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Resistance, Religion and Responsibility

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Theology, epistemology and toleration: against the 'Empire of Darkness'

Before his exile in the Netherlands in 1683 Locke had shown some first stirrings of interest in doctrinal theology in the mid-1670s, and these stirrings had then probably been very significantly developed by external influences between 1679 and 1683 – the reading of unitarian works in 1679 and perhaps in 1680, Locke's own increasingly biblically and patristically astute criticisms of Stillingfleet and Filmer and the reading that occasioned of these necessitated in 1681–3, and his discussions with Burnard and Damaris Cudworth in the early 1680s. In exile in the Netherlands this burgeoning interest turned very rapidly into very deep interest indeed. Locke's correspondence, notebooks, journals, and book reviews in his first years in the Netherlands are filled with theology. Cudworth declared shortly after Locke's arrival that his time in the Netherlands had already 'Certainly been Advantageous to you, since I cannot but say . . . that you have learnt more Scripture there than ever you Knew in your whole life before'.

There are many reasons for this transformation. Theology was central to Burnard Cudworth, with whom Locke had just fallen in love. While it is likely that Locke supported the attempt at revolution in England in 1685 by trying to finance the ill-fated Monmouth rebellion, he very probably thought that he was destined to remain in exile for the rest of his life. More importantly, freed from the political duties of Shaftesbury's campaigns and intrigues, Locke's restless intelligence found a substantial new area of interest in the extensive theological debates of the Netherlands, where the questioning of central theological doctrines both reflected and furthered his own long-standing anticlerical suspicions of clerical 'orthodoxy' and his support for toleration. Enquiry into the nature of the patristic tradition had become for Locke with the 'Critical Notes' a major necessity in order to challenge the powers claimed by priests; opposition to priestly

traditions manipulable in whatever direction interest led the priests had led Locke in 1682 in the midst of a series of epistemological notes on reason to attack clerical 'tradition' and to suggest that pursuit of the content of divine law needed to be undertaken by men's 'natural light' (not, it should be noted, supernatural light). The initial attempt of the First Treatise to find 'plain' messages in Scripture had increasingly turned even within the treatise towards an attempt to determine the precepts of natural reason before revelation, and Locke had followed the latter tack almost exclusively in the Second Treatise. In theological debate in the Netherlands Locke found learned allegations of far more widespread abuses of powers of what was already coming to be called 'priestcraft' in theological works that opposed the Trinity and satisfaction and thus the status of 'priests' of Protestantism as well as Catholicism as mediators of Christ's sacrifice. These works indicated the self-interested motivations of various Fathers in adopting trinitarianism, and challenged claims to authority in biblical interpretation that derived from command of languages and patristic sources.

Locke quickly became an avid reader and contributor to various Continental journals reviewing recent publications on theology through Europe and discussing central issues of theology, toleration and epistemology. The most important of these journals was the *Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique*, founded in these years by an impetuous Calvinist Huguenot refugee turned Arminian, Jean le Clerc. The *Bibliothèque* frequently discussed issues of theological orthodoxy and reviewed the new critical scholarship on the patristic period. Le Clerc indicated the thing of the impact of these journals in his smugly self-satisfied declaration that the 'republic of letters is at last become a country of light, and not of authority and implicit faith as it has been too long was to the *Bibliothèque* that Locke contributed his first significant contributions – an article on his method of taking adversaria and an essay the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; he may also have contributed a number of book reviews on theological works, including the *Commentaire Philosophique*. In the 1690s Locke himself tried to contribute to the critical theological debate in the *Bibliothèque* by supplying for the new English unitarian challenges to orthodoxy.²

Locke was placed into the vortex of theological debate because

² BM Add MS 15642, 124 for an example of Locke's interest in learned journals. Le Clerc in Colie, 'John Locke', 111–29; van Limborch's letter of introduction to Joannes Graevius, *Correspondence*, II, 793; J. le Clerc (ed.), *Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique de l'année 1686–93*, cf. the marks and notes and page lists by Locke in copies of the *Bibliothèque*.

his early years in Holland hiding from arrest under assumed names in the houses of various leading members of the Arminian community, and his later years in the household and in the library of the theologically learned and free-thinking Quaker Benjamin Furly, whose hatred for the priestly 'quacks' outdid even Locke's own detestation and who found even Quakerism too restrictive and too priestly a religion. Furly's house was at the centre of the early Enlightenment.

Locke struck up a particularly close friendship with Philipp van Limborch, Remonstrant Professor of Divinity and their leading theologian. Within a few months of their first meeting in 1684 Locke was reading van Limborch's works before publication and making suggestions for improvements, and the rapid pace of growth in Locke's interest in theology is suggested in van Limborch's letters of introduction to Locke to his friends having few equals in knowledge of theology. Within a few years Locke was lauding van Limborch as the 'best of friends' and 'the best of men', recognising his importance as a friend who supported and advised him. In a 1677 manuscript 'Study' Locke had stressed that friends were vital to discuss and re-examine received ideas, and in the *Essay* Locke described 'rational discussion' with a close friend as an example of a 'very agreeable idea of pleasure'; van Limborch quickly became exactly the kind of friend that Locke had lauded.³

When twenty years later Damaris Cudworth noted that Locke had 'when Calvinism was the fashion in England' and had described 'opinions that as Ralph's daughter she had grown up with and 'always' prevalent in the University 'and among the clergy' as being new to her, she continued – with a comment that suggests that for her Locke had been hostile to all clergy before going to the Netherlands because he associated them all with the Calvinism of his youth – that he had had 'very little contact with clergymen' before going to Holland, and 'indeed' that he had found the opinions of the Remonstrants particularly 'agreeable' – being unaccustomed to hear 'theologians speak in such a reasonable manner'. That Locke found elements of Arminian thought attractive is clearly suggested by his arrival in the Netherlands is also suggested by a letter of van Limborch that when Locke first arrived in Holland he had 'surprised' to find how much he agreed with in Arminian thought,

and Gough, *Letter*, introduction; Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics*, chs. 9 and 10; *Correspondence*, II, pp. 648–51 on the Remonstrants and van Limborch; *Correspondence*, II, p. 39 on Furly and his many letters to Locke in the 1690s in vols. IV and V for his consideration of toleration, theology and Quaker unorthodoxy. *Correspondence*, II, 793; 831; 865; 868; 877.

having long attributed to them views 'very different' than they actually held.⁴

It is possible that Locke's rapid support for Arminianism was prompted by their advocacy of religious toleration and their practice of this toleration through doctrinal comprehension: giving practical effect to van Limborch's views on the limited requirements of Christianity, the Arminians admitted to communion with them as fellow Christians a number of Socinians who had fled from Polish persecution and were allowed to settle in the Netherlands but were not permitted their own churches for public worship. On 30 July 1684, Locke went to an 'Armenian' service and recorded that 'They admit to their communion all Christians, and hold our duty to join in love and charity with those who differ from them in opinion.' While some English Arminians were supporters of toleration, very many English Arminians were high-church Anglicans and strong supporters of religious persecution. It still seems unlikely, however, that Limborch's comment about views that Locke found surprising but genial referred to toleration: as a contributor to English toleration debates which clearly enunciated the comparative tolerationism of Dutch, it is not easy to believe that Locke would have been surprised at Dutch Arminian support for toleration.⁵

By as early as April 1684 Locke had purchased and begun to read a number of Arminian works, including works by the leading Arminian of the previous generation, Episcopius, and had purchased several works explicitly debating predestination and grace such as Velthuisius' *De Gratia et Praedestinatione Tradita Novo Methodo*. Locke may have been surprised to find that the Arminians were trinitarians who defended the satisfaction and original sin as well as man's free will and reason in England the Arminians were often accused of elevating men's freedom and ability to act morally too greatly, an accusation that was voiced, for instance, in Hammond's *Pacifick Decrees*, which Locke read in the 1660s, and in Fowler's *Principles and Practices*, which Locke probably read in 1674-5. The logic of Locke's August 1680 journal comment on the goodness and Damaris Cudworth's comment opposing Arminianism and Calvinism, however, make support for Arminian trinitarianism and in Christ's satisfaction and original sin seem very unlikely to have been what Locke found appealing.⁶

⁴ Amsterdam: Remonstrant MSS J57A, cited and very variously translated in many editions, including Klibansky and Gough, *Letter*, xv-xvii; Fox, Bourne, *Life*, II, 6; le Clerc, *passim*.

⁵ MS Locke f8, pp. 100-1, 30 July 1684.

⁶ MS Locke f8, 36-9; 41-2; 49; 52; 57; 75; 78-9; 203; 210; 268-9; 287-93; 305-9; 315-16; 319-20; 321-2; 323-4; 325-6; 327-8; 329-30; 331-2; 333-4; 335-6; 337-8; 339-40; 341-2; 343-4; 345-6; 347-8; 349-50; 351-2; 353-4; 355-6; 357-8; 359-60; 361-2; 363-4; 365-6; 367-8; 369-70; 371-2; 373-4; 375-6; 377-8; 379-80; 381-2; 383-4; 385-6; 387-8; 389-90; 391-2; 393-4; 395-6; 397-8; 399-400; 401-2; 403-4; 405-6; 407-8; 409-10; 411-12; 413-14; 415-16; 417-18; 419-20; 421-2; 423-4; 425-6; 427-8; 429-30; 431-2; 433-4; 435-6; 437-8; 439-40; 441-2; 443-4; 445-6; 447-8; 449-50; 451-2; 453-4; 455-6; 457-8; 459-60; 461-2; 463-4; 465-6; 467-8; 469-70; 471-2; 473-4; 475-6; 477-8; 479-80; 481-2; 483-4; 485-6; 487-8; 489-90; 491-2; 493-4; 495-6; 497-8; 499-500; 501-2; 503-4; 505-6; 507-8; 509-10; 511-12; 513-14; 515-16; 517-18; 519-20; 521-2; 523-4; 525-6; 527-8; 529-30; 531-2; 533-4; 535-6; 537-8; 539-40; 541-2; 543-4; 545-6; 547-8; 549-50; 551-2; 553-4; 555-6; 557-8; 559-60; 561-2; 563-4; 565-6; 567-8; 569-70; 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2551-2; 2553-4; 2555-6; 2557-8; 2559-60; 2561-2; 2563-4; 2565-6; 2567-8; 2569-70; 2571-2; 2573-4; 2575-6; 2577-8; 2579-80; 2581-2; 2583-4; 2585-6; 2587-8; 2589-90; 2591-2; 2593-4; 2595-6; 2597-8; 2599-2600; 2601-2; 2603-4; 2605-6; 2607-8; 2609-10; 2611-12; 2613-14; 2615-16; 2617-18; 2619-20; 2621-2; 2623-4; 2625-6; 2627-8; 2629-30; 2631-2; 2633-4; 2635-6; 2637-8; 2639-40; 2641-2; 2643-4; 2645-6; 2647-8; 2649-50; 2651-2; 2653-4; 2655-6; 2657-8; 2659-60; 2661-2; 2663-4; 2665-6; 2667-8; 2669-70; 2671-2; 2673-4; 2675-6; 2677-8; 2679-80; 2681-2; 2683-4; 2685-6; 2687-8; 2689-90; 2691-2; 2693-4; 2695-6; 2697-8; 2699-2700; 2701-2; 2703-4; 2705-6; 2707-8; 2709-10; 2711-12; 2713-14; 2715-16; 2717-18; 2719-20; 2721-2; 2723-4; 2725-6; 2727-8; 2729-30; 2731-2; 2733-4; 2735-6; 2737-8; 2739-40; 2741-2; 2743-4; 2745-6; 2747-8; 2749-50; 2751-2; 2753-4; 2755-6; 2757-8; 2759-60; 2761-2; 2763-4; 2765-6; 2767-8; 2769-70; 2771-2; 2773-4; 2775-6; 2777-8; 2779-80; 2781-2; 2783-4; 2785-6; 2787-8; 2789-90; 2791-2; 2793-4; 2795-6; 2797-8; 2799-2800; 2801-2; 2803-4; 2805-6; 2807-8; 2809-10; 2811-12; 2813-14; 2815-16; 2817-18; 2819-20; 2821-2; 2823-4; 2825-6; 2827-8; 2829-30; 2831-2; 2833-4; 2835-6; 2837-8; 2839-40; 2841-2; 2843-4; 2845-6; 2847-8; 2849-50; 2851-2; 2853-4; 2855-6; 2857-8; 2859-60; 2861-2; 2863-4; 2865-6; 2867-8; 2869-70; 2871-2; 2873-4; 2875-6; 2877-8; 2879-80; 2881-2; 2883-4; 2885-6; 2887-8; 2889-90; 2891-2; 2893-4; 2895-6; 2897-8; 2899-2900; 2901-2; 2903-4; 2905-6; 2907-8; 2909-10; 2911-12; 2913-14; 2915-16; 2917-18; 2919-20; 2921-2; 2923-4; 2925-6; 2927-8; 2929-30; 2931-2; 2933-4; 2935-6; 2937-8; 2939-40; 2941-2; 2943-4; 2945-6; 2947-8; 2949-50; 2951-2; 2953-4; 2955-6; 2957-8; 2959-60; 2961-2; 2963-4; 2965-6; 2967-8; 2969-70; 2971-2; 2973-4; 2975-6; 2977-8; 2979-80; 2981-2; 2983-4; 2985-6; 2987-8; 2989-90; 2991-2; 2993-4; 2995-6; 2997-8; 2999-3000; 3001-2; 3003-4; 3005-6; 3007-8; 3009-10; 3011-12; 3013-14; 3015-16; 3017-18; 3019-20; 3021-2; 3023-4; 3025-6; 3027-8; 3029-30; 3031-2; 3033-4; 3035-6; 3037-8; 3039-40; 3041-2; 3043-4; 3045-6; 3047-8; 3049-50; 3051-2; 3053-4; 3055-6; 3057-8; 3059-60; 3061-2; 3063-4; 3065-6; 3067-8; 3069-70; 3071-2; 3073-4; 3075-6; 3077-8; 3079-80; 3081-2; 3083-4; 3085-6; 3087-8; 3089-90; 3091-2; 3093-4; 3095-6; 3097-8; 3099-3100; 3101-2; 3103-4; 3105-6; 3107-8; 3109-10; 3111-12; 3113-14; 3115-16; 3117-18; 3119-20; 3121-2; 3123-4; 3125-6; 3127-8; 3129-30; 3131-2; 3133-

tion from even those contemporary accounts to which he was closest that most noteworthy here.

