does not make them binding or obligatory. It may allow Hobbes to appeal to our natural fears to get men to give up their natural rights, but it does not force them to do so. Human reason may tell an individual that giving up their rights is the best way to satisfy their desires, but the passions are more complex than this. Recall that Hobbes tells us that “the passions of men, are commonly more potent than reason.” One of these passions, glory, is especially prone to making men forget about their natural fears and aversions. This is why Hobbes devotes all of Chapter X

---

¹⁰² *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 15.

¹⁰³ *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter 28.

¹⁰⁴ See for example Glenn Newey *Hobbes and Leviathan* or Paul Cooke *Hobbes and Christianity*.

¹⁰⁵ See section 3.7.

to discussing it, and why all Hobbes can ultimately say in response to the problem of glory is that men must abandon honour-seeking to seek peace. In the state of nature there is no normative basis to distinguish between the various passions. Thus, glory cannot be condemned, while the desire for peace cannot be praised. Hobbes realizes this and acknowledges that political legitimacy must be built on human preferences, and not on universal duties or obligations.

The role that nominalism plays here cannot be understated. The distant God of nominalism and the radically particular natural world it creates leads to an understanding of man's natural condition that is very different from other conceptions. The natural world is emptied of normative content, and the state of nature becomes an ethical vacuum. On nominalism, natural laws are simply God's will, but the limits of natural theology restrict man's capacity to know the natural law. The only solution to this is to create an artificial God that can enforce the natural laws in God's absence and make them obligatory.

More importantly, the role that God plays in *Leviathan* cannot be understated. While Hobbes is often seen as a great secularizer in the history of political thought, this was probably not his intention. Regardless of the sincerity of Hobbes's Christianity and his radical materialist theology, theism shapes Hobbes's understanding of man and our natural condition. This in turn shapes his political doctrines. More fundamentally, *Leviathan* is heavily shaped by the nominalism woven throughout the book. Thus, *Leviathan* is best understood and interpreted as a work of nominalist political thought, one responding to the intellectual and philosophical issues that emerged after the nominalist revolution in philosophy and theology. Hobbes is indeed the first of many modern philosophers to use self-interest as the basis for political legitimacy, but this is not a result of a conscious rejection of Christianity. Instead, it is a result of an internal theological revolution at the heart of Christian philosophy.

3.1 – The Lockean Dilemma

Locke directly references Hobbes only once in the *Two Treatises of Government*, and only does so in passing in the preface. However, a lack of explicit references should not be misinterpreted as evidence that Locke's political thought has no direct relation to Hobbes's thought. *Leviathan* looms large over Locke's political doctrines. In Chapter III of *An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government (Second Treatise)* Locke says that "here we have the plain difference between the State of Nature and the State of War, which however some men have confounded, are as far distant, as a state of peace, good will, mutual assistance and preservation, and a state of enmity, malice, violence, and mutual destruction are from one another."¹⁰⁶ The men to whom Locke refers include Hobbes. Locke makes clear that his state of nature is different from the one described by Hobbes, which invites an exploration as to why Locke would wish to distinguish his state of nature from the Hobbesian one.

Locke's conscious distinguishing of his own thought raises two important questions about his state of nature. Firstly, why does Locke's state of nature look so different to the one depicted by Hobbes? Secondly, and following from the answer to the first question, if Locke's state of nature is a peaceful place of "men living together according to reason"¹⁰⁷ then why would anyone consent to leaving it in the first place? To answer these questions an examination of Locke's moral and epistemological thought is necessary.

While some scholars have suggested that Locke's political thought in the *Second Treatise* is incoherent, this claim is only plausible when the *Second Treatise* is read as a standalone work. This is a mistake. Locke makes this clear in the first line of the *Second Treatise* when he explicitly refers to the *First Treatise* as the basis for what he is about to say in the *Second*

---

¹⁰⁶ *The Second Treatise*, Chapter 3, Section 19.

¹⁰⁷ *The Second Treatise*, Chapter 3, Section 19.

Treatise.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Locke's state of nature is built on numerous assumptions and foundational claims that are described in more detail in Locke's work outside of the *Two Treatises*, primarily *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke's doctrine of the state of nature is centred on notions of human liberty, equality, reason, and natural law. However, none of these concepts are elaborated upon in the *Second Treatise*. Locke's political thought is inseparable from his epistemological, moral, and theological thought. When his political thought is examined within the context of Lockean philosophy more generally, it becomes more comprehensive and coherent than an isolated reading of the *Second Treatise* would suggest.

Instead of beginning with Locke's doctrine of the state of nature, this chapter will conclude with an examination of the Lockean state of nature. Most of this chapter will be devoted to describing Locke's moral and epistemological ideas. The central argument of this chapter is that the Lockean state of nature can only be fully understood in the context of these other aspects of Locke's thought. This will help to not only better understand Locke's political thought, it will also explain why Locke's state of nature is different to the Hobbesian state of nature. Furthermore, just as Hobbesian philosophy is inseparable from its theological foundations, Locke's theism is central to his thought. Locke's God can be broadly understood as a rational God who gives humanity the tools necessary to understand his will for humanity. While Locke's epistemology is a form of limited scepticism and suggests clear limits to the extent and possibility of what man can know, God puts man into the world with the capacity to know how he ought to live. This allows Locke to form a moral theory in which reason can tell us about what we ought to do. Furthermore, man's relationship with God as his "workmanship" means that man can know that he was designed in such a way as to ensure that our natural

---

¹⁰⁸ *The Second Treatise*, Chapter 1, Section 1.

desires and instincts are compatible with God's will. Locke's doctrine of self-preservation is rooted in an understanding of man and God that suggests the compatibility of virtue and happiness. This ultimately leads to a state of nature where man has access to a rational and universally accessible natural law. Thus, contra Hobbes, the Lockean state of nature is not an ethical vacuum and is far more stable and peaceful than the Hobbesian version. This also means that on Locke's account, men leave the state of nature not out of necessity, but out of convenience. All of this stems from Locke's epistemology and moral philosophy, which is rooted in Locke's understanding of God. Locke's God is a rational and omnipotent craftsman, and the entire world is made in such a way as to make it knowable to us. The differences between Hobbes and Locke are best understood as theological differences.

3.2 – The Epistemological Foundations of Lockean Philosophy

The question of how, or if, we can know anything at all is the premier philosophical question. Without a coherent position that allows for the possibility of knowledge, we cannot hope to have any reliable basis for knowledge about ourselves, our experiences, or the external world. Locke understood this, which is why he devoted so much time and energy to his major epistemological work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke makes explicit his intent of at the outset of the *Essay* by saying “this, therefore, being my purpose to enquire into the original, certainty and extent of humane knowledge; together with the grounds and degrees of belief, opinion and descent.”¹⁰⁹ Predictably, Locke begins the *Essay* by refuting the major alternative to his position, the beliefs that knowledge is innate. He then establishes his own foundation for how we come to know things (sense and reflection) and the nature of the things we come to know (ideas).

---

¹⁰⁹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 1.

Book One of the *Essay* is an attempt to clear the commonly accepted epistemological position of the age, that knowledge is innate. Just as Hobbes built his philosophy from the ground up by first refuting false positions, Locke attempted to do the same. Locke opens Book I by making clear his intentions:

“It is an established opinion amongst some men, that there are in the understanding certain innate principles; some primary notions, characters, as it were stamped upon the mind of man; which the soul receives in its very first being, and brings into the world with it. It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced readers of the falseness of this supposition, if I should only show (as I hope I shall in the following parts of this Discourse) how men, barely by the use of their natural faculties may attain to all the knowledge they have, without the help of any innate impressions; and may arrive at certainty, without any such original notions or principles.”¹¹⁰

Locke’s targets in this opening section are philosophers like Descartes, philosophers who defend the position that much of our knowledge is innate, or already possessed by humans a-priori and independent of any experience. Locke rejects this, and tells the reader that his intention is to show that that all the knowledge men have is acquired and not inborn. These natural faculties are discussed more later, but include things like our sense of smell and vision. These natural faculties are the tools with which we experience the world and thus gain knowledge.

Locke begins by attacking the most common claim made to support the idea that we have innate knowledge, the suggestion that “*there are certain principles, both speculative and practical, (for they speak of both), universally agreed upon by all mankind.*”¹¹¹ If this is true, then it seems commonsensical to think that these positions cannot be learned, but come from an a-priori source that resides within all people. Locke first rejects this by saying that “if it were true in matter of fact, that there were certain truths wherein all mankind agreed, it would not prove them innate.”¹¹² He then argues that there are no principles to which mankind universally agrees.

---

¹¹⁰ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 1.

¹¹¹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 2.

¹¹² *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 2.

The examples he gives are the law of identity and the law of non-contradiction: "I shall begin with the speculative, and instance in those magnified principles of demonstration, "Whatsoever is, is," and "It is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be;" which, of all others, I think have the most allowed title to innate."¹¹³ Locke's argument against this is simple, there are some men that do not understand these seemingly basic and universal maxims, children and mentally deficient people: "it is evident, that all children and idiots have not the least apprehension or thought of them. And the want of that is enough to destroy that universal assent which must needs be the necessary concomitant of all innate truths."¹¹⁴ Locke also rejects the notion that we use reason to discover or 'unlock' certain truths:

But how can these men think the use of reason necessary to discover principles that are supposed innate, when reason (if we may believe them) is nothing else but the faculty of deducing unknown truths from principles or propositions that are already known? That certainly can never be thought innate which we have need of reason to discover; unless, as I have said, we will have all the certain truths that reason ever teaches us, to be innate. We may as well think the use of reason necessary to make our eyes discover visible objects, as that there should be need of reason, or the exercise thereof, to make the understanding see what is originally engraven on it, and cannot be in the understanding before it be perceived by it. So that to make reason discover those truths thus imprinted, is to say, that the use of reason discovers to a man what he knew before: and if men have those innate impressed truths originally, and before the use of reason, and yet are always ignorant of them till they come to the use of reason, it is in effect to say, that men know and know them not at the same time.¹¹⁵

It is absurd to suggest that men use reason to discover innate principles, because if they were innate there would be no need to learn them. Locke suggests that this is oxymoronic as it would mean that men both know and do not know things at the same time. The next Chapter is devoted to attacking the idea that moral knowledge is innate. Locke attacks this on the same basis,

---

¹¹³ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 2.

¹¹⁴ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 2.

¹¹⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 2.

namely that it is simply not true that all people universally accepts certain moral principles.¹¹⁶ Locke also makes clear in Chapter IV that he thinks there are absolutely no ideas that are a-priori. This includes knowledge of God: “the truest and best notions men have of God were not imprinted, but acquired by thought and meditation, and a right use of their faculties: since the wise and considerate men of the world, by a right and careful employment of their thoughts and reason, attained true notions in this as well as other things.”¹¹⁷ This is not a denial of the possibility of knowledge of God, but a rejection of the notion that men instinctively know of God. Man can know of God according to Locke, but this knowledge is acquired through reason. This basic principle established early on, that all our knowledge is acquired through our natural capacities is the fundamental principle upon which Lockean epistemology is built.

Locke then discusses how men acquire knowledge. All knowledge is a result of experience, and all experience is acquired either through sense or reflection:

“Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either, about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.”¹¹⁸

Our knowledge is not a-priori and while we are born with the natural faculties to learn our minds are like “white paper, void of all characters.” This is commonly referred to as the *tabula rasa* or ‘blank slate.’ All our knowledge is derived from experience, either internal or external.

Locke then elaborates on what he means by sense and reflection. Locke says:

---

¹¹⁶ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 3.

¹¹⁷ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 4.

¹¹⁸ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 1.

“our Senses, conversant about particular sensible objects, do convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things, according to those various ways wherein those objects do affect them. And thus we come by those ideas we have of yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet, and all those which we call sensible qualities; which when I say the senses convey into the mind, I mean, they from external objects convey into the mind what produces there those perceptions. This great source of most of the ideas we have, depending wholly upon our senses, and derived by them to the understanding, I call sensation.”¹¹⁹

Our sensory knowledge comes from the experiential faculties we have that allow us to perceive and interact with the external world. This includes things like touch, taste, smell, vision, and hearing. Importantly, the senses allow us to *perceive* the world. These faculties do not give us insights into the nature or true essence of things, but they allow us to generate ideas about things.

The second type of experience that produces knowledge Locke calls reflections. Locke says:

“the perception of the operations of our own mind within us, as it is employed about the ideas it has got; which operations, when the soul comes to reflect on and consider, do furnish the understanding with another set of ideas, which could not be had from things without. And such are perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing, and all the different actings of our own minds; which we being conscious of, and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our understandings as distinct ideas as we do from bodies affecting our senses. This source of ideas every man has wholly in himself; and though it be not sense, as having nothing to do with external objects, yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be called internal sense.”¹²⁰

Reflection is internal experience. This is an experience of our mental operations. This faculty develops later than our sensory faculties because it requires a degree of training and attention. However, reflection is still fundamental to the way we perceive the world because it tells us about our internal operations, and gives us a conscious understanding of how we react to and perceive the external world.

Locke lays this out at the beginning of Book Two. The rest of this book is devoted to describing and detailing what experience imparts in our minds, ideas. Locke uses this term

---

¹¹⁹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 1.

¹²⁰ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 1.

broadly, but in the introduction of the *Essay* he attempts to give a definition: “I must here in the entrance beg pardon of my reader for the frequent use of the word idea, which he will find in the following treatise. It being that term which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by phantasm, notion, species, or whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking.”¹²¹ Ideas include things discovered via the senses, theoretical concepts and anything else that comes into the mind. The words you perceive as you read this, and any emotional or physical reactions you have are all ideas, as are the theoretical concepts that Locke proposes in the *Essay*. Ideas for Locke are thus every mental construct and creation. Ideas are simply what Locke calls the things that inhabit our minds.

Briefly, there are two basic types of ideas. These are simple and complex. Complex ideas emerge from simple ideas that are all rooted in experience. Simple ideas are single ideas, such as a direct sensation of taste. These ideas are isolated and particular.¹²² Complex ideas are combinations of simple ideas that cannot be treated as singular ideas and must be taken together. these are often a result of the activity of the mind. There are three ways complex ideas are formed, by combining simple ideas together, comparing different ideas with each other or deducting from multiple ideas commonalities between these various ideas that results in a new abstract idea.¹²³ Single ideas are passive and require no direct conscious activity, while complex ideas are active and require us to use our faculties to act upon the simple ideas we gain passively. Locke spends the rest of Book Two discussing the operation of these various complex ideas such as duration, time, space, infinity, substance, motion, and God.¹²⁴

---

¹²¹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Introduction.

¹²² *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 2.

¹²³ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 12.

¹²⁴ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapters 12-33.

