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The Reasonableness of Locke, or the Questionableness of Christianity

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Locke's apparent affirmation of the truth of Christianity in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* conceals a demonstration of reason's inability to vindicate this truth. Locke shows that one should strive to adhere to the Christian law of nature which he argues is the bedrock of Christianity only if sanctions for this law exist in an afterlife; reason, however, cannot prove the existence of an afterlife. Therefore, reason justifies obedience only to a law of nature the sanctions for which exist in this life, such as the law Locke elaborates in other writings. In the *Reasonableness* Locke refashions Christianity into a support for this rational morality, and he vindicates the practice of morality out of a concern for rewards and punishments by presenting Jesus as practicing a mercenary morality.

After his famous description in *Democracy in America* of the principle of self-interest rightly understood, according to which one understands oneself to practice virtue out of a far-sighted concern for private advantage, Tocqueville shows how Americans apply this principle to religion (II.ii.9). Although he does not think that "interest is the only driving force behind men of religion," he maintains that "interest is the chief means used by religions themselves to guide men," who are encouraged to sacrifice in this world for the advantage of rewards in the next. But Americans have taken this one step further. Whereas "[p]riests in the Middles Ages . . . hardly took any trouble to prove that a sincere Christian might be happy here below[,] . . . preachers in America are continually coming down to earth. . . . The better to touch their hearers, they are forever pointing out how religious beliefs favor freedom and public order, and it is often difficult to be sure when listening to them whether the main object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the next world or prosperity in this." Such Christians seem far removed from the original Puritan immigrants to America, who, if they did not think so much less of this world than the Americans of Tocqueville's and our day, were at least less forthright about it. What accounts for the transformation of Christians in America?

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To some extent, a reinterpretation of Christianity by Locke does. Not only did Locke greatly influence the political thought of America's founders, but as Dworetz (1990, 32, 135–83) has shown, he also helped to shape the religious thought of eighteenth-century Americans through his rationalistic interpretation of the Bible. That interpretation joined Christianity and a rational, self-interested morality in a system of mutual support which stands to this day. Of course, Locke's was by no means the only influence on the development of Christianity in America, and to argue that he influenced Christians is not to claim that they clearly grasped his full teaching. On the contrary, I shall argue that Locke wrote so as to conceal his full teaching, which most readers would have rejected in a less than sober manner had they understood it, behind a surface teaching more acceptable to his Christian audience; only the latter teaching was intended to influence Locke's typical reader. But whatever the actual extent of Locke's historical influence, his treatment of Christianity offers a profound theoretical justification for the kind of Christianity that Americans have commonly practiced. A study of his arguments can therefore help us to gain a critical perspective on American Christianity.

Over three decades ago Leo Strauss first published his provocative thesis that Locke, contrary to first appearances in his writings, "deviated considerably from the traditional natural law teaching and followed the lead given by Hobbes" (1953, 221). Strauss argued that the apparently traditional and pious surface of Locke's texts, full as it was of inconsistencies, concealed Locke's true, quasi-Hobbesian teaching, which Locke chose not to promulgate openly lest he endanger not only himself but the reception of his political teaching. Certain passages in Locke on the expression of ideas indicated to Strauss that Locke sanctioned a covert style of speech "if unqualified frankness would hinder a noble work one is trying to achieve or expose one to persecution or endanger the public peace" (209); those passages include most prominently Locke's approving presentation in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* of Jesus and of ancient philosophers as speaking covertly (§§ 62–145, 238[35–86, 135–37]).[1] That Locke sanctioned a procedure in

[1] Until the Clarendon Press issues its planned critical edition of *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, we must rely on currently available versions of the text. I quote the *Reasonableness* from Locke 1823, volume 7, because of this edition's general availability; I have corrected the text in one prominent place, noted below (note 9). I cite the *Reasonableness* first by paragraph or section number and then in brackets by the page number of this edition. Both the 1958 and 1965 editions of the *Reasonableness* edited by Ramsey and Ewing, respectively, conveniently number the text's paragraphs.

The passages in this first citation include references to Jesus' "concealment of himself" in order to avoid death and fulfill his ministry (§ 62[35]), to his inability to "declare himself to be the Messiah, without manifest danger of tumult and sedition" (§ 74[42]), to his "perplexing . . . his meaning" and "so involv[ing] his sense, that it was not easy to understand him" (§§ 108, 115[59,64]), and to the fact that before Christ "[t]he rational and thinking part of mankind" kept

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others of course does not prove that he employed it himself. But Strauss found that only by reading Locke as though he wrote covertly could one discern in him a consistent natural law teaching, one worthy of a great philosopher. And that teaching resembled Hobbes's: "Locke's natural law teaching can . . . be understood perfectly if one assumes that the laws of nature which he admits are, as Hobbes puts it, 'but conclusions, or theorems concerning what conduces to the conservation and defense' of man over against other men" (229).

If Locke's full teaching resembles Hobbes's, then two factors explain his concealing it behind a pious surface. In an age when exponents of unorthodox views faced persecutions ranging up to execution, one might well have wished to conceal similarities between one's own views and those of the unorthodox and "justly decried" Hobbes;[2] when "the fear of the Magistrate's Sword, or their Neighbour's Censure, tie up" atheists' tongues (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I.iv.8), Hobbes's reputation as the "Great Master and Lawgiver" of atheists, to quote Locke's vehement critic John Edwards ([1695] 1984, 129), helps to explain why a follower of Hobbes might have disguised his views. But there is an arguably more important reason for a follower of Hobbes in any age to write covertly than the risk of persecution: a raw Hobbism seems ill-suited for promotion as the foundation of public morality, certainly among a religious public. A morality nakedly based on considerations of self-interest offends moral sentiments, and it is therefore little likely to gain converts. Moreover, considering that the characters of citizens would reflect the harshness of such a morality, one might hesitate to promote this morality forthrightly even if one thought it possible to win converts. Such reasons justify using the religious beliefs already existing among a public to moderate the harshness of a Hobbesian morality—even in the service of promoting a Hobbesian rationalism to moderate the harshness of religious believers. Just as Locke suggested in the *First Treatise* (§ 7) that his opponent Filmer wrote "like a wary Physician, [who] when he would have his Patient swallow some harsh or *Corrosive Liquor*, . . . mingles it with a large quantity of that, which may dilute it; that the scatter'd Parts may go down with less feeling, and cause less Aversion," Strauss argued that Locke diluted the harshness of his quasi-Hobbesian teaching by concealing it behind and thereby blending it with a pious surface.[3]

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the truth about God "locked up . . . nor ever durst venture it amongst the people" lest they meet Socrates' fate (§ 238[135–36]).

[2]The phrase is Locke's, from his *Second Reply to the Bishop of Worcester* (Locke 1823, 4:477).

[3]As noted above, whether Locke himself wrote covertly must ultimately be judged in light of the interpretations of Locke based on the hypothesis that he did. In addition to confronting such interpretations directly, critics of the Straussian approach to Locke have disputed the

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"But [Strauss's] thesis has not received general acceptance. The bulk of scholarship on the political philosophy of John Locke since 1955 outspokenly repudiates it. Its authors have attempted to restore to general acceptability the idea that Locke's liberalism rests on a traditional view of human nature, conceived within a framework of divinely mandated natural law" (Bluhm,

existence in Locke of evidence that he might have resorted to covert writing. For example, Yolton denies the contention made above that the *Reasonableness* shows Locke to believe "cautious speech [to be] legitimate if unqualified frankness would hinder a noble work [etc.]"; rather, "Locke's point is that Christ did not come right out and say 'I am the Messiah' simply because he knew he had to fulfill his mission of preaching the gospel. Locke in no way generalizes from this very special situation to a theory of the art of writing under persecution" (1958, 478). But as Zuckert points out, "Locke explains Jesus' behavior not from the special character of his mission, but from a general consideration of prudential behavior in the circumstances. Indeed, as Strauss points out and Yolton ignores, Locke attributes a similar caution or concealment to the pagan philosophers. So while Locke does not 'generalize . . . to a theory of writing under persecution,' such a general theory seems implicit in his discussion" (1975, 283). For definitive responses to many other criticisms of the Straussian reading of Locke, see Zuckert 1975, 280–93, and 1978.

