

and a king's power religious,¹ in which a family was a kingdom and a kingdom a family and all duties were one. The axioms of Filmer's thought, the legalism in which all change is seen as usurpatory, the stress on authority, prototypically paternal authority, as a social fact, made plausible his frenetic over-assimilation of differences to unity. But the plausibility was emotional and not intellectual. For Filmer men needed a concrete continuing authority in which they could be wrapped. Like crabs they could live only in a continuous God-given shell. But to Locke they were more like hermit crabs: the shells they needed, their instincts made available to them. It was God's world they lived in—but as difficult as it seemed.

¹ *Patriarcha*, p. 96.

J. Dunn, The Political Thought of
John Locke, Cambridge University
 Press, 1969

LOCKE AND HOBBS

The worthy, if slightly bumbling Locke we all used to know (just as we knew that he wrote in defence of that worthy if slightly bumbling apotheosis of English constitutionalism, the Glorious Revolution) wrote to answer the terrible, if undeniably clever Hobbes. Both of these hallowed opinions were vigorously attacked by Mr Laslett in his edition of the *Two Treatises* and the attacks had an immediate impact. But, rather surprisingly, the complicated and difficult historical demonstration that the bulk of the work was written several years before the Revolution rapidly became the new orthodoxy, while the simple and wholly convincing dialectical demonstration that the shape of the *Two Treatises* was dictated by the attempt to answer Sir Robert Filmer's political tracts has never received a very enthusiastic response and its importance scarcely been sympathetically understood. One reason for this curious difference in the two responses, perhaps, is rather vulgar. The recognition that the *Two Treatises* was not the rationalization of a successful revolution in the past at most implied the abandonment of a particular historical doctrine about a single figure; brashly, it meant rewriting one lecture. But the historically supported argument that lining Locke up against Hobbes and comparing their various dimensions was not the way to approach the study of Locke (indeed, at its most disturbing, perhaps not even a way) had altogether more sinister implications. If it were correct, it did not just mean the rewriting of one lecture; it meant a significant revision of the entire way in which the history of political theory was conceived. It meant that the pedagogic experience of most people who teach the subject, the study of a historically selected series of accredited texts (in itself, perhaps the most crushing refutation ever of the empirical claims of Social Darwinism), barely meshed at all with the epistemological, empirical, and hence even the philosophical problems raised by the subject matter. In the face of this disturbing threat it is not altogether surprising that this particular claim should have received

some sharp examination and we may no doubt expect it to continue to do so for some little time to come.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest, quite apart from the valuable historical light which any such dispute is likely to shed, that there are not admirable as well as rather unimpressive reasons for dissent. To put the point at its crudest: Hobbes was undoubtedly the most intelligent man to write about politics in England in the seventeenth century before Locke and he wrote about it in a specifically philosophical manner. Furthermore, his greatest book was devoted to the exposition of a political theory which at a pragmatic level espoused a set of imperatives directly antagonistic to those of the *Two Treatises*. Is it conceivable historically that a man with Locke's philosophical ambitions could have written such a work at the time when he did without his intellectual course being powerfully deflected by the magnetic pull, exercised by reason of its very existence, of that great mass of intellectual magma? Thus it seems that, quite apart from the fact that what most interests us about the political theories of seventeenth-century England is the confrontation of these two intellectual giants (and this interest seems philosophically apt), there must be a definite sense in which the confrontation is also apt historically. The reasoning is not subtle but it has the force of its own crudity. In what sense, then, should it be unconvincing?

The problem arises, essentially, over the assimilation of the historical case to the philosophical. Because it is plausible to claim that there must have been some sense in which Locke felt himself in the intellectual presence of Hobbes in writing the book and because what is undoubtedly of supreme philosophical fascination to us, at least about Locke's work, is this confrontation of the two, we are prone to suppose that the confrontation must be the key to the meaning of the book, that, as it were, it enables us to crack the structural code of the work. But this is simply to pun on the word 'meaning': All too irrefutable as an assessment at the level

¹ This is not something of which Mr. Laslett is unaware. I make no attempt to give an account of his position because it is stated clearly in his introduction to John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, pp. 67-91. Rather, what I am attempting here is to follow the movement of thought which has led to the unsympathetic reception of these notions and to show that the undoubted force of this intellectual hesitancy does not have the implications which those who feel it sometimes suppose.

of our own autobiography, it simply begs the question of historical assessment and manages to beg it while ostensibly claiming support from historical evidence which does not bear at all on the issue. It is rather as though, possessing a heuristic device analogous to an X-ray which reproduced, however, only the nervous system of the human body, we should mistake its depictions for those of a conventional X-ray. Pictures of a skeleton are not inferior surrogates in physiology for pictures of the nervous system—though they may certainly seem to us more banal. The metaphor is loose but it brings out fairly the extreme oddity of the historical supposition.