In Books One and Two Locke lays out the epistemological foundation for his entire philosophy. Notice that his epistemology does not include any metaphysical positions or doctrines. Locke has nothing to say at this point about the nature or origin of our natural faculties, about whether the external world exists and whether our knowledge is reliable. Locke assumes that before we can ask any meta-epistemological question we must first establish what we are talking about. Locke will answer these questions in Books Three and Four of the *Essay* as he elaborates more upon how his new empiricist epistemology functions. At this stage, all that has been established is that knowledge is experiential, not innate and that our experience allows us to perceive ideas in our minds.

3.3 – Locke’s Pragmatic Scepticism

Now that Locke has established the mechanism by which we acquire knowledge, he can reflect upon the nature and limits of the knowledge we can obtain. Locke is not simply concerned with what we do know and how we know it, but also what we cannot know. This is important. Locke’s epistemology is concerned with showing what the limits of human knowledge are, and the reliability of the knowledge we can have. Before establishing his empiricism or rejecting innate knowledge Locke tells us that:

“I suppose it may be of use to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension; to stop when it is at the utmost extent of its tether; and to sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities. We should not then perhaps be so forward, out of an affectation of an universal knowledge, to raise questions, and perplex ourselves and others with disputes about things to which our understandings are not suited”¹²⁵

Locke thinks there are certain things we simply cannot know, because of our limited faculties and finitude. However, it is important to note that this scepticism is not simply epistemological

---

¹²⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 1.

nihilism. While affirming the limits of what we can know Locke is also saying that we can be confident that we can have some knowledge. Locke warns us not to fall into complete scepticism, saying that “when we have well surveyed the powers of our own minds, and made some estimate what we may expect from them, we shall not be inclined either to sit still, and not set our thoughts on work at all, in despair of knowing anything; nor on the other side, question everything, and disclaim all knowledge, because some things are not to be understood.”¹²⁶ This is a limited scepticism.

Locke also makes clear from the outset of the essay what sort of knowledge we can hope to have. According to Locke, we can know of “whatsoever is necessary for the conveniences of life and information of virtue.”¹²⁷ This is a large claim, one that will require a lot of work to demonstrate. This is perhaps the primary intention of the *Essay*. Locke wants to show us what we can know, which means showing us how we ought to live and what we need to know to know this. Locke makes clear from the outset that the reason we can reasonably expect that this knowledge is accessible to us is because of God. According to Locke, God has made us for this world and thus gives us the things necessary to be able to live and live according to his will. The passage quoted above is preceded by the claim that:

“though the comprehension of our understandings comes exceeding short of the vast extent of things, yet we shall have cause enough to magnify the bountiful Author of our being, for that proportion and degree of knowledge he has bestowed on us, so far above all the rest of the inhabitants of this our mansion. Men have reason to be well satisfied with what God hath thought fit for them, since he hath given them (as St. Peter says), whatsoever is necessary for the conveniences of life and information of virtue.”¹²⁸

---

¹²⁶ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 1.

¹²⁷ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 1.

¹²⁸ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 1.

This is a claim that Locke repeatedly asserts. Later in Book Two Locke says that “it appears not that God intended we should have a perfect, clear, and adequate knowledge of them: that perhaps is not in the comprehension of any finite being. We are furnished with faculties (dull and weak as they are) to discover enough in the creatures to lead us to the knowledge of the Creator, and the knowledge of our duty; and we are fitted well enough with abilities to provide for the conveniences of living: these are our business in this world.”¹²⁹ However, this seems like a strange claim to introduce so early. While Locke will eventually establish why his epistemology allows for certainty about the existence of God, and subsequently that our relationship to God means we can expect certain things to be true about ourselves and the world, at this point we must simply accept this claim.¹³⁰ For now, what it is important to note is that right from the outset a theological claim shapes Locke’s thought.

Beginning with the idea that there are certain things we can and cannot know, Locke introduces a crucial distinction, the distinction between knowledge and belief. Book IV is titled “Of Knowledge and Opinions.” He begins by offering a simple, but incomplete definition of what he means by knowledge: “Knowledge is the perception of the agreement or disagreement of two ideas. Knowledge then seems to me to be nothing but the perception of the connexion of and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas. In this alone it consists. Where this perception is, there is knowledge, and where it is not, there, though we may fancy, guess, or believe, yet we always come short of knowledge.”¹³¹ Knowledge is simply to do with perceiving agreement or disagreement of the various ideas in our minds.

---

¹²⁹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 23.

¹³⁰ See section 3.4.

¹³¹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 1.

There are four different types of knowledge, laid out in the first chapter of Book IV. The first is knowledge of identity and diversity. This knowledge is gained by comparing ideas, and is thus straightforward and simple knowledge. The next type of knowledge Locke refers to as relational, which “is nothing but the perception of the relation between any two ideas.”¹³² The third type is knowledge of coexistence. This might be better called knowledge of similarities. The fourth kind of knowledge is the knowledge of “real existence.” This is simply when our ideas correspond to something real in the world.

In the second chapter of Book IV Locke discusses the three different ways we can gain knowledge; intuitively, demonstratively, or via the senses. Intuitive knowledge is a direct understanding of the agreement or disagreement of ideas. Knowledge of identity would be intuitive. Intuitive knowledge “leaves no room for hesitation, doubt, or examination,”¹³³ but is very hard to obtain. Locke then discusses demonstrative knowledge. This kind of knowledge is “where the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of any ideas, but not immediately [intuitively].”¹³⁴ Locke tells us this kind of knowledge is dependent upon “those intervening ideas, which serve to show the agreement of any two others, are called proofs; and where the agreement and disagreement is by this means plainly and clearly perceived, it is called demonstration.” However, because demonstration is dependent upon proofs that are formed together to create by logical chain “a man must be sure that no part is left out: which, because in long deductions, and the use of many proofs, the memory does not always so readily and exactly retain; therefore it comes to pass, that this is more imperfect than intuitive knowledge, and men embrace often falsehood for demonstrations.”¹³⁵ Thus, if there is any weakness in the chain, the

---

¹³² *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 1.

¹³³ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 2.

¹³⁴ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 2.

¹³⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 2.

argument loses the certainty that intuitive knowledge has. Finally, there is sensitive knowledge which is simply knowledge of something external, even if we know nothing about it. As will be discussed later, knowledge of an external world is sensitive knowledge and possesses a degree of certainty even if we know nothing about the thing that we are sensing.

Locke makes clear in Chapter Three that this places extreme limits on the extent of human knowledge, and thus extreme limits on the things we can know with absolute certainty. Locke concedes that “from all which it is evident, that the extent of our knowledge comes not only short of the reality of things, but even of the extent of our own ideas. Though our knowledge be limited to our ideas, and cannot exceed them either in extent or perfection... I think I may, without injury to human perfection, be confident, that our knowledge would never reach to all we might desire to know concerning those ideas we have; nor be able to surmount all the difficulties, and resolve all the questions that might arise concerning any of them.”¹³⁶ Apart from intuitive knowledge, which is extremely rare, absolute certainty is all but out of the reach of the human mind. Because of this, we must readjust our expectations about what sort of certainty we can have about the world.

Locke does not think that this leads us to epistemological nihilism. Locke proceeds to introduce the notion of ‘belief’ or ‘opinion’ which he believes is a more accurate term for most of our epistemic beliefs and norms. While today we use the words knowledge, belief, and opinion imprecisely, for Locke these ideas meant specific and different things. Knowledge possesses certainty, and is rare. Belief is based on probability and relies on our use of reason to assess the reliability of various ideas, positions, and statements. Locke does not think that this

---

¹³⁶ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 3.

lack of certainty makes belief or opinion unreliable. Recall that Locke thinks that God has placed us in a world in which we can have not complete, but sufficient knowledge:

“The Understanding Faculties being given to Man, not barely for Speculation, but also for the Conduct of his Life, Man would be at a great loss, if he had nothing to direct him, but what has the Certainty of true *Knowledge*. For that being very short and scanty, as we have seen, he would be often utterly in the dark, and in most of the Actions of his Life, perfectly at a stand, had he nothing to guide him in the absence of clear and certain Knowledge.”¹³⁷

Our knowledge of and relationship with God means that there is another method by which we can acquire epistemic information that allows us to act and live. Locke thinks that God “has afforded us only the twilight, as I may so say, of probability; suitable, I presume, to that state of mediocrity and probationership he has been pleased to place us in.”¹³⁸ Put simply, God gives us the tools for practical reasoning. Locke calls this faculty judgement:

“which God has given man to supply the want of clear and certain knowledge, in cases where that cannot be had, is judgment: whereby the mind takes its ideas to agree or disagree; or, which is the same, any proposition to be true or false, without perceiving a demonstrative evidence in the proofs. The mind sometimes exercises this judgment out of necessity, where demonstrative proofs and certain knowledge are not to be had; and sometimes out of laziness, unskilfulness, or haste, even where demonstrative and certain proofs are to be had.”¹³⁹

The faculty of judgement allows us to evaluate the reliability of ideas and beliefs when we lack certainty about them. This faculty is generally deductive but does not produce deductive knowledge. Locke says:

“As demonstration is the showing the agreement or disagreement of two ideas by the intervention of one or more proofs, which have a constant, immutable, and visible connexion one with another; so probability is nothing but the appearance of such an agreement or disagreement by the intervention of proofs, whose connexion is not constant and immutable, or at least is not perceived to be so, but is, or appears for the most part to be so, and is enough to induce the mind to judge the proposition to be true or false, rather than the contrary.”¹⁴⁰

---

¹³⁷ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 14.

¹³⁸ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 14.

¹³⁹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 14.

¹⁴⁰ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 15.

Probable knowledge is different from demonstrative knowledge because while demonstration produces absolute certainty, probabilistic deduction only suggests the likelihood of something. Locke makes this clear, saying “probability is likeliness to be true, the very notation of the word signifying such a proposition, for which there be arguments or proofs to make it pass, or be received for true. The entertainment the mind gives this sort of propositions is called belief, assent, or opinion, which is the admitting or receiving any proposition for true, upon arguments or proofs that are found to persuade us to receive it as true, without certain knowledge that it is so.”¹⁴¹ Again, this lack of certainty does not make belief unreliable. It is not indisputable, but we can still have strong confidence in many of our beliefs. Locke thinks that some of our beliefs “border so near upon certainty, that we make no doubt at all about them; but assent to them as firmly, and act, according to that assent, as resolutely as if they were infallibly demonstrated, and that our knowledge of them was perfect and certain.”¹⁴² Some of our beliefs are so probable that they are practical, if not actual knowledge. Thus, it is a misreading of Locke to think that he is disparaging what he refers to as belief or opinion.

In the proceeding chapter Locke goes on to outline the foundations on which our acceptance of opinions or beliefs are built. He calls these grounds ‘degrees of assent.’ What these degrees of assent do is regulate and direct our judgement, and thus regulate our opinions. This allows us to separate reliable and unreliable opinions, and give us the capacity to trust certain beliefs and opinions even if we cannot know them to be true with absolute certainty. This gives us sufficient confidence in most of the information we gather about ourselves and the world to act without suffering from crippling doubt or uncertainty.

---

¹⁴¹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 15.

¹⁴² *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 15.

There are two major degrees of assent; the concurrence of personal experience with the experience of others, and the reliable testimony of others of things we have not learned through direct experience. The first is more reliable than the second, though both produce a high degree of probability. Locke says “the first, therefore, and highest degree of probability, is, when the general consent of all men, in all ages, as far as it can be known, concurs with a man's constant and never-failing experience in like cases, to confirm the truth of any particular matter of fact attested by fair witnesses: such are all the stated constitutions and properties of bodies, and the regular proceedings of causes and effects in the ordinary course of nature. This we call an argument from the nature of things themselves.”¹⁴³ When this is the case, we can have almost as much confidence in our beliefs as we do in knowledge. This dispels any suggestion that Locke was an extreme epistemological sceptic. Many of our opinions are nearly indistinguishable from knowledge, and many of our opinions can be treated as if they were on the same epistemological status as knowledge. This can be understood as practical, if not absolute, certainty. Moving on, Locke says that “the next degree of probability is, when I find by my own experience, and the agreement of all others that mention it, a thing to be for the most part so, and that the particular instance of it is attested by many and undoubted witnesses.”¹⁴⁴ Though not as reliable as the first degree, this second degree can still produce confidence that allows us to act and respond without having to worry heavily about the veracity of our beliefs. Locke also details in Chapter Sixteen how we ought to act when our experience and the testimony or experiences of others are in conflict. In such cases, we lose the confidence that we would have had if the two had agreed, and Locke cautions us against accepting beliefs based on blind trust in tradition. However, what is important here is that Locke makes clear that the faculty of judgement, acting upon probabilistic

---

¹⁴³ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 16.

¹⁴⁴ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 16.

reasoning can produce in many instances practical certainty, and provide us the information “necessary for the conveniences of life and information of virtue.”

Locke has removed the certainty of many of our opinions and beliefs, while simultaneously giving us the confidence to trust and act upon these beliefs. This is in line with Locke’s intentions at the outset of the *Essay*, which was to set out the limits of human knowledge while also providing the grounds for practical reasoning about how we ought to live. But, just as Locke’s political thought is inseparable from his epistemology, Locke’s epistemology is also in some ways influenced by his politics. Locke implies as much in Chapter Sixteen when he discusses the dangers associated with false epistemological certainty:

“I cannot but own, that men's sticking to their past judgment, and adhering firmly to conclusions formerly made, is often the cause of great obstinacy in error and mistake. But the fault is not that they rely on their memories for what they have before well judged, but because they judged before they had well examined...And yet these, of all men, hold their opinions with the greatest stiffness; those being generally the most fierce and firm in their tenets, who have least examined them. What we once know, we are certain is so: and we may be secure, that there are no latent proofs undiscovered, which may overturn our knowledge, or bring it in doubt. But, in matters of probability, it is not in every case we can be sure that we have all the particulars before us, that any way concern the question; and that there is no evidence behind, and yet unseen, which may cast the probability on the other side, and outweigh all that at present seems to preponderate with us.”¹⁴⁵

The false certainty many men place in their beliefs is unwarranted, and many of the opinions we hold as incontrovertible may be not only uncertain, but false. For Locke and his contemporaries, false certainty was more than an intellectual mistake. Locke was born shortly after a time of brutal violence, violence that originated from disputes over ideas. As the Reformation spread across Europe, bloodshed quickly followed as Protestants and Catholics killed each other with equal ferocity and ruthlessness. At the centre of these horrific conflicts were beliefs. Both sides were certain of the veracity of their cause. This certainty led to devastating and unimaginable

---

¹⁴⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 16.

violence and destruction across Europe for well over a century. In removing the certainty associated with many beliefs, Locke hoped to provide an epistemological foundation for intellectual tolerance. Locke also lived at the beginning of an epistemological crisis. With the collapse of the authority of one central and supreme Church across much of Europe, the epistemological bedrock of much of the Christian west disappeared. There no longer existed one indisputable authority on ultimate matters of truth, and the rise of Protestantism led to an epistemological individualism where each man was the sole arbiter and authority on his own opinions. Locke's new science of knowledge preserved this individualism without turning all men into infallible and self-sufficient epistemological bubbles.

