

Locke's Anthropology: Travel, Innateness, and the Exercise of Reason

Previous accounts of Locke's ethnographic perspective on human custom have commonly focused on what might be called his political anthropology, above all in the *Second Treatise* and Locke's view of the state of nature. His discussion of the origins of government, the function of money in transforming political relations, and the role of property led him to comment suggestively on historical instances of Amerindian practice derived from his reading of travel literature.¹ Interesting though they are, these examples represent only a part of Locke's engagement with questions of custom and belief around the world and his view of the primitive. In the first book of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke developed a case against innate ideas and principles with far reaching anthropological implications, causing alarm to his contemporaries in ways that his travel references in the *Treatises*, on the whole, did not. Rather than dwell on the controversy, I propose to investigate the anthropological dimension of Locke's critique in some detail, initially focusing on how he used his sources and represented what they had to say.

The 'anthropological' side of Locke's strategy against innateness was to point out the existence of irreducible cultural diversity, which he refused to write off as degeneracy caused by education or the results of the Fall.² In this context, we can trace Locke's engagement with the phenomenon of cultural diversity to two principal sources.³ In the first instance, his way of approaching human nature through a study of customs and manners was indebted to the methodology of natural history. This approach emphasised the accumulation of evidence on a probabilistic basis without assuming a knowledge of essences in advance. From the perspective of such a natural history, Locke refuted the claim of innate ideas or principles by treating their existence as an empirical question, a matter of fact subject to determination through historical research.

The logic of Locke's position was based on the claim that attributions of innate principles, tendencies or ideas, required as *a necessary condition* the establishment of universal consent to an agreed set of moral tenets and beliefs

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(such as the idea of God). Accordingly, he made use of reports of cultural diversity to attack supposedly innate common notions or natural prolepses, drawing on a technique of argument well established in the sceptical tradition. Sceptics, both ancient and early modern, pointed to incommensurable customs and the existence of cultural difference in order to demonstrate the absence of universal consent and also to raise the criterion problem (i.e., the lack of a criterion for deciding differences of moral opinion). In so doing, Locke answered Stoic assumptions about a uniform human nature.⁴

The two sources of Locke's encounter with diversity converged in his reading of travel literature. This material not only confirmed the absence of unanimous consent, as Locke referenced it, but it also constituted up-to-date information, supplying empirical testimony on human practice which could be cross-checked and confirmed. Strictly speaking, Locke's argument against innateness did not require the extended attention he gave to accounts of travel to distant parts of the world. Variation in opinion and belief of almost any kind (at home as much as abroad) would have been sufficient for his needs. But there is no doubt that he regarded himself as strengthening the case against unanimous consent or a *consensus gentium* by surveying the testimony of travellers so carefully. The fact that 'whole Nations' (I.iii.9) dissented from what allegedly unified mankind lent credence to the view that no internal rules or principles inhabited the soul. Those closest to nature – primitive peoples – evidently lacked the requisite knowledge or tendency to embrace appropriate moral practices and religious beliefs. Polite nations, whom we might have expected to benefit from learning and inquiry, observed the same lack of support for these basic notions.

Thus, while he was laying the groundwork for a new theory of knowledge, one that abandoned innateness in favour of a new way of ideas, Locke was also advancing an anthropology with important consequences. Yet despite Locke's explicit citations to back up his statements, inviting scrutiny of his sources, the actual texts in question are sometimes more problematic than Locke made them appear, notably in the case of the 'atheist nations' which failed to give witness to an innate idea of God.

In the second half of the essay I look more closely at the predicament of primitive peoples in Locke's philosophy. If neither innateness nor general agreement existed as a means of accessing moral truth, what prospect did such peoples have for gaining insight into ethical principles and the law of nature? Locke's fundamental belief in the power of reason is crucial in many respects, but we still have to confront the consequences of his empiricism. The dependence of reason on ideas and ideas on environment potentially placed a crippling limitation on the scope of reflection possible in underdeveloped societies. Finally, I conclude with a comparative discussion of Locke's perspective in the *Two Treatises of Government*.

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I

Locke's attack on innateness had several components. He began with allegedly innate intellectual principles or maxims before moving on to moral matters and finally to innate ideas, the most important of which is the idea of God. The anthropological dimension of his critique focused largely on the latter two areas – ethics and religion. In both these domains Locke considered whether primitive as well as polite nations assent universally to the idea of the divine and to shared moral principles.

On the question of moral practice, Locke could establish his point without much difficulty. Reports of barbarism and savagery were a stock in trade of travel writing and Locke cited them to show the lack of unanimity in what constituted acceptable moral action. He was essentially true to this literary form when he remarked on incidents of child-murder, parricide, and other abominations as matters routinely described by travellers in various countries.⁵ Locke made reference to two Catholic missionaries, Johann Grueber and Arcangelo Lamberti. Grueber told of the abandoning of the sick in Asia and Lamberti of burying children alive 'without Scruple' in Mingrelia, a Christian country.⁶ Locke added that the classical scholar Isaac Vossius avowed there were places where people ate their own children, although the value of the report was diminished by the fact that Vossius did not name any of the countries in question or witness these events first-hand.⁷ Nor did Peter Martyr (Pietro Martire d'Anghiera), the Italian humanist historian at the court of Ferdinand and Isabella, and subsequently Charles V, who chronicled activities of exploration and conquest in the New World. Martyr alleged that the Caribs gelded their children to fatten them up and eat them.⁸ Martyr's report was complemented by information from the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, who claimed that in Peru children were begotten on female captives precisely to devour them, and when the women passed the age of child-bearing they too were dispatched and eaten.⁹ Garcilaso wrote with authority as the son of an Incan princess and a Spanish conquistador. Finally, Locke cited the practices of the Toupinamba in Brazil who upheld cannibalism and vengeance as virtuous actions, according to the Calvinist settler Jean de Léry.¹⁰ Locke's sources occasionally wrote at some remove from the original, but he did not misrepresent their testimony. He could also have backed them up with numerous other citations he recorded.¹¹

In the first four editions of the *Essay* he only included one example from a 'polite' people. Tactfully retaining the Latin of the original, Locke quoted the German nobleman Martin von Baumgarten's account of sexual habits maintained by Muslim holy-men in Egypt.¹² In the final edition he revised, Locke added that 'More of the same Kind' (I.iii. 9) could be found in the travels of the Roman aristocrat Pietro della Valle in Turkey.

Locke was able to advance the polemic against innateness by setting an important condition – he insisted that we must regard people's *actions* as the

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best interpreters of their thoughts.¹³ In other words, he required the defenders of innateness to establish the existence of consistent moral behaviour around the globe, or 'Conformity of Action' as he called it (I.iii.3). He therefore eliminated a possible rescuing strategy which might have claimed that while principles are shared, interpretations of them differ across mankind.

With this provision, Locke achieved his critique economically. No innate moral principles existed, as the testimony of diversity made clear. Yet diversity was by no means total. Some consistency was observable at a social and moral level across mankind even if one denied that it came from innate sources. The question was how to account for this degree of unity without supporting a Stoic reading of it. Locke's unwillingness to countenance the Stoic account appears in his interpretation of an important passage from Scripture. In St Paul's letter to the Romans, the apostle had described the morality of the gentiles to whom the Mosaic law had not been given. When these people nonetheless acted in a moral way, St Paul said this showed 'the work of the Law written in their hearts, their Consciences also bearing witness, and amongst one another their thoughts accusing or excusing' (2.14–15).¹⁴ Locke would have been well aware that many took this statement as affirming the innateness of moral principles and the law of nature.¹⁵ But when Locke quoted this remark in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), he expressly interpreted it not as a reference to anything innate, but rather as alluding to moral principles known by reason, his rationally derived law of nature.¹⁶

We might have expected Locke to account for social regularities on the basis, then, of reason. However, he adopted a different approach which we can describe as sociological in orientation. His argument appears in a number of contexts, but we can see its shape in a chapter originally intended for the *Essay* but abandoned, 'Of Ethick in General' (c. 1689). Locke observed that 'Some kinde of morality is to be found every where received'.¹⁷ It was not perfect or exact, but what he called a 'notion' of it existed everywhere. He had never heard of a nation which did not distinguish between virtue and vice, right and wrong, adopting what he called rules, boundaries and measures of some kind, although they were 'very different'. What is more, he considered it significant that morality had emerged generally in the world as a distinct subject of study from the provinces of theology or law, and was given over to philosophers, which argued that some kind of 'impression' existed in the mind telling of a 'discovery still amongst men of the law of nature, & a secret apprehension' of rules of action that differed from those inculcated by priests or lawyers.¹⁸

If anything, Locke seems to set up a basis for an account of morality on innate grounds. In fact he pursues a very different analysis. The philosophers who explored the subject failed to pursue their derivation of moral rules to the source, namely God, who meted out retribution, and as a result they enforced their rules with nothing more than the promise of reputation or shame. By definition, Locke confined such moral practice to the world of

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opinion, fashion, and local language.¹⁹ Thus, while offering a sociological and anthropological insight into how moral rules function in practice, Locke placed a strict limitation on this ethics.

