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# Locke on education and the rights of parents

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John Locke is often taken to be a staunch defender of parents' rights in the realm of education. In fact, Locke's pedagogical reasons for preferring home education to school education do not necessarily apply to similar choices in modern contexts. Locke's political argument for defining education as a duty of parents rather than the state does not mean that the state has no legitimate interests in providing or regulating education, as seen in an analysis of Locke's writings on toleration where he explores different societies that exist for different ends but that also make conflicting jurisdictional claims.

## Introduction

John Locke (1632–1704) is often taken as a canonical defender of the rights of parents in education, even as someone who carries the rights of parents too far in that sphere (Gutmann, 1987; Carrig, 2001). This is somewhat ironic given the fact that in his own day he was famous for limiting the rights of fathers as part of his rejection of the divine right of kings. In response to those who thought that Adam, by virtue of fatherhood, was monarch of the world and that his paternal sovereignty was passed on to his oldest heir, Locke argued that paternal power exists for a different purpose than political power and the power of parents over children is limited to the purpose of families, the proper care and raising of offspring (*TT*, 1.50–72, 2.52–76).<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, it is true that Locke argued in favour of education at home by parents or tutors selected by parents, and it is also true that Locke talked about the education of children primarily as a right and duty of parents rather than of the state. This is a topic of no small importance now given the substantial number of children educated at home by parents and the frequent conflicts between parents and schools over policies and curricula. This article challenges the traditional reading of Locke's view of education.

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Locke's reasons for believing parents should play the leading role in educating children can be divided into pedagogical reasons and political reasons. Each type of reason requires a different type of argument. Pedagogical reasons simply explain why one type of educational arrangement is likely to work better than another in terms of the goals of education itself. While Locke did favour education by parents rather than schools, when his reasons for doing so are set in terms of his larger theory of education it follows that many of his objections to schools apply with less force today than they would have in Locke's day.

Political reasons, for Locke, are a qualitatively different kind of reason. Locke believed that people had rights, including the right to make foolish choices while raising children (*L*, p. 34). The question is how far such rights extend. This article will first explain Locke's pedagogical reasons for preferring education by parents and then focus on Locke's distinctly political reasons that seem to imply a right of parents to control their children's education even in cases where their choices do not seem to be in the educational interest of the child. Previous studies of Locke's views on the rights of parents have failed to notice the implications of his larger theory of toleration for his views on the rights of parents. In Locke's theory, different entities (a government, a family, a church, a business) exist for different reasons and may have exclusive rights to act in pursuit of the goals of that sphere. Locke also realised that two different entities pursuing two different goals may legitimately make claims to regulate the same activity. In such cases, Locke allowed the government to enforce its views in the face of opposition so long as it does so in pursuit of a legitimate governmental goal. This implies a sphere of legitimate state control over education.

### **Locke's pedagogical argument for parental education**

Some argue that in the 18th century, Locke, well known today for his *An essay concerning human understanding* and *Two treatises of government*, may have had his most significant immediate influence through his theory of education (Wood, 1983). His *Some thoughts concerning education* is based on a series of letters to his friend Edward Clarke, who was about eight years younger than Locke (Woolhouse, 2007, p. 175). They were first published under that title in 1693, and he made corrections and revisions on three more editions before he died in 1704. The book was reprinted and translated at an astounding rate and was very influential (Axtell, 1968, p. 17). That Locke was considered an expert on parenting despite having been a lifelong bachelor is less surprising than one might think, since he was both a tutor for the children of English nobility and a doctor and was therefore often asked by friends for his advice on the rearing of children.

