

John Locke, Racism, Slavery, and Indian Lands

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Abstract and Keywords

Locke owned stock in slave trading companies and was secretary of the Lords Proprietors of the Carolinas, where slavery was constitutionally permitted. He had two notions of slavery: legitimate slavery was captivity with forced labor imposed by the just winning side in a war; illegitimate slavery was an authoritarian deprivation of natural rights. Locke did not try to justify either black slavery or the oppression of Amerindians. In *The Two Treatises of Government*, Locke argued against the advocates of absolute monarchy. The arguments for absolute monarchy and colonial slavery turn out to be the same. So in arguing against the one, Locke could not help but argue against the other. Examining the natural rights tradition to which Locke's work belongs confirms this. Locke could have defended colonial slavery by building on popular ideas of his colleagues and predecessors, but there is no textual evidence that he did that or that he advocated seizing Indian agricultural land.

Keywords: John Locke, natural rights, just war, slavery, Indian agricultural lands

ACCORDING to John Locke's most recent biographer, there is no consensus in the field about Locke's attitude toward colonial slavery (Woolhouse 2007, 101 and 187). On the one hand, Locke was involved in a variety of ways with slavery and the slave trade. Because of his involvement, he knew a great deal about these topics, probably as much as or more than any man in England. This strongly suggests to some that John Locke was a racist and his philosophical writings, particularly the *Second Treatise of Government*, where he sets forth an account of slavery, must have been intended to justify the slave trade and the institutions and practice of African American slavery and the seizure of Indian lands (Bernasconi and Mann 2005, 91; Farr 2008).

On the other hand, attempts to show that Locke is in fact trying to justify these things are open to serious criticism. The most serious of these objections is that the positions he takes about natural rights, natural law, just war, and slavery seem designed for a different purpose than justifying colonial slavery and slave trading and the seizure of Indian lands. It is widely recognized that one of Locke's explicit purposes in *Two Treatises of*

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Government was to refute the doctrine of Sir Robert Filmer's book *Patriarcha* concerning the divine right of kings and their right to rule by arbitrary absolute power. Filmer and his followers were apologists for the Stuart monarchs, Charles II and James II. In the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke proposes to give a different account of the origin of government and political power in which might does not make right. It is this explicit aim that makes it difficult or impossible for him to effectively justify the institutions and practices of colonial slave trading, slavery, and the seizure of Indian lands because what makes these colonial crimes so morally abhorrent is precisely that they involve injustice and the use of force.

It has been admitted that Locke's account of slavery is a poor way to justify colonial practices, but that since Locke was a racist, that was the best he could do. I will point out that in the natural rights tradition of his day, he had the materials at hand to do a fine job of justifying these practices, but instead he gave arguments for rejecting all of them. I will also point out that Locke actually had two theories of slavery—a theory of legitimate slavery and its dark mirror image, a theory of illegitimate slavery. Recognizing that this second theory (p. 22) exists makes it even more difficult to interpret the *Second Treatise* account of slavery as justifying the practices of colonial conquest and slavery, for colonial slave trading and so forth required the use of force unjustly—which is the hallmark of illegitimate slavery for Locke. I will begin with the two theories because this makes it plain that Locke did intend to show that the Stuarts were attempting illegitimately to enslave the English people. Next, I will discuss the natural rights tradition and the materials that Locke could have used to justify slavery and the seizure of Indian lands. Finally, I will discuss the principal way in which it is claimed that Locke sought to evade applying his theories to Africans and Amerindians and offer a different account of how he was thinking about America.

Locke's Two Theories of Slavery in the *Second Treatise*

As noted, one important consideration that has largely gone unnoticed in the discussion of Locke and slavery is that Locke has two theories of slavery in the *Second Treatise of Government*. One is the theory of legitimate slavery expounded in Chapters 4 and 16 of the *Second Treatise*. The other is a theory of illegitimate slavery. Presumably, the theory of illegitimate slavery has largely been ignored in the debate over whether Locke is seeking to justify the institutions and practices of colonial slavery, because it is the legitimate theory that ought to do the justifying. But recognizing that Locke had a theory of illegitimate slavery tells us some important things about his intentions in writing about slavery at all, and so what shape the legitimate account took, and the constraints it put upon that account.

