

## *Introduction*

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### The Great Recoinage

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF LIBERAL SELF-GOVERNMENT is by no means inevitable. It is a complicated, contingent, and ultimately provisional undertaking. This observation might seem commonplace, yet it is also commonly ignored. Enchanted by the belief that liberal democracy is the result of the effortless proliferation of universally accepted principles, its supporters have underestimated the difficulty of fostering stable and just communities both at home and around the world. They have failed to see that government based on free and equal participation cannot simply be decreed, and have thus overlooked the many ways in which such polities can falter. Perhaps such overconfidence was predictable. In the wake of international liberal ascendancy, it has been tempting to assume that everyone embraces the same political aspirations.

Yet this costly self-assurance is not only the result of the proliferation of regimes claiming to be liberal democracies. It also stems from the way in which modern liberalism has come to understand itself as primarily a set of political axioms that can be universally endorsed. All rational individuals, it is assumed, can agree on a set of basic commitments: a hostility toward tyranny, a faith in toleration, an insistence on representative government and the separation of powers, a commitment to free inquiry in the arts and sciences, a conviction that the common good is served through regulated private ownership, and most importantly, the belief that governments are human creations that derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed. These commitments seem so familiar that it is difficult to imagine that anyone could object to them. In the context of such a consensus, it would seem that liberal democracy could be justified and sustained simply by the articulation of its principles.

By assuming that political justification rests solely on abstract principles, however, we have tended to overlook the dangers and excesses to which liberalism is especially vulnerable. We have ignored the ways in which liberal institutions can foster the very conditions that threaten their continued viability—conditions characterized by isolating egoism, thoroughgoing materialism and secularism, and the uncritical pursuit of a narrowly self-interested freedom. Such conditions can undermine shared political commitments, breeding both debilitating skepticism and violent fanaticism.

The liberal emphasis on intellectual and moral autonomy can make citizens especially susceptible to the perils of radical subjectivity and disconnectedness. Cut off from a shared sense of place or tradition, they risk stumbling into the Tocquevillean nightmare in which “each man is narrowly shut in himself and from that basis makes pretense to judge the world.”<sup>1</sup> Modern liberalism seems to foster a skepticism concerning the possibility of genuinely shared standards of judgment. This type of skepticism isolates citizens from one another and undermines their ability to form stable and lasting communities. Given the capacity of liberalism to fracture and isolate individuals, it is not hard to understand the continuing allure of religious and ideological movements that promise to clarify political ambiguities by offering members a sense of certainty that transcends the doubts and disagreements that pervade liberal culture. These movements cannot simply be dismissed as the last gasps of an atavistic faith or the predictable symptoms of socioeconomic deprivation. They continue to appeal to individuals living in a world shaped by liberal institutions and practices because they respond to an inextinguishable desire for transcendent assurance, a desire that liberalism often seems to suppress or ignore. In fact, the restlessness and uncertainty that characterizes liberal democratic culture seems at times to nurture a type of fanaticism that promises clarity by imposing uniformity.

The assumption that liberalism consists of a set of unassailable political axioms obscures the fragile and tentative character of self-government.

The specters of skepticism and fanaticism that haunt modern liberal society cannot simply be exorcized by the incantation of abstract principles, regardless of how universally acceptable they might seem. Liberal democracy rests on the character, dispositions, and capacities of those who sustain it. Citizens must be able to think and act in ways that foster self-government. They must be able to evaluate their leaders and hold them accountable if they rule in ways that are harmful to the people as a whole. The establishment and maintenance of liberal institutions relies upon the judgment of the governed.

The problem of judgment lurks at the very center of the tradition of liberal theory. Here we find a seemingly contradictory view of human reasonableness. The plausibility of consensual government rests on faith in human judgment, trust that those around us will make more or less reasonable judgments concerning the common good. Yet it also relies on widespread suspicion of the ways people arrive at and defend their judgments. On one hand, human beings are regarded as naturally free, equal, and rational. We are capable of forming sensible judgments that ensure

<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper, 1969), 394.

our peaceful and prosperous coexistence. On the other hand, human beings are identified as slavish, domineering, and irrational. We are partial in our judgments, clinging to indefensible opinions, and pursuing reckless desires even when our actions lead to misery and conflict. Human beings, it would seem, experience a dual nature: although capable of recognizing the prudence of mutual preservation, we have a troubling tendency to dupe, kill, and enslave one another.

This tension—between the potential dignity and potential barbarism of human judgment—animates the familiar defense of constitutional government, rule of law, and individual rights. In the *Second Treatise*, John Locke argues that it is the failure of individuals to make predictable and accurate judgments in their natural condition that necessitates civil society and the establishment of a public, authoritative judge. “The inconveniences of the state of nature,” he writes, “must certainly be great, where men be judges in their own case” (2T 13).<sup>2</sup> The volatility of our judgment makes unregulated interactions not only inconvenient but ultimately unbearable. The primary problem of human association is the potential transgressiveness of private judgment.

Yet Locke appeals to this same faculty in order to establish a practical standard of political authority. As naturally free, equal, and rational individuals, Lockean agents are called on to remain vigilant judges of whether existing institutions are worthy of continued allegiance. The judgment of individuals serves not only as a practical check but also as an ethical benchmark for any political regime. Legitimate political authority rests on the consent, that is, the considered judgment, of those who are being governed. The answer to his oft-repeated question, “Who shall be judge?” is unmistakable: the Lockean agents themselves are to discern whether a regime should be obeyed or resisted. It is by exercising their judgment that individuals experience self-government and dignify themselves as free, equal, and rational beings. Thus for Locke, as well as for the tradition of consensual government that he inspired, the faculty of judgment plays an ambiguous role. It is celebrated as a sign of our individual freedom and equality and appealed to as a guarantor of legitimacy. Yet it is also viewed with suspicion as a source of disorder and conflict, an unpredictable faculty that must be tutored and constrained if it is to resist its own tendency toward excess. Locke does not resolve this tension. Instead, his political thought is best understood as an attempt to respond to its political consequences. It is the determined effort to provide a

<sup>2</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Locke’s *First Treatise* will be cited throughout as 1T and the *Second Treatise* as 2T followed by paragraph number. I have modernized spelling and followed modern practices of capitalization.

political solution to the problem of judgment that unifies his various writings into a single, comprehensive project. This solution involves intellectual and cultural transformation. Locke sought to shape the way his readers form judgments and deliberate over matters of public importance.