Locke began his book by claiming in the first section that 'of all the Men we meet with, Nine Parts of Ten are what they are, Good or Evil, useful or not, by their Education' (*STCE*, 1). This claim is related to the philosophical claim for which Locke is perhaps most famous, his rejection in the *Essay* of innate ideas. It is actually in his writings on education that Locke makes the point most strongly. He states that he imagines the 'Minds of Children as easily turned this or that way as Water itself'

(*STCE*, 2). In the very last paragraph of the book, Locke reiterates that his focus has been only on the sort of education proper for the son of a gentleman ‘who being then very little, I considered only as white Paper, or Wax, to be molded and fashioned as one pleases’ (*STCE*, 217). Just as Locke argued in his theory of property that 9/10 (or 99/100 or 999/1000) (*TT*, 2.40, 2.43) of the value of property comes from the human labour that is invested into it, so too he thought people come to be what they are by the sort of education they receive (*SCTE*, 1).

The implications of this are that education is of monumental importance. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Locke considered human beings completely malleable. Yolton (1989) makes the case that although children are born with no ideas Locke did not think all children were born with identical natures. Locke also writes at the end of his book that much more would need to be said, ‘especially if one should take in the various Tempers, different Inclinations, and particular Defaults, that are to be found in Children; and prescribe proper Remedies’ (*STCE*, 217). Education must, therefore, be tailored to the diverse personalities of children (*STCE*, 66, 101–2).<sup>2</sup>

It is legitimate to infer from these passages that Locke believed education could have a tremendously important role. Locke believed throughout his life that most people unthinkingly adopt the beliefs and practices of those around them rather than revising their beliefs and actions on the basis of reason. In *On the conduct of the understanding*, Locke admonished people to think for themselves and to love truth more than tradition (C, 10–12), just as he concluded the last sentence of his book on education by hoping that his book would give some direction to those who are ‘so irregularly bold, that they dare venture to consult their own Reason, in the Education of their Children, rather than wholly to rely upon Old Custom’ (*STCE*, 217). While some have read this as an invitation to utopianism in that human nature can be remade through education, Locke’s tone is not at all utopian. It is, rather characteristically, sober. The phrase ‘irregularly bold’ indicates Locke’s belief that few people will actually choose the path he recommends.

Locke’s writing on education begins with the child’s body rather than his mind. Locke was trained as a doctor and so it is unsurprising that this topic would be of interest to him. It is important because Locke sees both the education of the mind and the education of the body as resting on the same principle, namely that education consists in the learning of correct habits by engaging in the requisite actions. Locke recommends that children be exposed to heat and cold, for example, by giving them ‘Shoes so thin, that they might leak and let in Water’ (*STCE*, 7). Training the body to endure hardships turns out to be a crucial element in the larger goal of education.

As the Strength of the Body lies chiefly in being able to endure Hardships, so also does that of the Mind. And the great Principle and Foundation of all Virtue and Worth, is placed in this, That a Man is able to *deny himself* his own Desires, cross his own Inclinations, and purely follow what Reason directs as best, though the appetite lean the other way. (*STCE*, 33)

Education, for Locke, thus consists in helping people to overcome the temptations of shortsighted behaviour.

This idea summarises much of the overall message of Locke's book on education and connects it with his hedonistic theory of motivation. Locke argued in the *Essay* that pain and pleasure were the only motivators of human behaviour. He wrote that 'Pleasure and Pain, and that which causes them, Good and Evil, are the hinges on which our *Passions* turn' (E, 2.20.3). Human beings therefore naturally act in pursuit of their own pleasure. Locke proceeded to explain why it is that human beings so often act in ways that are not likely to bring them pleasure if human beings are always motivated to pursue the greatest pleasure. He thought that pleasure or pain will move us to act only if there is some 'uneasiness'. He wrote:

This *Uneasiness* we may call, as it is, *Desire*; which is an *uneasiness* of the Mind for want of some absent good. ... But here all absent good does not, according to the greatness it has, or is acknowledged to have, cause pain equal to that greatness; as all pain causes desire equal to itself: Because the absence of good is not always a pain, as the presence of pain is. And therefore absent good may be looked on, and considered without *desire*.' (E, 2.21.31)

Locke thought that human beings neither automatically perceive the pleasures and pains that will flow from particular actions nor automatically desire pleasures that are not immediately present. He then explained that 'by a due consideration and examining any good proposed, it is in our power, to raise our desires, in due proportion to the value of that good' (E, 2.21.46). While we do not have the power to act for something that we do not perceive to be for our good, we do have the power to suspend judgment so that we can think through the ramifications of our actions and choose the action that is truly in our best interests (E, 2.21.47).

