

# Locke on Bodily Rights and the Immorality of Abortion: A Neglected Liberal Perspective

*Eric Manchester*

## ABSTRACT

Abortion rights proponents often defend their position by insisting that women have a “right over what happens to their own bodies.” Such a view generally presupposes that pre-natal offspring are but “extensions” of a woman’s body. Ironically, however, the seventeenth-century philosopher (and physician) John Locke, whose enormously influential defense of individual property (and other democratic) rights takes as its basis a fundamental right that one has over his or her own “person” (normally interpreted as “body”) explicitly declares abortion to be among the most obviously immoral actions. This article examines Locke’s view of pre-natal offspring, while demonstrating how his opposition to abortion is consistent with other aspects of his philosophy. I also examine how one author who takes Locke to defend only a limited pro-life position can develop Locke’s principles further in establishing a stronger case against abortion rights. I apply these insights to refute the arguments of three other scholars who appeal to Locke’s general political theory in defending abortion rights. Lastly, I consider the concerns of certain pro-life advocates that Locke’s principles, despite his own personal opposition to abortion, naturally tend toward alienated individualism and the commodification of human life in such a way as to lend support to an abortion rights culture.

**A**DVOCATES FOR “ABORTION-RIGHTS” often argue for the permissibility of abortion on the grounds that a woman has a “right” to decide on what happens to her own body. The tacit assumption here, of course, is that abortion only involves the body of the woman, and not the body of another, such as that of the “fetus,” understood at least as a subject in its own right.<sup>1</sup> The tendency in this case is to

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<sup>1</sup> There are those, of course, who maintain that women have a right to abortions

regard the fetus as an “extension” of the woman’s body, at least until it reaches a stage of viability, if not all the way to the point of birth. But is such a position defensible? Significantly, the seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke, whose systematic and highly influential account of natural rights is rooted in a right that one has over his or her own “person” (normally understood as “body”) apparently does not think so. While his *Second Treatise of Government* develops the notion that one has a right to private property as an extension of his or her body and labor, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he lists abortion among the most obviously immoral actions (Bk. 1, ch. 3, §19).<sup>2</sup> Incredibly, this comment seems to have gone almost unnoticed by scholars.

Locke himself never elaborates on his reasons for opposing abortion. Given his influence over the development of modern conceptions of individual liberty and natural rights (particularly in American history), a serious investigation of his opposition to abortion is certainly worthwhile. Accordingly, this paper aims to examine how the relevant concepts in the *Essay*, along with his more explicit political theory of the *Second Treatise* and other works, can be applied to form a coherent case against abortion rights.

Section one will examine four authors who have relied substantially on Locke in formulating arguments concerning abortion. One of these, Bradford William Short, examines Locke’s medical writings and training to indicate his opposition to fetal abortion, with earlier-stage abortions remaining an open question. Three other authors who employ Locke’s political principles to defend abortion rights are then considered. Only one of these, Ingrid Makus, acknowledges Locke’s statement against abortion in the *Essay*, while maintaining that his opposition here contradicts his

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even if the fetus is an individual subject, possessing its (his or her) own body, but this is a concession that “mainstream” defenders of abortion are apt to avoid, as it is tantamount to saying that a woman’s “right to choose” trumps another’s right to life, which is an intrinsically repugnant view to most, and difficult if not impossible to defend with any adequate notion of “rights.”

<sup>2</sup> Locke’s texts will be internally cited by an abbreviated version of the title of the work in question, followed by the book, chapter, and paragraph numbers, or in some works, by chapter and paragraph only. For example, the above text would be cited as *Essay* 1.3,19.

fundamental political principles developed in other works.<sup>3</sup> As a preparation for responding to each of these arguments in section three, section two will explain how Locke's understanding of morality and democratic rights is conceptually dependent upon his philosophical arguments for mind-body dualism and, by relation, God's existence. Section three will then demonstrate, in response to each of the authors addressed in section one, that Locke's political principles, when examined properly in light of his philosophical arguments for mind-body dualism and the existence of God, point to a clear-cut case against late term abortion, while denying at least a fundamental right to early-term abortions. (As to this last point, I will show that one can make a sufficiently strong Lockean case against early-term abortion, even if it falls short of the clear-cut opposition to late-term abortions.) Finally, in section four I will address the concern that Locke's philosophy may ultimately contribute to, rather than oppose, the abortion-rights agenda, to the extent that it promotes a culture of individualistic libertarianism that reduces human worth to the values of production and consumption.

#### I. OTHER WRITERS ON LOCKE AND ABORTION

##### *A. Bradford William Short on Locke's Opposition to Late-Term Abortion*

While not acknowledging Locke's condemnation of abortion in the *Essay*, Bradford Short provides a serious study of Locke's own medical writings and training to demonstrate a clear opposition to late-term abortion, with Locke's convictions about early-term abortions being inscrutable.<sup>4</sup>

Short reveals that the three translations of the Hippocratic Oath used at the time of Locke's own medical training "clearly ban post-quickening-

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<sup>3</sup> Ingrid Makus, *Women, Politics, & Reproduction: The Liberal Legacy* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> All references are to Bradford William Short's "John Locke: The 'Healing Philosopher'" in *Issues in Law and Medicine* 20/2 (2004): 103-52. This article was purchased at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and unfortunately does not include page numbers. Particular citations, consequently, are referenced by article section Roman numeral, and subsection letter, following Short's own pattern.

ing/late term abortion.”<sup>5</sup> The relevant phrase in the Oath, according to Short, is that whereby a physician swears that he “will not give to a woman any abortive remedy.”<sup>6</sup> Short investigates three English translations of the Oath that were in use in Locke’s time, each written between 1586 and 1597. Thomas Newton’s version forbids giving poison, or counseling others to do the same, to a woman “being with child” for the purpose of “killing the infant in the womb.”<sup>7</sup> By comparison, John Read’s translation requires a physician to vow that he will not administer “suppositories” to pregnant women with the intent to “hurt or corrupt the child,”<sup>8</sup> while a version by Peter Lowe demands that nothing be done “to a woman breeding” who is “big with child” that would “destroy or void her fruit.”<sup>9</sup>

While Short himself opposes abortion at all stages, he concedes that each of these accounts of the Oath can only be unambiguously used to denounce abortion at the fetal stage, and not at the earlier embryonic and pre-embryonic stages. Referencing the work of Robert Bym, Short concludes that the phrase “big with child” was synonymous in seventeenth century England with “quickening,” which only occurs after the first trimester.<sup>10</sup> Even apart from historical research, it does seem relevant that each of these translations specifically use terms such as “child” and “infant,” which convey a stage associated with post-natal offspring, with only the expression “fruit” being perhaps suggestive of earlier stages of development.