Aspects of his argument survive in chapter three of Book I and in Locke's formulation of what he called the 'law of opinion or fashion' in the chapter 'Of Power' in Book II.²⁰ There he reached an optimistic conclusion, explaining that the law of opinion tended to coincide with the will of God. Even those who neglected to practice virtue nonetheless approved of good and condemned evil for the most part, which meant that despite corrupt manners, what he called the 'true boundaries of the Law of Nature' (II.xxviii.11) were still preserved.

By treating any convergence between social practice and the law of nature as a happy coincidence, Locke kept reason out of the equation and avoided an implausible analysis which would have overstated the extent of human rationality in his view. In an optimistic vein, Locke still had mankind replicating the law of nature; in his less sanguine moments, Locke remarked on how difficult it was to achieve a proper understanding of moral duty.²¹ The pivot in his position meant that he could account for confirmations of natural law without recourse to innateness and also provide an explanation for departures from it without the potential discomfort this caused to innatists.²²

The resourcefulness of Locke's position appears once again in his account of social utility. In the *Essay*, for example, Locke observed that God had providentially made virtue necessary to social life. Yet these rules were not built into our natures innately. Instead, self-interest and utility, as much as actual conviction, encouraged us to adhere to them.²³ Elsewhere, he could turn this view to advantage by detaching it from any contact with authentic morality, and maintaining that while societies might agree in employing the language of virtue, the actual demands placed on people were highly diverse. The only requirement was that such injunctions ensured the survival of the group and obedience to law and government.²⁴

We can see the development of the latter position in a journal entry of Locke's from 1678, made when he was reading Jean de Léry. Locke began by remarking: 'That vertue is but the name of such actions as are most conducing to the good of the society & are therefore by that society recommended by all meanes to the practise of the people seems to me very plain.'²⁵ He then observed that although the Tupinamba of Brazil had no notion of God or signs of any worship or religion, they nonetheless held that the virtuous would be rewarded after death by going to a place in the mountains where they would dance in beautiful gardens. For this society, virtue consisted of exacting revenge on their enemies and eating them, as he would later point out in the *Essay*. The effeminate, meanwhile, were visited with torments by the devil. If the allegation of atheism was correct, then by definition their views on the afterlife served nothing more than a social function.

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II

Locke's account of morality was bound up with his critique of the innate idea of God in several ways. His case against moral principles became even more convincing, he argued, if he could show that the supposition of an innate idea of God was false. After all, he reasoned, if any idea was likely to be innate, then surely it was the divine, and its absence would weigh heavily against the plausibility of moral principles having such a status. What is more, the lack of an innately held belief in God had further explanatory value in accounting for the confused and reprobate behaviour observed in the world. A proper concept of a creator and lawgiver who punished sins in the afterlife was necessary to achieve an adequate concept of duty. The Tupinamba travestied one part of this (the afterlife) in their belief system, contriving it only as a means of social control.

The stakes were that much higher, then, when it came to disputing the innateness of the idea of God. Locke employed the same strategy to establish his point: if the idea was indeed innate, then unanimity of belief in God had to be shown. The existence of atheist peoples, as reported in travel accounts, was sufficient to disprove the claim. Since much depended on Locke's sources of testimony at this point, we would do well to examine how he represented them. In fact, on closer inspection his reading of these texts was problematic in relation to a number of primitive as well as polite nations he described as atheist.

In the instance of the Tupinamba of Brazil, Locke came to this conclusion on the basis of chapter 16 of Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la Terre du Brésil*. Léry began the discussion of local religion with an important adage of Cicero's, namely, as he expressed it, 'that there is no people so brutish, nor any nation so barbarous and savage, as to have no feeling that there is a divinity'.²⁶ This pronouncement is important in relation to Locke not simply because it was widely quoted, not least by travellers,²⁷ but because it expressed the Stoic belief in common consent and was interpreted in Locke's time in relation to another Stoic concept, that human beings were endowed with natural prolepses leading them to the divine, which were identified with innate ideas. Locke was entitled, initially, to draw support from Léry. 'When I consider closely our Tupinamba of America', Léry said, 'I find myself somewhat at a loss in applying [Cicero's claim] to them.'²⁸ He asserted that they were 'utterly ignorant of the sole and true God', and unlike other pagans did not subscribe to a plurality of deities. On the contrary 'they neither confess nor worship any gods, either of heaven or of earth'.²⁹ Léry had observed no sacred rites among them or religious assembly, nor any form of prayer conducted either in private or public.

Thus far, Locke's inclusion of the Tupi in his list of atheists seems entirely warranted. But Léry's ethnography on this subject was complex and variable. He began to qualify his judgement by investigating the light they still possessed

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in the midst of shadows (*encor de lumiere, au milieu des espesses tenebres*). To start with they believed in the immortality of the soul and a place of future reward or punishment in the afterlife, as we have seen, according to the merits of the deceased. They also trembled when they heard thunder and Léry attached some significance to this fact. Closer consideration of the phenomenon suggested that they were forced to acknowledge a higher and irresistible power, and on this basis Léry concluded that 'Cicero's adage is verified through them after all: indeed, there is no people that does not have the feeling [*sentiment*] that there is a divinity'.³⁰ The 'Americans' did not verbally assent to a deity, but Léry now maintained that they had an internal conviction which made them subject to judgement and unable to plead ignorance. They lived in darkness but 'the seed [*semence*] of religion (if, after all, what they do deserves that name) germinates in them and cannot be extinguished'.³¹ A Stoic reader would have found this sufficient to claim that a divine spark or *igniculus*, common to all mankind, remained within them.³² In support of this assessment he mentioned once again their belief in the soul's immortality and their fear of thunder, as well as the fact that devils and evil spirits afflicted them, and finally the existence of what he called 'false prophets' known as *caraiibes* who travelled from village to village and organised religious meetings. He contradicted his earlier assertion that they had no religious assemblies by describing at length a solemn gathering which he attended, something convened by the *caraiibes* every three or four years. There was much to object to in the practice of these prophets, but Léry was also ravished by the harmonious chanting of the congregation and clearly found it expressive of something that might bring them to the true faith. Moments of slim optimism competed with his Calvinist view of human degeneration, but Léry's account of the Tupinamba was certainly not one in which simple 'atheism' told the whole of the story. Locke clearly knew the chapter well, but he elided Léry's interpretation in favour of a strict insistence on their atheism. By doing so he negated the category of 'feeling' or 'sentiment' as a means of rescuing human uniformity.

The same pattern appears in Locke's inclusion in the *Essay* of the Carib Indians on his list of the atheist peoples. In this instance alone, Locke does not cite a source, but it is likely he was drawing on Charles de Rochefort. We know that Locke read the English translation, *The History of the Caribby-Islands*, shortly after it was published in 1666.³³ Even if he did not have Rochefort in mind when mentioning the Caribs, he was 'responsible' for his testimony on them since he had indeed encountered it.

Rochefort was a French Protestant minister sent to the Caribbean by the congregation of La Rochelle. He returned in 1650 and later established himself in Rotterdam where his *Histoire naturelle et morale des Iles Antilles de l'Amérique* appeared in 1658.³⁴ When Rochefort addressed the question of religious belief among the Caribs in the text, he began by recalling Cicero's conviction that no nation existed without some 'opinion and perswasions of a Divinity', citing the *Tusculan Disputations*.³⁵ Rochefort concurred with this

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judgement, arguing that nature 'seems to have been so indulgent to Mankind, as to make some impression of a Divinity in the minds of Men', which he called a 'natural sentiment', appearing without instruction.³⁶

But experience had put these views to the test, and it was now difficult to 'make good' on Cicero's belief. In the Andes, Mexico, New France, New Holland, Brazil, Tierra del Fuego, and elsewhere, there existed people entirely lacking in religion, with no sign of revering a higher power, if historians of those regions could be credited. The same unfortunate conclusion seemed merited in the case of the Caribs. If Locke was drawing on Rochefort for support, he could have availed of it here.