Locke begins Book II, Chapter 1 of the *Second Treatise of Government* by summarizing the points he made in the First Treatise against Sir Robert Filmer's arguments. These premises having been made out, the result, he says, is that "it is impossible for the rulers

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now on earth should make any benefit or derive any the least authority from that which is held to be the fountain of all power: *Adam's private dominion and paternal jurisdiction ...* " (Locke 1690/1980, 6). What follows from this rejection of the divine right of kings is that

He that will not give just occasion to think that all government in the world is the product only of force and violence, and that men live together by no other rules but that of beasts, where the strongest carries it, and so lay a foundation for that perpetual disorder and mischief, tumult, sedition and rebellion (things that the followers of that hypothesis [the divine right of kings] so loudly cry out against) must of necessity find another rise of government, another original of political power, and another way of designing and knowing the persons that have it, than what Sir Robert Filmer hath taught us.

(Locke 1690/1980, 6)

In other words, Locke proposes to give an account of government in which might does not make right. He does this using his account of the state of nature, natural law, natural rights, and the state of war. One has the rights to one's own life, liberty, health, and property as means to pursue one's preservation and flourishing. The natural equality in which people find themselves in the state of nature leads to the law of nature: just as I would not have my rights to life, liberty, health, and property violated by others, so I will not violate theirs. To fail to abide by this law is to reduce oneself from the level of a rational human being to that of a beast—a creature that lives by the rule that the strongest carries it. Such a creature may be (p. 23) destroyed just as a wolf or a lion may. Both Locke's theories of slavery (legitimate and illegitimate) are not free standing, but are woven out of the materials of the first three chapters of the *Second Treatise*—those materials that are foundational to Locke's claim that he is producing a new rise of government, another original of political power and another way of designing and knowing the persons that have it.

The Lockean concept of war makes the connection between natural rights and natural law and slavery. One who has a steady intent on the life of an innocent victim puts himself in a state of war with that innocent victim and in doing so violates the law of nature. On Locke's account, such an aggressor ceases to be a rational human being or a person and so reduces himself to the level of a beast and can legitimately be killed or enslaved. It is not the color of his skin that makes him a subject of just punishment, but the nature of his actions. Hence, Locke's new design of persons makes being just and following the law of nature a condition for having the rights of a person. Locke makes it plain in Chapter 4, "Of Slavery" that engaging in an unjust war against an innocent victim and losing is the only way in which one can become a legitimate slave. The innocent victim, now the victor in the war, has the right to kill the unjust aggressor or to make use of him by enslaving him. Locke characterizes legitimate slavery as a continuation of the war between the just victor and the unjust aggressor (Locke 1690/1980).

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For Locke, slavery (whether legitimate or illegitimate) requires the exercise of absolute, arbitrary power of the master over a slave. This means that the master may at his discretion kill the victim or engage in many kinds of arbitrary actions toward the slave. Locke's account of the limited nature of those to whom absolute power legitimately applies is in stark contrast with that of Sir Robert Filmer in *Patriarcha*, who sees the king as holding absolute power over a slave population.

As for the ending of legitimate slavery, while there is a complete ban on suicide, the unjust aggressor, now a slave, may bring about his own death at the hands of the victor should he find the conditions of his life intolerable. Slavery may also be ended by a contract for obedience by the slave and limitations on the harms the master may inflict on the slave. Thus, slavery ends at the same time as the exercise of absolute power. The conditions for becoming a legitimate slave are very narrow indeed. It is their very narrowness that makes it difficult or impossible for anyone to say that on Locke's account, the Stuart kings could legitimately enslave the population of England.

In Chapter 16, "Of Conquest" Locke sets constraints on what a just conqueror can do with respect to the unjust aggressors and their families and the other people who did not participate in the war. The only people who can be enslaved are the direct participants in the unjust war. The families and particularly the children of slaves are free and innocent and so cannot be enslaved. Nor can slaves be inherited. (James Farr [2008, 519, note 41] points out the implications of this for the purchase of slaves—that a purchaser would be in an even more remote relation to the "crime that deserves death" than one of the victor's relatives. So, if it is illegitimate for the one to inherit a slave, it is even more illegitimate to buy one.)

Furthermore, the just victor can only take as much property that belongs to the slave as is required for reparations for damage done during the war. And even this can be trumped by the needs of the aggressor's innocent family for survival. It is clear that many of these conditions mean that the institutions and practices of slave trading, slavery, and the seizure of Indian lands simply do not fit Locke's account of just conquest and legitimate slavery. What then is illegitimate slavery?

