

## Introduction

This study is an effort to demonstrate John Locke's central place and important role in the development of the collection of philosophical, social, political, and theological ideas broadly defined as modernity. As an intellectual phenomenon, modernity is characterized both by what is not, that is in contradistinction to the pre-modern period, and by its constitutive aspect as the body of beliefs, principles, and attitudes toward human life that have dominated western civilization since the seventeenth century arguably through to our own time. The central question then animating this book is to what extent, if any, did Locke's thought contribute to the creation of the world we know.

Admittedly, this is a task that presents several daunting interpretive challenges. First, there is by no means consensus among Locke scholars that he even has any place among the ranks of seminal thinkers of modernity. Most notably, John Dunn established an influential line of interpretation nearly forty years ago when he insisted that he "simply cannot conceive of constructing an analysis of any issue in contemporary political theory around the affirmation or negation of anything Locke says about political matters."<sup>1</sup> For Dunn, as for many commentators who followed in his wake, Locke was not an apostle of modernity, but rather a somewhat forlorn figure marooned between a disintegrating Christian natural law tradition

<sup>1</sup> John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. x. While Dunn subsequently softened this claim somewhat, he has repeated the basic thrust of this judgment as recently as 2003. See John Dunn, "What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Political Theory of John Locke?" in *Interpreting Political Responsibility: Essays 1981–89* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) and "Measuring Locke's Shadow," in *Two Treatises and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, Ian Shapiro, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 257–285, esp. 271–272.

on the one hand and the emerging wave of secular modernity, the central antitheological tenets of which he could never subscribe to, on the other.<sup>2</sup> A more recent iteration of this interpretation can be seen in Jonathan Israel's magisterial works on Enlightenment philosophy. In Israel's view, Locke was an "essentially conservative" thinker whose body of work on a variety of subjects ranging from religious toleration, gender equality, and constitutional government represents a rejection of the democratic principles of radical modernity championed by Spinoza and others, who are the true heroic founders of modernity.<sup>3</sup> According to Dunn and Israel, any attempt to locate Locke among the central intellectual figures of modernity is simply an example of historical and philosophical naïveté.

On the other end of the interpretive spectrum, a very different set of difficulties arises from the ideologically charged nature of Locke scholarship since the 1960s. Over the years, Locke has often been wrenched from Dunn and Israel's dustbin of history by a different group of scholars who have made him serve as mentor or foil for the current preoccupations in contemporary political theory. Libertarian, communitarian, socialist, feminist, and postcolonial theorists, as well as the legion of combatants in the interpretive wars over the ideological meaning of the American Founding, have all to varying degrees made Locke a central figure in their analysis in recent decades. Whether cast as hero or villain, there has long been the suspicion that the spirit and substance of Locke's authentic political and philosophical teaching has too often been sacrificed to the theoretical requirements posed by contemporary concerns that Locke did not share. That is to say, if contemporary political theorists did not have Locke to serve as the touchstone for our anxieties about liberalism, they would have had to invent him. Or perhaps, Dunn might observe, they frequently have.

The third, and in some respects most daunting, challenge facing any attempt to demonstrate Locke's seminal role in the creation of modernity arises from the complexity and broad scope of Locke's body of work. Locke

<sup>2</sup> Dunn, "Measuring Locke's Shadow," 271, 278. Waldron shares Dunn's assumption about the centrality of Locke's theological commitments to his political theory, and thus agrees that Locke approached political and moral questions from a perspective very different from secular modernity. However, unlike Dunn, Waldron also sees much that is radical about Locke's commitment to equality (Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002]).

<sup>3</sup> See Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 259–269 and *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 57–58.

was a prolific writer whose published works reflected a prodigious variety of philosophic interests including epistemology, natural science, moral philosophy, educational theory, political theory, and theology. This range of interests has even led some distinguished commentators to question whether Locke's thought reflects a single unified and coherent philosophy, as opposed to a series of disjointed or contradictory intellectual commitments.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, many scholars who have strived to illuminate Locke's influence on the formation of modernity have understandably tended to focus their analysis on one or a few aspects of Locke's thought. In recent years, this research has produced many important specialized studies into a given dimension of Locke's modern project such as his individualistic philosophy,<sup>5</sup> his innovative educational theory,<sup>6</sup> his rational theology and teaching on toleration,<sup>7</sup> or the democratic foundations of his political theory.<sup>8</sup> However, when dealing with a concept as capacious as modernity and a thinker as wide ranging as Locke, it is perhaps inevitable that this approach will leave the answer to the larger question of Locke's role in modernity somewhat incomplete.

