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# JOHN LOCKE'S CHRISTIAN INDIVIDUALISM

Richard J. Mouw

John Locke is regularly portrayed as a key figure in the emergence of a kind of political-economic individualism that is antithetical to a Christian understanding of human nature. In this essay I argue that such an account fails to recognize Locke's own serious engagement with biblical themes. Locke's discussions of political topics are in fact very much in the mainstream of Christian thought. But he begins to depart from biblical patterns, I argue, when he offers a confused account of the sense in which human beings "belong" to God.

On March 30, 1696, John Locke sat down to pen a letter to William Molyneux, in response to his Irish friend's urging that Locke write "a treatise of morals." He had given serious thought to writing such a book, Locke confessed, but he had decided that it would not be a good use of his time. Indeed he had even come to the conclusion that the world did not need such a philosophical study. "[T]he Gospel," Locke wrote, "contains so perfect a body of Ethicks, that reason may be excused from that enquiry, since she may find man's duty clearer and easier in revelation than in herself."<sup>1</sup>

This pious declaration would have done nothing to satisfy the Reverend John Edwards, a retired Calvinist clergyman who during that same year of 1696 published a book entitled *Socinianism Unmask'd*, the second of several scathing attacks by Edwards on Locke's religious views. Edwards was convinced that the author of *The Reasonableness of Christianity* was a unitarian heretic—or as Edwards actually put it, that Locke had shown "himself to be of the right *Racovian* breed"<sup>2</sup> (thus linking Locke to a Socinian school of thought that had been flourishing during the 17th century in the Polish city of Rakow).

What most disturbed Edwards about Locke's theology was Locke's insistence that, in Edwards's words, there is "but *One Article of Faith* in all the Chapters of the four *Gospels* and the *Acts of the Apostles*," namely, that "Jesus is the Messiah." To settle for such a simple formula requires, Edwards insisted, that one not only ignore "several considerable passages in the very *Gospels*," but that one must also set "aside the *Epistles*, as if they were no part of the New Testament."<sup>3</sup>

Of all of his critics, Locke seemed to find Edwards especially irritating.



But Locke's most recent biographer, Maurice Cranston, suggests that at least part of this irritation was due to the fact that Locke felt vulnerable to Edwards's charge that he was operating with a very limited canon within the canon.<sup>4</sup> Cranston even thinks that it was this particular criticism that moved Locke to concentrate, in the final years of his life, on the writing of his posthumously published work, *A Paraphrase and Notes of the Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians, Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians*.

Cranston's suggestion is substantiated, I think, by the apparently apologetic tone of Locke's remarks in his prefatory "Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles by Consulting St. Paul Himself." He there confesses that he had not previously grasped the intricacies of Pauline thought:

I had been conversant in these epistles, as well as in other parts of sacred scripture, yet I found that I understood them not; I mean the doctrinal and discursive parts of them: though the practical directions, which are usually dropped in the latter part of each epistle, appeared to me very plain, intelligible, and instructive.<sup>5</sup>

I will not focus in any detail here on the contents of Locke's studies in the Pauline epistles. I do want to offer some comments, though, on the fact that Locke's wrestlings with biblical materials have been for the most part ignored by philosophers who have studied Locke's political thought. And I want to suggest that it would be a good thing if this situation were corrected, since Locke's explorations of the relationship of the individual to the larger societal unit can serve as an important resource for contemporary Christian reflection on the issues of public life.

## I

Locke isn't the only 17th century political philosopher whose serious interest in a theology of politics has been a closely guarded secret. As the historian J. G. A. Pocock has pointed out in his fascinating essay, "Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," books III and IV of Hobbes's *Leviathan*—which are roughly equal in length to the much discussed first two books—are devoted to a detailed study of biblical-theological matters; "yet the attitude of far too many scholars towards them," Pocock observes, "has traditionally been, first, that they aren't really there, second, that Hobbes didn't really mean them."<sup>6</sup> And even when people have offered "esoteric reasons" as explanations of "why Hobbes should have written what he did not believe," Pocock continues,

the difficulty remains of imagining why a notoriously arrogant thinker, vehement in his dislike of 'insignificant speech,' should have written and afterwards defended sixteen chapters of what he held to be nonsense, and exposed them to the scrutiny of a public which did not consider this kind of thing nonsense at all.<sup>7</sup>

Pocock's case for taking Hobbes's discussions of biblical topics seriously is impressive. But an even more convincing argument can be made for looking carefully at Locke's theological explorations. For one thing, in Locke's case it has mainly been his treatment of the relationship of the Bible to *political* thought that has been ignored. Other religious writings, such as *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, and even his analysis of the political toleration of religious diversity, have been objects of sustained scrutiny.

