Medical Metaphors in Locke's Account of Moral Depravity: A Charitable Interpretation

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Abstract: This paper offers a charitable interpretation of Locke's use of medical metaphors in his moral description of economic and social issues – poverty, idleness, madness, and religious enthusiasm – which he frames in terms of moral depravity (or corruption of manners). First, I address and compare his perspectives as a physician and as a moral philosopher, highlighting methodological disparities amounting to a tension between scepticism in medical hypotheses and dogmatism in deductive moral science (Section 1). Second, I introduce Locke's description, explanation of, and solution to moral depravity, which is presented as a social 'disease'. His medical vocabulary indicates that he subscribes to the idea that society is a 'body politic', and that moral depravity is a moral issue that requires a fourfold treatment: religious, rational, pedagogical, and political (Section 2). Third, I discuss three tensions in Locke's moral approach on the corruption of manners and suggest to reframe this phenomenon as a social issue (Section 3). Finally, I discuss and exclude two possible interpretations of the purpose of medical metaphors in Locke's moral philosophy and present a third and more probable one (Section 4). I conclude that Locke's use of medical metaphors is constitutive of his views on society and reflect his struggle at providing a consistent social theory.

Keywords: John Locke, medical metaphors, moral philosophy, depravity, social theory

Introduction

In *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, Locke writes that children should be kept from the "the ill Examples, which they meet with amongst the meaner Servants [...] For the contagion of these ill precedents, both in Civility and Vertue, horribly infects Children, as often as they come within reach of it".[1] In

[1] Locke, *Education*, § 66, p. 40.

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Some Thoughts on the Conduct of the Understanding, he writes that "Association of Ideas [...] is a Disease of the Mind as hard to be cur'd as any".[2] And in the *Second Treatise* he writes that "many [*Penalties*] tend to the preservation of the whole [of Society], by cutting off those Parts, and those only, which are so corrupt, that they threaten the sound and healthy, without which no severity is lawful".[3] The main question here is: what is the meaning and import of Locke's use of medical metaphors in his epistemological, pedagogical, moral, and political writings? To put it differently: Are Locke's medical vocabulary and analogies innocent remains of a tradition, or do they indicate underlying connections between his interests in various dimensions of human life? Do they reflect a habitual way of thinking crafted during Locke's significant medical training, or do they aim at providing a genuine theoretical apparatus to address sociopolitical issues?

Locke expressed his interest in epidemiology and "social medicine",[4] but he did not thematize his medical gaze on moral and political issues and there is no reason why he should have done so. This specific topic is not extensively discussed in Locke scholarship, but we can mention the works of Constantine George Caffentzis and John Baltes.[5] The metaphor of society as a living body has roots in ancient philosophy and medicine, and for more than a century before Locke, it was common for medical and political discourses to cross paths when it came to the question of sin and corruption in society.[6] Arguably, Locke used the metaphor to elaborate strategies against the "money madness" in England[7] and to promote the culture of industry during the economic crisis.[8] Nineteenth-century "social physicists" and early sociologists compared society to an organism before this analogy was deeply challenged by the Marxist view, according to which society is a hierarchical structure characterized by class conflict. However, the idea of a "body politic" that needs "prevention" and "cure" against social grievances is still in fashion today, not without problematic moralizing connotations.[9] Given the puzzling nature of medical metaphors in moral discourses to present-day readers, their purpose, in Locke's account of moral depravity, deserves to be addressed.

2 Locke, *Conduct*, § 41, p. 218.
3 T2, ch. XV, § 171, p. 382.
4 Dewhurst, *John Locke (1632-1704), Physician and Philosopher*, pp. 164, 301.
5 Caffentzis, "Medical Metaphors and Monetary Strategies"; Baltes, *The Empire of Habit*.
6 Harley, "Medical Metaphors in English Moral Theology, 1560-1660", pp. 396-435, 405-7.
7 Caffentzis, "Medical Metaphors and Monetary Strategies".
8 Baltes, *The Empire of Habit*.
9 Rodehau-Noack, "War as Disease: Biomedical Metaphors in Prevention Discourse".