Short’s interpretation is consistent with Locke’s own language. Locke himself finds it likely that sense experience for “infants” begins in the womb, but he does not comment on the status of offspring prior to sensation (*Essay* 2.9, 5). Given that Locke bases personal identity and

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<sup>5</sup> Short, II.A.

<sup>6</sup> Short, II.A.

<sup>7</sup> Short, II.B.

<sup>8</sup> Short, II.B..

<sup>9</sup> Short, II.B.

<sup>10</sup> Short, II.C.

legal status on the chain of sense-memories (e.g., 2.27.9ff), this would reinforce Short's claim that Locke would accord later-term offspring moral status. (Locke's view of personal identity is discussed in greater details in sections two and three of this present work.) At the same time, Locke himself is aware of the terminological distinction between "embryos" and "fetuses." For example, he uses the latter term several places in the *Essay* (e.g., 3.6,26 and 4.4,16), while he uses the former term, for example, in 2.27,6. The relevance of this distinction between "embryo" and "fetus" to abortion is further evidenced in the *First Treatise on Government*, where he comments (as Short also notes) that it is difficult to see how an "embryo" could be "in possession of" a "rational soul" (*FT* §55).<sup>11</sup>

The denunciation of abortion in the *Essay* does nothing to clear up the question as to what status earlier-term offspring would have for Locke compared to infants. Right after listing abortion among immoral actions in 1.3,19, Locke condemns "exposing children." Given the evidence that Locke considers fetuses to be basically the biological and moral equivalent of already-born infants, one could surmise that Locke assumes that fetuses are included under the condemnation of exposing infants, in which case his statement against abortion could be applied to embryos. On the other hand, one could just as reasonably argue the converse; namely, that since late-term abortions are immoral, obviously exposing already-born children would be as well. Other writings do nothing to resolve this ambiguity. In his earlier *Essays on the Laws of Nature*, for instance, Locke speaks disapprovingly of "primitive" people who expose children, but does not mention abortion at all here.<sup>12</sup>

Other statements in the *Essay* (none of which are noticed by Short) produce even greater doubt as to whether Locke would extend his prohibition of abortion to early-term pregnancies. In 3.6,26ff and 4.4,14ff, for example, he refers to "changelings" and "monsters" born to human women as creatures whose humanity was impossible to adequately

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<sup>11</sup> Short also notes this reference in II.C.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Essay V, in "Essays on the Laws of Nature," in *Locke's Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (New York NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), p.112.

discern.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Locke surmises that they can reasonably be taken to constitute a species “between man and beast” (4.4,14). On the other hand, later he warns against carelessness in forming ideas of what constitutes a “man,” as this could lead someone (apparently illegitimately, he thinks) to exclude “Negroes,” “changelings,” and “infants” (*Essay* 4.7,16-19). Even so, Locke clearly distinguishes biological humanity from *moral* personhood (2.27, 6-7; also, 22) the latter requiring the possession of the reason and memory that is needed for one to be subject to law (3.21,16).<sup>14</sup> In this case, “very material doubts” can be raised as to whether such “monstrous productions” (3.6,23) should “receive baptism,” or be “determined” to “life or death” (3.6,27).

All of the above statements, I agree, make it impossible to argue that Locke would unambiguously judge early-term and late-term abortions on equal terms morally. Nonetheless, I will show later why the same principles that make the morality of early-term abortions ambiguous for Locke also make it impossible to assert a fundamental right to early-term abortion. In so doing, I will also show how Locke's principles make it reasonable to ban most such abortions, without counting such cases as “murder” (3.6,27, line 5).

### *B. Lockean Defenses of Abortion Rights*

#### *James Bowers*

James Bowers applies Lockean principles in offering a position that he takes to be both pro-choice and anti-abortion.<sup>15</sup> He defends abortion rights for the following reasons: (1) Locke advocates limited government

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<sup>13</sup> Locke distinguishes the term “man,” which is a biological class, from “person,” which is a moral and legal class. Accordingly, a rational parrot (to use his example in 2.27, 6-8) would still be a person. “Man” (or, “human being”) is based on shape, and not rational capacities.

<sup>14</sup> In 2.27,22 Locke explicitly states that if a drunk man commits a crime, but later forgets committing it, he is the same “man,” but not the same “person,” with punishment being just only because we cannot be certain that he has truly forgotten his deed.

<sup>15</sup> James R. Bowers, *Pro-Choice & Anti-Abortion: Constitutional Theory and Public Policy* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1997).

for the sake of individual liberty; (2) if a choice to abort is not private, then neither is a right to give birth, so that a government mandate to abort would be logically as justified as a mandate to give birth;<sup>16</sup> and (3) beliefs about when personal life begins “almost always” rely upon particular “theological” conceptions, so that opposing abortion on the basis of such beliefs is tantamount to “imposing” religion on the “civic community,” which violates Locke’s emphasis on religious liberty.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, he claims to be anti-abortion, since minimized government would discourage public funding for abortions.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Bowers expects that Locke would permit government attempts to *persuade* against abortion, even on religious grounds, though only apart from *imposing* these convictions through the coercive force of law.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Ingrid Makus*

As noted previously, Makus appears to be alone in acknowledging Locke’s comments against abortion in the *Essay*. Nevertheless, she then shifts her focus to chapter 6 of the *Second Treatise* regarding paternal power. Here, Locke writes that children do not enjoy the same liberty rightfully ascribed to adults, inasmuch as they do not yet exercise the reason that provides both the foundation and the limits of liberty (*ST* 6.55).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Locke recognizes a duty for parents to nurture their children, for the sake of repopulating the human race.<sup>21</sup>

For Makus, this “duty to repopulation” violates the fundamental right

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<sup>16</sup> Bowers, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Bowers, p. 42-43.

<sup>18</sup> Bowers, pp. 38 and 43.