Toward the end of his life, Locke wrote several pamphlets in response to a looming monetary crisis that he believed would cripple the economy of England and destabilize its political institutions. Deceptive merchants were clipping the edges of sterling crowns, half-crowns, and shillings, smuggling the bullion out of the country, and then passing the clipped coins off for their original value. This type of fraud was devastating for the emerging economy. The problem was not only that unscrupulous bankers and tradesmen were slowly siphoning off silver bullion from the national treasury, but more importantly that the recognized and accepted value of the common currency was being undermined. For Locke this crisis was primarily an epistemological one. The coin-clippers were unsettling the settled and established meaning of money. They were breeding uncertainty and confusion in order to achieve short-term gain and expand their own economic power. They were tearing down the trust between citizens by debasing the coin of the realm. Without a trustworthy currency, it was feared, individuals would have difficulty conducting trade or entering into contracts since they could not be sure that others were assenting to the same terms of exchange. Locke echoed many of his contemporaries when he insisted that a Great Recoinage was needed immediately to preserve the possibility of commerce and sustain a peaceful and prosperous society.<sup>3</sup>

Although Locke's reply to the coin-clippers took shape within a particular economic context, his discussion of the currency crisis mirrored his diagnosis of a more profound and far-reaching political predicament. His condemnation of those who would undermine the common currency and his work to stabilize that currency at the end of his life reflected in small scope his political project as a whole. His worries over debased currency parallel his worries concerning the collapse of a common language of public judgment. Locke himself draws this connection in his writings on money as well as in his treatment of language and politics. He recognizes that the tools and institutions that human beings use to bind themselves to one another and improve their lives, whether they are coins or words, are uniquely vulnerable to manipulation and abuse. Those capacities that make us capable of living together in a peaceful and mutually beneficial

<sup>3</sup> P. H. Kelly has collected Locke's policy proposals concerning money in a single volume. For a thorough discussion of the debates that took place during the currency crisis of 1695 and the Great Recoinage of 1696 as well as an account of Locke's important role in shaping policy during these years, see Kelly's excellent introduction in Locke, *Locke on Money*.

manner are the same capacities that enable us to perform acts of unsettling deception and shortsighted cruelty. By utilizing monetary and linguistic currencies, we facilitate social interaction. Yet at the same time, we open ourselves up to a whole range of social dangers.

This often-overlooked connection between coins and words provides us with a clue to both Locke's diagnosis of political disease and his remedy for it. Locke took the economic possibilities and the dangers of money to be analogous to the political possibilities and dangers of language generally. Coins and words are uniquely human tools of social unity and interaction; both can assist us in forming lasting bonds with one another. Yet they can also undermine the very conditions for the formation of such bonds. For Locke, the money used to enable commerce is akin to the language used to form and sustain communities. Just as coins serve as a durable measure of physical labor, words serve as a common standard of intellectual labor that can be accumulated, stored, and traded. Our acquired capacity to use coins allows us to prosper beyond mere subsistence because it provides us with an authoritative standard that facilitates a nonviolent exchange of goods and fosters cohesive communities. Our acquired capacity to use words sets us apart from other animals because it enables us to speak and reason and form lasting attachments with one another. It enables us to enter into political contracts. Just as a recognized unit of currency makes it possible for individuals to bind themselves to each other over time through financial agreements, an accepted and stable vocabulary serves as "the great instrument and common tie of society" (E III.i.1; see also III.x.13).<sup>4</sup>

Yet the uniquely human capacity to use coins and words carries with it significant dangers. The practices that draw us together can also tear us apart. This is because individuals not only *use* these tools to craft stable and prosperous societies, but they also *abuse* them. And the abuse of words unsettles society in the same way that the abuse of coins does. "It is no wonder," Locke writes in *Further Considerations on Money*, "if the price and value of things be confounded and uncertain, when the measure itself is lost. For we have now no lawful silver money current amongst us; and therefore cannot talk nor judge temporality right, by our present, uncertain, clipped money, of the value and price of things" (FCM 158).<sup>5</sup> If we are to "talk and judge right," we need to maintain a common

<sup>4</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). The *Essay* will be cited throughout as E followed by book, chapter, and section.

<sup>5</sup> Locke, "Further Considerations on Money," in *Locke on Money*, ed. P. H. Kelly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 158. Locke's economic tract "Further Considerations on Money" will be cited as FCM, and "Some Considerations on Lower Interest and Raising the Value of Money" as SCM followed by page number.

understanding of the value of money and a stable consensus surrounding the meaning of words. It is for this reason that Locke inveighs against the “shameful and horrible debasing” of coins that “disorders trade and puzzles accounts” (SCM 127; FCM 189) and also derides scholastic philosophers as “mint-masters” and ridicules religious fanatics for “coining” their own private languages (E III.x.2, and II.xiii.27, IV.xix). Counterfeiters, Scholastics, and religious sectarians all destabilize the conventions that are necessary for peaceful coexistence.

In the same way that it is an abuse of the common trust to debase the currency, “’tis plain cheat and abuse” to make words “stand sometimes for one thing, and sometimes for another; the willful doing whereof, can be imputed to nothing but great folly, or greater dishonesty” (E III.x.5). “For words,” Locke writes, “especially of languages already framed, being no man’s private possession, but the common measure of commerce and communication, ’tis not for any one, at pleasure, to change the stamp they are current in” (E III.xi.11). For Locke the clipping and counterfeiting of words is worse than the abuse of money: “to me it appears a greater dishonesty, than the misplacing of counters, in the casting up a debt; and the cheat the greater, by how much truth is of greater concernment and value, than money” (E III.x.5; see also I.vi.23). The clipping of coins is certainly devastating to the economy, but it is nothing compared with the abuse of language, an abuse that threatens to impede the free and dependable exchange of ideas that provides the “comfort and advantage of society” (E III.i.1).

