

6-2013

John Locke and the Creation of Liberal Subjects

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Acknowledgements

I would not have completed this thesis without the support and encouragement of several individuals. My adviser, Professor John Baltes, has been an engaged and inspiring mentor. His critical feedback vastly improved the rigor of my arguments, while his consistent, friendly responsiveness to all of my questions and concerns kept me excited about the project from its hesitant beginnings all the way through to its eventual completion. I could not have asked for a better advisor.

I would also like to thank Professors John Lombardini and Elizabeth Radcliffe for serving on my committee and providing me with feedback. I especially appreciate the former's willingness to discuss Aristotle, Foucault, and everything in between with me. My knowledge of the history of political thought has benefited immensely from his guidance. I am particularly indebted to Professor Radcliffe for her thoughtful comments on my interpretation of Locke's epistemology.

Finally, I would like to thank my friend Henry Ware for spurring my interest in Foucault and encouraging me to undertake an honors thesis. Without that small glimmer of inspiration, this project would not have come to fruition.

John Locke and the Creation of Liberal Subjects

“Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct. If we can find out those Measures, whereby a rational Creature put in that State, which Man is in, in this World, may, and *ought* [emphasis added] to govern his Opinions and Actions depending thereon, we need not be troubled, that some other things escape our Knowledge” – John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

“...of all the men we meet with, Nine Parts of Ten are what they are, Good or Evil, useful or not, by their Education.” – John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*

The epistemology formulated by John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* establishes the individual as acutely responsive to external factors. By rejecting the possibility of innate ideas and emphasizing the limits of human knowledge, Locke creates a conception of the self in which one’s putative individual identity is almost entirely the product of particular social conditions. The “truths” that men take to be natural and self-evident are in fact little more than the product of the social contexts in which they find themselves, received wisdom that is implanted in their minds at a young age and thus goes unquestioned.

However, while Locke devotes much of the *Essay* to demonstrating how little we can know with any degree of certainty, he also recognizes that there are certain natural tendencies in all humans: “Nature, I confess, has put into Man a desire of Happiness, and an aversion to Misery.” These “inclinations to appetite” are what

determine our conduct, as they “continue constantly to operate and influence all our Actions, without ceasing.”¹

This distinctive combination of epistemological skepticism and hedonism results in a Lockean subject that is not just malleable, but also understood to be motivated by natural, continuously present impulses of pleasure and pain. Locke is not only aware of the extent to which subjects are shaped by the contingency of their surroundings; he also identifies the most effective *means* by which this shaping can be achieved.

Much of Locke’s mature thought is given over to his grappling with the implications of this idea of the self for politics and education. James Tully has argued² that Locke began the *Essay* with the hope of demonstrating that while there are limits to indubitable human knowledge, we can be satisfied with probabilistic reasoning as “sufficient to govern all of our concernments” (E 1.1.5). In attacking innate and dispositional theories of the mind (which hold that we possess “either innate ideas or innate dispositions that predispose us to assent to the true or the good and dissent from the false or evil,”³) he sought to clear the way for his competing understanding of how beliefs are formed.

In this conception, belief is not the product of some natural internal tendency that inclines us towards the “truth,” but rather is determined by an examination of

¹ John Locke and P.H. Nidditch, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Book 1, Chapter 3, Section 3. Subsequent references to the *Essay* will be parenthetical and in the form of, for example, E 1.3.3.

² James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1993). This argument unfolds over the course of the chapter entitled “Governing Conduct: Locke on the Reform of Thought and Behavior,” 179-241.

³ *Ibid.*, 185.

the likelihood of external phenomena. One judges the truth or falsity of a given proposition according to the criteria of probability: is it consistent with what we have already experienced, and with the testimony of others?⁴ These are what Tully calls “the new mechanical properties, the ‘weight’ of the evidence and the ‘force’ of the argument.”⁵ As Locke puts it, “a man, who has weighed them, can scarce refuse his assent to the side on which the greater probability appears” (E 4.20.15). Thus, we are in a sense compelled to give our assent to the most probable “side”; the use of the heuristic of probabilistic reasoning is deterministic, in that it inevitably leads to a consensus regarding what is believed to be true.⁶

And yet much of the *Essay* finds Locke making arguments that directly undercut this mechanistic theory of assent. He asserts that it is “the nature of the understanding to close with the more probable side” (E 4.20.12), but then concedes that there are those “who, even where the real Probabilities appear, and are plainly laid before them,” give their assent “to the less probable Opinion” (E 4.20.7). In these instances, individuals are not swayed by the force and weight of rational arguments, but instead form their beliefs on the basis of non-rational factors such as passion, custom, and authority.⁷ The psychological and epistemological analyses that Locke advances over the course of the *Essay* not only rip the carpet out from under innate and dispositional theories of subjectivity; they also have the same effect on rationalistic conceptions of subjectivity. The subject that emerges from the

⁴ Ibid., 194.

⁵ Ibid., 195.

⁶ Tully sees this consensus as the fulfillment of “an important Enlightenment ideal” that “once our beliefs are carefully examined in the light of rational criteria, we will come to agree” (Ibid.,198).

⁷ Ibid., 199.

Essay is one whose beliefs and conduct are determined by arbitrary and contingent forces. Locke attempts to develop a means of transcending this fact, but ultimately this effort, too, is rendered futile by his own analysis. The sheer force of his radical skepticism leads him to a notion of the self that clashes with the model of detached rationality that he initially sought to champion, forcing him to reevaluate the manner by which subjects may be led to govern themselves in a “rational” manner.

The methods that he develops for this purpose reveal the degree to which the proto-liberal institutions that Locke is famous for devising are dependent upon a form of subjectivity that is radically different from the autonomous liberal subjectivity that these institutions are often associated with. By analyzing his writings on education from this perspective, I hope to convey a Locke quite different from the traditional interpretation. My Locke is attuned to the powerful role played by contingent forces in the formation of subjects, and is interested in developing systematic ways of using those forces to construct certain kinds of subjects. To better grasp the nature of *this* Locke, we must first turn to his account of the mind.