Locke implores his readers to practice intellectual humility, saying that "since, therefore, it is unavoidable to the greatest part of men, if not all, to have several opinions, without certain and indubitable proofs of their truth; and it carries too great an imputation of ignorance, lightness, or folly for men to quit and renounce their former tenets presently upon the offer of an argument which they cannot immediately answer, and show the insufficiency of: it would, methinks, become all men to maintain peace, and the common offices of humanity, and friendship, in the diversity of opinions."¹⁴⁶ The fact that the most we can hope for in many cases is probable beliefs compels us to be more accommodating and tolerant of those who hold different beliefs. Ultimately, this lack of certainty should remove the likelihood that people are willing to commit atrocities in defence of those beliefs. Locke is explicit in warning about the dangers of blind fanaticism, in Chapter Nineteen, titled "Of Enthusiasm" Locke warns that:

"Their minds being thus prepared, whatever groundless opinion comes to settle itself strongly upon their fancies is an illumination from the Spirit of God, and presently of divine authority: and whatsoever odd action they find in themselves a strong inclination to do, that impulse is concluded to be a call or direction from heaven, and must be obeyed: it is a commission from above, and they cannot err in executing it.

---

¹⁴⁶ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 16.

This I take to be properly enthusiasm, which, though founded neither on reason nor divine revelation, but rising from the conceits of a warmed or overweening brain, works yet, where it once gets footing, more powerfully on the persuasions and actions of men than either of those two, or both together: men being most forwardly obedient to the impulses they receive from themselves; and the whole man is sure to act more vigorously where the whole man is carried by a natural motion. For strong conceit, like a new principle, carries all easily with it, when got above common sense, and freed from all restraint of reason and check of reflection, it is heightened into a divine authority, in concurrence with our own temper and inclination.”¹⁴⁷

Blind and unquestioned acceptance of beliefs, often religious ones, leads to fanaticism and incites men to act in reckless and destructive ways. Ultimately, all our beliefs must be questioned and subject to our rational faculties and judgement. Not only is certainty difficult to obtain, it is dangerous. We are not omnipotent beings, and Locke makes clear that we were not created with the tools or capacity to ever have complete or ultimate knowledge. However, Locke establishes an epistemological framework in which God gives us the tools necessary to know how we ought to act and live. This epistemological framework forms the basis for Locke’s political thought, and at its centre is a specific understanding of God and man’s relationship with God.

3.4 – Certainty and God

Locke’s pragmatic epistemology seemingly solves the problems associated with both certainty and scepticism. However, Locke cannot escape the necessity of certain knowledge in some specific instances. Specifically, Locke details how we can have knowledge of existence, the existence of God, and the existence of other things. Without certainty in these three areas, especially the existence of God, Locke’s epistemology would fall apart. The assumption Locke made at the beginning of the *Essay* that we can expect God to have provided us with the tools necessary to know “whatsoever is necessary for the conveniences of life and information of

---

¹⁴⁷ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 19.

virtue” would be a meaningless assertion if we could not have certainty that such a God exists. Locke’s discussion of the certainty of knowledge in these three areas also further reveals the conscious limitations Locke places on the possibility of knowledge. Specifically, while we can be certain of the existence of God, there is little that we can know about God specifically.

After describing the nature of knowledge in the first part of Book IV, Locke moves to establish three basic examples of things we can know with certainty. The first of these, discussed in Chapter Nine is our knowledge of our own existence. Locke spends little time discussing this, and cites it as an example of something that is plainly clear by simple intuition. Locke says “that we have the knowledge of our own existence by intuition...As for our own existence, we perceive it so plainly and so certainly, that it neither needs nor is capable of any proof for nothing can be more evident to us than our own existence. I think, I reason, I feel pleasure and pain.”¹⁴⁸ The fact that we can so plainly perceive of things like our own thoughts, pleasure, or pain, is in Locke’s view incontrovertible proof that our existence is certain. Notice that because this knowledge is rooted in an intuitive certainty it is beyond any doubt.

Locke then turns to the existence of God. Recall that Locke thinks that “God has given us no innate idea of himself,” but that we can still learn of God’s existence through our natural faculties. Chapter Ten is Locke’s attempt to demonstrate this. Locke is aware of the necessity of God to his epistemological project, saying that knowledge of God is “necessary to the end of our being, and the great concernment of our happiness.”¹⁴⁹ Locke then makes it explicit that God’s existence is rooted in our intuition and characterized by the certainty that accompanies intuitive knowledge. Locke makes clear that “though this be the most obvious truth that reason discovers, and though its evidence be (if I mistake not) equal to mathematical certainty. To show, therefore,

---

¹⁴⁸ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 9.

¹⁴⁹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 10.

that we are capable of knowing, i.e. being certain that there is a God, and how we may come by this certainty, I think we need go no further than ourselves, and that undoubted knowledge we have of our own existence.”¹⁵⁰ God’s existence is not something that invites scepticism or humility, as most of our beliefs do. Locke makes clear that if we exercise our natural faculties we can easily possess certainty about the existence of God, and that this forms the basis for our confidence in the rest of our beliefs.

Locke then lays out exactly how we can have intuitive certainty about the existence of God. Locke presents a standard cosmological argument that shows through intuitive certainty that there exists a being that is eternal, omnipotent, and omniscient. Firstly, Locke says that:

“man knows, by an intuitive certainty, that bare nothing can no more produce any real being than it can be equal to two right angles...If, therefore, we know there is some real being, and that nonentity cannot produce any real being, it is an evident demonstration, that from eternity there has been something; since what was not from eternity had a beginning; and what had a beginning must be produced by something else.”¹⁵¹

This is a basic formation of the cosmological argument, namely that anything that begins to exist must have a cause, and that the cause of something cannot be nothing, since nothing cannot cause anything. At this point, Locke has proven that there must be something that created the finite universe that is eternal. Next, he argues that we intuitively know that a being that creates another being must be equally as powerful as the thing that it causes, and therefore that “all the powers it [the universe] has must be owing to and received from the same source. This eternal source, then, of all being must also be the source and original of all power; and so this eternal being must be also the most powerful.”¹⁵² Thirdly, Locke says that “there was a time, then, when there was no knowing being, and when knowledge began to be; or else there has been also a

---

¹⁵⁰ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 10.

¹⁵¹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 10.

¹⁵² *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 10.

knowing being from eternity. If it be said, there was a time when no being had any knowledge, when that eternal being was void of all understanding; I reply, that then it was impossible there should ever have been any knowledge.”¹⁵³ The being that Locke has shown through intuition is eternal, omnipotent and omniscient. The idea that this intuition forms in our mind is what we call God. Locke tells us that “there is an eternal, most powerful, and most knowing Being, which whether any one will please to call God, it matters not.”¹⁵⁴ Locke gives further intuitive proofs in the chapter, including the argument from motion and the idea of an unmoved mover. What Locke believes he has shown is how we can have intuitive knowledge of the existence of God. Because this knowledge is rooted in intuition it is the most certain form of knowledge. This allows Locke to build his epistemology on solid and undeniable grounds. Thus, the bedrock premise that Locke lays out at the beginning of the *Essay*, that there exists a God that we can trust to have made the world in such a way as to make sure we are not left without the possibility of any knowledge is built on certain foundations.

Locke also offers an argument for the certainty of the existence of other things. Locke lays out how we can know of the existence of other things not by an intuitive certainty, but by a certainty rooted in our senses. Locke tells us that “the knowledge of the existence of any other thing we can have only by sensation...no particular man can know the existence of any other being, but only when, by actual operating upon him, it makes itself perceived by him.”¹⁵⁵ Even if our senses are completely deceiving us, and something like Descartes’ malicious demon is manipulating us, that we feel anything at all means that there is *something* acting upon us. This knowledge is different from intuitive knowledge, which provides knowledge of things in

---

¹⁵³ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 10.

¹⁵⁴ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 10.

¹⁵⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 11.

themselves, but still provides us certainty. Sensation tells us nothing about the nature of the thing acting upon us, but it does tell us with certainty that there is something acting upon us.

Without certainty of these three fundamental facts about reality, all other knowledge would be hopeless. Knowledge of our own existence and the existence of other things are both important facts for knowledge in general, but knowledge of God is particularly important for Locke's epistemology. Knowledge of God has important implications for our relationship with the world, and tells us important things about our personal conduct. Locke has established that because God exists we can trust that our faculties can provide us enough information to live and to know how to live properly. But, Locke also thinks this tells us something about the nature of morality and the 'workmanship' relationship between man and God.

Just like Hobbes, Locke is also an ethical voluntarist. Locke tells us that "yet I think it must be allowed that several moral rules may receive from mankind a very general approbation, without either knowing or admitting the true ground of morality; which can only be the will and law of a God."¹⁵⁶ Morality is grounded directly in the will of God and the only justification for why something is good or bad is because it is God's will. Not only is Locke's epistemological theory dependent on God, his moral theory and understanding of natural law is also directly dependent upon God. Thus, when Locke tells us that we can trust God to have provided us the tools necessary to know how we ought to act, this means God has given us the tools to be able to discern his will. Locke's trust in God distinguishes him from Hobbes in a very clear and important way. Despite both being voluntarists, because Locke believes God has given us the faculties to be able to know his will, we are not left in the dark about what we ought to do. Locke's voluntarism does not lead to the same problems that Hobbes's voluntarism does. Locke

---

¹⁵⁶ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 3.

has established that there exists an eternal, omnipotent and omniscient being. But, notice that Locke has not even attempted to establish that this being is omnibenevolent. Locke does not try to do this partially because he cannot establish this with any intuitive certainty, but also because his voluntarism makes this unnecessary. If God is the only source for morality, then God cannot be bad because what is ‘bad’ is still dependent on the will of God, there is no external standard of evil by which to judge God.

However, even though Locke’s voluntarism sidesteps questions of God’s benevolence, we are still left with doubts about whether Locke’s trust in God is well-founded. Why should we trust that God is the sort of being that would give us the tools to know his will, or to know anything about the world? Locke’s answer to this is implicit in the way he understands man’s relationship with God. Locke repeatedly describes man and the world as the product of God’s ‘workmanship’ in both the *Essay* and the *Second Treatise*. Locke says that “the idea of a supreme Being, infinite in power, goodness, and wisdom, whose workmanship we are, and on whom we depend,”¹⁵⁷ and again “yet, since it denies on and the first great piece of his workmanship, the creation.”¹⁵⁸ He continues with this notion in the *Second Treatise*, saying “for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent, and infinitely wise maker; all the servants of one sovereign master, sent into the world by his order, and about his business; they are his property, whose workmanship they are.”¹⁵⁹ This notion of workmanship is vital to understanding man’s relationship with God, and why Locke thinks we can trust God to have given us the faculties to know his will. Workmanship is rooted in Locke’s understanding of property and his notion that once someone mixes their labor with a good it becomes their property. Because God

---

¹⁵⁷ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 3.

¹⁵⁸ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 10.

¹⁵⁹ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 6.

has made us, we are his property. This gives God property rights over us and makes us bound to his will. Thus, God made us with his expectations of us in mind. This means that we are made in a way that allows us to meet these expectations. Thus, God must have made us in a way that allows us to know his expectations and demands. Hence, the epistemological faculties God gave us can be trusted to give us accurate information about his will.¹⁶⁰ Locke also makes clear that because we are God's property we are also dependent on him. The central role of God in his epistemological and moral thought shows that Locke understands and takes this implication seriously. Thus, in the natural condition man already has the capacity to know, and thus the obligation to obey God's will and law.

However, our certainty about God's existence and the obligations we have towards him are the limits of our knowledge about God. Locke's pragmatic scepticism places limits on what we can know about God himself. While we can know of God, God himself is incomprehensible: "the great God, of whom and from whom are all things, is incomprehensibly infinite: but yet, when we apply to that first and supreme Being our idea of infinite, in our weak and narrow thoughts, we do it primarily in respect to his duration and ubiquity; and, I think, more figuratively to his power, wisdom, and goodness, and other attributes which are properly inexhaustible and incomprehensible."¹⁶¹ This is a good illustration how Locke's pragmatic scepticism works. While we can have knowledge of God and his will, we cannot know anything about God himself, who is incomprehensible. This is not problematic for Locke, as we can have the knowledge we need about God. Our ability to know how we ought to live does not depend on abstract theological debates, but merely on God's existence and our relationship with him.

---

¹⁶⁰ For a detailed exploration of Locke's workmanship model see James Tully *A Discourse on Property: John Locke and his adversaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

¹⁶¹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 17.

3.5 – Locke’s Christianity

There can be no doubt about the centrality of God to Locke’s epistemological thought. But, if God is such a vital part of Locke’s philosophy, why are both the *Essay* and the *Second Treatise* devoid of scriptural references? The absence of scripture from these works has led some to suggest that the theism or Christianity of Locke was either insincere or false. Specifically, Leo Strauss and many of his students have offered this interpretation. However, this interpretation is based on a misunderstanding about Locke’s doctrines of self-interest and self-preservation. A correct understanding of these doctrines places God at the centre of our desire for self-preservation. Furthermore, in his work Locke attempts to create a new rationalistic faith. This is not an attempt to undermine Christianity, but to reconcile it with his epistemology.

Locke attempts to harmonize reason and faith by showing how both depend on one another. Thus, Locke rejects the notion that reason and faith are separate spheres that can never be brought together. Locke’s project here is not radical, and many Christians prior to Locke, including Aquinas have tried to do something similar. In the *Essay* Locke outlines his understanding of the relationship between faith and reason. Then, in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke’s last major work, Locke lays out this rational Christianity.