<sup>19</sup> Locke, in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, allows for the government to offer religious persuasion, as long as it is free from legal coercion. See Patrick Romanell’s edition (Indianapolis IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), pp. 18-19 and 45-47.

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that while Locke states in chapter 6 that children are not yet at liberty because they cannot *exercise* their reason, they are nevertheless “born rational” and with a “natural freedom” (6.61). Locke, then, seems to suggest that infants (and thus fetuses) have a natural right to life and liberty, though this right is not yet prepared to be extended into positive legal rights or liberty.

<sup>21</sup> See Makus, pp. 66-71.

that one has over one's body and, by extension, one's labor. Significantly, for Makus, abortion rights are not so much based on the claim that the fetus is *intrinsically* part of the woman's body (a difficult case to make). Rather, she takes the woman's right over pre-born offspring to be based on the fact that its care is primarily attached to her productive (in this case, reproductive) *labor*,<sup>22</sup> so that it is in this sense her property, by *extension*.<sup>23</sup>

Although Makus does not limit abortion rights to pre-fetal stages, at the very least one may concede that her analysis, when coupled with Locke's apparent view that embryos, at least, do not unambiguously possess moral status, makes a formidable case for early-term abortion rights. Consequently, for Makus, the duty that women supposedly have to society to give birth is actually a thinly-veiled demand that they surrender their natural rights over their body, labor, and material production to the interests of men. This, in turn, contradicts the very principles upon which Lockean rights are grounded.

Section three responds to Makus by considering that Lockean property rights are developed primarily in terms of a right to *use*, and not a right to *destroy*. In fact, when considered alongside Donna Dickenson's defense of abortion but opposition to the sale of fetal tissue on Lockean grounds (addressed next), Makus's argument becomes all the more problematic. This is true, inasmuch as it seems to imply, *contra* Locke, that a right to destroy one's alleged "property" is actually more fundamental than a right to use it.

In further response to those who might claim that while a right to destruction is not recognized by Locke in cases of waste (e.g., *ST* 5.37-38), it may be in cases where liberty is otherwise jeopardized, I will examine Locke's statements regarding offspring whose human status is unclear to show that, on his principles, it is more reasonable to preserve their life. The key here, developed in more detail in section two, involves Locke's conviction that there is adequate empirical basis for belief in God, and that this belief provides a basis for refraining from destroying

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<sup>22</sup> Makus, p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> She does not use the words "intrinsic" and "extension" here, but this meaning, I believe, is clearly conveyed.



creatures whose human rights status is unclear. Moreover, such a belief is necessary for a coherent account of democratic property rights generally.

*Donna Dickenson*

As section two will address in detail, Locke's argument for private property is based on the fact that each individual has, by nature, property in his or her own "person." While most readers of Locke take "person" to be the equivalent of "body," abortion-rights advocate Donna Dickenson disagrees. First, she notes that Locke explicitly states (such as in his condemnation of suicide) that our bodies belong to God (and thus, she presumes, cannot also belong to us).<sup>24</sup> Secondly, she correctly points out that in the *Essay*, the term "person" (synonymous there with "personal identity" and the "self") is not equated with one's body, or even with the immaterial substance called "the soul," but with one's consciousness, constituted by a chain of sense memories (*Essay* 2.27,9ff).<sup>25</sup> Locke himself declares that "person" is a "forensic" term, so that it is technically the personal consciousness, and not the soul or body, that serves as the foundation for one's moral and legal responsibility and rights (2.27,26).

Locke's account of personal identity is among the best known, and the most frequently critiqued. These critiques normally focus on his insistence that irretrievably forgotten experiences do not constitute part of one's identity, even in cases where such a claim is highly counter-intuitive or logically absurd.<sup>26</sup> Even so, in stressing the importance of linking personhood back to even the earliest stages of (later forgotten) experience (e.g., 2.9,5-6), such critiques if anything bolster rather than undermine the Lockean opposition to abortion.

In any case, on the surface, Dickenson's rejection of the equation between Lockean "personhood" and "body" could be construed as helping to make the case for abortion rights, as it is undoubtedly more difficult to

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<sup>24</sup> E.g., *Second Treatise of Government*, ch. 2, §6.

<sup>25</sup> For Dickenson's own application of the person/body distinction in defending an abortion-rights position, see ch. 7, case study 3, esp. pp. 166-68.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Thomas Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (III.2), or John Wesley's *Remarks Upon Mr. Locke's "Essay on Human Understanding,"* comments from §8.

argue that the fetus (or embryo) does not possess its own body than it is to try to deny it personal rights by virtue of its lacking consciousness. Dickenson's view seems to entail (though she does not say so directly) that even if the pre-natal offspring has "its" own body, it (if one can excuse the use of the impersonal pronoun here) can still be rightfully construed as being the "property" of the mother insofar as its existence is the result of her (re)productive labor.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps inconsistently, Dickenson makes a nuanced Lockean case against the sale of fetal tissue, even as she defends abortion. She justifies this opposition by appealing to the relational nature of personhood.<sup>28</sup> This, of course, suggests a relational aspect to property (since one's first property is "in one's person"). Not surprisingly, her possible inconsistency is compounded, arguably, by the fact that these relational aspects of personhood and property are not used to accord fathers any "property rights" over their pre-natal offspring.

The language of relationalism, of course, is particularly popular among feminists, who often regard "rights" philosophies, such as Locke's, to appeal to allegedly male tendencies of competition rather than cooperation. In any case, Dickenson is concerned that the practice of selling fetal tissue could become exploitative to women (who presumably might resort to pregnancy simply out of economic need). Oddly, this seems to suggest that a right to destroy the product of one's labor is more basic than the right to use it for economic gain, a view that clearly runs counter to Locke's political vision.

While Dickenson is to be given credit for a careful reading of Locke, section three will show that her distinction between "body" and "person" here is practically irrelevant. In brief, I will argue (1) that on Locke's scheme, a right to consciousness ultimately is incoherent without a corresponding right to the body, and (2) that she appears to make the highly questionable assumption that "property" cannot belong both to us and to God.

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<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Dickenson herself does take the fetus to be "physically part of" the woman, even though she is hesitant to ground property rights in the body rather than in "personhood." See p. 169.

<sup>28</sup> Dickenson, p. 169.

