Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 24 | Issue 1

Article 9

1-1-2007

John W. Yolton, THE TWO INTELLECTUAL WORLDS OF JOHN LOCKE

Jeanine Grenberg

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Grenberg, Jeanine (2007) "John W. Yolton, THE TWO INTELLECTUAL WORLDS OF JOHN LOCKE," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil200724142

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol24/iss1/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

suggestive in several areas. One is in addressing the broadly Aristotelian vs. Stoic dispute over the relation between happiness and enjoyment. Can one, by acting virtuously, suffer genuine harm (and thus not experience flourishing in the sense of well-being), and still be “happy” in the morally rich sense of flourishing? On Porter’s interpretation of Aquinas, the answer is a qualified, “yes.” Happiness and well-being are not equated; the attainment of well-being is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness. However, the happy life is normally and properly an enjoyable life; the virtues and the capacities that they perfect are in fact aimed at the full functioning of human nature, i.e., well-being. Such a view, says Porter, “is at least suggestive that the joys and pleasures of the happy life are intimately bound up with enjoyment of those goods which are proper to the life of well-being” (p. 173). (Put differently, Aquinas’s understanding of value does not, as some forms of consequentialism, reduce moral goods (happiness) to non-moral goods (well-being); yet it is able to account for the real goodness of the latter as well as its relation to the former.)

In *Nature as Reason*, Porter has added significantly to the goods to be enjoyed in thinking about the natural law.

The Two Intellectual Worlds of John Locke, by John W. Yolton. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004. \$35.00 (cloth)

JEANINE GRENBERG, St. Olaf College

John Yolton takes on a difficult task in this book: to convince us that John Locke is not simply an empiricist, but that his thought is deeply and centrally informed by more speculative and conjectural, even religious and theological, concerns. Yolton is intrigued by pervasive references in Locke’s *Essay* and other works to “things obscure, hidden, and even noble and beautiful,” (p. 139) and this book is his effort to convince us of the centrality of such things in Locke’s philosophy.

Yolton’s audience is thus “those who still cling to labeling Locke ‘empiricist’ (of whom there are fewer today),” (p. 137) and also those who tend to assume that Locke was interested only in attacking and rejecting central Christian doctrines. (p. 151) At the center of Yolton’s attack against a narrowly empiricist and secular interpretation of Locke is the claim that Locke is in fact concerned with two “intellectual worlds”, one the more familiar, materialistic world accessed via sense experience and observation; the other a less attended to Lockean world of “God, angels and spirits” accessed (or more accurately, imagined or thought of) via speculation and conjecture.

I am torn in trying to assess Yolton’s success in this task. On the one hand, we are indebted to him for uncovering a host of interesting textual references in Locke’s works which suggest of Locke escaping his empiricist bounds, and which enigmatically hint at a Lockean concern for this second, more spiritual, intellectual world. For example, in the Fourth Book of the *Essay*, Locke speaks of the goal of “natural philoso-

phy" as "bare speculative Truth, and whatsoever can afford the Mind of Man any such, . . . whether it be God himself, Angels, Spirits, Bodies, or any of their Affections, as Number, and Figure, *etc.*" (*Essay*, 4.21.2, quoted at p. 46) Similarly, Locke surprisingly for an empiricist, suggests that, "[W]hatsoever we can reach with our Eyes, or our Thoughts . . . is but a point, almost nothing, in comparison of the rest." (*Essay*, 4.3.23, quoted at p. 49) Yolton appeals not only to the *Essay*, but also to less familiar works, including *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, "Of the Conduct of the Understanding," and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* to make his argument. We should be grateful to him for amassing these citations for our consideration, for they surely do raise interesting questions about Locke's basic philosophical orientation.

There are problems, however, with the extent to which these texts can make Yolton's case. First, with just a few notable exceptions, the texts to which he appeals almost invariably make only indirect reference to a spiritual world, usually within the context of saying that we can say nothing of this world, and so should be content not to. The larger, more positive claims which Yolton hopes to draw from them thus sit on shaky textual ground. When, for example, Locke speaks of the soul, it is usually within the context of questioning the purported "demonstrations and undoubted Propositions" about it which in fact fail to advance knowledge at all. (*Essay*, 4.8.9, quoted at p. 54) There are even times when texts which Yolton finds "attention grabbing" for their non-empiricist flavor, leave the reader cold, and perplexed at Yolton's more vigorous response. He quotes, for example, the following as indicating a deep concern for "things hidden and unknown":

And if there are things obscure, sublime, and noble, which even reason itself may marvel at and bring forth and proclaim as a discovery, yet, if you would run through each single speculative science, there is none in which something is not always presupposed and taken for granted and derived from the senses by way of borrowing." (*Essays on the Law of Nature*, 151, quoted at p. 139)

This is less-than-convincing textual evidence for Locke's positive concern for things "obscure, sublime and noble." Locke seems here to be introducing a deflationary, empiricist reading of things purported to be obscure, sublime and noble, instead of indicating an awe-filled appreciation for such spiritual entities.

Ultimately though, the larger problem with Yolton's effort is that it doesn't seem quite finished. There may indeed be secure textual basis for some non-empiricist leanings in Locke, but the book we have before us does not do enough with these intriguing texts to make that argument. Indeed, at times the book reads in a draft-like, rather text-heavy fashion, introducing copious references from Locke which go uninterpreted. When we do receive interpretation, it is often in a more lexicon-like style, cataloguing the use of individual words (e.g., "person", "soul", "creature") in Locke's texts, but not convincing us of a larger, positive program of speculative or spiritual concern. And often, discussions of individual bits of text end with a query, or hesitant suggestion, rather than a conclusion. For ex-

ample, Yolton ends a discussion of the happiness of God by saying: “*Perhaps* the happiness of spirits (and God) is just their superior knowledge.” (p. 82, emphasis added)

In the end, Yolton has succeeded in intriguing me, but not convincing me. It is at best an uphill battle to engage in the task which Yolton has undertaken for himself, and it may be that he has done the best that could be done with what is to be found in Locke’s text. But if there are speculative, theological and spiritual concerns positively informing Locke’s philosophy, we have yet to fully uncover it.

Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction, edited by Sohail H. Hashmi and Stephen Lee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, xiii + 533 pages, \$85.00 hardback, \$37.99 paperback.

TOMIS KAPITAN, Northern Illinois University

This book is devoted to ethical issues concerning the use, deployment, possession, and regulation of so-called “weapons of mass destruction” (WMD). The topics are approached from a broad range of theoretical and practical perspectives, with nearly half the space given to the views of six major religious traditions. Also included are essays representing political realism, natural law ethics, liberalism, feminism, and pacifism. Contributors were asked to address six questions:

- What are the general norms concerning the use of weapons in war?
- Is it ever justified to use WMD in warfare?
- Is it ever justified to develop and deploy WMD as deterrents?
- If some nations possess WMD, is it proper to deny possession to others?
- Should there be a WMD disarmament?
- What are the policy options of the major ethical traditions concerning WMD?

This technique serves not only to distinguish major positions, depending on how these questions are answered, but also to facilitate comparison among the represented viewpoints. For the most part, the volume is historically sophisticated, sensitive to contemporary political concerns, and replete with state of the art thinking about the ethics of WMD. With its breadth and thorough index, it would be an excellent text for use in courses devoted to war, violence, and international conflict.

The editors note that there is some difficulty in determining what counts as WMD. Typically, nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons are cited, but the question has been raised whether such mechanisms as economic sanctions and machetes shouldn’t also be included, since both were used to destroy hundreds of thousands of lives in the 1990s. Perhaps the best distinction between WMD and “conventional” weapons is that the former