Locke thinks that reason can regulate and purify faith, and that reason and revelation can ultimately convey the same truths. Locke can be understood to be reviving or defending the classical notion of natural theology, theology that attempts to learn about God and the world via means other than revelation. Locke makes clear that some think that reason and faith are enemies, but that this is based on both bad reasoning and bad faith:

“Here is another use of the word reason, wherein it is opposed to faith: which, though it be in itself a very improper way of speaking, yet common use has so authorized it, that it would be folly either to oppose or hope to remedy it. Only I think it may not be amiss to take notice, that, however faith be opposed to reason, faith is nothing but a

firm assent of the mind: which, if it be regulated, as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything but upon good reason; and so cannot be opposite to it. He that believes without having any reason for believing, may be in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks truth as he ought, nor pays the obedience due to his Maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error.”¹⁶²

Locke agrees that a certain kind of faith, enthusiasm, is opposed to reason. This kind of faith is dangerous because it is blind and simply asserts truths without providing any justification for them. But, proper faith is not like this. Proper faith is a “firm assent of the mind” that is regulated by reason. This is a rational faith, a faith guided by the power of reason. God gave man reason, and thus God gave man a tool to correctly discern how to distinguish good from bad faith. Furthermore, Locke thinks that reason and revelation can ultimately discover the same truths, namely the existence of a God to whom we owe obedience: “I say that the same truths may be discovered and conveyed down from revelation, which are discernible to us by reason, and by those ideas we naturally may have.”¹⁶³ When faith is properly regulated by reason and our belief is rational, it will come to the same truths provided by reason. This is not a blind faith, but a rational trust in the power of reason and the natural faculties God has given us.

Locke is specific about the ways that reason regulates faith and revelation. Revelation from God possesses the same degree of certainty that intuitive knowledge does: “the greatest assurance we can possibly have of anything, unless where God immediately reveals it to us: and there too our assurance can be no greater than our knowledge is, that it is a revelation from God.”¹⁶⁴ However, distinguishing what is and what is not true revelation from God is where reason comes in to regulate faith. There are two specific ways that reason regulates faith: “first,

---

¹⁶² *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 18.

¹⁶³ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 19.

¹⁶⁴ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 19.

that we deceive not ourselves, in ascribing it to God; secondly, that we understand it right.”¹⁶⁵

Reason regulates faith by helping us decide whether revelation is authentic or not and in helping us interpret revelation to produce correct beliefs. Thus, Locke’s rational faith is one that understands reason as a mediator that helps to distinguish reliable from unreliable revelation. Furthermore, reason is a natural faculty that God intended for us to use to discern his will. This includes not just giving us the capacity to know of God, but the capacity to distinguish in revelation what is and what is not a correct and rational interpretation of his will.

Locke’s last major work, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, was an attempt to show what this rational Christian faith looked like. In line with his pragmatic scepticism, Locke leaves many specific Christian doctrines above or beyond reason, limiting their certainty, but puts the key tenets of Christianity on rational ground. By putting many sectarian differences into the realm of belief, Locke is also trying to remove the potential for conflict that comes from sectarian fanaticism. Locke’s rational faith is remarkably simple. We can know of the existence of God through reason, but our assent to Christianity is through Jesus. We believe in the revealed truths of Christianity based on the life and resurrection of Jesus. Locke thinks we are justified in assenting to these beliefs because Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah and because of his performance of miracles. Locke emphasizes the resurrection as the central claim that justifies our faith. Locke makes clear the centrality of the resurrection:

“We may observe, that the preaching of the apostles every-where in the Acts, tended to this one point, to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. Indeed, now, after his death, his resurrection was also commonly required to be believed, as a necessary article, and sometimes solely insisted on: it being a mark and undoubted evidence of his being the Messiah, and necessary now to be believed by those who would receive him as the Messiah. For since the Messiah was to be a Saviour and a king, and to give life and a kingdom to those who received him, as we shall see by and by; there could have been no pretence to have given him out for the Messiah, and to require

---

¹⁶⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 19.

men to believe him to be so, who thought him under the power of death, and corruption of the grave.”¹⁶⁶

Faith in Christ rests upon faith in his resurrection. This is a simple faith, designed deliberately this way by God so that “the bulk of mankind: there are articles that the labouring and illiterate man may comprehend.”¹⁶⁷ This is not a faith that requires elaborate beliefs or doctrines, but a simple faith that Jesus is the Messiah based on his life, death, and resurrection. The testimony of scriptures and the apostles is justified because “to convince men of this, he did his miracles...and that he was the Messiah, was the great truth he took pains to convince his disciples and apostles of; appearing to them after his resurrection.”¹⁶⁸ The simplicity of Christ’s message and the lengths he went to convince others of his status as the Messiah is the ground for our belief.

Furthermore, Locke understands both Jesus and Paul as apolitical figures. Instead, it is the role of reason that discovers God’s will through natural laws to tell us about this. Christ was an apolitical figure because he did not come to change or alter the existing law, merely to universalize it. Natural law is accessible independent of revelation via universal reason, and thus Christ did nothing to this law with his resurrection. Thus, revelation is not the place to look for political doctrines, because God provided these already through natural revelation. This approach stands in contrast with the approach suggested by someone like Sir Robert Filmer, and the primary purpose of the *First Treatise* (even though it was written before *The Reasonableness of Christianity*) was to present this apolitical approach to scripture in contrast to Filmer’s political theology. This helps to explain why Locke would not build his political or moral arguments on

---

¹⁶⁶ *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, section 32.

¹⁶⁷ *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, section 252.

¹⁶⁸ *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, section 29-31.

scriptural grounds. Even in the *First Treatise* Locke focuses on Adam and not on Jesus. This is because Jesus and the New Testament cannot be treated as directly political.¹⁶⁹

3.6 – Theistic Hedonism

The most serious doubts about the sincerity of Locke's Christianity come not from his explicit statements on faith and reason, but from Locke's understanding of self-interest and its relation to pleasure and pain. However, these accusations misunderstand Locke's doctrine of self interest, which is best characterized as 'theistic hedonism.' This hedonism is not an overt subversion of theism or Christianity, it is instead an attempt to reconcile virtue and happiness.

In *Natural Right and History*, Leo Strauss presents Locke as a thinker in the 'modern natural right' tradition who has consciously subverted the classical notion of natural right. Specifically, Strauss thinks that Locke's theology subverts natural law by resting it on notions of an afterlife that cannot be proven by reason.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, Locke's natural law doctrine is in direct conflict with revelation, best demonstrated by Locke's discussion of marriage in the *First Treatise*.¹⁷¹ This leaves Strauss to conclude that, just as Hobbes's doctrines are ultimately founded on self-interest and preference, that "Locke is a hedonist: That which is properly good or bad is nothing but barely pleasure or pain."¹⁷² The suggestion that Locke's hedonism is a groundless one that is a consequence of the limitations of reason, natural law and revelation only makes sense if Locke's moral philosophy is isolated from his epistemology. Locke's pragmatic scepticism helps us understand why Locke understands good and evil in terms of pleasure and pain, and why he cannot rely on the afterlife as the sole grounds for moral obligation.

---

¹⁶⁹ Greg Forster, *John Locke's Politics of Moral Consensus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 235.

¹⁷⁰ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 203.

¹⁷¹ Strauss, 216.

¹⁷² Strauss, 249.

Strauss is correct to claim that Locke defends a version of moral hedonism. Locke makes clear that good and evil are not metaphysical claims. Instead, good and evil are understood in relation to pleasure and pain: “Things then are good or evil, only in reference to pleasure or pain. That we call good, which is apt to cause or increase pleasure, or diminish pain in us; or else to procure or preserve us the possession of any other good or absence of any evil. And, on the contrary, we name that evil which is apt to produce or increase any pain, or diminish any pleasure in us: or else to procure us any evil, or deprive us of any good.”¹⁷³ Like everything else, good and evil are ideas. These ideas are relational, and are related to the pleasure or pain that they produce in human beings. Locke emphasizes this repeatedly, saying in the following chapter that “the greatest happiness consists in the having those things which produce the greatest pleasure, and in the absence of those which cause any disturbance, any pain.”¹⁷⁴ Taken in isolation, these statements do seem to suggest that Lockean morality is purely naturalistic and makes no reference to God.

But, Locke explains that this hedonism is not a naturalistic, but theistic interpretation. Locke has stated that God is the grounds for morality, which means that good and evil are God’s will. If good and evil are to be understood in relation to pleasure and pain, then God must have made men in such a way that the pleasure and pain we feel is in accordance with his will. Locke states this early in Book One. Not only can we trust God to have given us the tools to know his will for how we are to live, we can also trust that God has made sure that his will is consistent with our happiness: “For, God having, by an inseparable connexion, joined virtue and public happiness together, and made the practice thereof necessary to the preservation of society, and

---

¹⁷³ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 20.

¹⁷⁴ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 21.

visibly beneficial to all with whom the virtuous man has to do.”¹⁷⁵ This is not a naturalistic, but theistic hedonism. God has made man, and the world, in such a way as to ensure that our happiness is his will. This does not mean that God defers to man to decide what is good and bad. Instead, our intuitive senses and pleasure and pain correspond with what God does and does not will for man. At the root of this pleasure and pain is a desire for self-preservation. Self-preservation forms the basis for Lockean natural law, which will be discussed later. It is not simply that God wants us to be happy, instead God uses happiness to orient us towards his will. This is different from classical notions of how we are oriented towards the good. Given his complete rejection of innate ideas, Locke does not think that we are innately drawn towards some sort of *summum bonum*. Instead, it is because we are sensory and experiential creatures with a preference for pleasure and an aversion to pain.

This further strengthens Locke’s foundational claim that God has given us the tools to know what we need to know to live in accordance with God’s will. Locke claims that it is “upon this ground it is that I am bold to think that morality is capable of demonstration, as well as mathematics: since the precise real essence of the things moral words stand for may be perfectly known, and so the congruity and incongruity of the things themselves be certainly discovered; in which consists perfect knowledge.”¹⁷⁶ Pleasure and pain are intuitive and rooted in direct experience. We know with certainty what causes pleasure and what causes pain. Since this intuition is a tool that God has built into us to help us discern his will, it gives us an intuitive certainty about how God wishes us to act. Acting in accordance with self-interest is not only conducive to personal flourishing, it also means we are fulfilling our moral obligations:

“the unchangeable rule of right and wrong, which the law of God hath established; there being nothing that so directly and visible secures and advances the general

---

¹⁷⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 3.

¹⁷⁶ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter 11.

good of mankind in this world, as obedience to the laws he had set them, and nothing that breeds such mischiefs and confusion, as the neglect of them. And therefore men, without renouncing all sense and reason, and their own interest, which they are so constantly true to, could not generally mistake, in placing their commendation and blame on that side that really deserved it not.”¹⁷⁷

Men are not required to forgo their personal happiness to fulfil their moral obligations to God.

Collective happiness, individual happiness and the moral obligations owed to God have all been harmonized and made universally knowable. Lockean epistemology and moral philosophy thus fit together to provide a systematic basis for the basic claim made at the beginning of the *Essay* that God has given us enough to know of “the conveniences of life and information of virtue.”

Recall that Strauss also suggested that Locke’s inability to provide a rational basis for knowledge of the afterlife points towards an understanding of morality and natural law that is purely naturalistic. However, once again, Locke’s epistemology as it was outlined above helps to contextualize Locke’s discussion of the afterlife and show how it is consistent with his theistic hedonism. Locke understands that our eternal fate plays an important role in shaping his hedonism: “For if there be no prospect beyond the grave, the inference is certainly right—'Let us eat and drink,' let us enjoy what we delight in, for tomorrow we shall die.”¹⁷⁸ Locke is explicit about the implications of there being no afterlife. If death is the end then man is left only to enjoy the time he has, and Locke’s hedonism could only be concerned with worldly pleasure and pain. This also implies that the inverse is true, that if there is an afterlife then our actions in this world should reflect their possible eternal consequences.

Locke considers immortality and our eternal fates to be an extension of his hedonism, and understands the afterlife in relation to pleasure and pain. Specifically, the potential for reward or punishment after we die is the ultimate good or evil, because it represents either boundless

---

¹⁷⁷ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 28.

¹⁷⁸ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 21.

happiness or boundless torment. Thus, our hedonistic calculations should consider both short term immediate consequences and long term eternal consequences:

“The rewards and punishments of another life which the Almighty has established, as the enforcements of his law, are of weight enough to determine the choice against whatever pleasure or pain this life can show, where the eternal state is considered but in its bare possibility which nobody can make any doubt of. He that will allow exquisite and endless happiness to be but the possible consequence of a good life here, and the contrary state the possible reward of a bad one, must own himself to judge very much amiss if he does not conclude, That a virtuous life, with the certain expectation of everlasting bliss, which may come, is to be preferred to a vicious one, with the fear of that dreadful state of misery, which it is very possible may overtake the guilty; or, at best, the terrible uncertain hope of annihilation.”¹⁷⁹

However, this is a calculation we can only include in our hedonistic calculus if we can be certain that there is an afterlife for which we need to account for. However, Locke admits in Book Four that knowledge of the afterlife is beyond reason: “we can have no knowledge at all; these, as being beyond the discovery of our natural faculties, and above reason, are, when revealed, the proper matter of faith. Thus, that part of the angels rebelled against God, and thereby lost their first happy state: and that the dead shall rise, and live again: these and the like, being beyond the discovery of reason, are purely matters of faith.”¹⁸⁰ If Locke’s hedonism is dependent upon being able to incorporate both our temporal and eternal happiness into its considerations, then Strauss seems to be correct that Locke’s rationalism undermines the theological basis of his thought.

However, again Locke’s pragmatic scepticism does enough to ensure that this is not a problem. While Locke concedes that specific knowledge about the nature of the afterlife (namely the resurrection of the dead) lies beyond reason and thus beyond certainty, we still have the tools necessary to make decisions with knowledge of our immortality. Firstly, Locke asserts that we can know intuitively of the existence an incorporeal or spiritual part of ourselves: “For whilst I

---

¹⁷⁹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 21.

¹⁸⁰ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 28.

know, by seeing or hearing, etc., that there is some corporeal being without me, the object of that sensation, I do more certainly know, that there is some spiritual being within me that sees and hears. This, I must be convinced, cannot be the action of bare insensible matter; nor ever could be, without an immaterial thinking being.”¹⁸¹ While our intuitive sense of a spiritual part of ourselves tells us nothing about the specifics of this part of our being, it does tell us that an immaterial part of us exists.

Locke then uses this as a basepoint from which he can give us some certainty about our immortality. Locke roots our potential for continued existence beyond death on the continuation of consciousness and not substance:

“[Identity] can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done... But it is further inquired, whether it be the same identical substance... For, it being the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself, personal identity depends on that only, whether it be annexed solely to one individual substance, or can be continued in a succession of several substances.”¹⁸²

In doing this Locke makes consciousness the basis for personal identity, and not substance.

Locke has already established that our intuition tells us about the immateriality of our thoughts. Because our thoughts are immaterial, this leads to the possibility that the immaterial part of us might be able to survive the death of our bodies. Our consciousness is the location of these immaterial thoughts, and thus our consciousness is the part of us that Locke believes will be maintained to ensure our continuation beyond this world. In line with his pragmatic scepticism, Locke tells us that we need to trust God to maintain our consciousness, but the knowledge God has given us about the immateriality of our thoughts and consciousness means this trust is well founded. This is a good illustration of how Locke believes faith and reason work together. God

---

¹⁸¹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 23.

