

NATURE AND HAPPINESS IN LOCKE: A Review of Michael Zuckert's *Launching Liberalism: On Lockean Political Philosophy*

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This is the original draft as submitted to the Claremont Review. The editors, in their wisdom, cut out about 30 percent of the text below, some of which was necessary for my argument. —TGW.

Michael Zuckert's *Launching Liberalism* contains thirteen meaty chapters published over a period of twenty-five years, between 1975 and 2002. The topics covered include: how to read Locke; Locke on the Old and New Testament; comparisons of Locke to Aquinas and Hobbes; Locke in the American founding; Locke and Blackstone; and Lockean responses to current liberal, conservative, and libertarian theorists.

There is much to be praised in *Launching Liberalism*. The analysis of the *First Treatise* provides an insightful inlet into a very difficult book. The chapter "Fools and Knaves," on Locke's analysis of the use and misuse of language, uncovers a powerful but hidden Lockean argument in defense of ordinary language. In three chapters at the end of the book, Zuckert does a fine job showing the weaknesses of the moral theories of John Rawls, Alan Gewirth, and Alasdair MacIntyre, in comparison with what Zuckert regards (rightly, in my view) as Locke's superior arguments. Throughout the book, there is a laudable seriousness and concentration on the main issues at hand, with minimal use of distracting jargon or windy digressions. The picture of Locke that emerges is of a first-rate philosopher whose thought is much superior to most of what is considered the best thinking of our time—a worthy teacher of the American founders.

The book's considerable merits confirm, too, that Zuckert is one of the foremost Locke scholars of his generation. Nonetheless, in this review, I propose to focus on, and to criticize, what he himself calls "the core of his [Locke's] philosophy—the notion of human beings as rights-bearers by nature because they are self-owners." Zuckert clearly takes this to be his most original and important argument about Locke.

Hobbes and Locke

In several of the chapters of *Launching Liberalism*, Zuckert argues that Locke, unlike

Hobbes, really does establish a moral basis of individual rights. Zuckert believes that he has broken with Leo Strauss on this point. Strauss's Locke, according to Zuckert, had no such moral foundation. Like Hobbes, Strauss's Locke supposedly relied on "an inference from the passions" as the ground of his rights doctrine.

Whether Zuckert is correct about Hobbes, or about Strauss's view of Hobbes, has been effectively questioned by James Stoner in "Was Leo Strauss Wrong about John Locke?" Zuckert argues that for Hobbes, "there can be nothing like property by nature" and "human beings in the state of nature do not own even their own bodies." But Stoner points out that Strauss says the exact opposite: "There could not be natural right in Hobbes's sense if there were not some natural property. . . . Hobbes recognizes that natural property . . . : the individual's body and his limbs . . . [and] even the 'inward thought, and belief of men.'"

Going beyond Stoner and perhaps beyond Strauss (or at least beyond Strauss's surface), I would add that the overall structure of Hobbes's argument on natural law is similar to the Lockean argument that I will sketch below. For Hobbes no less than Locke, the ultimate touchstone for determining what is right is what promotes human happiness. That is why Hobbes's famous chapter 13 of *Leviathan* is entitled "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery." That title implies that the state of nature is bad not just because it threatens our life, but because it is inimical to human happiness. In the natural state, life is "short," to be sure; violent death is a constant menace. But life there is also "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish"—defects that contribute to human unhappiness but not necessarily violent death. These defects are not remedied by the security of mere life, but only by civilization, morality, education, the sciences, and friendship, all of which presuppose civil society. One can infer that the state of nature, being brutish, also makes it hard for someone to pursue "the desire to know why and how." This desire, says Hobbes, is a "lust of the mind, that by a perseverance of delight in the continual and indefatigable generation of knowledge, exceedeth the short vehemence of any carnal pleasure." That is, one reason that the state of nature is bad is that in it one is deprived of the pleasures of the philosophic life.

Zuckert believes that in Hobbesian man, "thoughts make no fundamental contribution to action," and that man's mind, being subject to "the general laws of matter in motion," cannot direct his actions. Hobbesian man, for Zuckert, is "moved primarily by fear." But if Zuckert were

correct, why would Hobbes argue that when man is uncontrolled by reason (that is, by the laws of nature), he is moved primarily not by fear but by vanity and glory? Why would Hobbes write books, unless he thought that reason could intervene in the mechanism of the passions? Hobbes says he hopes that “this writing of mine may fall into the hands of a sovereign” who, being persuaded of its truth, will “convert this truth of speculation into the utility of practice.”