The focus of this paper differs from the standard topics usually discussed in Locke scholarship. Metaphors are crucial in the frontier between the sciences;[10] and given Locke's watchful use of language in his philosophical writings, this feature deserves attention. In the scholarship, Locke is generally presented from angles that put emphasis subsequently on this or that aspect of his thought – e.g., epistemology, metaphysics, moral theory, natural philosophy, political theory, etc. This charting is useful in that it emphasises Locke's multiple interests and provides a close-up on some of the many subjects addressed by this polyvalent thinker. However, by present-day academic standards, arguably, John Locke may not be labelled a philosopher but an ideologist: His epistemological and scientific project of understanding human nature is escorted by a comparable (if not greater) practical attempt at bringing change into the world as an educator and a political advisor, based on his moral theology. The highlights of Locke's heritage thirty years ago consisted chiefly in his justification of "contractual and constitutional government", "unlimited acquisition of private property", and "the merits of his ideas on liberal democracy"[11] and it is still the case today.[12] His account of human nature includes and combines fields of study that used to be undistinguished in his time and would fall today under different titles, such as political theory, social anthropology, psychology, medicine, and theology. While his first scholarly readers were possessed with similar assumptions as his concerning such an integration of disciplines and therefore would not be surprised by his use of metaphors and analogies, today's audience may expect greater clarity and analytic rigor from a writer whose works have made such an impact in the history of philosophy.

Recent emphasis has been put on Locke's non-philosophical writings, often revealing insightful connections to his metaphysics and epistemology.[13] It has been established, for instance, that his beliefs in physics informed some of his most central philosophical doctrines, such as his account of substance, of matter and thought, and of secondary qualities.[14] However, one of the main issues stemming from Locke's wide set of scientific interests is that the relations between the multiple facets of his oeuvre can reveal unsuspected issues and biases. For example, mapping Locke's political views onto his psychology of education

[10] Montuschi, "Metaphor in Science".
[11] Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, p. 6.
[12] Gordon-Roth and Weinberg, *The Lockean Mind*, pp. 417-18.
[13] Crignon, *Locke médecin*; Baltes, *The Empire of Habit*; Pritchard, *Religion in Public*; Anstey, *John Locke and Natural Philosophy*.
[14] Jacovides, *Locke's Image of the World*.

and habit, John Baltes put forward a Foucauldian interpretation of Locke's philosophy, where he brought out the controversial disciplinarian implications of Locke's medical gaze on the phenomenon of idleness.[15] Recently, Charles T. Wolfe addressed the import of Locke's Christian commitment and its impact on his theory of the mind, shedding a new light on the hidden agenda of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, and on what has long been misunderstood as Locke's "empiricist" stance.[16] Portrayed as the advocate of natural rights and thus seen as a precursor of Rousseau,[17] Locke's moral philosophy is fuelled by religious beliefs,[18] social assumptions,[19] and utopian travel literature.[20] One may contend, then, that Locke's work as a philosopher suffers from ideological blinders and somewhat lacks analytic rigor. In a similar critical spirit, this paper discusses Locke's use of a medical vocabulary in his moral and political writings.

Specifically, I will argue that Locke's use of medical metaphors in his account of moral depravity corresponds to his want of a consistent social theory. For this purpose, I will lay out the methodological disparities between his approaches to human nature as a physician and as a moral philosopher (Section 1) and present his description, explanation of, and solution to the effects of moral depravity, where moral and medical discourses meet (Section 2). I will proceed to discuss his moral approach on this social phenomenon and suggest to reframe it as a social issue (Section 3). Finally, I will outline and then exclude two possible interpretations of Locke's use of medical metaphors in his account of moral depravity and argue in favor of a third one, according to which it reveals the social nature of the phenomenon of moral depravity and the lack of a consistent social theory in Locke's philosophy of human nature (Section 4).