¹⁸² *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 27.

does not give us the capacity to know the specifics about how immortality works, but he gives us enough to know of this immortality and thus enough to be able to include this knowledge in our calculations about how we ought to live:

“till we have clearer views of the nature of thinking substances, be best resolved into the goodness of God; who, as far as the happiness or misery of any of his sensible creatures is concerned in it, will not, by a fatal error of theirs, transfer from one to another that consciousness which draws reward or punishment with it.”¹⁸³

Locke’s epistemology is fully consistent with his moral philosophy, and ensures that Locke is justified in asserting that we can know everything we need to know about how we ought to live. Locke says that “in this personal identity is founded all the right and justice of reward and punishment.”¹⁸⁴ Locke can say this because his development of personal identity ensures a degree of certainty concerning man’s immortality. God makes the world in such a way that his will is consistent with our happiness, and that our happiness is consistent with doing what is good and avoiding what is evil, which is rooted in our intuitive preference for pleasure and aversion to pain. Furthermore, our intuition over our immateriality means that our rational self-interest involves not just worldly considerations of good and evil, but also eternal consequences. The worldly and eternal consequences of being moral provide reciprocal insurance for each other. Man can know of his eternal fate, but even if a man is ignorant or unsure about this, he still has an irresistible reason to conform himself to God’s will because it is conducive to his immediate happiness. Thus, man is fully and with a high degree of certainty capable of knowing how he ought to live. This theistic hedonism is rooted in Locke’s epistemology and the role that God plays in Locke’s philosophy. This forms the basis for his understanding of natural law. All of this is vital to understanding and shaping Locke’s state of nature.

---

¹⁸³ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 27.

¹⁸⁴ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 27.

3.7 – Reason and the *Imago Dei*

One thing that virtually all scholars who study Locke agree upon is the supremacy of reason in his thought. Locke is clear that “reason must be our last judge and guide in every thing.”¹⁸⁵ But, this discussion has so far failed to identify what precisely Locke means by reason. We have already seen that reason is a faculty that includes things like judgement, which when acting upon degrees of assent allows us to distinguish between reliable and unreliable beliefs. Reason also allows us to deduce certain basic facts about reality, acting upon our intuitions. This includes important facts like the existence of God. But, reason is important for Locke’s thought beyond its epistemological value. Reason has an ontological role in Locke’s thought, because reason is for Locke the central component of what makes us human, and what makes us unique as humans. Reason not only allows us to discern God’s will for how we are to live, it is also central to the Christian idea of man being made ‘in the image of God.’ Our rational faculty and its universality is ultimately what makes us both free and equal.

While it is implicit in the discussion above, Locke still ensures that the reader clearly understands that man is to be understood as a rational creature:

“when we say that man is subject to law, we mean nothing by man but a corporeal rational creature: what the real essence or other qualities of that creature are in this case is no way considered. And, therefore, whether a child or changeling be a man, in a physical sense, may amongst the naturalists be as disputable as it will, it concerns not at all the moral man, as I may call him, which is this immovable, unchangeable idea, a corporeal rational being.”¹⁸⁶

Furthermore, reason is a tool given to man by God: “God has been more bountiful to mankind than so. He has given them a mind that can reason without being instructed in methods of syllogizing...it has a native faculty to perceive the coherence or incoherence of its ideas.”¹⁸⁷

---

¹⁸⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 19.

¹⁸⁶ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter 11.

¹⁸⁷ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 17.

Man's rationality is a natural faculty that God has built into us. Locke's conception of God as a maker and the owner of man helps to contextualize this. Because God made man and wants him to act in a certain way men were built with the tools to follow God's will. In some sense, Locke has a teleological view of man, whereby man is made with a certain end in mind.

However, because our understanding is ultimately connected to our ability to associate and disassociate the ideas that come into our mind through sense and reflection, this definition of a man does not seem exclusive to human beings. Locke realizes this, saying that "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 consequences about general ideas, he would no doubt be subject to law, and in that sense be a man."¹⁸⁸ Locke solves this problem in Book Two by modifying what is unique about human reason. Specifically, human reason has a capacity for abstraction that no animal possesses:

"And, therefore, I think, we may suppose, that it is in this that the species of brutes are discriminated from man: and it is that proper difference wherein they are wholly separated, and which at last widens to so vast a distance. For if they have any ideas at all, and are not bare machines, (as some would have them,) we cannot deny them to have some reason. It seems as evident to me, that they do reason, as that they have sense; but it is only in particular ideas, just as they received them from their senses. They are the best of them tied up within those narrow bounds, and have not (as I think) the faculty to enlarge them by any kind of abstraction."¹⁸⁹

Human reason is completely unique in its capacity to abstract. Animal reasoning is a basic faculty that can only consider the most basic ideas, but human reason allows us to abstract from basic ideas certain general principles that no animal can understand. Specifically, this abstraction is what allows for us to know of God and our basic obligations and duties in life.

---

¹⁸⁸ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter 11.

¹⁸⁹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 11.

Furthermore, by rooting anthropomorphic uniqueness in our capacity for abstract reason Locke can make this a universal definition of man. All men can know of God and of their duties to God because of these faculties, and thus all men have the same epistemological and moral status in Locke's view. This formulation is made explicit in the *First Treatise*, where Locke attempts to establish a natural basis for human liberty and equality.

Unlike animals, men have the capacity to rise above their instincts and act independent of them. This is the source of our freedom and liberty:

“a power to suspend the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires; and so all, one after another; is at liberty to consider the objects of them, examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others. In this lies the liberty man has; and from the not using of it right comes all that variety of mistakes, errors, and faults which we run into in the conduct of our lives, and our endeavours after happiness; whilst we precipitate the determination of our wills, and engage too soon, before due examination. To prevent this, we have a power to suspend the prosecution of this or that desire; as every one daily may experiment in himself. This seems to me the source of all liberty.”¹⁹⁰

This liberty is rooted in our rational faculties which allow us to rise above our instincts. Reason allows us to do this because it gives us the ability consider the consequences of our actions not simply in terms of immediate outcomes. Animals can rise above their instincts in some circumstances. Animals can learn that certain actions cause pain. For example, a dog with an electric collar that shocks the creature if it leaves a designated area quickly learns to stay within the boundaries. Once the dog learns this, it will rarely, if ever, go beyond the boundary even when it sees something it desires, like a squirrel that it wants to chase. However, this is just a basic reflex. Humans can go beyond this, and consider the abstract consequences of their actions, such as whether they conform with the expectations God has for us. This liberty makes us agents in the sense that we have the “power to act, or not to act according as such determination directs,

---

¹⁹⁰ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 21.

is a free agent.”¹⁹¹ Our status as rational free agents gives us the capacity to know and obey laws. This is something only human beings are capable of. Thus, liberty is what allows us to follow laws: “and so belongs only to intelligent agents, capable of a law, and happiness, and misery.”¹⁹²

The work Locke does in the *Essay* lays the groundwork for two of the central claims that Locke makes in the *First Treatise*, that man is made in the image of God and that this entails universal human equality. The *First Treatise* establishes this by attacking the theory of divine kingship in *Patriarcha* that absolute monarchy is the divinely sanctioned mode of government because its power is derived through direct inheritance from the patriarchal sovereignty given to Adam by God (although the *First Treatise* attacks a version of *Patriarcha* quite different to what is written in *Patriarcha*). While it is unnecessary to discuss many of the arguments in the *First Treatise* here, it is important to note that one of Locke’s central claims is that the dominion God gave to man was not given solely to Adam. Instead, this dominion was given to mankind in general and thus cannot be used to justify the absolute power of monarchs who inherit this paternal authority from Adam:

“The word *them* in the text must include the species of man, for it is certain *them* can by no means signify Adam alone. In the 26th verse, where God declares his intention to give this dominion, it is plain he meant, that he would make a species of creatures that should have dominion over the other species of this terrestrial globe. The words are, “And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish,” &c. They then were to have dominion. Who? even those who were to have the image of God, the individuals of that species of man that he was going to make; for that *them* should signify Adam singly, exclusive of the rest that should be in the world with him, is against both scripture and all reason; and it cannot possibly be made sense, if man in the former part of the verse do not signify the same with *them* in the latter; only man there, as is usual, is taken for the species, and *them* the individuals of that species: and we have a reason in the very text. God makes him “in his own image, after his own likeness; makes him an intellectual creature, and so capable of dominion:” for wherein soever else the image of God consisted, the intellectual nature was certainly a part of it, and belonged to the whole species, and enabled them to have dominion over the inferior creatures; and therefore

---

¹⁹¹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 21.

¹⁹² *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 27.

David says in the 8th Psalm above cited, “Thou hast made him little lower than the angels, thou hast made him to have dominion.” It is not of Adam king David speaks here, for verse 4, it is plain it is of man, and the son of man, of the species of mankind.”¹⁹³

Locke specifies that the *imago dei* is an intellectual notion. Man is made in the image of God because he has the capacity to reason. This reason is what gives man dominion over creation. God made man in his image and thus gives man the capacity to rule. The word dominion appears frequently in the Bible, beginning in *Genesis* and is a translation of the Hebrew word ‘radah,’ which roughly means to rule or have control over. Because God is the maker, and owner of the world, our dominion does not simply give us the right to rule however we desire. It means we are stewards to rule according to God’s will, acting as God’s agents. This agency, and ability to follow law is rooted in our rationality, which is what it means to say we are made in the image of God. Thus, our dominion is rooted in our status as rational beings.

Because dominion, and temporal power is rooted in the *imago dei*, this means that dominion is not given to specific men to rule over others, as Filmer suggests. Instead, all men are given dominion equally to rule over God’s creation. This means that all men are equal because all men are rational and thus made in the image of God, and thus all men are stewards of creation under God’s authority. Thus, the dominion God gave to Adam is inherited not by specific individuals, but by all individuals: “If there be more than one heir of Adam, every one is his heir, and so every one has regal power: for if two sons can be heirs together, then all the sons equally are heirs, and so all are heirs, being all sons, or sons' sons of Adam.”¹⁹⁴ Reason and liberty go together to establish universal human equality. Locke’s epistemological thought shapes the ontological and moral status of man in his philosophy, which forms the foundation of his

---

¹⁹³ *The First Treatise of Government*, Chapter IV, Section 30.

¹⁹⁴ *The First Treatise of Government*, Chapter X, Section 105.

political thought presented in the *Second Treatise*. Once again, God, and man's relationship with God critically shape Locke's philosophy.

At this point, Locke has built a comprehensive picture of man behind what we might understand as a 'veil of ignorance.' The view of man and human nature presented here is completely pre-political and independent of socialization. This is the man found in the state of nature. Our relationship with God is central to this picture. Man's epistemological faculties give him the capacity to know everything that is necessary for him to know God and know how to live. Man's status as a corporeal rational being is central to this. Furthermore, this rationality, which is universal and is what defines us as human beings makes us universally free and equal. Man is placed in the state of nature as a rational, free and equal being. Locke builds this man outside of the *Second Treatise*, but these notions are presupposed and built into the *Second Treatise*. This means that Locke's political thought is inseparable from his epistemological, moral, and theological thought. Thus, to fully understand the *Second Treatise* and Locke's state of nature we must consider it in relation to his broader philosophy.

3.8 – Natural Law and Self-Preservation

In the *Essay* Locke has constructed a systematic epistemological and moral framework that gives man the tools to know God and know how he ought to live. But, he has not given any details about what exactly this means. It is not enough to simply say that God gives us the tools to learn about our moral obligations, Locke also needs to provide us with specific rules to govern our conduct. Locke's doctrine of natural law does this, and provides universally binding moral obligations and duties. Natural law is central to the Lockean state of nature and plays a key role

in the *Second Treatise*, but Locke's doctrine of natural law makes no sense if it is divorced of the epistemological and rational framework Locke has set up in the *Essay*.

However, as important as natural law is in Locke's political thought, Locke never produced a systematic, independent treatise on natural law. Locke did deliver a series of lectures on natural law while he was Censor at Oxford in 1664. These lectures, that have since been published as a collection of nine separate works collectively known as the *Essays on the Law of Nature*. But, Locke never formally published these lectures, and they were written decades before both the *Essay* and *Two Treatises*. Similarly, Locke also wrote *Questions Concerning the Law of Nature*, but this was only published posthumously. Thus, Locke's doctrine of natural law in his major works seems both underdeveloped and incoherent. Both Leo Strauss and Peter Laslett have taken this position, though they drew different conclusions about what the implications of this were for Locke's philosophy more broadly.

It will be conceded here that Locke's doctrine of natural law is at best incomplete, and at worst incoherent. This is an undeniable challenge to Locke's political and moral philosophy. Locke himself concedes this. In his last major work, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* Locke admits that neither he, nor anyone else has every produced from reason alone a complete elaboration of the law of nature: "Or whatever else was the cause, it is plain, in fact, that human reason unassisted failed men in its great and proper business of morality. It never from unquestionable principles, by clear deductions, made out an entire body of the "law of nature."¹⁹⁵ However, Locke's limited discussion of natural law in the *Second Treatise* is sufficient for his political thought. This is because Locke's moral and epistemological thought developed in the *Essay* can ensure that the duty of self-preservation and the preservation of mankind is coherent.

---

¹⁹⁵ *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, section 139.

Because this basic principle is coherent, Locke can assert (as he does repeatedly in the *Second Treatise*) that there exists a knowable and obligatory law of nature in the state of nature. This may not be a complete doctrine of natural law, but it is sufficient. Furthermore, Locke does not need to produce a systematic doctrine of natural law to demonstrate the intelligibility of the law of nature. Locke has already demonstrated how this is the case in the *Essay*. If anything, the limited nature of Locke's discussion of natural law is a further practical demonstration of Locke's pragmatic scepticism.

Locke's natural law is built upon the theistic hedonism he has established in the *Essay*. Recall that Locke thinks we can intuitively deduce that God exists. Because we can know that God exists, we can know certain things about our obligations because of our relationship with him. Because God made the world, we can know that in some fundamental way we are made to live in this world. God has given us the necessary faculties to live in the world according to his will. Since Locke is voluntarist, morality is rooted in God's will. Thus, our moral obligations are simply to obey God's will. Because God wants us to follow his will, we can also deduce that we were made in a way that we naturally gravitate towards God's will. This is the basis for Locke's theistic hedonism. Our preference for pleasure and aversion to pain is a natural and intuitive faculty that gives us information about God's will. God joined happiness and morality together, which means that what makes us happy is also good. Since pleasure makes us happy and pain makes us miserable, God's will is for us to be happy and to avoid pain.