Grant (1987, 9) dissociates herself from Strauss's approach to Locke partly because Locke "often emphasized that the best writing made the author's views directly accessible to the reader and minimized the possibility of confusion or misinterpretation. See (*On the Conduct of the Understanding* [Locke 1971], 20, 29, 32, 42; *Essay* III.9, III.10, III.11; 'An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles . . . ' in [Locke 1823,] 8:21"). But Grant oversimplifies the issue by presenting "the author" as directly and clearly addressing "the reader." Her account ignores the evidence in Locke that different modes of discourse are appropriate for different purposes; that certain authors, including those who write most carefully, do not seek to be understood by every reader; and that readers must exercise great care in order to understand some authors. Thus, in the passages she cites from the *Essay,* Locke distinguishes between the "civil" and "philosophical" uses of words (III.ix.3). When he suggests rules for the use of words to reduce misunderstandings, he appeals only to "those, *who* pretend *seriously* to *search after,* or maintain *Truth,*" for "the Market and Exchange must be left to their own ways of Talking" (III.xi.3). Not all will follow the "best writing" (cf. III.ix.6; xi.11). Locke stresses careful *reading* as much as he does careful writing, and if his rules minimize confusion or misinterpretation, they do so only for careful readers. In the *Conduct of the Understanding* as well Locke calls for great care in reading (see especially section XX), and he even warns readers to "read with the greatest caution" those "that write against their conviction," who, like those "resolved to maintain the tenets of a party they are engaged in, cannot be supposed to reject any arms that may help to defend their cause" (section XLII). The pages Grant cites from this essay speak of the proper conduct for sound thinking but not of the communication of thoughts, and so they do not offer a theory of the "best writing." As for the essay on St. Paul, the page Grant cites shows how to read Paul's terms. Grant's citation seems to indicate that she considers Paul's an example of the "best writing," which can be clearly understood if properly approached. It appears that Locke concurs in her judgment: Paul "knew how to prosecute his purpose with strength of argument and close reasoning." But the essay as a whole stresses the difficulty of understanding Paul, the great "pains, judgment, and application, to find the coherence of obscure and abstruse writings," "the utmost [that] ought to be done to observe and trace out St. Paul's reasonings" (Locke 1823, 8:14–16). Accessible as the "best writing" may be according to Locke, it may be so only to very careful readers, and hence only to few readers. Grant's evidence thus allows for the expression of thoughts in such a manner that few will understand them.

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Wintfeld, and Teger 1980, 414). The premise underlying this interpretation of Locke's liberalism is that Locke wrote as a sincere Christian trying to reconcile reason and faith; the important thing is this attempted reconciliation, not the possibility that Locke's writings present a consistent but less than fully pious teaching. Locke did in fact claim to be a Christian. "A Christian I am sure I am, because I believe 'Jesus to be the Messiah' . . . and, as a subject of his kingdom, I take the rule of my faith and life from his will, declared and left upon record in the inspired writings of the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament"; "The Holy Scripture is to me, and always will be, the constant Guide of my Assent; and I shall always hearken to it, as containing infallible Truth, relating to Things of the highest Concernment" (Locke 1823, 7:359, 4:96).[4] Reasonably and typically enough, Biddle cites the latter statement as proof of Locke's faith in Christian revelation. He seems compelled to cite it because he has just noted a defect in Locke's supposedly reasonable acceptance of revelation which would call into question Locke's Christian faith were it not for Locke's profession of faith. After observing that Locke stressed reason's "task of establishing the validity of a revelation," he comments that "Locke nowhere stated precisely how reason could judge something to be divine, nor did he ever offer a systematic case for the probability that the Christian Scriptures were a divine revelation." Nonetheless, Locke "assumed that such a judgment was possible and believed that the Scriptures were, indeed, of divine origin," as Biddle shows by citing Locke's aforementioned claim (1976, 415–16).

Biddle's procedure exemplifies the practice common among Locke scholars of resolving or dismissing difficulties in Locke's arguments by appealing to Locke's Christian faith. Dunn finds that "Locke's own ideas remain for his entire life profoundly and exotically incoherent," as "the dubious commitments of his theological conviction" prevented clear thinking; one of Dunn's "central expository points . . . is the intimate dependence of an extremely high proportion of Locke's arguments for their very intelligibility, let alone plausibility, on a series of theological commitments" (1969, xi, 29, 80). In his oft-cited "Faith and Knowledge in Locke's Philosophy," Ashcraft interprets the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in light of "Locke's primary commitment . . . to certain principles of the Christian faith"; after showing several problems raised by the conflict between this commitment and Locke's rationalism, he argues that only in the *Reasonableness* "are the problems, so intellectually troublesome to a reader of the *Essay,* resolved definitively." Ashcraft's contention that Locke actually resolved inconsistencies in his arguments distinguishes him from other scholars, but even Ashcraft does not seem quite to believe what he says, for he concludes his essay by can-

[4]Locke made these professions in polemical writings defending himself against vigorous attacks on his orthodoxy. The first quotation is from Locke's *Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity;* the second is from the postscript to Locke's *Letter to the Right Reverend Edward Lord Bishop of Worcester.*

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didly remarking that "[i]f, ultimately, the epistemological views of Locke, the Christian, cannot be satisfactorily reconciled with those of Locke, the philosopher, it is the faith of the former which ensures the salvation of the latter" (1969, 194, 218, 223). Snyder likens Locke's position on faith and reason to that of Thomas Aquinas while finding that Locke cannot account for the fully assured faith he claims to support. Snyder admits that "Stillingfleet seemed to have had a valid complaint that Locke undermines the assurance of religious faith," but he does not think that Locke undermined the assurance of *Locke's* religious faith (1986, 211). Locke remains inconsistent but faithful. Most recently, Spellman has concluded that Locke was a Latitudinarian who shared "the orthodoxy of the Broad-Church divines" (1988a, 92; see also 1988b).

Although Locke's inconsistencies are rooted in his efforts to square rationalism with faith and thus cannot be resolved as long as his professions of faith are taken at face value, most Locke scholarship sees no reason to probe beyond Locke's assumed Christianity for a consistent Lockean teaching. But by according greater importance to Locke's proclamations of piety than to the difficulties of reconciling his rationalism with faith, one blinds oneself to Locke's covert suggestions about the resolution of these difficulties. The full Lockean teaching does not emerge in all its clarity. Whatever Locke's private beliefs, his published treatment of Christianity is not a faithful one which informs his reasoning but a manipulative one informed by his reasoning. The crucial but much-neglected text for understanding Locke's ruthlessly rational treatment of Christianity is the one that explicitly and most fully indicates Locke's approval of covert writing, *The Reasonableness of Christianity.* Insofar as attention is paid to it today, it is generally read as an appendix to the *Essay,* as supplementing the *Essay*'s inadequate demonstrations of the reasonableness of faith with a demonstration of the reasonableness of Christianity. Christianity is said to be reasonable for Locke because only through the Christian revelation is morality fully supported, reason having "failed men in its great and proper business of morality" (§ 241[138]). Of course, that morality depends upon the Christian revelation for full support does not prove the truth of, but at best the need for, that revelation, and so Locke's demonstration of the reasonableness of Christianity is also deemed inadequate.[5] But the fact that Locke attempted such a demonstration is interpreted as further evidence of how serious Locke was about his Christianity, and hence as another reason not to scrutinize his logical difficulties.

