


ARTICLE

Natural Teleology in John Locke's Ethics

Graedon Zorzi 

Department of Classical Liberal Arts, Patrick Henry College, Purcellville, VA 20132, USA
Email: ghzorzi@phc.edu

Abstract

According to some of the past half-century's most influential critics of liberalism, John Locke is the pivotal subverter of the pre-modern ethical tradition. Locke's view of nature and of human nature, the story goes, divorced ethics from natural teleology and so set off an inevitable spiral downward into moral dissolution. This story about Locke remains influential even though the last fifty years of Locke scholarship have brought a cascade of studies treating Locke as operating within the tradition of Reformed natural law. These studies, in part because they embrace a distorted view of Locke's conception of the person, have failed to address satisfactorily the crux of the story told by the critics of liberalism. This article corrects that distortion and demonstrates how natural teleology operates within Locke's ethics. I show how Locke sought to identify the teleological ordering of human beings to the supreme good by developing a relational conception of the person, analysing the human being as embedded in and defined by a web of relationships including neighbour and God. The result is a Locke far more in continuity with pre-modern ethical approaches than has hitherto been realized, one who sought to preserve natural teleology for the modern world.

I

...that we finding imperfection, dissatisfaction, and want of complete happiness...might be led to seek it in the enjoyment of him

(E: 2.7.5)¹

¹ Locke's works are abbreviated as follows. Locke's spelling has been modernized for clarity where appropriate.

1st T *Two treatises on government*, bk I, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1988). Citations by paragraph.

2nd T *Two treatises on government*, bk II, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1988). Citations by paragraph.

CE *Some thoughts concerning education*, ed. John Adamson (Mineola, NY, 2007). Citations by section.

E *An essay concerning human understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1971). Citations by book, chapter, section.

In the five decades since John Dunn's seminal *The political thought of John Locke* showed Locke to be embedded in the tradition of Reformed natural law,² new generations of scholars have done valuable work to advance Dunn's basic insight across a wide variety of topics. Reconceptualizing Locke's contributions to a host of issues such as equality,³ property,⁴ education,⁵ rights,⁶ epistemology,⁷ and religion,⁸ scholars have done much to fill out the portrait of a Locke as a practitioner of the Protestant natural law tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and, for this reason, a thinker still essentially operating within the natural law tradition that extends back through the medieval era to link up to Christian and pagan classical thought.⁹

ELN *Essays on the law of nature*, in *Locke: political essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (New York, NY, 1997). Citations by essay and page.

PE *Political essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (New York, NY, 1997). Citations by essay and page.

PN *A paraphrase and notes on the epistles of Saint Paul to the Galatians, I and II Corinthians, Romans and Ephesians* (6th edn, London, 1763). Citations by page and verse.

RC *The reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford, 1999). Citations by chapter and page.

² John Dunn, *The political thought of John Locke* (New York, NY, 1969). Two years prior, Dunn published an opening salvo against misunderstandings of Locke in a classic article in this journal. John Dunn, 'Consent in the political theory of John Locke', *Historical Journal*, 10 (1967), pp. 153–82.

³ Waldron's treatment of equality (as possession of 'light enough' to make one responsible to God) is perhaps the most acclaimed work to come out of the Locke scholarship following Dunn. Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and equality* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 66, 72, 76. Of the criticisms of Waldron, the most important is Nomi Stolzenberg and Gideon Yaffe, 'Waldron's Locke and Locke's Waldron', *Inquiry*, 49 (2006), pp. 186–216. Dunn's essential insight into the topic remains unsurpassed: 'All men are equal because the primary definition of their jural situation is the set of duties which they owe to God'. Dunn, *Political thought*, p. 121.

⁴ Consider James Tully, *An approach to political philosophy* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 28: for Locke, 'natural property rights are, accordingly, use rights set within a larger framework of rights and duties'; cf. John Colman, *John Locke's moral philosophy* (Edinburgh, 1983).

⁵ Nazar, for example, has shown Lockean education to be foremost 'education of desire' to move humans toward 'the dignity and excellence of a rational creature'. Hina Nazar, 'Locke, education, and disciplinary liberalism', *Review of Politics*, 79 (2017), p. 232; cf. CE: 25; Michelle Brady, 'Locke's thoughts on reputation', *Review of Politics*, 75 (2013), pp. 335–56; Rita Koganzon, 'Contesting the empire of habit', *American Political Science Review*, 110 (2016), pp. 547–58; Gideon Yaffe, *Liberty worth the name* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

⁶ McClure argues, for example, that Lockean natural rights designate 'a sphere of freedom' in which actions are morally indifferent 'matters of choice', rather than 'obligations stipulated by the precepts of natural law'. Kirstie McClure, *Judging rights* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), pp. 65–6; cf. A. John Simmons, *On the edge of anarchy* (Princeton, NJ, 1993); Peter Myers, *Our only star and compass* (Lanham, MD, 1998); Ruth Grant, *John Locke's liberalism* (Chicago, IL, 1987).

⁷ For an intriguing reading of Locke as an intellectualist, see Andrew Israelson, 'God, mixed modes, and natural law', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 21 (2013), pp. 1111–32; cf. Alex Tuckness, 'The coherence of a mind', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 37 (1999), pp. 73–90; Patrick Connolly, 'Locke's theory of demonstration and demonstrative morality', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 98 (2018), pp. 1–17.

⁸ E.g. Kim Ian Parker, *The Biblical politics of John Locke* (Waterloo, 2004); Victor Nuovo, *John Locke* (Oxford, 2017); Diego Lucci, *John Locke's Christianity* (Cambridge, 2021).

⁹ As Kirby commented, in embracing the natural law tradition 'the judicious Hooker' (2nd T: 5) followed 'a well-established pattern in the practical theology of the magisterial Reformers'.

Not all readers of Locke have found these efforts convincing, however, in part because no one has yet been able to demonstrate Locke's continuity with pre-modern natural law on a fundamental point: natural teleology. The pre-modern natural law tradition centred on natural teleology, the idea that we could learn from observation of human beings grasp objectively and universally valid human ends, including especially the final end, or supreme good. The supreme good, or *summum bonum*, refers to the ultimate end toward which all human action is directed, the end that organizes all other potential ends in subordination to itself. But the scholars who read Locke as an authentic natural lawyer have not succeeded in explaining how Locke could have upheld this traditional conviction about natural teleology alongside his modern view of nature. For reasons that I will explain below, many have thought that Locke's view of nature renders impossible the view that human nature conveys to us rationally discoverable and objectively valid ends. And if Locke's view of nature had indeed cut off natural teleology, then it might be reasonable to think the meaning of the word 'natural' in his version of 'natural law' had shifted in such a way as to undermine the tradition.