However, Rochefort preserved his conviction in some form of innateness by saying that they had merely 'smother'd the apprehensions Nature had bestow'd on them'. As a result of the effort to extinguish what nature had endowed them with, no evidence emerged among them of any invocations, ceremonies or sacrifices demonstrating such a native belief, nor did they possess a word to express the concept of the Deity. When Rochefort came to describe their actual beliefs and practices, he encountered an obvious problem – the Caribs were not as devoid of worship as he had suggested, although he found it, in general, abhorrent. To negotiate the inconsistency, he continued to maintain that they possessed a 'natural sentiment' of God, a conception of some 'superior and obliging power' residing in Heaven. Despite their efforts to eradicate it from their consciences, there still 'remain'd in them some spark of that Knowledge'.³⁷ In effect, he proceeded with a Stoic account which regarded belief in God as a prolepsis, but one that required further development and intellectual nourishment. On this basis, Rochefort arrived at a conclusion which kept innate ideas intact. No matter how much the Caribs turned away from God, they could not help demonstrating some basis for belief, almost in spite of themselves. Their profound fear of thunder was evidence, for Rochefort as for Léry, that they recognised the divine, a notion 'imprinted by Nature on the minds of all men'. Their assiduous attempts to remove this conception therefore ended in failure, allowing Rochefort to reinstate Cicero's dictum, 'That it is innate, and as it were graven in the minds of men, that there is a Divinity'.³⁸

Locke's examples in the *Essay* of atheist peoples among the polite nations are subject to even greater dispute. In the first edition he referred only to the Siamese, but he later included the Chinese as well, based on recent information he had acquired. The Siamese instance was complicated from the start because Locke alluded to testimony which indicated that they were actually polytheists. For Locke this outlook was tantamount to atheism because it betrayed the fact that they possessed an inadequate conception of the divine: 'What true or tolerable Notion of a *Deity*, could they have, who acknowledged, and worshipped hundreds?' (I.iv.15).³⁹ Here his source was the narrative of the travels of Pierre Lambert de La Motte, bishop of Beirut and apostolic vicar, who arrived in the country in 1662.⁴⁰

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Locke strengthened his atheist interpretation of Siamese religion by going on to remark that, in fact, the ‘Theology of the *Siamites* . . . consists properly in acknowledging no God at all’ (I.iv.15). He adopted this conclusion on the basis of the abbé de Choisy’s account of Siam.⁴¹ In his travel journal, Choisy explained the Siamese term *niraphan* (nirvana) and described the story of the Siamese Buddhists’ ‘last god’: Somono-Ckodom (i.e., Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama), who was said to have died 2229 years ago.⁴² Since Somono-Ckodom [Buddha] was annihilated, Choisy continues, they now have no God, although the Buddhist monks continue to uphold his law. It was on this basis that he concluded that ‘their religion . . . consists properly in not recognising any God’.⁴³

Locke’s interpretation of Siamese religion was at the very least open to debate. In the fourth edition of the *Essay* (1700) he added Simon de La Loubère to his list of authorities on Siam. He too affirmed that the Siamese, according to Locke, wanted ‘the *Idea*, and Knowledge of God’ (I.iv.8), a fact which Locke said caused him surprise, evidently forgetting his existing conclusion in this and earlier editions of the *Essay*. La Loubère had travelled to Siam in a diplomatic capacity, charged by Louis XIV with a complex set of military, commercial and missionary objectives.⁴⁴ The embassy failed rather spectacularly and La Loubère returned after three months. On the basis of his short stay he produced a remarkably thorough and well-informed account, published in two volumes as *Du Royaume de Siam* (1691). In the key passage to which Locke directed the reader, La Loubère offers his interpretation of Siamese Buddhism. After discussing the transmigration of souls, nirvana, and the honour given to Siddhartha (Buddha) as the summit of virtue, he described this as the whole of Siamese doctrine and stated that he could not locate a true conception of the divine in it. His conclusion was predicated on the lack among the Siamese of any understanding of God as a governing figure who punished sin and rewarded virtue or as a first mover who created nature and its principle of order. On these grounds, La Loubère said, ‘I believe it may be asserted, that the *Siameses* have no *Idea* of any God, and that their Religion is reduced all intire to the worship of the dead.’⁴⁵ Thus, for La Loubère as much as for Locke, the deficiencies of their doctrine warranted their inclusion within the category of atheists, despite the fact that the Siamese had the appurtenances of religion, in terms of worship, prayer, priesthood, and a theology. Not every reader would have found their harsh verdict necessary, especially those intent on rescuing some form of universal consent.⁴⁶

In the fifth edition of the *Essay* (1706), Locke went further by placing the Chinese in the atheist camp: ‘the Missionaries of *China*’, he said, ‘even the Jesuits themselves, the great Encomiasts of the *Chineses*, do all to a Man agree and will convince us that the Sect of the *Litterati*, or *Learned*, keeping to the old Religion of *China* . . . are all of them *Atheist*’ (I.iv.8). This assertion is certainly untenable in claiming unanimity of opinion amongst Western missionaries about Chinese atheism. The best way to establish the

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contentiousness of this statement is to examine Locke's sources carefully. He cites two texts – the work of Domingo Fernández de Navarrete and the anonymous volume *Historia cultus Sinensium* (1700).

Navarrete was a Dominican missionary in China. Once the preserve of the Jesuits, proselytisation in China had been opened up to other religious orders in 1633 and an inevitable rivalry resulted. The Dominicans actively sought to question and discredit the Jesuit accommodation of Chinese rites (that is, the Jesuit characterisation of ancestor worship and sacrifice to Confucius as purely 'civil ceremonies') and the Jesuits' favourable interpretation of Confucian terms, which they squared with Catholic theology. Navarrete played a key part in this dispute. He returned to Spain where he published his *Tratados historicos, politicos, ethicos y religiosos de la monarchia de China* (1676). Like others in his order, Navarrete was convinced that the Chinese were atheists, but he went further by making use of testimony from a key Jesuit figure, Nicolò Longobardi (or Longobardo), who had succeeded Matteo Ricci as superior of the Jesuit mission in China. Longobardi disagreed with many of Ricci's conclusions about Confucianism and composed several treatises on this matter. Only one survived (dating from 1623–4), a unique if incomplete copy of which Navarrete obtained and published in his *Tratados*.⁴⁷ Locke could of course take some encouragement from this judgement but it was certainly false to maintain that all missionaries, Jesuit and otherwise, attributed atheism to the Chinese.⁴⁸

Locke's second source, the *Historia cultus Sinensium*, was equally problematic. This lengthy volume, consisting of numerous documents, was also produced in the midst of controversy over the Jesuit accommodation of Chinese rites and theology. A number of the pieces in the volume came from Charles Maigrot, apostolic vicar of the Fujian province. The category of apostolic vicar was created by Pope Alexander VII, who appointed missionaries to defunct bishoprics in order to avoid openly abrogating the privileges that the Portuguese enjoyed under the *Padroado Real*. The *Padroado* had given control over missions in Asia to the Portuguese who in turn had entrusted them to the Jesuits. As we have seen, this exclusivity was already being eroded. Under the papacy of Innocent XI, the apostolic vicars in China were entitled to demand an oath of obedience from other missionaries, but this right was disputed by the Jesuits. Maigrot attempted to enforce it in Fujian which placed him in conflict with members of the Society of Jesus. He was also at odds with them, like the Dominicans, because he too rejected the Jesuit position on Chinese tradition and doctrine. In 1693 he issued a *Mandatum seu Edictum* with seven prohibitions bearing on this controversy. The Jesuits once again questioned his authority to enforce the Mandate. In response, Maigrot delegated Nicolas Charmot to represent him in Rome and their joint literary and theological productions against the Chinese and the Jesuits appeared in the *Historia cultus Sinensium*.⁴⁹ Maigrot alleged that all Confucians were atheists, and he even found some support in references to Jesuit authorities like Matteo Ricci

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and Francesco Brancati, although he exaggerated what they had to say.⁵⁰ Locke's presentation of this argument, however, claims an unwarranted degree of consensus.⁵¹ The judgements advanced in the *Historia* were subject to considerable dispute.

In this sense Locke was giving us what can be called a sceptical anthropology, as opposed to a Stoic one predicated on human uniformity and natural internal principles or impulses.⁵² My point in discussing Locke's sources is to establish that the Stoic version is more viable than Locke makes out – viable that is, as a reading of these same sources. He clearly strained to make out his interpretation of the polite nations as atheists, but he evidently wanted them included in his critique. Why? Although Locke was drawn to the case of the primitive peoples, on the grounds that they stood closest to nature and should therefore exhibit the stamped character of an innate idea of God most clearly,⁵³ his examples could also be set aside as mere savage aberrations. Bishop Stillingfleet took this line in his response, adopting a familiar strategy.⁵⁴ Grotius had earlier employed a similar argument in defending common consent to the existence of God, excluding the barbarous and wild who dissented, just as he proved the law of nature *a posteriori* in reference to the consent of the politer nations.⁵⁵ The polite were therefore of some consequence in securing Locke's critique.

III

We should remember that Locke regarded himself as requiring only a single example of atheism (individual or collective) to establish his case, as he understood it (and as he argued in reply to Stillingfleet).⁵⁶ He demanded universal consent in a strict sense – any dissent would be enough to refute the innateness of the idea of God. If we grant Locke his critique, on his own terms, then we should consider its anthropological implications. On the whole, polite nations had an advantage in rectifying their inadequate conceptions because they cultivated learning and engaged in rational discussion of theological matters. The predicament of the underdeveloped was more precarious in this respect. How would they arrive at true notions of the divine and of moral duty, given the lack of innate ideas or principles to direct them?