Nor has the scholarly community approached Locke's treatment of religious topics with the same degree of cynicism that it has directed toward Hobbes's references to revelational data. Henry F. May seems to express a scholarly consensus of sorts when he suggests that while it is reasonable to think that Locke's "frequent professions of Christianity were sincere enough," it is nonetheless "unlikely that he was a man of profoundly religious temperament."<sup>8</sup>

The criteria that we use to measure a philosophical writer's spiritual temperament are not easy to establish in such a way that they are beyond challenge. But it is difficult to sustain the impression, while reading Locke's studies in the epistles, that the author's apparent enthusiasm for his task is merely a smokescreen to throw off a particularly cranky Calvinist pursuer. Furthermore, the Reverend Mr. Edwards's charge that Locke's interest in the Scriptures had been confined to the first five books of the New Testament loses a little more of its credibility when we look at the contents of Locke's *First Treatise of Government*, which had appeared in print, along with the *Second Treatise*, several years before Edwards published his allegations regarding Locke's narrow focus.

The *First Treatise* seldom gets more than a passing mention from Locke's scholars, even from John Dunn, who has recently argued persuasively that "[t]he entire framework of [Locke's] thinking was 'theocentric' and the key commitment of his intellectual life as a whole was the epistemological vindication of this framework."<sup>9</sup> To be sure, it is difficult for contemporary political thinkers to get excited about the basic project of the *First Treatise*; the whole of that work is given over to a detailed refutation of the thesis of Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*—Filmer's thesis being that monarchical power is properly possessed only by those who are the legitimate heirs of Adam's parental authority. In the course of developing his critique of Filmer's patriarchalism, though, Locke actually treats a number of important Biblical passages in considerable detail: he deals, for example, with such topics as the "dominion" mandate of Genesis 1, the nature and extent of the curse of the fall, the difference between parental and political authority, the creational status of women, and the Bible's perspective on the origin of national identities.

There is much in Locke's discussions of these Old Testament materials, as well as in his studies in the Pauline epistles, that is worthy of closer

attention on our part. And not just for purposes of satisfying our historical curiosity. Locke argues, for example, against Filmer's insistence that Eve was created to be one of Adam's political subjects in a manner that is both insightful and highly relevant to contemporary Christian discussions of male-female relationships.

The project of cultivating more sympathy for Locke's overtly Christian discussions of political topics has been given a boost by recent historical studies that have encouraged the blurring of some longstanding period markers. A notable case in point here is the work of Quentin Skinner, who argues in his much celebrated work, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, that the "radical jurists" of the late medieval period and the Calvinists and Locke were all operating within the same conceptual-theological framework<sup>10</sup>—a thesis that apparently has enough currency these days so that John Diggins is able to refer quite casually, in his recent study of American political history, to Lincoln's thought as a reaffirmation of "the Lockean-Calvinist tradition."<sup>11</sup>

## II

If some scholars have begun to view Locke as closer to Christian political reflection than has often been thought to be the case in the past, the word doesn't seem to have reached the authors of the much discussed recent book *Habits of the Heart*. In the interpretive scheme set forth by Robert Bellah and his co-authors, Locke's views about human sociality stand in stark contrast to the biblical perspective. Here is the Bellah team's capsule account of the Lockean heritage:

In seventeenth-century England, a radical philosophical defense of individual rights emerged that owed little to either classical or biblical sources. Rather, it consciously started with the biological individual in a "state of nature" and derived a social order from the actions of such individuals, first in relation to nature and then in relation to one another. John Locke is the key figure and one enormously influential in America. The essence of the Lockean position is an almost ontological individualism.<sup>12</sup>

And it is this same understanding of the Lockean position that has regularly served as the basis for much Christian hostility toward Locke's political thought. This hostility is especially strong among conservative Christians. It is not uncommon, for example, for traditional Roman Catholic and evangelical thinkers to contrast a contractarian understanding of the basis of government with the account of political authority set forth in the first seven verses of Roman 13. This is how Gordon Clark argued the point in a 1952 essay on political thought. After quoting the Romans passage, Clark observed that "government is a divine institution. The authority of magistrates does not derive from any voluntary social compact, but derives from God."<sup>13</sup>

It is significant that both Clark and the Bellah team employ the "derived

from” formulation in this context. Clark says that contractarian thought tries to derive governmental authority from a voluntary compact rather than from the will of God. And while the Bellah group is not explicit about the source from which a “social order” can be derived, they are certain that the answer is not to be found in Locke’s “almost ontological individualism.”