The Mind

Locke famously devotes the entirety of Book I of the *Essay* to attacking the notion of innate principles, ideas “stamped onto the minds of men” at birth. John Baltes, Mark Button, and Tully, among others, have framed this intellectual assault as one deliberately designed to challenge the legitimacy of established bases of power.⁸ The notion that some ideas are innate can be a particularly effective tool for

⁸ Ibid., 189-92; Mark E. Button, *Contract, Culture, and Citizenship: Transformative Liberalism from Hobbes to Rawls* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 142;

legitimatizing authority, in that it allows factors that are contingent on custom appear to be universal and immutable.⁹ In doing so, they bestow a level of perceived certainty upon prevailing local beliefs. Such certainty can then be used to justify the use of power to enforce such beliefs: if there are unwavering truths that we naturally assent to, then it follows that those who deviate from these truths have taken “the wrong path,” that their minds are in some sense malfunctioning, and thus that they can be rightfully forced to submit to authorities that will guide them back to the proper path. In dispelling the very possibility of innate ideas, Locke robs such arguments of their force, revealing that the foundation of supposed certainty that justifies established social authority in 17th century England as nothing more than the product of circumstance.¹⁰ Consequently, the task of valorizing one’s personal beliefs as universal truths was suddenly made quite a bit more difficult.

However, this is not Locke’s sole purpose in opening the *Essay* with an extended demolition of innate ideas. His argument not only undermines political and religious authority, but also suggests a particular conception of the way in which the human mind works: if we are born with no ideas in our minds, then what is the source of our knowledge? By cutting through the metaphysical haze that propped up theories of innate ideas, Locke’s critique in Book I opens the door for the empiricist account of the mind that he develops over the course of the remainder of the *Essay*.

John Baltes, “The ‘Empire of Habit:’ John Locke, Discipline, and The Origins of Liberalism, ” 2012, 12-13.

⁹ Button, *Contract*, 142.

¹⁰ Tully, *Approach*, 195-96.

For Locke, “knowledge is the perception of the agreement or disagreement of two ideas...where this perception is, there is knowledge, and where it is not...we always come up short of knowledge” (E 4.1.2). Thus, knowledge is predicated upon internal coherence. To “know” something is to be aware that it fits within a set of established rules. Knowledge does not involve some sort of direct contact with the “real”; the mind and the substances that are external to it are ineluctably separate. According to Locke’s epistemology, a phrase like “certain knowledge of real existence” is simply nonsensical. The realm of what constitutes real existence does not overlap with the realm of what humans can know with any certainty.

The upshot of this skeptical epistemology is that to the extent that we can know anything, we owe that knowledge to our ideas. Locke’s memorable description of the mind as “white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*” is intended to give us a clear image of this connection between knowledge and ideas. In the absence of ideas, the mind has no knowledge. It is only after ideas are perceived, after they are *experienced*, that the notion of acquiring knowledge even makes sense, because it is only then that there can be any agreement or disagreement between them. Experience is the source of all human knowledge, and Locke splits it into two categories: sensation and reflection. All that we can know is built off of these two modes of perception (E. 2.1.2).

Sensation refers to the process through which “*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*” (E 2.1.3); in short, sensory perception. The concepts Locke is dealing with here are

quite straightforward: external stimuli, processed through our five senses, provide the raw data, or as Locke calls them, “simple ideas,” that provide the foundation of what we refer to as our knowledge. It is important to stress that these simple ideas are merely perceptions of external phenomena, and that such perceptions in no way imply any sort of contact between the mind and the phenomena themselves. Our senses function as mediators between the mind and phenomena, and the products of these mediations are simple ideas.

Reflection, conversely, refers to the “*Perception of the Operations of our Minds* within us, as it is employ’d about the *Ideas* it has got” (E. 2.1.4). It is through reflection that we are able to grasp what is going on *inside of* our own minds, including concepts like reasoning and knowing. Locke characterizes reflection as “internal sense,” suggesting that it is fundamentally similar to sensation: we are observing ideas *within* ourselves in the same way we observe them from external sources.

The simple ideas that we observe by way of these two “Fountains of Knowledge” are then combined, mixed, and matched by our minds to create different forms of knowledge. Armed with these perceptions, we are able to “repeat, compare, and unite them even to an almost infinite Variety, and so can make at Pleasure new complex *Ideas*” (E 2.2.2). Locke’s description of mental activity is one in which the mind passively receives “Impressions,” which it then actively makes sense of by combining them, relating them to each other, or separating them by way of abstraction (E 2.12.1). This work of comparing and contrasting impressions is heterogeneous, in that each of us goes about doing it in a different way.

Empirical knowledge, then, does not refer to some sort of fixed point upon which our minds will all converge. It is variable from person to person, dependent upon the idiosyncrasies of our individual methods of combining perceptions. So while Locke attempts to downplay the extent of the power wielded by our minds when he states that it “reaches no farther than to compound and divide the materials that are made to his hand” (E 2.2.2), his analysis nevertheless produces a radically fragmentized and atomized understanding of knowledge. The extent of our knowledge may be limited to within the bounds of whatever simple ideas we have happened to perceive, but within those bounds we have the ability to create “an almost infinite Variety” of individualized combinations, and these combinations constitute our knowledge.

Locke calls “mixed modes” those combinations of simple ideas that are “put together to make one complex one,” such as beauty, which describes “a certain composition of color and figure, causing delight to the beholder,” as one distinct notion (E 2.12.5). Such concepts are dependent on context, emerging and then disappearing in accordance with “the several Fashions, Customs, and Manners” of a nation (E 2.12.6). Mixed modes exist to the degree that they are useful, and because the utility of a term hinges upon the social context in which it is used, it follows that this context will determine which mixed modes come into use.¹¹ As a result, even when the mind is actively combining sensory information to form complex ideas, its reach is still bounded by external factors, in that the manner by which it *goes about* combining ideas is the result of contingent and variable cultural factors. The manner

¹¹ Baltes, “Empire,” 19.

by which we make sense of the sensory data that we have passively absorbed is not in fact a bonanza of individualized creativity, but rather is heavily dependent on the norms of our societies. The prevailing methods by which we combine our impressions are determined by the needs of the distinct intersection of time and place at which we find ourselves. Thus, while we all construct meaning through the same technique of combining the simple ideas that we have perceived, the meaning that we construct is at the mercy of convention. Locke's epistemology anticipates Michel Foucault's observation that knowledge exists only as a construct of power,¹² in that it reveals how the social dynamics of a community determine how its individual members combine simple ideas to form knowledge.

Crucially, Locke goes on to state that morality is a mixed mode (E 4.4.7). This would seem to lead him down the path to relativism; if mixed modes are constructs that vary according to time and place, and morality is no different, then moral truths are themselves context dependent. Indeed, in his attack on innate ideas, Locke notes, "there is scarce that Principle of Morality to be named...which is not, somewhere or other, *slighted* and condemned by the general fashion of *whole societies* of Men" (E 1.3.10). His purpose in that quote is to demonstrate that if entire societies indulge in practices contrary to supposedly innate principles, than those principles might not be so innate after all. When read in accordance with his discussion of mixed modes, however, it can seem to suggest that Locke was no less than a predecessor to modern day social constructivists, attuned to the manner by which communities develop intersubjective truths.