While recognizing the interpretive challenges outlined, it is nonetheless the contention of this study that Locke is a seminal thinker in the making of modernity. I aim to demonstrate that his vision of modern life

- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, Peter Laslett's assessment in the "Introductory Essay" to John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 82–86 and P. J. Crittenden, "Thoughts about Locke's Thoughts about Education" *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, 15, 2 (1981), p. 157.
- <sup>5</sup> For example, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 159–176; Michael Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), chs. 8–9; and 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).
- <sup>6</sup> See Peter A. Schouls, *Reasoned Freedom: Locke and Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) and Nathan Tarcov, *Locke's Education for Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- <sup>7</sup> For Locke's rational theology, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Greg Forster, *John Locke's Politics of Moral Consensus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and for his argument for toleration, see John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion, and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Richard Vernon, *The Career of Toleration: John Locke, Jonas Proast and after* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).
- <sup>8</sup> See Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) and Ian Shapiro, "John Locke's Democratic Theory," in *Two Treatises and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, Ian Shapiro, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 309–340, esp. 309–311.

was constructed on the foundation of a unified and coherent philosophy of human freedom that provides the intellectual nerve connecting the various strands of Locke's mature writings. The core principles in Locke's philosophy of freedom derive from his assessment of the intellectual properties and rational capacities of the individual human mind. This was what we will call the "democratization of mind" that marked Locke's most significant contribution to modernity. The democratization of mind represents Locke's confidence that the essence of human freedom lay in the individual's ability to acquire knowledge and construct meaningful identities from the intellectual materials made available to mind through sensation and reflection. Locke's vision of modernity challenged practically every previous mode of philosophical analysis by making the autonomous individual freed from the weight of tradition, custom, and conventional inequality, the sole determinant of truth. The democratization of mind supplied Locke with the basis for refashioning a new, distinctly modern definition of philosophy deeply impacted by the empirical scientific method, which rejected what Locke took to be the misguided metaphysical pretensions characterizing philosophy in both its traditional scholastic form and the system-building aspirations of modern scientific naturalism *à la* Spinoza. The profoundly democratic character of this reorientation of philosophy toward the individual as a primary unit of analysis derived from Locke's conclusion that the epistemic capacities grounding human freedom and the acquisition of knowledge about the most important moral, ethical, and theological matters were distributed in an emphatically egalitarian manner across humankind. For Locke, modernity is inseparable from the discovery of this new mental world of human understanding, a hitherto scarcely observed terrain of interiority and subjectivity from which a new conception of freedom in the phenomenal realm would ultimately emerge.

The depth of Locke's commitment to the modern project, that is to say to the replacement of the vast intellectual inheritance of pre-modernity with a radically new dispensation, can be measured by the range and scope of his philosophical inquiry. To understand Locke's contribution to modernity simply in terms of his political philosophy is, however, to limit his impact considerably. For Locke, modernity involved, and indeed required, the critical examination of practically every authoritative institution in modern life including not only government, but also crucially the churches, the family, educational methods, and the conduct of international relations. The variety of Locke's philosophical interests was not then simply adventitious or driven by the exigencies of his immediate historical context. Rather the range of Locke's thought and writings reflected what he took to be the

most important theoretical and practical imperatives confronting philosophy in the early-modern period. The *ancien régime* at the core of traditional European culture in Locke's age rested on certain venerable assumptions about the naturalness and intrinsic goodness of the hierarchical relationship between God and humanity, men and women, kings and subjects, fathers and children, as well as a set of deeply entrenched beliefs about the sacred character of ecclesiastical and civil power.<sup>9</sup> In pre-modernity, the individual as such was unintelligible as a meaningful political or social agent independent of one's proper place in the organic structure of society mirroring the cosmic order. In order to deracinate the complex web of hierarchical and traditional relations that characterized pre-modern life, Locke examined and reformulated authoritative institutions and rules that governed these relations under the searing light of reason and the principle of human freedom.