Locke used these ideas to explain how virtue is acquired in *Some thoughts concerning education*. He repeated the hedonistic assumptions of the *Essay* when he stated that 'Good and Evil, *Reward* and *Punishment*, are the only Motives to a rational Creature; these are the Spur and Reins, whereby all Mankind are set on work, and guided, and therefore they are to be made use of to Children too' (STCE, 54). The task of education is therefore to help children both perceive the consequences of actions and, even more importantly, to become 'uneasy' about the possibility of missing out on important pleasures in the future. Since a present pain may seem to overwhelm a future good, much of the task of education is helping children to acquire the habit of learning to endure a present pain for the sake of a greater future pleasure and to forgo present pleasure to avoid a greater future pain (STCE, 45).

Locke employed several different educational strategies to achieve this goal. Parents should not give children things that they do not need or are not good for them simply because the children demand them (STCE, 35). The father should be more stern with the child when the child is young to establish an appropriate '*Awe* and *Respect*' (STCE, 44) but this can be relaxed as the child grows older (STCE, 41). Interestingly, a child should not be offered material rewards for behaving well since this will only increase his tendency to govern his behaviour by the pursuit of immediate rewards. 'To make a good, a wise, and a virtuous Man, 'tis fit he should learn to cross his Appetite, and deny his Inclination to *riches*, *finery* or *pleasing his Palate*, etc. whenever his Reason advises the contrary, and his Duty requires it.' And thus parents who motivate a child by promising a treat or new clothes to get a child to do something 'by misapplied

*Rewards and Punishments* sacrifice their Virtue, invert the Order of their Education, and teach them Luxury, Pride, or Covetousness, etc.’ (STCE, 52).

Locke’s alternative was to cultivate a different kind of motive which is more indirect, the desire for esteem and the desire to avoid disgrace which Locke says are ‘the most powerful incentives to the Mind, when once it is brought to relish them’ (STCE, 56). These words are essential to understanding Locke’s approach. He had argued in the *Essay* that to a great extent popular conceptions of virtue and vice ‘in a great measure everywhere correspond with the unchangeable Rule of Right and Wrong, which the Law of God hath established; there being nothing, that so directly, and visibly secures, and advances the general Good of Mankind in this World, as Obedience to the Laws he has set them’ (E, 2.28.11). He also stated that the fear of being punished by a loss of esteem from other people is a more powerful motivator for most people than the fear of divine or governmental punishment (E, 2.282.12). In his book on education he stated that although reputation is not ‘the true Principle and Measure of Virtue’ (which stems from knowledge of God’s rewards and punishments) it is nonetheless ‘that, which comes nearest to it’ (STCE, 61).

Locke’s remark that esteem and disgrace are the mind’s most powerful motives ‘once it is brought to relish them’ is also extremely important. The pleasure of being esteemed, like any other pleasure, will move a person only once he or she is uneasy about losing it. Parents, therefore, must nurture this desire to be well thought of by praising the child’s good actions and letting him or her know their disappointment when he or she behaves wrongly. Children should also be taught that those who are esteemed for doing well ‘will necessarily be beloved and cherished by everybody, and have all other good Things as a Consequence of it’ (STCE, 58). Reputation thus becomes a way to habituate children to seek pleasures that are more likely to correspond with the actual principles of right and wrong.