## II. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF LOCKE'S OPPOSITION TO ABORTION

Apart from his passing comment in the *Essay*, Locke nowhere else explicitly mentions abortion in his writings. To discover the basis for his objection to abortion, then, one must examine the general empiricist epistemology of the *Essay*, and its application to Locke's general ethical theory.

For Locke, morals are capable of the same demonstrable certainty as mathematics (e.g., *Essay* 4.3,16 and 18), although he never completely proves this, either to his or his reader's satisfaction. Nevertheless, once one provides an overview of his general ethical method, one can further apply this method to show how later term abortion can be opposed, while dismissing the claim to a basic right to earlier term abortion, even if it cannot be unambiguously demonstrated to be immoral within his system. Specifically, Lockean arguments regarding abortion can be derived from his general demonstration of democratic rights (including property rights), which themselves are based on a belief in God and mind-body dualism, both of which Locke maintains are supported by empirical experience. In doing this, it will also become clear that developing an argument against abortion on the basis of such beliefs not only does not constitute an impermissible imposition of explicitly religious beliefs into social policy, as Bowers contends, but that the very protection against such an imposition, as well as the defense of other cherished democratic values, depends upon these dualistic and theistic foundations.

### *A. Locke's Empirical Basis for Dualism and Theism*

#### *Dualism*

In terms of mind-body dualism, Locke maintains that empirical experience supports belief in an immaterial soul as follows: in the act of sense perception, one has an immediate, intuitive knowledge of his or her own existence (*Essay* 4.9,2-3) in which he or she is immediately aware of his or her distinction from the objects of sensation. From this, one has practical certainty of the existence of an external world, including one's own body (*Essay* 4.11,1-4). This awareness of a mind distinct from body, then, provides evidence of the distinction between mind and body.

Strictly speaking, he takes it to be only "probable" that mind is "immaterial," stating that a better term for this distinction is "cogitative"

versus “incogitative” reality (e.g., *Essay* 4.10,9).<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, he is steadfast (e.g., in his argument for God) that even if cognition is not immaterial and matter under certain conditions is capable of thought, such a possibility can only occur through God “superadding” the capacity for thought to matter (*Essay* 4.3,6). He remains convinced that it is impossible for matter, operating simply under physical principles, to produce cognition.

Beyond simply empirically inferring a fundamental distinction between “cogitative” and “incogitative” reality, Locke maintains that we also have an experience of mind and body as “linked” together through the power that each has to produce change in the other. This insight relates to Locke’s concept of “active” and “passive” power.

For Locke, one derives an idea of “active” power by observing the ability of one object to produce an alteration in the simple sensory ideas that constitute one’s idea of another object. Similarly, an idea of “passive” power is formed in observing such qualities being altered (e.g., 2.21,2ff). For example, one of the active powers ascribed to “fire” is its ability to melt “gold,” which in turn has a passive power to be melted (2.21,1).

Locke insists that our “clearest” idea of active power comes from the experience we have of being able to initiate motion in our own bodies by thought or by an act of “willing” (2.21, 4ff). Of course, we are also aware that the ideas constituting our consciousness (and thus “personal identity”) arise from sensory experience that we receive through our body. In this way, we have empirical evidence of the body’s ability to operate on the mind, and *vice versa*. Insofar as the knowledge that we have of our power to initiate bodily activity is crucial to Locke’s theory of human action, it is also important in developing Locke’s theory of property rights based on bodily activity, as I will show later in section two.

### *God’s Existence*

Just as Locke believes that it is evident from experience that the mind is distinct from material objects (which serve as the objects of perception),

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<sup>29</sup>Unless otherwise stated, I will treat “consciousness,” “cognition,” “thinking,” and “cogitative being” as practically equivalent terms, although important distinctions undoubtedly could be made in the context of other discussions.

he is also convinced that one cannot ascribe a physical cause to the immaterial mind. As an empiricist, Locke insists that we have no experience of unconscious, material objects being able to produce consciousness (e.g., *Essay* 4.10,10). Hence, it is reasonable to assume that there must be an immaterial cause of consciousness, and that this cause must itself be conscious—and, he adds, eternal, all-powerful, and so on (4.10,5-6).

Of course, contemporary science may challenge Locke on this point, as one may contend that there is more and more understanding of how consciousness is produced from neurological physical causes. I confess that I do not find Locke's response to such contentions very convincing. For example, his claim that "thinking" could be "superadded" to matter by God may involve circular reasoning. If God's existence is inferred from the *immateriality* of our own thinking, doesn't the admission that *matter* could be "thinking" negate the basis for arguing for the necessity of an immaterial Creator of consciousness?

One suspects, in relation to the above point, that Locke's conviction about "thinking matter" is more *a priori* than *a posteriori*. One gets a sense of this, for instance, when he proclaims: "It being as impossible, that Things wholly void of knowledge, and operating blindly, and without any perception, should produce a knowing Being, as it is impossible that a Triangle should make itself three Angles bigger than two right ones" (*Essay* 4.10,5), and then adds: "it is impossible to conceive that Matter...could have originally in it, and from itself Sense, Perception, and Knowledge..." (4.10,10). These assertions rely on an intuition that consciousness is qualitatively different than unconscious matter, so that no degree of complexity could by itself "cross the gap" between unconsciousness and consciousness. Such a retort may well be regarded as *ad hoc*. Given this, there may be sound ways to defeat this physicalistic account of consciousness, but it is not clear that Locke can do so consistently within the conditions of his empiricism.

In order to advance the discussion of Locke's opposition to abortion, it may be that the best that one can do for Locke at this point is to suggest that the *a posteriori* evidence suggests that it is statistically unlikely that the complexity of interactions needed to produce consciousness (if such is possible at all) could occur at random, without some kind of an intelligence guiding them. This, however, would reduce the argument for

God's existence to one of probability rather than of demonstration (4.10,1). Likewise, insofar as "rights" are based on a fundamental distinction between cogitative and incogitative being, and thus on an immaterial God, rights-based arguments would be at best probabilistic and subject to revision upon certain scientific findings.

The above concession certainly falls far short of Locke's assertion that morality is capable of "mathematical" certainty. What we might say, then, is that to the extent that one wishes to appeal to individual rights to justify abortion, such an appeal presupposes the existence of God (and thus, a basic distinction between cogitative and incogitative being). Whether or not these principles are "demonstrable" or merely "probable," the abortion-rights advocate will find that any attempt to defend his or her position by refuting these principles will result in destroying the coherence of his or her own account of rights, as will be shown later. Before exploring these connections, however, it is helpful to consider Locke's basic position on morality.

