**Rousseau**

Rousseau's contributions to political philosophy are scattered among various works, most notable of which are the Discourse on the Origins of Inequality, the Discourse on Political Economy, The Social Contract, and Considerations on the Government of Poland. However, many of his other works, both major and minor, contain passages that amplify or illuminate the political ideas in those works. His central doctrine in politics is that a state can be legitimate only if it is guided by the “general will” of its members. This idea finds its most detailed treatment in The Social Contract.

In The Social Contract, Rousseau sets out to answer what he takes to be the fundamental question of politics, the reconciliation of the freedom of the individual with the authority of the state. This reconciliation is necessary because human society has evolved to a point where individuals can no longer supply their needs through their own unaided efforts, but rather must depend on the co-operation of others. The process whereby human needs expand and interdependence deepens is set out in the Discourse on the Origins of Inequality. In that work, the final moment of Rousseau's conjectural history involves the emergence of endemic conflict among the now-interdependent individuals and the argument that the Hobbesian insecurity of this condition would lead all to consent to the establishment of state authority and law. In the Second Discourse, this establishment amounts to the reinforcement of unequal and exploitative social relations that are now backed by law and state power. In an echo of Locke and an anticipation of Marx, Rousseau argues that this state would, in effect, be a class state, guided by the common interest of the rich and propertied and imposing unfreedom and subordination on the poor and weak. The propertyless consent to such an establishment because their immediate fear of a Hobbesian state of war leads them to fail to attend to the ways in which the new state will systematically disadvantage them.

The Social Contract aims to set out an alternative to this dystopia, an alternative in which, Rousseau claims, each person will enjoy the protection of the common force whilst remaining as free as they were in the state of nature. The key to this reconciliation is the idea of the general will: that is, the collective will of the citizen body taken as a whole. The general will is the source of law and is willed by each and every citizen. In obeying the law each citizen is thus subject to his or her own will, and consequently, according to Rousseau, remains free.

### 3.1 The idea of the general will

Rousseau's account of the general will is marked by unclarities and ambiguities that have attracted the interest of commentators since its first publication. The principal tension is between a democratic conception, where the general will is simply what the citizens of the state have decided together in their sovereign assembly, and an alternative interpretation where the general will is the transcendent incarnation of the citizens' common interest that exists in abstraction from what any of them actually wants. Both views find some support in Rousseau's texts, and both have been influential. Contemporary epistemic conceptions of democracy often make reference to Rousseau's discussion in Book 2 chapter 3 of of The Social Contract. These accounts typically take Condorcet's jury theorem as a starting point, where democratic procedures are conceived of as a method for discovering the truth about the public interest; they then interpret the general will as a deliberative means of seeking outcomes that satisfy the preferences of individuals and render the authority of the state legitimate. The tension between the “democratic” and the “transcendental” conceptions can be reduced if we take Rousseau to be arguing for the view that, under the right conditions and subject to the right procedures, citizen legislators will be led to converge on on laws that correspond to their common interest; however, where those conditions and procedures are absent, the state necessarily lacks legitimacy. On such a reading, Rousseau may be committed to something like an a posteriori philosophical anarchism. Such a view holds that it is be possible, in principle, for a state to exercise legitimate authority over its citizens, but all actual states—and indeed all states that we are likely to see in the modern era—will fail to meet the conditions for legitimacy.

Rousseau argues that in order for the general will to be truly general it must come from all and apply to all. This thought has both substantive and formal aspects. Formally, Rousseau argues that the law must be general in application and universal in scope. The law cannot name particular individuals and it must apply to everyone within the state. Rousseau believes that this condition will lead citizens, though guided by a consideration of what is in their own private interest, to favor laws that both secure the common interest impartially and that are not burdensome and intrusive. For this to be true, however, it has to be the case that the situation of citizens is substantially similar to one another. In a state where citizens enjoy a wide diversity of lifestyles and occupations, or where there is a great deal of cultural diversity, or where there is a high degree of economic inequality, it will not generally be the case that the impact of the laws will be the same for everyone. In such cases it will often not be true that a citizen can occupy the standpoint of the general will merely by imagining the impact of general and universal laws on his or her own case.

### 3.2 The emergence of the general will: procedure, virtue and the legislator

In The Social Contract Rousseau envisages three different types or levels of will as being in play. First, individuals all have private wills corresponding to their own selfish interests as natural individuals; second, each individual, insofar as he or she identifies with the collective as a whole and assumes the identity of citizen, wills the general will of that collective as his or her own, setting aside selfish interest in favor of a set of laws that allow all to coexist under conditions of equal freedom; third, and very problematically, a person can identify with the corporate will of a subset of the populace as a whole. The general will is therefore both a property of the collective and a result of its deliberations, and a property of the individual insofar as the individual identifies as a member of the collective. In a well-ordered society, there is no tension between private and general will, as individuals accept that both justice and their individual self-interest require their submission to a law which safeguards their freedom by protecting them from the private violence and personal domination that would otherwise hold sway. In practice, however, Rousseau believes that many societies will fail to have this well-ordered character. One way in which they can fail is if private individuals are insufficiently enlightened or virtuous and therefore refuse to accept the restrictions on their own conduct which the collective interest requires. Another mode of political failure arises where the political community is differentiated into factions (perhaps based on a class division between rich and poor) and where one faction can impose its collective will on the state as a whole.

**1. Introduction**

**1.1 The puzzle of Locke's moral philosophy**

There are two main stumbling blocks to the study of Locke's moral philosophy. The first regards the singular lack of attention the subject receives in Locke's most important and influential published works; not only did Locke never publish a work devoted to moral philosophy, but he dedicates little space to its discussion in the works he did publish. The traditional moral concept of natural law arises in Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) serving as a major plank in his argument regarding the basis for civil law and the protection of individual liberty, but he does not go into any detail regarding how we come to know natural law nor how we might be obligated, or even motivated, to obey it. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (first edition 1690; fourth edition 1700, hereafter referred to as the *Essay*) Locke spends little time discussing morality, and what he does provide in the way of a moral epistemology seems underdeveloped, offering, at best, the suggestion of what a moral system might look like rather than a fully-realized positive moral position. This brings us to the second major stumbling block: What Locke does provide us by way of moral theory in these works is diffuse, with the air of being what J.B. Schneewind has characterized as “brief, scattered and sometimes puzzling” (Schneewind 1994, 200). This is not to suggest that Locke says nothing specific or concrete about morality. Locke makes references, throughout his works, to morality and moral obligation. However, two quite distinct positions on morality seem to emerge from Locke's works and it is this dichotomous aspect of Locke's view that has generated the greatest degree of controversy. The first is a *natural law*position, which Locke refers to in the *Essay*, but which finds its clearest articulation in an early work from the 1660s, entitled*Essays on the Law of Nature*. In this work, we find Locke espousing a fairly traditional rationalistic natural law position, which consists broadly in the following three propositions: first, that moral rules are founded on divine, universal and absolute laws; second, that these divine moral laws are discernible by human reason; and third, that by dint of their divine authorship these rules are obligatory and rationally discernible as such. On the other hand, Locke also espouses a hedonistic moral theory, in evidence in his early work, but developed most fully in the *Essay*. This latter view holds that all goods and evils reduce to specific kinds of pleasures and pains. The emphasis here is on sanctions, and how rewards and punishments serve to provide morality with its normative force. Both elements find their way into Locke's published works, and, as a result, Locke seems to be holding what seem to be incommensurable views. The trick for Locke scholars has been to figure out how, or even if, they can be made to cohere. The question is not easily settled by looking to Locke's unpublished works, either, since Locke also seems to hold a natural law view at some times and a hedonistic view at others.