Parents who do this will be able to minimise the use of corporal punishment. ‘Frequent *Beating* or *Chiding* is therefore carefully *to be avoided*’ (STCE, 60). Children should be praised in front of others, but reprimanded in private (STCE, 62). Locke was particularly critical of parents who give children complicated rules to follow and then punish them when they fail to follow them. Instead, parents should keep things simple and teach children by getting them to practise the action in question until it becomes a habit (STCE, 64). The one instance where Locke thinks corporal punishment should be used is when children are insubordinate (STCE, 78), since this is necessary to establish the parent’s authority.

It is against this background that we can understand Locke’s criticisms of the schools of his day and his reasons for recommending education under the supervision of parents. Schools, in Locke’s opinion, lacked the ability to provide adequate supervision for the children outside the periods of formal instruction. Moreover, teachers were not able to tailor education to the specific needs of each child. Locke thought it highly likely that the child would learn rudeness, dishonesty and a host of other vices from the other children at the school. Locke asks whether a father will ‘hazard your Son’s Innocence and Virtue, for a little Greek and Latin’ (STCE, 70). Moreover, the schools tended to practise exactly the kind of pedagogy that Locke criticised (beating



children for making mistakes in Latin, for example). Locke was convinced that children would learn far more if learning was part of play and was not forced upon them (*STCE*, 72–74). As much as possible, children should learn additional languages (French, then Latin) in the same way they learned English to the extent possible, ideally finding a tutor who would speak to the child only in that language (*STCE*, 165).

In the home, by contrast to the school, the father can find a tutor who will instruct and model virtue and manners for his child. Locke's list of praiseworthy virtues presents a helpful picture of the sort of adults he sought to produce. A child should be taught civility, humanity (abstaining from cruelty), generosity, gracefulness, honour, humility, industry, kindness, love of God, love of study, modesty, politeness, prudence, reverence, self control, self-denial and self-restraint (Yolton & Yolton, 1989, pp. 22–23). Locke's discussion of generosity is instructive because Locke explained that a child's rational faculties are not advanced enough for the child to understand property, and therefore justice. Instead, since humans incline naturally to selfishness, parents are to contrive things so that self-sacrifice actually ends up being beneficial for the child, so that the child will develop a habit of generosity and will more generally desire the esteem that goes along with being thought generous (*STCE*, 110).

Locke favoured education by a tutor because, given his views on education, it seemed at the time the better option. Locke believed each child was different and that individualised education was therefore important. Locke thought esteem the most important motivator and was eager to capture the natural desire to be esteemed by parents that children have and harness it for the purposes of education. He was also writing in a historical context where the crucial choice would be whether to have the child educated at home or whether to send the child off to a school wherein his contact with the family would be limited to a few weeks each year. Because, as indicated above, Locke's view of education was significantly intertwined with developing virtuous character, allowing children to be without adequate supervision so many hours per day was too risky. Ruderman and Godwin (2000, pp. 508–509), for example, assume that since Locke was critical of schools he would have obviously opposed a system of public schools. Tarcov (1984, p. 210) on the other hand points out that Locke admitted that both home and school education had inconveniences and that some of Locke's opposition to schools may have stemmed from the fact that they were boarding schools. A public school system where children can conveniently attend school and still live at home under the supervision of their parents is a very different system from the one Locke criticised. Tarcov is right to see that we must be cautious in making claims about how Locke would apply his ideas in a radically different historical context. Locke's statements were a judgment based on his assessments of the positives and negatives of the two forms of education in his day; they were not a statement of a timeless principle.

