John Locke is famous for having promoted religious toleration in an age of intolerance, and for advocating a brand of reasonable Christianity. Scholars have linked his form of Christianity to a belief in the power of reason to discover moral truth independently of special revelations, and thus to the belief that human moral and cognitive capacity are fundamentally sound, unscarred by Adam’s transgression. Recent scholarship has, however, also emphasized Locke’s failure, despite repeated attempts, to produce a purely rational morality, and his corresponding focus on the analysis of scripture in his later publications. Indeed, increasing attention has been paid to Locke’s belief that the Christian religion is uniquely positioned to lead believers to moral clarity, and that revealed Christianity is indeed a practical necessity for salvation. I argue that Locke’s adherence to the centrality of revelation ultimately derives from original sin; not because original sin defaced human moral and cognitive capacity, but because it resulted in the necessity of labour and drudgery, and this labour makes rational religion a practical impossibility. Finally, I explore some of the ramifications of this view in the political and economic dimensions of Locke’s work.

There appears to be a profound tension at the heart of Locke’s thinking on religious matters. On the one hand, he suggests that the Christian revelation is not, strictly speaking, necessary for salvation, because humanity is capable of discovering the rational essence of the Christian religion, which is true morality, by the light of nature alone. After all, no just God would necessitate conviction and damnation of all those who, through no fault of their own, never
had access to the Christian scriptures and their revelation, and who never appointed Adam as their representative. Thus God has given to all humanity the tools of reason to discover the moral law, which tools we ought to be able to employ to completion in moral affairs.

On the other hand, Locke also seems to hold that no one has in fact been able to discover the true system of morality by the light of nature alone, and, further, indicates that the chances of anyone doing so in the future are exceedingly remote. This means that the Christian revelation turns out to be something of a practical necessity despite its theoretical dispensability. However, if humanity has the rational capacity to discover true morality and thereby establish natural religion, why has it failed so miserably? The question is not why or if God might justify those who have failed to discover rationally the full moral law, but rather what might explain the fact (as Locke sees it) of the historical failure of humanity to discover the moral law. It is, in Locke’s mind, consistent with God’s mercy and grace to forgive and save those who have failed, because of practical limitations, error, and so on, properly to employ their reason in the discovery of the moral law. The explanatory question about why humanity has failed to discover true morality can be answered if we attend closely to Locke’s views on original sin, and more specifically its effects beyond human moral capacity, because his opinions on the importance of revelation, despite the in-principle potential of human reason to establish natural religion, largely flow from his position on the effects of original sin. Moreover, once his position on the effects of original sin is clarified, it will become apparent that his claims in a number of domains beyond religion, including politics and economics, are deeply influenced by his conception of these effects.

The majority of recent scholarship on Locke’s religious views has claimed that he unequivocally repudiated the traditional Christian doctrine that the sin of Adam permanently perverted the moral capacity of the human race. Because of this repudiation of
imputed sin, so the majority interpretation holds, humanity is at least in principle capable of moral knowledge and perfection guided by the light of nature alone, and thus, at least in principle, requires neither the revelation of the Christian bible nor the mission of Jesus to attain salvation. John Marshall, for example, claims that ‘Locke’s account of the understanding as a tabula rasa at birth and of the will as a power left it unclear how either could have been in any sense damaged by inherited sinful dispositions’.\(^1\) Here Marshall makes the claim that Locke’s empiricist epistemological doctrine, as expounded most famously in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, is inconsistent with any version of original sin which imputes moral or cognitive stain to Adam’s posterity. Instead of the fall leading to a corrupted will or understanding, Marshall offers a much more limited account according to which Locke’s view was only that ‘Adam’s posterity received mortality but no inherent sinfulness from his original sin’.\(^2\) The reason why Locke would wish to restrict the effects of original sin is that to blame automatically and punish all of humankind for a sin that they did not commit, irrespective of their actual conduct, seems to run contrary to the justice of God. While Marshall concedes that Locke developed these views over many years, and that it was not until his mature works that his repudiation of the traditional notion of original sin emerged in full clarity, it is implicit in Marshall’s view that from at least the early 1660s Locke was already moving away from any views which imputed total depravity to postlapsarian humanity. This is because if we assume the *tabula rasa* doctrine to