From this Locke can deduce the fundamental principle of his natural law theory, the duty not only of self-preservation, but the duty to preserve mankind in general. The notion that our hedonistic preferences can guide our actions run into an immediate problem. Men are varied, and our preferences vary widely. Locke admits this in the *Essay*: "the greatest happiness consists in

the having those things which produce the greatest pleasure, and in the absence of those which cause any disturbance, any pain. Now these, to different men, are very different things.”¹⁹⁶

Things like our personal taste preferences are not signs of God’s will. But, this is different when our preferences and aversions are universal and uniform. So, while your preference for cheesecake and my preference for ice cream might be a subjective distinction of no normative value, the fact that we both desire food and sustenance, and that all humans appear to have this instinct might point towards a moral obligation.

Locke’s natural law is built on the idea that universal preferences and aversions point towards moral obligations. Locke says that “but where the practice is universal, tis’ reasonable to think the cause is natural.”¹⁹⁷ Natural practices and preferences have normative value because they reflect God’s will. Man is not a purposeless organism for Locke, he was made by God and thus there exists an intentionality in our natural structure that is the result of purposeful design. A universal natural impulse or practice thus points towards a moral obligation. This makes sense considering Locke’s moral and epistemological thought. Universal human nature become the key to understanding natural law. God has joined morality and happiness, and has bestowed upon us the faculties necessary to know of these obligations. This means that we can reasonably infer from our natural preferences God’s will, which is given to us in the form of natural law.

This leads to the most fundamental and basic of God’s commandments, the duty of preservation not only of oneself but of all mankind. This is the central commandment of Lockean natural law. Right after telling the reader that where a practice is universal it is reasonable to infer that the practice is natural Locke specifies that fundamental importance of preservation: “The ground then I think to be this. The first and strongest desire God planted in men, and

---

¹⁹⁶ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 21.

¹⁹⁷ *The First Treatise of Government*, Chapter IX, Section 88.

wrought into the very principles of their nature, being that of self-preservation, that is the foundation of a right to the creatures for the particular support and use of each individual person himself.”¹⁹⁸ Locke makes this assertion repeatedly in the *First Treatise*, being careful to specify that God is the author of this desire for self-preservation: “God having made man, and planted in him, as in all other animals, a strong desire of self-preservation; and furnished the world with things fit for food and raiment, and other necessities of life, subservient to his design, that man should live and abide for some time upon the face of the earth, and not that so curious and wonderful a piece of workmanship.”¹⁹⁹

While the *Second Treatise* simply assumes the intelligibility and existence of natural law, Locke lays out a foundation for its intelligibility in the *First Treatise* that is built on his epistemological and moral thought. As our maker, God makes us in such a way to know his will and joins our desires together with his will to ensure that fulfilling our moral obligations will also make us happy. We are responsible for ourselves, but as God’s workmanship we are God’s property. We are not entitled to destroy things that belong to someone else. Furthermore, to fulfil our moral duties, we must be alive. Our instinct for preservation reflects a rational order and will. Locke’s harmonious understanding of our epistemological faculties, personal desires and moral obligations is the key to understanding Lockean natural law. Our instincts and reason orient us towards God. We are naturally inclined towards the good because our natural moral inclination is rooted in our natural hedonism and desire for happiness.

From this first principle other fundamental tenets of the natural law can be discovered. Locke specifies in the *First Treatise* that we have a moral obligation to protect and nurture children: “He has in all the parts of the creation taken a peculiar care to propagate and continue

---

¹⁹⁸ *The First Treatise of Government*, Chapter IX, Section 88.

¹⁹⁹ *The First Treatise of Government*, Chapter IX, Section 86.

the several species of creatures, and makes the individuals act so strongly to this end, that they sometimes neglect their own private good for it, and seem to forget that general rule, which nature teaches all things, of self-preservation; and the preservation of their young, as the strongest principle in them, over-rules the constitution of their particular natures.”²⁰⁰ This is a natural and rational obligation, knowable because it is a universal human instinct so powerful that men will sometimes endanger their own lives to protect their children. The universality of this desire tells us that it is God’s will and thus a moral obligation. Our happiness is also dependent on being able to successfully carry out this duty. Failure to protect children is a painful and damaging experience, and thus we not only follow God’s will, but achieve personal happiness by fulfilling this obligation.

This example helps us understand why Locke’s doctrine of self-preservation extends to a universal duty to endeavour to preserve all men where possible. Because we know that our universal desires are rational and are moral obligations, we know that they are not simply personal and subjective preferences. This means that our desire to preserve ourselves applies not only to ourselves, but to all mankind. All human beings, because we are made in the image of God are equal under God’s authority. We are all also the property of God. This means that our obligations towards God are identical and universal. God desires not only our preservation, but the preservation of all men, because all men are equal. Thus, our personal obligation to preserve ourselves becomes an external obligation to aid in the preservation of others. Our obligation to protect children is not simply rooted in the happiness it gives us, we are also obliged to care for children because God’s will the preservation of all human beings: “For children being by the course of nature, born weak, and unable to provide for themselves, they have by the appointment

---

²⁰⁰ *The First Treatise of Government*, Chapter VI, Section 56.

of God himself, who hath thus ordered the course of nature, a right to be nourished and maintained by their parents.”²⁰¹ Similarly, in the *Second Treatise* Locke refers to the “charity as we owe all one to another.”²⁰² The divine nature of our moral obligation of self-preservation and the equality of all men under God means that we owe obligations towards one another as well. These obligations are not direct obligations, they are indirect. We ought to endeavour to preserve others because of our obligations to God, and because of the relationship not only between ourselves and God, but between other men and God as well.

3.9 – Natural Law and the State of Nature

We are now ready to discuss Locke’s state of nature doctrine. Lockean natural law, while being frustratingly incomprehensive, is developed sufficiently outside of the *Second Treatise* so that Locke’s discussion of natural law and the role that it plays in shaping the state of nature in the *Second Treatise* is not incomprehensible or fatally flawed. Read in isolation of Locke’s other work, the state of nature as it is presented in the first few chapters of the *Second Treatise* makes little sense. But, much of what Locke says about the state of nature makes sense when contextualized by the preceding discussion of Locke’s epistemological and moral thought.

Locke begins Chapter Two by saying “we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a *state of perfect freedom* to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature.”²⁰³ Straight away Locke qualifies his discussion of the state in which we are completely free by insisting that there still exists a natural law that creates some boundaries around this freedom. Locke’s insistence on

---

²⁰¹ *The First Treatise of Government*, Chapter IX, Section 89.

²⁰² *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter VII, Section 93.

²⁰³ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 4.

there being an active and binding law of nature in the state of nature forms the bedrock of his depiction of the state of nature, and is the central reason that Locke's state of nature is different to the Hobbesian version. Locke also establishes at the outset that man's natural condition is one of perfect equality: "A *state also of equality*, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident, than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination."²⁰⁴ Locke assumes the existence of the natural law, as well as our natural liberty and equality in the original condition, but he has established the basis for this elsewhere.

Locke then uses this equality to begin his construction of the duty of universal preservation: "this *equality* of men by nature, the judicious Hooker looks upon as so evident in itself, and beyond all question, that he makes it the foundation of that obligation to mutual love amongst men, on which he builds the duties they owe one another."²⁰⁵ It was established in the previous section that the duty to preserve all mankind stems from Locke's doctrine of equality. Human beings are equally under God's authority because we are his property and made in the image of God. This means we must preserve not only ourselves but other human beings as well. Because Locke establishes this elsewhere, he is justified in asserting that natural equality leads to a duty of "mutual self love."

Then, in an illuminating and significant passage that helps us understand why Locke's state of nature is a place of "peace, good will and mutual assistance," Locke tells us that the state of nature is a place of law. This law is knowable by reason and tells us of our obligations towards other people despite the absence of a civil sovereign:

---

²⁰⁴ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 4.

²⁰⁵ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 5.

But though this be *a state of liberty*, yet it is not a *state of licence*: though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession, but where some nobler use than its bare preservation calls for it. The *state of nature* has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all *equal and independent*, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions: for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent, and infinitely wise maker; all the servants of one sovereign master, sent into the world by his order, and about his business; they are his property, whose workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's pleasure: and being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature, there cannot be supposed any such *subordination* among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for our's. Every one, as he is *bound to preserve himself*, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, *to preserve the rest of mankind*.²⁰⁶

There is a lot to unpack here. Despite being free, man cannot destroy himself or anyone else.

Instead he must do all he can to preserve both himself and everyone else. This is because man is God's property and he is bound by his relationship with God to fulfil his moral obligations that are rooted in God's will. Locke makes clear that the state of nature has a law that governs it, which as we have seen is knowable through our natural epistemic faculties, and through our reason. Reason tells us that the central commandment of the law of nature is that "no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions." Locke emphasizes repeatedly the notion that we are God's workmanship and that much of what he is saying stems from the maker-creation relationship between God and man. Finally, Locke explicitly says that what this means is that we ought to endeavour to preserve ourselves and others wherever possible.

Without the framework Locke establishes in the *Essay* and the *First Treatise* this description of the state of nature is incomprehensible. Locke asserts the existence of a knowable natural law through reason and obligations of preservation because of our workmanship

---

²⁰⁶ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 6.

relationship with God and our rational capacities. These are complex notions that ultimately stem from Locke's epistemology and moral philosophy. While we cannot know everything we can know of God's existence with certainty. We can also know that God made the world in such a way to ensure that our happiness and his will would coincide. Knowing this we can look inward at the things that universally bring us happiness. From this we can know that the desire for preservation is universal and is therefore God's will. This means that in the state of nature, where there is no positive or civil law, there still exists a knowable natural law. This law binds us in the state of nature, and regulates our freedom.

Locke, repeats this assertion throughout the *Second Treatise*. The natural law is plainly intelligible to all men as rational beings: "it is certain there is such a law, and that too, as intelligible and plain to a rational creature, and a studier of that law, as the positive laws of commonwealths; nay, possibly plainer; as much as reason is easier to be understood."²⁰⁷ Locke asserts confidently that the natural law exists and is knowable. This has an important implication; the state of nature is not an ethical vacuum. Locke claims that "but though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of license."²⁰⁸ Because there exists a law of nature in the state of nature, we are compelled to follow it. Thus, the state of nature is not a place where there is no justice, as it is for Hobbes. Our status as rational beings is the key to this. Our rational faculties, given to us by God, allow us to know of the natural law and God's will. Because the law is so plainly accessible to men, we cannot ignore it out of ignorance. Our knowledge of the law, and that it is God's will compels us to obey it. Thus, the epistemological model Locke has established elsewhere is key to the obligatory nature of the natural law in the state of nature.

---

²⁰⁷ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 12.

²⁰⁸ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 6.

Lockean liberty is not simply a condition where an individual can do whatever they want. The laws of nature still bind free men. While our natural condition is one of liberty where no one else can claim authority over us, we are still proscribed limits to our actions: “the natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule.”²⁰⁹ This is why Locke can distinguish between a state of liberty and a state of license, while Hobbes cannot. Furthermore, the fact that a state of liberty is not a place of unrestrained license is precisely what makes a state of liberty free: “for in all the states of created beings capable of laws, where there is no law, there is no freedom: for liberty is, to be free from restraint and violence from others; which cannot be, where there is no law.”²¹⁰ The natural law is what allows us to be free, because it creates a condition in which we have freedom and are not constrained by the violence or actions of others.

The theistic hedonism that allows Locke to join virtue and happiness together is plainly stated in the *Second Treatise*, even if he does not elaborate on it in detail as he does in the *Essay*. Firstly, Locke is explicit that reason comes from God: “Adam was created a perfect man, his body and mind in full possession of their strength and reason, and so was capable, from the first instant of his being to provide for his own support and preservation, and govern his actions according to the dictates of the law of reason which God had implanted in him.”²¹¹ Because our reason is a faculty given to us by God, we can know that rational commandments, namely the natural law, are also God’s will and divine law. Furthermore, Locke asserts that following this law is the key to our happiness: “for law, in its true notion, is not so much the limitation as the direction of a free and intelligent agent to his proper interest, and prescribes no farther than is for

---

²⁰⁹ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter IV, Section 22.

²¹⁰ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter VI, Section 57.

²¹¹ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter VI, Section 56.

the general good of those under that law: could they be happier without it, the law, as an useless thing, would of itself vanish.”²¹² This is a strange claim by itself, without context. Locke does not give any reason here why the natural law is the key to our happiness, he just asserts his version of theistic hedonism. But, when contextualized by the *Essay* this statement makes sense. Because God made us and wants us to follow his will, he made us in such a way that not only allows us to know of God’s will, it means we can know that God designed us so that following his will was conducive to our personal happiness and self-interest. Locke hints at this elsewhere, but never explicitly explains that this workmanship relationship between God and man justifies our trust in our natural instincts as a guide to God’s will: “God having made man such a creature, that in his own judgment, it was not good for him to be alone, put him under strong obligations of necessity, convenience, and inclination to drive him into society.”²¹³

While Locke is vague in explaining the details, he is still clear that the central tenet of this doctrine of natural law is the duty of self-preservation and the preservation of all mankind. After telling the reader that the natural law is knowable through reason and comes from God, he goes on to state that “every one, as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind, and may not, unless it be to do justice on an offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another.”²¹⁴ Again, Locke gives no explanation in the *Second Treatise* of how we can know that preservation is a duty stemming from natural law. But, the work Locke has done on natural law in the *Essay* and the *First Treatise* makes this more comprehensible.

---

²¹² *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter VI, Section 57.

²¹³ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter VII, Section 77.

²¹⁴ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 6.

Self-preservation is a universal desire, which gives it normative implications. Similarly, while he does not do it here, Locke has explained elsewhere why our status as equal and free beings made in the image of God and under the equal authority of God means that our duty of preservation becomes a duty to aid others in their preservation as well.

Because the state of nature is a judicial condition, and because we have obligations independent of a civil sovereign, Locke can distinguish between a state of nature and a state of war. While the two are coterminous for Hobbes, Locke defines them both differently. A state of war exists when someone violates the law of nature: “which is so much as may serve for reparation and restraint: for these two are the only reasons, why one man may lawfully do harm to another, which is that we call punishment. In transgressing the law of nature, the offender declares himself to live by another rule than that of reason and common equity, which is that measure God has set to the actions of men, for their mutual security; and so he becomes dangerous to mankind, the tie, which is to secure them from injury and violence, being slighted and broken by him.”²¹⁵ The state of nature is naturally a place of “peace, good will, mutual assistance and preservation” because in the natural condition men cooperate with one another because they are morally bound to do so and because it is in their personal interest. When someone violates the natural law, they have acted irrationally, and become criminals. Locke explicitly refers to people who violate the natural law as criminals. Criminality is only possible if a law exists for you to break. There are no criminals in Hobbes’s state of nature.

Once someone violates the natural law “every man hath a right to punish the offender, and be executioner of the law of nature.”²¹⁶ This is important. Our duty of preservation towards someone ceases if they violate the natural law. These individuals are now outside the law, and

---

²¹⁵ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 8.