So, during the same time period when scholars following Dunn have been emphasizing the centrality of natural law to Locke's thought, scholars critical of modern moral thought have frequently identified Locke as a subverter – often *the* pivotal subverter – of the traditional natural law approach. The argument, made by some of the more influential critics of liberalism over the past thirty years, goes: Locke divorced ethics from natural teleology ordered toward the supreme good, cutting human beings off from the ethical tradition that had sustained a healthy manner of understanding our relation to God, one another, and the world, and set off a spiral downward into a panoply of moral ills (variously described as radical individualism, consumerism, subjectivism, relativism, and in more precise and detailed ways).¹⁰ By targeting Locke, the critics of liberalism are attempting to show the tree of liberalism to be rotten at its core, cutting off attempts to differentiate the classical liberalism of Locke,

Torrance Kirby, 'Richard Hooker and Thomas Aquinas on defining law', in Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen, eds., *Aquinas among the Protestants* (New York, NY, 2018), p. 103; cf. Richard Hooker, *The laws of ecclesiastical polity* (Oxford, 1888), bk 1, chs. 2–3; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion* (Edinburgh, 1845), bk 1, chs. 1–4; Todd Billings, *Calvin, participation, and the gift* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 30–9. The early modern Protestants, as Witte put it, 'used natural law concepts to work out their ideas and institutions of law, politics, ethics, and society'. John Witte, 'A demonstrative theory of natural law', in Johannes Althusius, *On law and power*, trans. Jeffrey J. Veenstra (Grand Rapids, MI, 2013), p. xlix; cf. Johannes Althusius, *Politica* (Carmel, IN, 1995), ch. 1, pp. 21ff; Girolamo Zanchi, *On the law in general*, trans. Jeffrey J. Veenstra (Grand Rapids, MI, 2012), ch. 2, pp. 9–25; Junius Brutus, *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* (Moscow, ID, 2020), question 3.6, pp. 97ff; Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, rex* (London, 1644), question 2; Matthew Hale, *Of the law of nature*, ed. David Systma (Grand Rapids, MI, 2015) ch. 6, pp. 107–10.

¹⁰ See, for example, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), pp. 171ff; Pierre Manent, *The city of man*, trans. Marc A. LePain (Princeton, NJ, 1998), pp. 113–16; Uday Singh Mehta, *The anxiety of freedom* (Ithaca, NY, 1992), pp. 170–4; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After virtue* (Notre Dame, IN, 2007), pp. 33, 217; Patrick Deneen, *Why liberalism failed* (New Haven, CT, 2018), pp. 32–4; Samuel Zinaich, *John Locke's moral revolution* (Lanham, MD, 2006); J. B. Schneewind, *The invention of autonomy* (New York, NY, 1998), pp. 141–59.

Montesquieu, and Madison from, for example, the eighteenth-century liberalism of Rousseau and Kant, the twentieth-century liberalism of Rawls, or the various ailments of liberal democracies today.¹¹

My aim here is to show the error in the attack on Locke from the critics of liberalism by demonstrating natural teleology to be at the heart of Locke's ethics.¹² In doing so, I am aligning myself with those Locke scholars who, following John Dunn, have understood Locke to be embedded in the tradition of Reformed natural law. Yet, those Locke scholars have made a mistake: one reason they have struggled to show how natural teleology fits with Locke's view of nature is that they have mischaracterized Locke's understanding of the human person. So I will correct that error, clarifying Locke's view of the human person, in the course of rebutting the attack on Locke from the critics of liberalism.

My argument, briefly, is that Locke's view of nature and, critically, of human nature, does not undermine natural teleology but rather preserves it for a scientific age. Locke preserved natural teleology for a scientific age by showing

¹¹ As per Stanton, 'Locke has an especial importance because he is taken to have put into currency certain persuasive conceptions' – not least about legitimacy, consent, and authority – 'which transformed subsequent thinking'. Timothy Stanton, 'Authority and freedom in the interpretation of Locke's political theory', *Political Theory*, 39 (2011), p. 7. Whether Locke is actually the 'father of liberalism', though, as is so frequently claimed, has as much to do with how liberalism is defined as with how Locke is understood. To find natural teleology in Locke is not to show that it is also present in the eighteenth-century liberalism of Rousseau and Kant or the twentieth-century liberalism of Rawls. Those are questions beyond the scope of this article. The strategy of critiquing later forms of liberalism to discredit earlier thinkers is exemplified by Deneen, who argues that the assumption of individual autonomy captures the guiding principle of 'such authors of the liberal tradition as John Locke and the American Founding Fathers'. Deneen, *Why liberalism failed*, p. 45. Celebrators and critics of liberalism alike have 'discovered what they already knew' in Locke, reading 'radical moral individualism' into his texts rather than allowing him to speak on his own terms. Timothy Stanton, 'John Locke and the fable of liberalism', *Historical Journal*, 61 (2018), p. 615. On Locke's influence on the American founding, see Claire Arcenas, *America's philosopher* (Chicago, IL, 2022); Mark David Hall, *Roger Sherman and the creation of the American republic* (Oxford, 2015), ch. 2. For the claim that Locke fathered liberalism, see Eldon Eisenach, *Two worlds of liberalism* (Chicago, IL, 1981); Steven Dworkin, *The unvarnished doctrine* (Durham, NC, 1990); John Rawls, *Lectures on the history of political philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA, 2007), pp. 103ff; John Perry, *The pretenses of loyalty* (Oxford, 2011).

¹² Limitations of space and scope prevent me from applying my argument about teleology to the perspective of those who join Leo Strauss in praising Locke as a secularizer. The most engaging recent debate over the Straussian reading of Locke unfolded over several articles between Tate (representing the Straussian perspective) and Stanton and Bou-Habib (both representing the Dunnian camp). John William Tate, 'Dividing Locke from God', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 39 (2013), pp. 133–64; Timothy Stanton, 'On (mis)interpreting Locke: a reply to Tate', *Political Theory*, 40 (2012), pp. 229–36; John William Tate, 'Locke, God, and civil society: response to Stanton', *Political Theory*, 40 (2012), pp. 222–8; Paul Bou-Habib, 'Locke's tracts and the anarchy of the religious conscience', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 14 (2015), pp. 3–18; John William Tate, 'Locke, toleration and natural law: a reassessment', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 16 (2017), pp. 109–21; Paul Bou-Habib, 'Locke, natural law and civil peace: reply to Tate', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 16 (2017), pp. 122–7; see also Michael Zuckert, *Natural rights and the new republicanism* (Princeton, NJ, 2011); Michael Zuckert, *Launching liberalism: on Lockean political philosophy* (Lawrence, KS, 2002).

how knowledge of human teleology can run ahead of knowledge about human constitution; the common person can know his or her purpose and duties without awaiting the conclusions of scientific analyses of the human being or philosophical speculations about body and soul. The common person can reach such moral knowledge by focusing on the relations that belong to human beings – in particular (1) the relation between a human being and the actions (as well as thoughts, emotions, etc.) he or she is responsible for, and (2) the relations between that human being and all the other beings, including God and other humans, that provide the context in which those actions are to be evaluated. Locke thought that relations define human teleology and that the human mind is capable of grasping those relations with precision. It is the nature of the human being as embedded in these webs of relationships – call it the relational self – that we are able to understand teleologically.

My argument proceeds as follows. The next section lays out in detail the attack from critics of liberalism saying that Locke divorced ethics from natural teleology. The third section shows how the way Locke scholars currently understand Locke's view of the human person renders it very difficult for them to rebut this attack. The fourth section offers my explanation of Locke's analysis of the human person as essentially relational. The fifth section explores how, for Locke, these relations reveal human teleology. The sixth section summarizes my argument and suggests some of its implications. I turn first, then, to the concern that Locke subverted the natural law tradition by disconnecting morality from the supreme good.