Self-ownership as the ground of natural rights?

But let us leave the thorny question of Hobbes aside and stick to Zuckert’s argument about the ground of Locke’s doctrine of natural rights. Zuckert notes that Locke’s *surface* argument for his natural law and natural rights teaching is that human reason can discover that God exists and that God has laid down a law of nature that is obligatory for all human beings. Here Locke deploys his famous “workmanship” argument: “For men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent, and infinitely wise maker . . . , sent into the world by his order and about his business, they are his property, whose workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another’s pleasure.”

Now Zuckert argues, correctly in my view, that Locke did not really believe this argument. That is, Locke did not believe that human reason can prove that such a transcendent, God-given natural law exists. For even if reason can prove the existence of a wise and powerful God, it cannot prove that this God is a lawmaking God who enforces his law with rewards and punishments.

Zuckert argues, and I agree, that there must be another argument that Locke uses to ground the idea of individual natural rights. Zuckert says this argument is that all human beings own themselves: “on the rock of self-ownership Locke builds his doctrines of natural rights, justice, and limited government.”

Zuckert points to Locke’s discussion of personal identity in the *Essay on Human Understanding*. The Lockean self is its consciousness of its past actions, its future possibilities, and its present possessions. Each self asserts ownership over the body it inhabits, the things it has done, and the projects it intends to do. This, says Zuckert, creates “an exclusive claim in the nature of a property right.”

How, according to Zuckert, does this claim lead to a “moral inviolability” for the self, so that

it can claim a right not to be molested by other selves? “Each claims a right that others forebear from interfering with what is the self’s own, and logic . . . requires that each self raising such a claim recognize that every other self raises ipso facto the very same claim on the very same ground. Each self cannot help but raise the claim and logically must recognize the claim of all others.”

This reasoning, however, is not Locke’s. He never makes an argument of this sort for moral obligation. (In fact, at this point Zuckert’s Locke sounds like Kant.) Nor, even if Locke did make this argument, would it prove what Zuckert thinks he has proven. How does “logic” require my own sense of self-ownership to respect that sense in others? If, as Locke writes, “happiness and misery” are “that for which every one is concerned for himself,” and if someone believes his happiness consists in conquest and exploitation, no moral limit can be inferred from the potential victim’s claim to be a self-owner.

Zuckert’s belief that self-ownership is the ground of natural rights is also vulnerable to a second objection. Locke frequently asserts that the law of nature not only justifies the right of individuals to preserve themselves, but is also the ground of parental obligation to children. It is hard to see how self-ownership could possibly create what Locke calls a “right of being nourished and maintained by their parents, which God and nature has given to children, and obliged parents to, as a duty.” And in fact Locke does not even try to ground parental duties in self-ownership. Instead, Locke suggests that this duty is grounded in the parents’ “strong desire also of propagating their kind, and continuing themselves in their posterity.”

A striking feature of Zuckert’s many writings on Locke, in this book and elsewhere, is their total or near-total silence on this Lockean doctrine of the family—the theme of much of the *First Treatise* and parts of the *Second*. I am surprised by this silence, for it is one of the areas where Locke’s argument departs most obviously from Hobbes’s. Usually, Zuckert is eager to point out the areas where Strauss overstated the agreement between Locke and Hobbes. (Strauss, like Zuckert, also tends to neglect Locke’s natural law teaching on the family.) But this by the by.

Finally, it is hard to see how each self’s ownership of itself could ever generate a moral obligation, given Locke’s strict definition of moral law. As Zuckert himself correctly points out, the only source of moral obligation that Locke recognizes is a law whose punishment is imposed by a lawgiver. Locke writes, “Moral good and evil, then, is only the conformity or disagreement

of our voluntary actions to some law, whereby good or evil is drawn on us, from the will and power of the law-maker; which good and evil, pleasure or pain, attending our observance or breach of the law by the decree of the lawmaker, is that we call reward and punishment.” Self-ownership as such does not imply a lawgiver or a law. Therefore it cannot be the ground of moral obligation.