1. *Morality and medicine: methodological disparities*

In the *Essay*[21] Locke considers moral philosophy as a purely speculative science like mathematics, and in a journal entry he compares it with

15 Baltes, *The Empire of Habit*.
16 Wolfe, "Rethinking Early Modern Empiricism: The Case of Locke".
17 Nazar, "Locke and Rousseau on Educating for Freedom".
18 Schneewind, *Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant*, p. 201; Ashcraft, "Locke's Political Philosophy", p. 226.
19 Macpherson, "The Social Bearing of Locke's Political Theory".
20 Talbot, *"The Great Ocean of Knowledge"*, pp. 85-87.
21 Locke, *Essay*, IV.iii.18, pp. 548-49.

geometry – a demonstrative science: "That the three angles of a triangle are equall to two right ones is infalibly true whether there be any such figure as a triangle existing in the world or noe, and it is true that it is everyman's duty to be just whether there be any such thing as a just man in the world or noe".[22] Since early modern times the mathematics-morality analogy has been wielded by rationalist thinkers against voluntarist and relativist approaches to morality. Based on similarities such as the self-evidence of first axioms and the logical process leading from proofs to deduction, this analogy granted the same necessity to mathematical and moral reasonings.[23] Thus, in the *Second Treatise*, Locke's moral theory rests on the double assumption – descriptive and normative: (1) that *humans are God's property* (2) and that *no one may interfere with someone else's property*.[24] Those maxims derive in their turn from the following claims: (1) *God is the lawmaker and creator of Nature* and (2) *the natural right of self-preservation extends to one's creation*. Divine law, especially the law of property, is the natural source of moral duty in rational beings, and its efficacy is bolstered by civil laws and social pressure.[25] Despite the authority of Locke's moral theology, he must acknowledge that most of the time moral action is motivated by people's mundane concern for their reputation.[26] The observation of nature and history reveals that commendable behaviour is spurred by a desire for social recognition, and thereby, depends on social interactions and culturally established social codes. In this view, moral practice, moral vocabulary, and moral evaluation emerge and settle over time due to contingent yet customary social functioning or what Locke calls the "law of fashion". The relativistic conclusions of this naturalist perspective challenge Locke's concept of morality as a speculative and demonstrative science. To bridge the gap from contingency to necessity, Locke declares certain conventions to be common to all human societies throughout history, and thereby infers their universal origin. "Surely, when many men in different times and places affirm one and the same thing as a certain truth, this thing must be

22 Dewhurst, *John Locke (1632-1704), Physician and Philosopher*, p. 164.

23 Gill, "Morality Is not like Mathematics".

24 T2, ch. II, § 6, p. 271.

25 Boeker, "Locke's Moral Psychology", p. 364.

26 Locke, *Essay*, II.xxviii.12, pp. 356-57: "I think, I may say, that he, who imagines Commendation and Disgrace, not to be strong Motives on Men, to accommodate themselves to the Opinions and Rules of those, with whom they converse, seems little skill'd in the Nature, or History of Mankind: the greatest part whereof he shall find to govern themselves chiefly, if not solely, by this Law of Fashion; and so they do that, which keeps them in Reputation with their Company, little regard the Laws of God, or the Magistrate".

related to a universal cause which can be nothing else but a dictate of reason itself and common nature".[27] His moral theory can involve a priori metaphysical entities (e.g., God, natural laws) presented as necessary conditions for the emergence and establishment of moral conventions in civil society. This way, that which makes actions moral, for Locke, can always be traced back to a set of universal principles that are immune to the contingencies of culture and history. Relegating the law of fashion to the domain of habit and unreflective mental and social processes, Locke argues that it is through study and rational thinking that one acquires knowledge of natural laws. Thus conceived, moral science is abstract and theoretical: it is independent from any social context. It involves unobservable putative entities that cannot be submitted to careful empirical examination.

