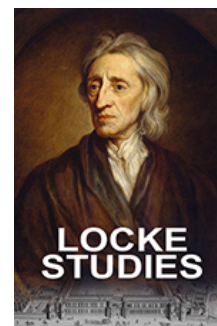


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Improvement as the Foundation of Liberty Locke on Labour, Equality, and Civic Membership

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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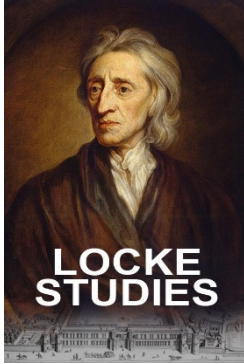
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Improvement as the Foundation of Liberty: Locke on Labour, Equality, and Civic Membership

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Abstract:

Locke's egalitarianism is concerned with not only equality before law (both natural and civil) but also moral and civic equality among those who are treated unequally, according to social rank. He considered the labouring poor as moral equals, with respect to their contribution towards labour and the responsibility they are able and ought to take in their acts, although he also recognised that they often fail to do so. A key to Locke's moral vision is the term "labour," implying the use of the common faculties of humankind, with industry and pain, in the manner in which God, who had provided them with these faculties, intended them to do. Locke's idea of industry, which represents the contribution and disposition every person should make and have, marks the break with the humanist ideal of civic virtue. He also replaced the Protestant dichotomy between ordinary and political callings by recognising common people as equal contributors to the common good.

Keywords: civic membership, civic virtue, equality, industry and idleness, labour, labouring poor, moral egalitarianism, use of reason

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1. Introduction: Locke on Labour, Equality, and Civic Membership

Was John Locke an egalitarian? In what sense, and to what extent was he dedicated to the idea of equality? Was his idea of equality based on the concept of natural rights, that of *tabula rasa* (a blank mind), or something else? Researchers have discussed these questions for many years and from various perspectives, yet the answers are far from definite.

This paper attempts to address these questions by focusing on Locke's concept of the *individual as a labourer* in a specific context, that is, *as an agent who uses the common faculties of humankind with industry and pain to improve human life*. Thus, an examination of the Lockean individual reveals that the philosopher not only advocated equality before law (both natural and civil) but also conceptualised equality *at the civic level*. On the one hand, Locke considered a person contributing to the improvement of material living conditions as a moral equal, including a poor labourer. On the other hand, he believed that every person was responsible for improving their moral understanding because, regardless of social status, every person was more or less capable of achieving it. The key to Locke's concept of civic equality is not active participation in the business of politics but contributing towards the improvement of life both in a material and moral sense.

1.1. What kind of Equality?

Researchers who read Locke as a liberal democratic or who focus on his theory of liberal rights formulate the Lockean idea of equality at a civic level. According to A. D. Lindsey, Locke envisaged a "society of equals in that all have equal moral rights," and they enjoy equal treatment under the government which has been "founded on [people's] consent."¹ In contrast, Simmons focused on Locke's view of "civil justice" rather than political consent, arguing that its "central feature" is "juridical equality under general laws and impartial judges," which secures "equal standing under one common set of rules," if not the "equality of possessions."² To characterise the Lockean idea of equality as juridical fits with what he actually expressed in the "Second Treatise," where he justified that people ought to be governed "by promulgated establish'd Laws, not to be varied in particular Cases, but to have one Rule for Rich and Poor, for the Favourite at Court, and the Country Man at Plough" (II.142, 363).³

Conversely, it can be argued that Locke's ideas of political consent and civil justice do not effectively support equality at the civic level, if one considers his theory of property, which gives an account of these ideas, tolerates economic inequality. Locke's discussion

¹ A. D. Lindsay, *The Modern Democratic State* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 122.

² A. John Simmons, *The Lockean Theory of Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 321.

³ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). The "I" or "II" denote the citations from Locke's "First Treatise" and "Second Treatise," respectively, and are followed by section and page numbers.

of human equality by nature does not imply “all sorts of Equality” (II.54, 304). In fact, he showed why the right to property is a natural right (II, Chap. V, 285 ff.), and how the use of money, which had begun in the state of nature, “introduced (by Consent) larger possessions” without prejudice to the natural right to property (II.36, 293). Considering this, Macpherson argued that Locke prioritised property rights over “any moral claims of the society,” while justifying the subordination of the non-propertied through the purchase of labour power, and subsequently excluding the untaxable poor from the active part of society.⁴ Thus, according to Macpherson, the natural right to property results in economic and social inequality. Incidentally, Locke’s account of political consent and civil justice is derived from this right. The “great and chief end, therefore, of Men’s uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government”, or the purpose for which they give consent to do so, is the “Preservation of their Property” (II.124, 350–51). In addition, equality before law is one of the “Bounds which people’s consent, or the trust, that is put ... by the Society,” have set “to the Legislative Power of every Commonwealth” (II.142, 363). If this is the case, then it would be right to argue that Locke’s idea of juridical equality never proves his dedication to equality: instead it conceals his justification of economic and social inequality.

With respect to social equality, how should Locke’s overall attitude towards the labouring poor be evaluated? Researchers do not agree on answers to this question. As Macpherson suggested, Locke’s theory of property eventually annihilates the natural equality of humankind and justifies social inequality. In contrast, Ashcraft argued that Locke was allied with the working majority against the idleness of the rich and the noble, insisting that Locke’s “general attitude to manual labour . . . was overwhelmingly positive.”⁵ Both treat Locke’s view on the labouring poor in a one-sided manner. It would be more fruitful to address the question of *how Locke’s treatment of labourers as equal members of the commonwealth was consistent with the assumption that they were particularly unaccustomed to using reason*. In this context, Locke considered the labouring poor as *moral equals* with respect to their contribution towards labour and the responsibility every human being is able and ought to take, even though he recognised that they often fail to achieve them.

1.2. Moral Equality and Civic Membership

Treating the labouring poor as moral equals is associated with the concept of *citizenship* or *civic membership*, which represents the qualification of the individual as an equal participant in society. Some remarks should be made on this issue.

A few influential scholars reconsidered Locke’s individualism to challenge the conventional image of his political thought. They considered the Lockean individual as

⁴ C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 221, 231–32, 257–58.

⁵ Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke’s Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 270.

Hobbesian (Strauss), as bourgeois or capitalist (Macpherson), or as profoundly Christian and, to some extent, Calvinist (Dunn).⁶ These scholars, despite their disagreements and disputes with each other, fail to see that Locke deduced from the natural law doctrine the individual as a *participant in society*.

In this respect, Pocock expressed the view that the individual in Locke's theory of natural law draws a clear contrast to the ideal of an active citizen. According to Pocock, Locke's political theory based exclusively on natural laws was exceptional in comparison to the common political language of the time, which was predominantly constitutionalist or republican, but closely similar to what we call a liberal theory of rights. While citizens are qualified in the former as active participants in politics, they emerge in the latter as rights holders who passively belong to society, in the expectation of the protection of their life, liberty, and property.⁷

The view that the Lockean individual is a holder of rights would be a good reason to provide a low estimate of Locke's idea of equality. If Locke intended to treat people as passive members and not as active participants of society, his view fully conforms to the society he belonged to, where the majority, the non-propertied class, had hardly any voice in the public sphere.

It is true that some researchers have stressed the affinity between Locke's and republican or constitutionalist discourses, which is supposed to prove his commitment to the ideal of contribution to common life. Tully listed the similarities between them.⁸ John Marshall showed how deeply Locke was committed to civic consciousness by focusing on how Cicero's and Seneca's philosophies influenced him.⁹ Goldie traced the eighteenth-century reception of Locke, in which his political doctrine was strongly compatible with republican or constitutionalist discourses.¹⁰ Maloy labelled Locke a "Liberal constitutionalist," who combined a radical concept of natural rights with a more moderate

⁶ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), chapter 5.B; Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, chapter 5; John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the "Two Treatises of Government"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), chapter 18.

⁷ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 423–24; J. G. A. Pocock, "The Ideal of Citizenship since Classical Times," in *Theorizing Citizenship*, ed. Ronald Beiner, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 42–43. For relatively recent examples that have labelled Locke as the theorist of modern liberal citizenship, see Derek Heater, *A Brief History of Citizenship* (New York: NYU Press, 2004), 65; and Andreas Fahrmeir, *Citizenship: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 28.

⁸ James Tully, "Placing the Two Treatises," in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, eds. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 253–55.

⁹ John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion, and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 161, 293–94.

¹⁰ Mark Goldie, introduction to *The Glorious Revolution Defended, 1690–1704*, vol. 1 of *The Reception of Locke's Politics*, ed. Mark Goldie, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), xlvii.