II

Some of the most influential critics of liberalism have thought that Locke cut off ethics from natural teleology and, in so doing, condemned the modern West to a downward spiral toward decadence, immorality, subjectivism, and so on. Charles Taylor, for example, traces a modern loss of respect for 'mimesis' (the need to read from nature the pattern for a good life) and overemphasis on 'poiesis' (the imposition of human power to create meaning whole cloth) to Locke's view of the self, which Taylor characterizes as 'extensionless'.¹³ Locke's self, Taylor argued, is not at all like the human being of Aristotle or Aquinas who could be observed to be teleologically ordered toward an objective good, but rather exists only in the 'power to fix things as objects' and 'remake' them.¹⁴ Similarly, Pierre Manent held that Locke's work was 'central in every respect of the word' to the 'destruction of substance' that births 'what is commonly called modern philosophy', because Locke supposedly rejected concern with human 'excellence' in favour of a focus on 'the capacity to produce effects', and so it is through Locke's influence that 'man's "artistic" character devours his "natural" character'.¹⁵ Similar arguments have shown up in

¹³ Taylor, *Sources of the self*, pp. 171ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Manent, *City*, pp. 113–16.

other critics of liberalism.¹⁶ Louis Dupré summarized the concern: ‘Once the human self [became] detached from its cosmic and transcendent moorings, the good...now came to be conceived in terms of personal need or fulfillment.’¹⁷

This line of attack on Locke has been most fully developed, in recent years, by D. C. Schindler. Schindler’s case can be encapsulated in the distinction he sees between Locke and Nicolas Malebranche, who influenced Locke. Malebranche, according to Schindler, worked within a ‘classical, Platonic metaphysics of participation, in which the various acts of the will rested in and were ordered to participation in a “Supreme Good”’.¹⁸ Malebranche, then, Schindler views as still embedded within a traditional natural law approach. Locke, Schindler argues, took many of Malebranche’s notions but ‘remov[ed] these notions from any metaphysical (and so intrinsic) relationship to the good’.¹⁹ Thus, according to Schindler, Locke gave us ‘the birth of the modern conception of freedom’ because he cut ethics away from the traditional teleological ordering toward a supreme good.²⁰ Indeed ‘modern freedom comes to a certain perfection of expression in Locke’,²¹ Schindler suggests, because Locke (allegedly) eliminates a ‘truly ontological good, a generous and abundant first cause’ in order to ‘clear space’ that ‘the individual might have the power to make choices, to determine himself, to acquire property and pursue his own happiness’.²² While, as Schindler puts it, ‘natural law in the classical tradition is understood as an expression in the moral and legal sphere of natural teleology’, Locke supposedly lost this teleological ordering to the good.²³ So ‘the law of nature for Locke is *regulative* rather than *constitutive*’, Schindler argues, something that has its role in regulating behaviour but is unrelated to ‘flourishing’ or ‘human excellence’ because it does not ‘guid[e] us internally

¹⁶ MacIntyre, for example, folds Locke into his story of the development of what he calls the ‘emotivist self’, arguing that Locke conceived of the self as a ‘character abstracted from a history’, part of the movement toward a self ‘detached from’ and ‘set over against the social world’. MacIntyre, *After virtue*, pp. 32–4, 217; cf. Mehta, *Anxiety of freedom*, pp. 170–4; Deneen, *Why liberalism failed*, pp. 32–4.

¹⁷ Louis Dupré, *Passage to modernity* (New Haven, CT, 1993), p. 143.

¹⁸ D. C. Schindler, *Freedom from reality: the diabolical character of modern liberty* (Notre Dame, IN, 2017), p. 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 360. Schindler’s argument updates previous criticisms of Locke. Byrne, for example, argued that Locke destroyed ‘the proximate metaphysical foundation of the law of nature’, because, given that ‘man is a substance’, in Locke’s epistemological framework, man’s ‘real nature is unknowable and cannot be the means of discovering the content of the natural law’. James W. Byrne, ‘The basis of the natural law in Locke’s philosophy’, *The Catholic Lawyer*, 10 (1964), p. 58. For the same reasons, David Wootton held that Locke’s intellectual commitments demanded he ‘abandon the notion of natural right’ and commit himself to ‘utilitarian principles’. David Wootton, ‘John Locke: Socinian or natural law theorist?’, in James Crimmins, ed., *Religion, secularization, and political thought* (New York, NY, 1990), p. 63. See also C. B. Macpherson, *Possessive individualism* (Oxford, 1962); Willmoore Kendall, *John Locke and the doctrine of majority rule* (Urbana, IL, 1965); Zinaich, *Locke’s moral revolution*.

²³ Schindler, *Freedom*, p. 81.

toward fulfillment'.²⁴ Schindler thinks that in Locke's conception of the natural law, what God demands of human beings is disconnected from what human beings are able to discover to be intrinsically good for them.

Schindler is wrong on this point, but one could see how he (and others) could make the mistake. Schindler's criticism of Locke (like Taylor's and Manent's) centres on a specific chapter (bk II, ch. XXI, 'Of power') of his *Essay concerning human understanding*, and the criticism sharpens to an attack on section 55 of that chapter. In that section, Locke says that 'the philosophers of old did in vain inquire, whether the *summum bonum* consists in riches, or bodily desires, or virtue, or contemplation' because 'the greatest Happiness consists, in having those things, which produce the greatest pleasure', and 'these, to different Men, are very different things' (E: 2.21.55). Locke goes on, 'if there be no Prospect beyond the Grave, the inference is certainly right, *Let us eat and drink, let us enjoy what we delight in, for tomorrow we shall die*' (E: 2.21.55; cf. Isa 22:13, 1 Cor 15:32). Schindler quotes these lines and comments, 'For Locke, the normative dimension is imposed in a wholly extrinsic manner through divine judgment...the moral quality of the things makes no difference to their inherent desirability, but is "superadded" to them, we might say, by the divine law.'²⁵ What Schindler gets wrong here I will point out soon. First, though, I want to show why it might seem reasonable for Schindler to think Locke intends to say that there is no inherent connection between good and evil (which Locke defines in terms of pleasure and pain) and *moral* good and evil (which Locke defines as pleasure or pain drawn upon a person by a judgement in accordance with law; E: 2.28.5).²⁶

Schindler's mistake is reasonable because, if one approaches Locke assuming that the only way natural teleology could operate is through knowledge of substances,²⁷ then one will miss how natural teleology operates in Locke's thought. Schindler thinks Locke's approach to nature renders impossible the kind of reason 'the classical tradition' cherished, 'that by which man transcends himself into the real', coming to 'intimacy with the being of things' and finding 'a genuinely objective measure, such as the *truth* of reality'.²⁸ Schindler quotes Locke's claim that the human mind cannot know the real essences of substances – 'our faculties are not fitted to penetrate into the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 34. Similarly, J. B. Schneewind claims that, for Locke, 'the ancient question of the *summum bonum* cannot be answered in a way that is both valid for everyone and useful in guiding action'. Schneewind, *Invention of autonomy*, pp. 143–4.

²⁶ Schneewind puts the concern this way: 'Locke accepts the Cumberlandian distinction between natural and moral good', but he does not 'require the law involved in moral good to direct us to natural good'. Schneewind, *Invention of autonomy*, p. 145. Schneewind is mistaken; as we will see below, Locke did require the law involved in moral good to direct us to natural good.

²⁷ Schindler seems to be making this assumption. He speaks glowingly of how, for Aquinas, 'the soul first apprehends its object intellectually, by abstracting the intelligible species – the essence – of the thing, becoming "intentionally" identical with it through the act of understanding, and thus quite literally "internalizing" its intelligible form'. D. C. Schindler, 'Towards a non-possessive concept of knowledge', *Modern Theology*, 22 (2006), p. 581.

²⁸ Schindler, *Freedom*, p. 44.

internal fabric and real essences of bodies' (E: 4.12.11) – and concludes that reason, for Locke, cannot deliver 'intimacy with reality in any significant sense' and so 'can be justified only by what it *produces* beyond itself'.²⁹ It is easy to hear here the echoes of Taylor's concern with poiesis and Manent's worries about man's artistic nature.