One might conclude, with J.B. Schneewind, among others, that Locke's attempts at constructing a morality were unsuccessful. Schneewind does not mince words when he writes the following: “Locke's failures are sometimes as significant as his successes. His views on morality are a case in point” (Schneewind 1994, 199). Schneewind argues that the two strands of Locke's moral theory are irreconcilable, and that this is a fact Locke must have realized. This view is indeed an apt representation of the frustration many readers have felt with Locke's moral theory. Locke's eighteenth-century apologist, Catharine Trotter Cockburn thought Locke provided a promising, but incomplete, starting point for a positive moral system, imploring, in her work “A Defense of Mr. Locke's *Essay of Human Understanding*,”

I wish, Sir, you may only find it enough worth your notice, to incite you to show the world, how far it falls short of doing justice to your principles; which you may do without interrupting the great business of your life, by a work, that will be an universal benefit, and which you have given the world some right to exact of you. Who is there so capable of pursuing to a *demonstration* those reflections on the grounds of *morality*, which you have already made? (Cockburn 1702, 36)

Locke's friend William Molyneux similarly implored Locke to make good on the promise found in the *Essay*. In a letter written to Locke on September 16th, 1693, Molyneux presses Locke to work on a moral treatise once he has finished editing the second edition of his *Essay*, writing as follows:

I am very sensible how closely you are engaged, till you have discharged this Work off your Hands; and therefore will not venture, till it be over, to press you again to what you have promis'd in the Business of Man's Life, *Morality*. (Locke 1742, 53)

Several months later, in December of the same year, Molyneux concludes a letter by asking Locke about what other projects he currently has on the go “amongst which, I hope you will not forget your *Thoughts on Morality*” (Locke 1742, 54).

Locke never did produce such a work, and we might well wonder if he himself ever considered the project a “failure”. There is no doubt that morality was of central importance to Locke, a fact we can discern from the *Essay* itself; there are two important features of the *Essay* that serve to enlighten us regarding the significance of this work in the development of Locke's moral views. First of all, morality seems to have inspired Locke to write the *Essay* in the first place. In recounting his original inclination to embark on the project, he recalls a discussion with “five or six friends”, at which they discoursed “on a Subject very remote from this” (Locke 1700, 7). According to Locke, the discussion eventually hit a standstill, at which point it was agreed that in order to settle the issue at hand it would first be necessary to, as Locke puts it, “examine our own Abilities, and see, what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with” (Locke 1700, 7). This was, he explains, his first entrance into the problems that inspired the *Essay* itself. But, what is most interesting for our purposes is just what the remote subject was that first got Locke and his friends thinking about fundamental questions of epistemology. James Tyrell, one of those who attended that evening, is a source of enlightenment on this matter—he later recalled that the discussion concerned morality and revealed religion. But, Locke himself refers to the subjects they discussed that fateful evening as ‘very remote’ from the matters of the *Essay*. That may well be, but it is also true that Locke, in the *Essay*, identifies morality as a central feature of human intellectual and practical life, which brings us to the second important fact about Locke's view of morality. Locke writes, in the *Essay*, that “Morality is the proper Science, and Business of Mankind in general” (*Essay*, 4.12.11; these number are, book, chapter and section, respectively, from Locke's *Essay*). For a book aiming to set out the limits and extent of human knowledge, this comes as no small claim. We must, Locke writes, “know our own *Strength”* (*Essay*, 1.1.6) and turn our attention to those areas in which we can have certainty, i.e., “those [things] which concern our Conduct” (*Essay*, 1.1.6). The amount of attention given to the question of morality itself would seem to belie its primacy for Locke. The *Essay* is certainly not intended as a work of moral philosophy; it is a work of epistemology, laying the foundations for knowledge. However, a very big part of the programme involves identifying what true knowledge is and what it is we as humans can have knowledge about, and morality is accorded a distinctive and fairly exclusive status in Locke's epistemology as one of “the Sciences capable of Demonstration” (*Essay*, 4.3.18). The only other area of inquiry accorded this status is mathematics; clearly, for Locke, morality represents a unique and defining aspect of what it means to be human. We have to conclude, then, that the *Essay* is strongly motivated by an interest in establishing the groundwork for moral reasoning. However, while morality clearly has a position of the highest regard in his epistemological system, his promise of a demonstrable moral science is never realized here, or in later works.

It seems we can safely say that the subject of morality was a weighty one for Locke. However, just what Locke takes morality to involve is substantially more complicated an issue. There are two broad lines of interpretation of Locke's moral views, which I will briefly outline here.

**1.2 Critical interpretations of Locke's moral philosophy**

The first interpretation of Locke's moral theory is what we might call an incompatibility thesis: Locke scholars Laslett, Aaron, von Leyden, among others, hold that Locke's natural law theory is nothing more than a relic from Locke's early years, when he wrote the *Essays on the Law of Nature*, and represents a rogue element in the mature empiricistic framework of the*Essay*. For these commentators, the two elements found in the *Essay* seem not only incommensurable, but the hedonism seems the obvious and straightforward fit with Locke's generally empiricistic epistemology. The general view is that Locke's rationalism seems, for all intents and purposes, to have no significant role to play, either in the acquisition of moral knowledge or in the recognition of the obligatory force of moral rules. These fundamental aspects of morality seem to be taken care of by Locke's hedonism. Worse than this, however, is that the two views rely on radically different epistemological principles. The conclusion tends to be that Locke is holding on to moral rationalism in the face of serious incoherence. The incompatibility thesis is supported by the fact that Locke seems to emphasize the role of pleasure and pain in moral decision-making, however it has difficulty making sense of the presence of Locke's moral rationalism in the *Essay* and other of Locke's later works (not to mention the exalted role he gives to rationally-deduced moral law). Added to this, even in Locke's early work, he seems to hold both positions simultaneously. Aaron and von Leyden both throw up their hands. According to von Leyden, in the introduction to his 1954 edition of Locke's *Essays on the Law of Nature*,

the development of [Locke's] hedonism and certain other views held by him in later years made it indeed difficult for him to adhere whole-heartedly to his doctrine of natural law. (Locke 1954, 14)

In a similar vein, Aaron writes:

Two theories compete with each other in [Locke's] mind. Both are retained; yet their retention means that a consistent moral theory becomes difficult to find. (Aaron 1971, 257)

Yet, it is curious that Locke neither claimed to find these strands incompatible, nor ever abandoned his rationalistic natural law view. It seems unlikely that this view would be nothing more than a confusing hangover from earlier days. Taking seriously Locke's commitment to both is therefore a much more charitable approach, and one that takes seriously Locke's clear commitment to the benefits of rationally-apprehending our moral duties. An approach along these lines is one we might call a compatibility approach to the question of Locke's moral commitments. John Colman and Stephen Darwall are two Locke scholars who have argued that Locke's view is neither plagued with tensions nor incoherent. Their common view is that the two elements of Locke's theory are doing different work. Locke's hedonism, on this compatibility account, is intended as a theory of moral motivation, and serves to fill a motivational gap between knowing moral law and having reasons to obey moral law. Locke introduces hedonism in order to account for the practical force of the obligations arising from natural law. As Darwall writes,

what makes God's commands morally obligatory [i.e., God's authority] appears…to have nothing intrinsically to do with what makes them rationally compelling. (Darwall 1995, 37).