¹² Michel Foucault and Colin Gordon, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

Locke is neither a relativist nor a constructivist, however. He is a committed theist and natural law theorist who believes that the will of God is an objective moral standard by which all humans should judge their actions (E 1.3.6). All of Locke's views regarding morality and politics are built off of this deeply religious ontology. While the divinely enforced law of nature may not be innate, this does not mean that it isn't in fact the *correct* moral criterion by which we should govern ourselves. Locke has very specific beliefs regarding how we should conduct ourselves, but the epistemology that he develops in the *Essay* threatens the ontological foundation that provides the basis for this normative prescription. His highly skeptical analysis of the limits of human knowledge directly undercuts the veneer of certainty that is so crucial to his understanding of what constitutes moral behavior.

The Power of Custom

One of Locke's most consistent themes is the vital role played by custom in determining men's behavior. He refers to "Custom, a greater power than Nature" (E 1.3.25), and ruefully notes that "*Doctrines, that have been derived from no better original, than the Superstition of a Nurse, or the Authority of an old Woman; may, by length of time, and consent of Neighbors, grow up to the dignity of Principles in Religion and Morality*" (E 1.3.22). Once these principles have been imbedded within one's mind, they become "riveted there...beyond all possibility of being pull'd out again" (E 4.20.9). Locke considers this phenomenon to be an inevitable one; after all, we all need *some* kind of foundation upon which to build our perception of the world (E 1.3.24).

Mark Button argues that Locke's fixation on custom reflects his fear that the unexamined manner by which it generates beliefs inevitably leads to the dulling of subjects' "critical discerning faculties."¹³ While that specific term is problematic for reasons I will explore subsequently, it is correct to say that Locke is concerned with the effects that unthinking assent to locally generated norms have on the mind. He identifies a certain type of person, those who

seldom reason at all, but do and think according to the example of others, whether parents, neighbors, ministers or who else they are pleased to make choice of to have an implicit faith in for the saving of themselves the pains and trouble of thinking and examining for themselves.¹⁴

This is the most obviously dangerous symptom of the power of custom: those individuals who simply fail to reason at all, who are too lazy to think for themselves and thus uncritically submit to the prevailing way of thinking.

Locke sees this submission as particularly common among the "day-laborers" who comprised the working class of his day: "take the thoughts of such an one, used for many years to one tract, out of that narrow compass he has all his life been confined to, you will find him no more capable of reasoning than almost a perfect natural."¹⁵ In Locke's view, the form of reasoning practiced by the poor is a practical and limited one, developed only in so far as it is immediately useful to them in their day-to-day lives. Otherwise, they are passive absorbers of dominant modes of thought.

¹³ Button, *Contract*, 148.

¹⁴ John Locke, and John W. Yolton, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1993), Section 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Section 6. For an extended discussion of Locke's views regarding the rationality of the poor, see E.J. Hundert, "The Making of Homo Faber: John Locke Between Ideology and History". *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 33.1 (1972): 3-22.

Just as disturbing to Locke, however, is the sway that custom holds over the landed gentry of which he is a part. He notes that there are those who “readily and sincerely follow reason but, for want of having that which one may call large, roundabout, sense, have not a full view of all that relates to the question.”¹⁶ This “roundabout” sense involves the ability to scrutinize the presuppositions from which one reasons. In order to do this, one must be willing to recognize the contingencies that provide the basis for one’s premises, and to engage with those alternate premises that develop within different sets of contingencies.

This failure to develop a roundabout sense explains “why some men of study and thought that reason right and are lovers of truth do make no advances in their discoveries of it.”¹⁷ Locke compares these men to “the inhabitants of the Mariana Islands, which, being separate by a large tract of sea from all communion with the habitable parts of the earth, thought themselves the only people of the world.”¹⁸ Their refusal to historicize, “to look beyond the boundaries that chance, conceit, or laziness has set to inquiries,” dooms them to this form of intellectual isolation, in which they are “separate from the notions, discourse, and attainments of the rest of mankind.”¹⁹

Thus, custom poses a threat to the rationalistic notion of subjectivity that Locke initially hoped to develop. This threat cuts across class lines: among the poor, it discourages the exercise of all but the most basic kinds of reasoning, while among the elite, it leads to a kind of self-imposed myopia, as they build deductively valid

¹⁶ Locke, *Conduct*, Section 3.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

arguments upon potentially unsound premises. Once again, it can be seen how the arguments Locke advances regarding belief generation and human behavior undercut the conception of assent that he began the *Essay* hoping to demonstrate.

“Uneasiness” and “Wrong Judgment”

Locke defines the will as “nothing but a power in the Mind to direct the operative Faculties of a Man to motion or rest, as far as they depend on such direction” (E 2.21.29). He distinguishes between the will and desire, noting that whenever you do something you don’t want to do, the two are at odds with each other (E 2.21.30). In such instances, the will exercises power over a conflicting desire by forcing it into submission. It is sovereign over all desires in that it can deny the fulfillment of those that it determines should not be satisfied. The successful dieter may be overcome with an intense craving for cherry pie, but resists this impulse through the force of her will, which knows that it should not give in to such a desire. This distinction between will and desire serves to clear the air in anticipation of a question that is of great importance to Locke’s understanding of human behavior and its causes: what determines the will?

He identifies the crucial determinant of the will as “*uneasiness*,” declaring, “The motive, for continuing in the same State or Action, is only the present satisfaction in it; The motive to change, is always some *uneasiness*; nothing setting us upon the change of State, or upon any new Action, but some *uneasiness*. This is the great motive that works on the Mind to put it upon Action” (E 2.21.29). More specifically, it is usually “the most pressing” (E 2.21.31) *uneasiness* that compels our

will to act. This notion of “uneasiness” is crucial to Locke’s understanding of human motivation and conduct. What exactly does he mean by this term?

“*Uneasiness*,” he tells us, covers “All pain of the body of what sort soever, and disquiet of the mind.” The inevitable corollary to this uneasiness is a “Desire, equal to the pain or *uneasiness*,” that, as it is perceived, “is scarce distinguishable from it” (E 2.21.31). Uneasiness can be the result of both present pain, on the one hand, and the absence of some “good,” on the other.²⁰ In the former case, it manifests itself as a frantic desire to escape from the claws of immediate agony, while in the latter case, it is closer to a dull, throbbing ache, as you are gnawed away at by the craving to have what you currently don’t. For obvious reasons, present pain provides a greater impetus to action than the absence of something pleasant that one desires, but in both cases, the misery of lingering, unresolved uneasiness is so great that it can render life unbearable (E 2.21.32). And because the first step towards happiness involves escaping from misery, the will constantly seeks to remove present uneasinesses (E 2.21.45).