And Locke did indeed criticize the Aristotelian metaphysics – or at least the scholastic form of that metaphysics taught to him at Oxford, where it was presented 'as useful for undergraduate instruction rather than as part of a living philosophical tradition' – that centred ethics on the ability of the human mind to grasp the real essences of substances.³⁰ Scholastics such as the Dutch logician Franco Burgerdijk, whose definition of substance Locke quoted in a letter to Edward Stillingfleet, held that as humans encounter 'medium-sized physical organisms' like horses or dogs we intuitively grasp the 'distinct and perfect concept' of each natural kind.³¹ Locke, by way of contrast, thought that when we encounter a horse or dog, we observe a 'collection' of properties that we 'find united in the thing' and then suppose those properties must be 'supported by some common subject' (E: 2.23.4). Locke thought it was 'certain' that this common subject *does actually exist* behind and underneath the properties themselves, but he was convinced that we are unable to directly observe it, leaving us with 'no clear, or distinct *Idea* of that *thing* we suppose a Support' (E: 2.23.4). Locke held that we cannot form clear and distinct ideas of the substances of horses or dogs or, most importantly, human beings. The actual objects we encounter in the world around us can be studied empirically, but our minds are not capable of mastering them completely, reducing their inner realities to perfectly clear propositional truths. Thus, if Locke did indeed build his natural law ethics around natural teleology, he would have needed to have identified some route by which human reason could penetrate into the reality of human nature other than through intuitive grasp of the real essence of the substance *man*. I want to suggest that he did identify such a route but that it would be quite hard to recognize it if one were to follow the way current Locke scholars understand Locke's conception of the human person.

III

The closest Locke scholars have come to explaining how natural teleology could operate within Locke's ethics alongside his views on substance is through the popular view that Locke's concept *person* is a mode.³² Modes are abstract

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁰ E. J. Ashworth, 'Locke and scholasticism', in Matthew Stuart, ed., *A companion to Locke* (Oxford, 2016), p. 98.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 87–9. On Locke's debate with Stillingfleet over his views on substance, see Roger Woolhouse, *Locke* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 372–3, 406–7.

³² Other scholars have argued that Locke's *person* is a substance, an interpretation that, given his view of substances, makes it highly difficult to see how Locke could have offered a coherent view of natural teleology. For the substance view, see Jessica Gordon-Roth, 'Locke on the ontology of persons', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 53 (2015), pp. 100–3; Samuel Rickless, 'Are Locke's persons

concepts like 'gratitude' and 'murder' that 'contain not in them the supposition of subsisting by themselves' (E: 2.12.4). Thus, Antonia LoLordo, who has produced the best account of the mode interpretation, holds that 'one of Locke's main goals', the chapter of the *Essay* where he discusses his conception of the person (E: 2.27), is to show that the word *person* does not refer to 'existing things'.³³ Instead, according to LoLordo, Locke's *person* is a concept that refers to the abstract idea of an 'understanding, rational creature' and may or may not fit anything actually existing in the world, whereas *man* (a substance idea) refers to the actually existing human beings around us.³⁴

The mode interpretation would seem to be a real advance in the case for Locke as embedded in the tradition of Reformed natural law, because the mode interpretation purports to explain how Locke can make ethical deductions about human beings. Ethical deductions about human beings cannot, for Locke, proceed from our knowledge of the substance of man because Locke has denied our ability to form a priori sufficiently precise ideas about man's substance. But clarity of reasoning would be possible if we take Locke to be discussing in his ethical and political works not so much *man* (the substance concept), but *person* (the mode). And Locke does tell us the term *man* in moral discourses should be read as a metonymy for the concept 'moral man', a term that for Locke is synonymous with *person* and thus refers to a being capable of and therefore 'subject to Law, and, in that Sense...a Man' (E: 3.11.16). So Locke wants us to read his references to human beings in his moral discourses as references not to the substance concept *man* but to this other concept *moral man*, or *person*. And if we take *person* to be a mode, an abstract idea that we can know precisely because it exists only inside our heads, then Locke's moral discourses can proceed with some internal coherency – but only at the cost of cutting off natural teleology.

The mode interpretation can show how, for example, the *Second treatise* might be read as a demonstrative science of morality,³⁵ as Ruth Grant famously claimed it to be,³⁶ but that demonstrative science would be built around an abstract concept (*person*), not around human beings as they actually exist in the world. This conclusion is one some Locke scholars have embraced. 'The moral truths that agree' with the abstract idea of the person would, Eliot

modes or substances?', in Paul Lodge and Tom Stoneham, eds., *Locke and Leibniz on substance* (New York, NY, 2015), pp. 124–5; Kenneth Winkler, 'Locke on personal identity', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 29 (1991), pp. 201–26.

³³ Antonia LoLordo, *Locke's moral man* (Oxford, 2012), p. 79; others who take the mode view include Peter Anstey, 'John Locke and the philosophy of mind', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 53 (2015), p. 239; Udo Thiel, *The early modern subject* (Oxford, 2011); Elliot Rossiter, 'Hedonism and natural law in Locke's moral philosophy', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 54 (2013), pp. 203–26; A. Jonathan Simmons, *The Lockean theory of rights* (Princeton, NJ, 1992); Steven Forde, 'Mixed modes in John Locke's moral and political philosophy', *Review of Politics*, 73 (2011), pp. 581–608; Ruth Mattern, 'Moral science and the concept of persons in Locke', *Philosophical Review*, 89 (1980), pp. 24–45; William Uzgalis, 'Relative identity and Locke's principle of individuation', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 7 (1990), pp. 283–97.

³⁴ LoLordo, *Locke's moral man*, pp. 79, 84.

³⁵ For this argument, see Mattern, 'Moral science', pp. 33–9.

³⁶ Grant, *John Locke's liberalism*, pp. 198–205.

Rossiter writes, ‘apply to any creature that was corporeal and rational (including, say, a rational monkey)’.³⁷ John Simmons concurs, writing, ‘[W]e need only know that the creature is corporeal and rational’ for Locke’s argument about the natural law to hold.³⁸

Locke’s moral reasonings could, on this view, have some degree of internal coherency – but it is unclear how they could lead to a genuinely objective apprehension of reality. Among the Locke scholars who accept the mode interpretation, Steven Forde is especially clear-eyed about the problem this interpretation creates. As Forde puts it,

It is difficult to conceive exactly how Locke understands the relationship between humanity as a collection of natural beings, with no Aristotelian form, no species essence, and no perfection, on one hand, and humanity as part of the abstract category ‘corporeal, rational creature’, subject to moral law, having a purpose and a perfection, on the other.³⁹

Forde is acknowledging here the chasm the mode interpretation leaves between *man* as a substance concept referring to natural beings and *person* as a modal concept referring to an abstract idea. We would have an abstract idea of a *person* that, according to the way we shape that idea, might include a purpose, perfection, and teleology, but how these abstractions could be said to tell us about the natural teleology of real human beings remains unclear.

In that light, consider again Schindler’s claim that *reason* for Locke is not what it was for the classical tradition, because reason for Locke no longer provides a means by which ‘man transcends himself into the real’, comes to ‘intimacy with the being of things’, and finds ‘a genuinely objective measure, such as the *truth* of reality’.⁴⁰ The mode interpretation makes it difficult to rebut Schindler’s criticism, because it makes it difficult to show how moral reasoning can uncover for us purposes built into the nature of human beings as we actually exist.