Thus, on this account, reason deduces natural law, but it is hedonistic considerations alone that offer agents the motivating reasons to act in accordance with its dictates.

This interpretation convincingly makes room for both elements in Locke's view. A central feature of this interpretation is its attention to the legalistic aspect of Locke's natural law theory. For Locke, the very notion of law presupposes an authority structure as the basis for its institution and its enforcement. The law carries obligatory weight by virtue of its reflecting the will of a rightful superior. That it also carries the threat of sanctions lends motivational force to the law.

A slight modification of the compatibility account, however, better captures the motivational aspect of Locke's rationalistic account: Locke does, at times suggest that rational agents are not only obligated, but motivated, by sheer recognition of the divine authority of moral law. It is helpful to think of morality as carrying both intrinsic and extrinsic obligatory force for Locke. On the one hand moral rules obligate by dint of their divine righteousness, and on the other hand by the threat of rewards and punishments. The suggestion that morality has an intrinsic motivational force appears in the *Essays on the Law of Nature* and is retained by Locke in some of his final published works. It is, however, a feature of his view that gets somewhat underappreciated in the secondary literature, and for understandable reasons—Locke tends to emphasize hedonistic motivations. Why this is will be discussed in [section 4](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-moral/#MorMot2RigMor). At this point, however, it suffices to say that Locke's theory does not have the motivational gap that the compatibility thesis suggests—hedonism serves as a ‘back-up’ motivational tool in the absence of the right degree of rational intuition of one's moral duty.

**2. Locke's natural law theory: the basis of moral obligation**

In order to get a complete understanding of Locke's moral theory, it is useful to begin with a look at Locke's natural law view, articulated most fully in his *Essays on the Law of Nature* (written as series of lectures he delivered as Censor of Moral Philosophy at Christ Church, Oxford). Two predominant features of Locke's natural law theory are already well-developed in this work: the rationalism and the legalism. According to Locke, reason is the primary avenue by which humans come to understand moral rules, and it is via reason we can draw two distinct but related conclusions regarding the grounds for our moral obligations: we can appreciate the divine, and thereby righteous, nature of morality *and* we can perceive that morality is the expression of a law-making authority.

**2.1 Morality as Natural Law**

In the *Essays on the Law of Nature*, Locke writes that “all the requisites of a law are found in natural law” (Locke 1663–4, 82). But, what, for Locke, is required for something to be a law? Locke takes stock of what constitutes law in order to establish the legalistic framework for morality: First, law must be founded on the will of a superior. Second, it must perform the function of establishing rules of behavior. Third, it must be binding on humans, since there is a duty of compliance owed to the superior authority that institutes the laws (Locke 1663–4, 83). Natural law is rightly called *law* because it satisfies these conditions. For Locke, the concept of morality is best understood by reference to a law-like authority structure, for without this, he argues, moral rules would be indistinguishable from social conventions. In one his later essays, “Of Ethic in General”, Locke writes

[w]ithout showing a law that commands or forbids [people], moral goodness will be but an empty sound, and those actions which the schools here call virtues or vices may by the same authority be called by contrary names in another country; and if there be nothing more than their decisions and determinations in the case, they will be still nevertheless indifferent as to any man's practice, which will by such kind of determinations be under no obligation to observe them. (Locke 1687–88, 302)

For Locke, then, moral law is, by definition, an obligatory set of rules, *because* it is reflects the will of a superior authority.

Moral rules are obligatory because of the authority structure out of which they arise. But, this is not the only story Locke has to tell regarding the nature of our obligation to divine moral dictates. The set of moral rules that reason deduces are taken by Locke to be reflective of human nature. The rules that govern human conduct are specifically tailored to human nature, and our duty to God involves realizing our natures to the fullest degree. There is a noticeable degree of teleology in Locke's theory, which is worth pausing to consider in its content and its implications.

**2.2 Morality and Teleology**

In the *Essays on the Law of Nature*, Locke draws a connection between the natural law governing human action and the laws of nature that govern all other things in the natural world; just as all natural things seem nomologically determined, so human beings are likewise law-governed. Humans are not determined to the same degree as other physical and biological entities, but we are beholden to God to ensure that our lives follow a certain path. Natural law is, Locke writes, a “plan, rule, or … pattern” of life (Locke 1663–64, 81). Locke's early view has a teleological strain typical of the Aquinian (and thus Aristotelian) tradition. In fact, Locke does not shy away from this teleological angle, acknowledging this inheritance when he writes of Aristotle's that he

rightly concludes that the proper function of man is acting in conformity with reason, so much so that man must of necessity perform what reason prescribes. (Locke 1663–64, 83)

Locke considers moral duty to be tailored to human nature, a set of laws specific to humanity and governing our actions according to God's will. These laws are not only discoverable by reason, but in order to fulfill our function, humans are required to make use of reason to this very end. This view resurfaces in the *Essay*, where Locke writes the following:

it will become us, as rational Creatures, to imploy those Faculties we have about what they are most adapted to, and follow the direction of Nature, where it seems to point us out the way. (*Essay*, 4.12.11)

The way it points us, he goes on to explain, is in the direction of our “greatest interests, i.e., the Condition of our eternal Estate” (*Essay*, 4.12.11). The greater effort we each make in refining our rational faculty, the more clearly each of us will discern the proper path to eternal salvation.

This teleological element may seem somewhat out of step with Locke's unqualified empiricistic rejection of teleological metaphysics in the *Essay*. However, it is important to bear in mind that the teleological aspects of Locke's moral theory do seem to be serving a very specific purpose. Locke seems to be aiming to establish a natural-theological basis for natural law. Why would this be so crucial for Locke?

Locke is grounding human conduct within a general framework of laws originating in God's divine command. This is not just a nomologically-ordered universe, but one, as we have seen, that reflects the interests of “a powerful and wise creator…who has made and built this whole universe and us mortals” (Locke 1663–64, 103) Humans are obligated to obey God's laws since God is a superior to whom we owe “both our being and our work” (Locke 1663–64, 105) As such, we are obligated to show obedience to the “limits he prescribes” (Locke 1663–64, 105). The laws governing our nature are discovered by reason and their content is specifically suited to human nature. Thus, for Locke morality is clearly and necessarily anthropocentric, understood by reference to human nature. But moral rules are, above all, an expression of God's will. It is this latter aspect of morality that binds us to abide by the dictates of morality. Moral obligation is a matter, for Locke, of obedience to the rightful authority of God.

**2.3 Morality as a deductive science**

There are two baseline assumptions of Locke's moral thinking: morality is universal and it is something that can be understood clearly and unequivocally by human reason—when Locke imagines us rationally-discovering natural law, he envisions us applying a rigorous set of logical principles to a set of clear and well-defined ideas about human nature, God, and society. But, how exactly is this done?