Locke viewed the monetary crisis of the 1690s as a symptom of a deeper social and political crisis. He believed that a stable and reliable mode of discourse constitutes a unifying authoritative language through which norms of law and justice can be articulated. It does not guarantee universal agreement on every particular, but it does allow for the possibility of a makeshift consensus within which political deliberation can take place. It is for this reason that he insists in the *Essay* that “the discourses of religion, law and morality” are of the “highest concernment” (E III.ix.22). When a shared vocabulary deteriorates or is undermined, common experiences are suddenly susceptible to systematically different interpretations. Public judgment collapses into private opinion. Formulas that had once served as unambiguous explanations and unquestionable justifications suddenly appear controversial. Distinctions suddenly seem spurious. When matters of public importance can no longer be publicly evaluated, mutually beneficial communal practices fracture and fall apart.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Dawson has recently argued that Locke’s insight into the instability of language threatens to undermine his political project. Hannah Dawson, “Locke on Language

In many ways Locke's experience of cultural fracturing and cognitive instability is similar to our own. Like us, Locke found himself in a world of religious conflict and social upheaval. Yet the brutality that he experienced was much closer to home. He was ten when Civil War broke out in England, sixteen when the king was beheaded next to his school, and twenty-six when Oliver Cromwell's death brought about two years of political chaos that eventually led to the Restoration of Charles II.<sup>7</sup> As a student at Oxford, Locke described England as a "great Bedlam" of "hot-headed" sectarians and "mad" zealots. He observed men and women, especially religious men and women, asserting their moral and political claims without bothering to articulate them in terms that might be discernible to others. They justified the most preposterous statements and rationalized the most vicious and violent actions by appealing to the subjective guidance of their own divine inner light, a light only comprehensible to those who were similarly illumined. For Locke, such appeals were not only perplexing; they were insane.<sup>8</sup> He believed that the widespread rejection of a stable and common language of justification represented an epidemic of madness. The violence and turmoil in the years prior to the Restoration only confirmed his view. Invocations of reason or reasonableness seemed to have no meaning. In 1659 he wrote to a

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in (Civil) Society," *History of Political Thought* 26, no. 3 (2005), 397–425, and Locke, *Language and Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Since the publication of de Man's influential essay "The Epistemology of Metaphor," it has been common to deride Locke as naively ignorant of the metaphors and slippages that take place in his own attempt to achieve clarity. As Dawson shows, however, Locke is perfectly aware of the slippery character of language. Yet he remains much more optimistic than most of his commentators about the potential for humans to understand each other. For Locke, language may be philosophically deficient and descriptively approximate, but it is still a crucial medium of exchange. It can still bind people together in community.

<sup>7</sup> John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1994), 8. J.G.A. Pocock writes that "seventeenth-century men were still pre-modern creatures for whom authority and magistracy were part of a natural cosmic order, and . . . the starting point of much of their most radical thinking was the unimaginable fact that, between 1642 and 1649, authority in England had simply collapsed." *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 55.

<sup>8</sup> One of the most conspicuous features of Locke's early correspondence is his repeated employment of medical or psychological terms such as "distempered," "mad," and "hot-headed" to describe the political and religious actors of his day. See John Locke, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E. S. De Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976–80), 1:30, 43, 59, 82, 91. For a provocative account of the role that madness plays in Locke's thought, see Uday Singh Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom: Imagination and Individuality in Locke's Political Thought* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992). For a general discussion of the relationship between madness and religious fanaticism among Locke's contemporaries, see Michael Heyd, *"Be Sober and Reasonable": The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

friend in exasperation, “Where is that Great Diana of the world, Reason? Everyone thinks he alone embraces this Juno, whilst others grasp nothing but clouds. We are all Quakers here, and there is not a man but thinks he alone hath this light within and all besides stumble in the dark.”<sup>9</sup>

These are the words of an eyewitness to an epistemological crisis. Appeals to reason, which had once appeared to hold a generally accepted and assessable meaning, suddenly seemed like nothing but smoke and mirrors. The common language that had once sustained rational deliberation in matters of public importance was breaking down. This cognitive instability was intensified by the discovery of new worlds—some suspended in the heavens, others across vast oceans, and still others within the body itself. Assumptions that had once served as a stable framework within which individuals understood themselves and their relation to others no longer seemed plausible. The collapse of a common mode of discourse left people feeling profoundly isolated from one another. The absence of a shared understanding of the individual’s place within a unified whole endangered the stability and coherence of civil society.

This anxiety about the political consequences of a deteriorating common language was certainly not unique to Locke and his contemporaries. Long before him, Thucydides worried about words’ loss of meaning in the chaos that arose in Greece during the Peloponnesian War.<sup>10</sup> And long after him, George Orwell argued passionately that the abuse of language is the first step toward totalitarian government.<sup>11</sup> The importance of a common political vocabulary among those who aspire to self-rule has long been recognized. Many have also noted that these vocabularies are among the most fragile and least durable of human innovations. The loss of a shared moral language of judgment represents the loss of community and the collapse of a common world. “In the whole conduct of the

<sup>9</sup> Locke, *Correspondence*, 1:81. For a brief overview of Locke’s views of the political unrest in the years before the Restoration, see Roger Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35–38; Maurice Cranston, *John Locke: A Biography* (London: Longman’s, Green, 1966), 40–46; and Marshall, *John Locke*, 25–32.

<sup>10</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Modern Library, 1982), III.82, 198–200.

<sup>11</sup> See George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” in *Shooting an Elephant, and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), and, of course, his haunting depiction of “doublespeak” in the novel *1984* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984). Similarly Hannah Arendt worried that “we have ceased to live in a common world where the words we have in common possess an unquestionable meaningfulness, so that short of being condemned to live verbally in an altogether meaningless world, we grant each other the right to retreat into our own worlds of meaning, and demand only that each of us remain consistent within his own private terminology.” Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 95–96.

understanding,” Locke writes, “there is nothing of more moment than to know when, and where, and how far to give assent, and possibly there is nothing harder. . . . Some admit of certainty, and are not to be moved in what they hold: others waver in everything, and there want not those that reject all as uncertain” (CU 33).<sup>12</sup> Locke recognized that the temptation of fanaticism and skepticism is a constant threat to the possibility of public deliberation. Yet he did not only diagnose the problem, he also went to great lengths to remedy it. Locke’s solution to the deterioration of a common vocabulary of rational appraisal parallels his solution to the monetary crisis. He sought to institute a Great Recoinage of language. He wanted to establish and defend a stable mode of public judgment that could serve as an authoritative and communal standard for judging the legitimacy of political claims.