#### *B. Morality in Locke*

The statement against abortion in 1.3,19 occurs in the context of rejecting the (largely Cartesian) doctrine of innate ideas. As an empiricist, Locke denies that we have any knowledge prior to sense experience. This is not to say that for him all knowledge is directly derived from sense experience. It is to say, however, that sense experience is a necessary prior, or at least concomitant, condition to any and all knowledge.

Along these same lines, Locke explicitly denies that there are any innate "practical principles" that are known prior to sense experience (1.3). This is not to say that the immorality of certain actions cannot be known with certainty. As already noted in section two, Locke ascribes to morality a demonstrability that is supposedly on par with that of mathematics.

To comprehend the similarity between moral and mathematical demonstration, it is helpful to review Locke's basic understanding of the nature of mathematical proof. For him, mathematical truths can be known with certainty, even though they are not immediately self-evident (*Essay* 4.2). Rather, their truth is demonstrated by "perceiving" the "agreement or disagreement" of various ideas, in relation to understanding the

meaning of the terms involved (e.g., 2.28,2-4). For example, one can affirm the truth of the statement “the sum of the angles of a triangle equals the sum of two right angles” once he or she “perceives” certain facts about the angles of a triangle, such as, if one angle exceeds ninety degrees, the other two must be less than ninety degrees.

Carrying this model over to morality, Locke asserts that if one understands the word “property” to refer to that which rightfully belongs exclusively to another, he or she will perceive that the idea of stealing “disagrees” with this concept, and thus conforms to the idea of “injustice” (4.3, 18). Of course, the very concepts of “right,” “belonging to,” and the like must themselves be based on what is learned from experience.

Now that the philosophical evidence for Locke’s dualism, theism, and general understanding of morality has been reviewed, we can proceed to the details of how these concepts can be employed by Locke to demonstrate the nature of democratic rights. Finally, after this demonstration, Locke’s scheme will be contrasted with the metaphysical materialism of his predecessor Hobbes to show that Locke’s reliance on dualism and theism do not simply constitute one basis of support among others for democratic rights, but appear to be essential in maintaining such a position coherently.

### *C. Outlining a Lockean Demonstration of Rights*

Locke’s basic argument for property rights and the basis and limits of representative government is laid out primarily in the *Second Treatise of Government*. His views can be summarized as follows: In the “state of nature,” everyone has a right to provide for his or her own basic well-being, as well as a basic obligation, according to “natural reason,” to help others in need once his or her own basic needs are met (ST 2.6). Thus, people have a natural right to produce what is needed for life. Specifically, they have a “property” in their own “person” (ST 5.27). This property in their own person(s) is extended to a right over their own productive labor, as well as over the products of this labor, and the land with which this labor is “mixed” in the production of these goods (ST 5.27ff).

As stated previously, mind-body dualism, or at least a fundamental distinction between mental and physical reality, is central to Locke’s notion of democratic rights. Dualism, in turn, relies upon the existence of

God, which is then appealed to in adding support for such rights. To the point, Locke indicates in the *Essay* that, reflecting on our mental capacities, it is evident that we have an ability to initiate bodily motion. For him, this suggests that we have a liberty over our actions that no other human person has. Hence, we may conclude that it is proper to associate a “natural right” over our own bodily actions, thereby making the body, as the instrument of such activity, our property. In addition, because the body requires interaction with the external world for its care, it is reasonable to extend our rights to the objects with which one interacts, as well as to whatever is produced through this interaction, such as the harvesting of food or the construction of buildings. Simply put, the right we have to land and the products of our labor extends from the right that we have over our own bodily activity, as initiated by our own rational decisions.

Bringing God into the picture, Locke surmises that this connection between mind, labor, and production indicates that God intended humans to “mix” their labor with the earth and to own and use what they produce. In fact, the claim that this process reflects God’s intention is further supported by the fact that the earth is naturally designed to produce much more when it is cultivated, than when it is left to flourish on its own (ST 5.32-34, and 42-43).

Dualism also provides a conceptual foundation for economic exchange. Since production is initiated by one’s personal rational decision, one can, if he or she chooses, opt to trade his or her produced goods with those produced by another. As technology increases, it is inevitable that the amount of goods that can be produced through a given amount of natural resources and labor will increase. This creates greater and greater excess. Given the prohibition on waste, however, it becomes reasonable for production to focus on goods that are not quickly perishable, as well as to replace the excessive storage of perishable goods with the accumulation of wealth that cannot perish, i.e., the production of cash (e.g., ST 5.47). Because cash is imperishable, there is nothing unnatural or unreasonable about “hoarding” it (ST 5.50).

For Locke, the primary task of government is the preservation of life and property (e.g., ST 8.95). Representative government is the logical outgrowth of this task, as when one surrenders his or her own wealth, he or she naturally merits some control over how this wealth is used (e.g., ST



11, esp. 140). In the pre-social state of nature, everyone is expected to exercise self-governance in respecting the rights of others, in accordance to natural reason. Thus, while social organization and government become practically necessary as human relations and the division of property and goods become more complex, democracy most closely approximates this natural order of self-government.

While Locke focuses on economic rights, his theism and dualism also establish a basis for other rights, such as that of religious liberty. For example, in the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, he maintains that the task of government is to protect property and those matters concerning the body, while religious institutions should focus on concerns of the soul.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, however, section four will demonstrate that these concerns are in many ways secondary to economic interests. In fact, it will become clear that religious concerns are valued by Locke largely because of the conceptual and pragmatic support they provide for socioeconomic functioning.

#### *D. The Centrality of Dualism and Theism to Democratic Rights*

Locke insists that it is virtually impossible to make sense of morality, or the free will that he believes morality presupposes, on a purely mechanistic system (e.g., 1.3, 14, and 4.27,4). Free will and morality require a fundamental distinction between cogitative and incogitative being, and thus God. A brief analysis of the philosophy of Locke's predecessor Thomas Hobbes demonstrates this well. Locke himself mentions Hobbes's notion of "justice" in the *Essay* (1.3,5), and clearly holds a view contrary to Hobbes's in both the *First* and *Second Treatise*.