²¹⁶ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 8.

thus can be punished. This punishment is required to ensure that the criminal does not continue to be a threat to the preservation of those people still within the bounds of the law of nature. This means that “in the state of nature, every one has he executive power of the law of nature.”²¹⁷ In the state of nature the obligation to enforce the natural law falls on individuals, and not a sovereign or common power. This does not mean that the law is unenforceable, it just means that its enforcement is decentralized.

This is the key to understanding why Locke thinks we should or would choose to leave the state of nature. The picture Locke paints of the state of nature is one where people have and know of their moral obligations, and cooperate to fulfil their moral duties. This is stable and peaceful, so why would we consent to government in the first place? Locke’s answer is simple; inconvenience. Locke says “that it is not at all to be wondered, that history gives us but a very little account of men, that lived together in the state of nature. The inconveniences of that condition, and the love and want of society, no sooner brought any number of them together, but they presently united and incorporated, if they designed to continue together.”²¹⁸ We consent to come together and form a common sovereign not out of necessity but out of convenience. Having to enforce the natural law individually is time consuming and potentially dangerous. Because of this, individuals that obey the natural law consent to a sovereign that takes over the enforcement of the natural law. Things like scarcities and the variation in personal traits like strength and intelligence also make conflict more likely. However, this inconvenience does not make it a necessity for men to consent to a common power, as it does for Hobbes. We benefit from, but are not obligated or bound by natural law to consent to a sovereign.

---

²¹⁷ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 13.

²¹⁸ *The Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter VIII, Section 101.

Locke's state of nature is inseparable from the epistemological and moral thought that he has developed in the *Essay* and *First Treatise*. The Lockean state of nature is peaceful, stable and ordered. This is in sharp contrast to the Hobbesian version. The work Locke does in the *Essay* and *First Treatise* prepares him to discuss the state of nature, because it builds a pre-political human being. Man in the Lockean state of nature is already a complex being, and the myriad of premises and assumptions Locke makes in his state of nature scenario are only possible and plausible because he has already sketched a detailed picture of the pre-political man that exists in the state of nature. Locke's pragmatic scepticism and empiricism are sufficient to give man the information he needs to live, and tell us enough about God to know of our obligations towards him and why we can trust God to have made the world in such a way that it is in our immediate and eternal self-interest to follow his will. Furthermore, without giving us a complete or comprehensive natural law doctrine, Locke elaborates enough on what the natural law requires us to do. Thus, man is placed in the state of nature as a moral and judicial animal, capable of knowing and following the duties God has placed upon him.

3.10 – God, Reason, and the State of Nature

Locke's political thought is heavily shaped by his moral and epistemological thought. More fundamentally, Locke's conception of God plays a vital role in shaping his political thought. Locke's theism is not simply isolated to Locke's theological thought, it is central to virtually every major part of his thought. As has been discussed, theism plays a central role in Locke's understanding of knowledge, morality, reason, liberty, equality, natural law. Ultimately, this shapes his state of nature. Just as the nominalist God of *Leviathan* plays a crucial role in

shaping the Hobbesian state of nature, the rational God of the *Essay* plays a central role shaping the Lockean state of nature.

Locke begins with epistemology. While we cannot know everything, we can know what is necessary to know how we ought to live. This is because Locke believes there are certain things we can know with certainty, namely the existence of God. Because we can know this, we can know that God has given us the tools to discover and follow his will. While God does not give us any innate knowledge, including innate knowledge of God's existence, he has given us an intuitive capacity to know certain things. Intuition is the basis for knowledge (which is certain), and we can intuit that God exists. But, there are limits to our knowledge, and most of what we know falls under the category of 'belief.' While these beliefs can be reliable, they are never certain. However, because we know God exists and he created us, we can know that we can have sufficient knowledge for practical action.

This epistemology and trust in God forms the basis for Locke's moral thought, which is best described as 'theistic hedonism.' Our relationship with God, and his status as our maker means that we can know that God made us in such a way that our happiness would not conflict with his will. Thus, this allows us to use our preferences and aversions as signposts to God's will, and thus our moral duties. Good and evil are metaethically God's will, but descriptively correspond with pleasure and pain. Reason not only gives us moral and epistemic information, it also gives us ontological information about ourselves. Our ability to think abstractly is what makes us unique as humans, and this forms the basis for our status as being made in the image of God. Reason is what allows us to rise above our instincts. It thus allows us to be free agents. Our agency is what allows us to follow laws. This forms the basis for our dominion over the earth. As stewards of creation we are tasked with living as God's will, and not simply doing as we please

with the world. Furthermore, our status as free beings made in the image of God means that dominion over the world was given to all men. This forms the foundation for Locke's notion of universal human equality.

Our equality also gives us additional moral duties. Locke's natural law doctrine is rooted in his theistic hedonism. Our most basic preference is for self-preservation. Thus, self-preservation is not only personally preferable, it is a moral duty. But, because we are all naturally equal under God's authority, this duty of preservation extends to all mankind as well.

Locke's development of equality, liberty and the duty of preservation are the bedrocks of his state of nature. None of these ideas makes sense isolated from the epistemological and moral thought developed in the *Essay*. Because God plays a central role in all these separate, but interconnected parts of Lockean philosophy, the state of nature itself is built on theistic foundations. Our capacity to know the natural laws, and the shape of those natural laws makes our natural condition one of peace. We exit the state of nature not out of necessity, but out of inconvenience. Furthermore, because the state of nature is not an undesirable place, we should not simply accept any alternative to living without a common power. Thus, while Hobbes can claim that living under a bad monarch is better than living under no monarch at all, Locke cannot. The limited nature of Lockean government is in part because we would only consent to a government that is better than the individual executive power that we have in the state of nature. Thus, it is not only Locke's state of nature, but also his notion of limited government that is built on theistic foundations.

God animates every part of Locke's philosophy. Thus, while Locke was a thinker whose ideas have played a vital role in shaping the development of liberalism, capitalism, and modernity itself, Locke himself cannot be understood to have been a conscious agent of the

secularization that has accompanied modernity. John Dunn suggests that Locke's philosophy is highly theological. He also suggests that because of this, Locke has limited value in today's pluralistic and secular world. This is debatable, but what is not debatable is the role that theism plays in shaping Lockean philosophy. If we are to understand Locke, and his disagreements with historical thinkers like Hobbes we must look to the theological foundations upon which his thought is built.

4.1 – Psychology versus reason as the Basis for Political Order

It is clear now that the differences between the Hobbesian and Lockean state of nature are rooted in theological differences. These differences range from the status of reason, the role of self-interest, the basis for political order, disagreements over whether the state of nature is a state of war, and why men ought to leave the state of nature. Ultimately, the theological differences between Hobbes and Locke render the Hobbesian state of nature an ethical vacuum, while the Lockean state of nature is still a place in which a knowable and obligatory law exists.

Specifically, this theological dispute at its core explains the different political implications of Hobbes's nominalist God versus Locke's more rationalistic and knowable God. This chapter will pull out some of the specific differences between Hobbes and Locke, and make clear how these differences are theologically grounded.

Firstly, Hobbes and Locke are forced to ground the legitimacy of their political theories in different sources. Hobbes is forced to ground political legitimacy in psychology, appealing to men's self-interest while Locke can ground political legitimacy in reason and our status as corporeal rational beings made in the image of God with knowable duties and obligations.

Hobbes grounds natural law in reason, just like Locke. However, Hobbes's conception of reason is different to that of Locke, and this changes the status of reason in his political thought. Hobbesian reason is rooted in the passions, and is an instrumental mode of reasoning that allows us to figure out the consequences of our actions. Hobbes does not conceive of reason as a force that allows man to access some independent or metaphysical realm of truth, it merely helps him put together "traynes" of thought that allow us to discover consequences. In this way, reason can help us uncover the law of nature, because reason can tell us what is and is not conducive to our self-preservation. But, this reasoning possesses no normative force. Our reason cannot give us moral obligations or commandments. While reason tells us what we ought to do to seek preservation and peace, namely give up our rights if others do the same, we cannot be compelled to do so. Thus, our consent to natural laws, especially the second natural law where we agree to give up our natural rights is rooted not in an obligation, but in an appeal to our self-interest. We can be convinced to give up our rights because it is conducive to our preservation, and thus our desires, but we cannot be compelled to do so because our reasoning has no moral weight.

This is rooted in Hobbes's nominalist theology. Hobbes's God is distant and unknowable, and his nominalism empties nature of any teleological end or purpose. Our passions and instincts, like everything else in nature possess no normative force, and natural knowledge of God and his will is impossible outside of revelation because of our limited and finite faculties. Thus, in our natural condition there is no moral force, no obligation, and no justice. The source of moral obligation is absent, and the only thing left for Hobbes to compel us to enter society is psychology. Our passions, specifically fear make us inclined to seek peace, but they do not force us to do so.

Lockean reason is very different, and allows us to build political legitimacy on reason because of what it tells us about our moral obligations. Because we can know of God's existence with certainty, and our obligations towards him, we have knowable and thus obligatory moral duties in our natural condition. These duties are obligatory because they are God's will, and we know that we are obliged to follow the will of God as the product of his workmanship. Furthermore, reason not only compels us to follow God's will, it tells us specifically of our duties to preserve ourselves and aid in the preservation of others. This leads to natural cooperation, which is rooted in a moral obligation. Furthermore, because we know that God wants us to follow his will, we know that virtue and happiness have been joined together. This means that our obligation to follow God's will is also in our self-interest.

Thus, Locke can build political legitimacy on a rational moral obligation, and does not have to appeal to self-interest and psychology to convince us to seek peace and leave the state of nature. This is all rooted in Locke's epistemological formulation of man as a creature with the capacity to know everything he needs to know how to live. This epistemology is rooted in a rationalistic and knowable God. We can know of this God and know of his will. Furthermore, we can trust God to have given us the faculties to discover our moral obligations, and to have ensured that the world was created in such a way that it would be in our self-interest to fulfil our moral obligations. Thus, reason is the basis for political legitimacy in Locke's thought because reason can create moral obligations. This is a fundamental difference between Hobbes and Locke, and it is ultimately rooted in different conceptions of God and man's ability to know God in the natural condition. This will become clearer shortly, as ultimately it means the Hobbesian state of nature is an ethical vacuum while the Lockean state of nature is a judicial condition.

4.2 – Self-interest versus the Duty of Preservation

Hobbesian psychology versus Lockean rationalism as the basis for political legitimacy leads to another important distinction between Hobbesian and Lockean political thought; self-interest versus the duty of preservation. Both Hobbes and Locke make preservation a central component of their political thought. But, the moral status of preservation means Hobbes and Locke build their doctrines of self-preservation very differently. For Hobbes self-preservation is simply a preference and is rooted in self-interest. For Locke, preservation is a moral duty that extends beyond oneself to the whole of mankind.

Hobbes paints a picture of human beings as passionate machines. The most fundamental and basic of these passions is fear. Specifically, all men fear violent death. This fear leads us to seek to avoid violent death, and preserve ourselves. Again, for Hobbes this desire for preservation and fear of death is not a normative fact about human beings. Thus, preservation for Hobbes is rooted solely in self-interest. We preserve ourselves because it is in our interests, and because preserving ourselves means we avoid violent death. Furthermore, our natural rights give us the right to do whatever is necessary to ensure our self-preservation, including harm others. Preservation for Hobbes is solely an individual concern, and the preservation or destruction of others is irrelevant unless it has consequences for our own preservation.

Again, because God is distant and unknowable, moral commandments are limited in the natural condition and we are left with nothing other than our own interests to guide us in our actions. Preservation forms the core of Hobbesian political doctrines because it is all that we are left with in the state of nature. While this is often mistaken as being a consequence of Hobbes's secular and naturalistic thought, it is instead a result of his theology.

Preservation plays a very different role in Locke's political thought. While preservation is the key to the laws of nature for both Hobbes and Locke, preservation is a moral commandment for Locke. As God's property, we do not have the right to destroy ourselves. We would also be unable to fulfil our commandments to God if we were dead, so we are required to preserve ourselves to fulfil our moral obligations. Furthermore, because we also desire preservation, and because this is a universal desire, we can know that preservation is God's will. Thus, preservation is the central doctrine of Lockean natural law. But, this applies not only to ourselves but to all other men as well. All men are equal and are all property of God. We are thus equally under God's authority. This means that our obligations towards God are identical and universal. God desires not only our own preservation, but the preservation of all men. The divine nature of our moral obligation of self-preservation and the equality of all men under God means that we owe obligations towards one another as well. We ought to endeavour to preserve others because of our obligations to God, and because of the relationship not only between ourselves and God, but between other men and God as well.

Locke's knowable God gives us intelligible and obligatory moral duties in the state of nature, even in the absence of a sovereign that can physically enforce laws. Furthermore, these obligations extend beyond ourselves to others as well because of the relationship between God and mankind, and not simply between God and ourselves. Hobbes's nominalism means that divine commandments are resistible, and thus not obligatory in the natural condition. Thus, while preservation is central to his conception of natural law as well, it is rooted solely in our preferences and passions, and carries no normative weight. Hobbes roots his doctrine of self-preservation in psychology out of necessity, and thus can only apply it at an individual level. Our desire for preservation applies only to ourselves and entails that we have natural rights that allow

us to harm others when necessary. Because preservation is a universal duty for Locke, it proscribes rules about what we cannot do to others. Unlike Hobbes, Locke's theology leads to a doctrine of preservation that does not necessarily make the natural condition a state of war.

4.3 – A State of War versus a State of Peace

This leads to another distinction between the Hobbesian and Lockean states of nature; the state of nature as a state of war, versus the state of nature as a state of peace. Once again, the different theological foundations of Hobbesian and Lockean political thought is the primary cause of this disagreement. Hobbes makes clear that man's natural condition is indistinguishable from a state of war. Because the state of nature is a condition in which there are no standards of right and wrong, and every man is equally entitled to do all that is necessary to ensure their own preservation, the natural condition almost instantaneously becomes a war of all against all. The state of nature is characterized by scarcity, which leads to competition for resources that leads men to quickly see others as enemies and rivals. Furthermore, diffidence and glory lead us into conflict even when there is no direct competition over scarce resources. On Hobbes's account, man is thrown into the state of nature, with natural faculties capable only of telling him what he needs to do to survive and avoid violent death. Our dependence on God and his will for guidance about moral obligations and duties means that his absence from the state of nature leaves very little to guide us in our actions and behaviour other than our own desires and passions. These passions lead us into direct conflict, and make everyone else a potential enemy.