Robert Boyle had broached this issue in a work that Locke knew well. Boyle's discussion occurred in the context of his defence of the orthodoxy of inquiry into nature. In *Some Considerations Touching the Usefulness of Experimental Naturall Philosophy* (1663), a text read very carefully by Locke,⁵⁷ he made the point that 'if there be, at this day, any Nations (as Navigators inform us there are in *Brasil*,⁵⁸ and some parts of the *Indies*) that worship no God, they consist not of Naturalists, but Bruit, and Irrational Barbarians, who may be supposed rather to ignore the Being of God, than to deny it.' Boyle affirmed the consonance between natural philosophy and religious belief. The atheist Brazilians

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were not, in this sense, 'naturalists' but individuals who simply failed to employ their reason. Initially he concerned himself with the matter of their irrationality, but he went on to question the problem of innateness:

And if it be a Truth that there are really such Atheistical People, it may serve to recommend to us the Study of Physiology, by shewing us, That without the help of any such innate belief, or persuasion of a God, as is suppos'd connatural to Man, Reason exercis'd upon the Objects the Creation presents us with, is sufficient to convince Philosophers of a Deity.⁵⁹

Boyle proceeded in a cautious manner, treating reports of unbelieving nations conditionally. Equally, he referred to innate principles as a supposition, and by calling them 'connatural' he used the term favoured by the Cambridge Platonists for describing such ideas.⁶⁰ Boyle made it clear, however, that mankind needed to recognise God's intention with the world, a task that could be accomplished without innate ideas: 'Beasts inhabit and enjoy the World: Man, if he will do more, must study, and (if I may so speak) Spiritualize it.'⁶¹ Reason had sufficient power to grasp the existence of God and to work out the consequences of our situation as created beings, a view that Locke accepted entirely.

Boyle's remark alerts us to the fact that in the absence of innate ideas, reason provided the means of access to religious truth and moral duty. Locke concurred. Although Locke undermined internal principles by stressing human diversity, he preserved the capacity of reason to rescue the situation, transcending local custom in favour of natural law. In connection with Locke's portrait of human nature, then, the final issue we must address is what level of rational ability he attributed to primitive peoples. If Locke denied them not only a set of predispositions toward the deity and the good, but also adequate mental power to exercise their limited stock of ideas, then inevitably they would fail to regulate their conduct properly.

In making the case against innate speculative principles – maxims such as '*Whatsoever is, is*' and '*Tis impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be*' – Locke invokes the savages to establish his point. If such principles exist innately, then surely they should emerge with some force in the thoughts in savages who are least corrupted by 'Custom, or borrowed Opinions; Learning, and Education'. These 'native Beams of Light', as Locke described them, should appear with as much conviction as their obvious 'love of Pleasure, and abhorrence of Pain'. But on examination we find:

Their Notions are few and narrow, borrowed only from those Objects, they have had most to do with, and which have made upon their Senses the frequentest and strongest Impressions And a young Savage has, perhaps, his Head fill'd with Love and Hunting, according to the fashion of his Tribe. But he that from a Child untaught, or a wild Inhabitant of the Woods, will expect these abstract Maxims, and reputed Principles of Sciences, will I fear, find himself mistaken. Such kind of general Propositions, are seldom mentioned in the Huts of *Indians*. (I.ii.27)

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Locke sets himself up as something of an authority on Indian conversation and mental life, while satirising those who naively insist on the purchase of various maxims in the soul. But his point about the Indian mind is worth pursuing. It is not immediately clear why, even when rejecting innate maxims, Locke should describe the range of Indian 'notions' as 'few and narrow', arising only from immediate experience. Children and idiots have an obvious excuse, but why should one assume that Indian conceptions extend no further than bows and arrows, love, and hunting? In Locke's draft of this passage, the formulation was even more troubling. In addition to universal principles of knowledge, he wondered what 'rules of morality' were to be found among the savages. Those who expected 'notions of a god, doctrines of morality, or fundamental rules of right & wrong' would find themselves mistaken.⁶²

Locke of course emphasised the power of the environment to shape ideas, and thus a correlation would obtain between the rudimentary material conditions of Indian life and the relative paucity of their ideas. In his chapter in the *Essay* on 'Number', Locke stated that he had conversed with some American Indians who, though they possessed 'quick and rational Parts enough', were unable to count to a thousand.⁶³ This occurred 'Because their Language being scanty, and accommodated only to the few necessaries of a needy simple Life, unacquainted either with Trade or Mathematicks, had no Words in it to stand for 1000'. He also noted in this passage L ry's report that the Tupinamba 'had no Names for numbers above 5' (II.xvi.6).⁶⁴

From one point of view, Locke is remarking on a predicament facing any group of people who lack certain experiences, regardless of whether they are primitive or polite. In his chapter on probability, for example, Locke relates an anecdote from a Dutch ambassador resident at the court of the King of Siam. While regaling the sovereign with stories of Holland, the diplomat mentioned that in his country it was occasionally so cold that water froze solid and became hard enough to bear the weight of an elephant. The king replied, '*Hitherto I have believed the strange Things you have told me, because I look upon you as a sober fair man, but now I am sure you lye*' (IV.xv.5).⁶⁵ Here Locke notes the difficulty of accepting testimony on matters of fact when they directly contradict one's own experience.⁶⁶ But the king lacks a corresponding physical impression (ice), rather than failing to exercise his mind with sufficient industry on an abstract topic. The narrow compass of Indian understanding seems to result from a mixture of the two pitfalls: on the one hand, their confined mode of life shelters them from a wider circle of impressions, but they also fail to enlarge the stock of what they have through rational application.⁶⁷

But the difficulties for so-called primitives in Locke's philosophy cannot be set aside so easily. The rudimentary condition of their existence means that they run the risk of missing out on a range of ideas of great importance. We can glimpse the problem in a passage translated by Locke from the moral essays of Pierre Nicole. In 1676–77, Locke translated three essays by Nicole,

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a French Jansenist. In the essay on the 'Weakness of Mankind', Nicole speculated on the mental life of various primitives, despairing over the neglect of reason. In Locke's version the passage reads:

And in Truth, if one takes a general Survey of the World, one shall find the Bulk of Mankind buried in a Stupidity so gross, that if it does not wholly dispossess them of their Reason, yet it leaves them so little Use of it, that one cannot but wonder how the Soul can be depressed into so low a Degree of Brutality. What does a *Canibal, Iroquoi, Brazilian, Negro, Cafer, Groenlander* or *Laplender* think on during his whole Life? The ordinary wants of the Body, and some dull ways of supplying them, Fishing and Hunting, Dancing, and Revenge on his Enemies, is the whole Compass of his Contemplations.⁶⁸

While offering an Augustinian outlook on human nature, Nicole drew attention to the sadly limited scope of ideas circulating in the savage mind.⁶⁹

Locke, who often altered Nicole's text when he translated it, kept close to the original in this case. Although we cannot infer from this fact alone that Locke accepted Nicole's assessment, we can compare it with a very similar passage contained in Locke's *Conduct of the Understanding*. In this lengthy piece, intended as a chapter of the *Essay*, Locke criticised the laziness of those who failed to use their minds and expand their horizons. He introduced an elaborate travel-metaphor of knowledge acquisition, common in his writing, and rebuked those who lived 'mued up within their own contracted Territories'. Locke illustrated his point by referring to the inhabitants of the Marian Islands, separated by the sea from contact with the rest of the world. Even after the Spaniards introduced the islanders to fire, a technology previously unknown to them, together with information on a range of nations 'abounding in Sciences, Arts and Conveniences of Life', they continued to regard themselves, Locke reported, 'as the happiest and wisest People of the Universe'.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, Locke continued,

no body, I think, will imagine them deep Naturalists, or solid Metaphysicians; no body will deem the quickest sighted amongst them to have very enlarg'd Views in Ethicks or Politicks, nor can any one allow the most capable amongst them to be advanced so far in his Understanding, as to have any other Knowledge but of the few things of his and the neighbouring Islands within his Commerce; but far enough from that comprehensive enlargement of Mind which adorns a Soul devoted to Truth, assisted with Letters, and a free consideration of the several Views and Sentiments of thinking Men of all sides.⁷¹

This statement offers a crucial insight into Locke's view of primitive peoples. He assumes that even the most advanced mind among them would lack an array of thoughts extending beyond their circle. This condition results from the fact they do not take part in conversation with 'thinking Men', balancing rival positions as they search for truth, aided by literacy.⁷² The consequences of linking the savages with illiterates in the *Essay* (I.ii.12) become clear in this passage. Ultimately their minds cannot attain a 'comprehensive enlargement'.