It seems most likely, therefore, that Locke was surprised by Arminian views but found them congenial not because of their specific resolutions – the problems of free will and salvation but because of their reticence in defining these matters and their even greater reticence in enforcing their views on others – that he had formerly thought that they professed a rigidly defined soteriology and now found that they held broad commitments to man's freedom and the necessity of God's grace but encouraged an extremely wide range of more detailed theological opinions within that very broad commitments. It was the Arminians' doctrinal freedom and support for toleration that was to be by far the most important topic in Locke's letters to van Limborch after Locke's 1689 return to England. It seems to have been the central message that he took from Arminian works when first reading them. Locke announced to van Limborch in 1689 that he was 'everywhere in search of the truth alone' and that 'to the best of my understanding' he embraced it 'with equal readiness whether I find among the orthodox or the heterodox', an important and explicit commitment of theological eclecticism that he was thereafter to repeat on many occasions. In other letters Locke lauded van Limborch as one who embraced 'truth from whatever source it comes', and as one who reasoned arguments and could be convinced of views different from his own by reasoned arguments, being free from 'party spirit'.¹³

It may well have been van Limborch's personal support for a minimalist far beyond that of most Latitudinarians and his willingness to accommodate antitrinitarianism that Locke found surprising and unusual, or which, if Locke had not yet become very doubtful about the Trinity, helped considerably to lead Locke towards antitrinitarianism. The *Theologia Christiana* van Limborch declared that the only absolute necessary belief of Christianity was that Jesus was the Christ. Van Limborch went further still in the same year in composing *De Veritate Christianae Amica Collatio cum Eruditio Judaica*, a work of Jewish controversialist, Orbio, which attempted to show that coming was prophesied in the Old Testament. In the course of the argument van Limborch was willing to say that Christ's divinity was explicitly advanced in Scripture and that belief in it was not necessary for salvation. Van Limborch's two 1685 compositions could thus be indicating in tandem that the sole necessary belief of Christianity was that Jesus was the Christ, did not explicitly indicate that Christ was God.

¹³ Correspondence, II, 834; Five Letters Concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, 11690. 105; Correspondence, II, 834; III, 868.

may well have met the identification of Jesus as the Christ as the 'Unum necessarium' first in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, as his opponents were to claim in the 1690s, and he may well have been registering the non-trinitarianism of the minimal belief that Jesus was the Messiah in taking his one note from Bayly in 1679, and also aware of argument for such a minimal creed in reading Croft's *Naked Truth* in mid-1681. In reading Limborch's *Theologia Christiana* and *De Veritate* he surely became even more conscious of, and probably firmly committed to, the argument for a credal minimalism based on belief that Jesus was the Messiah that was to be central to his own *Reasonableness of Christianity* a decade later. The message was further reinforced and presented in combination with another major feature of Locke's thought in the *Reasonableness* in William Popple's *Practical Catechism*, which Locke read in 1687. This emphasised that the only belief necessary to salvation was that Jesus was the Messiah, the son of God raised from the dead, and it argued that the reinforcement of Christianity by Christ was necessary since the duties of natural religion required 'deep meditation'. They were therefore both beyond the 'vulgar' in their 'fine-spun' consequences, beyond even those who could not see it as well. Popple was to become a very close friend indeed of Locke immediately upon his return to England and was the translator of Locke's *Stella de Tolerantia*.¹⁴

II

Latitudinarianism that the Remonstrants promoted in theological enquiry and helped to provide an atmosphere of free intellectual enquiry in which they undertook his studies of theology in the Netherlands. The critical argument in the Netherlands in these years, however, owed rather more to the provocation by several French and English works than to Arminianism itself. A series of critical debates followed publication of Richard Simon's *Histoire Critique*, focused on but not restricted to Jean le Clerc's *Recherche Sentimens des quelques theologiens*, Simon's defence of the *Histoire Critique*, the *Response aux sentimens*, and le Clerc's *Défens des sentimens*.

Simon's forebook on the Old Testament which Locke very probably began in the early 1680s, and possibly began in 1680–1 even before coming to the Netherlands – which would date it at about the time that he was composing attacks on Filmer's treatment of the Old Testament – starts with two pages of notes on Richard Simon's *Histoire Critique*. These

¹⁴ See c33, 19; Klibansky and Gough, *Letter*, introduction, xxii; Spellman, *Locke and the*, 135.

summarise Simon's argument that several books of the Old Testament were collections of other more ancient writings recorded by public scribes from Moses' time, and that while these writings were divinely inspired over time many careless errors and alterations had been made. Simon's overall point was that Protestants who argued that 'the Scripture is plain itself' were ignorant or prejudiced. The textual problems of Scripture, particularly the errors that had been made in its transmission, necessitated for Simon an extrascriptural tradition and thus Catholicism. Showing great interest in examining these claims for himself, in his years in the Netherlands Locke took extensive notes from several works of sophisticated interpretation of the customs of the biblical period, such as Strabo, le Moynes's *Varia Sacra*, Sir John Marsham's *Chronicae Canaanus*, le Moynes's *Varia Sacra*, Sir John Marsham's *Chronicae Canaanus*, *Aegypticus*, *Ebraicus*, *Graecus*, et *Disquisitiones*, and, most importantly, John Spencer's 'very learned and . . . very dangerous' *De Legibus Hebraeorum*, which indicted Mosaic practices that had then been continued in Christianity and were major elements of priestly authority, including tithes, priestly vestments and sacrifices, as priestly 'accommodations', 'superstitious' gentile practices. Instead of being divinely required, Spencer in these practices God had allowed Moses to comply with partially. Spencer had, just possibly with some foresight of these attitudes, been one of those clerics that Locke had preferred in the Church of England in his time as Secretary to the Clergy in the early 1670s.¹⁵

Simon's work was written to defend Catholicism; its critical corrosion of Protestant clerics' hermeneutic authority and its emphasis upon the culties of interpreting the Bible were substantial. Reading it was to put John Hampden into free thought around 1680, and Locke may well have been reading it and moved further towards criticism of clerics' argument about orthodoxy as a result in 1680-2. The works of Spencer and Simon focused on the Old Testament. Le Clerc's *Sentiments* in response to Simon was a far more direct explosive attack on theological orthodoxy. What Clerc attacked Simon's dependence upon the church as an interpretive authority, he extended Simon's argument that not all of Scripture was newly inspired very forcefully from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The eleventh and twelfth letters in le Clerc's *Sentiments* argue in prophecies, in recording history, and even when discussing doctrine itself, the Apostles had often not been inspired by a particular revelation from God. The scriptural identification of the Apostles speaking 'with the Holy Spirit' had often meant no more than their being influenced

¹⁵ MS Locke f30, passim; MS Locke f32, passim, esp. 25; 30v; 43r; 54v; 61r; 64r; 82v; 137v; 146r; 160r; MS Locke f8, 305ff.; MS Locke f9, 4ff.; cf. Reedy, *Bible and Freedom*, 105-6; MS Locke c27, 238-9. I concur with M. S. Johnson, *Locke on Freedom* (1978), 160 n.7, on the dating of most of these entries and interest in these issues.

general spirit of piety. The Apostles were not 'secretaries of the Spirit' taking down the Spirit's dictation. Contradictions between the Gospels showed that not everything they said was inspired; the Apostles had dissembled, and had made mistakes in recording their Gospels. Le Clerc declared that this account of variation and mistake in the New Testament was supported by St Jerome, and by the critical scholarship of Erasmus, Hieronymus and Episcopus. According to le Clerc, to ignore these points was to lay religion open to attack from libertines who could point out the contradictions between the Gospels and therefore refuse to accept anything in the Gospels. Recognition of these problems did not necessitate an oral tradition, as Simon claimed. Rather, the important elements of Scripture had been recorded plainly, were agreed upon by all of the Evangelists, and could be seen clearly in all of their Gospels; *contra* Simon, they were even plain in all translations.

Among the major consequences of le Clerc's argument was a diminution of the importance of the Apostles' epistles. By both locating the important points as contained in the Gospels, and declaring that in writing the epistles the Apostles had not been divinely inspired, but instead had largely followed their own opinions, le Clerc substantially lessened the role of the epistles as sources of doctrine. Le Clerc simultaneously criticised the effect of the substance of the Gospel, the observation of 'gospel morals', the 'outside' of 'opinion'. The passion for orthodoxy of opinion was a human cloak for inability to behave morally, while the 'severe' morality required by the Gospel was little suited to men's 'way of living'. A refugee from Geneva orthodoxy who had been converted to Arminianism by reading the work of Stephen Courcelles, le Clerc showed how far he had travelled by arguing that men 'should apply our selves wholly to the obeying Christ's precepts, which is the only thing God indispensably requires from us'.¹⁶

Locke read le Clerc's *Sentiments* in 1685 with feelings apparently mixing considerable anticlerical hostility to those who he had no doubt would attack it immediately with reservations about the incaution of le Clerc's expression of the arguments – an attitude that may well reflect far more le Clerc's commitment to Nicole's strictures on challenging religious opinion with careful humility than opposition to the arguments themselves. He wrote to van Limborch that upon reading the eleventh letter he had heard of protest 'as if it meant the end of all religion'. The ways of critics like proclaimed all too well known to van Limborch: the less they are to refute some heterodox opinion, the more they are roused, in their

le Clerc, *Sentiments des quelques theologiens*; quotations from translation of the eleventh and twelfth letters in *Five Letters*, passim, esp. 13-27; 35; 42; 44; 60; 77-85; 93; 108-17.

anxiety not to appear idle in God's cause, to outrices, accusations, 'calumnies'. Locke recognised that Scripture was entirely 'divine authority' was to leave all of religion open to the assault of philosophers. Although not spelled out by Locke, his notion here may have included the view that much belief about natural philosophy in the Bible was erroneous, but was uncorrected by Christ in accommodating himself to gentile and Jewish views in order to concentrate on fundamental points mentioned in le Clerc's work, and later to be central to Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*. If every word of Scripture had to be treated as of divine authority in order to allow any to be of divine authority, all would fall together. Locke recognised, however, that accepting this was not of divine authority raised the question of the criterion to distinguish that which was from that which was not. This was a question of 'utmost degree fundamental', and for Locke it was therefore proper to proceed with the greatest caution, prudence, and moderation', which Clerc had signally failed to do.¹⁷

Locke wrote to van Limborch that he found some of le Clerc's descriptions of the Gospels so convincing that he recognised that there were a number of passages which cast doubt on the general infallibility of Scripture, which he could not find an answer, and about which he asked van Limborch for his opinion. Locke's doubts and questioning were surely heightened when he discussed theology with le Clerc and Furly after 1680. In the later 1680s, Locke was corresponding with le Clerc directly on a number of points of biblical interpretation, and his later correspondence with Furly suggests that their intellectual discussions in the late 1680s revolved around the need to interpret Scripture with humility and careful scholarship. Furly's swingeing criticism of almost all clerics for following neither course nor emphasis upon morality almost to the complete exclusion of doctrine in 1688 Locke was recommending le Clerc's *Défens des sentimens* to van Furly as demonstrating that there had been many alterations in the Gospels themselves.¹⁸

The clear implication of Locke's correspondence with van Limborgh and Furly is that Locke had become very interested by his reading of Clerc's work in developing a way of discriminating between parts of the Scripture of divine authority and those which were not, the question of 'the utmost degree fundamental'. Ten years later, in the *Reasonable Christianity* he was to proffer an interpretation of Scripture which

17 Correspondence. II. 834.

¹⁷ Correspondance, II, 65.
¹⁸ Le Clerc (ed.), Bibliothèque, passim; MS Locke f30, passim; MS Locke f32, passim; MS Locke f10, passim; An Account of the Life and Writings of Jean Le Clerc (1712), 16; S. A. Golden, New York.

Christ had deliberately neither confuted errors of natural philosophy nor announced his own role in order to be able to deliver his message of eternal life achieved through faith and moral behaviour. He was to argue that this general theme was identified clearly in the Gospels themselves, and that the epistles were relatively unimportant in delivering the main message of Christianity. He was to argue that the only essential belief of Christianity was that Jesus was the Christ. There is an important sense in which this interpretation was an amalgam of van Limborch's credal minimalism with an answer that largely followed le Clerc's own arguments to a problem that le Clerc's work had posed in a particularly acute form for himself in 1685.¹⁹

the *Sentiments* had argued that the Apostles had had the assistance of the Holy Spirit at certain moments only, and had itemised its means of operation, such as visions and voices. Christ alone was identified as dwelling in him. In Locke's notebook on the New Testament, which was very probably indeed used by Locke during the 1680s, there is a note which stresses at length the means of communication that God employed, which stresses passages to which le Clerc had been referring in his discussion, and which was therefore probably created in this period; the note bears the initials J.L., indicating that it is Locke's own interpretation. Interestingly, comments upon Colossians 2:9, a passage often interpreted as support for the Trinity, interpreted that passage in a way that did not ascribe to it a divine nature. Only Jesus of all of the prophets had been given the highest degree of revelation 'expressed here by the Spirit given not by nature'. There was no period when Christ did not have the assistance of the Spirit 'whereby every thing he said was of divine authority every thing he said was according to the will of God. And by this I think we may understand that expression of St Paul Col II.9 for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily viz that the Spirit of God without stint or measure was as certainly and constantly in him to be the source of all his words and actions, as our souls are annexed to our bodys as the principle of motion in us.' 120

identifying the passage as testifying to the deity of Christ, this observation comes close to that favoured by most unitarians, rather than most trinitarians. If this note was made in the mid-1680s, it is possible that Locke was simply unaware of the more usual trinitarian explanation of the passage. It is also possible, however, that it was constructed with a desire to distinguish fundamental truths of Scripture and with unitarian arguments that the Trinity was not among these at the

MS Locke f30, 42r.

front of Locke's mind. In the Netherlands Locke's general awakening of substantial interest in theological issues and his particular interest in debates over the arguments of Simon and le Clerc helped to reinforce pre-existing interest in Socinian works. By as early as April 1684 Locke purchased the leading Socinian Johann Crell's *Ethics* and *De Spiritu Sancto* and his pseudonymous *De Trinitate*, although there is no indication that he read these then. In 1685, however, he bought Johann Volkel's *De Vera Religione*, a synopsis of Socinus' thought by his amanuensis, and Johann Crell's *De Uno Deo Patre*, and there are several indications that he probably began to read each of these in 1685 and 1686. In a short manuscript entitled 'Volkeli Hypothesis De Vera religione', Locke started a synopsis of Volkel's work which was primarily concerned with the debate following Simon's analysis of the Old Testament.²¹

A lot of the notes in two notebooks on the Old and New Testaments come from these two Socinian works, bound together, that Locke had purchased in 1685, as do many of the notes in a number of bibles that was probably composing at this time. The vast majority of the notes in these notebooks and bibles concerned biblical customs and chronology in the Greek New Testament, probably the one that Locke purchased in 1685, and from Volkel's *De Vera Religione*. Many of these were complementary to Locke's many other notes from Arminian works in emphasising the continuity and working faith as necessary to justification, but many others were derived from them significantly in setting out lengthy Socinian analyses of passages of Scripture that were the basis of dispute between trinitarians and unitarians. Most crucially, Locke copied out Volkel's interpretation of the beginning of St John's Gospel, the central text in the entire trinitarian arsenal: 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.' In classic Socinian fashion, Volkel's interpretation referred 'In the beginning was the word' to the beginning of the world, not to eternity. The presence of the word with God was taken to mean that God had not yet explained his Gospel to man. That the word was taken to mean that the Gospel was God's wisdom, a divine revelation, not a person of the Godhead. Locke was thus recording Socinian arguments on the Trinity at the same time as reading critical debates