A major part of the conceptual difficulty facing any effort to understand Locke's contribution to modernity lies in the complex philosophical implications flowing out of the democratization of mind. Thus it is important from the outset to clarify one of the central interpretive techniques that will be employed for analyzing Locke in the present study. With the democratization of mind, Locke proposed new principles of intelligibility to replace the traditional paradigms of knowledge. These two principles are broadly analogous to rationalism and empiricism. The rational model will be identified as the *eidetic* approach, according to which Locke examined the institutions in modern life on the basis of their intellectual properties as ideas. As complex ideas, these institutions and practices derive one vital element of their intelligibility from the internal mechanics of human understanding. Central to Locke's idea of human freedom is the capacity to intellectualize phenomena in terms of ideas. However, Locke's version of idealism based on the logical agreement of composite ideas differs profoundly from the classical conception of the forms in that Locke rejected the cognitive connection between the human subject and an extrinsic intellectual, moral, or spiritual end, or *telos*. This connection was, of course, integral to the pre-modern confidence in natural and cosmic order. For Locke, the intelligibility inhering in any idea, whether it is government, the church, or individual rights, derives from the constructive capacities of human reason and not from an intrinsic connection to external reality. Thus human beings are

<sup>9</sup> Although Israel incorrectly excludes Locke from the ranks of the enlighteners, he does provide a solid account of the attitudes, theories, and beliefs that characterized pre-modern life (see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, vi).

capable of acquiring a true idea of government, the church, or individual rights because, in principle, the intellectual materials from which we can deduce a coherent, noncontradictory definition of these institutions and concepts are available to our minds as ideas.

However, the second principle of intelligibility for Locke relates to how things actually come to be in the world. In this regard, Locke also employs what we will call a *genetic* approach to philosophical analysis, which is characterized by empirical observation in a natural historical method. For Locke, the deepest source of complexity confronting political philosophy is the need to combine the eidetic and genetic modes of analysis, the being and becoming, as it were. For instance, comparing the idea of government or the church with the way in which governments and churches have come to be and developed in history may (and Locke believes typically do) display a radical disjunction between the true meaning of the word we use to identify an idea and the observable properties of the actual thing itself. The genetic dimension in Locke's philosophy has likely been the cause of giving it an appearance of conservatism to Israel, Dunn, and others. However, it is vital to recognize that Locke's inclusion of biological, sociological, economic, and political constraints on the actualization of ideas as factors for philosophical consideration is neither simply an unfortunate compromise with reality, nor does it signify a natural default position of conservatism in Locke's thought. Rather the progressive character of Locke's commitment to modernity lay precisely in his effort to combine observation about what is and has been with a philosophically rigorous effort to provide a normative demonstration of what by right should be. Thus in the complex interplay of distinct modes of reasoning, Locke's eidetic accounts of the state of nature, constitutional government, or the purely voluntary church stand as a measure of the legitimacy of actual churches, governments or individual rights claims in the world.

At this point it is important to indicate a few major elements of the methodology employed in this study. First, the focus is exclusively on Locke's mature works, by which is meant the body of Locke's writings published or completed between 1689 and his death in 1704, including the *Two Treatises of Government*, the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, as well as the many subsequent editions and seemingly endless polemical controversies that followed the publication of the *Essay*, the *Letter*, and the *Reasonableness*. This study is not an analysis of the development of Locke's thinking on topics spanning his earliest to his latest writings. While such projects can