Aristotelian framework.¹¹ This line of research has proved that Locke associated his doctrine of individual freedom with active citizenship. However, the non-propertied class never comes into view there.

This paper provides an alternative approach to the Lockean individual, which has seldom been considered in previous studies. In his political theory and philosophy, Locke described the individual as, in a specific context, a *labourer*. The term “labour” denotes the *use of the common faculties of humankind*, with *industry* and *pains*, in the manner in which God, who had provided them with these faculties, intended them to do. According to Locke, physical labour represents not only a source of property rights but also a contribution to the *improvement of the common life of humankind*, while mental labour performs the task of rational faculties for *moral improvement*. In accordance with this view, Locke considered the labouring poor as *moral equals*. In his view, although they are not active participants in the business of politics, they contribute equally towards improving material living conditions, and being equal moral agents, regardless of social status, are able to act with responsibility and personal freedom.

The next section presents Locke’s view of the moral capacity of labourers. Sections 3 and 4 examine the concept of labour in his two theoretical works. Sections 5 and 6 focus on the striking contrast between Locke’s view of the labouring poor as capable moral agents on the one hand, and Humanist and Protestant discourses on civic contribution and equality on the other.

2. Labourers as Moral Equals

A study of Locke’s view on the moral character of the lower classes, which is the principal focus of this paper, was formerly attempted by Hundert. According to him, Locke’s intention was to “train” the labouring poor so that they become “maximizing economic actors,” as he believed that “while most labourers did not, in fact, behave rationally, any labourer could,” and also that “those who did so were the *moral equals*, if not surpassing those above them socially.”¹² Although it appears that Hundert’s interpretation is substantially correct, we still need to examine how Locke’s view of labourers as moral equals remained consistent in his thought.

Locke’s broadly positive view of the moral capacity of labourers did not prevent him from describing the baseness or unworthiness of the poor. For example, in a fragment of his utopian manuscript entitled “Atlantis” (1677), in which he described the laws and customs of an ideal community, he argued that “ignorance making men brutes and learning proud, especially those of the lower sort.”¹³ In the 1693 manuscript entitled

¹¹ Jason S. Maloy, “The Aristotelianism of Locke’s Politics,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70, no. 2 (April 2009), 255, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40208102>.

¹² E. J. Hundert, “Market Society and Meaning in Locke’s Political Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 15, no.1 (January 1977): 42–43, italics added.

¹³ John Locke, “Atlantis”, in *Political Essays* ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 254.

“Labor,” Locke deliberately referred to “the self-employed worker rather than a day labourer” as a typical worker.¹⁴ This raises the question as to whether Locke’s view on labourers is coherent.

It is, therefore, necessary to examine the extent to which Locke’s broadly accepted view of labour conformed to the common notion of the time. From the sixteenth century onward, Europe experienced considerable population growth accompanied by the emergence of the “relative surplus population” suffering from “underemployment.”¹⁵ Economic and demographic shifts gave rise to the “growing problem of poverty” and “massive migration,” which created a great challenge to the social order that was posed by poor, able-bodied, unemployed, rootless, and corrupted vagrants.¹⁶ This situation strengthened the prejudice that already had a long tradition, namely the assumption that “the labouring poor were not driven by the same motives as their social superiors.” The propertied class believed that the only measures to keep labourers industrious were “low wages and highly selective forms of charity.”¹⁷ It was, thus, commonly believed that the poor’s moral incapacity was derived from their unique nature.

Lis and Soly argued that Locke had fully accepted contemporary opinions on the poor. According to them, his view on labourers was comparable with that of the anonymous author of *An Ease for Overseers of the Poore* (1601), who stated that “the poore are so by nature giuen to ease, that it is as hard to bring their bodies to labour, as the oxe that hath not beene vsed to the yoke to drawe.”¹⁸ However, Locke’s argument was somewhat different. In a pamphlet that was anonymously published on currency reforms in 1691, he argued that labourers would perform their roles only if they had enough money “to buy Victuals, Cloaths, and Tools.”¹⁹ What Locke asserted here was that the poor neither had to be kept needy, nor were they so idle “by nature” that tough measures had to be taken against them, but just that they would work for the money that was sufficient for daily living.

¹⁴ John Locke, “Labor” (entry in 1693, *Adversaria* 1661, pp. 310–11), in *Locke on Money*, ed. Patrick Kelly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), vol. 2, 493–95; Maria Luisa Pesante, “Slaves, Servants and Wage Earners: Free and Unfree Labour, From Grotius to Blackstone,” *History of European Ideas* 35, no.3 (September 2009): 304, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.histeuroideas.2009.04.001>.

¹⁵ Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 451.

¹⁶ A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560–1640* (London: Methuen, 1985), 3–4.

¹⁷ Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts*, 479.

¹⁸ Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts*, 478–79; Anonymous, *An Ease for Overseers of the Poore* (Cambridge, 1601), 20.

¹⁹ John Locke, *Some Considerations of the Consequences of Lowering the Interest and Raising the Value of Money*, in *Locke on Money*, vol. 1, 236.

What Locke intended in his pamphlet was to show the necessity of “the Natural price of Money” and “a certain Proportion of Money” for trade.²⁰ For that, Locke attempted to make a rough estimate of the sufficient amount of currency that had to be left in the hands of labourers. He illustrated how seriously the lack of currency was disturbing trade, citing the situation where the “Farmer not having Money to pay the Labourer, supplies him with corn,” and arguing that the prevalence of in-kind payments disrupted the natural price of commodities, with people imposing their “own rate,” for example, labourers upon farmers, masters upon workmen in manufacture, and the new sort of “Ingrossers or Forestallers” upon “poor landowners.”²¹ Here, labourers were, along with masters and “forestallers,” included among those taking advantage of the disruption of “natural price.” However, Locke’s target of blame was not the failure of currency management or the lack of money for trade. His point was to emphasise the need to secure the provision of sufficient currency in trade, but he never intended that low wages were required to facilitate trade.

What mattered to Locke in his consideration of money was not “whether the money be in Thomas or Richards hands,” but whether it would be encouraged “to let it go into the current trade, for the improvement of the general stock, and wealth of the Nation.”²² In his estimate of the proportion of money for trade, “Labourers” were, along with “Landholders” and “Brokers,” counted as key actors. Among these three actors, Locke considered “Brokers” harmful to the entire process of trade and to other actors as their number disproportionately increased, by making the achievement of returns “slower and scantier,” eating up “too great a share of the Gains of Trade, and even “Starving the Labourer, and impoverishing the Landholder.” To avoid this, “all Encouragement should be given to Artificers,” and “things so order’d . . . that those who make, should also Vend and Retail their own Commodities,” while there should be fewer “Lazy and Unworking Shopkeepers.”²³

This shows that Locke’s *distinction between industriousness and idleness* was concerned with *whether one participates in material production*, and not if one is merely engaged in any work. His condemnation of “brokers,” “shopkeepers,” or anyone making a profit from purchase and sale but not being engaged in material production is a natural consequence of this distinction. He set national prosperity as the eventual goal of trade and considered “those who make” the chief contributors to the “improvement of the general stock,” including labourers in farm work or manufacturing. None of Locke’s arguments presented above imply that the labouring poor are by nature driven by moral motives that are different from those of the social superior.

²⁰ Locke, *Some Considerations*, 219, 233.

²¹ Locke, *Some Considerations*, 236–37.

²² Locke, *Some Considerations*, 280.

²³ Locke, *Some Considerations*, 236, 238, 240–41.

Opposed to this, the proof of Locke's severe view of the poor can be seen in his *Essay on the Poor Law* (1697). Locke certainly supported selective charity and oppressive policy against the stigmatised "idle vagabonds" to force them to engage in labour. However, Locke clearly distinguished between the "idle" and the labouring poor. Locke classified the recipient of relief into three categories: those who "can do nothing," those who "cannot maintain themselves wholly, yet are able to do something," and those who "are able to maintain themselves." He further divided the last category into two types: those with too many children to support by their labour, and those pretending not to get work. Only the last category became the target of harsh policy.²⁴ Even though the measures he proposed were highly punitive at first glance, they "need to be considered in the context of contemporary opinion and legislation." As Beier stressed, Locke's proposals, in which "physical punishments were restricted to forgers of passports and vagrant children," reveal "the tendency away from corporal punishment for vagabonds."²⁵ Furthermore, based on a testimony "from a considerable person," Le Clerc reported not long after Locke's death that he was so sympathetic to the labouring poor who "had labour'd as long as their Strength wou'd hold" but "reduced to Poverty," that he believed that they deserved sufficient support to "live comfortably."²⁶ This shows that Locke's proposals for poor relief were consistent with his substantially favourable view of labourers, as well as his appreciation of industriousness as participation in material production.²⁷

²⁴ John Locke, "An Essay on the Poor Law" (1697), in *Political Essays*, 184–85.