Thus, Locke sketches a very clear and simple picture of the process by which individuals conduct themselves, one that identifies *why* we do what we do. However, he is far from sanguine about the implications of this understanding of human psychology. While we never choose “amiss” when confronted with present pleasure and pain, we are much more likely to make “wrong judgments” concerning pleasure and pain that lies in the future (E 2.21.58). Such feelings can only be hypothetical for us, conceptualized at a temporal distance; thus, they lack the immediacy of

²⁰ Baltes, “Empire,” 53.

sensations felt in the present moment. Locke, in his typically puritanical manner, uses the example of a hangover to illustrate this principle: while the “sick Stomack, and aking Head” that inevitably follows a night of heavy drinking may be exquisitely unpleasant, they remain far enough in the future that the immediate satisfaction of having another glass of wine outweigh them in the mind; this despite the fact that the pain it will bring lies just a few hours in the future and likely outweighs whatever pleasure another drink will bring (E 2.21.63).

The inability to give future pleasures and pains the proper weight in our calculations is, once again, part of the fundamental character of human psychology. Locke lays the blame on “*the weak and narrow Constitution of our Minds*” (E 2.21.63). The current “uneasiness that sits so heavy upon us...lessons in our Thoughts, what is future; and so forces us, as it were, blindfold into its embraces” (E 2.21.64). This instinctive human disposition can act to cloud our judgment, leaving us in a state from which we are unable to discern what is the best path for us to take. Just as the power of custom traps us within a given moral framework, uneasiness and the way our minds respond to it can potentially limit the range of choices we are capable of making. However, Locke does not believe that we must resign ourselves to this fate.

Suspension and Examination

For Locke, both the influence of custom on belief and uneasiness on conduct represent obstacles to what he considers to be the proper way of thinking. They are natural tendencies that must be conquered if we are to “govern” our “Opinions and Actions” *correctly* (E 1.1.6) and be free. What is needed is a procedure for overcoming these fundamental facts about belief generation and the governance of

conduct, one that takes into account the natural tendencies of humans, and then transcends them. Locke has just such a procedure in mind.

Again and again, Locke asserts that if individuals are to be happy and truly free, they must be able to practice a form of self-mastery,²¹ a process by which we can stand back from the “Passions” so that our “Understandings may be *free* to examine” them (E 2.21.53). In describing what he believes to be the conditions necessary for a person to be considered free, he identifies one who “is able to *deny himself* his own Desires, cross his own Inclinations, and purely follow what Reason directs as best, tho’ the Appetite lean the other way.”²² In order to achieve this freedom, one must “root out and destroy” (STCE 48) one’s own tendency to act solely on the basis of present appetites. Only after this is done can one be said to be free; self-regulation is the prerequisite of liberty.

The ability to control oneself, to govern oneself on the basis of disinterested rationality instead of the unstable and unpredictable swirl of one’s desires and passions, does not come naturally to humans. It requires not only that our will exert dominion over our desires, but also that the will itself become an object of reform. The very manner by which we will our actions has to be reoriented, such that it is no longer the most pressing uneasiness that controls the will, but rather a form of detached rationality: “A man may suspend the act of his choice from being

²¹ Nancy J. Hirschmann, *Gender, Class, and Freedom in Modern Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 90.

²² John Locke and John W. Yolton, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), Section 33. Subsequent references to this text will be in parenthetical form, e.g. (STCE 33).

determined for or against the thing proposed, till he has examined whether it be really of a nature, in itself and consequences, to make him happy or not” (E 2.21.57)

What Locke is describing is the possibility of developing a sustained method through which the will can give equal weight to what is felt now and what will be felt later. One can remove oneself from the immediacies of the moment and evaluate them in accordance with their non-immediate consequences, thus transcending the trap of shortsightedness that uneasiness leads one into.

Locke frames this process as active – an individual *suspends* his desires; he *examines* them; he *governs* his passions. Charles Taylor describes it as a form of “disengagement,” in which we manage to “wrest control of our thinking and outlook away from our passion or custom or authority and assume *responsibility* [emphasis added] for it ourselves.”²³ Above all else, Locke is pitting reason, as a process of thought, against the natural human impulses he identifies over the course of the *Essay*. The ability to suspend one’s judgment, and to examine one’s desires in relation to each other, allows us to apply some degree of control over the various irrational forces buffeting our minds. Through practice, we can cultivate a sort of disposition of rationality. Our tendency to assent to “wrong notions” is not inevitable: “pains should be taken to rectify these; and contrary habits change our pleasures, and give us a relish to what is necessary and conducive to our happiness” (E 2.21.71). By force of habit, we can reshape ourselves such that we will “relish” what is good for us as rational creatures.

²³ Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 167.

Taylor stresses the essentially procedural nature of this rationality,²⁴ but Locke is not content with reason merely as a way of thinking. One must examine one's desires, yes, but importantly, this examination must be in relation to a specified conception of morality.²⁵ The question of morality leads us back to Locke's hedonism.

"The Will and Power of the Law-maker"

Locke takes the fact that humans are motivated by a hedonistic calculus to imply that "things then are Good or Evil, only in reference to Pleasure or Pain. That which we call *Good*, which is apt to cause or increase Pleasure, or diminish Pain in us...And on the contrary we name that *Evil*, which is apt to produce any Pain, or diminish any Pleasure in us" (E 2.20.2). It follows that

Morally Good and Evil, then, is only the Conformity or Disagreement of our voluntary Actions to some Law, whereby Good or Evil is drawn on us, from the Will and Power of the Law-maker; which Good and Evil, Pleasure or Pain, attending our attendance, or breach of the Law, by the Decree of the Law-maker, is that we call *Reward* and *Punishment* (E 2.28.5).

Thus, moral behavior is only possible within the bounds of an enforceable law. Locke identifies three mechanisms for such enforcement, which Tully refers to as "juridical apparatuses."²⁶ These are the divine law, the civil law, and the law of opinion (E 2.28.7). The divine law is the law of God, enforced by the inducements of heaven and hell; the civil law is that which is laid down by the state, enforced by the agents of government; the law of opinion is dictated by social norms and enforced by the pressures of one's peers. (E 2.28.8-10).

²⁴ Ibid., 168.

²⁵ Button, *Contract*, 138.

²⁶ Tully, *Approach*, 210.