Nature: A guide to life

Contrary to Zuckert, I agree with Strauss that Locke’s doctrine of natural law is not a moral doctrine in the strict sense, because Locke is unable to establish by mere reason the fact of a moral obligation, that is, a lawgiver who promulgates the law and punishes those who disobey it. Locke is indeed able to show that the law of nature benefits all or almost all men. But he cannot show that it is promulgated (for only a small number know it in the state of nature). Nor can he show that it is enforced by the lawgiver (its enforcement in the state of nature is left up to every individual, which means that it will go mostly unenforced, as Locke admits).

My suggestion, then, is that Lockean natural law has a “utilitarian” foundation. The laws of nature are rules of convenience that are useful to human happiness. In this respect, Locke is still in the tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Aquinas, Hobbes, and most other major philosophers preceding Kant. Locke shares what Kant called the “eudaimonism” of that tradition, which Kant rejected, followed by Hegel and Marx. (“Eudaimonism” is “happinessism”—the view that the ultimate ground of morality and political right is human well-being.) That is, in this fundamental respect, Locke is closer to the classics, who also grounded natural right in a “utilitarian” way. In the end, according to this tradition, what is right is right because it is useful for human well being. (For example, in Plato’s *Republic*, book 9, and in the *Protagoras*, the virtues are good because they promote pleasure or happiness; in Xenophon’s *Hiero*, tyranny is bad because the tyrant is the most miserable of men.)

Locke’s argument for natural law and natural rights is not easy to figure out, because he never presents it systematically in one place. He touches on it in several of his books, leaving it to the reader to piece together. In fact, its foundation lies in arguments that do not even mention natural law explicitly.

I start with book 2 of Locke’s *Essay*. Happiness, Locke writes, “is that which we all aim at in

all our actions.” Zuckert says that for Locke, happiness “is defined in terms of a negation—the absence of unease.” But this formulation wrongly equates Locke’s explanation of what *motivates* human choice with his account of what the *goal* of choice is, namely, “satisfaction, delight, pleasure, happiness, etc.” We act, Locke says, only when we feel unease; that is, when we feel the pain of desire. But the goal of our unease-motivated actions is happiness. Happiness is something real for Locke: “the highest perfection of intellectual nature lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness.” We must, says Locke, take “care of ourselves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness.” Our desires often lead to short-term pleasure but long-term misery. Locke’s example is habitual drunkenness, which leads to “the loss of health and plenty.” The task of one’s own reason is to figure out which desires to pursue and which to deny. Since people often make mistakes about that, it is necessary to evaluate and rank one’s desires, and sometimes to cultivate new ones by habituation.

Contrary to what Zuckert says, Locke’s reasoning does not repudiate nature as a standard. In fact, it follows nature’s direct guide: “Nature, I confess, has put into man a desire of happiness and an aversion to misery: these indeed are innate practical principles which (as practical principles ought) do continue constantly to operate and influence all our actions without ceasing.” The rational pursuit of happiness also follows nature in a second sense: in determining the best path to happiness, reason must be attentive to the distinctness of one’s own nature. Different men have different natures, so there is no single path to what Locke calls “real happiness” for everyone. Locke does not mean that one can (to use the words of the U. S. Supreme Court) “define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” On the contrary, Locke insists that we “suit the relish of our minds to the true intrinsic good or ill that is in things.” If one chooses wrongly, for example by pursuing “a glass of wine” and “the idle chat of a soaking club” night after night, “by a too hasty choice of his own making, he has imposed on himself wrong measures of good and evil. . . . He has vitiated his own palate, and must be answerable to himself for the sickness and death that follows from it.”

Only by considering one’s own nature, its longings and its tastes, its strengths and weaknesses, can a rational path to happiness be found. Locke’s book on education gives many examples describing how parents should cope with children whose temperaments are bold or

timid, or whose minds are quick or slow. In Locke as in Plato, the best life is the one *kata tēn phusin*, “going along with nature,” just as one parts one’s hair with the grain and not against it. For example, if you don’t have the talent and inclination for it, trying to live the philosophic life will be a waste of time, a painful labor that produces frustration, anxiety, and boredom. It will not be pleasant. It will lead to misery, not to happiness. This is Locke’s qualified argument against the “teleological” approach of Aristotle, who posits the philosophic life as the best. Locke would answer, yes, it is best for those who have the capacity for it, but for everyone else, it is decidedly not the best.