Undoubtedly, Locke shared this project with many of his contemporaries who also recognized the political implications of the collapse of a common vocabulary of judgment. He is exceptional, however, in that he saw that a Great Recoinage of language could not simply be imposed by an absolute monarch or powerful political regime; he knew that a shared vernacular must emerge into general use from the bottom up.<sup>13</sup> A common language of judgment would have to be renewed and maintained by the people themselves. Locke aims to establish a regime dedicated to both popular sovereignty and individual rights, committed to both consent and reason. For this reason Locke’s primary political task can only be accomplished in a somewhat indirect way. By convincing his readers to accept a new vocabulary within which they could govern their political opinions and regulate their political judgments, he hopes to cultivate a new type of reasonableness. Throughout his various writings on religion, law, and morality, Locke seeks to disseminate a vocabulary of judgment that can sustain public deliberations over matters of public importance and provide for the establishment of an entirely new type of political authority.

<sup>12</sup> Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996). *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* will be cited by CU and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* will be cited as STCU followed by paragraph number.

<sup>13</sup> To a great extent Locke’s view of the importance of a stable political language and the many threats to such a language echoes a view that Hobbes articulated before him. The “tongue of men” Hobbes writes, “is a trumpet of war and sedition.” Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen: De Homine and De Cive*, ed. Charles T. Wood (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 168–69. The solution that Hobbes proposes, however, differs from the one that Locke offers. Hobbes insists that the purification of language can only be achieved through the declaration of an all-powerful sovereign. Locke’s approach is much more pragmatic and indirect. He seeks to help his readers arrive at judgments so that they can come to an agreement over political authority in the absence of a single, unlimited sovereign power.

Locke responds to the problem of multiple and contending authorities not simply by offering abstract principles of political justification, but by working to transform his readers into the type of citizens who are able to think, judge, and act in ways that are conducive to self-government. In a short essay written late in life Locke explains, “Politics contains two parts very different the one from the other. The one containing the original or societies, and the rise and extent of political power, the other, the art of governing men in society.”<sup>14</sup> Locke recognizes that the project of defining institutions and articulating principles is only one side of the story. The other, equally important aspect of politics involves “the art of governing.” Some commentators have interpreted this famous passage to show that Locke limited his writing to the elaboration of abstract demonstrations concerning rights and obligations and that he was relatively uninterested in the “art of governing.”<sup>15</sup>

Yet what is striking about Locke’s division of politics into the theoretical and the prudential is that he did not collapse it into either part. Locke did not believe that politics could be reduced to a science. Nor did he think that it must be abandoned completely to the prudential manipulation of power. Politics certainly includes formal arguments for Locke, yet it is not limited to an articulation and defense of abstract rights and institutions. Politics is not exhausted by the attempt to provide a demonstration of morality, since our political lives cannot be reduced to scientific certainties. Locke recognized the inescapability of contingency and uncertainty, and his political project involves the “art of governing” insofar as he seeks to shape the way his readers make judgments. He wants to convince his readers to conduct their lives properly and reasonably within the limitations of this “state of mediocrity” (E IV.xiv.2). Locke’s argument concerning “the true original, extent, and end of civil government” is couched in a larger polemical, one could even say rhetorical, framework. The coherence of his narrow argument relies on the persuasiveness of a much larger formative vision.

We can best appreciate the mixed quality of Locke’s political project by looking closely at his attempt to transform the way in which his contemporaries make judgments. It is here that we see the intersection between the explication of political power and the art of government. Judgment, as he tells us in the *Essay*, is required in matters in which absolute certainty cannot be attained (E IV.1.3). These are the matters of disagree-

<sup>14</sup> Locke, “Some Thoughts Concerning Reading and Study for a Gentleman,” in Locke, *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 351.

<sup>15</sup> Pocock points to this distinction to argue that Locke took the “high road of right and authority,” articulating abstract, juridical theories while all but ignoring the art of government. J.G.A. Pocock, “A Discourse of Sovereignty,” in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 394–95.

ment and contingency that make up our political lives. “Man would be at a great loss,” Locke writes, “if he had nothing to direct him, but what has certainty of true *knowledge*. For that being very short and scanty . . . he would be often utterly in the dark, and in most of the actions of his life, perfectly at a stand, had he nothing to guide him in the absence of clear and certain knowledge” (E IV.14.1). Since most of the matters that we face in our lives cannot be resolved in any final and absolute sense, it is of great importance to Locke that we learn to govern our judgments in ways that are conducive to rational deliberation.

It was this practice of reasoning, the hard labor of judgment, that became Locke’s primary interest in his final years. By placing judgment at the center of this study of Locke’s thought, I hope to show that he was involved in something deeper and more complex than is usually recognized. Locke’s epistemological, political, and religious writings should not be read as philosophical discourses in the narrow sense, but rather as “civil” discourse.<sup>16</sup> Locke is not simply offering his readers a formal argument in defense of a particular set of institutions; he is not simply laying out a theoretical account of legitimate political organization. Instead, he is attempting to foster the development of a certain type of intellectual conduct, which could in turn hold a constitutional regime together. In his philosophical as well as his explicitly political writings, Locke is setting the boundaries of reasonable judgment in order to foster the possibility of public justification and rational self-government.<sup>17</sup>

## The Allure of Certainty

Given the centrality of the problem of judgment for Locke and the importance that he places on instituting a common language of judgment, it might seem surprising that so few scholars have embarked on a sustained analysis of the role it plays in his work. One of the reasons for this neglect

<sup>16</sup> For the distinction between philosophical and civil discourse, see E III.ix.3. Michael Zuckert offers an important account of the importance of this distinction for interpreting Locke in “Fools and Knives: Reflections on Locke’s Theory of Philosophical Discourse,” in *Launching Liberalism: On Lockean Political Philosophy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 107–28.