Unlike Locke, Hobbes is a strict materialist, who systematically draws out the ethical and political implications of this denial of immaterial reality.<sup>31</sup> In terms of rights, Hobbes shows that since "right" in his system is reducible to the laws of physics, which dictate the inherent tendency of a moving object (such as a human body) to maintain its motion and to resist efforts to interfere with its trajectory, "right" is defined as the

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<sup>30</sup> Editor's introduction, p. 9, as well as pp. 18-19, 36, and 45-47 in the main text.

<sup>31</sup> For a general account of Hobbes's mechanistic scheme, see especially *Leviathan*, Part I "Of Man," chs. 1-7.

natural result of the interplay of force between humans competing for the same goods. This means that, in the state of nature, one does not even have an absolute right over his or her own body; if another is strong enough to dominate that person, this is perfectly “natural.”<sup>32</sup> Hence, there is no right to private property in nature as there is in Locke; “every man has a right to everything,” which in practice means that no individual has an absolute right to anything.<sup>33</sup>

As shown previously, Locke’s mind-body distinction creates a metaphysical basis for democratic self-government, since it becomes an extension of self-governance in the state of nature. For Hobbes, by contrast, there is no natural basis for such self-restraint. This is true, since for him “mind” itself is a product of physical forces, which deterministically “play themselves out,” leading to whatever outcome happens to result. Consequently, in the state of nature, any person has a right to whatever he or she can attain through the assertion of his or her natural force.<sup>34</sup> As a result, Hobbes explicitly denies an absolute right (or property) even over one’s own body.<sup>35</sup>

While the state of nature literally is a place where “might makes right,” the constant threat of violence in the state of nature makes even the strongest vulnerable.<sup>36</sup> Thus, societies inevitably form so as to help produce order and thereby enhance the prospects for survival.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Locke, however, who favors democratic government insofar as it approximates the naturally proper condition of self-governance, Hobbes favors authoritarian government as the best way to keep the constant threat of competing physical forces in check.<sup>38</sup> To maintain order, Hobbes

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<sup>32</sup> *Leviathan*, ch. 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Leviathan*, 14.4; see also 15.3

<sup>34</sup> *Leviathan*, 13.3

<sup>35</sup> *Leviathan*, 14. 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Leviathan*, 13.1 and 9

<sup>37</sup> *Leviathan*, 14.4-5

<sup>38</sup> Hobbes lists the advantages of monarchy over democracy in *Leviathan* 19.4-9.

also explicitly rejects freedom of “conscience,”<sup>39</sup> the press,<sup>40</sup> and religion.<sup>41</sup>

### III. COMPLETING THE LOCKEAN ARGUMENT AGAINST ABORTION RIGHTS

At this point, it is possible to address each of the authors mentioned previously who invoke Lockean principles in defending an abortion-rights position. It is also possible to apply more carefully the details of Locke’s political philosophy to show how he may be better equipped than Short realized to make a case for extending a pro-life position to early-term pregnancy as well.

#### *Response to Bowers*

Bowers’s use of Locke in defending an abortion-rights position, as section one explains, centers on two main claims: (1) Locke’s general political theory emphasizes minimizing government intervention and preserving, as much as possible, individual liberty; and (2) attempts to outlaw abortion on grounds of particular conceptions of the human person usually involve imposing a particular religious conviction, such as a belief in God.

By refuting (2), his argument for (1) fails as well. As we have seen, Locke provides a philosophical, and not simply a theological, justification for his dualistic conception of the human person. This, in turn, empirically justifies a belief in God, since on his view it is not possible (or at least highly improbable) that human consciousness, which serves as the basis of rights, could emerge from purely natural processes. Given Locke’s own condemnation of at least post-embryonic abortion, it is clear that Locke considers the protections accorded to the fetus to be in line with the proper restrictions on individual liberty. While the case for protecting earlier term offspring is less clear-cut, the responses to Makus and Dickenson are sufficient to show that a ban on such abortion at least does not violate a

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<sup>39</sup> *Leviathan*, 19.7

<sup>40</sup> *Leviathan*, 19.14

<sup>41</sup> *Leviathan*, 33.1ff. Here he defends granting ultimate religious authority to the monarch.

fundamental right on Locke's scheme and is actually in greater accord with "natural reason," given our natural limitations in judging the human status of the offspring in such cases.

*Response to Makus*

In response to Makus, even if embryos are not unambiguous "moral persons" and thus "possessors" of rights, this does not necessarily imply that the mother has the right to destroy them. For Locke, the property ownership extending from labor is rooted in a right of potential *use* of that property. This indicates that material that is fundamentally beyond the use of the mother does not properly count as "property" on Locke's view. Furthermore, if one considers Makus's assumption that one has a basic right to destroy one's material production in light of Dickenson's opposition to selling fetal tissue, this is problematic in conveying that the right to destroy one's property is more basic than the right to use it or sell it.

As Short mentions, Locke regards the creation of life simply for the sake of destroying it to be "audacious," inasmuch as it dares to appropriate a power to humans that properly belongs only to God.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in respect to the moral status of "changelings" and "monsters" (and likewise, I would argue, embryos), Locke states that the question of whether or not they possess an "immortal soul" is best left to God (4.4,15, lines 8-9). Insofar as our "nominal idea"<sup>43</sup> of "changelings," "monsters," and (I would argue) embryos defines such creatures as offspring whose "human" and "personal" status cannot be determined, we cannot judge definitely whether or not the idea of killing them "agrees" or "disagrees" with the idea of murder.

Because one clearly does not have a right to murder, the possibility that killing such offspring could involve murder at the very least precludes

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<sup>42</sup> Short, II.C, especially pghs. 16 and 17.

<sup>43</sup> Locke's view is that while there probably are natural species by which creatures are classified, only God can be sure of the "real essences" of these species, whereas we, as beings reliant upon sense, must perceive similarities between creatures as closely as we can in order to classify them according to the "nominal" essences that we name for them, which may or may not correspond to the "real essence" (e.g., *Essay* 3.3,11-18 and 3.6,13-32).

the possibility of asserting a certain right to abort them. In fact, since Locke clearly takes knowledge of a natural right first to require knowledge of the natural law<sup>44</sup> (including, among other things, the “valid and fixed” laws of “birth and life” established by God),<sup>45</sup> it is evident that one cannot assert a natural right to early-term abortion if we cannot know perfectly the natural status of such offspring.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, given that in 4.7,16-19 Locke considers “Negroes,” “changelings,” and infants together in his discussion of the idea of “man” (a biological term), his condemnation elsewhere of killing infants could reasonably (though not definitively) be viewed as intending, by this same association, to include “Negroes” and “changelings” as well.