Zuckert says that the Declaration of Independence, based on the philosophy of Locke, “posits something like Promethean Man. . . . There are intimations, therefore, of the ‘technological attitude,’ of the taming if not the conquest of nature.” Zuckert’s earlier book, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism*, expands on that theme. In Locke’s argument, says Zuckert, “[t]he natural endowment, far from being the support and ground of human life, becomes mere raw material, ‘almost worthless material’ at that. It is tempting,” Zuckert continues, “to view Locke’s theory of labor as a forerunner of Heidegger’s theory of ‘standing reserve,’ that is, raw material. . . . What Heidegger decries, Locke celebrates.” Zuckert concludes: “the notion that there are natural limits preceding and grounding natural rights rests on untenable premises of a beneficent and provident God or nature.” To see how radical Zuckert’s Locke is, consider that Heidegger’s “standing reserve” is a conception of reality that is guided by nothing except arbitrary, willful human projects that have no foundation in nature.

But Zuckert’s view of Locke takes too negative a view of Lockean nature. Locke does not say that nature gives us nothing. It gives us many things of crucial importance: our capacity for reason (the “candle of the Lord”); our desire for happiness (which gives us the crucial incentive to figure things out and to cultivate our mind and talents); and the natural resources that our labor can perfect to enable us to live well. Even in Locke’s famous list, in chapter 5 of the *Second Treatise*, of three supposedly worthless things that labor makes valuable (this list is discussed by Zuckert), the central item is water, converted by labor into wine. A moment’s reflection reveals that although at the supermarket wine costs more than water, water is far more valuable than wine for the sustenance of life. If we had only wine and no water to drink, we would die quickly and miserably. So nature’s “almost worthless materials” are not so worthless after all.

As Peter Myers argues in *Our Only Star and Compass*, which I regard as the best book on the foundations of Locke's moral and political doctrine, our lack of providedness is partial, not total. We do have what we need to live well, if only we make the right use of our faculties and the natural world around us. We are unable to penetrate the mystery of the beings; Locke argues that we can never know the true nature of any substance. But, as he argues in book 4 of his *Essay*, we are able to make probable judgments about the world around us, especially with regard to what promotes our happiness, if we make good use of our powers of observation and reason. We cannot abolish poverty and oppression from the earth (as if that were even desirable), but we can remedy the initial poverty, ignorance, and oppression of the human state by means of the right kind of laws (to encourage "the honest industry of mankind") and the cultivation of the arts and sciences. The partial unprovidedness of the human state, far from being a sign of God's or nature's hostility to man, is in Locke's argument a necessary condition of human excellence. Locke argues that it is a sign of God's or nature's beneficence that he gave us pleasure and pain to wake us up, so that we would cultivate our minds and bodies. President Franklin Roosevelt was fond of saying, "necessitous men are not free men." For Locke, *only* necessitous men have the capacity of becoming free men, although true freedom, which is the mind's ability to choose thoughtfully among our conflicting passions and therefore not to enslave itself to the opinions of others, must be won by human effort.

Although Locke says that there is a great variety in the natures of human beings, he mentions only two human types: the "epicure," who places "his satisfaction in sensual pleasures," and the "studious man," who places his satisfaction "in the delight of knowledge." When Locke sums up his argument on the different paths to happiness, he appears at first to endorse a simplistic relativism: "the philosophers of old did in vain inquire, whether *summum bonum* consisted in riches, or bodily delights, or virtue, or contemplation: and they might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best relish were to be found in apples, plums, or nuts, and have divided themselves into sects upon it." But then Locke provides a revealing image to illustrate his thesis: "Men may choose different things, and yet all choose right; supposing them only like a company of poor insects; whereof some are bees, delighted with flowers and their sweetness; others beetles, delighted with other kinds of viands. . . ." Locke's metaphor classifies mankind into two categories: bees, which seek flowers, and beetles, which seek other kinds of food (garbage and