(p. 24) We may begin with remarks that Locke makes in the Preface to the *Second Treatise*. Twice he mentions slavery. At first he says that what remains of what he has written (the middle part of the *Second Treatise* having been lost) "are sufficient to establish the throne of our great restorer, our present King William; to make good his title, in the consent of the people ... and to justify to the world the people of England, whose love of their just and natural rights, with their resolution to preserve them, saved the nation when it was on the very brink of slavery and ruin" (Locke 1690/1980, 5).

What this implies through its historical reference is that the Stuarts and James II, in particular, intended to enslave the nation and that James very nearly succeeded. Locke's remark about saving the country when it was on the brink of slavery and ruin clearly does not count as a case of forestalling legitimate enslaving. Locke's point is that kings who

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claim absolute power over their subjects are making the illegitimate claim to have the right to enslave their people—that is to take away all of their rights.

Locke's second remark about slavery in the Preface is equally negative about slavery. Speaking of Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, Locke says: "The king and the body of the nation have so thoroughly confuted his Hypothesis that I suppose no body hereafter will have either the confidence to appear against our common safety, and be again an advocate for slavery; or the weakness to be deceived with contradictions dressed up in popular stile" (Locke 1690/1980, 5). We need to consider that Locke wrote the *First Treatise of Government* explicitly to counter the claims in Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* that kings have absolute power. In Locke's view not only were the Stuart monarchs attempting to enslave the nation, but their partisans were arguing that Kings by divine right have absolute power over their subjects and thus may legitimately violate the rights of their subjects to life, liberty, health, and property. Thus, according to Locke, the Stuarts were attempting to enslave the nation illegitimately, and their partisans were attempting to justify this. This is enough to show that Locke had a concept of illegitimate slavery and that he took the Stuarts to be attempting to enslave the nation illegitimately in this sense. What then is illegitimate slavery?

Illegitimate slavery is the dark mirror image of legitimate slavery. Suppose that the unjust aggressor wins the unjust war and now by force has the innocent victim in his power. The unjust aggressor is thereby in a position to violate all the natural rights of his innocent victims, but this is on the basis of force without justice. Because Locke's aim is to give a new rise to government and the people in it—in which might does not make right—it is plain that the fundamental difference between legitimate and illegitimate slavery is that in the one case absolute power over another person is a matter not just of superior force but of justice and the triumph of the innocent; while in the other case it is simply a result of superior force overcoming the innocent and just. Robert Bernasconi and Anika Mann suggest that arguments involving prisoners taken in just wars was a widely used tactic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to justify chattel slavery. Did Locke, they ask, like many of his contemporaries, extend the argument beyond its limits? Or did he think that slavery did not need to be justified (Bernasconi and Mann 2005, 101)?

Once one has grasped that one of Locke's chief aims in the *Second Treatise* is to deny that the claims to absolute power on the part of rulers are legitimate, and that in fact they were attempting to use force to enslave the nation illegitimately, it becomes clear that the constraints that this puts on Locke's account of legitimate slavery make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to use such a theory to justify the transatlantic slave trade and the institutions and practices of slavery in the colonies both at the time and later. It also becomes clear, (p. 25) if one knows the facts about the transatlantic slave trade and the institution and practices of colonial slavery, that they fit Locke's account of illegitimate slavery in the fundamental sense that they are the results of the unjust use of power to deprive people of their rights. Abraham Lincoln in his last debate with Stephen Douglas remarked: "No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor or as an

apology from one race of men for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle." Thus, in holding that kings have no right to enslave their people, any attempt Locke made to loosen those constraints on legitimate slavery in the interest of justifying the institutions and practices of colonial slavery would have weakened his argument against the Stuarts. Still, Mann and Bernasconi remark that Locke was a racist and they add, "Racists often give bad arguments, it is the only kind they have" (Bernasconi and Mann 2005, 101). It is interesting therefore that we have some insight into the materials Locke had available for constructing his theories of slavery.