### **Locke and the rights of parents**

Where Locke did claim to be offering a timeless principle is with his political statements about the natural rights of individuals. In his more political works, Locke made

a number of statements that taken together have been thought to mark him as a strong supporter of the rights of parents in education relative to the rights of communities. Locke argued against the theory of the divine right of kings articulated by Robert Filmer (1588–1653) in which Adam was understood to have been created king of the earth by God and to have passed that right on to his eldest son and so on through the generations. Filmer argued that fathers have complete power over their children, including the power to put them to death. Political power and paternal power for Filmer differ only in scale, not in kind. Against this position, Locke argued in the *First treatise* that fathers have a much more limited power over their children. Locke argued persuasively from the Hebrew text of the Bible (or Torah) that God's grant of authority to Adam was not to him in particular but to mankind in general (*TT*, 1.21–43). Locke argued in the *Second treatise* that the appropriate term is 'Parental Power' not 'Paternal Power' since God commanded children to honour both father and mother (*TT*, 2.52). Unlike Filmer who believed human beings were born obligated to a particular family and political regime, Locke believed that 'we are *born Free* as we are born Rational; not that we have actually the Exercise of either: Age that brings one, brings with it the other too' (*TT*, 2.61). Since children are not able to act rationally, they are to obey their parents until they are adults, at which point they owe their parents only honour, not obedience (*TT*, 2.67–69). It is the power and duty of the parent to educate the child (*TT*, 2.69).

Locke's strategy, therefore, was to distinguish sharply between parental power and political power. Locke says that they are 'built upon so different Foundations, and given to so different Ends, that every Subject that is a Father, has as much a *Paternal Power* over his Children, as the Prince has over his' (*TT*, 2.71). The power and duty of parents is to educate their children until the point at which they can care for themselves (*TT*, 2.58), while the purpose of the government is to use its coercive power to secure the lives, liberties and properties of its citizens (*TT*, 2.123).<sup>3</sup>

Locke must grapple with the fact that parents' views on the education of their children may conflict with the views of the government about what will best secure the lives, liberties and properties of citizens. It is true that Locke holds that the right, duty and power of educating children are with parents. Some have seen this as an even more important 'separation of powers' than Locke's distinction between legislative and executive power (Tarcov, 1984; Ruderman & Godwin, 2000). Locke states in the *Second treatise* that parents are 'by the Law of Nature, *under an obligation to preserve, nourish, and educate the Children*, they had begotten, not as their own Workmanship, but as the Workmanship of their own Maker, the Almighty, to whom they were to be accountable for them' (*TT*, 2.56). Locke made it clear that the power parents have over children stems from the duties they have to care for children (*TT*, 2.58). The question then arises whether any part of this power is transferred to the government when individuals leave the state of nature. Locke went so far as to say that '*Parents in Societies*, where they themselves are Subjects, retain a *power over their Children*, and they have as much right to their Subjection, as those who are in the state of Nature' (*TT*, 2.71). When Locke described '*Conjugal Society*' he described it as a 'voluntary Compact between Man and Woman' to unite for the propagation of



offspring and the care of those offspring until the children are ‘able to provide for themselves’ (*TT*, 2.78). We have already seen that Locke regarded education as part of that care.

What this reading of Locke ignores is the fact that more than one entity can have a legitimate claim over a given human activity and that it is not enough to show that someone has a legitimate power, one must also know what happens when legitimate powers conflict. In his writings on toleration, Locke introduced the idea that what he called ‘societies’ exist for limited purposes and act legitimately only when trying to attain those purposes. He rejected the position of his opponent, Jonas Proast (1640–1710), who argued that governments can in principle regulate any action to produce any type of good. Locke responded that either societies are limited in the ends they can pursue by the purposes the parties who entered into the society agreed upon, or any society may act for any beneficial end. In other words, a prospective beneficial outcome does not justify acting for an end that a society does not exist to promote. Failure to recognise this, Locke argued, means ‘there will be no difference between church and state; a commonwealth and an army; or between a family, and the East India Company; all of which have hitherto been thought to exist for different ends’ (*W*, 6:117). The idea that different societies (commonwealth, corporation, church, family) exist for different ends is very important in Locke’s thought. By understanding how church and state relate to one another, we can learn about how state and family interact. Locke’s argument is that the family is a society that comes together for a particular end: the propagation, care and education of children. Religious societies come together to further the spiritual interests of their members. Civil societies come together to further the civil interests of citizens.