dung?). At the beginning of the *Essay*, Locke describes himself as a hunter of truth (that is, as a “studious man”), and he compares his book to a basket of flowers. He thereby puts himself on the side of the bees. Of the understanding, Locke says that “as it is the most elevated faculty of the soul, so it is employed with a greater and more constant delight than any of the other.” There are two main types of human beings, then: bees and beetles, each pursuing their own peculiar delight. Locke is fully aware that most men are beetles, who place their “satisfaction in sensual pleasures.” (In other writings, Locke indicates that there are in fact not just two but three major human types: the philosophers, who delight in seeking knowledge; the gentlemen, described in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, whose pleasure lies in living in accord with the honorable; and the vulgar seekers of sensual delights. These three correspond to the three kinds of human beings discussed by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. But this takes us beyond the scope of this review.)

If the choice of the best way of life for oneself depends on accurately evaluating one’s desires, then one has to find out whether one’s nature is that of a bee or a beetle, and choose accordingly which way of life to follow. Locke says that reason can figure out how to pursue happiness rationally. However, that is not easy to do, especially for a sensualist. For such a person is more likely to be impressed by the short-term pleasures of eating and drinking, than the more enduring pleasures, including, as Locke suggests in the *First Treatise*, the pleasures of generating and raising one’s own children.

For the most part, as Locke frequently emphasizes, human beings are profoundly irrational. They are dominated by their passions and their imaginations, and therefore by foolish or harmful customs and beliefs, especially by religious delusions. To use Locke’s gloomy images, most people plod through life like a horse in blinders driven back and forth to market on the same rutted road. They give themselves up to the domination of their passions, their imagination, and the opinions of others. In other words, for Locke, the great problem in human life is that although all men by nature pursue their own happiness, almost all men inevitably make gross and frequent errors about what their happiness is and the best means to pursue it.

The law of nature

This near-universal irrationality would leave human life in a dismal predicament, if it were

not for two important facts. And here we finally arrive at the ground of the law of nature.

First, although we all have different natures in some respects (*Essay* II.21), our natures are also similar to each other in many ways (most easily seen in *Two Treatises*, where those common elements are thematic). That similarity makes possible a partial agreement among all or almost all men about the content or at least the conditions of human happiness. So if one among us is rational enough to figure out what the content of this partial agreement is, the irrational majority will benefit—if that rational man can persuade or compel the majority to make the right choices. The rational man’s conclusion about what rules benefit everyone is the law of nature. This is why a common good is possible in politics. That is why moral law can be advantageous for all.

Therefore, Locke writes in the *First Treatise*, the natural law, when it is enforced by “the positive laws of the society,” promotes “the good of every particular member of that society, as far as by common rules, it can be provided for.” Similarly, in chapter 6 of the *Second Treatise*, Locke says that law exists solely to promote the happiness of those under it.

Zuckert asserts that the “basic Lockean rights do not emerge as a means to other things, but as a generalization from the preexisting structure of self-consciousness of the agent.” There is a crucial passage in the *First Treatise* where Locke addresses the ground of natural right. Contrary to Zuckert’s thesis, the basic right to kill animals and eat them, and the basic right of children to be taken care of by their parents, do “emerge as a means to other things,” namely, as a means to self-preservation and self-perpetuation. Human reason pronounces the means to these ends to be right because they are “necessary or useful for his being.”

How then does the law of nature promote the happiness of everyone under it? Partly by securing the conditions of happiness (such as a state of peace), and partly by requiring us to do things that are elements of happiness (to generate and educate offspring). The law of nature says we should eat, get married, have children, be industrious rather than quarrelsome, set up a civil society ruled by law, and defend it. If we do these things, we will live longer, we will have bodily access to eternity through our children, we will have a greater abundance of the material goods we need, and last but not least, we will have the kind of character that will enable us to enjoy the pleasures of love and friendship.

Zuckert occasionally touches upon this Lockean analysis of the ground of natural law, but he does not see that here is the answer he is looking for. For example, in *Natural Rights and the*

New Republicanism, he does draw attention to Locke's emphatic statements that the end of law, including of course the law of nature, is "variously described as 'interest,' 'good,' 'happiness,' and finally 'freedom.'" But this observation does not lead Zuckert to the conclusion, which I regard as the proper one, that one's interest, good, and happiness—and *not* self-ownership—are precisely the ground of the law of nature.