How would Locke respond to such characterizations of his thinking? Fortunately, we have a way of gaining a fairly reliable answer to this question. In the course of his chapter-by-chapter commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Locke explicitly deals with the teaching set forth in Romans 13. And not only does he take the Apostle to be saying the same thing that Gordon Clark thinks Paul is setting forth in that chapter, but Locke also seems quite happy to *endorse* the Pauline teaching about governmental authority. The apostle is telling us, Locke says, that God is the source from whom “all magistrates, everywhere, have their authority,” as well as addressing the question of “for what end they have it, and should use it.”<sup>14</sup>

On Locke’s reading of Romans 13, then, the passage provides an answer to this question: what is the origin and end of political authority? And the answer given—an answer that Locke seems quick to agree with—is that the right to govern has its source in the divine Ruler and it must be used to promote the purposes for which God has established that authority, such as rewarding the good and punishing the evil.

Having assured us of his endorsement of the Pauline perspective, Locke immediately goes on to point to some questions about political authority that the apostle does *not* address. He writes:

But, how men come by a rightful title to this power, or who has that title, [the apostle] is wholly silent, and says nothing of it. To have meddled with that, would have been to decide of civil rights, contrary to the design and business of the gospel, and the example of our Saviour, who refused meddling in such cases with this decisive question, “who made me a judge, or divider, over you?”<sup>15</sup>

Considerations, then, about how specific human beings come to possess that political authority that originates with God, and about who it is that may rightly *claim* possession of that power—such topics, Locke insists, are “meddling” questions that have no place within “the design and business of the gospel.” But this does not mean that they are bad questions. Indeed, these are the very questions which Locke addresses at great length in his political writings, especially in the *Second Treatise*.

Locke obviously thinks that it was quite proper for the Savior to refuse to function as a “judge” and a “divider” with regard to political questions; Jesus chose instead to point in an unambiguous manner to the simple facts of the divine Rule. The issues that Jesus and Paul refrained from addressing—the questions which have to do with the judging and dividing of the actual realities of political

power—these “meddling” questions are the more mundane stuff of political thought to which philosophers must devote their attention.

### III

Locke seems to be quite correct in dividing up the questions regarding political authority in this way. Indeed it is roughly the same way that John Calvin divided up the terrain of political discussion. While Calvin insists that civil magistrates “have been invested with divine authority, and are wholly God’s representatives, in a manner, acting as his vicegerents,”<sup>16</sup> he explicitly warns that this does not settle questions about the merits of actual forms of government. That kind of assessment, says Calvin, “depends largely upon the circumstances.”<sup>17</sup>

Calvin obviously did not think that we can settle questions about the actual processes whereby political power comes to reside in specific magistrates by appealing to a passage such as Romans 13. And later Calvinists were to make this point with considerable force. Samuel Rutherford lays out the distinctions nicely in his 1644 tract, *Lex, Rex*: “all Royal power,” he argues, “is only in God; but it is in the people as the instrument: and when the people maketh *David their King at Hebron*, in that very same act, God by the people using their free suffrages and consent maketh *David King at Hebron*.” Nor is it necessary to think, says Rutherford, that Israel had to consent to the “prior act of *God’s making David King*”; rather, he insists, it is *in* “Israel’s act of freely electing him to be King” that God expedites the king-making.<sup>18</sup> Thus the people’s delegating power to David simply *is* the way in which God delegates the power to David.

Locke’s method of sorting out the questions regarding political authority seems to be very similar to this. He sees the Bible as informing us that God gives civil authorities their power. But he does not take the Scriptures to be offering us a detailed account of the processes whereby magistrates gain possession of that power. Therefore Locke seems to think it quite legitimate to suggest that God used a process whereby individual citizens delegate divinely ordained power to specific authorities, under a contractual type arrangement.

But isn’t this precisely where Locke goes wrong? Isn’t there something very un-Christian about his emphasis here on the individual as the primary political delegator? By insisting that the social-political bond can be broken down into individual units hasn’t Locke become a very perverse kind of “judge” and “divider” of the political process?