²⁵ A. L. Beier, *Social Thought in England, 1480–1730: From Body Social to Worldly Wealth* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 409. However, in spite of Locke's moving away from the traditional view of the nature of the poor, he never arrived at the recognition that too little reward could not be the motive for industrious labour. "Perhaps the greatest failing of Locke's scheme was that ... it failed to recognise that low wages rather than lack of employment were the greatest curse of the poor," Beier, *Social Thought in England*, 410. On Locke's reluctance to regard high wages as the motivation to work, see also Paul Slack, *The Invention of Improvement: Information and Material Progress in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 188.

²⁶ Jean Le Clerc, *The Life and Character of Mr. John Locke* (London, 1706), 27, 29.

²⁷ Even though Locke showed a favourable view on labourers and moved "away from corporal punishment for vagabonds," whether his treatment of "idle vagabonds" contradicts his concept of equality is another question. According to Gianna Englert, the latter reveals Locke's view that "economic membership," or active participation in material production, must precede political membership. Regarding this, "idle vagabonds" are excluded from equal membership. Furthermore, the papers of Steven Forde and Juliana Udi may suggest that the exclusion of "idle vagabonds" from charity in Locke's poor law rather proves the consistency of his commitment to juridical equality, or equal protection of property. However, this is a question that must be discussed at length in another paper. See Englert, "Liberty and Industry: John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and the Economic Foundations of Political Membership," *Polity* 48 (October 2016): 551–79, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26358280>; Steven Forde, "The Charitable John Locke," *The Review of Politics* 71, no.3 (2009), 428–58, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670509990040>; Juliana Udi, "Locke and the Fundamental Right to Preservation: On the Convergence of Charity and Property Rights," *The Review of Politics* 77, no.2 (2015): 191–215, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670515000030>.

It is from the same perspective that Locke supported the naturalisation of expatriated French Huguenots. He argued that what naturalisation brings to a country is a benefit, as it contributes towards increasing the population. It would be unlikely to cause harm as “noebody can transport himself into another country with hopes to live upon other mens labour.” Locke’s chief interest lies in the *number of participants in material production*. He asserted that the increase in those having “noething to maintain them but their hands” would be “soe fare from being a burthen that tis to them chiefly we owe our riches.”²⁸ This shows that *Locke was quite convinced that the poor are sufficiently motivated to be industrious*, which marks a difference from the traditional opinion that they are generally idle.

The consistency in Locke’s substantially favourable view of labourers is now apparent. However, before judging that he considered the labouring poor as moral equals, it should be determined whether his view on labourers was compatible with the contemporary opinion that labourers were comparable with *servants*.

According to Lis and Soly, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, labour work was still “regulated within a legal framework entailing many dimensions of unfreedom” that made wage workers dependent people, and neither poor labourers nor servants were “persons in their own right,” but rather “means used by others.”²⁹ This suggests that Locke’s idea of the poor was also imbued with the idea of “servants.” Hundert argued that Locke’s idea of labour still had affinity with the customary language of “service, duty and deference to a superior” more than with free contract for wages, and that he used the term “servant” to include “all non-propriety persons in an argument about natural rights, political obligation, and the validity of contracts.”³⁰

However, in the late sixteenth century, the labouring poor recognised that their mode of dependence allowed them certain freedoms. For example, Thomas Smith, a counsellor of Elizabeth I, stated that the “fourth sort or classe amongst us,” namely “day labourers, poore husmandmen, yea marchantes or retailers which have no free lande, copiholders, and all artificers,” having “no voice nor authoritie” but “onely to be ruled,” should nevertheless “be not altogether neglected.” According to him, these semi-free people originated from “necessitie and want of bondmen” that had “made men to use free men as bondmen to all servile services,” but they were used “more liberally and freely, and with a more equalitie and moderation,” than slaves before the acceptance of Christianity.³¹

²⁸ John Locke, “For a Generall Naturalization” (1693), in *Locke on Money*, vol. 2, 489, 491.

²⁹ Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts*, 495, 497.

³⁰ Hundert, “Market Society and Meaning in Locke’s Political Philosophy,” 41, 42, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2008.0661>. Hundert disagreed with Macpherson’s interpretation, according to which Locke not only meant wage labour as he mentioned to a servant, but also “took it for granted ... that labour was naturally a commodity.” Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism*, 215–18, 220.

³¹ Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum: A Discourse on the Commonwealth of England*, ed. L. Alston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 46, 139.

A century later, Locke provided a much better assessment of labourers than Smith. As already stated, he treated “those who make [products]” as the crucial contributors to the commonwealth who are comparable to landowners. Furthermore, Locke clearly distinguished the position of “great Men’s menial Servants” in trade from that of labourers.³² As Booth argued, Locke’s servants are not part of the “body economic,” although they enter the household by consent, “as a free, equal, and independent person.”³³ In contrast, he placed greater importance on labourers for their contribution to social prosperity through their engagement in production. Thus, although it connotes service and dependence, it proves that Locke’s view of labour is closely associated with its *contribution to public life*, which marks the *difference from the idea of private service*.

3. Labour and Improvement of Common Life

The concept of labour as a factor contributing towards public life is consistent with Locke’s theoretical work. In his political masterpiece, the *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), labour makes a universal duty that is *extra-civic* in its origin, but simultaneously civic in fulfilling.³⁴

In the “First Treatise,” Locke associated a theological concept of labour with the original liberty and equality of humankind. From God’s command to work in the Old Testament, that is, “in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken,”³⁵ Locke derived that “God sets him [Adam] to work for his living,” for which God gave him “a Spade into his hand, to subdue the Earth” (I.45, 172). His purpose here was to refute Robert Filmer’s interpretation of the *Genesis*, from which he deduced the original monarchy of Adam. Locke argued that it would “be difficult to imagine that God, in the same Breath, should make him [Adam] Universal Monarch over all Mankind, and a day labourer for his Life” (I.44, 172). Interestingly, Locke compared Adam’s mode of life with that of a “day labourer.”

Labour in the extra-civic state of humankind is discussed further in the “Second Treatise.” The “law of nature” binds humankind “to preserve himself” as well as “to preserve the rest of Mankind,” and this obligation implies everyone’s right to life and to the things for self-preservation (II.6, 271). From this right, Locke derived the so-called labour theory of property, according to which one’s “Property in his own Person” gives a title to the things that one has “mixed his Labour with” (II.27, 287–88).

³² Locke, *Some Considerations*, in *Locke on Money*, vol. 1, 240.

³³ William James Booth, *Households: On the Moral Architecture of the Economy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 104.

³⁴ The term “extra-civic” is borrowed from Annabel Brett. See Brett, “The Development of the Idea of Citizens’ Rights,” in *States and Citizens: History, Theory, Prospects*, eds. Quentin Skinner and Bo Stråth, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 104.

³⁵ *Genesis* 3.19, King James Version.

To Locke, living on one's own labour represented a form of moral conduct in a *negative* sense. The natural obligation to preserve humankind binds them not to harm others. As human beings are the "Servants of a Sovereign Master," but not under "any such Subordination among us that may Authorize us to destroy one another," it is prohibited to "take away, or impair life, or what tends to be the Preservation ... of another" (II.6, 271). By contrast, appropriating something from nature, which is common, never harms anyone, unless one's possession exceeds the amount one can make use of "before it spoils." This measure can also be applied to the land. Possessing land "did not fall under any prejudice to any other Man," on the condition that "there was still enough, and as good left" (II.33, 291). Thus, appropriation through labour appears to be a moral way of living, that is, living without harming others.

Locke stressed the moral aspect of labour, in contrast to irrationality and idleness. Provided that God has "given them [men] reason to make use of it to the best advantage of Life and convenience (II.26, 286)," it should also be supposed that God has "commanded Man ... to labour," and "to subdue the Earth, that is, improve it for the benefit of life" (II.32, 291). It follows from this that the world is given to "the use of the Industrious and the Rational" but "not to the Fancy or Covetousness of the Quarrelsome and Contentious." For the latter, it was never allowed to "meddle with what was already improved by another's Labour ... which he had no right to" (II.34, 291). Locke's terms "industrious" and "rational" therefore connote a life following the command of nature not to harm others.