\(^2\) Ibid. 397. It is in part because of this conviction that Marshall has difficulty reconciling Locke’s claims in the *Essay* with those in the *Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul* on sin and freedom. For a discussion of this issue see J. K. Numao, ‘Reconciling Human Freedom and Sin: a Note on Locke’s *Paraphrase*’, *Locke Studies*, 10 (2010), 95–112.
entail the rejection of imputed sinfulness and guilt, then we can conclude that Locke was already on the path to such a rejection by around 1663–4 when he composed the *Essays on the Law of Nature*.

John Colman similarly argues that 'in Locke’s opinion the consequence of Adam’s fall for his posterity is only bodily death'. Colman further suggests that since bodily death was the only consequence of Adam’s fall, ‘the precepts of morality can be found out by unaided human reason’. According to Colman, it is precisely because original sin did not fundamentally impair the rational capacities of later humanity that true morality is discoverable by reason alone. Although Ian Harris allows that, in his earliest work, Locke ‘did not maintain a definite view of the juridical standing of original sin or the character of its consequences’, his mature writings ‘were not only incompatible with imputation but also with any extreme view of man’s moral debility on account of the Fall’. Harris thus suggests an analogous developmental view to that propounded by Marshall, according to which Locke moved from a position of relative ambivalence regarding how to view original sin to one in which human moral capacity remained basically unsoiled after the fall. Finally, Nicholas Wolterstorff, like Colman, explicitly claims that Locke ‘never doubted that some if not all moral obligations can in principle be demonstrated, and thereby known’. However, Wolterstorff is sensitive to a tension in Locke’s view, recognizing that for Locke ‘natural reason has never even approached telling anybody the totality of that which it is

---


4 Ibid. 139.


capable'. Unfortunately, Wolterstorff does not explain why natural reason should have failed so miserably in its proper task.

Other scholars have tried to give such an explanation, and produced a dichotomy between the theoretical possibility of natural morality and religion, and the practical failure of its execution. John Moore writes that by 1696 Locke 'finally gave up ... altogether' any attempts actually to produce a system of morality of mathematical certainty, but despite having given up his own attempts to produce a mathematical morality, continued to think it possible in principle. A similar interpretation of Locke's position is held by Victor Nuovo, who argues that 'when Locke refused to complete the task of founding morality on rational principles, we must not suppose that he did so out of disillusionment, for Locke continued to rely on this possibility in his defence of Christianity. What other reason might he have had? Dissatisfaction with the results of his earlier efforts, and a reluctance to continue with a difficult but not impossible task; these perhaps are closer to the truth'. Likewise, Marshall claims that Locke had a 'fear that he would not be able to demonstrate morality, but not a belief that it was undemonstrable'. Thus, according to this interpretation, we should not take Locke's shifting attitude towards his personal ability to produce a rational morality, and thereby a rational religion, as an indication that he believed the enterprise itself to be hopeless. Since God is forgiving and merciful, he does not require complete knowledge of morality from those for whom salvific revelation has not been available. This in turn supports an

---

7 Ibid. 129.


10 Marshall, 387.
interpretation of original sin as only minimally impactful on the project of natural religion.

However, Locke did not believe that he was unique in his failure to produce a complete and satisfactory rational religion, but rather thought that all of humankind had failed until Jesus, and that none had succeeded subsequently. And while God’s mercy might account for why Locke thought a complete rational religion is not required for salvation, it does not account for why all of humanity, each of whom has had the tools of reason available to them, had not until or after Jesus happened to discover, as it were, true morality. There must therefore be something more than merely his personal and individual failings that can account for the generalized failure of humankind (which Locke is keen to point out, especially in The Reasonableness of Christianity) to follow the light of nature to true morality and religion. That he believed the failure to discover natural morality to be a generalized one is especially clear late in his career when he published his 1695 The Reasonableness of Christianity, where he writes that