For one thing, this process looks a great deal like mathematical reasoning. For Locke, moral rules are founded on a fundamental set of principles, much like mathematical axioms. The fundamental principles can be deduced rationally, and it is from these that we can further derive all of our moral duties. Morality is, therefore, demonstrable, a term indicating mathematical-style proofs wherein conclusions are derived from axiomatic foundations. The moral status of any action is then determined by comparing our behaviour against these demonstrated rules. But, we might ask, what *kinds* of ideas are moral ideas, and what sort of rationalist could Locke possibly be? Locke is a well-known empiricist; for Locke, the mind is a blank slate, the content of which is supplied exclusively from sensory or reflective experience. Locke famously espouses this empiricistic view in the *Essay*, but holds it quite clearly also in *Essays on the Law of Nature*. In fact, however, Locke's moral rationalism takes this empiricistic theory of ideas as its starting point. Moral ideas, for Locke, are fundamentally experiential in origin. They are not directly so, of course, since we do not perceive something like justice or honesty directly. Moral ideas are experiential, in the special Lockean sense that they are complex ideas—products of the mind's ability to form complex constructions from its simple directly-experiential contents. For Locke, the interplay of reason and sensation works as follows:

reason is … taken to mean the discursive faculty of the mind, which advances from things known to things unknown and argues from one thing to another in a definite and fixed order of propositions… The foundations, however, on which rests the whole of that knowledge which reason builds … are the objects of sense-experience; for the senses primarily supply the entire as well as the chief subject-matter of discourse and introduce it into the deep recesses of the mind. (Locke 1663–64, 101)

From perceptual simple ideas, we can generate complex moral propositions. This seems like a tall order, and Locke offers very little, in any of his works, by way of actually putting this moral reasoning process to work. However, that is not to say that Locke is silent in this regard. There are places in his writings where Locke takes us through some moral demonstrations.

In the *Essays on the Law of Nature*, for example, Locke claims that, based on sensory experience, we can assert the extra-mental existence of perceptible objects and all their perceptible qualities. All such qualities can be explained by reference to matter in motion. What is also clear to the senses, Locke argues, is that this world of moving objects exhibits a nomological regularity, or as Locke puts it, a “wonderful art and regularity” (Locke 1663–64, 103). Such regularity and beauty leads the contemplative mind to consider how such a world could have come about. Such contemplation would lead any rational being to the conclusion that the world cannot be the result of chance, and must therefore be the product of a creative will. Note that Locke is here trying to demonstrate for us just how sensation and reason work together. The mind moves from ideas of sensation to what Locke considers logical conclusions regarding the creative force behind the world we experience. But, our understanding of natural law is not founded solely in sensory experience. Through reflection, which is an introspective kind of perceptual experience for Locke, humans can gain ideas of our own nature and faculties that serve to complete our understanding both of God and of God's creative will. This reasoning goes as follows—the creative being, which sensation indicates must exist, cannot be *less* perfect than human will, nor can it *be* human, because our ideas of reflection tell us that humans are not, and cannot be, self-causing. Reason must conclude, then, that the world is created by a divine will—a superior power, which can bring us into existence, maintain us, or take us away, give us great joy or render us in great pain. Locke concludes as follows:

with sense-perception showing the way, reason can lead us to knowledge of a lawmaker or of some superior power to which we are necessarily subject. (Locke 1663–4, 104)

From this deduction regarding divine purpose and authority, humans can conclude that they are obligated to render “praise, honour, and glory” to God. Beyond this, the rational agent can deduce, through reflection upon her own constitution and faculties, that her natural impulses to protect and preserve her life, and to enter into society with others are faculties with which she has been uniquely equipped by God and by which she is considered specifically human. These must constitute the basis of the principles and duties governing her conduct—her “function appears to be that which nature has prepared … [her] to perform” (Locke 1663–64, 105). Thus, by a series of steps from perception to reasoning about that perceptual experience, we are, Locke concludes, able to define our moral duties and regulate our conduct accordingly.

In the *Essay*, Locke develops this idea of the rational deduction of natural law somewhat further, setting it in the context of a more mature and coherent theory of ideas than we find in the *Essays on the Law of Nature*. In the *Essay*, moral ideas assume a particular significance owing to their place in Locke's general taxonomy of ideas. For Locke, all the basic contents of the mind are simple ideas. These are formed by the mind into what Locke terms complex ideas, which are combinations of simple ideas made in the pattern of our perceptions of things in the extra mental world, or according to a pattern created by reason alone. Moral ideas fall into the second category of complex idea, falling under the technical heading *complex ideas of modes*. Modes are a specific kind of complex ideas, created by the mind from simple ideas of sensation or reflection, but referring to no extra-mental reality. They are not intended as natural kinds, but are products of the mind alone, referring to purely conceptual archetypes. They are best understood in contradistinction to ideas of substances, which are created by the mind but aim to mirror the real essences of extra-mental things—for example, the idea *cat* is intended to capture a kind of thing in the world that has a specific set of perceivable characteristics. Ideas of substances fail in mirroring reality, however, as they can never be complete representations of the world outside the mind. Modal ideas, on the other hand, are a special kind of idea for Locke, and actually hold out the promise for real knowledge. Modal ideas are ideas by which we fully grasp the real essence of things, because the mind, in some sense, is the originator of them (I will return to this in the next paragraph). The idea of a triangle is a modal idea, made by reason and knowable in its essence with complete accuracy. The idea of a triangle is a product of the mind, and does not refer to anything outside the mind—i.e., any external archetype. The kinds of ideas that fall into this category are the idea of God, mathematical concepts, and, most importantly for our present purposes, moral concepts. Locke writes,

I am bold to think, that *Morality is capable of Demonstration*, as well as Mathematicks: since the precise real Essence of the things moral Words stand for, may be perfectly known; and so the Congruity, or Incongruity of the Things themselves, be certainly discovered, in which consists perfect knowledge. (*Essay*, 3.11.16)

Moral rules, for Locke, are knowable with the same degree of certainty as “any Demonstration in Euclid” (*Essay*, 4.3.18).

This might seem to be a tall order when considering the controversy generated by beliefs about moral rules, yet Locke clearly believes that moral rules can, with the right mental effort, yield indisputable universal laws. Locke offers an example of how this might work, by analyzing the moral proposition *Where there is no property, there is no injustice*. In order to see the demonstrable certainty of this claim, we have to examine the composite ideas and how those agree or disagree with one another. The idea of property, first of all, is a right to something. The idea of injustice, considered next, is a violation of that right. Given these definitions, which Locke thinks are arrived at by careful attention to definition, it is a rational deduction that injustice cannot exist if there is no property to be violated. Injustice and property must, by definition agree. This is a clearly demonstrable rule, according to Locke, deduced from clear and adequately conceived ideas. The only other example Locke offers is the proposition *No Government allows absolute Liberty*. Government, according to Locke, is the establishment of society upon certain laws, requiring conformity. Absolute liberty is allowing anyone to do as they please. These are modal ideas, according to Locke, and thus known with complete adequacy. As such, it is possible for the rational individual to see clearly that the ideas of absolute liberty and government cannot agree. Of course, most people will argue that these rational deductions rely upon definitions that are debatable. This would not seem to be helped by the fact that, for Locke, modal ideas, like all complex ideas, are put together by the mind; while complex ideas of substance are constructed on the pattern of perceivable objects, modal ideas are, Locke explains, “put together at the pleasure of our Thoughts, without any real pattern they were taken from” (*Essay*, 4.4.12). This might seem to pose a problem for Locke's moral theory, according to which moral laws are just as necessary as mathematical principles. However, Locke is not worried about any relativistic implications. For Locke, any disagreement about definitions of concepts like property, justice or murder, result from insufficient reasoning about the simple ideas that comprise our moral ideas, as well as bias, prejudice and other irrational influences. For Locke, it is precisely because these ideas refer to nothing outside the mind that they can be universally-conceived and adequately understood. Just as the notion of triangularity is known perfectly because it does not depend upon the existence of triangles outside the mind, so justice is understood perfectly because it is not using some extramental archetype as its inspiration. He writes,

the Truth and Certainty of *moral* Discourses abstracts from the Lives of Men, and the Existence of those Vertues in the World whereof they treat. (*Essay*, 4.4.8)

Mathematical concepts are impervious to bias, prejudice or otherwise-idiosyncratic definitions and their relative properties are clear to anyone who understands them perfectly. While many would contend that moral ideas are simply too controversial to fit a proto-mathematical picture, Locke would respond that they seem controversial only because many of us have not taken the time to consider moral ideas in an objective and analytical light. If we were to do so, he argues, we could come to know moral rules with certainty.