Locke consciously distinguishes his state of nature from the Hobbesian version by making clear that his state of nature is one of "peace, mutual assistance, good will, and preservation" and is far from a state of war. Locke's explicit differentiation between Hobbes and

himself is only possible because his theological foundations allow him to construct a far more stable natural condition that is characterized by peace instead of war. Because men have knowable moral obligations to God and to one another, our natural condition is one where we are expected to and will cooperate with each other. A state of war only comes about when someone fails to follow the law of nature. Once again, this is because Locke's God is knowable and gives man intelligible moral duties and obligations that bind him even in the state of nature. This imposes limits on our actions, and restricts us from harming others. Hobbes is unable to build a state of nature doctrine that imposes these restrictions on man because his distant and absent God means that the state of nature has no force that makes the laws of nature obligatory. Man's only source of guidance in the state of nature, absent an irresistible force capable of enforcing natural laws are his own passions, and these passions lead us into conflict with one another.

This difference also explains why Hobbes and Locke offer different reasons why we leave the state of nature. For Hobbes, we leave the state of nature out of necessity. For Locke, we leave the state of nature because of its inconvenience. Because we all have the same fundamental passions and fears, we all fear violent death. Because of this, men can be convinced through reason that it is in their best interests to consent to give up their natural rights and accept the absolute authority of the sovereign. While this is rooted in consent, our departure from the state of nature is one we are forced into by necessity because this is the only way we can escape the natural condition in which the chances of a violent death are much higher. For Locke, our departure from the state of nature is because of the inconvenience of enforcing natural law ourselves. We are all bound to follow the laws of nature, but we are also bound to enforce the laws of nature when others do not follow them. In the state of nature executive authority to enforce natural law is decentralized and equally in the hands of every individual. Because this is

difficult we unite and consent to the creation of a sovereign that has the power and authority to enforce these natural laws. Because Locke's God gives us knowable obligations in the natural condition this stabilizes the state of nature and means that our departure from it is not to escape its horrors, but to fulfil God's will as it is revealed in the laws of nature. A sovereign makes it easier for us to fulfil our moral obligations to God because it makes the enforcement of the laws of nature easier, and makes it easier to acquire and hold property, making it much harder to go ignore or act contrary to God's will.

4.4 – The State of Nature as an Ethical Vacuum versus a Judicial Condition

This leads to the most fundamental distinction between Hobbes and Locke; the Hobbesian state of nature is an ethical vacuum, while the Lockean version is a condition in which we have knowable and binding moral obligations and duties. The preceding discussion has made it clear that the differences between Hobbes and Locke are primarily rooted in the fact that there is a knowable moral law that creates obligations and duties independent of a sovereign in Locke's thought, while the Hobbesian state of nature is a place where the lack of an irresistible force creates a condition in which there are no duties other than the subjective ones we have to ourselves. This is the central difference between Hobbes and Locke, and this disagreement is ultimately rooted in theological differences at the core of Hobbesian and Lockean thought.

Hobbes's nominalism shapes his understanding of natural law. Natural law is God's will. If it was not God's will, it would not be law and would simply be a theorem that tells us what is conducive to our appetites and aversions. Natural laws are simply because God's will, which is obligatory because it represents God's irresistible will. But, nominalism also renders the natural laws impotent in the state of nature. Recall that for Hobbes, obligation only exists when there is a

coercive power present to ensure that obligation is not optional. Nominalism strips God of coercive power in the natural condition because it makes God incomprehensible and distant. The incomprehensibility of God is affirmed numerous times in *Leviathan*. Because God is incomprehensible, it is impossible for man to know what God's will is in the state of nature. The theology laid out by Hobbes in the second half of *Leviathan* is an affirmation of this, as it builds a theology based solely on revelation. However, this is only possible after man has escaped the state of nature and there exist authorities that can correctly interpret revelation. In our natural condition knowledge of God is impossible, and God becomes an absent figurehead whose irresistibility is limited.

God's absence and incomprehensibility restricts his irresistibility in the state of nature. Man can ignore God's will. Our passions also make us more inclined to ignore God's will because the chief passion that drives us is fear, and we fear other men who we can sense, rather than God whom we cannot. There is nothing in the state of nature that can force man to obey the natural laws, all Hobbes can do is attempt to convince man that following the laws of nature are in his best interest. Even fear of divine punishment is not enough in the state of nature because knowledge of our eternal fate comes only through revelation, and thus is not possible in the state of nature. Thus, the state of nature is a moral and ethical vacuum. The passions and our status as equal beings give rise to our natural rights and render the state of nature a state of war. This state of war cannot be condemned as evil because there is no good, evil, justice, or injustice in the natural condition. God's absence means that the only potential coercive force in the state of nature is non-existent and thus the laws of nature are rendered impotent, reduced to "theorems" with no obligatory power. Men are free to do whatever they feel is necessary to ensure their own preservation and there is no standard by which men can be judged or condemned. Thus, the state

of nature is a state of war in which life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Nominalism is central to this understanding of the natural condition. Hobbesian voluntarism makes God's pure and irresistible will the only source of moral authority, while also making knowledge of God and his will impossible in the state of nature.

Locke's conception of God plays a vital role in shaping his epistemology which allows him to build a state of nature in which there is a knowable and obligatory law. While we cannot know everything, we can know what is necessary to know how we ought to live. This is because Locke believes there are certain things we can know with certainty, especially that there exists a God that wants us to follow his will and has given us the tools to do so. Furthermore, we can know that God made the world in such a way to ensure that our happiness and his will are in harmony, and not opposition with one another. This allows Locke to defend a type of theistic hedonism. Our desires and passions point to God's will for us and tell us about our moral duties. Locke's natural law doctrine is rooted in his theistic hedonism. Our most basic preference is for self-preservation. Thus, self-preservation is not only personally preferable, it is a moral duty. Our equality also gives us moral duties. Because we are all naturally equal under God's authority, this duty of preservation extends to all mankind as well.

Our capacity to know the natural laws, and the contents of those natural laws makes our natural condition one of peace. This is the key to Locke's state of nature; it is a judicial condition. Law exists in the natural condition, and we are bound because of our relationship with God to follow these laws. Thus, the state of nature is not an ethical vacuum for Locke, as it is for Hobbes. Locke builds his thought on a very specific understanding of God, one that is far more rational and knowable than Hobbes's distant nominalist God. Locke's God has already set man up for success in the natural condition. Locke does not conceive of man as being thrown into the

state of nature as an isolated figure incapable of knowing how he ought to live. Instead, man is placed in the state of nature as a moral and judicial animal, capable of knowing and following the duties God has placed upon him.

4.5 – Hobbes versus Locke as a Theological Dispute

The state of nature has remained an important idea in political philosophy. Both Montesquieu and Rousseau make use of it and it has remained an important doctrine in liberal thought, even today. The most significant political philosopher of the twentieth century, John Rawls, adapts the state of nature into a thought experiment he calls the ‘original condition’ and uses it to derive basic principles of justice. Thus, understanding its origins helps us understand the development of liberal thought since it first began to take shape in the early-modern era.

The state of nature is not simply a secular adaptation of the Biblical idea of an Edenic original condition. Instead, the state of nature itself is a highly theological proposition because it is shaped by theological claims about God and the created world. The differences between the Hobbesian and Lockean states of nature seem baffling when considered independent of the theological foundations that shaped them. If we want to truly understand the state of nature, we need to understand the premises and assumptions upon which the differing versions are built.

Hobbes and Locke conceive of God and the created world in very different ways. Influenced by the nominalist revolution in philosophy and theology, Hobbes builds the first major political system that attempts to explore the consequences of nominalism on political philosophy. Just as nominalism cripples natural theology, it darkens man’s political and existential situation. Man is thrown into the world and finds himself far away from a distant and arbitrary God whose will is unknowable and whose irresistible power is render impotent. The

darkness of Hobbesian political thought stands in stark contrast with the uniquely English pragmatic optimism of Lockean political thought. Locke's God is knowable, and gives man enough to make the state of nature a place where an intelligible and binding law exists. God does more than just play a complimentary role here. Instead, God is undeniably the central component in the Hobbesian and Lockean formulations of the state of nature. Thus, the dispute between Hobbes and Locke over the nature of man's original condition is not a purely political or philosophical disagreement, it is at its core a theological dispute.

5 – Conclusion

The central contention developed here is that the state of nature as understood by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke is a scenario built and fundamentally shaped by theological differences. Hobbes is heavily influenced by nominalism, and the Hobbesian God represents pure and irresistible will. This God is arbitrary, distant, and unknowable. Hobbes's state of nature reflects this. Hobbes's state of nature is an ethical vacuum. God is not reflected in the natural order and can only be understood through pure will and commandments. Hobbesian epistemology is built entirely on the senses, and Hobbes thinks that men fear other men more than God because men are "sensible," while God is not. This restricts God's will and the natural law in the state of nature. The absence of an enforceable natural law in the state of nature leads Hobbes to build his political philosophy not on reason, but on psychology and self-interest to escape a nasty and miserable war of all against all.

Locke's theology shapes his epistemology, developed in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. This epistemology sets out the limits of human knowledge, what we can know with certainty and what we can know only probabilistically. Through both the senses and

reflection man can know certain basic things. Man can know God exists, and can infer from this that the world has an order that man is a part of. Because God created man, we can infer that our knowledge can tell us how to live and how to live morally. Through his natural faculties man can discover the laws of nature, which exist in the state of nature. This law is not merely a psychological preference for self-preservation, but a duty to preserve all mankind. The existence of a knowable moral and natural law in the state of nature means it is not an ethical vacuum, and we leave it only because of the inconvenience of enforcing the natural laws ourselves.

This has important implications not only for our understanding of Hobbesian and Lockean political thought, but for our understanding of the development and origins of modern political thought itself. Standard narratives in the history of political thought see the early-modern period as a watershed moment in political thought because of its turn towards building political doctrines on secular, not religious or theological foundations. This has led us to understand thinkers like Hobbes and Locke as architects of the centuries long process of secularization that has succeeded in making much of the modern west ‘post-religious’ for the first time in human history.

It is a mistake to understand Hobbes and Locke this way. Far from being agents of secularization, Hobbes and Locke build political doctrines that are highly theological and inseparable from their theistic foundations. While their doctrines were radical and revolutionary, any secularization that resulted from their thought was unintentional. A new history of secularization is required to understand the origins of the secular revolution that has so radically transformed the way modern human being live in and understand the world. Furthermore, while modernity, liberalism and Christianity are commonly thought to be at best uncomfortable bedfellows, and at worst irreconcilable opponents, the ideological origins of modernity are in

fact inseparable from the Christianity that preceded it. Just as Christianity is a child of the Jewish culture in which it emerged and the Latinized world in which it spread, modernity and liberalism are direct descendants of the Christian world in which they were born. If this is true, then the universality of modernity and liberalism need to be challenged. If modernity and liberalism were born in a specific cultural and religious context, can they exist independent of it?

The theological foundations of Hobbesian and Lockean thought has one more important consequence. If the work of both Hobbes and Locke is theistic and even Christian at its core, then how relevant is it in our modern, pluralistic, and secular political and philosophical climate? Both Hobbes and Locke are still highly influential in political thought. One of the main appeals of Hobbesian political thought is its realism and ability to explain the human condition absent of religious claims and doctrines. But, Hobbesian doctrines of man and his relation to the natural world are still heavily shaped by theology, even if this theology creates space for secular and naturalistic philosophy because it opens a distance between man and God that can be filled with ideas not entirely dependent upon explicit theistic ideas. Furthermore, Hobbes is often seen as an early liberal thinker because of the emphasis he places on consent and his role within the social contract tradition. But, instead of being understood as a liberal political philosopher, Hobbes is more accurately described and best understood as a ‘nominalist political philosopher.’

Locke remains a key thinker in liberal thought, and his understanding of property rights and the idea of self-ownership are especially influential among many classical liberal and libertarian thinkers. An example would be Robert Nozick’s formidable response to John Rawls, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. But if Locke’s thought is highly theological, is it coherent without these foundations? If not, then much liberal thought is rendered groundless. Furthermore, while liberalism is often seen as an answer to the central problem of political life today, pluralism, does

its remarkable capacity to allow people of fundamentally different cultural, philosophical, and metaphysical beliefs to live together actually rest on a very specific religious and philosophical understanding of the world? If pluralism and tolerance are ultimately rooted in a specific understanding of God and the world, then the claims of metaphysical neutrality upon which much of liberalism depends become much more limited in scope.

If this is true, then Weber's claim that our ancestors lived in a "great enchanted garden" needs to be modified. While our ancestors may have lived consciously in an enchanted world dependent on something beyond itself, the garden we live in today is still an enchanted garden, but it is one haunted by the enchantment that lies beyond it. The secular age we live in may itself be a peculiar and uniquely religious phenomenon, inseparable from its theological foundations.

Bibliography

- Arsleff, Hans. "The state of nature and the nature of man in Locke." In *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, edited by John Yolton, 99-136. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Ashcraft, Richard. *Locke's Two Treatises of Government*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1987.
- Carre, Meyrick. *Realists and Nominalists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- Cooke, Paul. *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan*. London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996.
- Devine, Donald. "John Locke: His Harmony Between Liberty and Virtue." *Modern Age*. Vol. 22, no. 3 (Summer 1978), 246-257. http://www.mmisi.org/MA/22_03/devine.pdf
- Dunn, John. *Locke: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2003.
- Dunn, John. *The Political Thought of John Locke*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Forster, Greg. *John Locke's Politics of Moral Consensus*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Gillespie, Michael. *The Theological Origins of Modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by Richard Tuck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Hood, F.C. *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.
- Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Pauline Phemister. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Locke, John. *Political Essays*. Edited by Mark Goldie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Locke, John. *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Edited by I.T Ramsey. London: A&C Black Ltd, 1958.
- Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. Edited by Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

- Martinich, A.P. *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004.
- Newey, Glen. *Hobbes and Leviathan*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Oakeshott, Michael. *Hobbes on Civil Association*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1975.
- Pangle, Thomas. *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Strauss, Leo. *Natural Right and History*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1965.
- Strauss, Leo. *What is Political Philosophy?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Thornton, Helen. *State of Nature or Eden? Thomas Hobbes and His Contemporaries on the Natural Condition of Human Beings*. Woodbridge: University of Rochester Press, 2003.
- Tuck, Richard. "The Christian Atheism of Thomas Hobbes." In *Atheism from the Reformation to Enlightenment*, edited by Michael Hunter and David Wootton, 111-130. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1992.
- Tully, James. *A Discourse on Property: John Locke and his adversaries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Waldron, Jeremy. *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Warrender, Howard. *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957.
- Zuckert, Michael. "An Introduction to Locke's First Treatise." *Interpretation*. Vol. 8, no. 1 (January 1979), 58-74. http://www.interpretationjournal.com/backissues/Vol_8-1.pdf