Locke and the Natural Rights Tradition on Slavery

James Farr in his paper "Locke, Natural Law and New World Slavery" has pointed out that all the materials needed to justify the institutions and practices of the colonial slavery and the seizure of Indian lands were available to Locke in the natural rights and natural law tradition. Following Richard Tuck, Farr notes a whole series of authors who began with "states of natural freedom or premises about natural rights and duty (often) ended up justifying absolute power or just enslavement" (Farr 2008, 501). Many of these accounts would have served Locke had he wished to justify colonial slavery because many of them were crafted in part to do just that. Luis de Molina, for example, coming from a country deeply involved in the slave trade, applied the notion of voluntary slavery to blacks in the sixteenth century (Tuck 1981, 54). Farr notes that while Filmer is the one opponent Locke cited by name in Chapter 4, "Of Slavery," "Filmer, Grotius and his followers form a complex web for Locke" (Farr 2008, 501). Filmer held that people were naturally slaves, not naturally free—a view that Locke indignantly rejected. Farr focuses on the theory of Hugo Grotius, citing Richard Tuck's conclusion that "the most faithful Grotian theory available from the presses in the late seventeenth century was that of Locke" (Tuck 1981, 173). Hugo Grotius, perhaps the most influential writer on natural law and rights in the seventeenth century, was sufficiently ambiguous to lead the next generation of his followers to produce competing theories, one of which endorsed "slavery and absolutism and the other a defense of resistance and common property *in extremis*" (Tuck 1981, 80). Thus, as Farr remarks, had Locke wanted to justify the institutions and practices of colonial slavery:

A simple endorsement of Grotius would have left in place the enslavement of non-combatants, women and children, the seizure of land, and especially the intergenerational institution of hereditary bondage. But again, Locke placed restrictions on all of these, the effect of which was to make new world slavery a glaring exception to his theory.

(Farr 2008, 501)

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One would come to the same conclusion Farr reached about Locke and Grotius by examining other authors in the natural law/natural rights tradition that he was familiar with. There (p. 26) were a whole series of writers who came before Grotius who held that one could voluntarily enslave oneself, including Gerson, Molina, and Suarez. Tuck notes about Suarez that he held that man has dominion over his own liberty and so drew the conclusion: "If voluntary slavery was possible for an individual, so it was for a whole people" (Tuck 1981, 56). After Grotius, Hobbes and Puffendorf also endorsed slavery. Whereas Locke rejected Hobbes, he knew and recommended Samuel Puffendorf's books, but not his account of slavery. Puffendorf held that there were degrees of slavery and so would not have assented to Locke's claim that, in effect, holding absolute power over someone is a necessary condition for slavery.

All this makes it plain that had Locke intended to justify slave trading and colonial slavery, he had a superabundance of materials at hand with which to do a fine job of it. Instead, he rejected them—all of them. If at this point one concedes that Locke's project was to give a new origin of government in which might does not make right, and that in particular this was aimed at giving an alternative to the doctrine of the divine right of kings, one may wonder whether this doctrine was intended to apply to America and Africa at all.

Given what we have discovered so far about what Locke aimed to do in the *Two Treatises of Government*, it might be doubted whether that account of a new rise of government and political power would apply to the effort to justify the institutions and practices of the slave trade, colonial slavery, and the seizure of Indian lands. Yet those who wish to maintain that Locke was trying to justify the institutions and practices of slavery and the seizure of Indian lands in the Americas (and Africa) point to numerous references to America that make it plain that Locke was thinking about America (Armitage 2004, 603–605; Arneil 1996, 2; Bernasconi and Mann 2005, 96, among others). They are certainly right about this. These critics, however, usually make an assumption that in thinking about America, Locke must have been thinking about justifying colonial slave practices, the seizure of Indian lands, and so forth (Armitage 2004, 603; Arneil 1996, 2; Bernasconi and Mann 2005, 95). For reasons noted earlier, this would have been extremely difficult. But there is another possibility. In thinking about America, Locke may have been thinking about the ways in which it illustrated some of the features of his account of the *state of nature*, which was the condition of mankind before the rise of government with genuine political power, without any intention of justifying colonial practices at all.

In Chapter 5, "Of Property" Locke makes it plain that Indians do have a right to the property of their labor when they gather berries and kill deer (Locke 1690/1980, 20). This strongly suggests that Indians had all the natural rights that Locke accorded to the rest of mankind. In *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke engages in a thought experiment to illustrate the general claim that no persons ought to be deprived of their lands and lives because of their religion. This thought experiment involves Christians seeking to deprive Amerindians of their lands and killing them if they resist. In this thought experiment he makes it plain that Indians have a full complement of natural and civil rights as long as

they obey the law of nature, that is, as long as they do not violate the natural rights of others. Thus, their lands cannot be taken from them because they are not Christians (Locke 1991, 37–38). There is in this thought experiment a clear analogy between dissenters in England and the Amerindians. Thus, it is plain that Locke intended various aspects of his theories of natural rights and natural law to apply to Amerindians, and hence to human beings around the world. Here we might turn to the argument most persistently given to show that Locke did not hold that Indians had a right to their land so that it could be legitimately taken from them. Let us turn to the principal way in which scholars have argued that Locke proposed to evade the implications of his (p. 27) theories of natural law and natural rights so that Indian lands could be taken by European colonists. I call this argument, the argument from agricultural inefficiency.