Locke, in fact, adds something of a meta-moral dimension to this epistemological point by suggesting that as rational beings it is our “proper Imployment” to contemplate morality. In Book IV of the *Essay*, where Locke concludes that morality is, like mathematics, a human science (and, properly-speaking, knowledge), Locke draws a teleological lesson—since we are clearly fitted with the capacity for discerning our moral duty, then that is what we ought to do: “I think I may conclude, that*Morality* is *the proper Science and Business of Mankind in general*.” (*Essay*, 4.12.11) Humans must, he argues, employ reason in the pursuit of that which “they are most adapted to, and follow the direction of Nature, where it seems to point us out the way” (*Essay*, 4.12.11). The fact that many people do not or cannot devote contemplative hours to their moral duties is something Locke will consider in his account of moral motivation, however, the key point here is that humans have a teleological makeup that allows for rational certainty with regard to divine moral law.

Is having this degree of knowledge enough to motivate humans to act accordingly—that is, does the sheer recognition of one's duty have any sway in one's practical deliberations?

The Social Contract harbors a further tension between two accounts of how the general will emerges and its relation to the private wills of citizens. Sometimes Rousseau favors a procedural story according to which the individual contemplation of self interest (subject to the constraints of generality and universality and under propitious sociological background conditions such as rough equality and cultural similarity) will result in the emergence of the general will from the assembly of citizens. In this account of the emergence of the general will, there seems to be no special need for citizens to have any specifically moral qualities: the constraints on their choice should be enough. However, Rousseau also clearly believes that the mere contemplation of self interest would be inadequate to generate a general will. This may partly concern issues of compliance, since selfish citizens who can will the general will might still not be moved to obey it. But Rousseau also seems to believe that citizen virtue is a necessary condition for the emergence of the general will in the first place. This presents him with a problem for which his figure of the legislator is one attempted solution. As a believer in the plasticity of human nature, Rousseau holds that good laws make for good citizens. However, he also believes both that good laws can only be willed by good citizens and that, in order to be legitimate, they must be agreed upon by the assembly. This puts him in some difficulty, as it is unlikely that the citizens who come together to form a new state will have the moral qualities required to will good laws, shaped as those citizens will have been by unjust institutions. The legislator or lawgiver therefore has the function of inspiring a sense of collective identity in the new citizens that allows them to identify with the whole and be moved to support legislation that will eventually transform them and their children into good citizens. In this story, however, the new citizens at first lack the capacity to discern the good reasons that support the new laws and the lawgiver has to persuade them by non-rational means to legislate in their own best interests.

The figure of the legislator is a puzzle. Like the tutor in Emile, the legislator has the role of manipulating the desires of his charges, giving them the illusion of free choice without its substance. Little wonder then that many critics have seen these characters in a somewhat sinister light. In both cases there is a mystery concerning where the educator figure comes from and how he could have acquired the knowledge and virtue necessary to perform his role. This, in turn, raises a problem of regress. If the legislator was formed by a just society, then who performed the legislator's role for that society, and how was that legislator formed? How did the tutor acquire his education if not from a tutor who, in turn, was educated according to Rousseau's program by an earlier tutor?

### 3.3 Rousseau's claim to reconcile freedom and authority

What then of Rousseau's key claim that freedom and authority are reconciled in his ideal republic through obedience to the general will? This claim finds notorious and deliberately paradoxical expression in Book 1 chapter 7 of The Social Contract, where Rousseau writes of citizens being “forced to be free” when they are constrained to obey the general will. The opening words of The Social Contract themselves refer to freedom, with the famous saying that “Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains”. This ringing declaration, however, is almost immediately followed by a note of paradox, as Rousseau declares that he can make this subjection “in chains” legitimate. The thought that Rousseau's commitment to freedom might not be all that it first appears is strengthened by other passages in the book, most notably his declaration that those subject to the general will are “forced to be free.” The value of freedom or liberty is at the center of Rousseau's concerns throughout his work. Since he uses the notion in several distinct ways, though, it is important to distinguish several uses of the term. First, we should note that Rousseau regards the capacity for choice, and therefore the ability to act against instinct and inclination, as one of the features that distinguishes the human race from animal species and makes truly moral action possible. In the Discourse on the Origins of Inequality, for example, he characterizes animal species in essentially Cartesian terms, as mechanisms programmed to a fixed pattern of behavior. Human beings, on the other hand are not tied to any particular mode of life and can reject the promptings of instinct. This makes possible both the development of the human species and also its fall from grace, since individuals can ignore benign impulses (such as pitié) if they wish to. The freedom to act contrary to the “mechanism of the senses”, and the power of willing and choosing is, for Rousseau, something entirely outside the laws of the physical world and is therefore not subject to scientific explanation. Rousseau also takes this freedom to choose to act as the basis of all distinctively moral action. In The Social Contract the connection between freedom of choice and morality is central to his argument against despotic government, where he writes that the renunciation of freedom is contrary to human nature and that to renounce freedom in favour of another person's authority is to “deprive one's actions of all morality” (SC 1.4).

In Book I chapter 8 of the The Social Contract, Rousseau tries to illuminate his claim that the formation of the legitimate state involves no net loss of freedom, but in fact, he makes a slightly different claim. The new claim involves the idea of an exchange of one type of freedom (natural freedom) for another type (civil freedom). Natural freedom involves an unlimited right to all things, an idea that is reminiscent of Hobbes's “right of nature” in Leviathan. Since all human beings enjoy this liberty right to all things, it is clear that in a world occupied by many interdependent humans, the practical value of that liberty may be almost nonexistent. This is because any individual's capacity to get what he or she wants will be limited by his or her physical power and the competing physical power of others. Further, inevitable conflict over scarce resources will pit individuals against each other, so that unhindered exercise of natural freedom will result in violence and uncertainty. The formation of the state, and the promulgation of laws willed by the general will, transforms this condition. With sovereign power in place, individuals are guaranteed a sphere of equal freedom under the law with protection for their own persons and security for their property. Provided that the law bearing equally on everyone is not meddlesome or intrusive (and Rousseau believes it will not be, since no individual has a motive to legislate burdensome laws) there will be a net benefit compared to the pre-political state.