In comparison, Locke's attitude towards medical science and knowledge is much more cautious and sceptical. He avoids overblowing the predictive value of scientific theories induced from experimental findings and refrains from subscribing to any scientific theory concerning the "unobservables", because they do not satisfy his epistemic standards as a physician. He reckons that theories lead more to a form of theoretical dogmatism than to actual medical progress.[28] Thus, breaking up with the stagnant scholastic tradition, Locke's education in Oxford combines Cartesian rational theorizing and scientific empiricism popularized by Bacon and Boyle.[29] Arguably, his life-long experience as a medical student, scientist, and practising physician contributed to shaping his empiricist stance as a philosopher.[30] Locke is aware of the most important currents in contemporary medical research, especially of the new trend of experimental philosophy. Despite the role of anatomical dissections and laboratory experiments for the progress of medical knowledge, Locke is sceptical about their utility in the development of the art of healing patients and relieving pain.[31] Although Locke does not object to the occasional use of hypotheses, which sometimes can help avoid jumping to wrong conclusions when it comes to assessing the cause of an illness, his medical practice is mainly based on heuristics and the consideration that human lives are not to be experimented on.[32] As a physician, Locke is aware that

27 Locke, "Essays on the Law of Nature" [1663-4] I, in *Political Essays*, p. 84.
28 Walmsley, "Locke on Physiology and Medicine".
29 Dewhurst, *John Locke (1632-1704), Physician and Philosopher*, p. viii.
30 Ibid., p. xi.
31 Crignon, *Locke médecin*, p. 231.
32 Lu-Adler, "Locke on Scientific Methodology".

no amount of empirical research will provide infallible results, and that the effect of antidotes is often temporary. No matter the level of refinement of laboratory tools and microscopes, he reckons that the close observation of anatomy, physiology, and bodily diseases – together with the sacrifices that these experiments sometimes require – only has a limited impact on the actual progress of clinical knowledge.[33] Locke's diminishing enthusiasm for the experimental method is replaced by a growing interest in holistic and comprehensive approaches to healing, focusing on cautious treatment and follow-up, and the development of remedies.

Thus, when it comes to Locke's medical gaze on moral matters, we are facing antagonist commitments: scepticism and dogmatism. The very notion of 'moral health', as innocent as it may sound in ordinary language, is a problematic theoretical phrase involving two concepts that belong to distinct registers: Locke's moral theology advocates universalized principles of conduct that should be observed regardless of the social state of affairs, while health is a socially constructed concept simply referring to habitual functioning.[34] Yet, when discussing the moral purpose of human life in his political writings, Locke associates idleness and poverty to vice and disease.[35] In *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, he conspicuously resorts to clinical vocabulary such as "contagion" and "infection" when referring to the consequences of children's exposure to the mores and manners of people belonging to the lower end of the social ladder.[36] In the 1700 edition of this *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, he uses medical terms when referring to the propagation of pathological mental functioning in society, and the need for its "prevention" and "cure".[37]

While it may come across as an unsignificant, metaphorical use of theoretical terms to the early modern reader, Locke's choice to resort to medical expressions equally deserves to be taken seriously today because it reveals conflicting philosophical commitments: (1) The medical perspective on a certain epidemy of bad habits suggests that social dynamics are responsible for moral practices – which means that divine law has *de facto* no impact on ethics; (2) The notion of 'disease', used in association to poverty and depravity, implies the existence of a defined concept of 'health', the medical meaning of which cannot

33 Crignon, *Locke médecin*, pp. 275-77.
34 Ibid., pp. 334-35.
35 Locke, "Labour" [1693], in *Political Essays*, p. 326.
36 Locke, *Education*, § 66, p. 40.
37 Locke, *Essay*, II.xxxiii.4, p. 395.

be compared with or applied to the moral state of affairs as Locke perceives it in his time. In other words, when medical and moral discourses meet, Locke's intention to avoid dogmatism, in his work as a physician, conflicts with his fixed notion of natural law as a moral philosopher. The point here is not to reinterpret or criticize Locke's entire moral-political philosophy in the light of his problematic account of moral depravity, but rather to show that his medical vocabulary in this specific context indicates that moral depravity is not a moral issue, but a structural feature of society, for the analysis of which Locke lacks the appropriate theoretical apparatus.