Experience shews that the knowledge of Morality, by meer natural light, (how agreeable soever it be to it) makes but slow progress, and little advance in the World...tis plain in fact, that humane reason unassisted, failed Men in its great and Proper business of Morality ... our Saviour found Mankind under a Corruption of Manners and Principles, which Ages after Ages had prevailed, and must be confessed was not in a way or tendency to be mended ... natural Reason no where had, nor was like to Cure the Defects and Errors in them. ¹¹

Moreover, Locke’s position on the historical inefficacy of reason can be found even during the early period of his career when he is

most optimistic about his prospects of formulating a purely natural morality and religion.\textsuperscript{12}

In order to explain the more general failure of humankind to discover the principles and truths of morality, an alternative explanation might involve a distinction between the cognitive and the moral capacities of humanity, such that Locke could maintain one to be unblemished by original sin and the other to have been tainted.\textsuperscript{13} However, such an explanation is, at the very least, apparently inconsistent with the most considered and elaborate account of human action put forth by Locke, namely that in his \textit{Essay Concerning Human Understanding}. In this account, Locke writes that ‘the result of our judgment ... is what ultimately determines the Man ... because the determination of the Will immediately follows the Judgment of the Understanding’.\textsuperscript{14} On this view, there is no gap between a given judgement made by the understanding concerning what is good or evil and the resulting action directed towards or away from that good or evil. This means that the understanding must be the ultimate source of any action taken to the good or evil, and it can be a wayward source in only one of two ways: either because the understanding is congenitally defective or because it is fundamentally sound but still capable of error. It is the latter which Locke consistently adopts in the \textit{Essay}, where he describes at length a host of ways in which the understanding winds up making erroneous judgements; for instance:

\textsuperscript{12} See, for example, his remarks on the paucity of instances of successful discovery of natural morality at the beginning of the early \textit{Essays on the Law of Nature}.

\textsuperscript{13} Nuovo claims that Locke ‘was sure that, human frailty being what it is, perfect righteousness is practically impossible’ (‘Locke’s Theology, 1694–1704’, in \textit{English Philosophy in the Age of Locke}, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford, 2000) 198), although he does not specify more exactly in what this frailty consists. See also W. M. Spellman, \textit{John Locke and the Problem of Depravity} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), passim.

though present Pleasure and Pain shew their difference and degrees so plainly, as not to leave room for mistake; yet when we compare present Pleasure or Pain with future, (which is usually the case in the most important determinations of the Will) we often make wrong Judgments of them...All Men desire Happiness, that's past doubt: but...when they are rid of pain, they are apt to take up with any pleasure at hand, or that custom has endear'd to them; to rest satisfied in that.¹⁵

However, while Locke holds that the understanding can make errors of judgement, it is constituted to make correct judgements when properly informed of the relative values of a given course of action, such that 'The Rewards and Punishments of another Life, which the Almighty has established, as the Enforcements of his Law, are of weight enough to determine the Choice, against whatever Pleasure or Pain this Life can shew, when the eternal State is considered but in its bare possibility, which no Body can make any doubt of'.¹⁶

There can thus be no conflict between a wayward will and a genuinely sober understanding, as it is the understanding that, in the final analysis, determines the will, and any moral errors in action must be accounted for by happenstance and particular errors in judgement, not in the understanding as a faculty.

Locke’s explanation for the complete failure of all attempts at natural religion, at least as given in the later The Reasonableness of Christianity, leads him into considerations of the consequences of original sin. He directly describes the effects of original sin by invoking Genesis 3:17–19, writing,

*Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life, in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground: For out of it wast thou taken; Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return ...* This shews that Paradise was a place of Bliss as well as Immortality, without toyl, and without sorrow. But when Man was turned out,

¹⁵ Ibid. 275, 279.

¹⁶ Ibid. 281.