In the concrete, this theme is delicate. The claim is that the disputed 'influence', negative or positive, of Hobbes upon the *Two Treatises* is irrelevant to the historical comprehension of that work. This is not because Locke did not care about Hobbes's arguments in *Leviathan*. Nor is it just vulgarly because the book was addressed to Filmer's position. It is rather because the problem which he needed to discuss in order to refute Filmer is not at all the same as Hobbes's problem.¹ Hobbes's problem is the construction of political society from an ethical vacuum. Locke never faced this problem in the *Two Treatises* because his central premise is precisely the absence of any such vacuum.² It was a premise which he emphatically shared with Filmer and this is why he could simply assume that part of his position which immediately controverts Hobbes. The reason why Hobbes confronted this problem was epistemological in essence;³ and it was the demonstrative force of the conclusion of which he boasted.⁴ Epistemologically, in the *Two Treatises* Locke is able to confront Filmer on a level of shared vulgar ideology, not because this represented the utmost refinement of which his own thought was capable but because his book was written to persuade those already irrefutably convinced of the truth of this premise. If we seek to discover

¹ All this is quite apart from Mr. Laslett's argument that in a sense Locke and Hobbes were on the same side, as against Filmer, in their rejection of patriarchalism. Cf. *Two Treatises*, pp. 67-70, esp. p. 70.

² *Ibid.* II, §6.

³ See, for example Stuart M. Brown, Jr., 'The Taylor Thesis: Some Objections', *Hobbes Studies*, ed. K. C. Brown (Oxford, 1965), pp. 57-71, esp. pp. 57-8; Quentin Skinner, 'Hobbes's *Leviathan*', *The Historical Journal*, VII (1964), 321-33.

⁴ See, for example, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford, 1946), pp. 6, 465-66, etc.

the point at which Locke does accept the Hobbesian challenge, does confront the demand to construe demonstratively from unchallengeable axioms the whole moral fabric of society, we shall find it most nakedly of all in that series of abortive sketches of a theologically based ethic which run from the *Essays on the Law of Nature* to the unfinished scraps of paper from the 1690s in the Lovelace Collection. And if we still demand the public locus of this confrontation, we find it readily enough, shifty though the form in which the challenge is accepted undoubtedly is, not in the cramped little anonymous octavo of the *Two Treatises*, but in the fine broad folio columns, sent proudly into the world under his own name and bearing his rank, of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. But because there too he accepted the challenge with such gingerly misgivings and brought it, even after the grand intellectual sweep of the *Essay*, to such an inconsequential and broken-backed conclusion, and because the sketches of the projected ethic were so persistently abortive, the final riposte came by necessity elsewhere. In the pages of the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, the psychological core of Locke's answer stands all too clear and its clarity reveals harshly how completely he failed to meet the epistemological challenge. Perhaps, to tease the traditional judgment, we may claim that his epistemological failure brought with it a greater sociological perception, that the dubious commitments of his theological conviction enabled him in compensation to sense the stolid dependability of a society in which reliable social control could be achieved with some assurance by educating the gentry¹ and refraining from sharply deflating the economy.² But this is to overstrain a paradox. We must surely allow that it was more the history of England, 1681 and 1688 instead of 1651, which permitted him this illumination while denying it to his terrible antagonist of the textbooks. Certainly Locke's own theory of individual psychology is no more felicitously linked to a social psychology than that of Hobbes, and his ethics in consequence far from sensitively articulated with his social assurance.

There is a sense in which this confrontation of the *opines* is apt—and apt not merely as a scholastic cliché. It is hard to believe that

¹ *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, Preface, side 2 (not paginated), *Works* (1768), iv.
² *Some Considerations of the Consequences of the Lowering of Interest*, *Works*, ii, 46.

when Locke transcribes a judgement upon Hobbes in his notebook in the 1680s¹ or when at an interval of more than ten years he twice identifies the secular authoritarian argument against the right of toleration as that of Hobbes,² there is no sense of the brooding presence of that challenge. The challenge, as Laslett insists, was certainly far from one of the confrontation of texts. But if the relationship was less by far than one of reflective intellectual communication, it was also in a sense more. *Leviathan* for Locke could never be merely an intellectual challenge, still less merely an intellectual seduction (though it was plausibly in some faint measure both). Rather it was an intellectual nightmare, a spectre which haunted Locke's thought. And not merely an intellectual nightmare and its hauntings not confined to the thought. For if, as I have tried to insist throughout, the life was a necessary condition for the thought, the thought was equally such for the life. *Leviathan* could never be a purely intellectual embarrassment, for inasmuch as its intellectual challenge was effective, it carried the power to destroy the entire psychological plausibility of Locke's life. Here we can see more clearly how savage was the irony of such occasions as Newton's paranoid brutality³ or