Forfeiture of Amerindian Land by the Argument from Agricultural Inefficiency

There are two versions of the argument from agricultural inefficiency and a corollary to both. The first is the natural law version and the second the wasteland version. David Armitage has pointed out that one can find this argument in the works of Sir Thomas More, published in *Utopia* in 1517 (Armitage 2004, 618–619). So it had certainly been deployed before Locke, and Armitage, like many others, thinks that Locke was giving this argument.

The natural law version of the argument from agricultural inefficiency claims that according to Locke's account of natural law, everyone is obliged to help the rest of mankind to survive, and that the Amerindians, being inefficient agriculturalists, failed to perform this obligation of natural law and so lost their right to their land. The corollary to that argument is that by opposing the Europeans who rightfully were taking their land, they committed a crime punishable by death or legitimate enslavement. This version of the argument is quite unconvincing once one examines the text. The only place in the *Second Treatise* where Locke talks about a natural law obligation to help the rest of mankind to survive and flourish is at the end of Section 2.6. Locke writes:

Every one as he is *bound to preserve himself*, and not to quit his station willfully, so by the like reason when his own survival comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, *to preserve the rest of mankind*, and may not, unless to do justice on an offender, take away or impair the life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another.

(Locke 1690/1980, 9)

Locke here makes it plain that one only has such an obligation to help the rest of mankind if one's own survival is not in question. Presumably this means one acquires such an obligation, only when one has the means to fulfill it. But the assumption made in the natural law version of the argument from agricultural inefficiency is that being subsistence

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farmers, the Indians could not help the rest of mankind, yet still had the obligation to do so. This being the case, they violated that obligation of natural law. But what the passage shows is that if they were subsistence farmers, then according to Locke they had no such obligation—and so could not be violators of the law of nature nor lose their rights to their land as a consequence.

I call the second version of the argument from agricultural inefficiency the *wasteland version*. In this version the Amerindians have lost the right to their agricultural land because they have farmed it less efficiently than Europeans would have farmed it. Thus, and this is the crucial step, it really is not agricultural land; it is wasteland and so can be legitimately taken by Europeans. Once again the corollary follows that if the Amerindians oppose Englishmen or other Europeans taking their land, they are committing a crime deserving of death and so can be legitimately killed or enslaved.

The crucial assumption in this version of the argument is that inefficiently used agricultural land is wasteland. But what Locke means by “wasteland” is land that no one is using (Locke 1690/1980, 26). It is true that agricultural land that has ceased to be used returns to (p. 28) being wasteland. But there is nowhere in Chapter 5, “Of Property” or elsewhere, so far as I know, any passage where Locke explicitly says that inefficiently used agricultural land is wasteland.

Note that this argument does not imply that Locke thought that there was no wasteland in America or land that no one was using. He was quite sure that there were vast tracks of wasteland. In this he was largely mistaken, and the mistake was consequential. He regarded the forest that stretched from the eastern seaboard to the Ohio valley as a commons (like the oceans) and did not recognize that the Amerindians regarded these regions as hunting grounds or that they labored to maintain these forests by, for example, burning underbrush. But his view was that there was enough and as good for both Amerindians and colonists. I dare say that no one at the time that Locke was writing, either colonial administrator, colonist, or Amerindian, would have conceived that a hundred and twenty years later, white Americans would be pouring over the mountains on their way to take the entire continent from the Amerindians.