Locke simultaneously considered labour as a *positive* contribution to others. He argued that labour, industry, and private possession of land "increase the common stock of mankind" (II.37, 294). In Chapter 5 of the "Second Treatise," he mostly talked about labour in the extra-civic state. The comparison of cultivated land with land "without any Husbandry upon it" revealed that "improvement in labour" makes "the far greater part of the value" produced from the former, even ninety-nine hundredths of it. This is the reason why "the Property of labour should be able to over-balance the Community of Land" (II.40, 296). Thus, property, particularly land ownership, contributes to the increase in the "common stock of mankind."

If Locke remained in the extra-civic state, what did he imply by the term "mankind"? Did it stand for all humanity, or only part of it? To answer this question, it is necessary to understand that Locke referred to different living conditions. Using culturally biased terms, he compared the life of a Native American with that of a "day-labourer in England." According to him, "several Nations of the Americans" do not have even "one hundredth part of the Conveniencies we enjoy," due to the "want of improving it [land] by labour" (II.41, 297). This shows that Locke accepted the differences in living conditions. Locke's use of the term "mankind" cannot be interpreted literally, but rather as falling within the scope of the same living conditions, and his phrase "increase the common stock" can be interpreted as an improvement in the overall standard of living within this scope. Locke presupposed that *different groups* of humans share a certain mode of life. Discussing property in this manner, he moved seamlessly from labour as the *source of private rights* to labour as a *contribution to common life*.

This illustrates how Locke's idea of *God-given duty to live on one's own labour without harming others* is associated with his idea of *labour as a positive service to others*. He believes that a person's extra-civic duty to work and make a living by oneself is simultaneously a *positive duty of mutual aid* with those who do the same thing.

This mutual aid is explicitly incorporated into Locke's theory of the origin of government in a later chapter in the "Second Treatise." Even in this case, Locke moved from labour as the source of private right to a contributor to common life. According to him, people's motive for uniting into the commonwealth is for the purpose of "Preservation of their Property" (II.124, 350–51). For this reason, people have to relinquish their natural powers for self-preservation and join "a private ... or particular Political Society" that is "separate from the rest of Mankind" (II.128, 352). Locke illustrated this "particular" society as a community for mutual aid.

For being now in a new State, wherein he is to enjoy *many Conveniencies, from the labour, assistance, and society of others in the same Community* as well as protection from its whole strength; he is to *part also with* as much of his *natural liberty in providing for himself*, as the good, prosperity, and safety of the Society shall require, which is not only necessary, but *just*; since *the other Members of the Society do the like*. (II.130, 353, italics added)

Here, Locke explicitly counted labour as a service that fellow members of society provide to each another and considered it the *moral ground* for accepting the restrictions of rights that society requires.

It is obvious that Locke employed the term "labour" in the *Two Treatises* as a moral concept from both negative and positive perspectives. Although formulated within the framework of a natural law that imposes extra-civic duties deduced from God's will, his concept of labour did not just include the negative or passive obligation to live by oneself and not violate the rights of others and the law of the country. It also represented active engagement in common life. Thus, Locke used the term "labour" to express the idea that material production is civic participation and contribution.

4. Improvement of Understanding and Human Liberty

Locke's term of "labour" represents not only civic participation and contribution, but also the *capacity of the individual for self-development* in both intellectual and moral senses, in other words, an effort to use mental faculties carefully to improve understanding.

4.1. Locke on Freedom of Mind

Since his youth, Locke had been concerned about how human faculties can be used for intellectual and moral improvement. He stated in his *Essays on the Law of Nature* (c. 1663–64) that there exists "no such imprint of the law of nature in our hearts (nullam ... legis naturae in pectoribus nostris inscriptionem sequentia suadent argumenta)," but we have two faculties to educate our minds, namely "reason and sense of perception

(rationem et sensum).”³⁶ However, the young Locke never believed that everyone can make use of these common faculties. According to him, “those who are more rational and perceptive than the rest (non-major pars hominum sed sanior et perspicacior)” should be consulted with respect to moral issues, and most of humankind is incapable of using reason in the right way because of “a bad way of life (prava consuetudo),” “pleasure (voluptas),” or “base instincts (pravi affectus).”³⁷

Concerning the difficulty of the majority of people in using reason in the proper way, Locke changed his view by the time he published his main philosophical work. In *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690), he did not exempt people from the *responsibility* of using their rationale. Although Locke considered most of humankind as ignorant, he found the cause of this ignorance elsewhere. As there are very few things human beings can understand with absolute certainty, there is “nothing more common than Contrariety of Opinions” (E.IV.xx.1, 706).³⁸ One of the chief causes of error is “want of proofs.” It is extremely difficult for “the greatest Part of Mankind” to overcome this cause, because they are “given up to Labour, and enslaved to the Necessity of their mean Condition, whose Lives are worn out only in the Provisions for Living.” They have neither the opportunities to “make experiments and observations,” nor those to “inquire into and collect the testimonies of others” (E.IV.xx.2, 707). Here, a far more mature Locke emphasised the root of ignorance in the general condition of humankind, but he did not argue that those who are particularly rational and perceptive should undertake moral issues for the sake of the “great Part of Mankind,” as he formerly did.

Locke argued that the daily routine of ordinary people is an excuse for one’s ignorance. According to him, “GOD has furnished Men with Faculties sufficient to direct them in the Way they should take,” and that there is no one “so wholly taken up with the Attendance on the Means of Living, as to have no spare Time at all to think of his Soul, and inform himself in Matters of Religion” (E.IV.xx.3, 708). We cannot read this as a radical push for moral equality contravening the existing order. Nevertheless, Locke recognised that regardless of social inequality, every member of a society is a capable moral agent who is obliged to make efforts to improve their understanding. (This topic will be discussed in detail in Section 4.3.)

This mental effort makes one free. Locke argued that even the poor are intellectually freer than those who are left ignorant and uninformed. The latter are those

whose largeness of Fortune would plentifully enough supply Books, and other Requisites for clearing of Doubts, and discovering Truth: But they are cooped in

³⁶ John Locke, *Essays on the Law of Nature*, ed. Wolfgang von Leyden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 136–37, 146–47.

³⁷ Locke, *Essays on the Law of Nature*, 114–15.

³⁸ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). The parenthetical citations beginning with “E” are citations from Locke’s *Essay*, in which book, chapter, section, and page numbers are indicated in this order.

close, by the Laws of their Countries, and the strict guards of those whose Interest it is to keep them ignorant, lest, they [people] should believe the less in them [the establishment]. They are ... farther from the Liberty and Opportunities of a fair Enquiry, than those poor and wretched Labourers ... And, however they may seem high and great, are *confined to narrowness of Thought, and enslaved in that which should be the freest part of Man, their Understandings* (E.IV.xx.4, 708, italics added).

According to Locke, this enslavement of the understanding is established in any country where “Care is taken to propagate Truth, without Knowledge,” and people are therefore forced to “swallow down Opinions” as if one takes “Empiricks Pills, without knowing what they are made of, or how they will work (E.IV.xx.4, 709). No one ought to remain ignorant because the capacity to know something is an essential part of human liberty.

4.2. Using Reason as “Labour of Thought”

For humankind to exercise its mental faculties freely and rationally, Locke frequently compared mental activity and physical labour as two principal activities of human beings. One of the most impressive passages about this point appears in the introduction of the *Essay*.

Men may find Matter sufficient to *busy their Heads*, and *employ their Hands* with Variety, Delight, and Satisfaction if they will not boldly quarrel with their own Constitution, and *throw away the Blessings their Hands are filled with*, because *they are not big enough to grasp everything*. We shall not have much Reason to complain of the *narrowness of our Minds*, if we will but *employ them about what may be of use to us; for of that they are very capable*. (E.I.i.5, 45–46, italics added)

What is particularly impressive in this passage is Locke’s comparison of the very limited capacity of our “Heads” or “Minds” with that of our “Hands.” Even though it is impossible to grasp everything in our “Hands,” we still have to rely on our own capacities. The same can be said about our minds. Their “narrowness” does not exempt us from employing them to get “what may be of use to us.”

In Locke’s *Essay*, readers can find several passages in which humankind’s mental activity is compared to purposeful and more or less painful exercises of the human body, which are represented by pain, industry, diligence, and application. Comparisons are sometimes made using an analogy. For example, as there is no maxim that is innate to the human mind but requires “the Use of Reason for the Discovery of these general Truths,” reasoning then becomes “the labour of our Thoughts,” or an act of “search,” and casting about them “requires Pains and Application” (E.I.ii.10, 52). In Book Two, Locke provided a contrast between “Judgment” as the proper use of reason, which lies “in separating carefully,” and “Wit” as the improper use of it, which lies “most in the assemblage of ideas.” The latter “strikes so lively on the Fancy” and “is so acceptable to all People,” but

this is merely as long as it requires “*no labour of thought* to examine what Truth or Reason there is in it” (E.II.xi.2, 156, italics added).