208
he was exposed to the drudgery, anxiety, and frailties of this Mortal Life, which should end in the Dust, out of which he was made, and to which he should return. ¹⁷

Locke here asserts that the loss of immortality was not the only consequence of the fall; in addition humanity lost ‘bliss’, and on account of this loss must live lives of great labour and drudgery. Locke goes on in the *Reasonableness* to explain the reasons why natural religion has not been successfully established in the world stripped of bliss, and why revelation was and is of supreme importance, writing that ‘the greatest part of Mankind have not leisure for Learning and Logick, and superfine distinctions of the Schools. Where the hand is used to the Plough, and the Spade, the head is seldom elevated to sublime Notions, or exercised in mysterious reasonings’. ¹⁸ Since most of humankind will never have the time, energy, or wherewithal to study rational ethics, ‘you may as soon hope to have all the Day-Labourers and Tradesmen, the Spinsters and Dairy Maids perfect Mathematicians, as to have them perfect in Ethicks this way’. ¹⁹ According to Locke, the fact that the greatest part of humanity lacks the necessary leisure to pursue rational morality and natural theology is no accident, but rather due to ‘the state of Mankind in this World, destined to labour and travel’. ²⁰ Indeed, he argues that even if some genius were to give a mathematical demonstration of all moral principles and truths (as has manifestly not been done), the state of postlapsarian humanity would make the demonstration of almost no practical value, for it could not be comprehended by the overwhelming majority of humankind: ‘if [Philosophy] should have gone farther, as we see it


¹⁸ Ibid. 149–50, 169–70.

¹⁹ Ibid. 157.

²⁰ Ibid. 169.
did not, and from undeniable Principles given us Ethicks in a Science like Mathematicks in every part demonstrable, this yet would not have been so effectual to man in this imperfect state, nor proper for the Cure'.

The Christian revelation is superior to rational religion because 'as it suits the lowest Capacities of Reasonable Creatures, so it reaches and satisfies, Nay, enlightens the highest'. While Locke does not go into great detail explaining the details of how humanity lost bliss as well as immortality in the fall, he was heir to a long tradition according to which the effects of the fall included the disruption of the natural order and its defructification.

II

The notion that Adam's transgression resulted in the derangement of the nonhuman natural world has a long history in many strands of Christian tradition, but the idea that these effects were especially severe was a popular trope of many Protestant thinkers. The central biblical passages in this regard are Genesis 3: 17–19, where God says to Adam:

Because thou hast ... eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Major Protestant theologians such as Luther and Calvin both commented on these passages, and both were likewise inclined to

---

21 Ibid. 157.

22 Ibid. 159.

give a literal interpretation of them. Luther, in his commentaries on Genesis, wrote that ‘without doubt, before sin the air was more pure and healthy ... indeed the light of the sun was more beautiful and clear, yet now the whole creature in every part reminds us of the curse inflicted because of sin ... before sin no part of the earth was sterile or defective, all things were wonderfully fertile and fecund’. 24 Similarly, Calvin, in his remarks on these passages in Genesis, had commented on ‘The earth ... was so adorned and crowned by God, as Scripture says, full of so many fruits where his glory shone, because in the earth we would have had a lively image through which God could display the great treasures of his goodness, virtue, and wisdom, and all of which was cursed solely on account of us ... thus, when we see the bushes, thorns, and brambles, we grasp that ... in those things God shows us his curse, in order to humble us’. 25 Such musings were not confined either to the continent or to theological thought: in England, Locke’s predecessor Francis Bacon had positioned the corruption of the natural world not only as an important revealed truth but also as the defect that his project for the reformation of natural philosophy was designed to reverse. In his Confession of Faith (c. 1603) Bacon had claimed that God ‘made all things in their first estate good ... upon the fall of Man, death and vanity entered by the justice of God ...

24 ‘Nec dubito, quin ante peccatum aura purior et salubrior ... Imo quoque solis lumen pulchrior et clarior fuerit. Ita ut nunc tota Creatura in omni parte nos admonet maledictionis per peccatum inflictae ... ante peccatum nulla pars terrae sterilis nec vitiosa, sed omnia mire fecunda et fertilia essent’, Martin Luther, D. Martin Luthers Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: H. Bohlau, 1883–), Vol. 42, p. 153.