2. *Locke on moral depravity: Moral description, biblical explanation, and fourfold solution*

The tension between Locke's scientific and philosophical commitments indicates that certain facets of his interdisciplinary thought may not be seamlessly connected. Through their association with moral and political ideas, the use of underdetermined notions such as 'disease' and 'health' have implications that open a space for interpretation. This lack of conceptual clarity can be explained by the fact that in Locke's time, the borders between medicine and philosophy was not yet defined, and the use of medical terms in non-medical discourse was common. Medicine, and science in general, was still the basis of metaphysical and epistemological enterprises. Like today, scientific findings triggered philosophical inquiries and reflections, which in turn would question the goals and methods of science.[38] Here, I discuss Locke's description of the effects of moral depravity, especially in three social phenomena – idleness, poverty, and madness – that Locke refers to sometimes in medical terms. We should note that while Locke does not always use medical metaphors to describe these issues, he uses them almost entirely in relation to the question of depravity in society and the ways to counteract it. My specific aim is to emphasize that Locke's use of medical metaphors derives from his view of society as a living entity with a fixed structure, where the corruption of manners amounts to a moral 'disease' embedded in society since primeval times, and that urgently requires prevention and treatment.

[38] Crignon, *Locke médecin*, pp. 18-19.

2.1. *Poverty, idleness, and erroneous thinking from Locke's moral perspective*

One of the recurrent targets of Locke's moral disapproval in his political essays is people's lack of socially useful physical activity. In the case of the poor especially, he associates unemployment with immorality. In his view, "beggars" and people living "upon the parish" are not only a burden to England's public economy; they also threaten public morals and social order. Baltes stressed the moral dimension of idleness in Locke's political theory. Baltes's point is that, since industry is a virtue according to Protestant ethics, inculcated early on in child education, and supervised among adult citizens through peer control, idleness receives a moral connotation for being the opposite of the virtue of industry.[39] No matter whether they are young or old, fit or disabled, in Locke's view, the poor should be the object of state policy so as not to disturb public morals; the new law that he proposes does not merely aim at suppressing the poor, but rather at turning them into an economic resource by putting them at "hard labour" for the public interest.[40]

In his political writings, Locke's identities as a scientist and a political philosopher converge, as he frames the economic situation of poverty in England as a moral issue requiring political measures. In "An Essay on the Poor Law", he writes that

> The growth of the poor must therefore have some other cause [than scarcity of provisions or want of employment], and it can be nothing else but the relaxation of discipline and corruption of manners; virtue and industry being as constant on the one side as vice and idleness are on the other.[41]

As a remedy to the "evil" of the "multiplying of the poor" caused by moral depravity, he suggests introducing strict disciplinary measures, such as the following:

> if any boy or girl, under 14 years of age, shall be found begging out of the parish where they dwell [...] they shall be sent to the next working school, there to be soundly whipped, and kept at work till evening [...].[42]

39 Baltes, *The Empire of Habit*, p. 21.
40 Locke, "An Essay on the Poor Law" [1697], in *Political Essays*, pp. 185-86.
41 Ibid., p. 184.
42 Ibid., p. 187.

The burden of labour is a central part of the human condition following the fall from grace after the original sin; it is a duty towards God, who enforces upon human beings the natural law of self-preservation. Idleness is an infringement of this law, and as such, a form of moral depravity: "[I]n their idle and loose way of breeding up, [poor children] are utter strangers both to religion and morality as they are to industry".[43] In framing the critical economic and social situation of idleness and poverty as a moral issue, Locke leverages his political theology to defend a certain social order, where the corruption of manners represents a disease in the body politic.

2.2. *Madness and religious enthusiasm: a lack of moral responsibility*

The hypothesis that Locke adopts a medical gaze on moral depravity in society is reinforced by another issue involving the uneducated part of the people, which, in certain cases, needs to be the object of state policies: the 'madmen'. Locke added only three chapters to the later editions of his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Two of them, "Of the Association of Ideas" and "Of Enthusiasm", concern human errors respectively of understanding and of faith.[44] When discussing madness and religious enthusiasm, in the *Essay*, the *Conduct*, and his essay on "Toleration", he often resorts to medical metaphors stressing the harmful or contagious characteristics of these phenomena.