²¹ MS Locke f8, 36-9; 41-2; 49; 52; 57; 75; 78-9; 203; 210; 268-9; 287-93; 305-9; 1-9; 18-19; 82; 93; 117; 124; MS Locke c33, 27v; MS Locke b2, 43-4; 50; MS Locke f29, 18; 90-1; cf. MS Locke f17, 1-5v; 45vff; MS Locke c27, 238-30; passim; MS Locke f32, passim, esp. 25; 30v; 43; 54v; 61; 64; 82; 106; 160r; Johnson, *Locke on Freedom*, 160n.7.

theistic theology in the learned journals and having his critical views of the Gospel refined and reinforced by Simon and le Clerc.²² Locke's *Methodus Adversariorum*, published in the July 1686 edition of the *Bibliothèque*, illustrated Locke's methods of taking notes with several sections from works that explicitly discussed the Trinity. It is unclear whether Locke himself provided the illustrative texts, or someone connected with the journal, such as le Clerc himself. At the least, they show Locke's familiarisation in the mid-1680s with patristic debates over the Trinity, and they suggest that Locke probably thought that the Trinity was particularly appropriate subject on which to compile adversaria. Among Locke's notes in this period from the *Bibliothèque* and from the Leipzig journal, the *Acta Eruditorum*, are further notes on Arianism and on the distinction between 'six separate creeds' all described as Athanasian. In November 1686 James Tyrrell wrote to Locke about Aubert de Verse's *Constant Pacificque*, responding to the work as by 'your' author. The opinion is that Locke had at least suggested that Tyrrell should read Verse's work, and perhaps that he approved of its arguments. This is surprising not so much because of the indication of Locke's continued but largely unsurprising interest in works advocating toleration, which was the theme of the *Protestant Pacificque*, as because among Locke's notes is an undated note from Verse's work which identifies Jonas Schlichting's *Confessio* and his work *Contra Meisneorum* as containing 'the sum of Socinianism'. Locke appears to have purchased Schlichting's *Confessio* in 1686. There is no direct evidence that Locke read Schlichting's work in later years, but the interest in Socinianism once again suggested by this note and book purchase suggest very strongly indeed that Locke's undated reading of Crell and Volkel took place in the 1680s rather than the 1690s. Locke's intellectual curiosity and the admittance of many of his readers to the worship of the Arminians who were sheltering Locke make examination of Socinian thought likely even without there being any clear indications in Locke's journals that he had undertaken any of their works in these years; the evidence of interest in Socinian thought in his journals and the extent of his purchases of Socinian works made it exceedingly difficult to believe that Locke was not at least some of these works in these years.²³

By as early as 1684, in a letter to his English friend Edward Clarke, Locke explicitly and explicitly adopted the position towards which his 1680 God's goodness had already pointed, recording an argument that it was largely difficult to reconcile with any Calvinist or Arminian account

²² MS Locke f17, 2v; *Testamentum Graecorum*, shelved under 9.40 in the Bodleian Library, 2862; 74v and passim.

²³ MS Locke f9, 82; MS Locke c33, 27v; *Correspondence*, III, 889.

of original sin but perfectly compatible with Socinian denial of original sin. He identified the virtuousness or viciousness of almost all men as almost entirely dependent upon their good or bad education. He argued that 'all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten, or perhaps ninety-nine of one hundred, are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education. 'Tis that which makes the great difference in mankind.' Children's minds were 'easily turned', like the fountains of rivers, where 'a gentle application of the hand turns the flexible waters into channels that make them take quite contrary courses'. Little impressions early in life had 'very important and lasting influences', and because of these impressions men arrived at places quite different and opposite'.²⁴

We have seen that in 1682 Locke declared that all improvements men's minds were to be ascribed to God's providence, listing education among the means of improvement. To argue as Locke was doing that almost all men became what they were, good or evil, by their education was therefore not in itself to deny outright that God's grace determined whether men became good or evil, nor to deny that men had been corrupted by original sin in such a manner that they needed God's grace provided through education to become good. Crucially, however, the men that Locke explicitly recognised whose virtue or vice did not depend on their education were the naturally virtuous. According to Locke, men's bodies and minds – one in ten, or perhaps one in a hundred, were well framed 'by nature' that their strength of 'natural genius' carried them towards 'what is excellent'. This is exceedingly difficult to accommodate with any notion of original sin corrupting Adam's posterity; even the attenuated version of original sin amongst the Arminians in Holland declared that all men had a backwardness to good and were naturally prone after Adam to do evil.²⁵

Even allowing that for Locke education was a form of God's providence, an expression of his grace, it is clear that in his argument a regeneration of faith in Christ whereby the Holy Spirit inspires and dwells in men to free them from the corruption of Adam's sin had been removed from its location in most Protestant thought: from the date of this letter at the latest. Locke's thought was very clearly focused not upon man's only hope of acting morally through regeneration by faith in Christ, but upon the immediate operations of the Holy Spirit, but upon the natural means

²⁴ *Correspondence*, II, 782.

²⁵ *Correspondence*, II, 782; cf. chapter one above. Spellman's *Locke and Deism* correctly that many Latitudinarians saw education as crucial in determining man's goodness or badness, and wishes to assimilate Locke's comment here to their view of sin; however, his argument fails to take account of Locke's comment on the hundred naturally carried towards the excellent.

particularly education, by which men could develop control of their desires by reason, and by which the development of the love of virtue would itself show them to act morally.

Locke's argument had thus clearly moved away from Calvinist and Arminian accounts of original sin and towards the effective denial of original sin, a denial whose explicit statement was particularly associated with Socinianism. There is no direct sign that this argument was the result of detailed scriptural analysis or theological reading. In the light of Damaris Badworth's comment in early 1684 that Locke had come to know more of Scripture than he had ever known before, however, it is very likely that he had been examining parts of the teaching of Scripture before contending his view of the role of education. It is also quite likely that reading of some theological works was influential upon his views, both directly in making him question the doctrine of original sin, and indirectly in increasing his awareness of issues of biblical scholarship that made much of the text seem more difficult to understand, and which made many of the historic and contemporary interpretations of the Bible that set out orthodox views of original sin seem to be suspect. Amongst the works which have directly influenced Locke's view of men's nature were Socinian texts which denied original sin. However, the most suggestive evidence of substantial Socinian reading by Locke seems to date – and no more decisive characterisation is possible – more from 1685–6 than from 1684, after the purchase of Crell and Volkel's works.

Therefore seems likely that Locke had moved by 1684 in the direction of Socinian views in his implicit denial of original sin in his letter to Clarke some reading of Socinian works, such as his 1679 reading of Enyedi's *Refutationes*, but before the extensive reading of *Sociniana* which he was to undertake from 1685–6, rather as his thought of 1680–3 had pointed in the direction of Socinian views on the satisfaction after some Socinian reading but before extensive reading of Socinian works. In the 1690s Locke responded to accusations of Socinianism by arguing that he sought to do so in an unbiased manner from Scripture itself and that he did not have any system. While this was a debating tactic as well as a description of method of enquiry used by many unitarians in the 1690s, it would not merely that Locke's commitment to theological eclecticism was already pronounced during his extensive Socinian reading in the 1680s – nearly long preceded it in his hostility to priestly power, in his reading approval of authors like Hales and Chillingworth, in his assaults upon and custom in various ecclesiastical and epistemological writings, in his very early opposition to the supine acceptance of wrested interpretations of commentators – but also that his own 'Socinian' views on sinfulness were developed in tandem with, and perhaps just before,

detailed and extensive theological reading which then massively reinforced them.²⁶

III

The *Essay*, turned from drafts into its published version during the 1680s and revised substantially during the period of Locke's letter to Clarke and of his Socinian reading, set out an account of men's capacity to know the duties of morality and of the reasons that men did not in practice come to such knowledge which was based upon opposition to Calvinist and Arminian accounts of original sin, and compatible with, and probably influenced by, Socinian views. The *Essay* never commented on the understanding having been clouded by men's Fall in Adam or being unable to function because of a significant inherited disposition towards sin; Locke's account of the understanding as a *tabula rasa* at birth and of the will's power left it unclear how either could have been in any sense damaged by inherited sinful dispositions. Locke gave many reasons in the *Essay* for men's failure to establish in practice a certain and accurate morality upon a certain foundation, but gave most extensive consideration to most of them referring their actions to the standards of their society and not to God's will, and to the many failures to construct the chain of reasoning required for establishment of a known morality. Locke did declare that men did contemplate morality because 'vices, Passions, and domineering Inclinations' opposed contemplation. In comparison with the stress laid upon reason and morality to the wrong standard, and to not examining ideas because they accepted the words of one's society, only a very minor role was given to the *Essay* to this opposition to morality of vice and passion. There was suggestion that these intemperate passions needed supernatural cure.

In these emphases upon the potential eradicability of sinfulness through proper education and enquiry Locke's *Essay* thus helped to foster the optimism about creating virtuous individuals (at least individuals among the elite) which was to spread massively in England in the early eighteenth century. It is important therefore to note again here that unlike the philosophers and poets of the eighteenth century the *Essay* did not proclaim a 'good nature' or natural benevolence, recognised that most men would even to come to knowledge of morality, and said nothing about the duty to which men would act morally even once they had come to know it. There was nothing in Socinianism which denied men's sinfulness; Socinians saw that sinfulness as caused by men's individual faults but not original sin. There was nothing in the *Essay* even when

clearly come to be broadly Socinian in his views in the mid-1690s that indicated that most men were not in fact severely deficient both in their knowledge of the content of morality and in the extent of their practice of morality; the *Essay* was therefore to be compatible both with the argument of Locke's later *Reasonableness of Christianity* that no men had ever come to knowledge of the full content of morality by unassisted reason alone, and with a deep pessimism about men's actual behaviour that he expressed in his later *Third Letter on Toleration* and *Paraphrase*.²⁷

In the 1690s Bishop Edward Stillingfleet attacked the *Essay* for supporting Socinianism. His attacks focused not upon its ready compatibility with Socinian denial of original sin, but upon the discussion of the concept of substance. For Locke, men's ideas came only from sensation and reflection and they could not gain knowledge of the real essences of things in the external world, being limited to denominating them from the information about their properties conveyed by the senses. Men could therefore only know of substance that it was something we 'know not what' which supported those qualities which produced simple ideas. Stillingfleet's attacks did not accuse Locke of taking a position directly antithetical to the Trinity emphasising the obscurity of men's idea of substance, but rather of ignoring Socinianism by compromising trinitarians' ability to construct detailed explanations of the Trinity. Despite Locke's reading of Socinian works in the Netherlands, Locke's stress upon the limits of the idea of substance in the *Essay* was almost certainly neither Socinian in intent nor fully Socinian in effect. Locke was generally hostile to discussion of the nature of God, and expressed that hostility on many occasions throughout his life as well as in muted form in the *Essay*. This hostility was not, however, necessarily antitrinitarian. On the one occasion when Locke explicitly recorded his belief in the Trinity, in the 'Essay on Infallibility' in 1692, he stated that he believed in the Trinity although he did not understand how it was true, and attacked those who tried to comprehend the nature of God. The way that the Trinity was true could 'not be expressed in a course nor grasped by the mind' in words 'other than those in which it has revealed it'. Even if Locke had read Sand, Enyedi and perhaps some of Biddle's works before composing these revised drafts of the *Essay*, he also read Crell and Volkel at about the time of finishing these drafts, and there is no evidence of any reading by Locke of Socinian works before the composition of the 1671 drafts of the *Essay*. These stressed the limits of the substance in a manner that directly foreshadowed the *Essay*.²⁸

²⁷ *passim*; cf. Spellman, *Locke and Depravity*, *passim*.

²⁸ II.xiii.15-19; II.xxiii.2; E. Stillingfleet, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Trinity* (1697), ch. 10; *idem*, *The Bishop of Worcester's Answer to Mr Locke's Letter* (1697); *The Bishop of Worcester's Answer to Mr Locke's Second Letter* (1698). On Locke

²⁶ *Correspondence*, II, 834; III, 868.

The essential element of the argument concerning substance was, then, surely composed long before Locke had any Socinian motivation for composition. The *Essay* itself was probably largely composed before Locke had extensively read Socinian works, and it may well have been published before Locke came to the Socinian view of Christ which he very probably held by 1695–7. Even when Locke probably did come to argue for a Socinian view of Christ, in a 1695–7 manuscript entitled 'Some General Reflections Upon the Beginning of St John's Gospel', his antitrinitarian argument was – appropriately for an agnostic about substance – entirely historical and hermeneutic. Among Locke's many notes from unitarian works in the early 1690s and in the 'General Reflections' there is almost no comment upon the nature of God. There is no sign that Locke ever felt the need to assert that there could not be three infinite persons of the Godhead, only one infinite space, as other unitarians were to assert in the 1690s. Locke did assert that there could only be one body in any particular space in the *Essay*, but there is no indication that he felt able to assert the same about spirits. Indeed, as Locke noted in reply to Stillingfleet, accepting the obscurity of the idea of substance limited unitarians' argument that the Trinity could be said to be impossible simply because they understood the nature of God, as much as it restricted trinitarians' explanations of the Trinity. The *Essay*'s comments upon the idea of substance were, then, surely animated by Locke's assessment of the limits of men's understandings, as any straightforward reading of the *Essay* would suggest, but invested with Socinian purpose.

Stillingfleet's charge of Socinianism for its comments on substance was only one of two major accusations of Socinianism that were levelled at Locke in the 1690s. As was noted in chapter four, the philosopher Leibniz joined Stillingfleet in attacking the *Essay* as Socinian because of Locke's recognition of the possible materiality of thinking substance and therefore of the soul. For critics like Leibniz it was the soul's certain immateriality which proved its immortality; Locke's recognition of the possible materiality was, for Leibniz, presumably intended to favour mortalism, a doctrine held by many Socinians. Again, Locke was apparently to be at least doubtful about the soul's natural immortality in the 1690s. As, however, Locke's argument concerning the possible materiality of the soul did not have any direct Socinian purpose.²⁹ Locke's comments on the

and substance see especially Ayers, 'Power and Substance'; M. Tindall, *Letter to the Reverend Clergy* (1694), 22; Locke, *A Letter to the Reverend Edward Lord Bishop of Worcester* in *Works* (1801), IV, passim, esp. 67–9; idem, *Mr Locke's Reply to the Answer of Worcester to his Letter*, in *Works*, IV, passim, esp. 147; cf. W. Sherburne, *Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity* (1690), Yolton, *Ideas*.