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From this mental impoverishment, we can infer, as Boyle did of the Brazilians, that the Marian islanders achieve little or nothing in terms of reflection on natural philosophy or metaphysics. Perhaps more importantly, their ethical and political conceptions will prove equally stunted. Locke had argued in the *Essay* that moral matters ‘require Reasoning and Discourse, and some Exercise of the Mind, to discover the certainty of their Truth’ (I.iii.1). In the absence of discourse and reasoning, little in the way of moral insight could be expected from those engaged in a rudimentary form of life.

Locke was certainly no primitivist. His epistemological theories supported the pessimistic conclusion that natives of these distant islands lacked a vital complement of ideas, and more damagingly that the range and capacity of their understandings were thereby reduced. There is something of a paradox in Locke’s position, however, given his commitment to the view, expressed elsewhere in the *Conduct*, that ‘The *Americans* are not all born with worse Understandings than the *Europeans* though we see none of them have such reaches in the Arts and Sciences.’⁷³ For Locke the exercise of reason remained possible, but the evidence he gleaned from travel writers, together with his own experience of the uncultivated, made him doubt the height the mind could reach in unfavourable conditions. To achieve sufficient moral sophistication one needed to enter a polite and civil world. This in turn explains why Locke deployed evidence of diversity to undermine innate moral principles, but kept the potential force of reason in place.

With that in mind we can return to the *Essay* and Locke’s final verdict on the subject, a mixture of Enlightenment liberality and disdain: ‘Had you or I, Locke addressed the reader, ‘been born at the Bay of *Soldania*, possibly our Thoughts, and Notions, had not exceeded those brutish ones of the *Hotentots* that inhabit there: And had the *Virginia* King *Apochancana*,⁷⁴ been educated in *England*, he had, perhaps, been as knowing a Divine, and as good a Mathematician, as any in it’ (I.iv.12). The telling difference, finally, came down to facts of geography and the acquiescence of too many in received ‘Opinions, Fashions, and Things of their Country’. A ‘more improved *English*-man’, by contrast, had the benefit not only of living in a superior society, by implication, but crucially the diligence and industry to pursue higher conceptions of the divine.⁷⁵

By way of conclusion, I want to raise the question of how this discussion relates to Locke’s perspective in the *Two Treatises*. Does he operate there with a different anthropology, especially of the primitive, or do shared assumptions and arguments underlie his politics and epistemology? Evidence exists to support both conclusions, but in general a different tendency is at work in the *Treatises*.

One point of contact between the two works comes in his citation of the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. In the *Essay*, as I remarked above, Locke referred to Garcilaso in the context of the critique of innate practical principles, noting

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his testimony that the Peruvians kept female captives as concubines in order to beget children by them who they would later eat (and the mothers too, when they were past childbearing).⁷⁶ In the First Treatise, Locke quoted an extended version of the passage in his own translation as part of his reply to Sir Robert Filmer.⁷⁷ If evidence was needed of patriarchal power, then Garcilaso supplied it, but Locke used this to polemical effect. Even if Sir Robert wished to claim it in support of his case, history did not supply a valid rule for human action.

Locke took this opportunity to expatiate on a moral theme. He described the Peruvian custom as an example of what occurs when man 'quits his reason'. The imagination and will take over, and under these circumstances the most extravagant and inventive individual assumes political command. Custom and practice then sanctify what began as folly or craft. Yet Locke did not confine himself in this instance to offering a lesson on the brutality of mankind which made them sink below 'the level of Beasts'. He went further by noting that, in fact, an impartial survey of government and social practice around the world would teach us a paradoxical lesson that 'irrational and untaught' residents of the woods and forests provided a *more* suitable source of moral rules than what he called 'Civil and Rational' peoples, on the grounds that they 'keep right by following nature'.⁷⁸ Locke was making a polemical point and we should not perhaps subject his remarks to excessive scrutiny. But it is worth noting that although nature is a source of limited norms (a point he would not have made in Book I of *Essay*),⁷⁹ he nonetheless separated the primitive from the civil on the basis of possessing reason: the former were, by definition it seems, irrational, even if the rationality of the latter did not free them from the authority of inherited custom, however dubious.

The issue of whether Locke placed a disability on reason in primitive circumstances, introduced casually here, takes on greater importance in the Second Treatise when he builds his positive case for the foundation of civil government. His references to the American Indians, scattered through this discussion, have been analysed by James Tully as part of a critique of Locke's role in denying aboriginal rights. Tully's argument is that Locke's anthropology writes over the authentic practices of the Amerindian population with respect to property, ecology and modes of government.⁸⁰ Does reason play any part in this? Certainly reason is fundamental to grasping the law of nature, but I do not believe that Locke assumed that the groups described by José de Acosta and others laboured under some deficiency in this respect.⁸¹ Locke does not justify the occupation of Indian lands on the grounds that they require the paternal care accorded to infants and idiots.⁸² The justification is based on a right to occupy ground that has not been cultivated, deriving ultimately from the basic law of self-preservation. The in-land parts of America certainly provide room enough.⁸³

If we want to read Locke suspiciously, we can point out an analogy between the failure to pursue ideas of the divine and moral duty with sufficient industry, which he attributed to the primitive, and the failure to cultivate the land

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and exploit its productivity and use-value. The English are undoubtedly vastly ahead of the Americans in this respect.⁸⁴ The capacity and potential are the same, but unequally exercised. Yet the more explicit factors identified by Locke for the Indians' lack of political development stem from their confined desires and limited occasions for conflict, together with the absence of money (or at least the absence of money viable in international exchange). When occasion requires, they follow the law of nature in providing for a war captain to lead them in battle, but his authority is temporary and circumscribed.⁸⁵

Locke's purposes in the *Second Treatise* are different from those that prompted his critique of innateness. While making much of human equality, from a juridical perspective (rather than a descriptive one), he insisted on the capacity for reason. In the *Second Treatise* reason is a political qualification and Locke has more at stake in showing that it is reached by mankind in their maturity.⁸⁶ He builds in two degrees of the operation of reason. On the one hand, possession of reason is a bare condition for promulgating the law: the law must be understood for it to apply; on the other, he has a more active sense associated with the effort to work out and understand the law's principles for oneself.

But the most telling difference between the two works is that Locke's anthropological references in the *Second Treatise* are not designed to raise the issue of diversity. On the contrary, in Locke's discussion 'Of the Beginning of Political Societies', for example, America exists as a kind of political embryo, offering us an insight into the development of civil societies in Asia and Europe.⁸⁷ The American Indians' mode of government, as well as their social and economic organisation, do not trouble European practice, undermining common consent, but rather show its history. Thus the Indians are subject to a narrative in which, implicitly, their current practices will be transformed (not least, one may assume, with help from colonial settlers) into those of Europe.

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Notes

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- 1 For previous work, if problematic in some cases, see W. Batz, 'The Historical Anthropology of John Locke', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 35:4 (1974), 663–70; H. Lebovics, 'The Uses of America in Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47:4 (1986), 567–81; J. Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University

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- Press, 1993), Chapter 5; B. Arneil, *John Locke and America: The Defence of English Colonialism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996); for a wide-ranging account see F. Castilla Urbano, 'El Indio Americano en la Filosofía Política de John Locke', *Revista de Indias*, 46 (1986), 421–51.
- 2 See *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975), I.iii.20; *Essays on the Law of Nature*, ed. and trans. W. von Leyden (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 139.
- 3 For previous discussion, see D. Carey, 'Locke, Travel Literature, and the Natural History of Man', *The Seventeenth Century*, 11:2 (1996), 259–80; 'Locke as Moral Sceptic: Innateness, Diversity, and the Reply to Stoicism', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 79 (1997), 292–309. Reprinted in *Locke: Epistemology and Metaphysics*, ed. Udo Thiel (Brookfield, VT, Ashgate, 2002), pp. 33–50. These essays are revised and expanded in *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).
- 4 See Carey, 'Locke as Moral Sceptic'.
- 5 Locke's debt to the rhetoric of travel literature at this time is probably clearest in a passage from his early lectures on natural law: '[A]nyone who consults the histories both of the old and the new world, or the itineraries of travellers, will easily observe how far apart from virtue the morals of these people are, what strangers they are to any humane feelings, since nowhere else is there such doubtful honesty, so much treachery, such frightful cruelty in that they sacrifice to the gods and also to their tutelary spirit by killing people and offering kindred blood. And no one will believe that the law of nature is best known and observed among these primitive and untutored tribes, since among most of them there appears not the slightest trace or track of piety, merciful feeling, fidelity, chastity, and the rest of the virtues; but rather they spend their life wretchedly among robberies, thefts, debaucheries, and murders . . . [They] live in such ignorance of every law, as though there were no principle of rightness and goodness to be had at all'. *Essays on the Law of Nature*, p. 141. For a discussion of Locke's reading practices in this genre, see D. Carey, 'Travel, Geography, and the Problem of Belief: Locke as a Reader of Travel Accounts', forthcoming in *History and Nation*, ed. J. Rudolf (Lewisburg, PA, Bucknell University Press).
- 6 *Essay*, I.iii.9. Locke's source in both cases was the redaction in M. Thévenot, *Relations de divers voyages curieux*, 4 vols (Paris, 1663–72), IV, 23; I, 37–8 (Thévenot's volumes were printed in separate fascicles, with separate signatures and pagination). Mingrelia (Samegrelo) is an historic province of Georgia, though not all of its people regard themselves as ethnically Georgian. The country was converted to Christianity in the fourth century.
- 7 I. Vossius, *De Nili et aliorum fluminum origine* (The Hague, 1666), chapters 18 and 19. Born in Leiden in 1618, Vossius moved to London in 1670. In an entry dated to 1679, Locke recorded contact details for him in London. Bodleian Library, MS Locke f. 28, p. 180.
- 8 P. Martyr, *De Orbe Novo Decades* (Alcalá de Henares, 1530). Martyr refers to incursions by the Caribs against the innocent inhabitants of Hispaniola, whose children they took captive. He had access to manuscripts of Columbus but they are not likely to have been his source here. Locke took note of this passage in a journal entry of 7 August 1683 (Bodleian Library, MS Locke f. 7, p. 121). For a