<sup>17</sup> Although most commentators emphasize Locke’s abstract, theoretical arguments concerning rights and obligations and neglect the way he helps cultivate dispositions that sustain liberal government, there are important exceptions. See Mark E. Button, *Contract, Culture, and Citizenship* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); Peter Josephson, *The Great Art of Government: Locke’s Use of Consent* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Duncan Ivison, *The Self at Liberty* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Nathan Tarcov, *Locke’s Education for Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

is Locke's own tendency to present his arguments, especially his political arguments, as if they were incontrovertible. Although he comes to focus his attention on the importance of probable judgment, he also seems to want to establish his claims in a way that transcends the vicissitudes of political contingency. At many points in his writings, Locke appears to be captivated by the possibility of achieving a type of demonstrative certainty in political and moral affairs. He seems more interested in establishing abstract truths that are irrefutable than in worrying about the vagaries of practical reasoning. In fact, Locke repeatedly asserts in the *Essay* that morality could be just as capable of demonstration as mathematics (E III.xi.16, IV.iii.18, IV.xii.8). In the *Second Treatise*, moreover, he presents his case with such methodical self-confidence and rigorous argument that judgment, at first glance, seems unnecessary.

In spite of his explicit appeals to intellectual modesty, Locke often appears supremely confident that divisive questions concerning morality and divine command can be answered with absolute certainty. He seems to think he can resolve disagreements concerning religion, law, and morality by appealing to an independent source of reason that lies beyond the empirical divisions and competing claims present in society. James Boyd White describes Locke's voice as "a voice of certainty, telling his readers how things are. . . . This is the mind that will tell you its first principles, then show you what flows from them, all as though this were an automatic process."<sup>18</sup> His arguments compel the reader to submit to them—not only in substance, but also in tone and style. We encounter a writer who seems breathtakingly optimistic about the political possibilities of rational inquiry, confident that he will be able to replace the diversity and disagreement that he encounters in the political sphere with the universally acceptable deliverances of reason.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> James Boyd White, *Acts of Hope: Creating Authority in Literature, Law and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 149.

<sup>19</sup> This view of Locke is most clearly developed in the work of Peter A. Schouls, *The Imposition of Method: A Study of Descartes and Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) and *Reasoned Freedom: John Locke and Enlightenment* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992). Yet many influential commentators have focused on Locke's failure to provide the type of unassailable philosophical system that he promises. John Dunn depicts Locke as a sincere yet somewhat befuddled thinker who retreats to Scripture when his demonstrative proof fails to materialize. Leo Strauss portrays Locke as a cunning philosopher who artfully offers his readers inadequate demonstrations in order to usher in a new age of egoism and acquisition. Both of these readings begin with a view of Locke as an unsuccessful system builder. John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), chaps. 8–9. See also Dunn's article "Measuring Locke's Shadow," in John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 257–85; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 202–51.

Thus Locke, as the founder of modern liberalism, is seen as an abstract, normative theorist who sets down a line of reasoning akin to a geometric proof in order to establish the legitimacy of certain abstract institutional arrangements. His arguments compel the reader to submit to them—not only in substance, but also in tone and style. Faced with the logical demonstrations that Locke offers, it would seem that there is no need for us to utilize our faculty of judgment. We simply assent to that which is undoubtedly true, an assent that Locke describes as almost involuntary (E IV.vii.14). This is a picture of a thinker who is breathtakingly optimistic about the political possibilities of rational inquiry, confident that he will be able to replace the diversity and disagreement that he encounters in the political sphere with the universally acceptable deliverances of reason.

With this view in mind, commentators have sought to uncover the foundations of Locke's philosophical edifice. They have wrestled with his cryptic appeals to natural law and struggled to understand how he could argue that this law provides the basis for a logically compelling demonstration of both the content and the obligations of a system of moral injunctions. Some have attempted to explain Locke's position by placing it within the context of the notion of moral science discussed in the *Essay*.<sup>20</sup> Others have sought to supplement this view of science by locating the true foundation of his moral and political argument in his appeal to the self-evident or intuitive character of certain propositions.<sup>21</sup> And still others have insisted that the basis of Locke's philosophical demonstration is found in his understanding of the necessary relationship between creator and creature.<sup>22</sup> Although these interpretations have brought to the fore important aspects of Locke's thought, the search for a freestanding, foundationalist argument yielding incontrovertible ethical conclusions has come up short. Some have pointed out that Locke's notion of demonstrative moral science is trivial, a process that cannot

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For a recent example of this approach, see Michael S. Rabbie, "The Reasonableness of Locke, or the Questionableness of Christianity," *Journal of Politics* 53 (1991), 933–57.

<sup>20</sup> Ruth Grant, *John Locke's Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 27–39. See also John Colman, *John Locke's Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983); J. W. Gough, *John Locke's Political Philosophy: Eight Studies*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

<sup>21</sup> John Yolton points to Locke's scattered references to self-evidence as well as his assertion that certain moral propositions are "writ in the Hearts of all Mankind" in the *Two Treatises* (2T 4, 5, 11) to argue that the basis of his political argument is a species of innatism. John Yolton, *Locke and the Compass of Human Understanding: A Selective Commentary on the "Essay"* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970).

<sup>22</sup> The most thorough account of Locke's "workmanship" argument is found in James Tully, *A Discourse on Property* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1980), 3–4, 34–51.

yield much more than clarified definitions.<sup>23</sup> Others have shown that his scattered appeals to self-evident truth contradict his forceful and tireless attack on similar arguments based on innate moral ideas in the first book of the *Essay*.<sup>24</sup> And still others have attacked Locke's theological argument for its failure to demonstrate the actual existence of effective moral commands enforced by divine sanctions.<sup>25</sup> Yet Locke himself seems to have recognized these shortcomings. He also repeatedly voiced concerns about the limits of human reason. Toward the end of his life he wrote that "it is plain, in fact, that human reason unassisted failed men in its great and proper business of morality. It never from unquestionable principles, by clear deductions, made out an entire body of the 'law of nature'" (RC 241).<sup>26</sup>

Faced with these difficulties, many commentators have understood their task as either to help clarify and perfect Locke's rationalist project or to expose his failure to do so. The assumption that underlies these approaches, however, is that Locke's primary purpose was to offer a demonstrative proof. Given this assumption, some commentators present Locke as a sincere yet somewhat befuddled theorist who is unable to supply the type of argument that he promises.<sup>27</sup> In the absence of demonstrative proof, he appeals to the guidance of Scripture, but his confident claims concerning politics and morality take on the hollow ring of dogmatic assertion. Other scholars view Locke as a cunning philosopher who recognizes the gaps in his own demonstrations. By feigning adherence to a traditional notion of natural law as the manifestation of the divine will and then offering a perplexing and ultimately contradictory argument in its defense, he artfully reveals that this notion is implausible.<sup>28</sup> In much of the literature, therefore, Locke is seen as either a muddled thinker, a man too caught up in his own historical con-

<sup>23</sup> R. S. Woolhouse, *Locke's Philosophy of Science and Knowledge* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971).