While pro-lifers undoubtedly find this to be an understated case against abortion, it does nevertheless provide a strong pragmatic case against early-term abortions, except perhaps in cases clearly involving the safety of the mother. In fact, one can be encouraged that, as an empiricist, Locke would likely acknowledge the prudence of preventing early-term abortions if it could be empirically demonstrated that leniency in this area was correlated with subsequent leniency in what he might take to be less ambiguous cases of impermissible abortion, such as late-term and even partial-birth abortions.

*Dickenson on “Personhood as Property” in Locke*

Finally, Dickenson’s attempt to support abortion rights by equating the “property” that one has in her own “person” with “consciousness” rather than “body” is practically irrelevant. For one thing, rights over one’s own “agency” and initiation of bodily actions practically necessitate having a right over the body through which this agency is exercised. Indeed, Locke himself defines “liberty” in terms of the ability to “act” or

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<sup>44</sup> *Essays on the Laws of Nature*, introduction to I, in Goldie.

<sup>45</sup> *Essays on the Laws of Nature*, I, section 3.

<sup>46</sup> One may point out that Locke refers to the laws of “birth” and not “conception.” This seems to matter little, as if we do not know exactly all the natural principles that make birth possible, we also do not know all the natural principles at work at various stages of pregnancy including, presumably, those that mark the transition into full human status.

“forbear acting,” according to one’s preference (*Essay* 2.21,8ff). A right to consciousness, then, apart from action would be akin to a right to religious “belief” apart from religious practice, a view that Locke for the most part dismisses (e.g., in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*).

Likewise, for Locke, the contents of consciousness arise from bodily sensations. Could one have a right to one’s personal identity without having a right to its necessary source? If not, it seems there would be nothing objectionable with denying one all sensory experience, so as to preclude the formation of any personal identity, a conclusion that seems *prima facie* absurd. Even more, if someone has “property” in his or her very consciousness, *to whom* does this consciousness “belong?” If the person him/herself is the “property,” is this a property without a human “owner”?

Dickenson further errs in her conclusion that Locke cannot regard our body to be our property, because he has already said that it belongs to God. To begin with, a claim that our bodies are God’s property does not logically preclude this “property” also belonging to us. Certainly, if our bodies “belong” to God by virtue of having been created by Him, surely the same is true for our consciousness! By the same reasoning, if Locke believes that someone owns something by virtue of having produced it through his or her labor, it follows that God, properly speaking, is the owner of all creation. This fact, however, does not strike Locke as inconsistent with the claim that God also intends for the earth to be the “property” of the human beings who mix their labor with it.

One cannot escape the above conclusion by suggesting that God renounces ownership over the earth by giving it to us as a gift, since if this were true, there would be no basis for His placing parameters on our use of it, as for Locke He obviously does. In fact, in light of this, in cases where we are unable to clearly discern the human and personal status of offspring, such as in those involving “changelings,” “monsters,” and embryos, it seems reasonable, given the ownership by God over all, for us to assume no right over the life of these offspring, but rather to leave it to providence to judge what should happen to them, as Locke suggests.

#### IV: IS LOCKE PARTLY TO BLAME FOR THE LEGACY OF ABORTION?

Locke’s dualism and theism are necessary for his defense of democratic

values, while also providing support for his opposition to abortion. But a case can be made that, despite his own moral convictions, Locke can still be charged, at least in part, with contributing to a cultural atmosphere of individualism and libertarianism that encourages the practice of abortion. While I am reticent to concede the premise that “worldview contributions” outweigh actual arguments in assessing a thinker, it does seem appropriate to consider how Locke’s principles may have contributed to an abortion-rights perspective. If for no other reason, such an exercise is useful for gaining insights into how his views can be adjusted, and if need be even corrected, so as to sustain more effectively a truly pro-life political theory.

With this in mind, the charge of individualism is somewhat warranted by the fact that Locke’s defense of private property is centered on the right that an *individual* has over his or her own *individual* body and labor. To be sure, this marks a point of departure from classical arguments from more communitarian thinkers such as Aristotle, whose defense of property centers, by contrast, on the *family*.<sup>47</sup> Ironically, Locke’s reliance upon certain aspects of Christian doctrine may be partly responsible for this difference, as will now be examined.

#### *A. Lockean vs. Aristotelian Foundations of Private Property*

Whereas Aristotle’s God serves entirely as a Prime Mover and not a Creator (since Aristotle believed this would, impossibly, imply change in the activity of a necessarily unchanging, eternally actual God), Locke accepts the Judeo-Christian notion that God creates each individual soul. Consequently, the restrictions on human activity as well as the obligation to care for others are rooted in the common status, shared between all human persons, of being created by God (and in that sense “equal”). By comparison, Aristotle recognizes a natural affinity for the family, rooted in the natural order itself.<sup>48</sup> For Aristotle, familial affection (and virtuous friendship)<sup>49</sup> is the backbone of social respect more than an abstract notion of “equality,” which emphasizes individual autonomy and views

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<sup>47</sup> E.g., *Politics* I, ch. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Politics* I.2

<sup>49</sup> E.g., *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, ch.3,1156b7-34.

community as the result of a “rational agreement” more than a natural good. Consequently, whereas Aristotelian concern for others concretely originates in the very biological, and practical, connection that one has to his or her own family, Locke relies upon the “story,” similar to Plato’s “Noble Myth” in the *Republic*, that we should honor our fellow citizens because we are all “created by God.”<sup>50</sup>

Locke’s defense of private property, as is explained previously, rests largely on the observation that God must intend the earth to be cultivated, given the greater yield that it produces in this case. As was also noted previously, he further maintains that when production increases beyond what can be individually consumed, waste should be avoided and excess yields given to others. But, we imagine, these “others” to whom it should be given are reasonably those, who upon receiving this assistance, are most likely to be able to become contributors to the system of economic exchange.