be highly illuminating with respect to Locke's intellectual career, this is not the focus of the present study.<sup>10</sup> Our aim rather is to demonstrate the unified and coherent philosophy linking the diverse topics considered in Locke's mature writings. Indeed, one of the chief ambitions of this study is to move beyond a specialized examination of a single aspect of Locke's thought and rather try to elucidate in a comprehensive and integrative way the full range of Locke's vision of modernity as he presented it in his mature works. For this reason, the object of our analysis is Locke's contribution to the formation of modern life broadly conceived rather than Locke's philosophy or political theory strictly speaking. When Locke contemplated the range of institutions and authoritative principles in his time that required transformation, he did not operate under the same disciplinary constraints academics typically do today. He boldly and irreverently cast his gaze upon matters of philosophy, religion, science, education, and politics that extended beyond political theory as normally practiced in our time. In order to appreciate Locke's vision of modernity, it is necessary then to follow his tracks into the manifold social relations that were altered profoundly in the transition from pre-modern to modern life. Indeed, one of the signal characteristics of Locke's modern project was his willingness to challenge authoritative conceptions of institutions like monarchy, the churches, the family, and education that had remained fundamentally unchanged for centuries.

A second important methodological point has to do with the connection between our analysis of Locke's texts and the overarching purpose of the present study. Why is it important to identify Locke's role in the creation of modernity? Or to put it differently, why does it matter *pace* Dunn and Israel to read Locke back into modernity and enlightenment philosophy? On the immediate level, the answer is self-evident. An inaccurate account of a complex phenomenon such as the origin of modernity or of a prominent thinker such as Locke is problematic in itself. It can lead to a misunderstanding of formative influences on later thinkers and philosophical movements and thus produce a ripple effect impacting our reading of the history of political thought more broadly. To the extent that studying intellectual history or the major figures of political philosophy remains a valuable exercise for contemporary scholars, the onus is on serious scholarship to be accurate and faithful to the sense and spirit of its subject. On a deeper level, however, there is more at stake than simply our degree of understanding one

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, the remarkable account of the complex development of Locke's thought on toleration in Marshall, *John Locke*, chs. 1–4.

particular thinker. Despite the great variety of opinions and interpretations among Locke scholars on a host of aspects of his thought, one conclusion reached by friend and foe alike is that Locke has, for better or worse, become the canonical figure of classical liberalism in the English-speaking world. This explains Locke's centrality to continuing debates over the American Founding, as well as his frequent appearances in the past clad in the garb of the Cold Warrior stoutly exemplifying or caricaturing the bourgeois culture of liberalism militant. However, since the collapse of Soviet communism and the resulting dramatic contraction of the ideological political spectrum in the West, Locke has, if anything, become an even more salient presence among practitioners of contemporary political theory reduced to having little left to do but highlight ever more refined strands of differentiation within the broad orbit of liberalism – that is, to say ever more and more about less and less. If since the end of the Cold War we are all liberals, then the suspicion is that in some sense we are all Lockean now. But needless to say, ideological consolidation hardly eliminates the sources of controversy and debate; indeed, divisions within liberalism previously suppressed by the threat of viable ideological alternatives promise to assume new significance in liberalism triumphant.

It is in this sense that Locke's role in the creation of modernity bears directly on the methodology of this study. Our treatments of Locke's examination of the most important institutions of his time will include reflection upon issues with palpable contemporary resonance. Whether it be the basis of individual rights claims vis-à-vis the government and community, the tension between executive power and rule of law, the reform of education, greater equality of men and women, the value of religious pluralism, or the ethics of humanitarian intervention in international relations, we will see in Locke's thought issues and concerns familiar to us. However, it is not my intention either to inject Locke into contemporary debates that were not his concern or to read modernity back into Locke by exaggerating the importance of trace amounts of contemporary issues unearthed with difficulty from Locke's texts. Rather our analysis means to show that Locke's influence on modernity was so pervasive that many, although certainly not all, matters that were of philosophic import to him continue to matter to us today. Moreover, the evidence to support this claim derives exclusively and directly from the texts of Locke's mature writings. In order to keep our analysis consistent with authentic Lockean concerns, this study will avoid elaborate theoretical reconstructions of Locke's philosophical principles designed to make Locke fit by analogy with the theoretical requirements of

current debates.<sup>11</sup> While such reconstructions can be very insightful treatments of contemporary issues, it is my aim to remain as closely wedded to the texture, tone, and substance of Locke's thought as possible. For our purposes, the burden of proof for demonstrating Locke's importance in the making of modernity must lie exclusively in Locke's texts and the practical issues and theoretical concerns that animated him.