[5]Ashcraft has, however, made another attempt to show how the *Reasonableness* vindicates the coherence of the Christian Locke's thought by stressing Locke's commitment to "moral egalitarianism." He argues that in the *Reasonableness* "Locke is . . . concerned to dismiss the efforts of philosophers . . . who have in any way supposed that their 'unassisted reason' could supply an ethical standard for mankind" (1987, 253); Locke thus paves the way for the reasonable acceptance of revelation. But Ashcraft also stresses the capacity of reason for Locke to

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This prevailing interpretation depends, however, on a misreading of the *Reasonableness*. By attending carefully to Locke's arguments there, we shall see that Locke was very much aware of the inadequacy of his presentation; according to the standards there set forth, Christianity is not reasonable. Or, rather, it is reasonable according to Locke only in the sense that, properly interpreted, it could serve as a useful support for the rational morality that he elaborated elsewhere. The *Reasonableness*, moreover, refashions Christianity into not only a support but a justification for a mercenary morality by presenting Jesus himself as an exemplar of mercenariness. The reasonableness of Christianity for Locke thus consists in the political effectiveness of a properly interpreted Christianity, and in nothing more than this.

The Unreasonable Foundations of Christianity

Since Christianity rests its claim to truthfulness on supernatural revelation, the very phrase "reasonableness of Christianity" seems paradoxical. If Christianity is perfectly reasonable, then it is accessible to natural reason and hence not in need of revelation; needless to say, Christianity does not present its underlying revelation as superfluous. Locke cannot plausibly present Christianity as "pure natural religion," for this would be "doing violence to the whole tenour of the New Testament" (§ 1[5]). His demonstration of the reasonableness of Christianity must therefore accommodate revelation and the centrality of Jesus' mission.

This Locke achieves in one swift stroke. He divides Christianity into a law of faith and a law of works. Reason seems unable to discern the former, and so Jesus' revelation seems to have been necessary to bring it into the world. This law of faith, according to which God treats leniently sinners who accept Jesus as the Messiah, appears reasonable in at best the qualified sense that mercy is reasonable; we shall see that it may be reasonable for God to allow faith "to supply the defect of full obedience" to the law of works (§ 22[14]), thus alleviating the harshness of that law. For the law of works is harsh; it "makes no allowance for failing on any occasion" (ibid.). According to it God judges everyone "[a]ccording to his deeds" and sentences to death all who sin even once (§§ 6, 11[7–10]). Since the law of faith is merely an appendix to the law of works, mitigating the standards to which God holds the faithful

discover ethical standards: "For Locke, every individual must be assumed to be *capable* of obeying natural law because 'a manner of acting is prescribed to him that is suitable to his nature' by God, who could not be supposed to have equipped man with reason and intellect except on the assumption that he would employ those faculties in order to discover that law . . . " (42, Ashcraft's emphasis). Reason cannot be both incapable and capable of discovering morality. If this dilemma is resolved by appealing to reason's capacity to verify "the evidence of [the] mission" of him who reveals morality to us (255), we shall see presently that Locke calls attention to great difficulties accompanying the verification of such evidence.

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when judging them by the law of works, it is really the latter by which God judges men, both before and after Christ (cf. §§ 22, 107, 220–27[14, 58, 125–28]). Now revelation is not, strictly speaking, necessary for knowledge of the law of works. Unlike the law of faith, it is claimed to be perfectly reasonable, even if it was not widely known before Jesus and his disciples had spread the Word. The "light of reason" can by itself show the law man is under (§ 231[133]). It is a law such "as the purity of God's nature required . . . the law of reason, or as it is called, of nature" (§ 14[11]). Or, rather, it turns out that the law of nature is comprehended "under the law of works," for the law of works also contains God's positive commands, such as "the ceremonial and judicial law" of the Jews (§§ 19–20[13]); because reason cannot discern them, these positive commands do not belong to the law of nature (subject to the qualification that it is "a part of the law of nature, that man ought to obey every positive law of God" [§ 23 {15}]). Yolton thus errs in arguing that according to Locke "neither [the law of nature nor the revealed law] contains distinct or unique injunctions which the other does not have" (1958, 485). "[T]he distinction between the law of reason . . . and the law revealed in the gospel . . . is preserved by Locke" (Strauss 1953, 203).

Locke thus fosters a certain ambiguity in his treatment of the relationship between the law of works and the law of nature. In principle the former comprises the latter. But the Christian law of works, the law which obliges Christians, seems to be essentially the law of nature. Locke says that "the civil and ritual part of the law, delivered by Moses, obliges not christians" and that "the moral law, (which is every-where the same, the eternal rule of right,) obliges christians, and all men" (§ 23[15]). He does not dwell on positive commands enjoined by Christians on God.[6] (The law of faith is not a positive command but a "privilege" joined to the Christian law of works [ibid.]; it is not part of that law, for God merely proposes the law of faith to men without obliging them to accept it, as we shall see.) In fact, what appear to be positive Christian commands are reinterpreted by Locke to square with the reasonable law of nature. For example, Jesus' apparent injunction to charity in Luke 18 is said to be not "a standing law of his kingdom; but a probationary command to this young man," whom Jesus told to sell all he had and given to the poor (§ 203[119–20]). The reasonableness of Christianity thus seems to lie fundamentally in its demanding reason-

[6] In a few passages Locke does permit the reader to see that Jesus enjoined certain commands which go beyond what Locke elsewhere presents as the law of nature. E.g. whereas Jesus "commands loving our enemies" (§ 188 [115]), reason according to Locke only teaches that "no one ought to harm another" (*Second Treatise*, § 6). But the *Reasonableness* as a whole presents a harmony between Christian moral teachings and reason. Jesus' revelation is generally depicted as not going beyond the law of nature: "there is a law of nature; but who is there that ever did, or undertook to give it us all entire, as a law: *no more*, nor no less . . . ? . . . Such a law of morality Jesus Christ hath given us in the New Testament" (§ 242 [142–43]; emphasis added). Cf. note 8 below.

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able behavior from men. Christianity's law of works is at bottom the law of nature, although it is not a law apart from God, it being "the law of his nature" (§ 23[15]). Moreover, in demonstrating the reasonableness of Christianity Locke is at considerable pains to show that Christianity's law of faith demands very little in the way of faith. The only necessary article of faith according to Locke is the belief that Jesus is the Messiah. In light of this, the warfare between Christian sects of Locke's day over particular tenets of faith appears not only barbarous but pointless; the reasonable behavior demanded of Christians excludes such warfare. By reducing the law of faith to one article so broad that all Christian sects can endorse it, Locke shows that Christianity is reasonable in that it is not a source of civil strife: "my Reasonableness of Christianity . . . tends to peace and union among Christians" (*Second Vindication*, Locke 1823, 7:189). Christianity is thus a pacific religion whose God demands and sanctions reasonable behavior, along with a minimal faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This is the surface teaching of the *Reasonableness* that Locke wishes to convey to the typical reader.