Rousseau makes a further claim in the same chapter of The Social Contract, namely that in conditions of civil society the citizen achieves “moral freedom,” by which he means obedience to a law that one has prescribed to oneself. Although this latter claim is presented almost as an afterthought, it is the form of freedom most directly responsive to the challenge Rousseau had set for himself two chapters earlier, which involved finding “a form of association” in which each citizen would “obey only himself.” Naturally, this raises the question of whether the citizen does in fact obey only himself when he obeys the general will. On the face of it, this claim looks difficult to reconcile with the fact of majorities and minorities within a democratic state, since those citizens who find themselves outvoted would seem to be constrained by a decision with which they disagree. Rousseau's solution to this puzzle is found much later, in Book 4 chapter 3 of The Social Contract, where he argues that those who obey laws they did not vote for remain bound by a will that is their own, since the democratic process has enabled them to discover the content of a general will in which that they share. Many commentators have not found this argument fully convincing.

Rousseau's invocation of three types of freedom (natural, civil, and moral) in the text of The Social Contract can appear confusing. The picture is further complicated by the fact that he also relies on a fourth conception of freedom, related to civil freedom but distinct from it, which he nowhere names explicitly. This is “republican freedom” and consists, not in my being subject to my own will, but rather in the fact that the law protects me from being subject to the will of any other particular person in the manner of a slave or serf. To find Rousseau's explicit endorsement of this idea, we have to look not to The Social Contract, but rather to some of his unpublished notes. Yet the concept is clearly implicit in the notorious “forced to be free” passage in Book 1 chapter 7, since he there explains that when each citizen is constrained to obey the general will, he is thereby provided with a guarantee against “all personal dependence”.

### 3.4 Representation and government

One feature of Rousseau's political philosophy that has proved least persuasive to later thinkers is his doctrine of sovereignty and representation, with his apparent rejection of “representative government”. At the center of Rousseau's view in The Social Contract is his rejection of the Hobbesian idea that a people's legislative will can be vested in some group or individual that then acts with their authority but rules over them. Instead, he takes the view that to hand over one's general right of ruling oneself to another person or body constitutes a form a slavery, and that to recognize such an authority would amount to an abdication of moral agency. This hostility to the representation of sovereignty also extends to the election of representatives to sovereign assemblies, even where those representatives are subject to periodic re-election. Even in that case, the assembly would be legislating on a range of topics on which citizens have not deliberated. Laws passed by such assemblies would therefore bind citizens in terms that they have not themselves agreed upon. Not only does the representation of sovereignty constitute, for Rousseau, a surrender of moral agency, the widespread desire to be represented in the business of self-rule is a symptom of moral decline and the loss of virtue.

The practical difficulties of direct self-rule by the entire citizen body are obvious. Such arrangements are potentially onerous and must severely limit the size of legitimate states. It is noteworthy that Rousseau takes a different view in a text aimed at practical politics: Considerations on the Government of Poland. Nevertheless, it is not entirely clear that the widespread interpretation of Rousseau as rejecting all forms of representative government is correct. One of the key distinctions in The Social Contract is between sovereign and government. The sovereign, composed of the people as a whole, promulgates laws as an expression of its general will. The government is a more limited body that administers the state within the bounds set by the laws, and which issues decrees applying the laws in particular cases. If the laws are conceived of as the people setting a constitutional framework for society, with the government's decrees comprising the more normal business of “legislation,” then the distance between a Rousseauian republic and a modern constitutional democracy may be smaller than it at first appears. In effect, the institution of the sovereign may be inconsistent with a representative model, where the executive power of the government can be understood as requiring it. Such a picture gains credibility when the details of Rousseau's views on government are examined. Although a variety of forms of government turn out to be theoretically compatible with popular sovereignty, Rousseau is sceptical about the prospects for both democracy (where the people conduct the day to day running of the state and the application of the laws) and monarchy. Instead, he favors some form of elective aristocracy: in other words, he supports the idea that the day-to-day administration should be in the hands of a subset of the population, elected by them according to merit.

Two important issues arise in relation to Rousseau's account of relations between sovereign and government. The first of these concerns his political pessimism, even in the case of the best-designed and most perfect republic. Just as any group has a collective will as opposed to the individual private will of its members, so does the government. As the state becomes larger and more diffuse, and as citizens become more distant from one another both spatially and emotionally, so the effective government of the republic will need a proportionally smaller and more cohesive group of magistrates. Rousseau thinks it almost inevitable that this group will end up usurping the legitimate sovereign power of the people and substituting its corporate will for the people's general will. The second issue concerns how democratic Rousseau envisaged his republic to be. He sometimes suggests a picture in which the people would be subject to elite domination by the government, since the magistrates would reserve the business of agenda-setting for the assembly to themselves. In other cases, he endorses a conception of a more fully democratic republic.

Although Rousseau rejects Hobbes's view of the sovereign as representing or acting in the person of the subject, he has a similar view of what sovereignty is and its relation to the rights of the individual. He rejects the idea that individuals associated together in a political community retain some natural rights over themselves and their property. Rather, such rights as individuals have over themselves, land, and external objects, are a matter of sovereign competence and decision. Individual rights must be specified by the sovereign in ways that are compatible with the interests of all in a just polity, and Rousseau rejects the idea that such rights could be insisted on as a check on the sovereign's power.

### 3.5 Civil religion and toleration

The final full chapter of The Social Contract expounds Rousseau's doctrine of civil religion. Contemporary readers were scandalized by it, and particularly by its claim that true (original or early) Christianity is useless in fostering the spirit of patriotism and social solidarity necessary for a flourishing state. In many ways the chapter represents a striking departure from the main themes of the book. First, it is the only occasion where Rousseau prescribes the content of a law that a just republic must have. Second, it amounts to his acceptance of the inevitability of pluralism in matters of religion, and thus of religious toleration; this is in some tension with his encouragement elsewhere of cultural homogeneity as a propitious environment for the emergence of a general will. Third, it represents a very concrete example of the limits of sovereign power: following Locke, Rousseau insists upon the inability of the sovereign to examine the private beliefs of citizens. The tenets of Rousseau's civil religion include the affirmation of the existence of a supreme being and of the afterlife, the principle that the just will prosper and the wicked will be punished, and the claim that the social contract and the laws are sacred. In addition, the civil religion requires the provision that all those willing to tolerate others should themselves be tolerated, but those who insist that there is no salvation outside their particular church cannot be citizens of the state. The structure of religious beliefs within the just state is that of an overlapping consensus: the dogmas of the civil religion are such that they can be affirmed by adherents of a number of different faiths, both Christian and non-Christian.

Despite Rousseau's concern for religious toleration both in the chapter and elsewhere, modern readers have often been repelled by one striking note of intolerance. Rousseau argues that those who cannot accept the dogmas can be banished from the state. This is because he believes that atheists, having no fear of divine punishment, cannot be trusted by their fellow citizens to obey the law. He goes even further, to suggest the death penalty for those who affirm the dogmas but later act as if they do not believe them.

## 2. Voltaire's Enlightenment Philosophy

Voltaire's philosophical legacy ultimately resides as much in how he practiced philosophy, and in the ends toward which he directed his philosophical activity, as in any specific doctrine or original idea. Yet the particular philosophical positions he took, and the way that he used his wider philosophical campaigns to champion certain understandings while disparaging others, did create a constellation appropriately called Voltaire's Enlightenment philosophy. True to Voltaire's character, this constellation is best described as a set of intellectual stances and orientations rather than as a set of doctrines or systematically defended positions. Nevertheless, others found in Voltaire both a model of the well-oriented philosophe and a particular philosophy attached to it. Each side of this complex played a key role in defining the Enlightenment philosophiethat he came to personify.