Ever mindful of the dangers and seductions of historical naïveté and ideological self-congratulations, the present study hopes to demonstrate that Locke's vision of modernity bore a considerable resemblance to most liberal societies today. Locke would see much in our world familiar to his thoughts, if not to the immediate reality of his time. There is thus in this study an implicit promise that contemporary liberals may understand ourselves more fully by reflecting on one of the most influential philosophical architects of the modern world. However, it is by virtue of this very process of self-reflection that contemporary students of liberalism should be made aware of the several important issues, especially regarding theology, toleration, political equality, and the basis of moral knowledge, about which Locke reached philosophical conclusions and devised political prescriptions with which many of our contemporaries may be uncomfortable and even profoundly disagree. The historical Locke who helped preside over the birth of modernity is capable of both exciting and disappointing the modern political imagination he did so much to create.

The design of this book is intended to integrate the major elements of Locke's mature works initially in the general framework of his philosophy of freedom, and then to consider Locke's critical examination of the key institutions of modern life. As such, Chapters 1 and 2 begin with a focus on the intellectual foundations of Locke's philosophy of freedom. Chapter 1 elaborates the democratization of mind, which supplies the conceptual apparatus for understanding the epistemological principles underlying the various aspects of Locke's modern project. This chapter demonstrates the fundamental importance involved in appreciating the crucial role Locke's epistemological principles played in his political theory by locating the

<sup>11</sup> There are a number of important contemporary issues in liberal societies, such as environmentalism, multiculturalism, and the biotech revolution, that simply were not matters of direct concern for Locke and thus would not be accessible to evaluation through Locke's principles except by means of theoretical reconstruction. These modern, or perhaps post-modern, issues will not be addressed in the present volume. For an example of how a "theoretical reconstruction" approach to Locke can make a good contribution to issues in contemporary democratic theory, see Alex Tuckness, *Locke and the Legislative Point of View* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in its proper intellectual and historical context. Locke set his individualistic theory of knowledge against the prevailing metaphysical tendencies dominating early-modern philosophy in both its traditional scholastic and more recent modern materialist form. The fundamental theoretical goal of Locke's epistemology was to radically transform the definition of the proper scope and procedures of philosophical activity. As such, Locke's rejection of the doctrine of innate ideas and its replacement with an egalitarian conception of ideas as the products solely of sensation and reflection by the human mind challenged the regnant paradigms of knowledge acquisition.

To Locke's mind, neither mechanistic philosophy nor dogmatic innatism could account for the demonstrable freedom inhering in human understanding. Rather human liberty derived from the self-directed mental activity of rational individuals supplied relatively equally with the natural capacities and intellectual materials necessary to exercise judgment in relative freedom from the influence of ephemeral desires or prescribed mental habits. On this basis, we will examine Locke's claim that moral knowledge – the kind of knowledge he believed was most important for human life – is capable of demonstrative certainty, and will argue that after considering Locke's treatment of the ambiguous status of human knowledge about key moral concepts such as soul and the existence of God, it becomes apparent that the democratization of mind involved Locke's conclusion that there is a variety of modes of moral reasoning available to human understanding. In Locke's new philosophical rubric, these various modes of moral reasoning, including both knowledge and probability, culminate in both a theistic and a secular formulation of the grounds of morality. It is this multifarious conception of the modes of individual moral judgment that Locke employs throughout his major works in critical examination of the most authoritative institutions of modern life.

Chapter 2 continues the task of exploring the eidetic foundations of Locke's political philosophy by turning to perhaps the most celebrated theoretical postulation in his entire corpus, namely the state of nature. The pre-civil state of nature presented in the *Second Treatise of Government* serves as both Locke's explanation for the origin of political society, as well as the testing ground for his conclusions about the rational individual's capacity to form moral judgments independently of authoritative political, social, and religious institutions. Our analysis will focus on the profoundly individualistic implications Locke derived from his theory of the natural punishment right, according to which every individual in the state of nature, being free and equal, is thus morally authorized to execute the law