Locke is very clear that the divine law is “the only true cornerstone of moral rectitude.” God has both the right and the power to govern our conduct; “we are his Creatures” and he holds “Rewards and Punishments, of infinite weight and duration, in another life” (E 2.28.8). We are not to inflict harm upon other humans because we are all God’s “Workmanship” and by extension, “his Property...made to last during his, not one another’s Pleasure.”²⁷

Furthermore, the law of God is apparent to all “rational Creatures” should they “but seriously reflect on” the “Works of the Creation” (E 1.4.9.) If we employ Locke’s method of suspending our desires and opinions, examining them free from the baggage of custom and uneasiness, we will be able to grasp the content of the divine law, and thus conduct ourselves in relation to “the true cornerstone of moral rectitude.” Rationality, as Locke conceives of it, is a necessary prerequisite for understanding the special nature of the relationship between God and man and the moral obligations that arise as a consequence of that relationship.

And yet Locke admits that it is actually the third apparatus, the law of reputation, which is most effective at motivating men. “*Vertue and Vice*,” he says, “are constantly attributed only to such actions, as in each Country and Society are in reputation or discredit” (E 2.28.10). Because we have an inborn desire to be respected by our fellow man,²⁸ this apparatus is the most successful at governing individual behavior. The pain of the social outcast is far too great for any human to

²⁷ John Locke and Peter Laslett, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 289.

²⁸ Locke, *Two Treatises*, 336-337: “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 to *Society*, as well as fitted him with Understanding and Language to continue and enjoy it.”

bear for long (E 2.28.12). This is what gives the law of society its bite – unlike the law of God, its rewards and punishments are felt immediately and constantly. They create a sustained uneasiness, one that will inevitably force a change in behavior: if the most pressing uneasiness determines the will, then the juridical apparatus that creates the most pressing uneasiness will be the most successful in enforcing codes of behavior. Compared to the very real and pressing sense of loneliness felt by the social pariah, the distant, uncertain inducements of heaven and hell are woefully ineffective as tools of motivation.

The implications of this fact are disturbing for Locke. If it is the law of society that most effectively governs conduct, his hopes of neutering the power of the various irrational tendencies of the mind are dashed. These hopes are grounded upon one developing the ability to disengage from one's passions, a capacity that must be nurtured through consistent practice. The possibility that an individual will undertake this necessary practice is greatly diminished by the manner in which the law of reputation influences their behavior. Social pressure achieves its power through the most irrational tendencies of the mind: habit, instinct, uneasiness, and passion. It traps a man within a cultural framework by playing off of his instinctive desire to avoid the immediately felt shame of being ostracized by "the company he keeps, and would recommend himself to" (E 2.28.12). On the basis of this desire, he chooses to conduct himself according to laws of his peers. Locke's chosen weapons for transcending the irrational - suspension and examination - are rendered toothless; the power of custom to determine beliefs is reinforced by the law of

society and its sway over us, while the will's slavery to uneasiness is further entrenched.

Consequently, Locke is forced to reexamine his method for guiding men towards the proper behavior. Rather than trying to conquer the irrational determinants of human behavior, he will have to take those factors as a given, and then turn them to his own end. There *is* a right way to govern one's actions and thoughts (E 1.1.6), and if disengaged rationality cannot lead us to this correct way of comporting ourselves, then the irrational qualities of the mind will have to do the work themselves. If peer pressure is powerful enough to get individuals to willingly alter their behavior, without using physical force, then perhaps suspension and examination are not needed to govern conduct; perhaps the forces of custom, passion, and education can be used to construct a subject that governs herself properly as a matter of socially reinforced habit and instinct, rather than detached rationality.

Discipline

We have seen how Locke's ideal of normative conduct is undercut by his own understanding of what actually motivates human behavior. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which was constructed from a number of letters in which Locke offered advice to his friend Edward Clarke regarding the education of the latter's son, can be interpreted as his response to this tension. *Education* is concerned with the making of a particular kind of individual, one that will behave in a manner congruent with Locke's normative prescription. Locke never fully abandons his notion of the active, rational agent that suspends and examines his

desires, yet his use of such language is misleading. The tool that he proposes to bring to bear on the mind is no longer that of disengaged reason, but rather its opposite: that of uneasiness and the instinct for social approval. These methods are used to enforce a variety of habits that create a bearing of internal control, one that is based upon an almost entirely unquestioned theistic moral foundation.

The techniques used to create this habitual stance are not coercive, but instead act to condition the subject's manner of self-regulation; through the influences of uneasiness and social pressure, the subject comes to will what Locke believes to be morally correct. Locke's project in the *Education* is to use these non-coercive methods to build subjects that fit his criteria for what it means to be a moral being, and who as a consequence are capable of conducting themselves according to what he believes to be their "proper interest."²⁹

This reading of Locke as a disciplinarian who purposefully designs subjects in relation to a moral standard has become increasingly prominent in the literature. James Tully, Uday Mehta, Nancy Hirschmann, and John Baltes have convincingly argued that Locke seeks to create individuals "who are oriented toward certain desires rather than others, who want to make certain choices rather than others."³⁰ However, even among those scholars who have engaged with these issues, there remain many, such as Alex Neill, Mark Button, and John Dunn, who considerably underestimate the extent to which Locke's program of self-mastery constrains his

²⁹ Ivison, Duncan. *The Self at Liberty: Political Arguments and the Arts of Government* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997,) 116.

³⁰ Hirschmann, *Gender*, 90. See also Tully, Baltes, and Uday Singh Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom: Imagination and Individuality in Locke's Political Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

subjects, foreclosing wide ranges of possible behavior. Neill fundamentally misreads Locke when he claims that the goal of the *Education* is to arm pupils with “epistemic autonomy,”³¹ while Button is far too reductive in suggesting that Locke seeks to cultivate the “critical discerning faculties” of subjects.³² Locke’s ideal subjects only develop an abridged capacity for critical thought, in that the moral assumptions that frame their self-conceptions lie just beyond the point at which their skepticism ceases. Charles Taylor’s description of the Lockean subject as being capable of taking “a radical stance of disengagement to himself or herself”³³ is misleading in how it implies that these subjects have the capacity to stand back and submit every aspect of their identities to scrutiny, when in fact their core beliefs escape such examination.

Furthermore, Dunn’s argument that Locke construes the relationship between political authority and human beings as “essentially negative”³⁴ may be superficially correct, but it misses a crucial part of the story. He is right in the sense that Locke does not envision a form of government that will act to “replace the active responsibilities of its subjects by a dominant agency of its own.”³⁵ However, Locke most definitely does articulate a form of authority that influences both the way in which subjects come to understand what these active responsibilities may

³¹ Alex Neill, “Locke on Habituation, Autonomy, and Education,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27.2 (1989): 241.