¹ Bibliothèque 551. Hobbes tacha de mettre la Morale en un ordre geometrique et d'établir l'hypothese d'Epicure qui pose pour principes des societiez la conservation de soi meme et l'utilité. En effet le but principal de Hobbes étoit d'étendre le pouvoir des rois sur le temporel et sur le spirituel contre les seditieux et les fanatiques ce qui lui a fait dire des choses qui ne s'accordent pas avec le repos de la société civile ni avec la religion Chrestienne 493' (MS Locke c 33, fo. 29^v). The reference is to volume III of the *Bibliothèque universelle et historique*, see John Harrison and Peter Laslett, *The Library of John Locke*, Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications (1965), no. 332. For Locke's connection with this periodical in which both his first piece of signed publication in prose and the first (abridged) version of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* appeared see M. Craunston, *John Locke, a Biography* (London, 1957), pp. 256, 289-91, 293 n. (corrected by Laslett in *Two Treatises*, p. 12). The journal was edited by Locke's close friend Jean Le Clerc. It also printed a lengthy abridgement of the *Two Treatises* in 1691, the year in which the French translation (of the *Second Treatise* only) was printed in Amsterdam by the publisher of the journal. (See *Two Treatises*, p. 126.) See also MS Locke c 33, fo. 33^v.

² Cf. MS Locke c 39, p. 9 (quoted by Craunston, *John Locke*, p. 133) with MS Locke 34, p. 40.

³ See Newton's letter of 16 September 1693 to Locke: '... I beg your pardon for my having hard thoughts of you for it, and for representing that you struck at the root of morality, in a principle you laid down in your book of Ideas and designed to pursue in another book and that I took you for a Hobbit' (*The Correspondence of Isaac Newton*, ed. H. W. Turnbull (Cambridge, 1961), III, 280).

Tyrell's all too needling questionnaire.¹ In the noise of the 'Drum Ecclesiastick',² beneath the vulgar hands of an Edwards,³ the accusation of Hobbism may have meant to Locke largely the threat of real physical danger, his timorous sense of the social isolation of the heterodox intellectual. And when the charge was bandied about by his own friends, this anxiety was no doubt all the keener. But it is naive to equate the anxiety simply with physical fear or intellectual embarrassment. It was no simple cowardice or pride that the charge evoked. The hysteria of Locke's letter to Covel, for instance,⁴ is hardly just panic—indeed it suggests a considerable assurance about his rights as a member of the elite. The key tone in his complaint is outrage rather than fear.

What made the accusation of Hobbism intolerable was plainly the location of his intellectual embarrassment, the crude force with which it pressed upon the whole emotional structure of his life. No confrontation with the Hobbesian *œuvre* could be purely dialectical for Locke because in this confrontation any extended dialectical embarrassment threatened his entire identity. But if, in this way, there is a real historical illumination in pointing to the dialectical confrontation and if it carries indeed its own high drama, this lends no excuse to the determination to regard the *Two Treatises* as a gloss on *Leviathan*. Their epistemological glibness has been often noted and it is scarcely inadvertent. Hobbism comes in, it is true, for passing insult.⁵ But it is the level of insult delivered by a man without the least anxiety as to the sympathies of his audience. The bitterness of his sneer is authentic enough. But that does not make a sneer into an argument. Hobbes himself and the dense and threatening mass of intellection which he represents make no appearance. It may be correct in a sense to see him as a ghostly adversary throughout the pages of the *Essay*

¹ MS Locke c 22, fols. 91, 93, etc. and, for how firmly Tyrell saw Hobbes as Locke's proper antagonists, fols. 119^v, 128.

² Cf. *Two Treatises*, Préface, p. 156.

³ John Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Several Causes and Occasions of Atheism* . . . (London, 1695) and *Socialism: Unmask'd* . . . (1697). Cf. the anonymous letter to John Churchill (MS Locke c 23, p. 200) reporting that Edwards had said that 'Mr Lock was Governour of the Seraglio at Oats with others of the like nature'.

⁴ MS Locke c 24, p. 32. Cf. the anxiety of Covel's replies to Locke and to Damaris Masham, MS Locke c 7, pp. 161, 163, 176, 177.

⁵ *Two Treatises*, II, §§ 19, 137. Perhaps also § 93, but cf. Laslett's comment, § 93 n.

and the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke's own evil angel with whom he wrestled throughout a lifetime and before whose malign strength he eventually collapsed in exhaustion.¹ But whether or not this is true is here of no significance. What concerns us is simply that it is not in the *Two Treatises* that the struggle is joined. In them, the Hobbesian arguments are not answered. They are merely and blandly ignored.

¹ This could at most be a psychological truth, a barely testable proposition about the shifting dimensions of semi-consciousness before which historical inquiry is almost paralysed. Whether it is true or not in any case (in any sense other than the metaphorical—and there indeed it is irrefutable because its truth depends upon our historical conditioning, not on how the past was), is of no relevance to my purpose here, which is to insist that however sympathetic one were to the picture of Locke's intellectual life as lived in a conscious tension with Hobbes, the focus of the tension cannot conceivably be located in the *Two Treatises of Government*.