The most striking use of the analogy between the proper use of reason and labour appears in the following passage, in which Locke compared the improvement of theological and moral knowledge with that of material living conditions through building bridges or houses. God has

given him [a man] Reason, Hands, and Materials, [so that] he should build him Bridges or Houses; which some people in the world, however of good parts, do either totally want, or are but ill provided of, as well as others are wholly without Ideas of God, and Principles of Morality, or at least have but very ill ones. The reason both cases being, that they *never employ’d their Parts, Faculties, and Powers industriously* that way, but *contended themselves with the Opinions, Fashions, and Things of their Country*. (E.I.iv.12, 91–92, italics added.)

Here, an analogy is drawn between those having no “Idea of God” or “Principles of Morality,” or ill ones, and those wanting “Bridges or Houses” or being “ill provided of” them. Locke attributes this to the fact that both types of individuals lack *industriousness* because their reasoning or labour merely depends on “Opinions, Fashions, and Things of their Country.” This reveals Locke’s view that no one is allowed to be so idle so as to follow customary opinions or given directions without assessing whether they are really right or not, if one attempts to improve (speculative and moral) knowledge or material life. Human beings should be industrious to seek improvements in intellectual, moral, and material life.

Locke’s condemnation of people who are learned but not intellectually industrious derives from this. In order to explain the cause and remedy for the “endless dispute, wrangling, and jargon” especially among “learned bookish Men,” Locke argued in Book Three that “it requires *pains and assiduity*” for the “Mind to put off those confused Notions and Prejudices till it resolves them into clear and distinct simple ones, out of which they are compounded” (E.II.xiii.27, 180–81, italics added). In Book Four, he emphasised the knowledge of the “Powers of Substances to change the sensible Qualities of other Bodies” (qualities and interactions of all things in nature), it is “some Men’s *generous pains*” that have been “brought to the stock of natural Knowledge” through “Experience” (E.IV.iii.16, 547–48, italics added).

4.3. Equality in Moral Responsibility and Liberty

As discussed in Section 4.1, Locke held the view that the poor can be intellectually freer than those having no freedom of opinion. However, can this be taken as an expression of egalitarianism? In the field of education, Locke’s egalitarianism has been discussed with respect to his attack on innate ideas and his theory of *tabula rasa*.³⁹ However, this

³⁹ The chief advocate of this view is Edward Power, who holds that Locke’s *tabula rasa* is an “interpretation of human nature that was bound to cultivate a yearning for equality.” See Power,

concept is not necessarily contradictory to inequality among social positions, as justified by the excellence of a few. Rather, Locke's egalitarianism lies in moral responsibility and liberty. In order to prove this, his underlying rationale of treating all human beings as equal moral agents needs to be clarified.

In Locke's view, morality should be the primary concern for all, both theoretically and practically. In the Chapter "Of the Improvement of our Knowledge" in Book Four of the *Essay*, he argued that morality is the "proper Science, and Business of Mankind *in general*" (E.IV.xii.11, 646, italics added). According to Locke, human beings are furnished with faculties that are *apt to understand morality* along with the existence of God. Even though they are "not fitted to penetrate into the internal Fabrick and real Essences of Bodies," our faculties "yet plainly discover to us the Being of a GOD and the Knowledge of ourselves, enough to lead us into a full and clear discovery of our Duty and great Concernment." If learning morality and religion is what God made it feasible for humankind to do, this is what we are obliged to do as long as we regard ourselves as "rational Creatures." Locke, therefore, concluded that "proper Employment [of our faculties] lies in those Enquiries, and in that sort of Knowledge which is most suited to our natural Capacities" (E.IV.xii.11, 646).

In Locke's view, being rational must be combined with being moral and having faith in God, because morality and religion are the features that make humankind rational beings and distinguish them from inferior ones. It is within the capacity of humankind to improve moral and religious understanding, if not to discover the true nature of the universe. Therefore, according to Locke, it is the *equal* responsibility of *all, regardless of social status*, to do the former. Quoting again, he argued that "No Man is so wholly taken up with the Attendance on the Means of Living, as to have no spare Time at all to think of his Soul, and inform himself in Matters of Religion" (E.IV.xx.3, 708).

The cause and remedy for the failure to improve one's understanding that Locke has identified are *applicable to all, regardless of social status*. In the chapter "Of Power" in Book Two of the *Essay*, he found the cause of this failure of desire in moral life. According to him, "desire is a state of uneasiness," which "determines the Will to the successive voluntary actions" (E.II.xxi.32–33, 251–52). On the one hand, uneasiness motivates one to will, act, and work industriously (E.II.xxi.34, 252). On the other hand, this does not assure that we are always motivated to choose greater happiness because greater good does not determine our will "until our desire ... makes us uneasy in the want of it." Therefore, one never attempts to get out of "nasty penury" as long as one is content with, but "finds no uneasiness in it." For the same reason, one is "never so well perswaded of the advantages of virtue" until one "hungers and thirsts after righteousness" (E.II.xxi.35, 253).

The discovery of the nature of desire and human action led Locke to consider moral *capacity* and *liberty*, namely, the question of how one can curb one's desire instead of being directed by it. He addressed this question by seeing liberty as the power of the

human mind which must be distinguished from the power to will. In contrast to will as the “power to think on its own Actions, and to prefer their doing or omission either to other,” he defined liberty as the “power a Man has to do or forbear doing any particular Action” (E.II.xxi.15, 241), in other words, as the power to direct the will which is otherwise determined by the desire strong enough to make one uneasy. Based on this definition of the reflection of will and liberty, Locke concluded that “the source of all liberty” lies in a “power to suspend the prosecution of this or that desire.” This is the capacity required to be a capable moral agent. According to Locke,

when, upon due Examination, we have judg’d, we have done our duty, all that we can, or ought to do, in pursuit of our happiness; and ’tis ... *a perfection of our nature* to desire, will, and act according to the last result of a fair Examination. (E.II.xxi.47, 263–64, italics added)

Locke thus equated human freedom with the capacity to pursue a greater, and morally more valuable good. In his words, a “careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness” paves the way for the “highest perfection of intellectual nature,” and lays the “necessary foundation of our liberty” (E.II.xxi.51, 266).

Success or failure in moral capacity improvement depends, therefore, on the power to suspend desire, and one makes use of this power when they have changed “the pleasantness and unpleasantness that accompanies any sort of action.” The effort for this change is supported by “practice, application, and custom,” as well as with a “due consideration” (E.II.xxi.69, 280). The improvement of moral capacity thus depends on the *improvement of disposition*, through which one is ready to take pain in seeking greater happiness.

What Locke emphasised about tutoring in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) was that a tutor had to establish this readiness in the pupil’s mind. According to Locke, a tutor’s chief purpose is “to fashion the Carriage, and form the Mind, to settle in his Pupil good Habits, and the Principles of Virtue and Wisdom.” The point is that a tutor has to teach his pupil “Application,” and get him accustomed to taking “Pains” so that he learns “some little taste of what his own Industry must perfect.”⁴⁰ This clearly shows Locke’s view that the key to education is less inculcating in a pupil with ideas, principles, or doctrines than improving the disposition of a pupil so that they attempt to gain or acquire something through their own efforts.

Locke was also concerned with the moral capacity of the labouring poor, as shown in the unpublished fragment which was, according to Peter King, intended to be included, but eventually omitted from, the Chapter “Of Power” in the *Essay*. In this fragment, Locke argued that, among the rich and the poor, the youth are morally incapable because, for different reasons, they are “never accustomed to reflect.” The poor have never raised their children’s thoughts “above the necessities of a needy drudging life.” Furthermore, the rich

⁴⁰ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, eds. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 156 (§94). The text is based on the third edition (1695).

let their children “loose only to sensual pleasures.” As a result, the latter’s children take “all proposals of consideration” as “nonsense,” while those of the former see “the names of virtue and worth” as “utterly unintelligible,” and “to talk of a future state of happiness or misery” as “a trick, and mere mockery.”⁴¹

Although the common cause of moral incapacity identified by Locke, that is, the lack of reflectiveness, is equally applicable to the rich and the poor, they grow up to be thoughtless by the different factors that are specific to their own circumstances. The poor fail to improve their disposition due to penury and the lack of leisure, while wealthy youth of the propertied class are surrounded by many things easily providing them with sensual pleasures. It is, therefore, an appropriate way for the rich to make them accustomed to self-control and diligence, as Locke advised in his educational writing, while the same remedy would not work for the poor because they are preoccupied with subsistence and are hardly motivated to improve their understanding, much less to provide their children with what gentlemen call education. Does this, therefore, lead to the conclusion that Locke considered the moral incapacity of the poor as irredeemable?