What should be clear, at this point in the discussion, is that in order to show that Locke’s version of moral reasoning purports to connect to an objective moral reality in the way standard in the pre-modern natural law tradition, we would need to show how Locke’s conception of the *person* is connected to his conception of the *man*. The mode interpretation makes it very difficult to show this connection, but there is another interpretive option, one that shares the strengths of the mode interpretation but not its weaknesses.

IV

Locke decentred ethics from substance concepts, but he did not thereby disconnect ethics from reality. Rather, Locke intended to reach a new level of

³⁷ Rossiter, ‘Hedonism and natural law’, p. 209.

³⁸ Simmons, *Lockean theory*, p. 24.

³⁹ Forde, ‘Mixed modes’, p. 605.

⁴⁰ Schindler, *Freedom*, p. 44.

precision in specifying exactly *how* we are able to reason morally about the substances around us: we reason morally about these substances by speaking of them in terms of the relations that belong to them. It is the human being understood relationally that is the subject of natural law. The perfection, the final end, the teleology of human beings – these things are to be understood, Locke thought, by reflecting on the web of relationships we are embedded into, relationships with God and one another.

Relations occupy a special place in Locke's thought: relational concepts allow us to speak about things actually existing in the world in terms of clear ideas. A 'relation', for Locke, 'consists in the consideration and comparing one idea with another' (E: 2.13.7). Locke holds, though, that some relations 'belong' to 'substances' (E: 2.25.8). Relations that belong to substances allow us to speak with clarity about those substances in the particular contexts the relational ideas reference. As Locke puts it, the '*Ideas* which relative words stand for are often clearer and more distinct than of those Substances to which they do belong' (E: 2.25.8). Locke explains that, for example, the 'notion we have of a Father, or Brother, is a great deal clearer' than the notion we have of 'a Man', in the same way that we can 'much easier conceive what a Friend is, than what God' is (E: 2.25.8).⁴¹

The way relations belong to substances, for Locke, makes moral reasoning possible. In tracing out the beginnings of how one could create a demonstrative science of morality (E: 4.12.8), Locke appeals to the relations between God and man. Locke holds that we 'certainly do not know' God's essence (E: 2.23.35), as indeed 'the comprehension of our understandings comes exceeding short of the vast extent of things' (E: 1.1.5). Nevertheless, we 'have cause enough to magnify the bountiful author of our being' for giving humans 'light enough to lead them to the knowledge of their maker, and the sight of their own duties' (E: 1.1.5). A clear-eyed view of what we 'infallibly find in our own constitutions', Locke thought, proves the existence of a Being superior to us who created us (E: 4.10.6).⁴² And by considering our relation to this Being, we are able to discover 'our Duty and Rules of Action' (E: 4.3.18), with our chief duty being to love and obey God. As Locke put it, if we consider 'the *idea* of an intelligent, but frail and

⁴¹ Recognizing how Locke used relations helps to dispel Reid's concern that the 'natural outcome' of Locke's understanding of nature was 'skepticism with regard to the existence of everything except the existence of our ideas and of the necessary relations amongst them that appear when we compare them'. Thomas Reid, *An inquiry* (Edinburgh, 2000), ch. 7. Reid's concern stands behind Schindler's criticism of modern thought. Schindler contrasts Aquinas, for whom 'what we understand, finally, is the thing itself', with Kant, whom Schindler interprets to hold that we can never understand 'the thing itself' but only 'our concept of it'. Schindler, 'Concept of knowledge', p. 581. Leaving Kant aside, Locke thought that our senses give us real information about the qualities of things themselves (E: 2.8.8; 2.8.12) and that we can reason with precision about those things using the relations belonging to them. On Locke's theory of knowledge, see Shelley Weinberg, 'Locke's natural and religious epistemology', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 58 (2020), pp. 241–66.

⁴² Locke cites Cicero's pithy summary of the teleological argument: 'what can be more sillily arrogant and misbecoming than for a man to think that he has a mind and understanding in him, but yet in all the universe beside, there is no such thing?' (E: 4.10.6; cf. Cicero, *De legibus*, §2.16).

weak being, made by and depending on another, who is eternal, omnipotent, perfectly wise and good', we will with a modicum of effort recognize that the weak being has an obligation to 'honor, fear, and obey GOD' (E: 4.13.3).

Because relations are so central to Locke's ethics, Locke developed a specific term to refer to the human being from a relational perspective, and that term is *person*. Locke's concept *person* is neither a substance nor a mode, but a relation.⁴³ Locke uses the concept *person* (and its equivalent *moral man*) to specify the way in which we are able to reason clearly about actual human beings. To take *person* to be a relational concept is to recognize it to be a term like *father*, *brother*, or *friend*, that denotes an entire human being while connoting the particular angle of vision on that human being provided by his or her connection to something or someone else.⁴⁴ It may not seem intuitive that Locke would think of *person* as a relational concept, but Locke warns that often 'languages have failed to give correlative names' to relational concepts, and then 'the relation is not always so easily taken notice of' (E: 2.25.2). Nevertheless, Locke tells us, all names that are 'more than empty sounds' denote either the 'thing to which the name is applied' by itself or 'the respect the mind finds in it, to something distinct from it, with which it considers it; and then it includes a relation' (E: 2.25.2). This definition of a relation fits exactly Locke's conception of the person, which he develops in the section of the *Essay concerning human understanding* focused on relations.

In that section, Locke tells us that the term *person* refers to a being with agency in relation to the actions for which that being is responsible. The relation the term *person* names is the relation between an agent and the actions he or she owns and for which he or she is thus accountable. As Locke puts it, what 'makes the same *Person*, and constitutes this inseparable *self*' are those actions (and thoughts, desires, etc.) that 'the *consciousness* of this present thinking thing can join it self...and so attribute to it *self*' (E: 2.27.17).⁴⁵ The actions to which an agent stands in this relation of ownership are just those actions for which the agent can be held accountable. Thus *person* is, for Locke, 'a

⁴³ I suggest, in another context, that Locke's *person* is a relation. Graedon Zorzi, 'Liberalism and Locke's philosophical anthropology', *Review of Politics*, 81 (2019), pp. 185–91. To my knowledge, Simendić is the only other recent author to see Locke's *person* as a relation, but he thinks it quite a different kind of relation than I do. See Marko Simendić, 'Locke's person is a relation', *Locke Studies*, 15 (2015), p. 93.

⁴⁴ This phraseology is derived from N. T. Wright's paper 'Mind, spirit, soul and body' presented to the Society of Christian Philosophers regional meeting in March 2011. Yolton may have something similar in mind when he suggests that we view Locke's terms 'man, self, person, agent' as referencing 'different functionalities' of man. John Yolton, *The two intellectual worlds of John Locke* (Ithaca, NY, 2004), p. 37.

⁴⁵ As Boeker explains, Locke's conception of consciousness includes awareness (of, for example, current mental states), memory (of, say, past mental states), and unity (in that consciousness 'provides a unifying structure' to a person's life over time). Ruth Boeker, 'Locke on personal identity', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 55 (2017), pp. 426–7; cf. Ruth Boeker, *Locke on persons and personal identity* (Oxford, 2021). On the metaphysics of the unifying aspect of consciousness, see Shelley Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 156–7, 394; Don Garrett, 'Locke on personal identity, consciousness, and "fatal errors"', *Philosophical Topics*, 31 (2003), pp. 107–8, 116–17; Nicholas Jolley, *Locke's touchy subjects* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 13, 102–3.

forensic term appropriating actions and their merit' (E: 2.27.26).⁴⁶ As the Lockean philosopher and Anglican bishop Edmund Law put it in 1769, when we apply Locke's word '*person...to any man, we do not treat of him absolutely and in gross*' but rather '*under a particular relation*', namely the '*moral relation*' according to which certain kinds of beings are '*properly accountable to some superior for their course of action*'.⁴⁷ Law rightly understood that Locke intends by *person* to refer to human beings as they actually exist in terms of a relation that belongs to them: the relation of responsibility between an agent and the voluntary actions for which he or she can be held accountable.