What light does a probing exploration of the arguments of the *Reasonableness* shed on this surface teaching? In particular, what light is shed on what Locke identifies as the heart of Christianity, the Christian law of works or law of nature, which the law of faith qualifies and on which it hence depends? Nowhere in the *Reasonableness* or elsewhere does Locke elaborate the contents of this law of nature to show that they are reasonable.[7] Leaving aside this difficulty, we wonder why men were not living under this law before Christ if it was such a reasonable law. Or is the law itself intrinsically unreasonable, so that obeying it makes sense only after Jesus enables men to enjoy rewards for good behavior in an afterlife by granting them access to the afterlife through the law of faith? For before the law of faith emerged, there was only the law of works, according to which one sin merits death; since everyone sins, access to the afterlife was effectively denied (§ 12[10–11]). Is the law of nature embraced by Christianity not choiceworthy for individuals unless they are rewarded for compliance with it? Locke says, rather, that the reason men failed to live by the law before Christ is that they were too unreasonable to live under this reasonable law, which few of them knew. For few knew God, the author of the law: "Though the works of nature . . . sufficiently evidence a deity, yet the world made so little use of

[7]Cf. Dunn 1969, 187; Strauss 1953, 202; and Yolton 1958, 487–88, and 1970, 164–72, on Locke's failure to complete a demonstration of the contents of the law of nature. Ashcraft implies that Locke had no reason to elaborate the law of nature: "To the repeated insistence of his friend, William Molyneux, that he should write a treatise proving the demonstrability of ethics, fulfilling the claim advanced in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke replies: 'The Gospel contains so perfect a body of ethics, that reason may be excused from that inquiry, since she may find man's duty clearer and easier in revelation than in herself' " (1969, 219; cf. also Spellman 1988a, 127–29). But this fails to consider the differences between Locke's ethics and the Gospel's, such as that mentioned above concerning charity. For more on such differences, see Strauss 1953, 214–22.

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their reason, that they saw him not. . . . Sense and lust blinded their minds in some, and a careless inadvertency in others, and fearful apprehensions in most . . . gave them up into the hands of their priests, to fill their heads with false notions of the Deity" (§ 238[135]). Since most men failed to apprehend God, it is not surprising that they did not know the reasonable law of His nature and that "[i]n this state of darkness and ignorance of the true God, vice and superstition held the world" (ibid.). "Next to the knowledge of one God; maker of all things; 'a clear knowledge of their duty was wanting to mankind' " (§ 241[138]; cf. *Essay* I.iii.12). Even if the law was reasonable, Jesus needed to reveal it to men who were not. Even if his mission had been simply to reveal to men the reasonable law of nature, it would not have been superfluous.

But if the law was reasonable, might not a few men have discovered it before Christ? Accordingly, Locke says that the "rational and thinking part of mankind . . . found the one supreme, invisible God" (§ 238[135]). Having discovered "the one only true God" (ibid.), did these men succeed in discovering the law of his nature? We are briefly allowed to think so, for they seem to have known duties: "[f]ew went to the schools of the philosophers to be instructed in their duties." However, even the ancient philosophers did not know the full law of nature; even they did not know morality fully. First, the ancients simply did not see far enough into morality: "[N]atural religion, in its full extent, was no-where, that I know, taken care of, by the force of natural reason. . . . How short [the philosophers'] several systems came of the perfection of a true and complete morality, is very visible. . . . [H]uman reason unassisted failed men in its great and proper business of morality. It never from unquestionable principles, by clear deductions, made out an entire body of the law of nature" (§ 241[139–40]). Now the fact that men before Christ had not discovered all of the allegedly reasonable law of nature need not imply that this law is unreasonable but rather that it is difficult for reason to discover. Locke says that we, with the advantages of hindsight, can see that it is fully reasonable, even though we did not see this until after Jesus revealed it (§§ 241, 243[140, 143–47]).[8]

But just what is it according to Locke that we see now about morality? What do we know that the ancients did not? The ancients knew "[s]o much virtue as was necessary to hold societies together, and to contribute to the quiet of governments." This is not trivial, for it could "conduce . . . directly to the prosperity and temporal happiness of any people" (§ 241 [139]). The ancients did not, then, lack knowledge that morality holds societies together,

[8] Before Christ, the unknown moral truths were "in *effect,* but not in *fact,*" above reason (Moore 1980, 65, Moore's emphasis). Ashcraft's claim that reason's failure in the business of morality is "less historical than ontological" (1969, 219–20) does not do justice to Locke's claim that reason can see the reasonableness of revealed morality with hindsight. As we shall see, reason's failure in the business of morality is indeed ontological, according to Locke, but it is not due to an inability to discern the *content* of ethics.

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nor did they lack knowledge of sufficient ("so much") virtue to hold societies together. Perhaps they did not know the full extent—more than sufficient—of this socially useful virtue; perhaps they did not know the morality that best holds societies together or that provides most fully for the prosperity and temporal happiness of any people. Or perhaps Locke finds that they did not know another kind of virtue beyond the socially useful, a splendid virtue which one should embrace for its sheer nobility rather than its calculated utility. But this latter suggestion, at least, seems wrong, for the ancient philosophers "showed the beauty of virtue"; they argued chiefly "from the excellency of virtue; and the highest they generally went, was the exalting of human nature, whose perfection lay in virtue." Indeed, Locke criticizes the ancients for appealing to the beauty of virtue to the disregard of the advantages of virtue, for this is an ineffective way to attract men to virtue: "they set [virtue] off so, as drew men's eyes and approbation to her; but leaving her unendowed, very few were willing to espouse her" (§ 245[149–50]).

Rather, the fundamental thing the ancients did not know was the foundations of the virtue they had discovered: "[t]hose just measures of right and wrong, which necessity had anywhere introduced, the civil laws prescribed, or philosophy recommended, *stood not on their true foundations*. They were looked on as bonds of society, and conveniencies of common life, and laudable practices" (§ 243[144], emphasis added).[9] Even had they known the full extent of "social virtue" or another virtue beyond this, they would not have known *obligation*. Even if "all the moral precepts of the gospel were known by somebody or other" before Christ—which Locke denies—men "were under no obligation" to adhere to these precepts (§ 242[141]):

> But where was it that their obligation was thoroughly known and allowed, and they *received as precepts of a law;* of the highest law, the law of nature? *That could not be* without a clear knowledge and acknowledgment of the law-maker, and the great *rewards and punishments,* for those that would, or would not obey him (§ 243[144], emphasis added; cf. § 185[114]).

The ancients may have known "the one only true God," but they did not know him as the maker of a law that men were obliged to obey. Whatever morality they knew did not achieve the status of law, for one cannot know

[9] I have corrected the 1823 *Works* version of the *Reasonableness,* which reads "[t]hose just measures . . . stood on their true foundations," to accord with Locke's personal, annotated copy of the *Reasonableness,* which Harvard's Houghton Library now houses. His copy, the original version of the *Reasonableness* published in 1695, and the text as it appeared in the first eight editions of Locke's *Works* all read "stood not." (I am grateful to Robert Bartlett for confirming the reading of Locke's personal copy for me.) In the ninth (1794) and following editions of Locke's *Works,* the "not" simply disappeared from the text. Ramsey's edition of the *Reasonableness* restores it; Ewing's does not. Since Strauss was quoting from the 1824 edition of Locke's *Works,* he unwittingly omitted the "not" (1953, 213, 220, note 77). But this does not fundamentally affect his argument, for the social utility of "those just measures of right and wrong" is the only foundation for them that reason can recognize, as we shall see.

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law without knowing a lawmaker who enforces it with rewards and punishments.

Locke echoes this in the *Essay:* "a Law" cannot "be known, or supposed without a Law-maker, or without Reward and Punishment"; without knowledge "that God had set up, and would certainly punish the breach of [a rule]. . . . a Man can never be certain, that any thing is his Duty" (*Essay* I.iii.12–13). But since "what Duty is, cannot be understood without a Law," and there is no law where there are not a lawmaker's rewards and punishments, then one has no *duty* to obey a prescribed morality unless sanctions are attached to it by a lawmaker. As Dunn rightly observes, "obligatoriness" according to Locke "is a substantive relationship between an authority with a power to enforce its commands and an individual subject to that authority" (1969, 190). Yolton denies this by arguing that "[t]he relation between right and obligation is that we are obliged to do what it is right for someone to require us to do." He seems able to avoid Dunn's conclusion because he abstracts from the power which "someone" must possess in order to oblige us; when he says that "[t]he law of nature obligates because it is the will of a superior," that superior is not said to be powerful (1958, 491, and 1970, 146). When Locke, however, speaks of "the Supreme and Infinite" being that "Dependent" man is "under an obligation to obey," that being is described as "omnipotent" (*Essay* IV.xiii.3).