Locke presents the association of ideas as an erroneous type of reasoning connecting ideas that don't belong together. It can happen either by chance, because of habit, or because of an overwhelming passion. Association of ideas is a mental functioning describing pathological thinking and is difficult to understand or cure. It reflects carelessness or laziness in the use of one's rational capacity and its propensity to contaminate other people is high:

> This sort of Unreasonableness is usually imputed to Education and Prejudice, and for the most part truly enough, though that reaches not the bottom of the Disease, nor shews distinctly enough whence it rises, or wherein it lies. [...] | And if this [madness] be a Weakness to which all Men are so liable, if this be a Taint which so universally infects Mankind, the greater care should be taken to lay it open under its due Name, thereby to excite the greater care in its Prevention and Cure.[45]

[43] Ibid., p. 192.
[44] Boespflug and Pasnau, "Locke on Enthusiasm", p. 554.
[45] Locke, *Essay*, II.xxxiii.3-4, p. 395.

> Association of Ideas [...] is a Disease of the Mind as hard to be cur'd as any; it being a very hard thing to convince any one that things are not so, and naturally so as they constantly appear to him.[46]

Pathological thinking, or "madness" as Locke calls it, is also discussed in the case of religious enthusiasm. Enthusiasts have a propensity to conflate imagination and divine inspiration. They think that God talks to them directly, which can bring them to hold unreasonable beliefs. When it comes to his religious views, Locke claims that revelation is always proportionate to knowledge; religious truths sent by God should be "comfortable to reason" because reason is a divine faculty and God cannot contradict himself.[47] Religious enthusiasts are unreasonable because giving one's assent to propositions that go against God's natural laws is unreasonable. While Locke dwells on the epistemic aspect of enthusiasm in the *Essay*, he discusses the social impact of religious conflicts led by enthusiasts, in a minor essay on "Toleration". There, he portrays these people as affected of a "delirium", prone to "distemper", whose "brains are a little out of order", and supposedly likely to "infect others'; to this follows a medical analogy with "palsy" and "apoplexy".[48] The point of this passage is to suggest proper treatment for enthusiasts, which should be given primarily by religious experts or a "minister", rather than by political power or "magistrates". Ministers" liability when it comes to religious excesses is mostly presented in Locke's *Letter concerning Toleration*, where he recommends ministers to resolve the issue of sectarian conflicts by teaching toleration and kindness to their disciples, rather than by resorting to coerced orthodoxy.[49]

In describing the issue of erroneous thinking in the context of madness and religious enthusiasm, Locke presents those phenomena in a moral frame where he adopts a clinical approach, indicating that society is a "body politic" in need of pedagogical and political care. At the same time, his identification of the issue of madness is based on a metaphysical premise, namely the duty

[46] Locke, *Conduct*, § 41, p. 218.

[47] Locke, "Faith and Reason" [1676], in *Political Essays*, p. 248. "Religion" [1681], in *Political Essays*, p. 278.

[48] Locke, "Toleration B" [1676], in *Political Essays*, p. 247.

[49] Locke, *Second Treatise and Toleration*, p. 137: "He that pretends to be a Successor of the Apostles, and takes upon him the Office of Teaching, is obliged to also to admonish his Hearers of the Duties of Peace and Good-will towards all men; as well towards the Erroneous, as the Orthodox; towards those that differ from them in Faith and Worship, as well as towards those that agree with them therein". On toleration and the limits of religious authority in political liberalism, as well as on Locke's critique of Jonas Proast on the question of coerced orthodoxy, see Tate, *Liberty, Toleration and Equality*.

to know the laws of nature, which puts all the responsibility on each individual, regardless of their education or acquired cognitive skills. In his description of religious enthusiasm as a moral issue, however, Locke emphasizes the responsibility on priests and ministers to foster social cohesion by teaching toleration to their disciples, despite the doctrinal disparity between various religious sects.