²⁹ N. Jolley, *Leibniz and Locke*, Oxford (1984), esp. ch. 2.

possible materiality of the soul were misrepresented by critics like Leibniz, who described these as though Locke had identified the soul as material, and by more cautious critics like Stillingfleet, who argued that Locke had canvassed the *ontological* rather than merely the *epistemological* possibility of a material soul. Locke's actual argument was carefully agnostic: men could not know whether the soul was material or not because their ideas were insufficient. Men had the ideas of matter and thinking, but might never be able to know whether any material being thought, or not. It was not possible to discover without revelation whether God had given to men some systems of matter 'fitly disposed, a power to perceive', or joined to matter 'a thinking immaterial Substance'. Men were 'very far' from knowing what their soul was, it seeming to Locke 'put out of the reach of Knowledge'. It was impossible to examine the 'dark and intricate part of each hypothesis' and to determine fixedly for or against the soul's immateriality. In the *Essay* Locke held that as far as men could tell God could 'peradventure' thought to-matter as well as to finite immaterial beings. Locke's point was not that the soul was definitely material, nor even that it was *early ontologically* possible that the soul was material. It was merely that men could not know from their ideas that it was definitely immaterial: it was epistemologically possible that thinking substance – and therefore the soul – was material. Locke's attitude here has been accurately characterised by Michael Ayers as the view that things which were not observed to happen, but which could not be known to be actually impossible because what we did know, were to be regarded as within God's power. In the *Essay* Locke was to challenge Stillingfleet to show that there was a manifest repugnancy in material things thinking, or to recognise that it was the (Stillingfleet), and not Locke, who was actually restricting God's omnipotency to the limits of man's ideas.³⁰

In his comments in the *Essay* Locke declared that he did not canvass the possibility of material things thinking in order to 'lessen belief of the Soul's immateriality: I am not here speaking of Probability, But Knowledge.' The *Essay* itself inclined towards the view that it was probable that men's souls were immaterial. In replying to Stillingfleet in the later 1690s Locke was unwilling to declare it to the 'highest degree probable' that the thinking substances in men were indeed immaterial. Even if Locke had not believed in the immateriality of the soul, as it appears that he did, Leibniz's assault on a surely mistaken in seeing this assertion of the possibility of the immateriality of the soul as intended by Locke to support mortalism. Locke from 1682 thought that the soul's immateriality was not capable of

see, Leibniz, passim; *Essay*, IV.iii.66ff.; Locke, *Second Reply*, in *Works*, IV, 462ff.; brilliantly, Ayers, 'Mechanism, Superaddition', passim, esp. 217ff., and 224ff. to which I am indebted.

proving it to be immortally sensible (such/ sensibility being the only significant thing about immortality). Put simply, if he did not believe that the soul's immateriality proved its immortality in 1682, there was no reason for him to have had to remove the grounds for belief in its immateriality in order to support the mortality of the soul in 1685 or 1690. In fact, it seems likely from the *Epistola de Tolerantia*, which declared without any qualification or apparent shadow of doubt that the soul was immortal, that Locke did believe that men had a naturally immortal soul both in 1682 when composing *Epistola*, and in 1689 when it was translated into English with Locke's knowledge even if without his active assistance. Although Locke probably did not continue to believe in a naturally immortal soul in the late 1690s, and although he probably did not see how it could be *proven* from his epistemological principles as early as the early 1680s, there is no evidence that he did not believe in it when composing the *Essay*.

IV

Although Locke thus apparently did not intend to provide direct support for Socinian beliefs of mortalism or antitrinitarianism in composing the *Essay*, and depicted his positions as preventing only claims to knowledge about these principles and not belief in them, the *Essay* was written many years when he was made extremely aware of the massive disagreement about belief about the meaning of central theological passages of Scripture when he had personal sympathy for Socinian positions on toleration, working faith and on original sin. These personal sympathies may have extended to denying the Trinity; at the least he was very aware of Socinian opposition to the Trinity. Locke clearly composed the *Essay* in order to remove false pretensions to theological knowledge and to promote toleration in theological enquiry, and he probably made claims on ontological 'proofs' of trinitarianism – very importantly with attempts at ontological 'proofs' of unitarianism, and of many theological doctrines – among his conscious targets as early as composition of the *Essay* during the mid-1680s.

It is also very likely indeed, given his apparently contemporaneous reading and composition of the *Essay*, that Locke had the Trinity in his mind in composing in the *Essay* a series of linked arguments about difficulties of assenting to a true faith. The *Essay* opposed many of the certainties asserted by theologians and its analysis of men's epistemological limitations meant that (with the exception of God's existence)

about which theological doctrine pronounced men could not achieve a reasoned certainty. Locke further described substantial difficulties in regulating assent correctly in those many subjects in which only probability was possible, from the interest of witnesses and 'strict guards' to the need of most men for leisure to study sufficiently. Particularly emphasised as susceptible to legitimate and very probably irreconcilable disagreements were the manifold difficulties of interpretation of words, including religious words. Recognising the possibility of claims to authority of expertise, he argued that acceptance of and obedience to an external authority if that authority used force rather than using persuasion based upon goodwill was 'unreasonably' to be expected. Very few theological doctrines were specified by Locke in the course of these arguments, but the cumulative effect of these arguments – especially when read in the context of the theological states which dominated both the years of their composition and of their publication and republication – was to suggest that no theological doctrine beyond the existence of God were beyond legitimate debate and differing interpretations and assents. It was in this important sense that Billingsfleet had good cause to think that the *Essay* 'favoured' Socinianism in England in the 1690s. It was surely in part for this cumulative effect of the *Essay* that Molyneux celebrated Locke in the 1690s for abridging the priestly 'empire of darkness, wherein ... the subjects wander deplorably yet the rulers have their profit and advantage'. It was for his 'reasons of Criticism' in studying 'ancient authors' that le Clerc cited the *Essay* in his programme of rationalist interpretation of Scripture.³²

According to the *Essay*, in most of the affairs of life men could operate upon probability, or 'likeness to be true', and not upon knowledge, from that Locke applied only to that which was understood with certainty. For Locke, there were many problems in regulating assent properly when men could not establish (or follow) the connection of ideas constituted knowledge they were limited to examining the conformity of their thing with their knowledge, observation and experience, and to the reliability of others' testimony which depended not merely upon the number of such witnesses but also upon whether the witnesses had any interest in the acceptance of what they testified. Most theological claims were extremely difficult to assess by these standards. In many cases men could not be sure that they had 'all the Particulars before us, in any way concern the Question'. Men lacked the 'leisure, patience and industry to collect all the proofs relevant to an issue, but had to make decisions about them in order to conduct their lives. It was therefore unavoidable that men would have 'several Opinions'. For the tolerationist Locke

³² Letter to ... Worcester, Works, IV, 33; 37; *Essay*, IV.x.10; IV.x.16; Jolley, *Locke*, Letter, 47; Ayers, 'Mechanism', 246ff.

this ought to lead all men 'to maintain Peace; and the common Offices of Humanity, and Friendship, in the diversity of Opinions'.³³

Locke did accept that the highest degree of assent was required by 'Testimony' without any support from observation or witnesses when the Testimony was 'of God himself'. This revelation, and man's assent by faith, 'as absolutely determines our Minds, and as perfectly excludes all wavering as our Knowledge it self; and we may as well doubt of our own Being as we can, whether any Revelation from GOD be true'. For Locke, however, men had to be sure that such a revelation came from God, and in order to exclude the 'Extravagancy of Enthusiasm', men's assent to revelation could come no higher than the evidence that it was a revelation, and their assent to any proposition contained in revelation could be no higher than the evidence that the meaning of it was correctly understood. Locke then ignored but implicitly denied the view that men were inspired by the Holy Spirit to believe the Scripture to be the word of God or to believe the tenets of the Scripture with an inspiration that provided greater certainty than came by knowledge or reasoning about the evidence of the truth of propositions. Faith was not knowledge, and involved probability and not certainty of knowledge. Furthermore, while God could imprint new ideas in the mind of a person by immediate revelation, these could not then be communicated to any other men because they had only the simple ideas of sensation and reflection as sources for their ideas: they had no way of understanding what was not based upon ideas derived from their senses. After being 'rapp'd up into the third Heaven', St Paul had therefore been able only to say to other men that he had seen things 'as Eye hath not seen, and heard things that 'ear had not heard'. It was illegitimate for men to receive for true anything that directly contradicted their knowledge. In this instance, men clearly 'knew' that one body occupied one space. If men tried to argue for one body in two places at once then it could not be accepted: it was not revelation, or its meaning was misunderstood. Locke argued that without this scrutiny of revelation by reason, there would be no grounds on which to discriminate the true from the false. Faith could therefore never convince men of what contradicted their knowledge. It could not be as certainly known, and it could not be conceived to come from that 'bountiful author' who had given men their faculties, if it would 'destroy' these faculties.³⁴

There were many things of which men had at best very imperfect notions, and many matters of fact which would not be known in any way than by revelation. Reasoning from analogy was not a powerful way of knowing these matters. These things, which were above but not contrary to

³³ *Essay*, IV.xv, xvi.

³⁴ *Essay*, IV.xvi.14; IV.xviii.3-5.

was the proper matter of faith. Such were the fall of the angels, and the resurrection of the dead. What was thus revealed carried assent even against probable reasoning, but the revelation itself was judged to be revelation by probable reason. Without even discussing the possibility that men had come to accept that a particular revelation was the word of God they were then aided by the Holy Spirit in interpretation of that word. Locke declared that 'reason' was also judge of the signification of words wherein it was revealed. Whatever God had revealed was certain; no doubt was possible. But 'whether it be a divine revelation, or no, reason must judge'.

Locke was explicit in the *Essay* in describing as the result of this distinction what his earlier journal notes have already clearly revealed to be largely the motivation for this distinction: setting the proper boundaries between faith and reason would eliminate the cause of 'great Disputes' in religion. It would prevent every sect from using reason as far as it supported their principles and then crying out that things were matters of faith above reason. The understanding of these boundaries between faith and reason would leave no room for 'those extravagant Opinions and ceremonies, that are to be found in the several Religions of the World', 'absurdities which filled almost all 'the Religions which possess and rule Mankind'. The principle that men did not have to consult reason for loose man's fancies and natural superstition and led them to very strange opinions which were offensive to God and even to 'a sober, good

The *Essay* made such reasoned interpretation of Scripture an extremely difficult task likely to lead to a wide diversity of opinions because of the problems associated with the use of words. In most usages in 'civil' conversation that were fitted to the 'conveniences' of life words were used in a loose and obscure manner that was adequate for communication but not for precise knowledge. Men therefore generally had only a confused and obscure understanding of the signification of words. Even those who had gained more precise notions very often had different notions of those of other equally intelligent and studious men. Since the signification of words in all languages at any time depended 'very much on the lights, Notions, and Ideas of him that uses them' these were 'unavoidable of great uncertainty, to Men of the same Language and Country'. This was magnified in 'different Countries and remote Ages, wherein the Philosophers and Writers had very different Notions, Tempers, Customs, Arguments, and Figures of Speech'. Making explicit the bearing of this uncertainty on the argument for religion, Locke declared that many men, 'well satisfied of the

meaning of a text of Scripture' had 'By consulting Commentators, who have lost the sense of it' and 'drawn obscurity upon the place'.³⁶

This natural obscurity was then magnified by several 'wilful faults and neglects'. Many words were used which did not stand for any clear idea even in their original usage, a fault of many words introduced by 'The several sects of Philosophy and Religion'. The 'authors or Promoters of these words had coined 'insignificant' words in order to affect 'something singular, and out of the way of common apprehensions', to supply 'strange Opinions', or to cover 'weakness' in their hypotheses. The words then became the distinguishing characters of churches or schools, because men did not examine the precise ideas that they stood for and found them absurd or meaningless. The schoolmen and metaphysicians were particularly prone to this kind of 'insignificant' speech. According to *the Essay*, the 'mischief' of perplexed meanings had infected not merely religious 'speculations' but had even 'obscured and perplexed the material Truths of Law and Divinity', which Locke unfortunately left undefined. This misapprehension had not destroyed the 'two great Rules, Religion and Justice', but it had 'in great measure' rendered them useless. These problems were even further exacerbated by the desire of some to keep others in ignorance in order to foster their own power. There were many 'strict guards' upon knowledge which did not wish others to enquire 'lest, knowing more, they should believe the less in them'.³⁷

For Locke, coming to understand these imperfections of language, which an entire book of the *Essay* was devoted, ought itself to lead to a cessation of 'a great many Controversies' and open the way to greater Knowledge 'and, perhaps, Peace too'. Instead of turning to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as providing elected hearers or readers of the Word with a correct understanding of Scripture, or even to claiming with the *Christian Sentiments* and most Latitudinarians that, whatever the obscurity of the parts of Scripture, the kernel of essential doctrine remained clear through time and translation, Locke turned to natural religion and lauded toleration among fallible interpretations of Scripture. Scripture was infallible, but men could not 'but be very fallible in the understanding of it'. It was 'become us to be charitable one to another in our Interpretation or Misunderstandings of those ancient Writings' which were liable to great obscurity and uncertainty. In discourses of 'Religion, Law and Morality, as they concern the highest concernment, so there will be the greatest difficulties'. The 'Volumes of Interpreters, and Commentators on the Old and New Testament' were 'but too manifest proof of this'. Men should 'magnify' God's 'Goodness, that he hath spread before all the World,

³⁶ *Essay*, III, passim, esp. chs. ix, x.

³⁷ *Essay*, III, x, esp. 1-12.

legible characters of his Works and Providence, and given mankind so sufficient a light of Reason, that they to whom this written word never came could not (when-ever they set themselves to search) either doubt of the Being of a God, or of the Obedience due to Him'. The 'precepts of Natural Religion' were plain and 'very intelligible to all Mankind', unlike the truths revealed in 'Books and Languages' and so liable 'to the common and natural obscurities and difficulties incident to Words'. For Locke, it would become us to be more careful and diligent in observing the former, and less magisterial, positive, and imperious, in imposing our own sense and interpretations of the latter'.³⁸

Locke was clear that men were obliged to think for themselves. The *Essay* argued that this search was a vital duty to God and would be recommended. In doing so he voiced an attitude that was to be developed further in his religious works and manuscripts in the 1690s, where the sincerity of the search was clearly depicted as far outweighing the objective truth sought, but which had already been set out in outline in his journal in the 1670s. Locke declared in the *Essay* that a man who sincerely and effortfully searched for truth but did not find it would certainly 'not miss the reward', while one who did not search but by luck held the correct opinion might well miss such reward. In addition to the motivation of inquiry by such reward for search, Locke provided a further glimmer of hope for the undertaking of the search rather than the acceptance of ideas from custom and party in describing the search for truth as naturally pleasurable. Mentioning simple ideas of pleasures and pains that he could have discussed at greater length, Locke gave as examples the pain of captious angling, the pleasure in rational conversation with a friend, and the pleasure of the discovering 'of a speculative truth upon study'. In later editions the search itself, as well as any resultant discovery, was described as pleasurable. Later editions of the *Essay* were also to recommend the expenditure of much effort in developing love of truth.³⁹

Locke recognised, however, that men most commonly adopted views from 'the opinion of others'. Although 'there cannot be a more dangerous thing to rely on, nor more likely to mislead one; since there is much more truth in Goodness and Error amongst Men, than Truth and Knowledge', men frequently judged opinions by the credit of their proposer with their party in their society, or from an opinion that the person was in some manner favoured by God. He combined his acute sense of the sociological formation and acceptance of belief that he had expressed over many years with his tolerationism by arguing that it could not 'reasonably' be expected that men should renounce their own opinions, *even if* these were adopted

³⁸ *Essay*, III, passim, esp. chs. ix, x.