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- translation of the passage Locke cites, see *Selections from Peter Martyr*, ed. and trans. G. Eatough (Turnhout, Belgium, Brepols, 1998), p. 46.
- 9 Locke referred to the French edition published as *Le commentaire royal, ou l'Histoire des Yncas, roys du Peru*, trans. J. Baudoin (Paris, 1633), pp. 58–9. For a translation of the relevant passage, see *Royal Commentaries of the Incas*, trans. H. V. Livermore, 2 vols (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1966), I, 36. Locke included his own translation in the First Treatise §57, as I discuss below.
 - 10 J. de Léry, *Histoire d'un Voyage fait en la Terre du Bresil* (La Rochelle, 1578). Locke cites chapter 16 but he clearly has in mind the account in chapter 15.
 - 11 See for example a letter of 1679 received from Nicolas Thoynard about an African people who were said to eat their enemies and who refused to nourish their children, burying them alive. *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 8 vols, ed. E. S. de Beer (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976–89), II, 85, recorded by Locke in MS Locke f. 28, p. 183; see also MS Locke c. 33, fos 5r–v, 9v–10r, 21v, for notes on abortion, cannibalism, parricide, sexual mores, homicide, and child murder from François Pyrard, Gabriel Sagard, and Jean Chardin; and various notes in MS Locke f. 2, p. 257, 258, 260.
 - 12 M. von Baumgarten, *Peregrinatio in Ægyptum, Arabiam, Palæstinam & Syriam* (Nuremberg, 1594), p. 73. Although Locke refers to the holy-men as Turks, the passage he quotes makes clear that the location is 'Belbes' (Belbeis) in Egypt. A translation of Baumgarten's account appeared in volume one of the Churchills' *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 4 vols (London, 1704). For this passage, see I, 456.
 - 13 *Essay*, I.iii.3, 7.
 - 14 As translated by Locke in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. J. C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 18.
 - 15 See, notably, Robert Sanderson, *Several Cases of Conscience Discussed in Ten Lectures in the Divinity School at Oxford*, trans. R. Codrington (Oxford, 1660). Sanderson argued that 'These *koinai ennoiai*, These common Notions, are that Law of God, which the Apostle Rom. 2. doth say is written in the Hearts of Men', connecting them with the law of nature (p. 132). For Locke's familiarity with this text in its Latin edition, *De Obligatione Conscientiae*, see W. von Leyden's introduction to *Essays on the Law of Nature*, pp. 32–4.
 - 16 Locke does not address the issue of innateness when he comes to this passage in *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*, 2 vols, ed. A. W. Wainwright (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987), II, 499.
 - 17 J. Locke, *Writings on Religion*, ed. V. Nuovo (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 9.
 - 18 *Ibid.* The word 'impression' is crossed-through in the manuscript.
 - 19 'But all the knowledg of virtue & vice which a man atteind to this way would amount to noe more then takeing the definitions or the significations of the words of any language either from the more skilled in that language or the common usage of the Country to know how to apply them & call particular actions in that country by their right names & soe in effect would be noe more but the skill how to speake properly or at most know which actions in the Country he lives in are thought laudible [*sic*] or disgracefull i.e. are calld virtues & vices' (*Writings on Religion*, p. 10).
 - 20 *Essay*, II.xxviii.10. See also *Writings on Religion*, pp. 10–11. In the first edition of the *Essay*, Locke called the law of opinion the 'philosophical law' and there are

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- traces of his rejection of scholastic verbal disputation over niceties of definition in this argument.
- 21 See *Reasonableness*, pp. 148–50; hence the need for moral rules revealed in Scripture.
- 22 The innatist account of derogations from in-built moral principles focused on improper education and the potential within human nature for savage degeneracy. Cases of non-confirmation could be treated as aberrant. See replies to Locke by J. Edwards, *A Free Discourse Concerning Truth and Error, Especially in Matters of Religion* (London, 1701), pp. 48–52; H. Lee, *Anti-Scepticism: or, Notes upon each Chapter of Mr. Lock's Essay concerning Humane Understanding* (London, 1702), p. 25.
- 23 '[I]t is no wonder, that every one should, not only allow, but recommend, and magnifie those Rules to others, from whose observance of them he is sure to reap Advantage to himself. He may, out of Interest, as well as Conviction, cry up that for Sacred; which if once trampled on, and prophaned, he himself cannot be safe nor secure' (*Essay*, I.iii.6).
- 24 See *Reasonableness*, pp. 147–8. 'Of Ethick in General': '[T]he generall rule . . . & the most constant that I can finde is that those actions are esteemed virtuous which are thought absolutely necessary to the preservation of society & those that disturbe or dissolve the bonds of community are every where esteemed ill & vitious' (*Writings on Religion*, p. 10).
- 25 MS Locke f. 3, pp. 266–7.
- 26 See Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I.44; *De legibus*, I.24–5; *Tusculan Disputations*, I.30.
- 27 For discussion of French travellers, both in favour of Cicero and at odds with him, see A. C. Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729*, vol. I: *The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990), chapter 5.
- 28 J. de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*, trans. J. Whatley (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), p. 134. For Locke's notes on his reading Léry, based on the (false) third edition of 1594, see MS Locke c. 33, fol. 4r. They include a note on 'religio nulla' and 'Deum habent nullum' referenced to p. 231, where Léry remarks on his difficulty with Cicero. This is the same page which Locke cites on atheism in the *Essay*, I.iii.9.
- 29 Léry, *History*, p. 134. ' . . . ils n'ont nulle cognoissance du seul et vray Dieu . . . ils ne confessent, ny n'adorent aucuns dieux celestes ny terrestres'. *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil (1578)*, ed. F. Lestringant (Paris, Livre de Poche, 1994), p. 379.
- 30 Léry, *History*, 139. '[I]l n'y a peuple qui n'ait sentiment qu'il y a quelque divinité' (*Histoire*, p. 395).
- 31 Léry, *History*, p. 140. '[C]este semence de religion (si toutefois ce qu'ils font merite ce titre) bourgeonne et ne peut estre esteinte en eux' (*Histoire*, p. 395).
- 32 Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 120.4. See also Cicero, *De Fimibus*, 5.43, where he refers to 'semina' and sparks of virtue which require cultivation. On this subject, see M. C. Horowitz, *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998).
- 33 C. de Rochefort, *The History of the Caribby-Islands*, trans. J. Davies (London, 1666). For Locke's references to this edition, see MS Locke f. 14, p. 198; MS Locke d. 10, p. 20; MS Locke d. 11, p. 15; British Library, Additional MS