<sup>24</sup> Peter Laslett is among many Locke scholars who have pointed out this difficulty. See his notes to 1T 86 and 2T 11 in *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>25</sup> Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 199–201; and Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 203–4. See also Peter C. Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass: Locke and the Struggle for Political Rationality* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 42–49.

<sup>26</sup> Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. George Ewing (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1965). Cited throughout as RC followed by page number.

<sup>27</sup> Dunn, *Political Thought of Locke*.

<sup>28</sup> Pangle, *Spirit of Modern Republicanism*; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*; Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism*.

text to recognize his obvious mistakes, or a crafty schemer, a context-transcending philosopher who purposely misleads his less philosophically acute readers.

Yet I believe that this stark choice is an artificial one. It rests on assumptions that have more to do with our preconceived notions of what Locke *should* be arguing than with what he *actually* says. It stems from a particular understanding of what philosophical activity entails, and this understanding leads us to search for something in Locke's writings that is simply not there and neglect aspects of his thought that are deemed inconsequential. This desire to isolate an abstract and logically compelling rationalist system from Locke's various tracts, essays, and letters can obscure the original meanings and purposes of these texts. As Eldon Eisenach has pointed out, this method can become a bloodless procedure in which scholars effectively sterilize Locke's texts against infection from their local contexts and then perform "analytic operations" on them.<sup>29</sup> The result is the discovery of confused and contradictory claims that must be modified or discarded in order to salvage the unity of his system.

It is worth remembering that Locke was aware that he had not supplied his readers with the type of comprehensive and demonstrative account that he said was possible.<sup>30</sup> Yet he seemed genuinely unconcerned with this fact. It is telling that modern commentators have fretted far more about this supposed failure than the author himself. Of course, it is undeniable that Locke was enamored with the possibility of producing a mathematically certain demonstration of our moral obligations. Yet he also seemed to understand that the success of his political project somehow stood apart from his ability to provide a logically compelling demonstration of the content and obligation of natural law. He recognized the ambiguous relationship between abstract reason and public life. Locke believed that properly governed judgment accords with nature. It is not entirely conventional. Yet he understood that our access to this

<sup>29</sup> Eldon Eisenach, "Religion and Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*," in *John Locke's Two Treatises of Government: New Interpretations*, ed. Edward Harpham (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 50. This criticism is most plausibly leveled against the decidedly ahistorical and analytical works of Peter Schouls and John Simmons. See Schouls, *The Imposition of Method and Reasoned Freedom*; and A. John Simmons, *The Lockean Theory of Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), and *On the Edge of Anarchy: Locke, Consent, and the Limits of Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> When Locke's contemporary Thomas Burnet criticized him for failing to provide a mathematical demonstration of morality or the natural law, Locke shot back, "I have said indeed in my book that I thought morality capable of demonstration as well as mathematics. But I do not remember where I promised this gentleman to demonstrate it to him." Thomas Burnet, *Remarks Upon an Essay Concerning Humane Understanding in a Letter Address'd to the Author* (London: Printed for M. Wotton, 1697), 34.

natural standard is always tentative and probable, especially in matters of public importance. Locke saw that it is *reasonableness* and not *reason* that ultimately binds civil society together.

### The Pedagogy of Probable Judgment

In a sense Locke is a theorist of “public reasonableness.” He does not simply appeal to an abstract conception of public reason, as some contemporary liberal theorists tend to do. Instead, he actively strives to generate and shape what constitutes reasonableness by persuading his readers to internalize a particular notion of judgment. His political project can thus be seen as a type of political pedagogy. Locke recognizes that the widespread acceptance of a common language of justification is a precondition for the acceptance and preservation of social contracts. It is only by teaching his readers to accept a more or less common notion of reasonable judgment that he will be able to foster the conditions that would enable constitutional self-rule. Locke is not simply defending an abstract theory of legitimate political institutions; he is promoting and encouraging the rational development and intellectual discipline of those who would inhabit such institutions. Locke recognizes that just and stable institutions require more than the articulation of what liberal theorists call public reason. Liberal democracy depends not just on articulation of principles, but also on the cultivation of virtues that sustain public reason.

The idea of public reason originates with Thomas Hobbes, who insists in chapter 37 of *Leviathan* that individual deliberation in the public sphere should be supplanted by a single, unified judgment or “publique reason.” Faced with the political instability brought about by the religious civil wars, Hobbes points out the difficulty of adjudicating between the opinions concerning miracles and insists that the stability of the state requires a common, authoritative view. Matters of public importance should be decided not by private opinion but by public reason, articulated and enforced by the sovereign. In place of irreconcilable private judgments, the sovereign can provide a judgment that applies to everyone equally. In contrast to private judgments, which often lead to conflict and disagreement, public reason can serve as a common standard in the midst of profound disagreement.<sup>31</sup>

Although subsequent liberal theorists rejected Hobbes’s notion of an unlimited sovereign, they often returned to his conception of public rea-

<sup>31</sup> For an influential explanation of the importance of public reason in Hobbes’s political theory, see David Gauthier, “Public Reason,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 12, no. 1 (1995), 31.

son as a way to ameliorate (if not to resolve) the tension between individual liberty and the necessary preconditions for establishing and sustaining liberal institutions. In the context of consensual government, public reason is invoked in order to place limits on private judgment, defining what counts as a legitimate basis for deliberation in the public sphere. Often the appeal to public reason has been a strategy to avoid the contingencies and uncertainties of politics by securing an external standard of judgment that exists beyond or above the actual opinions of citizens in communities. Thus Immanuel Kant argues that the social contract is best understood as a pure idea of reason, a regulative or “eternal norm” that can be used to judge laws and institutions regardless of whether that norm has any resonance with people inhabiting political institutions.<sup>32</sup> By presupposing a conception of practical reason or human will as the source of universal law, Kant presents a categorical, apodictic morality that hovers above political contestation.<sup>33</sup> The Kantian view of liberal theory as an *a priori* standard of right largely does away with concerns about equipping citizens with the types of capacities and dispositions that sustain political society.<sup>34</sup>

Insofar as contemporary liberal theorists, such as John Rawls, embrace the Kantian aspiration to articulate universal principles of right, they overlook the importance of moral and intellectual transformation. In his early work, Rawls derives “principles of justice” by exploring “the choice rational men would make in a hypothetical situation of equal liberty.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Immanuel Kant, “On the Common Saying: ‘This May Be True in Theory, but It Does Not Apply in Practice,’” in *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 79–81.