In fact, Locke thought that there is another remedy for moral deficiency, the Christian gospel, which specifically addresses the poor. He argued in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) that it is particularly the “labouring and illiterate” people that the Christian gospel is addressed to. According to Locke, Christianity suits to “vulgar Capacities” and the “state of Mankind in this World, destined to labour and travel.” It is easy for the “greatest part of Mankind,” who have no “leisure for Learning and Logick,” to comprehend “plain propositions” and “a short reasoning about things familiar to their Minds, and nearly allied to their daily experience.” Preached in this way, the Christian gospel made illiterate people believe the “promises of a Deliverer,” particularly the one that he should “at the end of the World, come again and pass Sentence on all Men, according to their deeds.”⁴² Thus, by virtue of the simple and plain clauses of the Christian gospel, the labouring poor are saved from moral depravity.

Locke’s treatment of the poor is fairly consistent with his view that the improvement of understanding, as well as of material living conditions, is the common business and primary duty of humankind that every person is, regardless of social status and with the help of religion and education, able and ought to undertake. With respect to this duty, Locke treated all as *moral equals*, with *equal responsibility and liberty in matters of morality*, or rather *equal responsibility for achieving moral freedom* through reflection, self-control, and the improvement of understanding, through mental activities compared to *painful labour*. From physical and mental perspectives, for Locke, labour represents the use of nature to improve the human life according to God’s will, through which human beings reveal their nature as rational creatures.⁴³

⁴¹ Peter King, ed., *The Life and Letters of John Locke* (London: G. Bell, 1884), 359–360.

⁴² John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 169–71.

⁴³ With regard to Locke’s association of labour with human nature, see also David Armitage’s view on Locke’s ‘constructivist’ understanding of labour, according to which it is the duty of humankind “to

In the above manner, Locke established the moral equality of individuals in their capacity for self-development. This allows the characterisation of Locke's egalitarianism as based on the common faculties of humankind. In his view, this sort of equality is morally relevant, regardless of the disparity in social positions and roles. In the "Second Treatise," Locke depicted that all are equal by nature "without Subordination or Subjection," and in the state where "no one" has "more than another" and the "Power and Jurisdiction is reciprocal," given that human beings are the "Creatures of the same species and rank" and provided with "the same faculties" (II.4, 269). However, this natural equality is lost through the development of property and by the establishment of society, government, and order. Nevertheless, equality of the common faculties of humankind remains relevant. These faculties are, according to the *Essay*, what God has "furnished Men" so that they can "direct them in the Way they should take" (E.IV.xx.3, 708). Therefore, in the state of society, all are equally able and obliged to use their faculties with which God endowed rational creatures.

5. Post-Humanist Concept of Civic Contribution

Locke's theory of labour transformed the concept of citizenship. His idea of civic contribution, in which labourers are regarded as contributors to the improvement of material living conditions, marks a break from that of humanist and republican writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although there are certain similarities among them in other respects.

5.1. Industry as Civic Virtue

In early modernity, citizenship was merged into a state of subjection. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the concept of citizenship survived the development of monarchies by being "subsumed under subjection," while the English term "citizen" itself denoted merchants or city dwellers. The concept of citizen as an ideal contributor to the business of politics was applicable to the active part of the monarchical state.⁴⁴ Furthermore, this ideal was hardly in conflict with subjection, as long as it was compatible with the social hierarchy and self-confidence of the privileged and educated.⁴⁵ In the sixteenth century, humanists shared the ideal in which any contribution to the common good marked true virtue. They appointed themselves as contributors to the commonwealth by educating the

construct it [nature as the divine creation] to their own devices, both mentally and physically", David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 122.

⁴⁴ Conal Condren, *The Language of Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1994), 91, 94–98.

⁴⁵ Peter Riesenberg, *Citizenship in the Western Tradition: Plato to Rousseau* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 203–4.

privileged that “virtue is true nobility (*virtus vera nobilitas*),” and warned against the neglect of the common good.⁴⁶

Humanists generally share the elitist idea of virtue. During the sixteenth century, humanists provided a contrast between true virtues and what they believed to be the characteristics of common people. For example, in 1516, Erasmus warned that the “true prince” should avoid the “degrading opinions and interests of the common folk,” who were “never pleased by the best things,” while advocating the notion of nobility derived from “virtue and good actions” versus that being “judged by ancestral portraits and family trees or by wealth.”⁴⁷ In 1531, Thomas Elyot also argued that virtue was “not constant in a multitude,” and democracy would lead to either tyranny or “the rage of a commonality.”⁴⁸

However, for humanists, the poor were not the single targets of criticism. While representing themselves as the advocates of common interest and active political life, humanists charged “both their social superiors and those at the bottom of the social scale” with idleness, which was a “comprehensive concept denoting everything they condemned in others and appreciated in themselves.”⁴⁹ When Erasmus advised a prince that there should be “as few idlers as possible among his subjects,” he meant by the term “idlers” people such as “beggars” in good health, “priests,” “monasteries,” “colleges,” “tax farmers,” “brokers,” and “the whole gang of agents and retainers whom some people keep purely for the sake of ostentation,” soldiers as “a very energetic” and the “most dangerous” sort of idlers, and so on.⁵⁰ As represented by Erasmus, an idler is any person who was neither directly nor indirectly engaged in material production.

Some famous humanists appreciated and encouraged manual work. This did not mean that they considered the labouring poor as virtuous contributors. They suggested that engagement in labour may have a positive effect on the rich and noble. Erasmus recommended that the rich and noble “should not be frowned on for instructing their sons in some sedentary occupation,” in order to keep them away from the depravity of idleness. He required them always to be diligent. Nevertheless, this itself cannot be interpreted as the recognition of manual work or as a civic contribution. According to him, the aristocracy was originally “excused for the more menial tasks” for the purpose of learning

⁴⁶ See Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought, 1570–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7–11; Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 285.

⁴⁷ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, ed. L. Jardine, trans. N. M. Cheshire and M. J. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15–16.

⁴⁸ Thomas Elyot, *The Book Named the Governor*, ed. S. E. Lehmberg (London: Dent, 1962), 6–7.

⁴⁹ Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts*, 461.

⁵⁰ Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, 83.

how to perform services “in the government of the state,” but later it was observed that such “menial” tasks could also serve as learning.⁵¹

Thomas More appreciated manual work, and he was sympathetic to the poor.⁵² More and members of his circle suggested “remedies for the poor and condemned idleness, oppression, and covetousness.” However, as Paul Marshall commented, their reform programme also had “a note of elitism” with “emphasis on wise and educated rulers, counsellors, and magistrates.”⁵³ More’s *Utopia* (1516) presented an ideal society in which the tasks imposed on male and female citizens were equal, namely engagement in agriculture and a “particular trade,” with the exception of the “syphogrants” or magistrates, whose business was to manage matters so that there is no citizen who “sits around in idleness” and “has to exhaust himself with endless toil.” However, More never described labour itself as a particular mode of civic contribution but merely as an obligation that is *neither exempted from nor heavily imposed on citizens*. Far more impressive is the condemnation of luxury and display of wealth in his fictional travel report. To prevent the love of silver and gold from taking root, Utopian citizens held them “up to scorn.” For example, they used “chamber pots” and the “humblest vessels” made of gold and silver, or dressed slaves or criminals in these metals as a mark of stigma.⁵⁴

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, terms denoting industriousness were frequently associated with virtue in political life, while it was a common notion that, as discussed in Section 2, labourers become industrious only when they were forced. Elyot’s text provides an example that may sound odd because he referred to the term “industry” as implying mental activeness analogous to the skill of “dancing.” In his definition, industry is “a quality proceeding of wit and experience, by which a man perceiveth quickly, inventeth freshly, and counseleth speedily.” Thus, Elyot denoted the practical skills required for the king’s counsellors. The prominent examples of industrious persons he gave were two military and political leaders in classical antiquity, namely Alcibiades and Julius Caesar.⁵⁵

Barnabe Barnes, the author of *Four Books of Offices* (1606), who recognised that the law of England was established “by consent of all the free Citizens,”⁵⁶ employed the term “industry” in a manner similar to that of Elyot. Defining it as “a ceaselesse and sincere

⁵¹ Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, 84.

⁵² Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts*, 460.

⁵³ Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man: Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 29; see also Pearl Hogrefe, *The Sir Thomas More Circle: A Program of Ideas and Their Impact on Secular Drama* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959).