2.3. *A biblical explanation of moral depravity*

According to Locke, corruption of manners is the main cause of poverty, idleness, and erroneous thinking in society. When it comes to the cause of corruption, however, he resorts to a biblical explanation. Spellman draws our attention to a teaching that has persisted for centuries since the time of foundation of the Christian faith, and the influence of which has been significant in the Reformed Christian tradition of seventeenth-century England.[50] In his Epistle to the Romans, St Paul writes about death and the original sin in a famous passage that has since triggered a long-term dispute over its possible interpretations. The prevailing understanding of this passage, among Puritan and Anglican theologians and philosophers, is a paradox according to which Adam's sin has been transmitted hereditarily to humankind; at the same time, the sacrifice of God's Christ saved humankind.[51] The practical consequences are, on the one hand, that humankind's fate is sealed and no voluntary actions on their part will change that, and on the other, that total devotion, obedience, and gratefulness are expected towards God for creating and saving humankind.[52] A related view in Protestant theology was that bodily suffering, natural disasters, and crises in general were the direct result of people's corrupted manners and sinfulness.[53] Locke was familiar with major biblical comments and was keeping up with the scholarly research on theological matters.[54] Besides several of his publications on biblical subjects, he commented on five of Paul's letters,[55] and appears to take on the Pauline view on the human predicament by claiming that Adam and Eve's fall from grace was the beginning of all evil on earth:

50 Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, pp. 8-38.
51 Ibid., pp. 11-12.
52 Ibid., p. 8.
53 Ibid., pp. 27-28.
54 Parker, "Locke on Biblical Method and Theological Interpretation", p. 564.
55 Ibid.

> Upon their offence they were afraid of God: this gave them frightful ideas and apprehensions of him and that lessened their love, which turned their minds to that nature, for this root of all evil in them made impressions and so infected their children, and when private possessions and labour, which now the curse on the earth made necessary, by degrees made a distinction of conditions, it gave room for covetousness, pride, and ambition, which by fashion and example spread the corruption which has so prevailed over mankind.[56]

The relation between original sin and corrupted manners in Locke's time is not clear, but the former seemingly preceded the establishment of private property as a social institution and of industry as a social value, which in turn fostered corruption among humankind. Spellman identifies in Locke's works a "definite strain of pessimism about human nature in general" that also applies to Locke's own contemporaries.[57] But whether Locke really endorsed the theory of the original sin is debatable and there is no universal consensus in the scholarship.

2.4. *Locke's fourfold solution against moral depravity*

With his medical metaphors, Locke the physician extends his medical gaze onto what seems to be the main issues of his time: economic challenges, political unrest, errors of reasoning, and religious extremism. Like in the case of physical impairment, Locke fails or renounces to grasp the root of the problem. Crignon stresses that his criticism of anatomy is based on the consideration that investigating the cause of diseases through experimental philosophy is (1) epistemologically counterproductive because it creates conflicting hypotheses; (2) religiously reprehensible because it implies that God created humankind imperfect; (3) and morally questionable because it doesn't lead to useful knowledge.[58] Through the analogy that his medical vocabulary suggests, the philosophical investigation into the cause of evil in human society is mistaken because it will not provide any secure basis for the treatment of humankind.

Rather than a systematic account of social functioning explaining the ins and outs of the human predicament, the reader of Locke will thus encounter topical solutions aiming at diminishing the impact of moral corruption. In this perspective, the solution to moral 'disease' is fourfold: religious, cognitive, ped-

[56] Locke, "Homo ante et post Lapsum", in *Political Essays*, p. 321.
[57] Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, p. 5.
[58] Crignon, *Locke médecin*, pp. 275-76.

agogical, and political. The religious solution is an act of faith in reason – the divine faculty that God provided to human beings to enable their discovery of the laws of nature and, thereby, to guide their conduct.[59] Faith in reason is a prerequisite for religious toleration because reason supports persuasion, which in turn fosters harmony between "market-friendly religions", thereby contributing to the rise of commercial society.[60] Locke is aware of the philosophical consensus that distinguishes between reason and faith;[61] and while he defends their compatibility, he acknowledges that excesses of faith can lead religious enthusiasts into socially deleterious errors.[62] In this respect, Locke warns against the undesired side-effects of policy making concerning religion and recommends caution:

> If you fear [people's rage] because you treat them ill, and that produces some symptom of it, you ought to change your method, and not punish them for what you fear because you go the way to produce it. If a distemper itself has a tendency to rage, it must be watched and fit remedies applied.[63]