### 2.1 Liberty

Central to this complex is Voltaire's conception of liberty. Around this category, Voltaire's social activism and his relatively rare excursions into systematic philosophy also converged. In 1734, in the wake of the scandals triggered by the Lettres philosophiques, Voltaire wrote, but left unfinished at Cirey, a Traité de metaphysique that explored the question of human freedom in philosophical terms. The question was particularly central to European philosophical discussions at the time, and Voltaire's work explicitly referenced thinkers like Hobbes and Leibniz while wrestling with the questions of materialism, determinism, and providential purpose that were then central to the writings of the so-called deists, figures such as John Toland and Anthony Collins. The great debate between Samuel Clarke and Leibniz over the principles of Newtonian natural philosophy was also influential as Voltaire struggled to understand the nature of human existence and ethics within a cosmos governed by rational principles and impersonal laws.

Voltaire adopted a stance in this text somewhere between the strict determinism of rationalist materialists and the transcendent spiritualism and voluntarism of contemporary Christian natural theologians. For Voltaire, humans are not deterministic machines of matter and motion, and free will thus exists. But humans are also natural beings governed by inexorable natural laws, and his ethics anchored right action in a self that possessed the natural light of reason immanently. This stance distanced him from more radical deists like Toland, and he reinforced this position by also adopting an elitist understanding of the role of religion in society. For Voltaire, those equipped to understand their own reason could find the proper course of free action themselves. But since many were incapable of such self-knowledge and self-control, religion, he claimed, was a necessary guarantor of social order. This stance distanced Voltaire from the republican politics of Toland and other materialists, and Voltaire echoed these ideas in his political musings, where he remained throughout his life a liberal, reform-minded monarchist and a skeptic with respect to republican and democratic ideas.

In the Lettres philosophiques, Voltaire had suggested a more radical position with respect to human determinism, especially in his letter on Locke, which emphasized the materialist reading of the Lockean soul that was then a popular figure in radical philosophical discourse. Some readers singled out this part of the book as the major source of its controversy, and in a similar vein the very materialist account of “Âme,” or the soul, which appeared in volume 1 of Diderot and d'Alembert'sEncyclopédie, was also a flashpoint of controversy. Voltaire also defined his own understanding of the soul in similar terms in his own Dictionnaire philosophique. What these examples point to is Voltaire's willingness, even eagerness, to publicly defend controversial views even when his own, more private and more considered writings often complicated the understanding that his more public and polemical writings insisted upon. In these cases, one often sees Voltaire defending less a carefully reasoned position on a complex philosophical problem than adopting a political position designed to assert his conviction that liberty of speech, no matter what the topic, is sacred and cannot be violated.

Voltaire never actually said “I disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” Yet the persistence of the myth that associates this dictum with his name attests to the way that this invented statement captures well the spirit of his philosophy of liberty. In his voluminous correspondence especially, and in the details of many of his more polemical public texts, one does find Voltaire articulating a view of intellectual and civil liberty that makes him an unquestioned forerunner of modern civil libertarianism. He never authored any single philosophical treatise on this topic, however, yet the memory of his life and philosophical campaigns was influential in advancing these ideas nevertheless. Voltaire's influence is palpably present, for example, in Kant's famous argument in his essay “What is Enlightenment?” that Enlightenment stems from the free and public use of critical reason, and from the liberty that allows such critical debate to proceed untrammeled. The absence of a text that anchors this linkage in no way removes the unmistakable presence of Voltaire's influence upon Kant's formulation.

Hobbes

By the time of Leviathan and De Corpore, Hobbes was convinced that human beings (including their minds) were entirely material.[[3](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hobbes/notes.html" \l "3)] Later on he came to think that even God was a sort of material being (Gorham 2013, Springborg 2012). This section focuses on Hobbes's materialism about human beings. This was not a popular or widely-held position at the time. Hobbes, however, was a materialist. Why was he a materialist?

We might suspect that Hobbes's story about the workings of mind and language (e.g., in the early chapters of Leviathan) is supposed to be an implicit argument for materialism. ‘Look’, we might take Hobbes to be saying, ‘I can explain all the workings of the mind using only material resources. What need is there to postulate an immaterial mind when this perfectly good, and more minimal, explanation is available?’ Hobbes perhaps suggests this when he notes that his nominalism means we do not need to suppose there's any faculty other than imagination in order to understand how universal thought works (Hobbes 1655, 2.9). However, for the most part we do not find Hobbes explicitly stating that argument. Instead he presents a series of arguments against various opponents' beliefs in immaterial beings (including immaterial human minds).

Most prominent in Leviathan is an argument that talk about incorporeal things is “insignificant speech”.

All other names are but insignificant sounds; and those of two sorts. One when they are new, and yet their meaning not explained by definition; whereof there have been abundance coined by schoolmen, and puzzled philosophers.

Another, when men make a name of two names, whose significations are contradictory and inconsistent; as this name, an incorporeal body, or (which is all one) an incorporeal substance, and a great number more. For whensoever any affirmation is false, the two names of which it is composed, put together and made one, signify nothing at all (Hobbes 1655, 4.20–1).

Thus Hobbes apparently thinks that talk about incorporeal substances (such as Cartesian unextended thinking things) is just nonsense. But why does he think that? Hobbes's comment about false affirmations suggests he thinks that ‘incorporeal substance’ is insignificant because ‘a substance is incorporeal’ is false. But that seems to derive the insignificance from the truth of materialism, which is hardly going to convince Hobbes's opponents. Hobbes does offer a supporting argument, when he claims that ‘incorporeal substance’ and ‘incorporeal body’ are “all one”. But that premise too will be denied by his opponents, who think that there can be substances that are not bodies, and that ‘substance’ and ‘body’ are far from interchangeable terms.

Hobbes offers a further argument against his opponents' belief in immaterial things in De Corpore, in a passage in which he talks at length about the “gross errors” of philosophers.

But the abuse consists in this, that when some men see that the increases and decreases of quantity, heat, and other accidents can be considered, that is, submitted to reasons, as we say, without consideration of bodies or their subjects (which is called “abstraction” or “existence apart from them”), they talk about accidents as if they could be separated from every body. The gross errors of certain metaphysicians take their origin from this; for from the fact that it is possible to consider thinking without considering body, they infer that there is no need for a thinking body; and from the fact that it is possible to consider quantity without considering body, they also think that quantity can exist without body and body without quantity, so that a quantitative body is made only after quantity has been added to a body. These meaningless vocal sounds, “abstract substances,” “separated essence,” and other similar ones, spring from the same fountain (Hobbes 1655, 3.4).

The key mistake, Hobbes thinks, lies in moving from the observations that we can talk about ‘A’ and ‘B’, and can think about A without thinking about B, to the conclusion that A can exist without B existing. Hobbes attacks various views associated with the Scholastic Aristotelian tradition as resting on that mistake. One aim of this critical passage is to support materialism by showing a problem with the belief that there can be thought without a body. Hobbes elsewhere claims that Aristotle thinks that “the human soul, separated from man, subsists by itself”, so presumably has Aristotle and Aristotelians in mind as targets (Hobbes 1668b, 46.17).