<sup>33</sup> Patrick Riley points out that unlike other liberal thinkers such as Locke or Rousseau, “Kant does not have to struggle [to get his subject] to think as a citizen and not as a man, because consent can be treated as a standard.” Patrick Riley, *Will and Political Legitimacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 127.

<sup>34</sup> The most famous example of this is Kant’s assertion that “the problem of setting up a state can be solved even by a nation of devils (so long as they possess understanding).” Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” in *Political Writings*, 112. In recent years, however, Kant scholars have sought to provide a broader view of Kantian ethics and politics in response to criticisms of his thought as overly formal, abstract, and individualistic. They have sought to balance his *a priori* argumentation with his anthropological and political writings. The result is a view of Kantian politics as more provisional and attuned to social conditions than has been previously recognized. See Elizabeth Ellis, *Kant’s Politics: Provisional Theory for an Uncertain World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Jeanine Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics of Humility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Mika LaVaque-Manty, *Arguments and Fists: Political Agency and Justification in Liberal Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Onora O’Neill, *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 11.

These principles are arrived at only by setting aside the actual values and aspirations of the individuals who would inhabit his political institutions. In his later work, Rawls seems to move away from an explicitly Kantian approach, yet he continues to seek a “free-standing” criterion for judging the legitimate exercise of political power.<sup>36</sup> His effort to define the social institutions and moral principles that free and equal agents would endorse focuses on the articulation rather than the formation of public reason. Insofar as he neglects or downplays the importance of cultivating liberal capacities and dispositions, Rawls’s later work retains a decidedly Kantian character.

The project of securing liberal democracy, however, is never merely a matter of defining abstract principles that can be accepted by hypothetical agents under certain specified conditions. It always involves the cultivation of citizens so that they are able to embrace a certain ethical sensibility and political self-understanding. Liberalism relies on the presence of citizens who possess particular capacities, dispositions, and virtues.<sup>37</sup> A stable and just regime based on consent requires subjects who are able to sustain a social compact or political agreement. These citizens must possess the moral and intellectual ability to evaluate and uphold such agreements over time. As Benedict Spinoza recognizes, “the preservation of the state depends mainly on the subjects’ loyalty and virtue.” Yet he adds that “the means whereby they should be induced to persevere in their loyalty and virtue are not so readily apparent.”<sup>38</sup> Liberal citizens must somehow

<sup>36</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), and “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” in *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 129–80.

<sup>37</sup> The debate over virtue and character in liberalism has been a result of the powerful challenges posed by Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). Those who defend the cultivation of virtue within liberal political theory include Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ronald Beiner, *What’s the Matter with Liberalism?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); William Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Good, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). Those who have resisted this renewed emphasis on virtue include John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (New York: New Press, 2000); Richard Flathman, *Reflections of a Would-Be Anarchist: Ideals and Institutions of Liberalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); and Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas J. Den Uyl, *Norms of Liberty: A Perfectionist Basis for Non-Perfectionist Politics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> Spinoza, *A Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 193.

develop the capacity for fairness, sociability, and foresight. They must cultivate a shared capacity for political judgment; they must come to accept a moral and intellectual currency of justification.

Locke remains important for contemporary liberal theory because he shows us that the liberal subject is not simply an unencumbered, originating source of political legitimacy, but rather an uncertain, incomplete, and fragile achievement. Locke helps us reconsider the type of intellectual cultivation necessary for sustaining meaningful commitments to liberty within the constraints of political order. By emphasizing the importance of a new type of probable judgment, Locke recoins a political vocabulary that enables citizens to agree on the terms of their relationship with government and to hold that government accountable when it fails to live up to those terms. Such a shared vocabulary is a prerequisite to self-rule. Howard Schweber writes, “Consent to the creation of a juridical language is what calls a sovereign ‘people’ into being in the first place . . . a group of people constitutes itself as a self-sovereign People by an act of political will exercised over the field of discourse.”<sup>39</sup> The possibility of legitimate constitutional rule, for Schweber, relies on the willingness of citizens “to translate private thoughts and opinions into an appropriate artificial language of constitutional discourse.”<sup>40</sup> The point of Lockean reasonableness is not to eradicate disagreement, but to ensure a common vocabulary within which disagreement can take place. A common language of judgment serves as a homogenizing agent that allows heterogeneity to arise without disaster. Even a regime that self-consciously avoids organizing itself around a single substantive purpose or good requires a particular shared understanding of what constitutes legitimate public justification.

Just as successful currency reform must avoid being either too lax or too austere, Locke’s successful reform of judgment has to restrain radical subjectivity without imposing an artificial uniformity upon his readers. As Mark Button puts it, Locke seeks “to shape and govern individual judgment from the inside out.”<sup>41</sup> Locke recognizes that his ability to promote limited, consensual government is intimately tied to his ability to persuade his fellow subjects to internalize a new vocabulary of judgment. By coming to view their own intellectual faculties in a new way, Locke’s readers can learn to resist the spurious claims of religious authoritarians and tyrannical monarchs. In this way Locke aims to effect a cultural and intellectual transformation through which a common mode of probable

<sup>39</sup> Howard H. Schweber, *The Language of Liberal Constitutionalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 78.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Button, *Contract, Culture, and Citizenship*, 132.

judgment can take root. Only then can political authority be rightfully established and maintained “by the people.”