³⁹ *Essay*, epistle to the reader; IV, xvii.24; IV, xx.4.

on the false bases of party and custom, in order to submit to an authority that they did not recognise. According to Locke, it was unreasonable to expect even those many men who had not regulated their assent correctly to accept the authority of others if they suspected that those who wished them to renounce their opinions were motivated by 'Interest, or Design, or Suspicion which Locke then asserted there 'never fail[ed] to be, where Men find themselves ill-treated'. Men would 'do well to commiserate the mutual ignorance, and endeavour to remove it in all the gentle and easy ways of Information; and not instantly treat others ill, as obstinate and perverse' because they would not accept our own opinions'. The necessity of believing in this 'fleeting state of Action and Blindness' ought to make men 'more busy and careful to inform ourselves, than constrain others'.

Arguing implicitly against the contention that the cumulative wisdom of men over time and the wisdom of experts who had correctly analysed matters should be put into the balance against the interpretation of fallible individuals, and on at least some and perhaps very many occasions should be preferred to those individuals' interpretations – a contention that was effectively voiced in varying form and degree despite their stress upon the inability of a number of the Latitudinarians and other Anglicans in the Restoration – Locke first asserted that those who had not 'thoroughly examined to the bottom all their own Tenets, must confess' themselves to be 'unfit to prescribe to others'. He then asserted that these were in fact 'few in number' – which is unsurprising since he had set the standard without discussion for its necessity at the ridiculously high level of examining to the bottom 'all' views – that almost no one had any legitimate licence to prescribe to others. He further added that those few who examined their views thoroughly found so 'little reason to be magisterial in their opinions' that 'nothing insolent and imperious is to be expected from them'. Behind this last contention was presumably the notion that examination of issues by these men revealed their own ignorance and the extreme difficulty of deciding matters with full awareness of all the relevant particulars and thus made them avoid any imposition of belief on others.

Locke did declare towards the end of this lengthy series of arguments that these very few men who had thus examined would have had a 'preference' than others to require others to follow them. The inexactness of his language here was probably deliberate; the strong impression of form of his argument, as it proceeded from the unreasonableness of being expected to accept the authority of others to command to dissent, of the few who had thoroughly examined, is firstly that because of the tolerationism this thorough examination would still not have constituted for him a 'just' claim, merely one that was a more just ('juster') 'pro-

position that of men who had not examined, and secondly that he wished to make it seem by this lengthy argument alone that there were absolutely no conditions in which men could reasonably be expected to submit to others, so that it was difficult to see how to preclude in principle the claim to authority of experts from the premisses of argument about men's largely irreducible ignorance. Without the strong *implication*, conveyed more by the tenor of his argument than by its detailed content, that the acceptance of expert authority was itself unreasonable even when the imposers had thoroughly examined all issues and others had not, Locke's case on probability could in principle still have been used to support intolerance through the claims of expertise, even if its very clear and vastly predominant practical orientation was to support toleration.⁴⁰

V

Locke had been concerned about increasing restrictions upon French Protestants during his years in France. In England in the early 1680s he followed their worsening position. In 1685 Louis XIV finally revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had officially provided toleration for Protestants in the past century, and instituted a vicious persecution in the name of religion. Refugees flooded into England and the Netherlands. Before Revocation, Protestantism had already lost substantial territory and was to Catholicism throughout Europe during the seventeenth century. Locke had long feared an absolutist and Catholic monarchy in England under Charles or under James. The cause of European Protestantism, its dependence upon the English King as the strongest Protestant King, was noted in Locke and Shaftesbury's *Letter From A Person of Quality*, seemed doomed if England as well as France became committed to Catholicism. Looking at France and England in 1685, the year of Louis' death and James' succession, surrounded by Protestant refugees from France and living under an assumed name to avoid extradition for treason in an English monarch that he was convinced was to be a Catholic absolutist, Locke had good reason to fear that Catholicism was about to re-conquer Europe.⁴¹

It was in this atmosphere in the winter of 1685 that Locke composed a long argument for toleration, probably as a piece of private correspondence, IV.xv.6; IV.xx; IV.xvi.4. Locke f5, 54 on Locke lending to James Tyrrell in May 1681 a work on the policy of France 'to destroy the Protestants'; *Letter*, in *Works*, X, 206-7 and 229 on the King and Church of England as Head of all Protestants being 'due' to them as church in favour and of 'nearest approach to the most powerful prince of that religion' as giving the greatest protection that that party could receive throughout the world; Scott, *Restoration Crisis*, passim.

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can nor ought' to be extended to the Salvation of Souls' was 'abundantly demonstrate[d]' by three 'Considerations'.⁴³ It is not entirely clear from this phraseology whether Locke had by this point in his life come to think that these considerations were themselves the necessary premisses of the conclusion that political society had purely secular ends or were merely sufficient 'demonstrations' as 'illustrations' or collateral evidence that would be sufficient evidence if that were necessary that the political society, which could be shown on other grounds to be established solely for such civil ends, neither could nor should interfere

The declaration that these considerations were 'abundantly to demonstrate' the limited ends of political society suggests more than a sufficiency of demonstration but it does not clearly suggest a necessity of demonstration in order for the conclusion to be true. As in the *Epistola*, Locke spoke of the considerations as 'sufficient to conclude' that the limits of civil society were as described, and later still he spoke of having already 'proven' in the *Epistola* that the civil society had only secular ends. It seems clear from these comments that he did think these considerations were sufficient by themselves to prove the limited ends of civil society, but again they do not definitely indicate that the considerations were necessary to that conclusion or the only way in which this could have been shown, and he explicitly argued that there were 'many' considerations that he could have 'urged to the same purpose'.

26-9; 34-6.

Word of God, these opinions did not affect the 'security of the Commonwealth, and of every particular man's Goods and Person'. The overall impression, then, is that for Locke his three 'considerations' were peculiarly powerful arguments showing that the magistrate should not interfere in worship, but that they were not absolutely essential arguments.⁴⁴

According to the first of these considerations, there was no indication that God had given any one authority to compel others in matters of faith. At this point in the argument Locke simply ignored the responsibility and authority claimed upon the basis of Scripture to interpret that Scripture and at the very least to prevent heresy and idolatry, including both the Roman church's claim from Matthew 16:18 and the duty of regenerate Christians to establish the true religion central to much Civil-War period thought. He simply asserted that 'it appears not that God has ever given any such authority to one Man over another, as to compel any one to worship him by other ways, than those that are prescribed by his Word'. The alternative source for the interpretative authority of the magistrate that Locke then described, the consent of its members, was denied to be able to create an interpretative authority because men are not conform their faith to the dictates of others. In worship men are fully satisfied in their own mind that their form of worship was true, not possible for men to consent to the authority of another by leaving it to him to prescribe their faith and worship.

Locke's reasoning here was that 'no man can, if he would, compel another to any more worship of God, than he himself approves of by his own Faith to the Dictates of another', and that no man could abandon his 'eternal salvation' to another to embrace under compulsion the faith that they prescribed. The point here seems, unsurprisingly, a significant part to be that of the 'Essay on Toleration' and also the edition of the *Essay*, that men physiologically determined their perception of the greater good simply cannot choose to follow anything other than one they perceive, rightly or wrongly, to lead to it. Their perception may be changed, but they cannot guarantee a change in line with a magistrate's dictates.⁴⁵

For Locke, the use of force in religion was improper and axiomatically inefficacious: 'such is the nature of the understanding that it cannot be compell'd to the belief of any thing by outward force, but only by the evidence of reason, and the dictates of conscience, which are of no force without penalties and punishments'.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 26-8; 34-9; 47; compare the argument of J. Waldron, 'The Rationality of Persecution' in S. Mendus (ed.), *Justifying Toleration*, pp. 61-86, on Locke's three considerations. Although I disagree with Waldron that Locke still wished to utilise his functional definition of political authority separate to arguing that his three considerations proved or demonstrated 'probavimus' that political society had limited ends, the rest of the argument very significantly influenced the discussion which follows.

⁴⁵ *Letter*, 26.

pertinent; because they are not proper to convince the mind'. Force was applied to the will; belief was not within the influence of the will. In the *Epistola* this case was not clearly presented as an account of the type of actions that could influence the will and thus the understanding, but apparently as part of an argument that the will could not influence the understanding. According to Locke, 'to believe this or that to be true, does not depend upon our Will'. Only the 'light of evidence' was held to be able to change men's opinions, which light 'can in no manner proceed from corporal sufferings, or any other outward Penalties'. Locke also declared in the *Epistola*, however, that truth had 'no such way of prevailing, as when strong Arguments and good Reason, are joined with the softness of Civility and good Usage'. By recognising that civility and good usage prepared men for considering arguments Locke was tacitly admitting that what affected the will could at least indirectly influence what was believed. It would seem that it was not that for Locke the will could not influence the understanding, but rather still that only certain influences - those that were positive - could prove effective in making men consider the arguments offered.

Locke's point may well have been that only a positive influence upon the will allowed it to consider the arguments proposed, because as he separated belief from the will, he was naturally averse to those that harmed them, but his positive admission that the will had a role in promoting consideration of arguments made the argument that 'only' light and evidence could influence belief without further argument about positive and negative influences upon the will a weak link in the chain of Locke's argument for toleration. This weakness is revealed clearly when the *Essay*'s parallel assertion that the mind could see only what was presented to its senses is examined. The *Essay* considered the world, and that much of belief was therefore not determined by it explicitly recognised that the choice of what was considered was within the power of men's will and was therefore to some extent arbitrary.

Locke's long-standing assertion, going back to the *Two Treatises*, that the understanding cannot be influenced by the will is thus in line with an equally long-standing and acute perception of the influence of the will upon the formation and acceptance of beliefs. Part of the argument of the *Epistola* was doubtless Locke's lengthy consideration of evidence that men had not in practice been convinced by the force of arguments, but his frequent recognition of the power of custom and party in the formation of belief was far more than any external penalties, and particularly a case, very probably heavily influenced by Nicole, that penalties were only effective means of convincing people because of their influence upon opinions, liberty in adopting these, and hatred of contra-

diction. Men were only willing to accept or consider the arguments of those that they trusted. The *Essay*, as we have just seen, argued that it was unreasonable to expect men to accept the authority of others if they used force, and attempted to suggest that this was true even when those others had examined an issue correctly. Locke's argument is not so much that it will cannot influence the understanding as the weaker but still not negligible assertion that only those who treat men well can persuade them to consider their arguments. It seems far more likely that this case would be able to amount at most to the argument that in practice most people will not reconsider their views under coercion in such a manner that they will genuinely change their minds, than that it could be shown *in principle* that none would do so, and a pessimist would suggest that many people probably could be made to change their views under duress if only by enforced 'extension' of the realm of issues considered. Unsurprisingly, Locke's opponents in the 1690s, such as Jonas Proast, were to exploit unmercifully by arguing that force as well as good usage could be used to make men consider what they were otherwise unwilling to think, and so could indirectly influence men's minds. On the simplest level, it could be used to make men read works that they otherwise would not, and thus come to views to which they would not otherwise have come.

Locke's third argument, again presaged in the 'Critical Notes', empirically answered this assault by indicating that 'even if force could be used to convince, such use of force would result in damage to the truth: 'though the rigour of Laws... were capable to convince and alter Men's minds, yet that would not help at all to the Salvation of them'. There was but 'one way to Heaven'. If religion was instituted by the state, then true religion would suffer in the world, because magistrates varied in their religious beliefs – and entire religions – from country to country, had no special knowledge of the way to heaven, and practice very susceptible to secular interests and to promoting interests which advanced these secular interests.⁴⁶

For Locke in such a situation 'most men' could not have 'hoped' heaven; therefore, such magisterial authority could not be granted. It was not an argument that most men would need to be saved for religion to be true, and if it was a lesser argument based on quality, the most men possible would be saved without magisterial imposition. It was not supported by anything more than the (for Locke) obvious bilistic declaration of the likelihood of magisterial corruption. The central point for Locke, although not fully articulated,

have been that since most men could not 'hope' to gain reward by this distribution of authority and since religious commitment was significantly based upon individuals' calculating the rationality of being religious, magisterial authority (derived from any source other than every individual's revocable consent) could not be legitimate.