I think not. At least I am not convinced that Locke deserves the kind of hostility that has often been directed toward his emphasis on the importance of the political individual. I mean to be offering here, then, a modest defense of Locke’s “individualism.” Not that I want to defend everything that has been associated with the label “Lockean individualism.” Locke himself would not, I am convinced, claim ownership of every item that has been subsumed

under that rubric. But I do think Locke deserves more Christian appreciation on this matter than has often come his way.

#### IV

The Bellah group is not opposed to individualism as such. "Individualism," they acknowledge, "lies at the very core of American culture." Even the two older perspectives—the republican and the biblical traditions—to which they look for help in the present cultural crisis are "in a profound sense individualistic." Thus the authors of *Habits of the Heart* can speak of a "biblical individualism" that affirms "the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual."<sup>19</sup>

The Bellah group sees Lockean individualism, then, as a distorted version of a good kind of individualism that can even be found in the Bible. Individualism, they insist, has gone awry in contemporary life. And Locke's social perspective is an important contributor to the present crisis.

Christian political philosophers can take heart from the Bellah group's insistence that a "biblical individualism" is an important corrective to the distorted understandings of individuality that are widespread in contemporary life. But we must not be too quick, I am suggesting, to follow Bellah and his associates in their identification of Locke's portrayal of the individual as a primary source of our present-day difficulties.

In an article written in 1932 for *The Times Literary Supplement*, on the occasion of the tercentenary of Locke's birth, Sir Ernest Barker credited Locke with a strong sympathy for biblical individualism. Locke possessed, Sir Ernest wrote,

the great Puritan sense of the supreme importance of the individual soul; the Puritan feeling for the soul's right to determine its own relations to God, and to enjoy, at the least, toleration from the State and from all authority in so doing; the Puritan instinct for setting the bounds to the State—"thus far, and no farther."<sup>20</sup>

More recently John Dunn has advocated a similar assessment of Locke's relation to biblical thought. Dunn has argued at length that Locke as a political philosopher is an important ally in the struggle against contemporary instrumentalist accounts of political agency.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the kinds of views that the Bellah group associates with utilitarian and expressive individualism, Dunn sees Locke's political thought as centered on the important, and much ignored, role of *trust* as the cementing factor in human social-political relations.

Most modern political theorists don't even think about the question of what it is that holds society together, Dunn insists. And if they do think about it, he says, they are most likely to "offer a fairly variegated list of contributory factors: greed, fear, lust, conviviality, habit, hope, despair, indolence, an extremely high degree of selective inattention—and so on."<sup>22</sup> But Locke sees trust as the only factor that can give coherence to the social-political bond, and he sets out to ascertain the determinants which make that trust possible.<sup>23</sup>



The details of Dunn's exposition of Locke are intriguing—and I think convincing. But it is not necessary to rehearse them here. What is directly relevant to our discussion is Dunn's insistence that, first of all, Locke really did think that trust is possible among human beings, and, second, that Locke's conviction on this matter was firmly grounded in his belief in God's creating purposes.

Dunn establishes the first point by arguing that Locke operated "with a wholly unalienated conception" of human sociality.<sup>24</sup> This may seem strange to those who think of the Lockean state of nature as a situation characterized by a pervasive distrust—but that reading of Locke's account stems, as Dunn shows, from the misguided insistence "that Locke's conception of the state of nature is distinguishable from that of Hobbes only by the degree of evasion with which Locke elects initially to describe it."<sup>25</sup>

This misreading of Locke chooses to ignore Locke's insistence on the "natural sociality" of human beings. And this is where Dunn's second point becomes important: his insistence that Locke grounded human trust in God's creating purposes. Here Dunn cites the rather clear formulation Locke offers in *The Second Treatise*:

God having made Man such a Creature, that, in his own Judgment, it was not good for him to be alone, put him under strong Obligations of Necessity, Convenience, and Inclination to drive him into Society, as well as fitted him with Understanding and Language to continue and enjoy it.<sup>26</sup>

Again, those of us who do profess to see the hand of the Almighty at work in human affairs ought to be more sympathetic than we sometimes have been to Locke's stated desire to acknowledge God's authority for political life. But our sympathies need not be unbounded. The fact that Locke has been so regularly blamed for trends that conflict with his own Christian professions constitutes at least *prima facie* evidence that he did not always pursue his social-political probings in a consistent manner.