With this conception of the person in mind, recall the crux of Schindler's criticism of Locke. We saw Schindler say that, 'For Locke, the normative dimension is imposed in a wholly extrinsic manner through divine judgment...the moral quality of the things makes no difference to their inherent desirability, but is "superadded" to them, we might say, by the divine law.'⁴⁸ But in making this claim, Schindler is misunderstanding what Locke means when he says, 'if there be no Prospect beyond the Grave, the inference is certainly right, *Let us eat and drink, let us enjoy what we delight in, for tomorrow we shall die*' (E: 2.21.55; cf. Isa 22:13, 1 Cor 15:32). Locke means that if we reason from the false premise that human beings are not in fact embedded in relationship with our Maker, then erroneous conclusions may well follow. As Locke puts it in his next lines in that section, 'Men may choose different things, and yet all choose right, supposing them only like a Company of poor Insects' (E: 2.21.55). Locke is saying that we are not the kinds of beings who 'cease to be, and exist no more for ever' (E: 2.21.55), so the actions we take in selecting among the array of goods around us are to be examined in the context of the web of relationships that unites us to one another and God.

Indeed, Locke's point in this section is not, as Schindler thinks, that there is no *summum bonum*, but rather that the pagan 'philosophers of old' failed to discover it because they did not properly acknowledge the relationship between man as a responsible, dependent creature and his Creator. Locke thought the pagans were in a 'state of Darkness and Error, in reference to the True God' (RC: 4, 145). The 'corruption of manners' among the pagans Locke thinks can reasonably be blamed in part on 'men's negligence' in failing to more carefully investigate their duties (RC: 14, 154).⁴⁹ And men were negligent, in part, because 'the doctrine of a future state', while not 'wholly hid', was nevertheless

⁴⁶ As Lucci emphasizes, for Locke 'personal identity entails moral accountability', implicating not only 'human justice' but also the 'last judgement'. Diego Lucci, 'The Biblical roots of Locke's theory of personal identity', *Zygon*, 56 (2021), p. 185.

⁴⁷ Edmund Law, 'A defense of Mr. Locke's opinion concerning personal identity', in Galen Strawson, *Locke on personal identity* (Princeton, NJ, 2014), Appendix 2, pp. 236, 243.

⁴⁸ Schindler, *Freedom*, p. 34.

⁴⁹ Locke thought that 'the moral rule to all mankind, being laid within the discovery of their reason...the gentile world did acknowledge' (PN: 227 on Rom 1:26). Pagan behaviour was nevertheless immoral because, as Locke put it, they 'revolted from God' and 'became servants and worshippers of the Devil', so 'God abandoned them to the vassalage they had chosen' (PN: 356 on Eph 1:6).

'not clearly known in the world' (RC: 14, 162). The doctrine of the future state secures the significance of the relationship between an agent and his or her actions. The doctrine does so by making that relationship the focus of the defining day in every person's life: the 'Great Day, when every one shall receive according to his doings', when it will be made clear to all 'that they themselves...are the same, that committed those actions, and deserve that punishment for them' (E: 2.27.26; cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). Therefore, because Jesus 'brought life and immortality to light', he 'changed the nature of things in the world' – placing the 'short pleasures and pains of this present state' in the context of a 'substantial Good, worth all our aims and endeavors' (RC: 14, 162–3; cf. 1 Tim 1:10).⁵⁰ If we think only in terms of this present state, we treat humans as if we were a company of poor insects and then fail to understand humans as persons, beings who must be understood by reference to the Maker they will stand before on 'the Great Day' (E: 2.27.26).

The *summum bonum* for humans, to Locke, can only be described in the context of the final end that is an actual encounter with their Maker. Far from thinking there is no *summum bonum*, Locke holds that 'morality is the proper science and business of mankind in general, who are both concerned and fitted to search out their *Summum Bonum*' (E: 4.12.11). Humans, for Locke, not only have good reason to search out their highest good but also are properly equipped to do so. Locke thought that God equipped humans to do so in part by the fit God created between human senses and desires and the objective good. He writes that God 'scattered up and down several degrees of Pleasure and Pain' so that we would find 'imperfection, dissatisfaction, and want of complete happiness in all the Enjoyments' the created world can afford us and might thereby be led to seek that complete happiness 'in the enjoyment of him, *with whom there is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore*' (E: 2.7.5; cf. Ps. 16:11). The highest good is for Locke just what it was for Augustine, the 'harmonious enjoyment of God'.⁵¹ God is the only end that can satisfy the human heart. As Locke puts it, we are led along by love, a 'sympathy of the soul' and 'union of the mind with the idea of something that has a secret faculty to delight it' (PE: 'Pleasure, pain, the passions', 239). Love fixes only 'upon an end and never embraces any object purely as serviceable to some other purpose' (PE: 'Pleasure, pain, the passions', 239). And the only end that finally satisfies the wandering human heart is God; in his presence alone is real 'happiness, such as the blessed enjoy and such as we are capable of' (PE: 'Pleasure, pain, the passions', 242).

Locke thought we were fitted to discover the natural ordering of man toward the enjoyment of God through the process of moral reasoning, and he thought that process of moral reasoning involved considering ourselves

⁵⁰ What Locke thought could be known of the future state by unaided reason is a matter of debate. Tuckness's proposal is the most intriguing: Locke believed such knowledge to be 'based on probability rather than certainty' but nevertheless sufficient to make obedience to God's law rational. Tuckness, 'Coherence', pp. 86–8.

⁵¹ Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York, NY, 1993), §19.13.

in the context of the relations that define us as creatures. As we examine those relations in more detail, we will fill in the picture of how natural teleology operated in Locke's thought.

V

Locke's account of natural teleology centres around the principle that God so ordered human life in the world that we would find 'imperfection, dissatisfaction, and want of complete happiness in all the Enjoyments' the created world can afford us and be thereby led to seek our highest good 'in the enjoyment of him' (E: 2.7.5).⁵² Schindler is profoundly mistaken to think that Locke took Malebranche's notions but 'remov[ed] these notions from any metaphysical (and so intrinsic) relationship to the good', eliminating a 'truly ontological good, a generous and abundant first cause' in order to 'clear space' that 'the individual might have the power to make choices, to determine himself, to acquire property and pursue his own happiness'.⁵³ On the contrary, Locke was convinced that people can only successfully pursue their own happiness by proper responsiveness to the relationships that define them, with the most important of these relations being the relation to the true ontological Good himself.