25 ‘La terre ... esté tant orné, que Dieu a coronée, comme l’Escriture en parle, et remplie de tant de fruits là où sa gloire devoit reeulir, car nous eussions eu une image vive en la terre, par laquelle Dieu eust despoilé les grands thresors de sa bonte, vertu et sagesse, et que tout cela soit maudit seulement a cause de nous ... Ainsi, quand nous voinions les buissons, les espines et les ronces, cognoissons que ... Dieu nous monstre la sa malediction, a fin de nous humilier’ Jean Calvin, Supplem enta Calviniana; Sermons Inédits, ed. Erwin Mühlapht (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchner Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1961–), Vol 11 pt. 1, 211–12.
and heaven and earth which were made for man’s use were subdued to corruption by his fall’. Bacon further indicated that it was the goal of natural philosophy to return the world to something like the state that obtained before the fall. After reiterating that nature after the fall ‘was the child of God and sin, and still is’, Bacon opines that ‘by far the most noble task of natural philosophy is indeed the restoration and renewal of corruptible things, and the preservation of bodies in their condition, and the retardation of dissolution and putrefaction’.

Locke thus formulated his opinions on original sin and its effects in a climate in which the effects of that sin on human moral and cognitive capacity were not the only effects thought to have resulted from the act; that there were also effects on the natural world more generally was taken for granted by the major reformers, and by some of the important philosophical figures of his native country. And while there was no doubt much that Locke found to disagree with in the Protestant traditions in which he developed, especially the hotter sort of Calvinist doctrines such as total depravity, there were important elements thereof which he took for granted. Indeed, his desire to find and focus on plain meanings in his biblical interpretation inclined him both to reject the traditional account of original sin as imputed to all of Adam’s posterity and to accept the account of original sin as negatively impacting the nonhuman natural world. It is then perhaps not so surprising, especially considering Locke’s penchant for plain meanings of scripture, that


we find, in some of Locke’s notes from 1693 concerning *Homo ante et post lapsum*, that he briefly but perspicuously sketches out the idea that the divine curse on the earth lies at the foundation of political economy: ‘when private possessions & labour which now the curse on the earth had made necessary, by degrees made a distinction of conditions, it gave roome for coviteousnesse pride & ambition, which by fashen & example spread the corruption which has soe prevailed over man kind’.29 The logic is straightforward. Original sin caused the diremption of the earth, which in turn placed humankind under the perpetual burden of lives of labour and drudgery. Given the contingencies of capricious circumstance and idiosyncratic talents, class structure naturally emerged, which provided ample opportunity for humanity’s vicious potentialities to find expression. While unstated in the 1693 notes, in other works of the same period Locke argues that the corruptions of character born of class distinction in turn formed the basis of the need for civil society.

Locke gives such a synoptic view of the connection between labour and legitimate government in the 1689 *Letter Concerning Toleration*, where we find the following:

besides their Souls, which are Immortal, Men have also their Temporal Lives here upon Earth; the State whereof being frail and fleeting, and the duration uncertain; they have need of several outward Conveniences to the support

29 *Writings on Religion*, 231. Harris notes that ‘the major losses incurred by mankind at the Fall were said to be immortality and the Garden of Eden’ (op. cit. 303) and that Adam ‘was … turned out of Paradise and subject to the inconveniences of work’ (304), but does not link this expulsion to a more global degradation of the natural world, nor to any of the consequences of the necessity of work. The argument developed here includes the claim that Locke subscribed to the literal diremption of the postlapsarian natural world, and thus relies heavily on his 1693 notes as the most unequivocal evidence of this; however, my further argument concerning the necessity of work is compatible with the possibility that Locke subscribed to some alternative (non-literal) construal of Genesis 3:17–19. So long as the result remains that humanity must live lives of drudgery, the same consequences as those of my argument follow.
thereof, which are to be procured or preserved by Pains and industry. For those things that are necessary to the comfortable support of our Lives are not the spontaneous Products of Nature, nor do offer themselves fit and prepared for our use ... But the pravity of Mankind being such, that they had rather injuriously prey upon the Fruits of other Mens Labours, than take pains to provide for themselves; the necessity of preserving Men in the Possession of what honest industry has already acquired, and also of preserving their Liberty and strength, whereby they may acquire what they further want; obliges Men to enter into Society with one another; that by mutual Assistance, and joint Force, they may secure unto each other their Proprieties in the things that contribute to the Comfort and Happiness of this Life; leaving in the mean while to every Man the care of his own Eternal Happiness ... This is the Original, this is the Use, and these are the Bounds of the Legislative (which is the Supreme) Power, in every Commonwealth. 30