In short, Locke argues that "the true nature of all *Law,* properly so called" is when "one intelligent Being . . . set[s] a Rule to the Actions of another" and has it "in his Power, to reward the compliance with, and punish deviation from his Rule by some Good and Evil, that is not the natural product and consequence of the Action it self. For that being a natural Convenience, or Inconvenience, would operate of it self without a Law" (*Essay* II.xxviii.6). Law, including moral law, is inseparable from the sanctions "annexed to that Law." Grant speaks loosely, and hence perhaps misleadingly, in saying that "[r]eason can tell a man what is right; his relationship to God is the source of his obligation to do what is right; and he will be motivated to do what is right by his expectations of painful or pleasant consequences of his actions" (1987, 44). Man may be motivated by expectations of pleasure and pain (cf. *Essay* II.xx.2–3), and motivation obviously differs from obligation—one is not obliged to do every act for which one feels some motivation—but to the extent that Grant's formulation severs obligation from all considerations of pleasure and pain, it is misleading. Since obligation requires law, and law, in turn, requires sanctions, those pleasures and pains annexed as sanctions to a law by a lawmaker are *fundamental* to obligation. The source of man's moral obligation is more precisely, then, his relationship to a law-making and law-enforcing God.[10] Without knowledge of this God, reason can tell a

[10] Locke does say in the *Essay* (IV.iii.18) that the "*Idea* of a supreme Being, infinite in Power, Goodness, and Wisdom, whose Workmanship we are, and on whom we depend; and the *Idea*

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man at best "what is right"; it cannot tell him the moral *law* obliging him. Thus, even had the ancients known "all the moral precepts of the gospel," their ignorance of God as a lawmaker would have prevented them from knowing the law of nature.

To understand why the ancients did not know God as a lawmaker, we must note that God's sanctions for the law of nature as revealed by Jesus are meted out in the afterlife, not in this world, where "[t]he portion of the righteous has been in all ages taken notice of, to be pretty scanty." A "great advantage received by our Saviour, is the great encouragement he brought to a virtuous and pious life. . . . [he] 'brought life and immortality to light'. . . . How has this one truth changed the nature of things in the world, and given the advantage to piety over all that could tempt or deter men from it!" While the ancients may have been aware of the possibility of the afterlife, they did not truly *know* the afterlife: "their thoughts of another life were at best obscure and their expectations uncertain," for the afterlife "was something they knew not what, between being and not being" (§ 245[148–50]). Because they did not know the afterlife, they did not know its sanctions, and they therefore did not know the obligatory character of the law of nature. Not knowing its obligatory character, they did not know it as a law. It is thus not so much their ignorance of the content of the law of nature as their ignorance of the afterlife and of its sanctions for the law that prevented the ancients from fully knowing morality. In contrast, we know morality according to Locke because we know the afterlife through Jesus. This means that the law of nature according to which God judges men and which is thus the foundation of Christianity has the afterlife as its cornerstone. Thus, the reasonableness of Christianity turns on the reasonableness of its teaching on the afterlife. This corresponds perfectly with Locke's famous statement that "the true ground of Morality . . . can only be the Will and Law of a God, who sees Men in the dark, has in his Hand Rewards and Punishments, and Power enough to call to account the Proudest Offender" in "the Hell he has ordain'd for the Punishment of those that transgress" moral rules (*Essay* I.iii.6).

The dependence of the law of nature on the afterlife can take two forms.

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of our selves . . . would, I suppose, if duly considered, and pursued, afford such Foundations of our Duty and Rules of Action, as might place *Morality amongst the Sciences capable of Demonstration.*" Does this passage, which Grant cites as evidence whereby "we might know our subjection to God's authority" (1987, 25), support the contention that regardless of God's sanctions for morality, man's "relationship to God" is the source of his moral obligation? Since Locke does not say that the rules taught by this scientific morality constitute law, without which there can be no duty, there seems to be no obligation to obey these rules despite man's "relationship to God" as described here. Or might there not be obligation? If the science can demonstrate that the "supreme Being, *infinite in Power*" annexes sanctions to its rules which are not the "natural products and consequences" of men's actions, then those rules can constitute law, and there can be obligation (but cf. note 13 below). But in this case it is, again, man's relationship to a law-making and -enforcing God that is the source of his obligation.

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Under one, the law of nature is not worth obeying unless there is an afterlife with sanctions for obedience and disobedience, i.e., the law is intrinsically unreasonable without the added support of the afterlife. If this is the case, then there is a fundamental disharmony between human nature and the law of nature, which only God's sanctions can overcome. But depending on the distance between the law's commands and what is good for human nature, those sanctions might begin to appear as blunt instruments of coercion or even of tyranny. We may, however, avoid the troubling questions raised by this line of thought if we take a different view of the law of nature, namely, that it is reasonable, but men are too unreasonable to live by it and need the incentive provided by the afterlife to prevent their going astray. Perhaps as Locke's contemporary William Popple argued, the "wilful 'Corruption into which Mankind has fall'n' made the extra incentives of revealed religion crucial to the maintenance of the moral order" (paraphrased in Spellman 1988a, 135). This latter view of the law of nature has been echoed by several scholars, like Tully, who argues that "[r]ewards and punishments do not function as the ground of obligation" but rather "as psychological inducements to the man who does not control his desires with his reason" (1980, 43; cf. Dunn 1969, 189–90; Moore 1980, 63; Spellman 1988a, 120; Yolton 1958, 491–92).

Now we know that at least a substantial portion of the law of nature is good for society: that portion which the ancients viewed as "bonds of society and conveniencies of common life." Surely this portion, at least, is worth obeying regardless of the afterlife; since men live in society, their happiness seems linked to that of society (cf. *Essay* I.iii.6). A short-sighted, unreasonable calculation of immediate interests might lead men away from the law, but if they understood their true interests, they would see the advantages of obeying it and hence its reasonableness—even if there were no afterlife to support it. Such a law of nature would be fully choiceworthy but not obligatory—and hence not true law "properly so called"—since only sanctions from a lawmaker establish obligation. Although men would have sufficient motivation to follow the law if they could see clearly, only additional sanctions from God would establish the *obligation* to do so. But the obligation added to the law by the afterlife would then appear a mere addition to entice men to live up to their true interests, which they are too unreasonable to see. And knowledge of how to live would not depend fundamentally on knowledge of the afterlife.

Locke does sometimes encourage this view of the law of nature. "The knowledge of morality makes but a slow progress . . . in the world" because of men's "passions, vices, and mistaken interests" (§ 241[140]). But in the same breath he attributes this slow progress to men's "necessities." One necessity is the pursuit of happiness, and the law of nature does not always seem conducive to this pursuit: "Mankind, who are and *must* be allowed to pursue their happiness, nay, *cannot be hindered;* could not but think them-

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selves excused from a strict observation of rules, which *appeared* so little to consist of their chief end, happiness; whilst they kept them from the enjoyments of this life; and they had little evidence and security of another" (§ 245[149], emphasis added). This seems to imply that the law of nature is unreasonable without an afterlife; observation of the law of nature appears to interfere with happiness. Only the distinction between appearance and reality keeps us from calling this the necessary consequence of Locke's statement, for he says that these rules "appeared" inconsistent with happiness, not that they were inconsistent.

But on closer inspection the apparent inconsistency seems very real. Locke says that "difficulties and obstacles . . . lie in the way" of "a virtuous and pious life," and "pains and hardships" afflict those who stick "firm to their duties" (ibid.). Can God's sanctions, then, be simply extra incentives to men to obey the reasonable law of nature? Locke further suggests that the law of nature really—not just apparently—conflicts with happiness, and therefore is not worth obeying apart from divine sanctions, when he calls the "inconveniencies" of virtue "visible" and "the rewards doubtful." Moreover, he says simply that "[v]irtue and prosperity *do not* often accompany one another" (ibid., emphasis added). The apparent discrepancy between the law of nature and happiness seems very real in light of the real and not merely apparent discrepancy between virtue and prosperity. This implies that the law of nature is unreasonable unless there is an afterlife with sanctions to support it. This does not mean that this law is unreasonable, only that its reasonableness depends on that of the afterlife.