- 32554, p. 9, 236. On the date of Locke's reading, see J. R. Milton, 'The Date and Significance of Two of Locke's Early Manuscripts', *The Locke Newsletter*, no. 19 (1988), 47–89. Locke first adds the Caribs to the group of atheist peoples in Draft B of 1671, that is, after composing the *Essays on the Law of Nature* (c. 1664), which refers only to atheism in Brazil and at Saldanha Bay, pp. 173–4. This increases the plausibility that Rochefort was his source. *Drafts for the 'Essay Concerning Human Understanding', and other Philosophical Writings*, ed. P. H. Nidditch and G. A. J. Rogers, 3 vols, vol. I: *Drafts A and B* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 106. Locke later purchased a copy of the first edition in French of 1658. J. Harrison and P. Laslett, *The Library of John Locke*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), no. 100 (hereafter abbreviated as LL). There is a note in MS Locke f. 28, p. 36, pointing out that the best edition of the text is the 'Holland' quarto of 1665 (i.e., the second edition, published in French at Rotterdam).
- 34 On Rochefort and the debated issue of authorship and his ethnographic sources, see R. Antoine, *Les écrivains français et les Antilles: des premiers Pères blancs aux surréalistes noirs* (Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose, 1978), pp. 26–7, 34–7; P. Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492–1763* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 57–8.
- 35 See *Tusculan Disputations*, I.30.
- 36 Rochefort, p. 276.
- 37 Rochefort, pp. 278, 284.
- 38 Rochefort, pp. 290–1. Quoting Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II.12.
- 39 Locke remarks on polytheists in the *Essays on the Law of Nature*, 'Quid hi, queaso, nisi alio nomine athei' (p. 174).
- 40 J. de Bourges, *Relation du Voyage de Monseigneur l'Eveque de Beryte* (Paris, 1666), chapter 13.
- 41 Given the slightly awkward juxtaposition of sources, it is perhaps not surprising that Locke added the reference to Choisy after Draft C (1685), in which the case against innateness was substantially complete.
- 42 *Sommono* is a Siamese term designating a priest or talapoin. *Codom* is a corruption of Gautama or Gotama (*Pāli*). See *Journal du Voyage de Siam*, ed. D. Van der Cruysse (Paris, Fayard, 1995), p. 308n.
- 43 Abbé de Choisy, *Journal ou Suite du Voyage de Siam* (Amsterdam, 1687): 'Voilà leur religion, qui consiste proprement à ne reconnaître point de Dieu' (p. 301). The page reference given by Locke in the *Essay* (I.iv.15) is incorrect. As the previous journal entry makes clear, Choisy's information was based on instruction he received from the Bishop of Métellopolis, Louis Laneau, and the abbé Artus de Lionne. Laneau was apostolic vicar of Siam and created Bishop of Ayutthaya in 1674. Lionne was a missionary.
- 44 For the context, see D. Van Der Cruysse, *Siam and the West 1500–1700*, trans. M. Smithies (Chiang Mai, Silkworm, 2002); and M. Jacq-Hergoualc'h, *Étude historique et critique du livre de Simon de la Loubère "Du Royaume de Siam"*, Paris 1691 (Paris, Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1987).
- 45 S. de La Loubère, *A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam*, trans. A. P. (London, 1693), p. 130. The translator was the Middlesex gentleman and fellow of the Royal Society, Alexander Pitfield. The identification is made by W. Poole, 'The Genesis Narrative in the Circle of Robert Hooke and Francis Lodwick', in

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- Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England*, ed. A. Hessayon and N. Keene (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, forthcoming).
- 46 Ralph Cudworth had included the Siamese on a list of 'pagan monotheists' in *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678), 458–9.
- 47 For some discussion, see the introduction to *The Travels and Controversies of Friar Domingo Navarrete*, 2 vols, ed. J. S. Cummins (Cambridge, 1962); P. A. Rule, *K'ung Tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp. 74, 77–87. Locke corresponded with his friend Nicolas Thoynard in 1698 and 1699 about the book, which Thoynard described as 'tres curieux et rare'. Locke asked if he would translate it into French (*Correspondence*, VI, 463, 569, 603, 615). Locke possessed a letter from Francis Atterbury to Col. Christopher Codrington of November 1699 discussing the existence of a manuscript translation into English. Atterbury described the book as reporting that 'the Antient Chinese had no true Notion of a Deity, and that their Philosophy was a Scheme of Atheism' (*Correspondence*, VI, 732). Locke obtained a copy of the Spanish edition which he loaned to Awnsham Churchill in November 1699, presumably to have it translated as part of his edition of travels. Churchill promised to return the book or to pay Locke the hefty sum of five pounds if he failed to do so (MS Locke b. 2, fol. 174). 'An Account of the Empire of China, Historical, Political, Moral and Religious' appeared in volume one of the Churchills' *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, to which Locke referred in the *Essay* (Liv.8).
- 48 It is worth noting that Locke owned Nicolas Trigault's Latin translation of Ricci's account of the mission in China: *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas* (Augsburg, 1615), LL 2983. The Italian original remained unpublished until the twentieth century. Locke also owned a French translation of Trigault (Lyon, 1616), LL 2984, which he loaned to Damaris Masham in 1683 (MS Locke f. 7, p. 13).
- 49 *Historia cultus Sinensium* (Cologne, 1700). The *Mandatum* appears pp. 332–8. The Cologne imprint is false. The abbé du Bos wrote to Locke from Amsterdam in July 1699 saying that one of the city's printers was engaged in preparing an edition of Latin documents relevant to the dispute between the Jesuits and the other missionaries in China. *Correspondence*, VI, 647. For the context, see C. von Collani, 'Charles Maigrot's Role in the Chinese Rites Controversy', in *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*, ed. D. E. Mungello (Nettetal, Steyer Verlag, 1994), pp. 149–83.
- 50 *Historia cultus Sinensium*, pp. 353–6. Locke marked an extensive number of pages for attention on the rear cover of his copy of the text (Bodleian Library shelfmark Locke 7.10), including this range. On the front flyleaf, he wrote: 'Celsus says the Seres (which I tak to be the Chineses) had noe god.' His source was Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.63. His identification of Seres with China is correct. *Der Kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*, 5 vols, ed. K. Ziegler, W. Sontheimer, and H. Gärtner (Stuttgart and Munich, A. Druckemüller, 1964–75), V, 133–5.
- 51 Locke was aware of the larger context of the dispute. In February he wrote to Nicolas Thoynard asking him to obtain a copy of the Paris edition of the Jesuit Louis Le Comte's *Nouveaux Memoires sur l'Etat Present de la Chine*, 2 vols (Paris, 1696), LL 827, because the Dutch edition was defective (*Correspondence*, VI, 568–9). See also his pencil list of pages marked for attention in his copy of Le Comte's *Lettre a Monseigneur le Duc du Mayne sur les Ceremonies de la Chine* (Liège, 1700), LL 828, which include two pages which affirm the Chinese belief

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- in a sovereign God (pp. 20, 33). Bodleian Library Locke 7.161e. Locke also read the Jesuit Joachim Bouvet's *Portrait Historique de l'Empereur de la Chine* (Paris, 1697), sent to him by Thoynard (*Correspondence*, VI, 535), LL 408. In July 1700, Du Bos kept him informed about escalating conflicts in Paris where the Theology Faculty of the Sorbonne had taken an interest in the Chinese rites (*Correspondence*, VII, 111). The faculty later condemned the position taken by Le Comte and by Charles Le Gobien in his *Histoire de l'Edit de l'Empereur de la Chine en Faveur de la Religion Chrestienne* (Paris, 1698). LL 1274. For some discussion, see J. Davy, 'La condamnation en Sorbonne des "Nouveaux Mémoires sur la Chine" du P. le Comte: les débuts de l'affaire', *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 37:3 (1950), 366–97.
- 52 We should not of course conflate it with the anthropology of Montaigne and Bayle, although it shares certain elements with them.
- 53 In addition to atheism in Brazil and the Caribbean, Locke referred to the testimony of Sir Thomas Roe about the Hottentot (i.e., Khoi Khoi) natives at Saldanha Bay (from Thévenot, I, 2), and to the Jesuit missionary Nicolaus del Techo on the Indians of Paraguay. For Stillingfleet's response, see *The Bishop of Worcester's Answer to Mr. Locke's Letter* (London, 1697), pp. 89–90. Locke replied by shoring up the testimony on Hottentot atheism, quoting E. Terry, *A Voyage to East India* (London, 1655), 17; and J. Ovington, *A Voyage to Suratt* (London, 1696), p. 489. *Mr. Locke's Reply to the Right Reverend The Lord Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Second Letter*, in *The Works of John Locke*, 9th ed., 9 vols (1794; rpt. London, 1997), III, 496. He then incorporated these references into the next edition of the *Essay* (1700). For good measure he added a new example taken from P. M. de La Martinière, *Voyage des pays septentrionaux*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1676), which reported laconically of the 'Borandiens': 'N'ont point de Religion, vivans comme des bestes' (p. 201). The country and people in question have not been identified satisfactorily. They may have been one of the Samoyed groups (perhaps the Nenets (Yurak) living between the Pechora and the Urals). Boranday or Berendey is quite possibly a Turkic name. Although Samoyeds are not a Turkic people, they had assimilated with many of them. I am grateful to Michael Khodakovsky and Michel Mervaud for their advice on this question.
- 54 See *Answer to Mr. Locke's Letter*, p. 90. He had earlier done so in *Origines Sacrae* (London, 1662), p. 395.
- 55 H. Grotius, *De Veritate Religionis Christianae*, new edn. (Amsterdam, 1662), p. 4; *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, new edn. (Amsterdam, 1646), pp. 5–6 (I.i.12).
- 56 Whatever ideas claimed the status of innateness, Locke said, 'must be universal in the strictest sense; one exception is a sufficient proof against it'. *Mr. Locke's Reply*, in *Works*, III, 495. In Draft B of the *Essay*, he had regarded the absence of an innate idea of God as merely 'probable'. *Drafts*, p. 109.
- 57 Locke made numerous references to it in his notebooks, e.g., MS Locke d. 11, p. 10; MS Locke f. 14, p. 28, 68, 93, 106, 140, 170.
- 58 Boyle's mention of Brazil here may be the source for Locke's reference in the *Essays on the Law of Nature* to 'some nations in Brazil . . . [who] acknowledge or worship no god at all, as is reported by those who have considered it worth while to go [there]' (pp. 173–5). Like Boyle, Locke is unspecific in tying the reference to a particular traveller. Locke only refers explicitly to Léry, whom he began reading in France in the late 1670s, in the first edition of the *Essay* (1690).