Even those who are most committed to defending the Christian integrity of Locke's philosophical project are careful to acknowledge his shortcomings in this regard. Dunn concedes, for example, that Locke can be plausibly viewed as slipping regularly into "a robustly hedonist mechanical theory of motivation."<sup>27</sup> And Sir Ernest Barker, having offered his glowing account, which I have already quoted, of Locke's "great Puritan sense of the supreme importance of the individual soul," is quick to add that "these nobler elements were mixed in Locke...with ignobler things."<sup>28</sup>

Nor is it insignificant that Barker sees Locke's departure from his noble Puritan sentiments as most obvious in his views on the subject of property. Barker's judgment is borne out in Paul Marshall's helpful and detailed study of Locke's understanding of "calling." It is precisely "in his conception of work and labour" that Marshall sees Locke as having departed most significantly from the Christian views that had shaped his thought.<sup>29</sup>

I have no desire to defend Locke against the criticisms of these commentators, who are most sympathetic to his professions of Christian commitment. In his discussions of property and labor Locke obviously offers formulations which, when written large, can rightly be viewed as an encouragement to much of the unhealthy, instrumentalist individualism of contemporary life.

I do find Locke's confusions in this area, however, to be instructive ones. Indeed it seems to me to be very important that Christian thinkers try to get clear about where Locke went wrong in his formulations—especially if we are convinced, as I am, that he does approach these topics with appropriately Christian designs.

## V

Everyone who has ever read at least a few pages about Locke's political and economic thought knows that Locke believed that one may legitimately claim some natural item as one's personal property if one has mixed one's labor with that item. But it is not as widely acknowledged that Locke insisted that this account of human ownership deals with a derivative sense of property. In the most basic sense there is only one property-owner—God. As Locke puts it in the *Second Treatise*:

for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker—all the servants of one sovereign master, sent into the world by his order, and about his business—they are his property whose workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's, pleasure.<sup>30</sup>

In his well-known study of 17th century political thought, C. B. MacPherson makes it clear that he is not very impressed by these pious professions on Locke's part. MacPherson sees Locke as a key figure in the development of "possessive individualism"—a theory which portrays the human individual as the sole owner of his or her own "person and capacities."<sup>31</sup> "[F]reedom from dependence on the wills of others" is, on MacPherson's reading of possessive individualism, the very essence of properly functioning humanness; thus I as an individual owe nothing to anyone else as I go about deciding how to treat my own person, as well as those items which have become my personal property by the mixing of my labor with nature.<sup>32</sup>

Not that MacPherson simply ignores those Lockean themes that seem to run counter to the patterns of possessive individualism. He recognizes, for example, that Locke insisted that our individual economic projects must respect the limits prescribed by a divinely-ordained natural law. But this kind of traditional language, says MacPherson, mainly served to make possessive individualism more palatable to Locke's contemporaries, thus giving the theory an attractive moral "facade" that would later be removed by more brutally consistent thinkers, like Hume and Bentham.<sup>33</sup>

This is not an altogether fair reading of Locke. But neither can he be

absolved from all responsibility for the rise of possessive individualism. Locke's culpability in this regard has to do with at least two factors. The first is a matter of emphasis. While he did insist—as we have seen—that our human political and economic commitments must be viewed against the background of our creaturely dependence upon God, he did not rehearse that insistence with any vigor when he entered into his investigation of the actual details of our political-economic arrangements. It should not surprise us, then, if some commentators are left with the impression that his occasional references to God have no serious role to play in his theory.

But the second factor has to do with a weakness in the theological formulations that Locke does offer with reference to property. In expressing his conviction that we human beings belong to God, Locke makes much of the fact that we are the creator's "workmanship." God's ownership of human beings, then, seems to be grounded in the same kind of relationship that a human owner has to a piece of physical property: God's proprietary claim on us seems to stem solely from the fact that God has expended labor in producing us.<sup>34</sup>

This is an unfortunate emphasis in Locke. And it means that, even if he had constantly repeated his belief about God's supreme ownership, Locke would not thereby have delivered himself of culpability with regard to the emergence of possessive individualism.

MacPherson's analysis of Locke's view of property is a highly sophisticated version of an argument that is often given a much more cynical expression in popular Marxism. The cruder formulation treats Locke's insistence that we are God's possessions as a mere rationalization of the private property relations that serve—as Marxists view things—as the glue that holds feudal and capitalist societies together. If God himself can be rightly seen as the supreme possessor of private property, the Marxists argue, then the conditions that give rise to oppressive systems of production are grounded in the very nature of things.