The intrinsic dependence of the law of nature on sanctions enforced in an afterlife also emerges from Locke's statement that it "should seem, by the little that has hitherto been done in it, that it is too hard a task for unassisted reason to establish morality in all its parts, upon its true foundation, with a clear and convincing light" (§ 241[139]). What is this "true foundation"? Since the ancients had established their just measures of right and wrong as socially useful but not upon the "true foundations" of obligation, the true foundation upon which unassisted reason "has not hitherto" established morality is obligation, which Locke says stems from rewards and punishments. These sanctions are found in heaven and hell, the view of which will "give attractions and encouragements to virtue which *reason* and interest and the care of ourselves, cannot but allow and prefer. Upon this foundation, *and upon this only*, morality stands firm, and may defy all competition" (§ 245[150–51], emphasis added). Again, could Locke mean merely that the real choiceworthiness of morality is not fully visible to unreasonable men until they see the sanctions of the afterlife? Reason "cannot but allow and prefer" these sanctions; Locke does not say that reason "cannot but allow and prefer" morality independent of these sanctions. After describing the only firm support for morality, Locke says that this "makes it more than a

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name; a substantial good, worth all our aims and endeavors." The transformation from a name to a substantial good—not a visible good—is not a transformation in mere appearance but rather a transformation from a mere appearance to a substance, a reality. Only if there is an afterlife with sanctions for the law of nature should it always be obeyed; only then is the law reasonable. This means that in the absence of an afterlife, to deviate from the law is not always to go astray; the afterlife's sanctions are not merely extra incentives to elicit obedience to an otherwise unreasonable law. A reasonable attitude to the law of nature is thus mercenary.[11]

But can reason demonstrate the existence of the afterlife? If it cannot, it is unsurprising that it should seem "too hard a task for unassisted reason to establish morality" properly. Locke allows us to believe that reason can demonstrate the existence of the afterlife by saying that before Christ some men were dimly aware of its existence: "Before our Saviour's time the doctrine of a future state" was "not wholly hid. . . . It was an imperfect view of reason" (ibid.). But the joke is on us if we think that before Christ reason could have demonstrated the existence of the afterlife. If it had, reason would stand revealed as untrustworthy. For before Christ redeemed mankind by dying on the cross, there was no afterlife. Because of Adam's sin men had been deprived of immortality, to which Locke says they had no right anyway (§ 6[7]);[12] "death came on all men by Adam's sin" (§ 3[6]). "From this estate of death, Jesus Christ restores all mankind to life" (§ 8[9]); Jesus died so that men might live. It is only through the new Christian dispensation that men can attain the afterlife.

What is the source of the knowledge that before Christ there was no afterlife and that after him there is one? At least at first glance it seems not to be reason but rather Jesus' revelation, for he "brought life and immortality to

[11] Dunn blurs the mercenariness in Locke's account of the reasonableness of performing obligations by referring to "the calling:" although from 1676 on, Locke's "broadly hedonistic theory of the will . . . led him to analyse human obligation as the rationally calculated maximization of individual utility, it is essential to note that he believed that rational men would spend a considerable portion of their time contemplating the rewards and punishments of a future state. . . . [But t]he utility which is advocated is . . . the spiritual and eventually heavenly utility of labouring industriously in the calling" (1969, 195–96). But this is merely to explain the reason for performing a duty in terms of another duty, for the "calling" is the duty to perform the functions of the station in which God places one (245–61); even Locke's scholarly activity is explained as a dutiful hearkening to the calling (251). Dunn thus avoids the question of why one should perform duty *per se*, which Locke answers by a mercenary appeal to rewards and punishments which *follow upon* an action and do not inhere in it; rewards and punishments in the afterlife are not part of laboring industriously in an earthly calling.

[12] This conflicts egregiously with the view subsequently expressed (e.g., § 9[9]) that complete righteousness entitles one to eternal life. Since no man was ever completely righteous, this seems a moot point, but we should note that even if a man had deserved eternal life, Adam's sin deprived him of it. It seems merely coincidental that no man ever deserved it. This undermines God's justice, contrary to Locke's argument at the beginning of the *Reasonableness*.

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light" (§ 245[150]). Now reason may help to show this. Locke argues from divine justice at the beginning of his essay to show that Adam's sin condemned men not to an afterlife in hell but to mortality and hence to show that before Christ there was no afterlife. It is Jesus, however, who reveals the afterlife that He brings men. That men may now live in the hereafter depends upon a divine act, and knowledge of that act depends upon the word of God as revealed through Jesus. Reason cannot vouch for the existence of the afterlife; "that the dead shall rise, and live again" is "beyond the Discovery of *Reason*" (*Essay* IV.xviii.7).[13] The reasonableness of belief in the afterlife thus depends upon the reasonableness of accepting a revelation whose content reason cannot prove, which means that belief in the afterlife is not reasonable.

But this difficulty can be overcome if reason can prove that this revelation is true, that it really comes from God (cf. *Essay* IV.xviii.8). Locke asserts that "the truth and obligation" of Christian law "are put past doubt by the evidence of [Jesus'] mission" (§ 242[143]). If reason can determine that a revelation truly comes from God, who would be so unreasonable as to suspend acceptance of its content until reason fully vouches for this content? Not Locke (cf. *Essay* IV.xvi.14). So what is the evidence of Jesus' mission which proves to reason that his revelation truly comes from God? How did Jesus "show his commission from heaven"? Here Locke says only that "his miracles show it." The miracle of Jesus' resurrection is "the great evidence that Jesus was the 'Son of God'" (§ 175[108]). Jesus himself thought his miracles "a sufficient declaration . . . that he was the Messiah" (§ 90[49]). In fact, according to Locke miracles comprised one of only three ways by which Jesus revealed his mission, the other two being circumlocutions and "plain and direct words" (§§ 57–61[32–35]). Since the latter two are only hearsay and not evidence to reason, miracles alone seem capable of proving to reason that the Christian revelation truly comes from God.

And how do miracles prove this? Locke's sole argument is manifestly ironic: Jesus' miracles "never were nor could be denied by any of the ene-

[13]This appears contradicted by Locke's saying that "it is evident, that he who made us at first begin to subsist here . . . can and will restore us to the like state of Sensibility in another World, and make us capable there to receive the Retribution he has designed to Men, according to their doings in this Life" (*Essay* IV.iii.6). But a few sentences earlier Locke says that "it becomes the Modesty of Philosophy, not to pronounce Magisterially, where we want that Evidence that can produce Knowledge." When Locke offers his only systematic proof in the *Essay* of the existence of "a god" (IV.x), "that proof does not so much as mention heaven, hell, the immortality of the soul . . . or divine judgment or punishment of any kind, and utterly fails to establish the omnipotence of the god in question" (Pangle 1988, 198). Since Locke offers no "Evidence that can produce Knowledge" of the creator's ability to restore us to "another World," his magisterial pronouncement seems not to become "the Modesty of Philosophy," and I believe Locke thus intimates that in boldly affirming the creator's ability to restore us, he does not speak as a philosopher; he does not express his considered judgment.

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mies, or opposers of Christianity" (§ 237[135]). This argument seems refuted by the mere existence of non-Christians who deny Jesus' miracles, such as the deists for whom Locke "chiefly designed" his book (*Second Vindication,* Locke 1823, 7:265, 375; cf. Strauss 1953, 210–11). Or, if one can accept miracles but oppose Christianity, then miracles do not sufficiently confirm the truth of the Christian revelation. That Locke's argument is deficient is obvious, but those deficiencies should be spelled out since we have been led in the *Reasonableness* to see that the whole reasonableness of accepting the law of nature rests on this slender argument.