⁵⁴ Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. George M. Logan (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 44–45.

⁵⁵ Elyot, *The Book Named the Governor*, 81, 82.

⁵⁶ Barnabe Barnes, *Foure Bookes of Offices: Enabling Privat Persons for the Speciall Service of All Good Princes and Policies* (London, 1606), 130.

cogitation,” and “all lucubration for the iust and inuiolable honour of his Prince and of the Commonwealth,” Barnes argued that “noble industrie” was “the true cognisance of a good Counsellor.” According to him, “Iudges, and iuridicall magistrates” were required to be “studious and industrious in the science and iudiciall practice.” For military leaders, their “owne experience will bee the best guide vnto himselfe if he be wise, obseruing, and industrious,” and soldiers will “become seruiceable and valiant” under their industrious leadership.⁵⁷

Thus, in humanist discourses, words denoting industriousness were far more frequently applied to the rich and noble than those who were engaged in labour, in order to encourage or emphasise their contribution to political life. By “industry,” humanists referred to practical skills, experiences, and mental agility required for leadership and holding public office.

In the mid-seventeenth century, this use of the term “industry” was made obsolete by civic humanists such as James Harrington and Marchamont Nedham. They *attempted to extend the scope of active members of society towards the lower end of the social hierarchy*, arguing that those formerly excluded from the sphere of politics must be regarded as contributors who serve the commonwealth by virtue of their industriousness.

After the establishment of the republican government in England, political writers referred to the industriousness of manual workers to show them as significant contributors to the commonwealth. In 1654, Nedham wrote that the Protectorate would work effectively in wartime by its “unitive virtue” of “Monarchy,” and with the management by the “Counsel of Aristocracie,” while in peacetime the “industry and courage of Democracie” would “improve it.”⁵⁸ We can interpret these words “industry” and “improve” in the same context that they are understood today, and also read what Nedham meant by them as the contribution of common people through material production.

For Harrington, the industry of citizens was the key to the land reforms he had proposed. In *The Prerogative of Popular Government* (1658), he intended to persuade readers that people would consent to his proposition, but never accompany sedition. For that purpose, he argued that people would not take up arms, instead would choose to take the lands of nobility “by way of counsel,” the way in which they “need not obstruct their industry.”⁵⁹ Here too, “industry” stands for material production, which is presented as the chief interest of the commonwealth. For Harrington, it is not that industriousness serves the business of politics, but rather it *defines* public good.

⁵⁷ Barnes, *Foure Bookes of Offices*, 28, 140, 168, 171.

⁵⁸ Marchamont Nedham [anonymous], *A True State of the Case of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1654), 51.

⁵⁹ James Harrington, *The Prerogative of Popular Government*, in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 430.

5.2. Locke on Industry as Civic Contribution and Disposition

Three decades later, Locke employed the term “industry” in a new manner. What he meant by “industry” was neither a distinct virtue of those ruling or being in public office, nor a mere material contribution made by private persons engaged in production, but a contribution to the improvement of common life, and a disposition that every member of society must have, and therefore a matter of concern for those in government positions.

In addition to protecting property, it is *labour* and *improvement of life* that it makes, which according to Locke’s theoretical interpretation, *fulfils the very purpose for which people should have established the state of society*. As we have seen, Locke argued in the “Second Treatise” that one in this state is “to enjoy many Conveniencies, from the labour, assistance, and society of others in the same Community as well as protection from its whole strength.” In order to receive these “Conveniencies” and “protection,” one has to renounce natural liberty “in providing for himself,” to the extent to which “the good, prosperity, and safety of the Society shall require” (II.130, 353). Thus, the purpose of people uniting into society, and the benefits they receive in compensation for the restriction of natural liberty are two: “Conveniencies” or the common life improved by labour on the one hand, and “protection” of life, liberty, and property on the other. The former is provided by the *labour of fellow citizens*, while the government provides the latter. In this manner, labour represents *a civic contribution* to Locke’s political theory.

In conformity with this, Locke considered industriousness a policy issue. This view is revealed in his paper on money, in which he compared a kingdom with a farm owned by a family to show how the former “grows Rich, or Poor.” Even though a “Farm” owned by a “better Husband” who contents himself “with his Native Commodities” will make him “much Richer,” the “Stock” he built up with “Industry, Frugality, and good Order” will be “quickly brought to an end” after the farm is succeeded by a “fashionable young Gentleman” who “cannot Dine without Champagne and Burgundy, nor Sleep but in a Damask Bed.” A farm and a kingdom “differ no more than as greater and less.” Trade can make a country poorer “unless we regulate our Expences.” At first glance, Locke did not support the policy that was later characterised as a mercantilist, in which trade surplus is identified as the key source of economic growth. However, it is not the case that he was concerned only with the balance of trade. His point was that industriousness should prevail in the entire country to avoid people from becoming so “Idle, Negligent, Dishonest, Malitious” that they disturb “the Sober and Industrious in their Business” and “Ruine the faster.”⁶⁰ This proves that Locke saw labour as a civic contribution at a practical or policy level.

The same view is also presented in the “Second Treatise.” Even though Locke mentioned it as “by the by,” what he described as the “Great art of Government,” or the wisdom of a prince, is fairly consistent with the idea of labour as civic contribution and industriousness as a matter of political concern. According to Locke, the prince

⁶⁰ Locke, *Some Considerations*, in *Locke on Money*, vol. 1, 230–31.

who shall be so wise and godlike as by established laws of liberty to secure protection and encouragement to the honest industry of Mankind against the oppression of power and narrowness of Party will quickly be too hard for his neighbours. (II.42, 298.)

At first glance, Locke's argument is no different from the caution Erasmus gave to a prince, that is, not to allow his subjects to remain idle. However, it is not the case that Locke presented "the honest industry of Mankind" as a means to preventing the moral depravity of subjects. Rather, industriousness provides the *highest purpose of rulership* and the measure by which the ruler's excellence should be accessed. Here, politics itself represents no ultimate good. Instead, the encouragement of industry was set against a ruler as the chief goal.

As in the previous section, by "labour" and "industry," Locke also meant improvement of the mind, which hardly has anything to do with what Elyot or Barnes attributed by these terms, that is, mental agility required for exceptional rulers, magistrates, or leaders. Locke associated diligence of mind with moral life and not with political business. He thought that it was obligatory for everyone to make efforts to improve their understanding of what human beings ought to do as rational beings. According to him, God commands us "to spend the days of this Pilgrimage with Industry and Care, in the search and following of that way which might lead us to a State of greater Perfection" (E.IV.xiv.2, 652).

Industry represented the disposition of excellence to sixteenth-century humanists, a virtue of "Democracie" to Nedham, and the chief interest defining public good in a popular government to Harrington. Despite the crucial differences among them in their attitudes towards common people, humanist political writers and advocates of the democratic form of government during the republican period were commonly concerned with who governs. Locke's idea of industry was not an elitist virtue, but represented a common view, while it defined public interest from a different perspective to Nedham and Harrington. Locke neither took a specific theoretical stance regarding the form of government (see II.132–33, 354–55) nor established an association between industry and democratic or popular government. In Locke's political philosophy, industry defined public interest as a *universal*, or more precisely, a *no class-biased* value, which corresponded neither to the virtue of the ruling class nor to that of the popular class.

Based on the above comparison, we can characterise Locke's industriousness as a *post-humanist concept of civic contribution*. It can be called *civic*, in a manner that is different from the humanist concept of contribution to the business of politics. For Locke, it was labour, industry, and improvement that defined public good to which members of society should contribute, regardless of their social status.

Thomas Hobbes marked a radical break from the humanist discourse that was propounded prior to Locke. He subverted the grounds of humanist politics by rendering the question of the form of government completely worthless. He attacked the traditional assumption and his contrary assertion was that democracy and monarchy were never different forms of government but were actually "equall." According to him, the difference between these forms lies only in "administration," or who should undertake the "acts"

(execution) of power. The “People rules in all Governments, for even in Monarchies the People Commands.” When they lack the integration into one will, the “People” are called a “Multitude,” but “the Multitude are citizens, that is to say, Subjects.”⁶¹

Hobbes rendered the various forms of government and the distinction between citizens and subjects in an entirely indifferent matter. According to him, citizens are symbolically the ruler, or the constituents of single people, but individually a subject, or participants in the commonwealth, which requires them to alienate their natural rights to the sovereign. Thus, passive subjection is charged as the fundamental and universal obligation of citizens of the Hobbesian commonwealth.