Scholars have attempted to show that Locke held that land in America belonged to Englishmen or Europeans on the basis of a passage in Section 34 of Chapter 5, “Of Property,” where Locke notes that God gave the earth to mankind in common but he did not intend it to remain that way for long. Rather, he intended to give it to “the industrious and rational (and labour was to be his title to it); not to the fancy of the quarrelsome and contentious” (Locke 1690/1980, 21). Some commentators have assumed that Locke meant that Europeans were “the industrious and rational” while the Amerindians were the “quarrelsome and contentious” and so have taken this passage to support the argument from agricultural inefficiency. Barbara Arneil argues that Locke took the Amerindians to be neither rational nor industrious (Arneil 1996, 149). But there are a number of passages in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* where Locke talks of the Indians he has met as rational and intelligent and writes both of ways in which European culture is

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superior to that of the Amerindians and vice versa (Locke 1690/1972, II, xiii, 20; II. xvi, 6; IV, xvii, 6). As for being industrious, the passage about the rational and industrious continues in such a way as to lead to the opposite conclusion from the one Arneil draws. Locke goes on from the sentence quoted earlier: “He that has as good left for his improvement, as was already taken up, need not complain, ought not to meddle with what was already improved by another’s labour; if he did it is plain he desired the benefits of another’s pains, which he had no right to ... ” (Locke 1690/1980, 22). The argument from agricultural inefficiency is clearly intended to justify the taking of Amerindian agricultural land by Europeans, not the taking of colonists’ land by Indians. So it is plain from this passage that Locke holds that there is room enough in America for both Amerindians and English colonists, and insofar as the colonists wanted to take Indian lands under cultivation, they wanted to take what had already been improved by the cultivation of the Amerindians—something they had no right to. Thus, the passage, in fact, is a rejection of the wasteland version of the argument from agricultural inefficiency. If this were taken as an argument for taking wasteland simpliciter from the Amerindians, it would be pointless. For on Locke’s view, wasteland belongs to no one and so was always available for appropriation.

Locke was most certainly a partisan of English agriculture practices, and he clearly thinks these vastly more efficient than the way in which the Amerindians use their land. Thus, he held that the same amount of industry produced vastly better results in England than in America. I would suggest that Locke’s point about efficient land use is that it represents a later stage in the evolution of the state of nature, where money and commerce allow for larger landholding and a commercial agriculture and bring about the conflicts that make a (p. 29) civil government the best solution to those problems. Thus, Indian hunting and gathering and subsistence agriculture are part of a stage in the evolution of the state of nature that is perfectly reasonable under the conditions in which the Amerindians find themselves but cannot provide the kind of flourishing that comes with the advent of money and commerce. Still, there is no hint that Locke saw this difference as the basis for legitimately taking the agricultural lands of the Indians. There was no need to do so. There was, on his view, plenty of land for both.

Conclusion

Locke’s extraordinary involvement with the slave trade, slavery, and Indian lands, as an owner of stocks in slave trading companies, as the valued Secretary of the Lords Proprietors of the Carolinas (who clearly had no problem with slavery), and as a government official and a colonial administrator, surely tarnishes his reputation as a great defender of liberty (Farr 2008, 497–499, for a list of Locke’s posts and involvement with slavery). Indeed, given that he knew so much and was so deeply involved in these things, there is some reason to call him a racist. (For the claim that Locke was a racist, see Bernasconi and Mann 2004, 101–103). Naomi Zack, on the other hand, has made the point that the absence in the seventeenth century of the concept of race as it later came to be conceptualized might lead “us to a deeper understanding of the causes of African slavery at the

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time, namely religious narrowness, a strong desire for monetary gain, nationalism, and of course, the material ability to impose slavery on others” (Zack 1996, 179). Some of these motivations are ones that Locke plainly did not have. Others he may well have. The facts about his involvement with the slave trade and colonial government have led many scholars to conclude that in thinking about America, Locke must have intended to justify the institutions and practices that he knew about in more detail than probably anyone in England. Those who seek to find in his works a justification for those horrific colonial crimes are seeking to make him a consistent racist or Eurocentrist. But given the nature of the work, it cannot be done. Locke’s explicit philosophical claims make the *Second Treatise of Government* a work of liberation and not a defense of colonial criminality. Those who want to speculate that Locke went beyond what he had written to somehow see it as a justification for those crimes can speculate as they will, but their claims are simply that—speculation. Locke was not involved in any contradiction between theory and practice in regard to the Amerindians. What he said and what he did fit well together. It is only in respect to slavery where there is a clear contradiction between the Lockean defense of rights and liberties and his involvement with slave trading and slavery. The contradiction is there and Locke was certainly not alone in being caught in that contradiction. But while we may want to call Locke a racist for his involvement with slavery to express our disgust at his actions, his philosophy is not racist—quite the contrary.

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