³² Button, *Contract*, 143.

³³ Taylor, *Sources*, 171-172.

³⁴ J.M. Dunn, “‘Bright Enough for All Our Purposes’: John Locke’s Conception of a Civilized Society,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* 43.2 (1989): 146.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

entail, and the degree of their willingness to shoulder them.³⁶ I agree with Dunn's claim that "the civilization, which Locke hoped to render possible...could be constructed only by the self-disciplinary efforts of the human beings who belonged to it,"³⁷ but what is neglected in that statement is an acknowledgement of just how far Locke went in seeking to develop techniques of power that would allow these self-disciplinary efforts to become a constitutive part of the very identity of subjects, such that their active agency never had to be replaced with the dominant agency of any external political authority.

Habituation

Locke's views on education are almost entirely given over to general advice regarding how to mold the behavior of a child,³⁸ and he devotes remarkably little attention to the specific details of curriculum. The goal of an education is not to fill the pupil's head with as much knowledge as possible, but rather to instill in him the capacity to regulate his own inclinations and appetites in a manner befitting a rational creature (STCE 195, 200). Above all else, Lockean education is concerned with the inculcation of mental habits; through practice, the ideal pupil develops a

³⁶ Iverson captures this point well: "I think it is far from clear that this authority, especially in the form of an art of government, is essentially negative. It did, in fact, work on the capacities of its subjects, but not in the sense of *replacing* their responsibilities as much as helping to dispose them in particular ways to civic affairs and the 'publick good,' taking into account their natural liberty and individual liberty," 131.

³⁷ Dunn, "Bright Enough," 146.

³⁸ In Section 6 of the *Education*, Locke addresses the question of gender, noting "I have said *he* here, because the principal aim of my discourse is, how a young gentleman should be brought up from his infancy, which in all things will not so perfectly suit the education of *daughters*; though where the difference of sex requires different treatment, 'twill be no hard matter to distinguish." Thus, while Locke refers to the "young master" throughout the remainder of the book, it seems reasonable to infer from the last sentence of that excerpt that he believes that the basics of his educational program can be applied to girls as well as boys, with only minor adjustments.

reflexive pattern of reasoning, a way of thinking that disposes him to behave in accordance with the normative prescriptions of Locke's particular form of "rationalized Christianity."³⁹ What distinguishes this process from the method of suspension and examination that Locke developed in the *Essay* is the manner by which it is internalized.

Locke's program is predicated upon his belief that "Our bodies will endure anything, that from the beginning they are accustomed to" (STCE 5). Pleasure and pain are the crucial determinants of behavior, and what we consider to be pleasurable or painful is heavily dependent upon the degree to which we have become habituated to certain types of sensation. The marathon runner can enjoy a four-mile jog as an invigorating and pleasant experience, whereas the couch potato will find it to be an act of exquisite agony. An individual's level of acclimation to an experience determines their subjective response to its effects.

With this in mind, Locke sets out a highly detailed program for regulating the habits of "the young master," one that modern readers might anachronistically describe as a form of helicopter parenting. The child's time of sleep must be strictly enforced, so that he will not be awake during the "Hours of Debauchery," and his bed should be a hard one (STCE 21-22). The timing of his bowel movements must be stringently enforced, such that, "by constant application," the activity of "*going to stool*" will become "habitual" (STCE 24-25).

³⁹ This phrase is borrowed from Charles Taylor, who notes that for Locke, "the exercise of rationality is the way we take part in God's plan" (*Sources*, 242). While that formulation is somewhat oversimplified for reasons that I hope I have made clear, it does succinctly capture the relationship between rationality and Christianity that provides the crucial element of Locke's conception of morality. See the chapter "Rationalized Christianity" (*Sources*, 234-247) for a more detailed account of this aspect of Locke's thought.

The establishments of these habits all have very specific purposes for Locke. By making the child sleep according to a pattern of “*Early Rising, and Early Going to Bed,*” one makes staying up through the night “uneasie to him,” and as a consequence he will “very seldom propose Mid-night Revels” (STCE 21). Sleeping in a hard bed “strengthens the Parts” of the body, while a rigidly adhered to schedule of bowel movements is necessary for one to have “strong Thoughts” and “strong Bodies” (STCE 23).

Similarly, any tendencies towards maltreatment of animals and servants on the part of the child should be immediately extinguished, not because the abuse is itself reprehensible, but because such behavior is inimical with the habits of humaneness and compassion that characterize a moral being (STCE 116-117). For Locke, these habits have instrumental purposes, in that they have the effect of disposing the child to certain types of behavior that are conducive to his conception of what is needed for the cultivation of a sound body, mind, and, most importantly of all, character.

It is not just such prosaic habits that Locke is concerned with. He is also adamant that the idea of God must be imprinted on the mind of the child, who should be made to understand that God “made and governs all Things, hears and sees every Thing, and does all manner of Good to those that love and obey him” (STCE 136). Furthermore, those who may be “too Curious in the Notions about a Being” are to be discouraged from their incipient skepticism, lest they “run

themselves into Superstition or Atheism.”⁴⁰ For all of his talk about examining one’s desires and encouraging the use of disengaged reason, Locke is unwilling to submit the notion of God to the scrutiny that he claims to prize. This idea must be cultivated by “the keeping of Children constantly Morning and Evening to acts of Devotion to God,” not through “curious Enquiries into his inscrutable essence and being.” Thus, the “cornerstone of moral rectitude” that Locke hopes to instill in children, the prism through which they view the world, is given its force not by rational examination, but by habituation. It is believed implicitly, unexamined, and with no need for explicit justification.⁴¹

All of these habits cohere to form a general carriage that befits a rational gentleman. Such individuals conceive of themselves and their peers as the “workmanship” of God, and this ontology serves as the foundation for their moral beliefs.⁴² They have been armed with a “moral compass”⁴³ that is “interwoven into the very Principles” of their nature (STCE 42). This compass allows them to scrutinize their transient desires in relation to the correct normative code. The compass itself, however – the ontological foundation – goes unquestioned.

Carrots and Sticks

Given that Locke endeavors to use habit as his major tool for crafting subjects, one must ask: how are these habits to be enforced? There is a wide gap

⁴⁰ This quote reveals just how inaccurate it is to follow Neill and describe Locke’s goal as the cultivation of “epistemic autonomy” among his pupils. See Neill, “Locke on Habituation”, 241.

⁴¹ Steven Forde, “What Does Locke Expect Us to Know?” *The Review of Politics*. 68.2 (2006): 255-256.