When Locke describes reasons for and ends of civil society (government), he states that:

the pravity of Mankind ... obliges Men to enter into Society with one another; that by mutual Assistance, and joint Force, they may secure unto each other their Properties in the things that contribute to the Comfort and Happiness of this Life; ... But forasmuch as Men thus entering into Societies, ... may nevertheless be deprived of them [goods], either by the Rapine and Fraud of their Fellow-Citizens, or by the Hostile Violence of Foreigners; the remedy of this Evil consists in Arms, Riches, and Multitude of Citizens; the Remedy of the other in Laws .... (*L*, 47–48)

What is important to notice here is that Locke believed that protecting civil interest required the government positively to pursue ‘Arms, Riches, and Multitude of Citizens’ so that the state could defend itself from foreign attack. This is central to Locke’s argument for religious toleration and has important implications for his views on education as well because in both cases different societies pursuing different ends may try to assert authority over the same actions. In the toleration case, governments do not exist to pursue religious ends and act illegitimately if they use their power for those ends, but they do act legitimately when pursuing the civil interests of citizens. Although one can argue about how broadly Locke would define civil interests, a point to which we will return, at a minimum it includes things like an economy that can support a well funded and highly educated military to guard from attack. Governments

must pursue positive goals to have the resources to protect 'negative' rights to non-interference with life or property (Tuckness, 2008).

The complication for Locke is that a given act, killing an animal for example, might be commanded by a church as part of a religious purpose and forbidden by a government trying to protect the national economy. Locke gave the example of a case where many animals have died from disease and the government bans the slaughtering of animals for a time so that the numbers can be replenished. Such a law would restrict the freedom of religious groups who want to practice animal sacrifice. Locke argued that such a law is legitimate, even though it restricts religious liberty, because the government is still acting for civic, not spiritual ends (*L*, 42). The implication is that in the case of parents and education, even if we grant that nurturing children is the purpose of parents, and promoting civil interests the purpose of government, the commonwealth might legitimately restrict parental rights in education so long as it can claim that it is doing so for the sake of legitimate civil purposes such as improving the strength of the nation to resist enemy attack. Requiring parents to teach children to read or to learn science might be important for having a viable military and economic system.

Suppose that the government, in pursuing what it takes to be the civic interests of the nation, requires children to learn things to which the parents object. Again, Locke gives us a parallel case with his writings on toleration. If a person thinks that the government, pursuing civic interests in good faith, has nonetheless issued an order that would violate the person's religious beliefs to obey, he has the option of disobeying the law and accepting the appropriate punishment. On the other hand, if he thinks the policy is one that in fact has ends other than the civil interests of the people (the policy was enacted to try to change people's religious beliefs or practices), he can regard the government actions as illegitimate uses of government force and regard the government as illegitimate and resist it (*L*, 49).

Let us now take this as a model for how Locke would handle conflicts between parents and the state regarding education issues. Since Locke gives parents, not governments, the primary duty and power of educating children, the presumption is generally in favour of parental control. Nonetheless, a system of public education and some restrictions on parental rights are permissible if they have, so to speak, a non-educational justification related to improving the safety and security of the state. This would imply that public education should not restrict parental rights on the grounds that it will make the child a better or more knowledgeable person alone. A political reason, the public good, is needed.

Perhaps the strongest objection against this interpretation is that it actually underestimates the extent to which political society can aim at virtue simply for its own sake. In Locke's earliest defence of toleration he claimed that governments had no power to enforce morality if the vice did not affect the preservation of human life (*PE*, p. 144). In his later writings, he states that magistrates should 'impartially set themselves against vice, in whomsoever it is found, and leave men to their own consciences; in their articles of faith, and ways of worship' (*W*, 6:65). Marshall argues that Locke expanded the range of moral concerns open to the magistrate so that it

would include moral reformation in general even if this did not directly improve the public good (1994, pp. 379–383). These texts would need to be weighed against others where Locke rules out laws of this sort. The best harmonisation of the various texts is likely that Locke later realised that the virtues he was concerned about (recall the list earlier in the paper) are all virtues that do affect the civil interests of the society and that it only confused matters to imply that the government had no legitimate interest in regulating such matters.