Since assent to Jesus' miracles seems to be the mark of Christian believers (§ 29[18]), it seems strange that men could accept his miracles but oppose Christianity. Yet Locke points to such men in the *Reasonableness,* and in doing so, he subtly indicates why he considers miracles insufficient to confirm the truth of Christianity. The Jews' chief priests and pharisees resolved to put Jesus to death precisely because of his miracles (§ 68[38]). They accepted his miracles, but not as proving that he was the Messiah, for they considered him a false prophet (§ 137[80]); they believed "he cast out devils by Beelzebub" (§ 90[49]). They rejected Jesus because he did not conform to prior prophecies about the Messiah.[14] The Biblical problem of false prophecy provides sufficient grounds for doubting the confirmation of Jesus' mission allegedly offered by his miracles. Moreover, as Zuckert (1986, 198) points out, Locke's stress on the example of the emperor Julian to prove the certainty of Jesus' miracles "entirely undercuts the argument for miracles . . . in a way Locke must have meant to convey." Julian is said to have accepted Jesus' miracles,[15] "which being granted, the truth of our Saviour's doctrine and mission unavoidably follows" (§ 240[138]). But Locke calls Julian one of "the enemies of Christianity," so that truth is in fact avoidable. Locke does not comment on the glaring contradiction of his argument which he here brings to light.

It thus is not true that "where the miracle is admitted, the doctrine cannot be rejected" ("A Discourse of Miracles," Locke 1823, 9:259). Miracles need

[14] I am indebted to Clifford Orwin for my awareness of the following feature of the *Reasonableness.* Locke announces that he will interpret Scripture in light of "the plain direct meaning of the words and phrases; such as they may be supposed to have had in the mouths of the speakers, who used them according to the language of that time and country wherein they lived" (§ 1[5]). By this standard Jesus was at most an erstwhile Messiah because the speakers in "that time and country" meant by "Messiah" something quite different from what Christians have meant since. They meant "a temporal prince and deliverer," "a mighty temporal prince" (§§ 117, 140[66, 82]; cf. §§ 38, 53–54, 74, 98, 103, 106, 131, 141, 155–56, 161, 183 [22, 29–30, 41, 52, 55, 57, 76, 83, 93–95, 99, 113]). In this light Jesus' disguised claim to Messiahship was a claim to be the liberator of the Jews, and Christianity appears as an attempt after the fact to make the most of Jesus' failure as a liberator (cf. esp. (§§ 77–78, 155[43–44, 93]).

[15] "Locke strongly overinterprets Julian's comments on the miracles of the Christians as implying an acceptance of their character as authentic miracles" (Zuckert 1986, 198).

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not come from God; false prophets may perform them. But "God can never be thought to suffer that a lie, set up in opposition to a truth coming from him, should be backed with a greater power than he will show for the confirmation and propagation of a doctrine which he has revealed, to the end it might be believed" (9:260); must not, then, Jesus' miracles be accepted as divine? But the fact that "God's power is paramount to all" does not mean that what men take to be supported by God's power is in fact so supported. Locke admits that Jesus' miracles may not be divine: "the truth of his mission will stand firm and unquestionable, till any one rising up in opposition to him shall do greater miracles than he and his apostles did" (9:260–61). This is hardly a ringing vindication of Christianity. If mere power is what confirms Christian faith, that faith can be only provisional. More importantly, faith can be no more than provisional insofar as it rests on miracles, for certainty about miracles is impossible without knowledge of what operations are "performable only by divine power," and we lack this knowledge (9:264). Like the *Reasonableness*, "A Discourse of Miracles" undercuts the vindication of Christianity allegedly provided by miracles.

Yet surely resurrection from the dead is performable only by divine power. Does not Jesus' resurrection "show his commission from heaven" (not to mention providing tangible evidence of an afterlife)? For "those who believed him to be risen from the dead, could not doubt of his being the Messiah" (§ 32[20]). Since Locke clearly understands the Jews as well as Julian to have doubted of his being the Messiah, it is this miracle above all which he must understand them to have rejected (cf. § 42[25]). (To argue that they accepted it would be to concede that even resurrection need not be taken as a sign of divine power.) The simplest response to the argument that Jesus' miracles "never were nor could be denied by any of the enemies, or opposers of Christianity" is thus the obvious one: they were. The more complicated response, to which Locke points through the manifestly ironic example of Julian, deprives his argument of all force: Jesus' miracles need not be taken to prove "the truth of our Saviour's doctrine and mission," for men who are said to have accepted them were nonetheless "enemies or opposers of Christianity." Either response will do.

Reason thus cannot rely on Jesus' alleged miracles to justify accepting his revelation. Reason therefore cannot rely on his revelation to demonstrate the existence of the afterlife, and it therefore cannot know the afterlife. Not knowing the afterlife, it cannot know the sanctions making the law of nature obligatory and thus cannot know the law as a law. Hence, reason cannot know the law of nature. The law of nature being the law of reason (§ 14[11]), there is no law of nature according to Locke. And since that law is the bedrock of Christianity, Christianity is unfounded. This is the conclusion to which the argument of the *Reasonableness* inexorably points.

But perhaps reason can know the afterlife without relying on Jesus' reve-

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lation. For, Locke says, reason can prove that God is merciful (§ 231[133]; but cf. § 228[129] and Pangle 1988, 160, on the works of nature as showing God's wisdom and power but not his care of mankind). Surely a merciful God would grant good men, at least, eternal life (cf. Zuckert 1986, 193–94). Thus, if reason had demonstrated the existence of the afterlife before Christ, it would not have been entirely mistaken; the afterlife may not have existed at the time, but a merciful God would somehow make it available to men, even if it meant sending his son to die for men. And he would make it available to all men, not just those fortunate enough to learn of Jesus through the Gospel. Accordingly, although Locke begins by saying that salvation depends upon accepting the single truth that Jesus was the Messiah, he winds up contradicting himself by saying that one may be saved even if completely ignorant of Jesus, for God "will require of every man, 'according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not'" (§ 231[132]). Ignoring the contradiction, Locke says that reason alone could show men that God "would forgive his frail offspring, if they acknowledged their faults, disapproved the iniquity of their transgressions, begged his pardon, and resolved in earnest . . . to conform their actions" to his law (§ 232[133]). Reason could thus show the way to an afterlife which reason could be confident a merciful God would grant worthy men.

Locke's full argument, however, undermines the contention that knowledge of God's mercy leads to knowledge of the afterlife. Redemption through faith in Jesus or through section 232's contrite promise to obey the law moderates the harshness of the law of works. Is this moderation reasonable? If it is, why did God originally judge men so strictly? Locke answers this latter question in section 14 by saying that God's reasonableness demanded such harsh judgment. This conflicts sharply with the claim that reason can know God to be forgiving. The tension between God's reasonableness and his mercy makes it impossible according to Locke for unassisted reason to derive the existence of the afterlife from a knowledge of God's mercy. Reason remains unable to know the afterlife, and the law of nature which rests on the afterlife remains unreasonable.