For Locke, the law of nature, commanding the preservation of everyone as much as possible, is the touchstone of excellence in the formation of the political community, in evaluating any religion, and in the education of the young. "And truly," writes Locke in his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, "if the preservation of all mankind, as much as in him lies, were every one's persuasion, as indeed it is every one's duty, and the true principle to regulate our religion, politics, and morality by, the world would be much quieter and better natured than it is." The preservation of all mankind requires the continued existence of mankind. That can only happen if people have children and raise them sufficiently well "to shift for themselves." Therefore the law of nature includes the institution of marriage as an enduring compact. Further, as Locke implies in the *First Treatise*, the law of nature also discourages sodomy and incest, both of which "cross the main intention of nature" by interfering with procreation and/or the integrity of marriage.

How natural law becomes effective

Besides the partial sameness of human nature, there is a second important fact enabling us to solve, somewhat, the problem of pervasive unreason in the human condition. Although the vast majority is unalterably irrational, people can be compelled by law to act in their true interest even when their passions and imagination lead them astray. This is the purpose of moral law.

These are three kinds of moral laws (*Essay*, book 2): divine law (God punishes sin), civil law (government punishes crime), and the law of opinion or fashion (your friends, family, and acquaintances punish conduct that they disapprove of by dishonoring or shaming you). So if a person lives in a society that has a sound religious doctrine, the right kind of political laws, and a sensible social consensus about right and wrong, he has a good chance to attain personal happiness, within the limits of his own nature. Zuckert's analysis of what he calls the "transcendent natural law" shows that it is meant to be taken as a divine moral law clearly commanded by God.

First, regarding the divine law, in his excellent chapter on *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Zuckert shows that in Locke's presentation, Christianity requires us to obey, to the best of our ability, the law of nature. What Christianity adds to the merely rational account of the law of nature is the idea of divine rewards and punishments. As Locke writes in the *Essay*, "the true ground of morality . . . can only be the will and law of a God who sees men in the dark, [and] has in his hand rewards and punishments." Otherwise, Locke argues, the law of nature will not be effective. In other words, if people can be persuaded to believe in a religion of this sort, they will be more likely to follow the law of nature. Locke faults the ancient philosophers for failing to take sufficient note of the need for a religion that teaches men to be moral by promises of reward and threats of punishment.

Second, the civil law also makes the law of nature effective. Locke's *Second Treatise* shows how a government should be erected to enforce the law of nature. To do so, it must do such things as preserve the individual; ban slavery; defend private property rights; guarantee religious liberty for all religions that teach toleration and sound morality; encourage marriage and stable families; make sure government operates through the rule of law; and require government to operate with the ongoing consent of the governed, expressed through periodic elections of representatives.

Incidentally, Zuckert says the "natural rights philosophy of the American Revolution," which is Lockean, "does not necessarily imply (or foreclose) . . . the modern welfare state." I do not agree. Locke argued that marriage "ought to last, even after procreation, so long as is necessary to the nourishment and support of the young ones, who are to be sustained by those that got them, till they are able to shift and provide for themselves." He also said that God gave the earth to "the use of the industrious and rational, . . . not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious." As I explain in my chapter on welfare in *Vindicating the Founders*, the modern welfare state violates both of these Lockean precepts. It funds single motherhood and idleness, and it allows the quarrelsome and contentious to extract support from the rational and industrious (using political power to compel transfer payments from one group to the other), instead of promoting lasting marriage, industriousness, and self-support. Locke's own 1697 welfare proposal set forth "proper methods for setting on work and employing the poor of this kingdom." For example, he proposed that able-bodied beggars who lived near the

seacoast should be sent to “the next seaport town, there to be kept at hard labour till some of his Majesty’s ships coming in or near there give an opportunity of putting them on board, where they shall serve three years under strict discipline, at soldier’s pay.”

Third, the law of opinion or fashion is also necessary to make the natural law effective. Locke’s book on education teaches that parents should instill into children a sense of honor and shame as the most effective means of getting children to acquire moral virtue. All of Locke’s books are devoted to changing the “law of fashion” among his readers, so that a moral climate of opinion could be formed that would shame the immoral and honor the decent, the rational, and the industrious. In particular, Locke’s books are designed to change elite opinion, which leads common opinion, which in turn will create a public moral consensus that will encourage sensible religious opinions, sound politics, and obedience to the law of nature.