What we are left with is an account of Locke's views on the rights of parents that gives the state more authority to intervene in the realm of education than previous interpretations have suggested. While Locke was adamant that different societies exist for different ends, he recognised that certain actions affect more than one end and that there will therefore be conflicts over whose will should prevail. Locke believed that government would be unworkable if the state had to suspend the pursuit of its basic goals every time it came into conflict with a claim from another sphere and so he permitted the state to act in ways that restrict the rights of religious believers, and by extension the rights of parents, so long as the policy could be justified as one necessary to keep the lives, liberties and properties of the citizens safe.

## Conclusion

An overlooked contribution of Locke to modern educational theory rests in his theory of toleration and its account of societies. The state, and the public school systems it supports (and in some cases requires students to attend) is not a family, and states and families do not exist for the same purposes. There is a sense in which states can be improperly paternal, acting as if the reasons that might motivate parents to educate children in a certain way must also be reason enough for the state to do it. Yet Locke also realises that the state's interest in promoting the civil interests of citizens, even if interpreted narrowly as the defence of rights, gives the state an interest in producing citizens who will be able to safeguard those rights in the future. Setting up a public school system and regulating home schooling to insure that both provide an education compatible with citizens who will protect rights is thus a perfectly legitimate goal for governments to pursue. But it is also one that may legitimately conflict with a parent's sense of how best to raise a child. The parent, in seeking the best interest of the child, is also aiming at an end legitimate for familial society. Locke would say that each is justified in acting on its best judgment, and thus the state could be justified in pursuing a policy against the wishes of parents if it believed there was a legitimate civil interest at stake.

## Notes

1. References to Locke's primary works will be given as follows: *E* = *Essay concerning human understanding* (Locke, 1979) by book, chapter and section number; *C* = *On the conduct of the understanding* (Locke, 1996) by section number; *L* = *Letter concerning toleration* (Locke, 1983) by page number; *PE* = *Political essays* (Locke, 1997) by page number; *STCE* = *Some thoughts*

concerning education (Locke, 1989) by section number; *TT* = *Two treatises of government* (Locke, 1988) by treatise and section number; *W* = *Works* (Locke, 1963) by volume and page number. The original formatting, spacing and punctuation are retained in quotations unless otherwise noted, but spellings have been modernised.

2. While Passmore has tried to argue that Locke's *Some thoughts* was 'the great turning point' (2000, p. 242) in the transition to an optimistic view of human nature that saw no limits to human perfectibility, Spellman points out that Locke's rejection of the Calvinist understanding of original sin did not necessarily imply a utopian view of human nature and human possibilities (1988). Locke, for example, believed that children had a natural inclination towards power and dominion (*STCE*, 103).
3. This strategy has been criticised from various angles. Gutmann (1987) argues that Locke's position fails to recognise the legitimate claims that the state has in producing citizens with the requisite skills and knowledge for democratic self-governance. Carrig (2001) goes even farther in claiming that Locke's liberalism is really despotism by parents. If we are nine-tenths of what we are by education and if parents control education, their rule over children is far more extreme than that of a political tyrant. Similarly, Sumser (1994) sees in Locke's substitution of internalised controls (like the need for esteem) for external force (corporal punishment) a system that leaves people no more free than they were before. Neill (1989) and Leites (1979) both claim that if autonomy is correctly understood it is compatible with parents raising children in the way Locke suggested. These suggestions do not, however, respond to Gutmann's contention that the state should have more say in the shaping of its future citizens. This paper does not challenge Gutmann's conclusion about the interest of the state in its future citizens, it instead challenges her reading of Locke.

### Notes on contributor

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