Again, I think this is a much too uncharitable interpretation of Locke's position. But this crude Marxist portrayal of his scheme is an embarrassingly plausible approximation of the way in which some Christians have synthesized an espousal of possessive individualism with a belief in God's authority and power. For example, that contemporary understanding of the Christian life that places a strong emphasis on a "name it and claim it" pattern of living often seems to rest on a belief in a God who is totally absorbed in the business of naming and claiming. The "Gospel of health and wealth" seems for all the world like the kind of message that would be issued by a deity who took primary enjoyment in maintaining his own health and wealth.

Locke's way of depicting God's ownership of us had a role in shaping these patterns of thought. Not that Locke was wrong in saying that we are God's "workmanship." We are. But it does not follow from this that we are divine property in the Lockean sense. And if his argument here is questionable, then

it may also be that much of the rest of his analysis of property relations must also be challenged—if it is misleading to think of human beings as God’s “property” in a straightforward sense, then it is also misleading to construe the relationship between human beings and their artifacts as property in some “derivative” sense. It may be that a consistently *Christian* Lockeanism would need to give much more attention to stewardship and trusteeship themes and much less to that of human ownership.

We can wish, then, that Locke had said more about the notion that God is the supreme owner of all created people and things. And we can wish that in doing so Locke had made it clear that the Bible’s depiction of God as one who delights in claiming human beings as his very own is not that of a cosmic entrepreneur who takes endless delight in the accumulation of possessions; rather, we are being given a glimpse of a mighty creator and redeemer who has condescended to ask us to offer him the love of our hearts.

In one of his devotional meditations, Abraham Kuyper likens God’s proprietary claims upon his human creatures to the relationship that a human artist has to a painting he has made. This is why our fallenness, Kuyper says, is a matter of such “bitter grief” to God: “The soul that He has made, has inwardly been torn asunder by sin, and is bruised and wounded almost beyond recognition.”<sup>35</sup>

This is an important reminder of the Bible’s use of the workmanship theme. But Kuyper only issues this reminder after he has already, in the preceding meditation, likened the relationship between God and a specific human creature to the bond between human parents and their individual children. Each of us is, says Kuyper,

[n]ot merely one of His children, no, but His child in an individual way, in a personal relation different from that of the other children of God, the most intimate fellowship conceivable in heaven and on earth—He your Father, you His child.<sup>36</sup>

We can only wish that Locke would have prefaced his comments about our being God’s “workmanship” with some explanation of this sort. It is unfortunate that he did not say very clearly that the relationship between the Creator and one of his human creatures is much more intimate than that which characterizes the relationship that human workers have to those physical objects upon which they have expended their labor—that it is more like the bond that holds between a mother and the child that she has birthed and named and nurtured in love.

Locke gives the unfortunate impression that interpersonal relationships are patterned after person-object relationships. He could have avoided giving this impression by saying very unambiguously that interpersonal relationships are so much the pulsebeat of the universe that it would be less erroneous to think of our relationships to purely physical nature on the model of a loving bond between persons than it would be to conceive of interpersonal belonging as something like the owning of an object.

I do not think these sentiments would have seemed completely misguided to Locke. There is, after all, much evidence in Locke's writings for John Dunn's contention that interpersonal trust is the guiding concept in his social thought. Locke even says at one point that we have a right to trust God to keep his promises, since "[g]rants, promises, and oaths are bonds that hold the Almighty."<sup>37</sup>

We can only wish that he would have extended this insight into an explicit endorsement of that biblical understanding of interpersonal "ownership" that is summarized so nicely in the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism: that my "only comfort in life and death" is "[t]hat I, with body and soul,...am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil;...and makes me heartily willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him."<sup>38</sup>

If Locke had unambiguously endorsed this understanding of what it means for us to belong to the God who claims us as his own, he would have done much to discourage the emergence of what has come to be known as "Lockean individualism."

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## NOTES

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20. Sir Ernest Barker, excerpted in his Introduction to *Social Contract: Essays by Locke, Hume, and Rousseau* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. xviii-xix.
21. Dunn, "Trust in the Politics of John Locke," in *Rethinking*, pp. 38, 54.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 54.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
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27. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
28. Barker, *Social Contract*, p. xviii.
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30. Locke, *Second Treatise*, p. 123.
31. C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 3.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
33. *Ibid.*, 269-70.
34. For a helpful discussion of this topic, see Andrew Reeve, *Property* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1986), pp. 114-16.
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36. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
37. Locke, *Second Treatise*, p. 220.
38. *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1979), p. 7.