To this Locke then added what appear to have been the beginnings of an argument about the necessity of reward for exertion, arguing that the absurdity of magisterial claims to religious authority was 'heighten[ed]' by men owing their eternal happiness in such a situation to the accident of their birth. For Locke, voicing an objection that was central to his way of thinking about God and his designed rewards for men in all of his ethical, epistemological and most of his most recent political and religious writings, and thus surely crucial on a motivational level to his objections to this argument, salvation because of accident of birth and not desert 'ill suits the notion of a Deity'.⁴⁷

For his opponents, however, this entire argument about the likelihood of magisterial error and corruption opened the possibility of replying that Locke's global perspective was irrelevant when the issue was the use of force in a country where 'true' religion was evidently established; this had been the argument of Stillingfleet's *Unreasonableness*, and it was to be the argument of Proast's replies to Locke. That magistrates of a false religion did not have the right to enforce their religion on all subjects was generally agreed (although the erastianism of the Latitudinarians had led several of them, including Stillingfleet when he had been young, into incautious arguments that the magistrate's duty to promote and establish religion gave him a duty of establishing the religion that he *believed* to be true). That magistrates of the true religion *in principle* could not establish religion – these magistrates of the false religion could not legitimately establish religion – needed for these authors a further argument than Locke provided simply pointing out that there were many magistrates of false religions that magistrates were susceptible to secular interests in order to and adequately to the Anglican clerics' focus upon a country with *only* true religion. In the *Epistola*, however, Locke went a considerable way towards such a further argument by contending that the ascription of power to the orthodox church over the erroneous or heretical was great and specious Words, to say just nothing at all. For every church is *idox* to itself; to others, Erroneous or Heretical'. Each church *and its religion true and the claim to orthodoxy of either of any two churches in dispute was 'on both sides equal'.*⁴⁸

order to meet the obvious response to this, that all claims to ortho-

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 27–8, 33, 37, 46; *Essay*, IV.xiii; Waldron, Locke, 79ff.; J. Proast, *The Letter Concerning Toleration Briefly Considered and Answered*, Oxford

27–8. Cf. Wootton, Locke; introduction.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 32; cf. Rogers, 'Locke'.

doxy were not equally valid since some magistrates, men, or churches, had examined religion more extensively or more accurately than others because of their greater abilities, efforts, or assistance from God, it would have been valuable to show at least one, and preferably more than one, of several things: that even if men (magistrates) did indeed believe the objectively true religion; it was impossible for them to know that they had indeed examined properly or accurately; that it was impossible because of the nature of religion for there to be an 'evidently' true religion and for any man to know as well as to believe that he believed 'the true religion; or that it was impossible if any man did have such knowledge or merely far greater expertise to show to others that this was the case in a way that ought to persuade them of that fact and make them legitimately consent to interpretative authority. In this sense, Locke's argument for the equality of claims to orthodoxy against knowledge, expertise or illumination, which have been buttressed by a convincing analysis of men's irreducible inability in religion, of men's limitation to faith and not knowledge in religious affairs in such a way that it could never be evident that any one held the true religion, or of their inability to show to others the truth of their religious views if they could certainly know the truth (as did those who were immediately inspired by God). We have seen that when Locke wrote the *Epistola* he was separately and contemporaneously committed to the necessary fallibility of almost all men in many religious issues; to the epistemological limitation in interpreting revealed religious doctrines to faith and not knowledge; to their inability if immediately inspired by God to communicate religious knowledge to others; and to the unreasonableness of the claim of almost all men to enforce religion because they had not thoroughly examined their views, which he set out in such a way that he attempted to make it appear that even the very few experts also could reasonably make such a claim to command others. Locke was to respond to some of these arguments in the *Third Letter on Toleration* in his response to the repeated assertion by Proast of the evident truth of religious dogmatism. The *Epistola*, however, did not expand in these directions upon an assertion that a claim of orthodoxy was specious, concentrating instead upon a declaration of equality of claim to orthodoxy and to the assertion that the different religions of magistrates, the fallibility of all magistrates, and the susceptibility of magistrates and their advisers to secular interests.

As in the 'Critical Notes', churches were described in the *Epistola* as voluntary societies with the power to institute order and appoint ministers. Since men entered churches voluntarily, they could leave whenever

those. Locke argued that there was no 'express and positive Edict' setting up any church order as necessary *jure divino*. Men could join societies wherever they believed that the order set up was *jure divino*, but this was by their own choice and they had no power to compel others to join such societies. A church could give power to make laws to the civil magistrate but this gave no power to the magistrate over other churches. Magistrates could impose indifferent things if they were for the public good, but nothing in worship was indifferent unless believed to be so by each individual. Church power was limited to exhortation and advice, and, if these failed, to expulsion of recalcitrant members. They had no right to 'pre-empt' another Person in his Civil Enjoyments' because he was of another church. Clerics were bound not merely not to persecute others but also 'to admonish . . . Hearers of the Duties of Peace, and Good-will towards all men; as well towards the Erroneous as the Orthodox'. Far more restrained than his comments about the clergy than the 'Critical Notes' had been, the *Epistola* nevertheless condemned clerical zeal or 'Craft' and argued that these clerics who claimed the power to use force betrayed ambition and showed that what they really desired was 'temporal Dominion'.⁵⁰ Locke declared that he intended to prevent the claim of liberty of conscience legitimating licentiousness, and he continued to argue that much of the reality had come under the magistrate's inspection because it was necessary to the peace and preservation of men and society, but he also suggested that there was much of morality that the magistrate would not enforce. It did not belong to the magistrate to 'make use of his Sword in punishing every thing, indifferently, that he takes to be a sin against God. . . . Envy, Uncharitableness, Idleness, and many other things are sins which require the consent of all men, which yet no man ever said were to be punished by the Magistrate. The reason is, because they are not prejudicial to other men's rights, nor do they break the publick Peace of Societies.' The magistrates did not, however, have to tolerate any opinions contrary to the peace and preservation of the society on the grounds of religious conscience. He did not have to tolerate churches which claimed religious powers which undermined the preservation of peace, as the Roman Catholic claims that the Pope could dispense with oaths, and depose rulers, and that faith was to be kept with heretics. Atheists were not to be tolerated because they could not be bound by promises. Promises were the oaths which bound men, and had no hold upon an atheist. 'The taking away of God, the very, and even in thought, dissolves all.' Atheists also had no claim of religious toleration.⁵¹

Locke then posed a problem that he had not pursued in the 'Critical

⁴⁹ *Third Letter on Toleration* in *Works*, VI, passim, esp. 143ff.; Waldron, 'Locke

ibid., VI, 28-34.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 26-8, 34-5; 39-40; 44-51.

Notes', or even in the *Two Treatises*, and which he had answered in different way in his earliest writings on toleration. If the magistrate attempted to enforce matters not for political ends of the public good but for religious ends – if, for instance, the magistrate attempted to enforce 'strange Religion' which all subjects had to 'join in the Worship and Ceremonies of' – or if he altered property solely on account of religion, then he exceeded his authority. God would judge between the supreme magistrate and the people, and was the only judge between them where the bounds of rightful legislation had been left behind, but until they reached this division of jurisdiction men were to take care firstly of their own soul, and then – then – of the public peace. Apparently reluctant explicitly to pursue the argument to its fullest extent by declaring in simple words that these people had a right to resist such a magistrate, this was the implication of taking care of one's soul first, and Locke did explicitly recognise that contest of force always began where the law could not settle a dispute. When Locke wrote the *Epistola* James had come to the throne in England and Louis recently revoked the toleration formerly provided by the Edict of Nantes. The *Epistola* was written against Catholic kings forcing their subjects the worship of Catholicism and taking their property because of religion.

It is important to note that it remains as difficult to speak of this argument as evolving out of an ideological commitment to the principles of religious dissenters in England as it was to speak thus of the *Two Treatises*. Nor is it possible to speak of a unified theory of religious toleration in the Netherlands. Many dissenters in England and many of Locke's friends opposed resistance and supported James' toleration of both Protestants and Catholics in 1685–7, including in Pierre Bayle the other major theorician of toleration in the Netherlands. Equally, in speaking of resistance the imposition of a 'strange' religion by force on a nation Locke did voice the arguments then being proffered by many recent Calvinist refugees in the Netherlands, such as Jurieu and Abbadie, as by over a century later Calvinist theoreticians, that there was a religious duty incumbent on the true religion to oppose the imposition of a false religion, and that agents of such resistance were the inferior magistrates. Locke's argument generally cleaved instead most closely to those of the Arminians and Bernard when published in 1689, but the arguments of those who tended to postulate an untyrannical magistrate and not to counter resistance by subjects in even as muted tones as had Locke.⁵²

⁵² *Ibid.*, 48–9.

⁵³ Klibansky, introduction; R. Colie, 'John Locke in the Republic of Letters' in J. P. Colie and E. Kossman (eds.), *Britain and the Netherlands* (1960), 111–29; Wootton, *The Renaissance*, 94ff.

VI

The major argument that Locke used in the *Epistola* that had not been used at length in the 'Critical Notes' was the unequivocal statement that it was a duty of Christianity to tolerate others. While the 'Critical Notes' had recognised the importance of edification as a duty owed to oneself, and persuasion and propagation of the truth of the Gospel as a Christian duty owed to others, it had not strongly asserted that toleration was a duty owed to others; Locke's earlier tolerationist writings had not even included duties of edification and propagation of the truth, let alone the Christian duty of toleration. There is a sense in which an unequivocal interpretation of the requirements of Christianity as tolerationist had finally become an important component of Locke's commitment to toleration; as such, it was to remain extremely significant for the rest of his life. In the Netherlands Locke was for the first time an intimate of many Protestants whom toleration and moral behaviour were the two central duties of Christianity and who cited several texts of Scripture repeatedly to convey this message, Locke was not merely friends with van Limborch, but he seems to have participated in yet another of his many intellectual circles of friends in the late 1680s with Benjamin Furly and others who emphasised the Christian duty of toleration; Locke drew up rules for this group of 'select Christians' which included citation of many of these texts in justification of toleration.⁵⁴

According to the *Epistola*, any man 'if he be destitute of Charity, Meekness and Good-will in general towards all Mankind, even to those that are Christians, he is certainly yet short of being a true Christian'. Christians had 'Duties of Peace, and Good-Will towards all men; as well towards the Erroneous as the Orthodox; towards those that differ from us in Faith and Worship, as well as towards those that agree with them'. Christianity required a faith which worked by 'love'. Here Locke turned to a published work for the first time, in a passage on the very first page of the *Epistola*, a citation of Gal. 5:6, the passage interpreted by the sermon of 1667 and cited frequently by all of those who stressed a loving faith, including notably many Latitudinarians, Arminians and Unitarians. Locke was to return to the passage many times in the course of his own works of religious interpretation in the mid-1690s, the *Reasonableness* and its *Vindications*.⁵⁵

Each of the account of the duty of toleration was embedded in the argument sharpened against Stillingfleet but now stated without specific

reference (ed.), *Letter*, 23–5; 34; MS Locke c27, fo. 80a–b. Cf. MS Locke c33, 24v, on which Locke compiled a list of scriptural texts supporting toleration in 1688. *Reasonableness*, 23–5; 34.

target: it was incongruous to prosecute those who were moral but could not conform to the entirety of worship, but to leave alone those who were immoral and conformist. This theme made very clear that morality and toleration were the centre of Christianity. The opening pages of the *Epistola* resounded with the declaration that 'I esteem . . . Toleration [among Christians] to be the chief Characteristical Mark of the True Church'. It was an attack whose terms applied to Catholics, and to most Anglicans and most dissenters in England, esteem not merely of antiquity of places and pomp of outward worship but also of reformation of discipline and 'Orthodoxy of their Faith' were declared 'Marks of Men striving for Power and Empire over one another'. The business of true religion was 'the regulating Men's Lives according to the Rules of Vertue and Piety'. It was 'above all things' for men to make war upon 'lusts and Vices'. Much religion consisted of 'a Good life'. Immorality was 'more contrary to the Glory of God . . . and to the salvation of souls, than any conscientious Dissent from Ecclesiastical Decisions'.⁵⁶

The *Epistola de Tolerantia* also saw a major development from 'Critical Notes' in being a straightforward advocacy of toleration with almost no argument for comprehension. This was no doubt partly because it was stated on a far more general level than the 'Critical Notes', concerned with European events and not focused on the political debates of England. Locke's extensive awareness of the theological debates of the Netherlands, the degree of theological disagreements countenanced in *Essay*, his close contact with more radical separatists than in England, as Furlly, and probably the consciousness of the distance that his own logical views had already travelled from those of his contemporaries and his youth, had surely helped to generate in Locke a markedly pessimistic estimate of men's prospects for ever reaching agreement in religion. A point in the *Epistola* Locke did still pose 'by the way' the question whether it 'were more agreeable to the Church of Christ' to make 'Conditions of her Communion consist in such things, and such things only, as the Holy Spirit has in the Holy Scripture declared, in Words, to be necessary to Salvation' than it was to impose 'their Inventions and Interpretations upon others, as if they were of Divine Authority, and to establish by Ecclesiastical Laws, as absolutely necessary to the Profession of Christianity, such things as the Holy Scriptures do either mention, or at least not expressly command'. Locke's own implied preference was thus still that there should be one church with very wide communion, similar to the ideal that he had first canvassed in 1667, and this was only a very minor argument in the course of the *Epistola*, however, and when in 1689 van Limborch arranged for publication of the *Epistola*

Gouda in a joint edition with Strimesius' *De Pace Ecclesiastica*, he was quite correct in depicting Locke's work as a plea for toleration outside of the established church, and Strimesius' work as a plea for comprehension, although also thereby seeing them as complementary rather than opposed visions of the desirable state of the church.⁵⁷

When the leading unitarian merchant and friend of Furlly, William Popple, translated Locke's *Epistola de Tolerantia* into English in 1689 as the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, very probably with Locke's knowledge but without his active assistance, he prefaced the *Letter* with a page of his own composition addressing its relationship to English thought and events. He declared that England had seen much written on the subject of toleration but still needed works like the *Letter* because of the failure of most conformists to argue for such toleration to be extended impartially. Not only had the government been partial in religion, but even those who had suffered under that partiality and had therefore vindicated their own rights and Liberties had 'for the most part done it upon narrow Principles, suited only to the Interests of their own Sects'. It was 'Equal and impartial Liberty' that England needed, but which had not been practised either by the government to the people in general 'or by any Dissenting Parties of the People towards one another'. Popple condemned the 'narrowness of Spirit on all sides' as the principal cause of England's miseries. He declared that the Declarations of Indulgence and Acts of Comprehension 'practised or projected' in England were insufficient, indicating comprehension in a forceful declaration as likely to 'encrease our Evil'.⁵⁸ In condemning the lack of consistent support for the principle of toleration amongst dissenters as well as Anglicans, Popple was echoing another of Locke's arguments in the *Epistola* itself. Again the passage was stated in very general terms, but it was unmistakably the universalisation of Locke's condemnation in the 'Critical Notes' of the dissenters' use of force whenever they gained power. It was 'worthy to be observed, and lamented' wrote 'that the most violent . . . Defenders of the Truth, the Opposers of Errors, the Exclaimers against Schism, do hardly ever let loose . . . their Call for God . . . unless where they have the Civil Magistrate on their side'. 'Soon as ever Court-favour has given them the better end of the Staff . . . Grace and Charity are to be laid aside; Otherwise, they are religiously to be served.' It was only 'Where they have not the Power to carry on persecutions, and to become Masters' that these churches 'desire to live upon fair terms, and Preach up Toleration'.⁵⁹

The Toleration Act of 1689 (1 Wm and M. c.18), which passed into law

ibid., 29; *Correspondence*, III, 1131.