When Hobbes talks about Aristotelian views, one might ask whether his target is Aristotle himself, or some later Aristotelians. When Hobbes talks about Aristotelian metaphysics in particular, his main approach seems to be to take a certain core view to have been Aristotle's, then to criticize both that view and the further uses that were made of it. Hobbes's attitude to Aristotelianism comes across forcefully in a discussion in Behemoth that begins by describing Peter Lombard and John Duns Scotus as writing like “two of the most egregious blockheads in the world” (Hobbes 1668a, 41–2). That exchange has several elements: the condemnation of the philosophical view as nonsensical; the claim that some philosophers aim to confuse; and the claim that views are promoted in order to control the public and take their money. However, though Hobbes rejected a good many of the views of the Scholastic Aristotelian tradition, his work nevertheless had a good many connections to it, as is illustrated by Leijenhorst 2002.

The view that there can be thought without a body is also Descartes's view. Indeed, Hobbes may be thinking of Descartes's argument for that view in the Sixth Meditation. A key claim in Descartes's argument is that “the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct” (Descartes 1641a, 2.54). Descartes argues, via that claim, from his ability to clearly and distinctly conceive of mind apart from body and vice versa, to the conclusion that mind and body are really distinct (i.e., are two substances, not one). Abstracting away from the details, we have an argument from the conceivability of mind without body to the conclusion that the mind is not physical. And such an argument is one of Hobbes's targets in the “gross errors” passage.

However Descartes, by endorsing that argument, does not endorse the claim that ‘if I can conceive of A's existing without B's existing, then A can exist without B existing’. He endorses at most the weaker claim that ‘if I can clearly and distinctly conceive of A's existing without B existing, then B can exist without A existing’. There's a special sort of conceivability involved here, clear and distinct conceivability, which licenses the move in this case but not in general. Hobbes's argument seems blind to this distinction.

Overall then, something of a puzzle remains. Hobbes clearly was a materialist about the natural world, but the explicit arguments he offers for the view seem rather weak. Perhaps he just had a good deal of confidence in the ability of the rapidly developing science of the his time to proceed towards a full material explanation of the mind. Just as his contemporary William Harvey, of whom he thought very highly, had made such progress in explaining biological matters, so too (Hobbes might have thought) might we expect further scientists to succeed in explaining mental matters.

## 4. Method

At any rate, Hobbes was very much interested in scientific explanation of the world: both its practice (which he saw himself as engaged in) and also its theory. Chapter 9 of Leviathan tells us something about the differences between scientific and historical knowledge, and the divisions between sciences. Chapter 6 of De Corpore gives a much fuller treatment of issues in the philosophy of science, issues of what Hobbes calls method. Method tells us how to investigate things in order to achievescientia, the best sort of knowledge.

Those writing about Hobbes's method have tended to tell one or other of two stories about the sort of method he proposes and its historical roots. One story emphasizes the connections between Hobbes's method and Aristotelian approaches. This has often been developed into a story about the particular influence on Hobbes of the works of Giacomo Zabarella, a sixteenth-century Aristotelian who studied and taught at the University of Padua, which influence is then often said to have been somehow mediated by Galileo. The alternative story emphasizes the connections between Hobbes's general views about method and the traditions of thinking about method in geometry. Here the notions of analysis and synthesis are key. Oddly enough, both of these stories can be connected to anecdotes that Aubrey tells about Hobbes: on the one hand, the report that Hobbes because friendly with Galileo while traveling in Italy, and on the other, the tale of how Hobbes became fascinated with geometry at the age of forty after looking at copy of Euclid's Elements, not believing a proposition, and tracing back the demonstration of it and the propositions on which it depended.

This section tells a version of the first story (for criticism of such an approach, see Prins 1990). Still, one should note that Hobbes sometimes uses the language of mathematical method, of analysis and synthesis, in describing his general method (Hobbes 1655, 6.1). Several commentators have seen this, together with his clear admiration for the successes of geometry, as evidence of a more general use of mathematical notions in his account of method (Talaska 1988.) And it might indeed be the case that both stories about Hobbes's method (the Zabarellan and the mathematical) have some truth to them.

Those writing about Hobbes often describe Zabarella's method as having two parts, resolution and composition. Resolution moves from the thing to be explained, which is an effect, to its causes, and then composition brings you back from causes to effects. At a suitably general level that is correct, but it misses much detail. Most importantly, Zabarella's method — as seen for instance in his work De Regressu – is better described as having three parts. A crucial though somewhat third mysterious step stands between the move from effect to cause and that from effect to cause. The complete sequence, the arguments from effect to cause and back again, Zabarella calls regressus. This sequence improves our knowledge, taking us from confused to clear knowledge of something. But how do we do this? The first step is to move from having confused knowledge of the effect to having confused knowledge of the cause. Roughly, you need to figure out what caused the thing you're trying to explain. The second step moves from confused to clear knowledge of the cause. This step works, Zabarella thinks, by a sort of intellectual examination of the cause. The aim is not just to know what thing is the cause, but to understand that thing. The final step then moves from the clear knowledge of the cause to clear knowledge of the effect. That is, your new full understanding of the cause gives you better understanding of the thing caused by it.

Chapter six of De Corpore is Hobbes's main work on method. There Hobbes lays out a model of the proper form of a scientific explanation. A proper explanation tells you three things: what the cause is, the nature of the cause, and how the cause gives rise to the effect. Thus Hobbes accepts the Aristotelian idea that to have the best sort of knowledge, scientific knowledge, is to know something through its causes. Similarities to Aristotelian theories such as Zabarella's show up even in section one of chapter six. Here Hobbes defines philosophy as knowledge acquired by correct reasoning. It is both knowledge of effects that you get through conception of their causes and knowledge of causes that you get through conception of their visible effects. Already we see signs of the Aristotelian picture in which you come to know the cause by knowing the visible effect and to know the effect by knowing the cause.

Moreover, there is in Hobbes's method something like the middle step of regressus. For Hobbes, to know an effect through its causes is to know what the causes are and how they work: “We are said to know scientifically some effect when we know what its causes are, in what subject they are, in what subject they introduce the effect, and how they do it” (Hobbes 1655, 6.1). The requirement to know how the cause works, not just what it is, is analogous to the Zabarellan requirement to have distinct knowledge of a cause. Knowledge that the cause exists comes from the first step of regressus. Complete regressus, i.e., complete explanation, requires that you make a fuller investigation of the cause. For Hobbes, analogously, to get to scientia of the effect you need to understand, not just what the causes are, but how they work.

Comparison of Hobbes's view to Zabarella's and other more fully Aristotelian ones is complicated by Hobbes's thinking that all causes are efficient causes and that motion is the cause of all change in the natural world. In a more fully Aristotelian picture, explanations are causal, but causes can be of several sorts. Hobbes's picture is more restrictive: to find the causes is to find the efficient causes. Moreover, he thinks the efficient causes are all motions, so the search for causes becomes the search for motions and mechanisms.

For all that there do seem to be similarities between Hobbes's method and older Aristotelian approaches, one might well wonder how Hobbes could have come to know about Zabarella's views in particular. One story is that Hobbes learned about this method from Galileo, but that claim is problematic. Galileo did know about Zabarella's ideas and other similar ones (Wallace 1984). However, the texts of Galileo in which signs of Zabarellan ideas are evident are early ones, but Hobbes knew Galileo's thought through his later published works. But even if the Zabarella-Galileo-Hobbes story is hard to support, there are other ways in which Hobbes might have learned of Zabarella's work. Harvey, whose work Hobbes greatly admired, and who studied at the medical school in Padua, might also have been an intermediary (Watkins 1973, 41–2). And it's far from ridiculous to contemplate Hobbes reading the work of the popular logician Zabarella.