⁴² Locke, *Two Treatises*, 289.

⁴³ Baltes, “Empire,” 56.

between identifying desired habits, on the one hand, and the successful development of them, on the other. To bridge this gap, Locke turns to the law of society, the most effective means of spurring behavior. Children are no different from adults in how they crave the respect of others, and their desire for affection from their parents in particular. The dueling incentives of “*Esteem and Disgrace*” are to be brought to bear on children, so that they are rewarded for the development of preferred habits and punished for the failure to develop said habits.

These carrots and sticks must be of a very particular quality, however. Locke is very clear that enticements and discouragements must not be of the immediate kind. After all, the principle of governing one’s action solely on the basis of presently felt pleasure and pain is the very one that Locke says he wants to crush (STCE 48). “Pains and pleasures of the body” should not enforce the duties of the child (STCE 55). Rewards should not take the form of indulgences like “*apples or sugar-plumbs,*” and punishments should rarely be corporal in nature. Such a system of incentives will produce a child that is little better than a dog, whose happiness is indistinguishable from the immediate satisfaction of his appetites (STCE 51).

Instead, the child’s behavior should be guided by incentives whose effects extend across time and work continuously, and which act not on the body, but the mind. He comes to behave as his parents wish him to through the mechanism of his *own choices*, rather than through a grudging and calculated response to the perceived threat of punishment. Thus, inducements and penalties are not to be directly tied to the fulfillment (or lack thereof) of particular duties, but to be experienced as the necessary and generalized consequences of one’s actions. An

industrious character on the part of the child should be met with parental commendation, but this praise is understood not in terms of a direct reward for industriousness. Rather, it will come to be recognized as the state that one “has brought himself into” (STCE 58) by acting correctly. The child will feel compelled to attend to his duties not because he expects to be explicitly rewarded, but rather because he will find himself to be treated by his parents with the love and respect that he has become accustomed to. The “*cold and neglectful countenance*” that he will be met with when he fails to complete his tasks works in a similar manner.

This distinction is an important one for Locke, and the extent to which he belabors it is revealing. In both cases, behavior is met with a purposefully designed set of responses, whose goals are to make different kinds of action seem more appealing than others. Locke, who remains dedicated to an ideal of resistance against the slavery of presently felt appetites, is keen to position his favored incentive structure as one of liberation, in which the individual attains “Mastery over his Inclinations” (STCE 45). And yet, his method produces a subject that is ultimately no less Pavlovian in its decision-making than his dreaded slave of appetite. After all, he himself states that his education should lead to pupils who can “practice” the proper conduct “without reflection” (STCE 65).⁴⁴ Locke wishes to see his ideas as involving the transcendence of the hedonistic calculus, but in fact he is using that same calculus to shape his subjects.

Normalization

⁴⁴ Button’s claim that Locke hopes to cultivate the “critical discerning faculties” of his subjects seems particularly off the mark in light of this quote from Locke.

This process of embedding habits by means of social pressure is best understood as one of normalization, in which a standard of the self is created and individuals then bring themselves into line with that standard. In Michel Foucault's formulation, normalization involves confronting the swarming, unpredictable mass of subjectivities that comprise the unstructured social body by individuating and compartmentalizing, such that individuals are separated from the crowd.⁴⁵ In his document of the rise of modern power, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault identifies this as the method of a variety of early-modern institutions, including prisons, hospitals, factories, and schools: individuals are compared, differentiated, homogenized, and situated within a hierarchical context, all for the purpose of bringing them into line with a particular conception of normality.⁴⁶

Foucault sees this as the effect of a form of power that he refers to as discipline, which "functions permanently and largely in silence" while also being "everywhere and constantly alert."⁴⁷ Such a power is all encompassing, yet also functionally invisible. Subjects are simultaneously objects, instruments, and constructs of this power.⁴⁸ Disciplinary practices – which should be understood in terms of the convergence of various institutional procedures, rather than as dictates emerging from some central source – act to *make* "individuals," in that these individuals are constituted by the disciplinary context in which they find

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, trans. Alan Sheridan, 1977), p. 201.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

themselves.⁴⁹ However, it is always their own actions and choices that achieve this constitutive work. Moreover, these actions and choices are not coerced. They are the consequence of an intricate relationship between authority and subject.⁵⁰

It is this type of power that is at work in Locke's education. Habituation and the incentives of social pressure are not ends in and of themselves; they are merely the most effective instruments of normalization. Locke's purpose is the "inculcation and consolidation of specific self-understandings";⁵¹ these self-understandings are the standard to which his subjects are compelled to conform, and successful instillation requires the techniques of individuation that Foucault identifies.

This can be seen in Locke's clear preference for an education that takes place in the home, administered by a private tutor (or "governor," in Locke's telling phrase,) over the alternative of sending the boy to a school where he will be taught among his peers. Communal education brings with it a "contagion" that threatens to infect the young master: the influence of other boys. This influence fosters traits that are "diametrically opposite the skill of living well," allowing for the emergence of a competing standard of normality that challenges Locke's own. The disposition that a boy picks up from his "play-fellows at school" is one of "rudeness and ill-turn'd confidence," a sort of "boldness and spirit" that is improperly regulated and therefore completely unacceptable (STCE 70). Immersed within the group, "a locus

⁴⁹ Ibid., 211.

⁵⁰ "From the master of discipline to him who is subjected to it, the relation is one of signalization: it is a question not of understanding the injunction, but of perceiving the signal and reacting to it immediately, according to a more or less artificial, prearranged code" (Ibid., 166).

⁵¹ Mehta, *Anxiety*, 6.

of multiple exchanges,”⁵² the child is no longer located in a zone where his parents can exercise complete sovereignty over him. A similar principle is at work when Locke urges parents to keep the child away from “the Examples of the Servants” so as to avoid “Ill Patterns” (STCE 89). Lockean discipline presupposes the individuation and isolation of the subject; only then can its tools of habit and incentives be truly effective.

It is this fact that necessitates the shift away from centralized public power of civil government towards the localized private power of the home. The exercise of power can no longer be understood solely in terms of the actions of state agencies, although it may still include them.⁵³ Locke offers only general educational advice because the specific *applications* of his counsel must be left to the discretion of each child’s parents.⁵⁴ Discipline is diffuse, stretching out across “the whole length of the social network.”⁵⁵ By its very nature, the specifics of its exercise must be tailored to the contingencies that it confronts. Even Locke concedes that men’s minds have certain characteristics that can’t be fundamentally altered (STCE 66). Consequently, the task of shaping rational, moral gentlemen will be most effectively achieved when it is undertaken at dispersed points in the social network, where divergent behaviors can be met with flexible responses. However, all across this widely distributed network, the *general* educative principles that Locke enumerates do not vary. The goal is always the normalization of the subject, a procedure that is

⁵² Foucault, *Discipline*, 201.