Here Locke claims that the necessities and comforts of life ‘are not the spontaneous products of nature’, and because of this civil society is needed both to advance and to protect human productive endeavour from the vagaries of chance, and the covetousness of others. This covetousness is itself a product of a failure to recognize and appreciate that the present increase in pleasure and reduction in pain resultant from criminal mischief is outweighed by future divine punishment. Once Locke has thereby established the grounds of the existence of civil society, he then limits the scope of such society to just these grounds in order to advocate his brand of religious toleration. While it is true that Locke’s clearest statements about the curse on the earth and its consequences were written a few years subsequent to the Letter Concerning Toleration, there is evidence that he had considered and accepted the literal interpretation of Genesis prior to this time, at least since the publication of the Two Treatises of Government in 1689, as we shall see more fully momentarily. We can therefore trace Locke’s view in the Letter Concerning Toleration that the necessaries of life are not the

spontaneous products of nature to the consequences of original sin, and thus conclude that his definition of civil society and its proper limits is deeply conditioned by his view on the effects of original sin on the nonhuman natural world.

Locke's views on the need for revelation and on the grounds of political society are thus predicated on his reading of Genesis and his conviction regarding the consequences of original sin; we are now in a position to see how these are strongly reinforced by elements of Locke's economic position as presented in the second book of the *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), in which the value of material items is closely tied to the amount of labour invested in them. Locke here claims that it is because of the barrenness of the earth that the lion’s share of the value of material goods must derive from labour which transforms them from worthless things into the supports and comforts of human existence. This is clear in a well-known passage in the *Two Treatises of Government*, where Locke opines that

"'tis Labour indeed that puts the difference of value on every thing; and let any one consider, what the difference is between an Acre of Land planted with Tobacco, or Sugar, sown with Wheat or Barley, and an Acre of the same Land lying in common, without any Husbandry upon it, and he will find, that the improvement of labour makes the far greater part of the value ... if we will rightly estimate things as they come to our use, and cast up the several Expences about them, what in them is purely owing to Nature, and what to labour, we shall find, that in most of them [symbol] ninety-nine hundredths are wholly to be put on the account of labour."\(^{31}\)

He continues,

whatever Bread is more worth than Acorns, Wine than Water, and Cloth or Silk than Leaves, Skins or Moss, that is wholly owing to labour and industry.

The one of these being the Food and Rayment which unassisted Nature furnishes us with; the other provisions which our industry and pains prepare for us, which how much they exceed the other in value, when any one hath computed, he will then see, how much labour makes the far greatest part of the value of things, we enjoy in this World: And the ground which produces the materials, is scarce to be reckon'd in, as any, or at most, but a very small part of it; So little, that even amongst us, Land that is left wholly to Nature, that hath no improvement of Pasturage, Tillage, or Planting, is called, as indeed it is, wast; and we shall find the benefit of it amount to little more than nothing.\(^\text{32}\)

In these passages, Locke claims that the value of material goods derives largely from the labour invested in them;\(^\text{33}\) he further claims that this fact results from the barren character of the natural world. But once again, this barrenness is itself the result of original sin and the curse on the earth. As we have seen in the cases of the domains of religion and politics, original sin enters into the development of Locke's position, because it is this sin that accounts for the barrenness of the earth, by way of the curse described in Genesis.

\[^{\text{III}}\]

Thus far I have focused on the negative effects of original sin on human life in Locke's thought; however, it is important to recognize that he did not hold these effects to be uniformly negative. The reason is the same as that for his rejection of imputed guilt: the conviction that God is just in his punishments as well as his rewards, and that we ought to be able to recognize all of his acts, including all his punishments, as just, because he has given us the rational faculties to do so. This means that, while it is true that the curse on the earth and attendant necessity of labour and drudgery

\(^{32}\) Ibid. 315.