Locke and the Bible

This is the place to state my reservations about Zuckert’s treatment of Locke on the Bible. Zuckert notes that Locke attempted both to support Christianity and to enlist it in his enterprise of promoting the natural law. Zuckert suggests, plausibly, that Locke’s understanding of Christianity made it suitable to perform the role of a “civil religion,” a religion that supports the political order. However, Zuckert doubts that Locke’s effort was effective. At the end of his chapter on *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Zuckert writes that Locke’s “philosophy undermined the conditions for the persistence” of the kind of Christianity that he taught. Zuckert mentions Locke’s approval of “improving [the human situation] physically, politically, and morally.” The consequence, according to Zuckert, is that Locke’s Christian teaching undermines itself: “the relatively steady encroachment and spread of ideas spawned by or related to him that have helped make the civil religion he tried to develop a fragile, even failed enterprise indeed. . . . Almost immediately after Locke wrote, men who claimed to be followers of his—Toland, Tindall, Collins—produced critiques of Christianity.” Zuckert admits that these men “forgot an important part of what he [Locke] had argued.” But Zuckert believes that these promoters of deism or skepticism “also attempted to carry out more thoroughly a part of his public project—the overcoming of the biblical orientation for the sake of the liberation of men.”

I do not believe that Locke intended the liberation of men from “the Biblical orientation,”

unless one is to say that the Bible intends men to remain in a state of childlike ignorance and subordination to oppressive rulers. If that is what the Biblical orientation is (and I am aware that some theologians would say it is), then Thomas Aquinas also intends “the overcoming of the biblical orientation for the sake of the liberation of men.” Locke (and, in my view, Aquinas) intended to liberate men from certain kinds of oppressive rulers and false ideas (including false interpretations of Christianity) and replace them with rulers who are more likely to rule in the common interest, and with ideas that promote that kind of rule and the moral conditions of that rule.

The idea that God sets limits on our passions, including “the fancy and covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious,” *is* the Biblical orientation. That one should honor and worship God, and honor one’s father and mother, that one should not steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, or covet, are Biblical commandments that Locke strongly endorsed.

Zuckert also says that Locke considers the Biblical attitude “as containing a decisive advance over Greek philosophy—the emphasis on freedom, first in the free and freely creating God, then in man as the image of that God.” This one sentence sums up the difference between Zuckert and myself on Locke. I would say the opposite: Locke’s lifelong task was to overcome the willfulness, the “quarrelsome and contentious” love of domination, that he saw at work in many of the professors, priests, and aristocrats of his day. Just as Locke sought in politics to check the tyrannical tendency inherent in human nature, he sought to return philosophy to its original task: to seek the nature of things, not to try to impose a willful and arbitrary framework on reality, either through medieval scholasticism, which uses words and concepts disconnected from actual things, or enlightenment dogmatism, which thinks that it can answer all questions because of its discoveries in the realm of the body. Locke’s critique of innate ideas is, from this point of view, a restatement of the old Socratic insight: what we know is that we do not know the most important things. At best, we can form judgments about things that are more or less probable, depending on how carefully we seek out and consider the relevant evidence.

Conclusion

Someone reading this review might wonder why anyone should care what Locke thought. He published his books 300 years ago in a world very different from ours. But Locke was one of the

most influential philosophers since Machiavelli. His doctrines have been under assault in America, Britain, and the continent for a long time. But they are not dead, especially not in America, whose institutions, religion, and moral habits still show signs of strong Lockean influence. If Locke's teaching is as radical as Zuckert says it is, then perhaps the historicism and liberalism of our time grew out of the founding principles, as natural consequences of Locke's doctrine of self-ownership and willful conquest of nature. But if I am right about the real roots of Locke's moral philosophy, then the founding is built on much the same sound philosophical ground that one finds in the great tradition going back to Socrates. This would help to explain why America has lasted so long and has done such a good job providing its citizens with the blessings of liberty. It would also help us to think through the kinds of political and moral agenda that America will need if it is to continue to enjoy those blessings.