This, however, does not mean that the entire law of nature is unreasonable but only those precepts which reasonable men would not obey if sanctions did not exist for them in an afterlife (cf. Strauss 1953, 212). For "[t]he law of nature, is the law of convenience too" (§ 242[142]). Those precepts which are enforced by rewards and punishments in this life are reasonable, such as just measures of right and wrong which are bonds of society and conveniencies of common life, such as the principles of the *Second Treatise*. One's compliance with such precepts is reasonable because it is generally in one's interest as a member of society to live peaceably in a peaceable, prosperous society. The oft-noted gap between the individual's and the common good can be narrowed considerably if the common good demands little sacrifice

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from individuals, which is possible if society is organized according to a law of nature whose commands do not chafe human nature much, a law devoted to life, liberty, and property. Such a this-worldly law of nature, unsupported by "the true ground of Morality . . . the Will and Law of a God, who . . . has in his Hand Rewards and Punishments," may not deserve the name "moral," but "then so much the worse for that name" (Pangle 1988, 203–204). But why does Locke nurture a belief in a Christian God to support his this-worldly law of nature? The most obvious reason is the fact that the gap between the individual's and the common good, though narrowed, remains, and the belief in this God helps to close it. Christianity, reinterpreted on the surface of the *Reasonableness* as a simple faith in Jesus and a divine sanction for the law of nature, is a useful support for Locke's rational morality.

The Mercenary Covenant

The tension noted above between God's reasonableness and his mercy makes it difficult to explain why, after depriving men of immortality because of Adam's sin, God changed his mind and restored immortality through Jesus' mission. In resolving this difficulty Locke refashions the Lord after his own image, making Jesus not only unopposed to selfishness but a very model of it, whose example justifies our attending to nothing but rewards and punishments in following the law of nature: we need have no qualms about the reasonable pursuit of their interests. To explain why a reasonable God would change his mind and restore the afterlife to men, we might look to the effect his change of heart has upon men. Now without the mercy granted men in the law of faith, there would be no incentive for men to strive to obey God's law of works, for according to Locke the law is not obligatory without the afterlife, and without the law of faith, attaining the afterlife is impossible. We might think, then, that God gave men the law of faith to make it reasonable to strive to obey the law as closely as possible. But then why did not God give men from the very beginning a law that they had reason to strive to obey? The argument that God simply wished to affect human behavior does not explain God's sudden show of mercy.

If God's relationship with men is thus insufficient to explain his change of heart, attributing responsibility to Jesus seems reasonable, even if the effects of this attribution are comic or blasphemous. Sections 172–78 (105–11) explain how the new covenant, with its law of faith, came about through Jesus. In turning to these sections Locke says that in them we shall find the correct way to explain God's change of heart and the emergence of the new covenant: "The reasonableness or rather necessity of [the new covenant] that we may the better comprehend, we must a little look back to what was said in the beginning" (§ 172[105]). After recalling that Adam's sin brought mortality

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upon all men, Locke says that God sent Jesus into the world "out of his infinite mercy, willing to bestow eternal life on mortal men" (§ 174[106]).

But this, of course, still does not explain why God waited until then to show mercy to mortal men. Unwilling to leave the explanation at "his infinite mercy," Locke at the end of this section finally has recourse to another motive: "Thus God, we see, designed his Son Jesus Christ . . . an everlasting kingdom in heaven" (§ 178[109]). There could be no subjects for the kingdom unless men were able to attain an afterlife in heaven, so God had to relax the standards for access to the afterlife; he did so by giving men a new covenant which allowed their faith to compensate for their deficiencies in obeying the law of works.[16] Had it not been for God's care for Jesus and his desire to give Jesus a kingdom, we would not, it seems, have the law of faith or access to the afterlife. Not a desire to make men more lawful and to promote harmony on earth but a desire to set up his son in the family business was what prompted the new covenant. This hardly conforms to the traditional Christian understanding of God's care for mankind. Locke's explanation for the new covenant is reasonable but at the expense of the orthodox Christian version of God. Now by making the law of nature worth obeying for men collectively and individually, by harmonizing social and private interests, the new covenant may be good for men, but it did not emerge from a concern for their good—unless Jesus cared about and died for them rather than for his future kingdom.

But Jesus' concern for men seems limited as well, for he seems mainly to have died for the sake of the kingdom God promised him: "his obedience and suffering was rewarded with a kingdom . . . which it is evident. . .he had a regard to in his sufferings" (§ 177[109]; cf. *Second Vindication*, Locke 1823, 7:235). Jesus may have died obediently for men, but it seems that he would not have done so were it not for the reward of a kingdom. His "morality," his obedience to his Father's wishes, is mercenary. The divine Jesus

[16]This covenant, of course, does not grant all men entrance into the kingdom of God; some are damned to hell, which was not possible before Christ and the new covenant. Is there something unreasonable or unjust about a purportedly merciful covenant which damns some men to hell even though before Christ "it seems the unalterable purpose of the divine justice . . . that the wages of sin" be death, not hell (§ 10[10])? In the *Reasonableness* Locke seems to equivocate on the existence of hell. He allows the Bible's affirmation of the existence of hell to emerge clearly in certain passages, but in other passages he refrains from affirming its existence in his own name; contrast especially § 220 (126) with §§ 221, 223, and 226 (126–27). The clearest evidence that Locke finds punishment in hell problematic is his presentation of Jesus' apologetic attempt to explain it. Jesus does not justify his rewarding of the good, but "he gives a reason of the necessity of his judging and condemning those who have done evil, in the following words . . . 'I can of myself do nothing. As I hear I judge; and my judgment is just; because I seek not my own will, but the will of my Father who hath sent me' " (§ 221[126]). Jesus, as presented by Locke, evidently feels compelled to explain his sentencing evildoers to damnation, and he confesses almost sheepishly that he doesn't make the rules, he just applies them.

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is not above the human concern for rewards. Jesus' mercenariness sets no high standard for us; rather, it justifies our mercenariness. Just as he would not have died without a reward, no one need accept him as Lord without a reward. Rather than order men to receive Jesus as Lord, God "proposed to the children of men, that as many of them would receive [Jesus] for their King and Ruler; should have all their past sins . . . forgiven them: and if for the future they lived in a sincere obedience to his law . . . their faith . . . should be accounted to them for righteousness . . . in the sight of God; who . . . did thus justify, or make them just, and thereby capable of eternal life" (§ 178[110–11]).[17]

The covenant is thus a true contract between men and God. Without the reward of eternal life, there would be no reason to enter into the covenant and try to live in a sincere obedience to the law. Recognizing this, God justly offers us this reward as consideration for our promise to strive to obey the law. He demands no more of us than he does of his own son. Locke's reinterpretation of the Christian covenant thus sanctifies our guiding our behavior only by rewards and punishments.

We may legitimately wonder what grounds Locke might have for thinking that men would accept the reinterpretation of Christianity offered on the surface of the *Reasonableness*. What kind of a God offers us a contract and demands of us no more than a rational, self-interested morality? And is a mercenary morality really moral? Precisely because Locke's this-worldly law of nature may not deserve the name "moral," we have sufficient reason to doubt that God supports it and only it, and we have reason to doubt that men will believe God stands foursquare behind it. Yet to the extent that the principle of self-interest rightly understood governs in those nations influenced by Locke, to the extent that morality does not demand great sacrifices of men and even promotes itself as being in their interest, Locke's religious project seems to have succeeded. This is not to say that men understand the full implications of Locke's revised Christianity. It would be difficult, to say the least, to embrace Christianity on Locke's terms if one fully understood them. But by reducing Christianity to a simple faith in Jesus (or merely in a God who shows mercy to the contrite), Locke has taken God off our minds. And by reinterpreting God as supporting his rational law of nature, Locke has left him in our conscience, but it is a conscience which sees little tension between self-interest and morality. Locke offers us a relatively painless morality backed by a kinder, gentler God. The success of Locke's religious project testifies both to the ability of self-interest to present and even to see

[17] It is far from clear that the Bible agrees with Locke's presentation of God as negotiating a contract with men which they are free to reject. If God is such a negotiator, why do those who rejected the apostolic preachers—and therewith, it seems, the covenant—incur "a heavier doom than Sodom and Gomorrah, at the day of judgment" (§ 97[51])? Cf. (§§ 110, 161 (60, 99). The tractableness of the Bible to Locke's reasonable manipulations is limited.

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itself in moral garb and to the willingness of morality to come to terms with self-interest.

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