⁵³ Hindess, Barry, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 109.

⁵⁴ Nathan Tarcov, *Locke’s Education for Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 78.

⁵⁵ Foucault, *Discipline*, 129.

predicated upon the ability to individualize, differentiate, and compare him or her in relation to other subjects. The genius of Lockean discipline is that it not only recognizes that this process of normalization must be accomplished through a decentralized web of social forces, but it also offers a detailed account of how this web can be created and maintained.

“A Perverseness in the Will”

Locke’s education is undeniably “innovative,” then, in how it develops a form of power that transcends the blunt, unwieldy, and sporadic instrument of state-enforced coercion in favor of subtle, non-coercive methods that work unceasingly.⁵⁶ These methods represent a vastly more efficient exercise of power,⁵⁷ in that they reduce the need for the direct application of governmental coercion on subjects.⁵⁸ However, Locke does not completely discard the tool of brute physical force, preferring to keep it in his back pocket for those occasions when discipline proves insufficient to the task of governing conduct.

Such instances arise when a child exhibits “a Perverseness in the Will” that manifests itself as “a designed, resolved Disobedience.” Recalcitrance of this sort must be met with a suitable punishment: beatings. Locke’s reluctance to endorse the use of the rod only extends so far; a rebellious disposition, incompatible as it is with the self-conceptions that he is seeking to create, can only be addressed through “force and blows” (STCE 78).

⁵⁶ Mark Bevir, “Foucault and Critique: Employing Agency Against Autonomy”. *Political Theory*. 27.1 (1999): 69-70: “Modern power takes the form of the gaze”.

⁵⁷ Foucault, *Discipline*, 219.

⁵⁸ Baltes, “Empire,” 58.

Most of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* takes the agency of subjects as a given, and then identifies ways in which this agency is to be guided (to put it mildly) down the correct path. The goal is to create subjects who will *willingly* make the choices that Locke deems they should,⁵⁹ in that the habits they have developed will lead them, in a deterministic sense, to make these choices. However, when the agency of subjects can't be harnessed for the purpose of normalization, respect for their agency goes out the window, and the last resort of raw force becomes the only option. Here, we have what initially appears to be an uncharacteristic lapse into the use of coercive power, as Locke embraces a form of subjection that is directly opposed to the practices of discipline that characterize the rest of the program he envisions.

More specifically, Locke's willingness to accept the use of corporal punishment in certain situations seems to contradict his professed desire to create subjects who govern themselves not on the basis of the pleasure and pains of the body, but according to the rational dictates of the mind. However, this ostensible tension proves to be a mirage, according to Locke: "the shame of the whipping, and not the pain, should be the greatest part of the punishment" (STCE 78). The physical blows themselves are ineffective to the task at hand because the terror they inspire is not permanent. Coercion may be successful at forcing subjects to undertake certain desired actions, but it cannot make them want to commit those actions of their own accord. Locke, who constructs his entire argument for religious toleration

⁵⁹ Hirschmann, *Gender*, 80.

on the basis of this principle,⁶⁰ is well aware of its implications. It should not be surprising, then, that he insists that the real target of corporal punishment is not the body, but the mind, and that the punitive character of the rod manifests itself not as transient bruises, but as lingering feelings of shame and disgrace.

There is something dissatisfying, however, in how Locke attempts to elide this contradiction. His description of corporal punishment and its effects on the subject is noticeably different from the discussions of disciplinary methods that take up the bulk of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. The tools of discipline – habituation and the incentives of social pressure – are so effective because they work subtly. The subject makes free choices, unaware of the complex array of forces that have predisposed her to making these choices. The entire process is predicated upon respect for the subject’s agency.⁶¹

Locke’s conception of corporal punishment, on the other hand, goes well beyond this silent, omnipresent exercise of power. He shares an anecdote that is worth quoting in full for what it reveals about how he conceives of these situations:

A prudent and kind mother of my acquaintance, was, on such an occasion, forc’d to whip her little daughter, at her first coming home from nurse, eight times successively the same morning, before she could master her *stubbornness*, and obtain a compliance in a very easy and indifferent manner. If she had left off sooner, and stopp’d at the seventh whipping, she had spoil’d the child forever, and, by her unprevailing blows, only confirm’d her refractoriness, very hardly afterwards to be cur’d: but wisely persisting till she had bent her mind, and suppl’d her will, the only end of correction and chastisement, she establish’d her authority thoroughly in the very first occasions, and had ever after a very ready compliance and obedience in all

⁶⁰ John Locke, William Popple, and Patrick Romanell, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1955.) For further explication of this point, see J. Judd Owen, “Locke’s Case for Religious Toleration: Its Neglected Foundation in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding,” *The Journal of Politics*. 69.1 (2007): 156-68.

⁶¹ Baltes, “Empire,” 40.

things from her daughter; for as this was the first time, so I think it was the last too she ever struck her (STCE 78).

Thus, corporal punishment requires a penalty that fully *extinguishes* the penchant for rebellion within the child. An insufficient penalty merely strengthens this proclivity; an effective one pushes hard enough that the child's very capacity for such resistance disappears, as her mind is "bent" and her will "suppled." Locke is quick to point out that this punishment should be used rarely (unlike his favored techniques of discipline, which require consistent application in order to be effective), because it simply isn't necessary in most cases. It is only among those rare cases of deeply rooted perverseness that discipline, as Locke has formulated it, will not be adequate.

If, as I have argued, Lockean education represents an early example of the transition away from centralized coercive power towards the non-coercive localized power of discipline, then we can understand this seemingly anomalous presence of corporal punishment within Locke's program as a lingering vestige of those earlier forms of power. Seen in this light, his attempt to frame the act of beating a child with a whip as qualitatively no different than reinforcing desired habits by means of parental praise and condemnation makes slightly more sense. Locke did not, after all, set out to create an ingenious new form of social power that might one day be extended across the whole of society. His goal was much more modest: to offer his friends some words of advice on raising their child, applying the insights that he had originated in his philosophical work.

With this in mind, we can view Locke's education as a tentative and even unassuming blueprint for the forms of power that would come to dominate social

life in the modern era. Analyzing *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* with the tools given to us by Foucault allows us to identify the astonishing degree to which it anticipates the rise of disciplinary practices, while also still recognizing the elements that render it distinctive to Locke and the various idiosyncrasies that characterized his thought.

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