resulted in the need for revelation and political society, this labour itself is not univocally dolorous. For instance, in his 1661 Common-place Book, Locke argues that ‘We ought to look on it as a mark of goodness in God that he has put us in this life under a necessity of labour ... to keep mankind from the mischiefs that ill men at leisure are very apt to do’. 34 If the leisurely classes invested more of their time in some ‘honest labour ... there would [not be] the temptation to ambition where the possession of power could not display itself in the distinctions and shows of pride and vanity’. 35 In the same passages, Locke includes a critique of contemporaneous political economy, claiming that the failure of governments to ensure ‘the real necessities and conveniency of life’ is due to ‘the carelessness and negligence of the governments of the world, which are wholly intent upon the care of aggrandising themselves at the same time neglect the happiness of the people and with it their own peace and security’. 36 Whilst the need for labour might be a hindrance to the production or acquisition of natural religion, it is also a bulwark against the mischief and vice that the life of leisure gives such great

34 John Locke: Political Writings, ed. D. Wootton (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 440. A substantive treatment of these issues lies beyond the scope of this essay; I will note, however, that Locke suggests in other places at least one alternative explanation for the value of goods involving market forces; for an exploration of the relationship between these alternative explanations of value and that centered on labour see Karen I. Vaughn, loc. cit. Ramon M. Lemos, op. cit. claims that Locke ‘does not ... accept a so-called labor theory of value, if by this one means that the economic value of something is determined by the amount of labor expended in its production’ (348); however, he concedes at least that ‘something upon which labor is expended may, as a result of this expenditure of labor, be transformed and become considerably more valuable than it would be had no labor been expended upon it’ (347). Lemos attacks any interpretation of Locke which entails that ‘the value of some thing is determined solely by the amount of labor expended in producing it’ (ibid.), but one could avoid this objection by interpreting Locke as claiming that the amount of labour expended in producing something is one, and not the sole, factor that ultimately determines its value.

35 Ibid. 442.

36 Ibid.
opportunity for. Labour is therefore as much a benefit toward moral action as it is an obstacle, and is part and parcel of a just government and healthy society.

Locke also discusses the connection between legitimate government and original sin in the first book of the *Two Treatises of Government*. Here he appeals to the fall to attack the idea that the proper form of government is absolute monarchy, and that monarchical power is ultimately founded on Adamic dominion over humanity. He writes that, according to the scriptures, 'God sets [Adam] to work for his living, and seems rather to give him a Spade into his hand, to subdue the Earth, than a Scepter to Rule over its Inhabitants. *In the Sweat of thy Face thou shalt eat thy Bread*, says God to him, ver. 19'. He further suggests that 'it would be hard to imagine, that God, in the same Breath, should make him Universal Monarch over all Mankind, and a day labourer for his Life; turn him out of Paradise, to till the Ground, ver. 23. and at the same time, advance him to a Throne, and all the Priviledges and Ease of Absolute Power'. Locke writes that if God had intended monarchy to be the natural form of government, such that monarchs should have derived their authority from the originary monarchy of Adam, then he would not have made labour one of the consequences of original sin. Given the central role of pride and ambition in not only original sin, but also so much later viciousness, it is no wonder that God incorporated the necessity of labour into the penalty for these vices.

From the early *Essays on the Law of Nature* through the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to the late *Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke maintains that humanity is in principle capable of discovering and formulating a true and complete moral system. However, in the *Reasonableness* he insists that revelation is

37 Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 190.

38 Ibid.
indispensable, and he does so because he believes that even if he himself had succeeded in producing a mathematical morality (which he did not), such a morality would be useless for the vast majority of humanity. The reason he offers for the latter is that the vast majority of humanity is destined to labour and toil; this destiny is the result of the curse on earth levied by God on account of original sin. Moreover, the consequences of the curse on earth are not confined to the need for revelation, but extend to inform Locke's views on the origins and rationale of polity and economy. This should not be entirely surprising, considering how popular the notion was in early modern Protestant Europe and the unchallenged status of the bible as a source of historical as well as salvific truth. The intertwined topics of original sin, labour, and the nonhuman natural world have profound import to a host of central Lockian ideas, and even if we accept that Locke discarded any notion whatsoever that intrinsic human moral and cognitive capacity had been damaged fundamentally by the fall, this would not mean that original sin and its impact have no place in his outlook.

University of Michigan, Flint