Locke followed Hobbes in breaking with humanist political discourse. Neither the form of government nor the question of who should govern mattered to Locke. What was paramount to him, as it was with Hobbes, was the voluntary alienation of natural rights from the government. Nevertheless, unlike Hobbes, Locke did not reduce civic membership to passive subjection. Instead of both the humanist idea of civic contribution by educating the ruling class and that of popular participation in government, Locke set labour and individual self-improvement as contributions, and hence active engagement, to common life. Thus, Locke filled the vacuum created by Hobbes’ attack on humanism.

6. Post-Protestant Concept of Civic Equality

Locke considered all members of society to be equal and as contributors engaged in the improvement of the common life. Although this is a sort of moral egalitarianism, it is characterised in some respects as a rather harsh, rigorous, and exclusive form. If he established this equality with no relevance to inequality in the context of participation in civic life, Locke’s view should be reduced to the Protestant work ethic. However, at this point, we can see Locke’s view transcending Protestant discourse.

Locke’s universalisation of industrious virtue seems consistent with what Paul Marshall identified as the “Protestant vocabulary of ... calling.” According to him, the Protestants prioritised labour “over a contemplative form of life,” because they believed that “all social stations and all types of work were equal before God.” This vocabulary was a remarkable contrast to the humanist political discourse, in which the “education of the ruler” and the “elevation of the wise and virtuous to positions of authority” were the subject matter of concern.⁶² As stated earlier, Locke broke from the humanist discourse, thus indicating an affinity between his view and the Protestant perspectives on labour. Hundert argued that Locke’s labour theory of property reflected a Protestant, or a “particularly Puritan” idea that workers injected “their personalities into the object worked upon.”⁶³

⁶¹ Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive: Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society*, ed. Howard Warrender, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 139 (Chapter X.xv, xvi), 151 (XII.viii).

⁶² Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man*, 36.

⁶³ E. J. Hundert, “The Making of *Homo Faber*: John Locke between Ideology and History,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 no.1 (January to March 1972), 8, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2709054>.

As Paul Marshall showed, the idea of a calling itself was far from unequivocal. While the doctrine of calling implied that all social stations are “equal before God,” it also justified the existing order and the exclusion of common people from political callings. During the Civil War, however, some Puritans began to challenge this exclusion. John Goodwin, an Arminian theologian, and the Levellers, argued that necessity justifies the interposition of those having no office in politics. However, the idea of a calling “common among post-Restoration divines” tended, unlike the puritan one, “to separate religion and particular callings,” and “Locke’s understanding of calling” also shared the same tendency.⁶⁴ This movement beyond the concept of a calling must be further examined.

When the Puritans had to justify their intervention in politics, the ground available to them was the doctrine of particular callings, the same as that which had formerly justified their exclusion from it. For Goodwin, the army’s “going beyond their ordinary callings” was quite legitimate unless someone could prove there was “no necessity” to do so. In April 1649, John Lilburne and other Levellers asserted that they had saved the commonwealth through their political intervention, as it served to “prevent its being so bad.”⁶⁵

To Locke, industry represented a different form of public contribution. He was indifferent to the notion of particular callings. Rather, in arguing that one should “busy their Heads, and employ their Hands” (E.I.i.5, 45), what mattered to him was far less the engagement in one’s designated role in this world, than one’s contribution to the *improvement* of both material and moral life.

In his manuscript on labour, Locke argued that the human condition to live “under a necessity of labour” is “a marke of goodnesse in god.” The point is that it is important for the “Gentlemen and scholar,” as well as for the “man of manual labour,” to balance manual work and mental effort, although different hours of distribution between labour and study may be required for different occupations or ranks. Whereas study serves to improve the mind, engagement in bodily work helps to keep one healthy and mentally vigorous.⁶⁶ Thus, what is implied here is not merely that a gentleman should engage in manual work while a labourer involve himself in study, but also that they should do so *for the same reason*, for the improvement of human life, but not for the reasons particular to their respective positions.

Locke’s universalisation of the virtue of labour, thus, assumed a sort of egalitarianism that can be characterised as the post-Protestant concept of *civic equality*. For Locke, it is not that the scope of political callings should be extended to the lower levels of society, but rather that, regardless of status, *all* members of the society *can and should contribute*

⁶⁴ Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man*, 36, 74, 79, 83, 89–90.

⁶⁵ John Goodwin, *Right and Might Well mett*, in vol. 1 of *The Struggle for Sovereignty: Seventeenth-Century English Political Tracts*, ed. Joyce Lee Malcolm (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 312; John Lilburne et. al., *A Manifestation*, in *The Leveller Tracts, 1647–1653*, ed. William Haller and Godfrey Davies (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 277–78.

⁶⁶ Locke, “Labor,” in *Locke on Money*, vol. 2, 493–94.

towards the improvement of the common life. Locke's means of making such a contribution is common to all, namely engagement in or the encouragement of material production on the one hand, and individual self-improvement for the attainment of better understanding and moral liberty on the other.

In the same manuscript, Locke expressed the conviction that the encouragement of labour is beneficial for both private and public life. He argued that, if the "labour of the world were rightly directed and distributed," labour would secure the "well instructed mindes of the people" from the "temptation to Ambition" and the incitement to sedition by "Aspireing and turbulent men," and there would be more "knowledge peace health and plenty," and accordingly more happiness for humankind than ever.⁶⁷ Locke did not see the need to set common people in office as the Puritans had attempted to, but just to treat them as equal contributors towards common life, whose labour may facilitate the improvement of "knowledge, peace, health, and plenty" of society. While this view is essentially conservative, compared to Puritans, Locke's idea of contribution to public life is more inclusive in at least one respect: Locke never associated this contribution with political office, whereas the Puritans maintained a distinction between political and ordinary callings.

Locke's recognition of common people as moral equals and equal contributors can also be contrasted with Calvinism. A Calvinist shift from charity to justice can be observed in Locke. According to Richard Boyd, Locke prioritised "procedural justice" over charity, just as Calvin replaced the duty of charity to help others with the "impersonal duty to refrain from harming those less advantaged."⁶⁸ This procedural justice can be considered egalitarianism of a sort, but people are equal here only under the negative obligation not to harm others. Locke's idea of civic equality cannot be reduced to this obligation alone. He never invalidated charity but just attempted, as Forde argued, to assign justice and charity in their own places.⁶⁹

It should also be remarked that Locke moved away from Calvinism in his reading of the gospel. He argued in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (quoted above) that the articles of the gospel are those that "the labouring and illiterate Man may comprehend," and suited to the "State of Mankind . . . destined to labour and travel."⁷⁰ According to Nuovo, this reading reflects Locke's aim to avoid, along with Deism, the harsh "exclusivism" of Calvinism.⁷¹ Conversely, Locke's view of the gospel articles as duties

⁶⁷ Locke, "Labor," in *Locke on Money*, vol. 2, 495.

⁶⁸ Richard Boyd, "The Calvinist Origins of Lockean Political Economy," *History of Political Thought* 23, no.1 (Spring 2002): 48, 51; see also John Locke, "Venditio" (entry in 1695, *Adversaria* 1661, pp. 268–69), in *Locke on Money*, vol. 2, 496–500, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26219860>.

⁶⁹ Forde, "The Charitable John Locke," 451.

⁷⁰ Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 169.

⁷¹ Victor Nuovo, *Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment: Interpretations of Locke* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 35.

designed to be understood by the labouring and uneducated was quite consistent with his forgiving, if not optimistic view on the capacity of common people to improve their understanding, for which they deserve to be treated as moral equals.

7. Conclusion

Clearly, Locke was dedicated to the idea of moral and civic equality, in which the labouring poor are considered moral equals, with respect to the *contribution* their labour makes to the *improvement of material living conditions* of society, as well as the *responsibility* they have for the *moral improvement* of themselves. Locke's understanding of the term "labour" was the proper use of the *common faculties of humankind*, proper exercise of their "hands" and "heads" with industry and pains, as to which every human being is equal. Both his political theory and philosophy support the view that common people are moral equals, as well as equal participants in civic life. Regarding this point, Locke breaks with the humanist ideal of civic virtue, and the Protestant doctrine of calling on the other.

Locke's civic egalitarianism should not be extended beyond what he intended. He denied that his doctrine of equality under natural laws affected any form of subjection, for example, the one that "Alliance or Benefits" justified (II.54, 304). This certainly reveals that Locke's juridical or "juristic" equality never challenged the social hierarchy of his time.⁷² However, we have seen another concept of equality that must be distinguished from the juridical or juristic one. The benefit of discovering the former is to highlight the consistency between Locke's much-discussed individualism and his all-inclusive idea of civic membership; the latter can be considered as an innovative remodelling of the classical ideal of active citizenship.

⁷² This was pointed out by John Marshall in *John Locke*, 299.

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