Schindler thinks 'the law of nature for Locke is *regulative* rather than *constitutive*' in that the natural law does not 'guid[e] us internally toward fulfillment', but Locke in fact insists that God has designed a correspondence between human beings and the moral law so that human flourishing and obedience to the law are coterminous.⁵⁴ Locke explained that correspondence in his early *Essays on the law of nature*, writing, 'there necessarily result from his [man's] inborn constitution some definite duties for him, which cannot be other than they are' (ELN: 7, 189–90). The point is repeated in Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, where Locke argues that the duties of God's law to man 'arise from the constitution of his [man's] very nature' and thus cannot 'be taken away or dispensed with, without changing the nature of things...thereby introducing and authorizing irregularity, confusion and disorder in the world' (RC: 9, 119).⁵⁵ Because of the way God's

⁵² This argument from desire is echoed in the work of Locke's friend Damaris Cudworth Masham, who wrote that 'the loveliness of his [God's] works as well assures us, that that cause, or author, is yet more lovely than they, and consequently the object the most worthy of our love'. Damaris Masham, *A discourse concerning the love of God* (London, 1696), p. 64.

⁵³ Schindler, *Freedom*, p. 360.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵⁵ Locke was what Tully calls a 'mitigated voluntarist', or, in Tuckness's phrasing, a 'ground voluntarist'. A 'ground voluntarist' holds the will of a superior to be necessary to create moral obligations; in contrast, a 'content voluntarist' holds (as Locke does not) that the *content* of moral obligations is determined by the will of the superior without reference to rationality from the standpoint of the inferior. Tuckness, 'Coherence', pp. 75–6; Tully, *An approach*, p. 281. Locke viewed 'morality as a law imposed on mankind from God...that followed necessarily from the creature God had freely created and to whom he had given reason to infer it'. Hannah Dawson, 'The normativity of nature in Pufendorf and Locke', *Historical Journal*, 63 (2020), p. 531.

law corresponds to human nature, that law is the order that makes it possible for God's 'new kingdom' (RC: 9, 119) to be a place of peace and flourishing.

Locke not only held that the *summum bonum* is the enjoyment of God and that God's law is coterminous with human flourishing, Locke also developed a theory about how God designed the human constitution to relate to the created world in such a way as to draw people from created goods upward toward their final end. This theory is Locke's Christian hedonism. Locke's hedonism does not, as Schindler claims, do away with the traditional idea of good – 'that which has intrinsic value and so presents an a priori claim on all human beings and the communities they form' – and reduce the meaning of good 'to what "they think good"' and 'the effective force they are able to give it'.⁵⁶ On the contrary, Locke was concerned to explain how God has equipped human beings to 'suit the relish of our Minds to the true intrinsic good or ill, that is in things' (E: 2.21.53).

Locke theorized that God equipped human beings to come to appreciate intrinsic goods by the way he designed our minds and bodies to experience pleasure and pain. God has designed us and fit us to our world in such a way that the 'greatest and most lasting' pleasures are 'pleasures of the soul' (PE: 'Ethica A', 318).⁵⁷ Pleasures of the soul are relational pleasures, the pleasures one gets from sparing 'a meal to save the life of a starving man', from saving 'a child's life', in sum, from 'loving others' (PE: 'Ethica A', 319). This 'rule of universal love' (PE: 'Ethica A', 319), which summarizes God's law (RC: 12, 123), is necessary to the flourishing of relational beings such as humans.⁵⁸ Indeed, the only people who can be 'said properly to love' are those who are 'delighted' in 'the very being and happiness' not only of their 'friends' or even of 'all good men' but of 'all mankind in general' (PE: 'Pleasure, pain, the passions', 239).⁵⁹ Thus, God has 'by an inseparable connection, joined virtue and public happiness together', making the practice of virtue not only 'necessary to the preservation of society' but also 'visibly beneficial' to everyone 'with whom the virtuous man has to do' (E: 2.3.6).⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Schindler, *Freedom*, p. 124.

⁵⁷ On 'Ethica A', see Rossiter, 'Hedonism and natural law', pp. 211–12; cf. Victor Nuovo, 'Aspects of Stoicism in Locke's philosophy', in *Christianity, antiquity, and enlightenment* (Dordrecht, 2011), p. 190; Forde, 'Mixed modes', p. 598.

⁵⁸ Stanton emphasizes the centrality of love to Locke's thought: 'for Locke, humanity is defined not by the freedom to choose, but by the freedom to love'. What matters to Locke is not 'autonomy' but the ability 'to follow a law which commands us both to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves'. Stanton, *Fable*, p. 616.

⁵⁹ Locke anticipates Adams's social requirement theory, sharing with Adams the convictions (1) that God's commands are necessary to create genuine moral obligations and (2) that the content of those commands should be understood in terms of 'responding well to the various claims and interests involved in a situation', a relational excellence of which 'God is praised as the supreme and definitive standard'. Robert Adams, *Finite and infinite goods* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 249, 254.

⁶⁰ According to Mitsis, Locke wanted to show that neither the moral law (as the Stoics claimed) nor pleasure (as the Epicureans claimed) is motivationally prior; instead, we apprehend moral law and pleasure together 'as a complex mode of ideas that answer to our rational nature and motivate us'. Phillip Mitsis, 'Locke on pleasure, law, and moral motivation', in Iakovos Vasiliou, ed., *Moral motivation* (Oxford, 2016), p. 178; cf. Michael Hawley, 'Locke's Ciceronian liberalism', *Perspectives on Political Science*, 50 (2021), pp. 74–9; Lisa Hill and Prasanna Nidumolu, 'The influence of classical

It makes sense that God would have fit humans to their world in this way, because human purpose is to 'promote the great design of God', and this great design is a relational one: to 'increase and multiply' and have 'dominion in common', building together a just and glorious civilization as God's vicegerents (1st T: 29, 41).⁶¹ The civilization God intends for humanity is, ultimately, his orderly and peaceable kingdom, 'where each person has his proper place, rank, and function to which he is fitted, that God will accept and delight in them as his people, and live amongst them, as in a well-framed building dedicated and set apart to him' (PN: 378 on Eph 2:22).⁶² God's presence with humanity will make this kingdom a glorious one, since God is 'glorious himself, being the fountain from whence all glory is derived, and to whom all glory is to be given' (PN: 364 on Eph 1.17).⁶³

If the 'pleasures of the soul' that arise from actions properly responsive to one's relational circumstances are the 'greatest and most lasting pleasures', the other pleasures humans experience are 'pleasures of the senses' (PE: 'Ethica A', 318). Pleasures of the senses come from 'a satiated appetite', 'perfumes', 'music', and other sources of 'bodily sensation' (PE: 'Ethica A', 318). Pleasures of the senses are not only lesser and more fleeting than pleasures of the soul, overindulgence of 'our natural propensity to indulge corporeal and present pleasure' poisons human society, leading to all manner of 'viciousness and wrong actions' (CE: 48).⁶⁴ Locke associates the apostle Paul's term *flesh* with such indulgence, commenting on Galatians 5:17 that 'by *flesh* is meant all those vicious and irregular appetites, inclinations and habitudes, whereby a man is turned from his obedience to that eternal Law of Right' (PN: 37).

Whereas pleasures of the soul lead us into service to others under God and so reflect our nature as relational beings, indulgence of the flesh is expressive of 'the love of power and dominion' (CE: 103) and causes us to curve in on

Stoicism on Locke's theory of self-ownership', *History of the Human Sciences*, 34 (2021), pp. 13–16; Nuovo, 'Aspects of Stoicism'; Michael Hawley, *Natural law republicanism* (Oxford, 2022).

⁶¹ Locke's *First treatise* lays out 'a teleology for human life, which revolves around a notion of divine purpose that sets ends to people's actions, which they learn cognitively through the exercise of their natural faculties'. Timothy Stanton, 'Hobbes and Locke on natural law and Jesus Christ', *History of Political Thought*, 29 (2008), pp. 75–6.