Fully, *Letter*, 21; MS Locke c33, 19; Klibansky and Gough, *Letter*, introduction, xxii; Sellman, *Locke and Depravity*, 135.

on 24 May, granted toleration of worship to Protestant trinitarians. It excluded unitarians, Roman Catholics and atheists, and it legalised toleration in the form of a revocable exemption from the penal laws against dissent. There was no recognition, in other words, that the community did not have the right to abridge peaceful forms of worship. Proposals for comprehension to be joined with this toleration failed to become law. Locke's correspondence with van Limborch in 1689 shows that he both feared that the toleration act as passed was too limited, and that he had increasingly limited hopes for comprehension as anything but a long-term aim. On 6 June 1689 he declared that toleration was now established by law, although it was 'Not perhaps so wide in scope as might be wished for by you and those like you who are true Christians and free from ambition and envy'. He hoped that 'with these beginnings the foundations have been laid of that liberty and peace in which the church of Christ is one day to be established'. Three months later he declared that the settlement of 'certain measure of indulgence' had not yet resulted in a 'complete settlement of the differences between minds and parties', but that the granting of liberty led to those who differed 'conducting themselves much more peaceably and moderately than I had expected'. Discussing comprehension however, which van Limborch was still energetically supporting in letters to Locke, he wrote that he could not 'feel any hopes that ecclesiastical peace will be established in that way. Men will always differ religious questions and rival parties will continue to quarrel and wage on each other unless the establishment of equal liberty for all provides a bond of mutual charity by which all may be brought together into a body.' Here toleration creating a bond of mutual charity is seen as necessary before comprehension can work at all.⁶⁰

VII

Jonas Proast was a high-church former chaplain of All Souls, Oxford, both to the high churchmen Henry Dowdwell, George Hickes and Thomas Hearne, and to Locke's later fierce opponent Jonathan Edwards, a formidable opponent of the Latitudinarians, including Tillotson, who then actively keeping him out of his position at All Souls. In 1690 and he composed two works that voiced the high-church Anglican case for religious toleration, the first of which assaulted Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*. In these Proast argued that while force could not directly on the understanding, it was not completely inefficacious: it could be used to make men 'consider' their religion. Proast argued that men's nature

⁶⁰ *Correspondence*, III, 1147; 1182.

'depraved' and 'corrupt' and that if left to a free choice of their religion they would choose a religion which legitimated their 'lusts'. He argued that the magistrate was empowered by the law of nature to do all possible good for his subjects, and that this included the spiritual good of enforcing their consideration of the 'true religion'. He added that by the duty of charity under the New Testament the civil sovereign was obliged to use such force. By applying 'moderate' penalties the advantage that false religion derived from its legitimization of men's lusts would be removed, and then the light of the Gospel would be able to prevail.⁶¹

Locke's *Second Letter on Toleration* (1690) was a reply to Proast's criticisms of the *Letter*; his *Third Letter on Toleration* (1692) was a response to Proast's reply to the *Second Letter*. While the *Second Letter* was even shorter than the first *Letter*, the *Third Letter* swelled to over 400 repetitive pages, and is consequently both almost entirely unreadable and very rarely read. As controversial works, the *Letters* concentrated upon pointing out the deficiencies of Proast's arguments far more than on setting out a clear vision of Locke's own arguments and add very little to the case for religious toleration. Disdaining the possibility of suffering bringing religious conversion, Locke argued that where all magistrates used force true religion would obviously be more damaged by force than helped. Locke stated considerable space to continuing to allege the absence of a commission for the magistrate in religion, and pointed out the difficulty of putting the force used against dissenters to the 'moderate' penalties that Proast proposed. He argued that since Proast explicitly based the need for tolerance in its counterbalancing of those lusts of men which had led them to choose a false religion, penal laws in religion were ineffective. They produced only conformity, and conformists would simply be able to preserve their lusts within the bounds of the church instead of outside. It was impossible to punish moral and considering dissenters for their alleged failure to consider religion properly, and not to punish unconsidering and moral conformists, and these laws were therefore illegitimate.⁶²

The *Second* and *Third Letters* were, however, concerned with English ecclesiastical politics as well as universal principles of toleration, and indicated that Locke continued his personal confessional allegiance in the early 1690s, twice identifying their author as a member of the Church of England. In the *Second Letter* he declared to Proast that 'I confess of myself membership of the Church of England. In the *Third Letter* he noted Proast's argument: 'You tell me "If I own with our author, that there is but one religion, and I owning myself to be of the church of England, you

⁶¹ *Letters*, VI, 142; 150; 152; 170; 262ff.; 351; 374.

⁶² *Ibid.*, passim, esp. 134-5; 142ff.; 374.

cannot see how I can avoid supposing, that the national religion now in England, backed by the public authority of the law, is the only true religion."⁶² Locke argued that 'If I own, as I do, all that you here expect from me' this would not lead to Proast's conclusion, because while he was of the Church of England and held that the true religion was taught in the Church of England, it was not the only true religion since it made things necessary to communion which were not made necessary in the Bible. In the late 1690s Locke attempted to gain a clerical position in the Church for a Cleric. He lived for most of the 1690s and early 1700s in the house at Oates of Damaris Masham, the Anglican daughter of an Anglican cleric, and his correspondence during these years shows that he attended the local parish church and encouraged visits by friends by asking them to the sermons and services at the parish church there. When he became too sick to attend the very end of his life, he received the sacrament at home, as was then the custom in the church.⁶³

With phraseology that was strongly reminiscent of the 'Critical Notice' Locke declared against Proast that 'the present Church of England [has] a greater number in proportion than possibly any other age of the church ever had, of those who by their pious lives and labours of their ministry adorn their profession'. This was not merely applause that was intended to soften his own criticisms of other Anglican preachers for their intolerance or failure to preach effectively, but also a reflection of his own continuing personal attraction to the views of many Latitudinarian Anglican clergymen, and of Chillingworth and Hales, their intellectual forefathers. In this was approval merely for the Latitudinarian willingness to preach and teach in a plain style and in the words of Scripture, and thus for attempts to avoid placing men's restrictive definitions upon the content conveyed in Scripture. This was reflected in his approval in *Some Thoughts* of the style of Tillotson and Chillingworth, and in his recommendation of the Cambridge Platonist and Latitudinarian John Worthington's *Christianism* as having 'all its answers in the precise Words of Scripture, a true good example, and such a sound form of words, as no Christian can be against, as not fit for his child to learn'. In part it was approval for Chillingworth's eirenicism, support of intellectual enquiry, and firm distinction of faith and knowledge; Locke read Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants* again in Holland, and re-read it several more times in the 1690s.

His approval also extended, however, to much more significant elements of Latitudinarian thought: their descriptions of morality, their enunciations of moral behaviour through prudential arguments that recognised men's motivation by desire for happiness, and, as we will see in

moments, their animus against 'debaucheries'. In 1703 Locke was to recommend to his relative Peter King the sermons of Tillotson, Barrow and Whichcote for their 'view of the parts of morality' which he thought nowhere else 'so well and distinctly explained, and so strongly enforced'. He declared them to be 'masterpieces in this kind'. Locke's memoranda of books in Holland suggest that he was reading Barrow's sermons there in the late 1680s, and his annotated bibles include a number of notes drawn from these sermons. He had possessed an early volume of Tillotson's sermons before his exile to Holland, and his bibles show that in the 1690s he read several of the further collections of these sermons that were published when Tillotson became archbishop. A few years before his death he read a volume of Whichcote's sermons, which he then recommended on the role of civility. In one of his bibles he recorded from Whichcote the simple but important summary of their view of faith: 'the reforming our lives is the way to believe the Gospel'.⁶⁴

As importantly, Locke maintained his friendship with the Latitudinarian clergies to whom he had been close before his exile, a friendship that was still far closer than that with any other English clerics. When he was very ill in 1703 Locke was visited at Oates by Fowler, and before Tillotson's death in 1694 Locke visited him several times. In 1694 Locke recorded his approval of Tillotson as a 'candid friend' whom he had consulted on all doubtful points of divinity'. Some of the volumes of Tillotson's sermons that Locke received were personal gifts from the author, and he sent copies of some of his own works to Tillotson and Fowler. He personally brought an Limborch's works to Tillotson, securing Tillotson's patronage for their publication. Tillotson and Fowler were among the Anglicans most fully attracted to the post-Revolution settlement because of their eirenicism and eirenicism, but probably also by some degree of Whig commitment, although not a commitment that had sanctioned armed

Works, VI, 172; *Education*, 262, 296, 377, 399; *Works* (1801), X, 306; *Correspondence*, VI, 1398; 1429; V, 1507; 1509; 1518; 1572; 1601; 1826; 2011; 2012; 2029; 2031; 2023; 2939; 332; le Clerc, *Life*, 44; MS Locke c25, 50; 51; 53; 53v; 54; 54v; MS Locke c33, 20, 27-9; MS Locke f30, 1, 7-9; 43; 47-50; 83; 90; 93; 110; 118; MS Locke f32, 15; 66; 119; 130; 137; Sir Thomas Pope Blount, *Censura Celebriorum Authorum* (1690), shelved under 838, 15; 19; 22-3; 40; 43; 54; 72; 100; 119; 125; 132; 138; 160; 200; 219; 221; 252; 370; 381; 532; 570; 628; 636-7; 644-5; 652; 676; 684; 695; 701; 725; 745; *Le Nouveau Testament*, Mons (1673), shelved under 9.103-7; IV, 4-5; 58; 82; 99; 102; *Holy Bible* (1648), 667; 682; 689-90; 711; 729; 731; 733; 750; 754; 773; 787; 789; 791-6; 807; 813; 819; 828; 830-1; 837-8; 841-2; 844; 847-50; 852; 854; *Holy Bible* (1654), shelved under 35-60; 3; 76; 88; 99; 151; 189; 245; 253; 329; 450; II, 536; 573. *Library*, under the names Barrow, Boyle, Burnet, Cudworth, Fowler, Lloyd, Patrick, Stillingfleet, Tenison, Tillotson, Whichcote, Worthington, Chillingworth, Hales and Smith; *The Trinitarian Scheme* 72, 28; [R. Howard], *A Twofold Vindication* (1696), 47-8, cited in Firpo, 'John

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 100; 320; *Correspondence*, VI, 2202; McLachlan, *Religious Opinions*, 80.

resistance. As we saw earlier, Fowler had been a frequent guest at Shaftesbury's house in the later 1670s and was tried in an ecclesiastical court in 1684 for his association with Whiggism, and Tillotson was still in contact with Locke in 1681. Locke remained close to the eirenic lay Anglican Edward Clarke and James Tyrrell. Locke's friendship with a number of unitarians, including Isaac Newton, Peter King and William Popple, will be shown in the next chapter to have been very significant to him during the 1690s. It is worth noting at this point therefore that while these men were all theologically unorthodox, all remained members of the Church of England, as, indeed, did almost all contemporary unitarians, a fact that repeatedly trumpeted.⁶⁵

Locke assaulted the punishments whose removal by the Toleration Act of 1689 Proast regretted as ruining many 'in their fortunes'; causing others to lose 'their liberties, and some their lives in prisons'. He anatomised the length the growth of penal laws under Queen Elizabeth which had eventually 'reached men's estates, liberties and lives'. Unlike Proast, however, Latitudinarians had supported the (limited trinitarian) toleration established by William, and had accepted preferment by William to the ranks of the church hierarchy. They attempted to secure comprehension in 1689 but failed because of the strength of high-church opposition among the lower clergy. For the Latitudinarians the post-Revolution Church of England was consequently still too insistent upon ceremonial. It was therefore in common with Latitudinarian desires that at many points in *Second* and *Third Letters* Locke condemned the use of the cross in baptism and the requirement of kneeling at the Sacrament, both of which he recognised as still 'matter of great scruple'. Locke strongly praised those Anglican clerics who had not persecuted dissenters, although noting the 'visible' failings of most Anglicans: 'I have heard of those, and possibly are instances of it now wanting, who by their pious lives, peaceable friendly carriage, and diligent application to the several conditions and capacities of their parishioners, and screening them as much as they could from the penalties of the law, have in a short time scarce left a dissenter in a parish, where, notwithstanding the force had been before used, they found any other.'⁶⁶

Partly because they were faced by inability to force men to church thus to instruction, and feared – in common with many dissenting ministers – that the Toleration Act had made it easy to attend no church at all, and partly because of their long-standing commitments, the Latitudinarian clergy attempted to extend the proselytising instruction that had been

⁶⁵ On Fowler and Whiggism see p. 80 above; on Tillotson and Locke in October 1682 amusingly, Dewhurst, *Locke*, 206; Cranston, *Locke*, 134.

⁶⁶ *Works*, VI, 261; 328–330; 422ff.; 154–6; 388; 289ff., 322; 463; 286–8.

used and advocated in the Restoration by Firmin and various of the Latitudinarians. Burnet's *Pastoral Care* (1692) encouraged the local parish clergy to be energetic in proselytising. In the *Third Letter* Locke noted that he had heard 'very sober people even of the church of England' say that current Anglican instruction was insufficient to teach the Christian religion, that Anglican ministers complained of the ignorance of the laity in religion more than of anything else, and made repeated use of the *Pastoral Care* in order to indict the failures of Anglican preaching and thus, like the Latitudinarian hierarchy, to encourage a proselytising ministry. Locke cited approvingly Burnet's declaration that preachers should visit parishioners at home and his encouragement of 'the discoursing with men seriously and friendly about matters in religion, by those whose profession is the care of souls; examining what they do understand and where, either through laziness, prejudice or difficulty, they do stick'.⁶⁷

Locke's citation of Burnet's work was in part the adoption of a screen to protect himself from the charge of 'ill-will' to the clergy with which Proast assaulted him. In most of his comments Locke avoided the strident anticlericalism of the 'Critical Notes', and he was careful not directly to insult preachers. His anticlericalism still surfaced at a number of significant moments, but it was directed especially against those of the high-church party rather than the proselytising Anglicans. Proclaiming the need of all individuals to consider, search and examine the Scripture, Locke noted that Proast was 'backward in putting men upon examination of the Scripture' and that it was 'convenient' for ministers that men should receive no instruction but from the ministry... examine no arguments, receive nothing of the gospel, receive no other sense of the scripture than that that ministry proposes'. Locke broadened the attack at a few points in the manner of the *Letter From A Person of Quality* and *Two Treatises*, attacking 'our churches' for altering their preaching, sometimes venting on monarchical principles and sometimes preaching up nothing but absolute monarchy and passive obedience; again high-church Anglicans are the primary target as preachers of *jure divino* monarchy. Accusing Proast of catering for 'party' and for 'preferment', Locke argued that the only party that he wrote for were those who 'in every nation fear God, work righteousness, and are accepted with him; and not those who in every nation are famous for human constitutions'.⁶⁸

Locke further argued that those were most 'authors and promoters of party and divisions, who impose creeds, and ceremonies and articles of faith making... who narrow christianity within bounds of their own

⁶⁷ 330; 302–3; 201–2; 391; 173; 527; 433; 524–5; 462.