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- 59 R. Boyle, *Some Considerations Touching the Usefulness of Experimentall Natural Philosophy* (Oxford, 1663), pp. 101–2; *The Works of Robert Boyle*, ed. M. Hunter and E. B. Davis, 14 vols (London, 1999–2000), III, 269.
- 60 I. Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, 2 vols (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991–2000), I, 77.
- 61 Boyle, *Usefulness of Experimental Naturall Philosophy*, p. 115. *Works*, III, 278.
- 62 Draft B (*Drafts*, p. 122).
- 63 When and where these conversations took place remains a mystery. Locke first makes this reference in Draft B (*Drafts*, p. 157). The opportunity may have come about through his role as secretary to the Lord Proprietors of Carolina (1668–71).
- 64 See Léry, *History*, pp. 178–9. For Locke's interest in counting, see MS Lock f. 2, p. 292, referenced to François Bernier; British Library, Additional MSS 15642, pp. 86–7 (entry for 25 April 1679). In a journal entry of August 1676, Locke reminded himself to add the 'nodus of numbers' to his list of inquiries (MS Locke f. 1, p. 388). See also later letters from Nicolas Thoynard from 1697 and 1698, the latter referring again to Léry (*Correspondence*, VI, 265, 492).
- 65 In his discussion of species the *Essay*, III.vi.13, Locke ponders the predicament of 'an *English*-man, bred in *Jamaica*' unfamiliar with ice. If he came to England in winter, he would find ice in his basin in the morning when it was water the night before. Furnished with a new 'idea', he would then have to make a species designation of the entity.
- 66 I think that Steven Shapin is mistaken in alleging that Locke criticises the king as 'proceeding on defective grounds'. *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 229. See also pp. 243–4, 248. The king's obligation was to seek further testimony and confirming witnesses, not to accept what he was told outright, on the strength of one witness, however credible in himself.
- 67 See the *Essay* II.i.7 where Locke makes a general criticism of failure to apply the mind and extend the range of ideas.
- 68 P. Nicole, *Discourses on the being of a God, and the immortality of the Soul; on the Weakness of Man; And concerning the way of Preserving Peace with Men. Render'd into English by the late John Locke, Gent.* (London, 1712), pp. 72–3. For a new edition, together with the French original, see *John Locke as Translator: Three of the Essais of Pierre Nicole in French and English*, ed. J. S. Yolton (Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 2000), this passage p. 87. For a discussion of Locke's translation, see I. Harris, *The Mind of John Locke* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 282–4, 287–8; J. Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge, Cambridge, University Press, 1994), pp. 131–7, 178–86. On Nicole, see E. D. James, *Pierre Nicole, Jansenist and Humanist: A Study of His Thought* (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1972).
- 69 For Nicole's equation of these primitives with 'labouring men', see pp. 73–4; Yolton, pp. 87–9.
- 70 Locke's source was C. Le Gobien, *Histoire des Isles Marianes nouvellement converties à la Religion Chrestienne* (Paris, 1700). Le Gobien reported: 'Jamais peuple n'a eu une présomption plus ridicule ni une plus sotté vanité. Plongez dans la plus profonde ignorance, qui fut jamais, & denué de toutes les commoditez de la

- vie, il se regarde comme la nation la plus sage, la plus polie & la plus spirituelle qui soit au monde. Tous les autres peuples luy font pitié, & il n'en parle qu'avec mépris' (p. 49). Locke owned a copy of the second edition (1701), LL 1275. His attention was first drawn to the work by the abbé Du Bos (letter of 14/24 February 1700, *Correspondence*, VII, 11). Independently, Pierre Bayle discussed the religious beliefs and self-satisfaction of the Marian Islanders, with reference to Le Gobien, in his *Continuation des Pensées Diverses, Ecrites à un Docteur de Sorbonne, à l'occasion de la Comete qui parut au mois de Decembre 1680*, 2 vols (Rotterdam, 1705), I, 57–8. See also the later notice of the Marian Islanders in a similar vein to Locke in Helvétius's *De l'esprit, or, Essays on the Mind and Its Several Faculties* (London, 1759), p. 106.
- 71 J. Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (Bristol, 1993), pp. 10–11. The work went through numerous editions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For details, see J. S. Yolton, *John Locke: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Bristol, 1998), pp. 347–58. For a critical edition, see *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. P. Schuurman (Utrecht, 2000). This is privately printed, based on a Ph.D. thesis, Keele University, 2000). Schuurman prints this passage as part of paragraph 98 (pp. 247–8). For his editorial rationale see the 'General Introduction', pp. 121–3.
- 72 Literacy and the absence of 'thinking men' must be crucial since Locke was well aware that primitive Amerindians engaged in deliberative political and war councils (described in the Second Treatise §103, 105) and were commended by him, elsewhere, for their manner of conversation: 'The Indians, whom we call Barbarous, observe much more Decency and Civility in their Discourses and Conversation, giving one another a fair silent hearing, till they have done; and then answering them calmly, and without Noise or Passion.' *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. J. W. and J. S. Yolton (Oxford, 1989), p. 206. This reference probably derives from his reading of G. Sagard, *Histoire du Canada* (Paris, 1636), p. 398, as noted in MS Locke c. 33, fol. 10r.
- 73 Locke, *Conduct*, p. 29. Schuurman, pp. 166–7.
- 74 Openchancanough, a Virginia Algonquian leader, headed insurrections against the English colonists in 1622 and 1644. See J. F. Fausz, 'Openchancanough: Indian Resistance Leader', in *Struggle and Survival in Colonial America*, ed. D. G. Sweet and G. B. Nash (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981), pp. 21–37. In Draft B, referring to a different Indian figure, Locke wrote: 'had Tottepottemay been educated in England, he had perhaps been as zealous a Christian & as good an Architect as any in it' (*Drafts*, p. 120). He cited Tottepottemay (the name was spelled variously), a Pamunkey chief who aided the English, dying in a battle of 1656. Locke's source was a work dedicated to Lord Ashley, *The Discoveries of John Lederer in three several Marches from Virginia, To the West of Carolina* (London, 1672), p. 7 (LL 1706). The change in phrasing between Draft B and the *Essay* indicates a development in his argument, moving away from a similar formulation in J. Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (London, 1661). According to Glanvill, 'For our initial age is like the melted wax to the prepared Seal, capable of any impression from the documents of our Teachers . . . and we may with equal facility write on this *rasa Tabula*, Turk, or Christian' (p. 128). Locke changes his initial emphasis on the arbitrariness of religious attachment (Tottepottemay as Christian or pagan depending on where he is raised) and now stressed the second point, namely that an Indian would have the basis for becoming accomplished in

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- divinity, architecture or mathematics were he not disadvantaged by the situation of his birth.
- 75 See also in this context his remarks on the consequences of the Indians' failure to discover iron (*Essay*, IV.xii.11).
- 76 *Essay*, I.iii.9. For the reference, see note 9 above.
- 77 Locke's colourful translation reads: 'In some provinces, *says he*, they were so liquorish after Mans flesh, that they wou'd not have the patience to stay till the Breath was out of the Body, but would suck the Blood as it ran from the Wounds of the dying Man; they had publick shambles of Man's Flesh, and their Madness herein was to that degree, that they spared not their own Children which they had Begot on Strangers taken in War: for they made their Captives their Mistresses and choisly nourished the Children they had by them, till about thirteen Years Old they Butcher'd and Eat them, and they served the Mothers after the same fashion, when they grew past Child bearing, and ceased to bring them any more Roasters'. *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. P. Laslett (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), I.57. Locke's truncated version elides Garcilaso's reference to Pedro de Ceiza de Leon as the eyewitness account of 'publick shambles'. See *The Travels of Pedro de Cieza de Leon*, ed. and trans. C. R. Markham (London, 1864), p. 97.
- 78 First Treatise, §58.
- 79 There Locke is concerned to stress that those closest to nature do not exhibit any moral consensus or indication of unanimously grasping true principles of morals.
- 80 Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy*, chapter 5. The extent of Locke's awareness of this remains a debated question.
- 81 Second Treatise §102.
- 82 Second Treatise §58–60. The Indians are subject to punishment by West Indian planters but only in retribution for offences against the law of nature (First Treatise §130).
- 83 Second Treatise §36.
- 84 Second Treatise §37, 41, 43.
- 85 Second Treatise §36, 45, 102, 108.
- 86 Second Treatise §59, 63, 170.
- 87 Second Treatise §102, 105, 108, 49. See Tully on this point.

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