The consumeristic, rather than care-based, nature of private property becomes fully apparent when one considers the diverging opinions of Aristotle and Locke in respect to the enterprise of “wealth-making.” For Aristotle, the most natural, and self-controlled, instance of wealth-making is where one earns and spends money only to the extent needed to care for family. He therefore warns against the dangers of using money simply for the sake of generating more money, severed from its locus in familial care.<sup>51</sup> Locke, by contrast, while mandating against waste, nevertheless regards the unrestricted generation of capital as being perfectly natural and thus virtuous, in light of the earth’s amenability to cultivation. In fact, while Aristotle stresses the importance of valuing the care of the family over the generation of wealth for its own sake, Locke’s dedicatory statement to *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* values education (and, one may wonder, the good of having children generally) because of its importance to the “well-being” and “prosperity” of the nation.

Of course, in practice, Locke’s scheme facilitates an economy

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<sup>50</sup> *Republic* III, 415a-c. Of course, Locke’s “story” creates the basis for democracy, whereas Plato’s justifies a social hierarchy, headed by the virtuous rule of the “golden-souled” philosopher kings.

<sup>51</sup> *Politics*, I.9-10.



capable of creating great discrepancy in individual wealth. It also encourages the ever-expanding development and consumption of commodities. At the same time, the “right” to consumption is implicitly commensurate with individual productive labor. Hence, to the extent that children are more consumers than producers, they are implicitly “unequal,” so that their value lies mainly in the enjoyment that they provide for the parents. Thus, in time, the unborn as well as the elderly and infirm may come to be thought of as expendable.

*B. The Commodification of Human Worth*

In critiquing Locke’s reliance upon a model of creation for his defense of private property, I wish to deny neither that the value of our lives ultimately rests in our being creatures of God, nor that society should be reminded of this. At the same time, it is likely that our values, and our very self-identity, will be formed as much, if not more, by our constant immersion and participation in the primary “public” institutions that reflect the fundamental values of our society as by our “private” participation in secondary institutions, especially in light of the role that the former play in our basic sustenance. In a liberal democratic system founded first and foremost on the protection of property and free economic exchange, this means that our values (and how we value others) will be based more on how well we (and they) contribute to this shared system, than on how we understand our (and their) value in relation to the “private” (and radically diverse) realm of “religious belief.”

To be sure, Locke in his *Letter* defends religious liberty as a basic right. Even so, it is significant that this liberty does not figure into his basic justification for founding society. The existence of society is not justified by reference to the good of worshiping God in community, but rather in terms of the good of protecting economic enterprises. One even wonders if, for Locke, industrious labor is considered more pleasing to God than either “private” worship or faith-inspired works of mercy toward those who are not, and perhaps never can be, contributors to the market-system. Indeed, the *Letter* refuses to extend “freedom of belief” to atheists (as well as to those whose primary loyalties are to religious leaders rather than their nation) on the grounds that such disbelief and loyalties

undermine the socio-economic order.<sup>52</sup> Hence, the value of individuals in society is ultimately rooted in their contribution to this order, and not in their relation to God (which, after all, is important mainly because it supports this order).

While both religious liberty and private property are linked by Locke to the distinction of the mind from the body, ultimately property is public (and thus basic to our social existence) in a way that faith is not. It is not surprising that in time a society dominated by the values of economic production will come to measure the worth of those who are unable to contribute to this economic operation (such as the unborn and the infirm) in terms of “the enjoyment” that they offer to “productive” members of society. Most likely, those who do not contribute to production are to be viewed as commodities and not as the “natural” bearers of “rights” that are predicated upon such production. This tendency is exacerbated by Locke’s inclination in the *Essay* to associate human activity, and thus liberty, more with the desire to overcome “uneasiness” than with the pursuit of a positive good (2.27,31ff).<sup>53</sup> Such a view easily lends itself to view liberty more in terms of the mother’s ability to escape the “inconveniences” of pregnancy (or of the child’s ability to avoid being born and raised under “undesirable conditions”) than in terms of the future goods to be gained by the pre-natal offspring (or even the mother herself) if the child is born.

To the degree that “rights” are conceived as extending from the *rational* power that one has over his or her own industrious labor, those lacking such power lack such rights. Therefore, rights have less to do with protecting the vulnerable against the strong than with monitoring relations of power among the strong. (Keep in mind that for Locke, as well as for the early government of the United States, most democratic rights were predicated on property ownership.) It may well be, then, that the acceptance of abortion has less to do with its allowance under the law than with the isolated, impersonal “autonomization,” and commodification of life itself that characterizes the market culture that gives rise to these laws.

In closing, this critique of Locke may overshadow the efforts of the

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<sup>52</sup> *Letter*, p.52.

<sup>53</sup> Locke mentions that this view corrects his earlier editions of the *Essay*, which consider motivation in terms of the desire for the greatest good (2.27, 35).

earlier sections of this paper to look to him as a historical and conceptual ally to the pro-life position. Even so, it is important, I think, to make advocates of abortion rights aware that the liberal tradition, even with all of its possible shortcomings, is at best mixed in its ability to provide conceptual support for *their* cause. That is, it is important for them to acknowledge that while the values of liberal democracy may have an inherent tendency to proliferate the values that make abortion rights seem more reasonable, this conclusion is by no means the self-evident conclusion, or “default” position, of such a system. Moreover, the seriousness of abortion requires pro-lifers to do the best they can to use the conceptual resources available to them within the economic and political system that they have inherited, even as they remain mindful of its flaws and misplaced emphases.

#### CONCLUSION

While Locke’s own statements on abortion are extremely limited, one can formulate a strong case against early-term abortion—and an adequate case against short-term abortion—by examining his various principles of morality, personhood, human action, and the like, as laid out in his *Essay* and considered in conjunction to his political works. In general, the dualistic and theistic foundations upon which Locke’s political principles rest are derived from his empiricism, and an attempt to challenge these assumptions undermines the very basis of rights and democratic values to which liberal defenders of abortion are likely to appeal. Finally, it behooves those of us who defend life from conception to natural death to invoke with caution the liberal values of rational autonomy, individual liberty, and the demarcation of the individual and society into the realms of the “private/spiritual” and “public/economic” in formulating an opposition to abortion. Rather, it is best to illuminate and develop the aspects of this political tradition that are amenable to according human life a basic rather than secondary value, while correcting or revising those aspects that subvert this value in the interests of purely physical production and consumption.