⁶⁸ 356–7; 473ff.; 542ff.

making, which the gospel knows nothing of'. He contended that the 'bond of unity might be preserved, in the different persuasions of men concerning things not necessary to salvation, if they were not made necessary to church communion'. Pointing out the doctrinal latitude of the church, he queried 'What two thinking men of the Church of England are there, who differ not from the other in several material points of religion, who nevertheless are members of the same church, and in unity with one another'. He continued by noting that if one of those points were made necessary to communion then division resulted and by arguing that in such circumstances the sects were created by the imposers. He declared pointedly that many imposers had 'established sects' under 'specious names of national churches', and queried of the division between presbyterianism and episcopalianism what a 'sober sensible heathen' would think of finding an island 'where christianity seems to be in its greatest purity' but where the south and north parts established churches upon the differences of 'only whether fewer or more, thus and thus chosen, should govern' and each then denied the other to be a true church of Christ. The criticism here extended beyond its most obvious target, Anglican imposition, to dissenters' unwillingness to compromise, and Locke condemned the 'sects which so mangle Christianity'.⁶⁹

While these passages suggest that a very broad comprehension remained a desire for Locke, this theme was generally muted within the text. These few very general passages aside, there was no appeal for comprehension in the *Second* and *Third Letters*. Instead, Locke stressed at the majority of points that each man had to follow his conscience in doctrine and ceremonial, and repeated the pessimism about ever achieving intellectual agreement between men that he had voiced to van Limborch in 1689. The ideal that he held to be practicable in the *Third Letter* was that of 'an agreement in truths necessary to salvation, and the maintaining of charity and brotherly kindness with the diversity of opinions in other things'. This was 'that which will very well consist with christian unity, and is all possibly to be had in this world, in such an incurable weakness and difference of men's understandings'.

VIII

We have seen in earlier chapters that from 1667 in his writings on toleration Locke restricted the morality to be enforced by the magistrate. In his 'Essay on Toleration' in 1667 he argued that the magistrate was not to enforce morality except as this was necessary to secure the public good, the

preservation of the society and of the individuals in society. Any such injunction would be 'injustice'. Locke took it as evident that men ought not to be forced to be healthy or wealthy; indeed, the rhetorical force of his argument against religious enforcement owed much to querying why, since this was so evident, men should think that they ought to force others to take care of their supernatural welfare. While these private civil concerns probably included merely indifferent matters, they also clearly included significant parts of Locke's morality; industrious labour, whatever one's calling, was, for Locke a prime duty of morality, and preservation of health and wealth in order to secure the means of subsistence also to do good to others were also very significant duties. The *Letter Concerning Toleration* similarly argued that the magistrate was not to enforce morality unless necessary to prevent injury, preserve society, and secure the common good. Locke argued that 'Covetousness' and 'Idleness' were recognised to be sins 'by the consent of all men, which yet no man ever saw to be punished by the magistrate. The reason is, because they were not prejudicial to other men's rights, nor do they break the public peace of Societies'. 'Nobody', Locke intoned 'corrects a spendthrift for consuming his substance in taverns'.⁷⁰

Both the *Second* and the *Third Letter on Toleration* continued the central arguments of these earlier tolerationist works in defending the argument of the *Letter* that civil society was established only for civil interests against Proast's claim that it was empowered to secure any good including spiritual good. In both the *Second* and *Third Letter* the burden of Locke's argument also continued to be that the magistrate had no commission to enforce religion and that almost all of morality remained beyond the bounds of magisterial authority. Against Proast's argument that the magistrate was to establish true religion because false religion was a offence to God, Locke queried why, if all offences had to be punished, the magistrate was not to punish 'envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness'. It was clearly not judicial proof that was the issue, for 'why does the magistrate never punish lying?' He declared that it was not the 'sense of mankind' that the magistrate had a duty to punish all offences against God. Using the same form of reply to the same form of argument by Proast later in the *Third Letter* he queried how Proast would 'prove that God has given the magistrates of the earth a power to punish all faults against himself? Covetousness or not loving our neighbour as ourselves, are faults or sins against God. Ought the magistrate to punish these?'⁷¹

Other passages of the *Second* and *Third Letter* were far less clear on the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 239-40.

⁷⁰ *Letter*, passim; *Treatises*, passim. Tully (ed.), *Letter*, esp. 34 and 44. *Works*, VI, 295, 535.

question of the enforcement of morality by the magistrate, however, and some even seem to imply that the magistrate had a duty to use force to promote morality in order to promote religion. The first of these passages came in the *Second Letter*. Proast had quoted various passages of the Bible to argue that the magistrate should enforce religion, among them John 7:17, 'if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine', a passage that Locke had himself quoted in emphasising moral behaviour as the way to gain knowledge of Scripture in his 1688 'Pacifick Christians'. In the *Second Letter* Locke suggested that this text proved that 'a good life is the only way to seek as we ought; and that therefore the magistrates, if they would put men upon seeking the way of salvation as they ought, should enforce their laws and penalties, force them to a good life; a good conversation being the readiest and surest way to a right understanding'. Thus, Locke's comment could be seen as merely an extension of his argument that penal laws in religion made men conform but did not prevent them from continuing in their 'lusts'; Locke is not necessarily agreeing with Proast that there is a magisterial duty of forcing men to seek salvation, pointing out that Proast's method is not suited to Proast's own ends, and is not entirely clear whether the 'ought' in his statement refers to a magisterial duty of putting men upon the seeking of salvation or to the way in which those men ought to seek salvation. Locke concluded this passage, however, by declaring that 'Punishments and severities thus applied . . . are practicable, just and useful.' The most natural way to read this comment is that the justness, practicableness and usefulness of penalties comes from their effectiveness in securing the subjects' effective seeking of salvation, which would imply a religious reason for the magistrate to have promoted morality. The entire passage is, however, phrased with sufficient imprecision that Locke may have meant by it that these penalties were as they separately procured other, purely civil interests that were connected with a good life. It could also be argued that Locke's approval of forcing a 'good life' and 'good conversation' referred only to a good life, it involved the prevention of injustice and securing of preservation.

In the *Third Letter* the picture becomes more obscure. Although specifically did not defend the magistrate imposing morality, extended beyond justice to issues such as envy, uncharitableness, covetousness, other passages suggest either that Locke was arguing magisterial duty to enforce morality when it was not clear that it was injurious to others or seditious, or, more probably, that the moral he thought was to be enforced as necessary to justice and preservation being very significantly expanded in a way that was in tension

earlier statements on not forcing men to be healthy or wealthy and not preventing them from being 'idle'.

Proast had condemned Locke's support for toleration as leading to 'epicurism' as well as to atheism. Locke responded that the toleration of corrupt manners, and of 'the debaucheries of life' was not pleaded for in the *Letters*: it was 'properly the magistrate's business by punishments to restrain and suppress' these. Making an effective point, he declared that it was 'in the magistrate's power to restrain and suppress them by more effectual laws than those for church conformity'. Locke reiterated his argument from the *Second Letter* in citing John 7:17, noting that he had argued 'already' that the way to seek salvation was a 'good life'. He concluded that the severity of the magistrate against vice should 'promote a good life' and that this was 'another means besides imposing of creeds and ceremonies, to promote the true religion'. Proast argued that religious 'seducers' would be 'hearkened to' because they taught 'opinions favourable to men's lusts'. Locke's reply was, 'Let the magistrate, as is his duty, under the practices which their lusts would carry them to, and the advantage will be still on the side of truth.' He gave no indication of the source of the magisterial duty, but his comment that the magistrate was to hinder 'practices' caused by lusts clearly suggests that he did not have in mind lusts in and of themselves but only their external results. That punishment was thus to be directed as sinful action and not at sin itself suggests that he may have had in mind the prevention of sinful practice as this was also injurious, and that the duty to punish may therefore have been that of the protection of property and peace stated elsewhere in the *Third Letter*.⁷³

Proast argued that men's lusts would prevent them from accepting the religion without being forced to 'consider' by the magistrate. In a manner similar to that of the *Second Letter*, Locke argued in the *Third Letter* that the way in which force 'can and ought to be serviceable' to men was 'in subduing of lusts; and its being directed against pride, rapine, luxury and debauchery, and those other immoralities which come properly under his cognizance, and may be corrected by punishments'. This was the magistrate's 'duty, in reference to religion'. It is possible to read the passage as arguing that these were only punishable in those instances where they came 'properly under the magistrate's cognizance' by causing injury and injustice, although by far the more usual way of reading the passage is that *in addition to injustice*, pride, rapine and debauchery were 'properly' punishable by the magistrate, as were other 'immoralities'; the question in such a reading then becomes

whether they were directly threatening to the civil peace or thought Locke to lead inevitably to injustice or sedition.⁷⁴

Proast argued that the prejudice of corruption against the true religion which required mortification of lusts, had to be counterbalanced. According to Locke this meant that a 'drunkard' must part with his cups and companions; and the voluptuous man with his pleasures. The proud vain must lay by all excess in apparel, furniture, and attendance; money (the support of all these) must be got only by ways of justice, honesty and fair industry: and every one must live peaceably, uprightly and friendly with his neighbour.' It was 'here' that Locke argued that magistrates 'may and ought' to 'interpose their power, and by severity against drunkenness, lasciviousness and all sorts of debauchery, by steady and unrelaxed punishment of all the ways of fraud and injustice and by their administration, countenance, and example, reduce the irregularities of men's manners into order, and bring sobriety, peaceableness, industry, and honesty into fashion'. According to Locke, 'This is the proper business everywhere and for this they have a commission from God both by the light of nature and revelation.' 'If men were forced by a magistrate to live sober, honest and strict lives, whatever their religion, then the advantage would be on the side of truth since the gratifying of lusts was not gained by forsaking her.'⁷⁵

Much of what the magistrate was to secure, according to this later passage, was unquestionably merely justice, and much of his way to honest, sober and upright lives was clearly through the influence of the magistrate's own example and encouragement. Locke was also, however, projecting laws and punishment – indeed, 'severities' – against 'drunkenness' and 'debauchery'. The substantial possibility is raised that Locke argued that the magistrate should enforce a good life in the passage of the *Second Letter*, and that he should prevent 'corrupt manners' in the passage in the *Third Letter*, that were both cited earlier, he was thinking there of force being used to make men lead 'honest' and 'sober' lives.

It might seem possible that as Locke came to believe that men's sinfulness was the result of custom, habit and the power of the flesh, rather than a necessity of sinning inherited from Adam, and as he came to accept

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 468.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 468–70 (my emphasis); on fashion and custom being more effective than 'Atlantis' in MS Locke c42, 36ff.; cf. also *Correspondence*, IV, 1336, Benjamin Locke: 'We laugh at your politicks; if your Parliaments would never trouble the about 2 things, that's Religion and Trade, we should grow both Religious and Prosperous. Provided the Laws might be rigorously executed against immorality and which I plead not for.'

scriptural teaching that the way to know more of the will of God was to act morally, he also came to believe that the magistrate should enforce more of morality than he had formerly thought as a way to promote his subjects' religious understanding. His arguments in the *Treatises* that individuals and thus the magistrate possessed the executive power of the law of nature, and that all men had the capacity to gain certainty in morality, although initially designed to support an individual right of resistance and liberty, could have come to seem to him to show that there was a way in which religion could legitimately be promoted by the magistrate without the magistrate attempting to force belief or worship, with all the dangers and reasons that he was still completely convinced made any such enforcement of belief and worship illegitimate. However, Locke had long believed in obedience to God's law was the way to a better understanding of that law, he continued to argue at a number of points in the text that the magistrate had no commission to seek the spiritual good of his subjects; he articulated so little of an opposing argument directly that it seems very unlikely he had come to believe in it; and if he had come to such a view, it seems difficult to see why he would then still have thought that no attempts should be made to punish other parts of immorality.

It seems more likely that several factors stood behind this set of arguments. First, in order to rebut Proast's charge of 'epicurism' on a commercial level, Locke blurred over the distinctions between a magisterial duty to promote religion by force and a duty to institute the parts of moral law necessary to secure justice and to preserve the society which would eventually help to promote religion. The magistrate would be doing his duty of helping others seek salvation, a duty that he possessed along with every other man in the world, but his use of force would actually be legitimised only on separate civil grounds. Second, Locke had come to think that magisterial regulation to force people to an honest and sober life was necessary to justice and/or to the preservation of the society. In works such as *Some Thoughts* and his translation of Nicole's *Essais* Locke argued that the magistrate would lead to injustice and oppression. As we saw in the last chapter, he argued in 1697 for forcing the able-bodied poor to labour in the workhouses. In his notebook entry 'Labour' in 1693 he suggested that governments ought to 'suppress the arts and instruments of Luxury and Vanity And bring those of honest and usefull industry into fashion', and that aristocratic competition should be prevented and that government should 'divert' men into honest labour. This would be an attempt to Ambition where the possession of power could not tempt itself in the distinctions of useless pride and vanity' and would encourage 'honest labour'. He asserted that if governments neglected to do

this they neglected 'the happynesse of the people' and with it 'their owne peace and security'.⁷⁶

Placed alongside the passages of the *Second* and *Third Letter*, these two recommendations of enforcing honest and sober lives and reasons for preventing luxury and pride and 'debauchery' make it seem likely that in the 1690s Locke had come to think that luxury, debauchery, vanity, drunkenness and lasciviousness ought to be prevented by the force of the magistrate because if these things were not prevented they would lead not merely to attack upon honest labour but also to injustice and to the undermining of the peace. Administration of the poor law throughout the seventeenth century was explicitly concerned with maintaining the public peace; these were Locke's first years of such administration. As the 1690s progressed Locke became increasingly convinced of the difficulties of making men understand morality and practise it, including gentlemen, and declared that most men had to believe and not to know. Locke's efforts to show how men could govern their own conduct in liberty were increasingly focused on the need for outside agencies to govern them: tutors, parents and preachers.

In these senses, a more acute awareness of the extent of morality needing to be enforced by the magistrate seems the culmination of a number of factors within Locke's own thought. The argument was also very probably the result of his identification with the Latitudinarian programme of moral reform promoted by Tillotson, Burnet, Fowler and others, who had long complained of the viciousness allowed under Charles II and James II. Locke's own probable criticisms of Charles in 1681 were discussed in chapter five. Many in 1689 celebrated the coming of William and Mary as bringing a new moral order to England. Mary, very close to many Latitudinarian churchmen, issued proclamations with their support against 'vicious, debauched and profane persons' in 1692, and the Latitudinarian churchmen then set about defining these over the next decades as necessary to the preservation of the peace and therefore enforceable by the magistrate rather than as necessary to spiritual redemption. Locke's complaint in *Some Thoughts* that his society had been becoming increasingly 'vicious' was a common complaint of the period; he was identified with many of the Latitudinarians who also believed this and were involved in the founding of 'societies for the reformation of manners', and he was visiting Tillotson frequently during approximately the period that he composed the *Third Letter*.⁷⁷

It thus seems most likely that Locke had not contradicted the central

argument of his writings since 1667 that the magistrate was limited to enforcing only those measures necessary to the public good, preservation and justice, but that he had come to expand the content of those necessary measures of moral reformation in such a way that he had contradicted the thrust of his argument in 1667 that it was evident that no one ought to be forced in their 'civil concerns' to be healthy or wealthy and in the *Letter* in 1689 that the 'idle' and the spendthrift in the taverns were committing sins whose punishment lay beyond the magistrate's penal authority. A massively coercive regime of industriousness and sobriety was quite legitimate and, indeed, required in this new vision.

⁷⁶ 'Labour', MS Locke Film. 77, 311; cf. Dunn, *Political Thought*, 235ff.
⁷⁷ Goldie, 'Proast'; S. Burt, *Virtue Transformed*, Cambridge (1997).