In order to understand Locke’s project as a Great Recoinage of language, however, we must first come to terms with the collapse of public judgment in the late medieval and early modern world. In the first chapter, I trace the breakdown of the medieval vocabulary of justification that was characterized by certain knowledge on one hand (*scientia*) and probable belief on the other (*opinio*). Terms associated with *scientia* such as “certainty” and “demonstration” came under intense attack by nominalists such as William of Ockham in the fourteenth century, and these nominalist suspicions were reinforced by the discovery and dissemination of ancient skeptical writings a century later. The unsettling of the medieval understanding of knowledge, we will find, was accompanied by an unsettling of opinion. Terms associated with *opinio* such as “probability” and “authority” were battered by the forces of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. In the place of a shared language of cognitive appraisal, Europeans encountered multiple and contending methods of justification. The collapse of the epistemological framework of the medieval world brought about a profound crisis of authority.

In the second chapter, I describe how this crisis led some to abandon the possibility of public justification altogether and others to seek out a type of knowledge that would be invulnerable to skeptical objections. Michel Montaigne and his popularizer, Pierre Charron, argued that in the absence of universally acceptable standards, wise men should defer to established traditions and reigning authorities. In stark contrast, René Descartes sought to resolve the problem of multiple authorities once and for all by erecting a new, apodictic science built on unassailable foundations. Although he hoped that his project would eventually yield absolute certainty in the contested realms of morals, politics, and religion, Descartes nonetheless counseled his readers to follow the customs and laws of their localities until such certainty could be achieved. Thus both the skepticism of Montaigne and the foundationalism of Descartes led to a kind of political quietism. Here we see that the fanatical longing for certainty and the skeptical rejection of public reason are two sides of the same coin. It is in this context that we can best understand the early writings of John Locke. As a student and teacher at Oxford, he expressed a deep anxiety concerning the inability of his countrymen to arrive at a shared understanding of their moral and political obligations. Although he explored possible ways in which such a consensus could be established, he ultimately embraced the sovereign power of the magistrate as the only trustworthy source of public order. Locke’s first response to the crisis of authority brought about by the collapse of the medieval

language of justification was a decidedly illiberal appeal to the unrivaled and unlimited command of an established sovereign.

Yet Locke did not remain a skeptic and absolutist. In the third chapter I show that Locke's gradual move away from his early political positions parallels his encounter with a new notion of reasonableness based on probable judgment. This shift took place as Locke became involved with a group of researchers surrounding Robert Boyle who were adopting a "new probability" linked to the evidential testimony of natural signs or nondemonstrable facts. Although their vocabulary grew from medieval notions of probability, these experimentalists unwittingly secularized practical rationality in a way that transformed scientific, religious, and political justification. They offered a notion of judgment authorized by God's utterances through natural signs. This shift hinged on an assumption that evidence presented to the senses can be seen as a natural deliverance emanating from an ultimately inaccessible, yet divinely ordained structure of order. The accessible world of sensory perception could then become a public standard of warranted judgment, a type of public reasonableness that remained open to interpretation and debate.

The purpose of Locke's *Essay*, seen in this light, was to teach readers the proper way to govern their faculties and constrain their intellectual yearnings in accordance with this new standard of public reasonableness. In the fourth chapter, I argue that Locke's goal in turning to epistemology was not simply to engage in abstract speculation about philosophical difficulties, but to instruct his readers in the proper way to govern their limited faculties and take on the burdens and responsibilities of judgment. Locke's philosophical investigations aim at a type of civic education; he seeks to teach his contemporaries the intellectual virtues of a properly governed mind. Although Locke continues to appeal to the traditional vocabulary of knowledge and opinion, he carefully shifts his readers' attention away from abstract, speculative reasoning and toward the importance of the faculty of judgment, which can attain degrees of probability but not certainty. In our "fleeting state of action and blindness," he insists, carefully regulated judgment is sufficient "for all our purposes" (E IV.xvi.4, I.i.5).

This teaching is not meant to guide a select group within society, but rather to transform society as a whole. In the fifth chapter, I explain that for Locke our capacity to experience freedom is tied to our capacity to make probable judgments. Although Locke joins Hobbes in arguing that liberty is a type of self-expression through action, he insists that it also requires a type of self-transcendence through judgment. Locke argues that our "reasonableness" cannot simply be measured by internal coherence, but must always be gauged by our conformity to that which lies outside of us. It is our ability to adjust our behavior to the authoritative signs of

nature that ultimately makes us free selves capable of self-governance. By learning to make judgments based on nature's probable deliverances, individuals become both reasonable and free.

It is this same appeal to reasonableness that runs through Locke's more explicitly political works. In the sixth chapter, I explain that Locke's extensive attack on Robert Filmer in the *First Treatise* is of a piece with his larger political project of recoinning a language of probable judgment. The particular arguments that Filmer advances and the conclusions that he reaches are not as threatening to Locke as Filmer's general appeal to a type of divine certainty based on Scripture. Locke is at pains to show that Filmerian certainty is both rationally groundless and politically disastrous. His sustained effort to discredit the patriarchal defense of absolutism is part of an attempt to supplant Filmer's method of justification with a new vocabulary of judgment. By insisting on the distance between the mind of God and the minds of men, Locke can transform Filmer's appeal to divine providence into a call for active and industrious application of limited human faculties in order to bring about the prosperity and order that characterizes "God's great design" (1T 41).

In the seventh chapter, I show that Locke's *Second Treatise* can be read as a revolutionary call for subjects to employ this new notion of probable judgment. In order to teach his readers to be active, critical, and at times even revolutionary members of the polity, Locke sets out to convince them not only that they are capable of making crucial determinations concerning the limits of political power, but also that they are obligated to do so. His account of the state of nature is not simply a heuristic device illustrating an abstract theory of government, but an attempt to provide tangible support to his contention that individuals have a natural right of judgment. Along the way he seeks to guide his readers in the proper exercise of this capacity by showing them the reasonableness of limiting their judgment to the concrete, visceral experiences of neediness and injury. By presenting the state of nature as one in which virtue and convenience are initially in agreement, Locke can also reassure his readers that an appeal to the judgment of the people will not necessarily entail the anarchic assertion of subjective will. Whether exercised by individuals in the state of nature, the executive in established government, or the body of the people during a constitutional crisis, the faculty of judgment based on visible and tangible experience ought to be the animating force of our political life. By teaching his readers to internalize the constraints of a new conception of probability, Locke hopes to enable them to take up the great task of self-government.