⁶² Setting Locke's view of law in the context of the order of the heavenly city helps us to see that, *pace* Schneewind, Locke did not reject but rather embraced Hooker's belief that law 'show[s] us our eternal roles in a cosmic harmony'. Schneewind, *Invention of autonomy*, p. 143.

⁶³ It is not hard to see parallels to Aquinas, who, as Herdt puts it, thought of God as 'the Supreme Good...who reorients all our loves...drawing them into the communion of the divine life'. Jennifer Herdt, 'Excellence-Prior Eudaimonism', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 47 (2019), p. 90; cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (Westminster, MD, 1981), I–II pr. In claiming that humans necessarily pursue happiness, defined in terms of excellent responsiveness to the relational webs that define us, Locke ends up holding, as Aquinas did, 'that the will is necessarily oriented toward the agent's own perfection, or equivalently, his happiness'. Jean Porter, *Justice as virtue: a Thomistic perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2016), p. 239; cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I–II Q. 1, A. 5.

⁶⁴ Locke denied innate concepts (the 'blank slate') but affirmed innate proclivities. His insistence that there are 'natural tendencies imprinted on the Minds of Men' (E: 1.3.3) is missed by Parker, who assumes Locke thought humans naturally morally good (he did not, see CE: 103) based on his denial of innate ideas. Parker, *Biblical politics*, p. 21.

ourselves in idolatrous rebellion against the harmonious order for human life God intends.⁶⁵ Such a disordered love of self necessarily impedes human flourishing. And, because the contrast between these two types of pleasures is objective and within the grasp of all humans to recognize, Locke insisted that those who disobey the law of love are justly accountable for their baneful actions. He wrote that the man who in shortsighted self-indulgence operates by ‘wrong measures of good and evil’ will eventually ‘vitate his own Palate’, clouding his ability to recognize the relational demands of his circumstances and to respond to those around him in love (E: 2.21.56). Such a man has only himself to blame ‘for the sickness and death that follows’ (E: 2.21.56).⁶⁶

VI

Because Locke thought humans quite capable of grasping the natural teleology of the relational self, his view of natural law was contiguous with rather than disruptive of the pre-modern teleological view of humanity. Locke did indeed hold a scientific view of nature and, concomitantly, think humans incapable of intuitively forming distinct and perfect concepts of substances. But this position has application only to the material cause of human beings, not the final cause. Our material cause – the question of human constitution, implicating the various mind–body and body–soul questions that continue to vex philosophers today – Locke thought it very difficult to settle with precision (E: 2.27.23–5).⁶⁷ Locke did not think humans have any such difficulty grasping our final cause and our teleological orientation toward it, because Locke thought that we could quite easily recognize ourselves to be persons.

Because Locke’s *person* is a relation, not a mode (as received wisdom among Locke scholars has it), reflecting on what makes for excellent personhood involves thinking about actual human beings as we find them in terms of the distinctive relation that belongs to them as persons. That relation is one of responsibility for our actions (and thoughts, desires, etc.), a relation that

⁶⁵ The relevant Latin terms, made famous by Augustine, are *libido dominandi* and *incurvatus in se*.

⁶⁶ Locke’s hedonism does not clear the way for subjectivism but instead provides a mechanism for justifying Calvin’s insistence that ‘the end of the natural law...is to render man inexcusable’ by removing ‘all pretext for ignorance’. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.22. By showing how mundane reflection on human desire can reveal human duty, Locke underscores the potency of the moral abilities of the ‘man of ordinary capacity’, a recurring theme for Locke (E: 3.10.11–12; 1.1.5–6; 4.17.4; 2nd T: 13). Waldron captures this democratic bent in Locke, writing that ‘he has little patience for the view that possession of the technical apparatus of philosophical argument marks an important distinction between types of reasoners’. Waldron, *God, Locke, and equality*, p. 92.

⁶⁷ Consider, for example, the mind–body problem in contemporary philosophy. See Richard Warner and Tadeusz Szubka, eds., *The mind–body problem* (Oxford, 1994). The precise issues Locke brings up in E: 2.27.23–5 about mind, body, and soul in relation to judgement and resurrection continue to be topics of inquiry among Christian philosophers, for example in the debate over whether the intermediate state requires a dualistic view of human constitution or, alternatively, is compatible with a monist view. See John Cooper, *Body, soul, and life everlasting* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000); Joel Green, *Body, soul, and human life* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2008); Ruth Baker, ‘Need a Christian be a mind/body dualist?’, *Faith and Philosophy*, 12 (1995), pp. 489–504; William Hasker, ‘Concerning the unity of consciousness’, *Faith and Philosophy*, 12 (1995), pp. 532–47.

draws us into a web of relationships with other persons, including God, that provides context for the evaluation of those actions. Excellence for the person, therefore, is relational excellence: love for God and neighbour.

Locke thought the moral law, summarized in the requirement to love God and neighbour, had been made by God to so cohere with human nature as to be integral to the flourishing of humans individually and collectively. For each person, the greatest pleasures they can know come from relational excellences, 'acts of love and charity' (PE: 'Ethica A', 319). And society as a whole becomes harmonious or diseased insofar as people are drawn out of themselves toward others in love. Even so, to postulate with the best of the pagan philosophers that happiness is to be found in 'virtue or contemplation' is to theorize 'in vain' (E: 2.21.55), because God has made it impossible for us to find 'complete happiness' in even the highest creaturely pursuits in order that we 'might be led to seek it in the enjoyment of him' (E: 2.7.5).

The place of natural teleology in Locke's thought suggests that Locke is an unlikely source for a modern overemphasis on 'poiesis' or 'man's 'artistic' character', as Taylor and Manent put it, respectively.⁶⁸ Locke's self is not at all 'extensionless', as Taylor thought it to be,⁶⁹ but relational. The healthy human being is the one extended outward in love toward God and neighbour. Such a person cannot create meaning whole cloth but must first receive with gratitude her self and her property (2nd T: 27) as a trust from God to be used in service (2nd T: 6). And whether or not Manent is correct to say that Locke gave birth to 'what is commonly called modern philosophy', Locke certainly did not reject concern with human 'excellence' in favour of a focus on 'the capacity to produce effects', as Manent claimed.⁷⁰ Locke held that humans are supposed to use their capacity to produce effects to 'approach infinite perfection and happiness' by imitating 'those superior beings [angels] above us, who enjoy perfect happiness' because they are, as we are meant to be, imitators of God in being 'steadily determined in their choice of good' (E: 2.21.49).

Arguments that Locke condemned the modern West into a downward spiral toward decadence and immorality by his acceptance of a scientific view of nature are unconvincing, because he did not reject natural teleology on the basis of his view of nature but instead was concerned to show compatibility between natural teleology and that view.

⁶⁸ On poiesis, Zuckert's Straussian reading of Locke's view of property is relevant. Had Locke, as Zuckert argues, supplanted divine ownership with self-ownership, Locke would indeed have been emphasizing man's poetic, artistic capacity. Zuckert reads Locke's claim 'every man has a property in his own person' (2nd T: 27) as contradicting his claim just above about humans being God's property (2nd T: 6). Zuckert, *Natural rights*, p. 219. A more convincing reading harmonizes those two claims by recognizing that, for Locke, to hold 'property in' something, including one's own person, is to hold a usufruct, a 'right to use and enjoy God's property for God's purposes'. Colman, *Locke's moral philosophy*, p. 122; cf. Tully, *An approach*, p. 28.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the self*, pp. 171ff.

⁷⁰ Manent, *City*, pp. 113–16.

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