Locke subscribes to the idea that reason alone can lead to safer knowledge, tamed by probabilistic reservations. The preventive cognitive 'cure' is thus at the centre of his philosophical enterprise in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. In his pedagogical writings, he applies his theory of knowledge to prevent 'pathologies' of the understanding; this consists in the education of children and the training one's mind through language and persuasion. Language and persuasion are also useful within the political solution, which consists mainly in public policies, the implementation of which is designed to address the economic situation in late seventeenth-century England. Political tracts and treatises target an educated readership, especially authorities, and thereby act on social order by shaping each other's mind.[64] However, unlike the three other 'cures', the political one is the most critical, because it can go to questionable lengths to bring order.[65]

59 Locke, *Essay*, IV.xvii.24, pp. 687-88.
60 Pritchard, *Religion in Public*, pp. 34-35.
61 Locke, *Essay*, IV.xviii, pp. 688-96.
62 Locke, *Essay*, IV.xix, pp. 697-706.
63 Locke, "Toleration B" [1676], in *Political Essays*, p. 247.
64 On the intersubjective model of the mind in Locke, see Lenz, *Socializing Minds*, pp. 99-155.
65 See for instance T2, ch. XV, § 171, p. 382.

3. *Reframing moral depravity as a social issue*

Locke frames the phenomenon of corruption in moral terms, based on certain metaphysical assumptions in his political theology. Endorsing the notion of a 'body politic', he approaches this moral issue from a clinical standpoint suggesting that 'moral health' is characteristic of a predetermined and fixed socio-political structure, and that any deviation to this structure is a 'disease' of the 'body politic'. Here I bring out potential tensions in his account of human nature that can be avoided if moral depravity is framed as a social issue rather than as a moral one.

On top of the discrepancies between Locke's medical and moral-political approaches, his analogies between disease, on the one hand, and moral depravity on the other, leverage conflicting claims about human nature and civil society. I will show that his theoretical apparatus, combining moral and theological claims, fails at presenting the social phenomenon of moral depravity in a convincing manner. Tensions in many areas of Locke's philosophy have been addressed already in the scholarship up to recent time,[66] and here I will focus on three relevant statements in the scope of our analysis: (1) *God created humankind free but submitted it to the laws of nature*; (2) *Human beings can improve greatly through proper use of their understanding, but the poor should spend most of their time working with their hands*; (3) *Humans in general are rational beings, but most of them are not*.

3.1. *Property and poverty: a structural feature of society*

It is self-evident for Locke that all human beings are born free and equal, except when "the Lord and Master of them all" expressly grants to one of them the right to sovereignty and dominion.[67] The first tension, between freedom and laws of nature, has been discussed from the point of view of freedom in moral agency. A Lockean free moral agent is, by definition, submitted to certain moral principles extracted from their rational knowledge of the natural law. While freedom pertains to what one *can* do, natural law determines what one *should* do. But since the impact of moral principles on social ethics is counteracted by the law of fashion, what we *should* do is, ultimately, a matter of

[66] For example: LoLordo, "Locke on Moral Agency and Moral Agents"; Mills, "Locke on Slavery"; Gill, "Morality Is not like Mathematics"; Baltes, *The Empire of Habit*; Macpherson, "The Social Bearing of Locke's Political Theory".

[67] T2, ch. II, § 4, p. 269.

moral conventions and political laws, which in turn may or may not be based on natural law. Locke himself admits that his project of a demonstrative moral science cannot be carried out within the limits of human cognitive capacities.[68] In practice, the contradiction between freedom and submission to law (natural or political) is overshadowed by education, whereby children internalize the moral codes established in society by the magistrate. If human beings should be equal in the state of nature, the moral notions and codes of conduct instilled in their minds will vary depending on their education. Consequently, obedience to law will feel habitual or natural to a well-educated moral agent, while it will be forced onto people who did not benefit from such an education.[69]

Locke's views on the 'poor' are relevant in the tension between freedom and submission because they are closely related to his theory of property, which is central to his moral theology. The 'poor' designates a social category including people who have no property, besides property of their own selves.[70] Either they are unemployed and live off charity (e.g., beggars and vagrants), or they work on someone else's property (e.g., labourers, dock workers, servants, etc). Locke's theory of property has been widely discussed in the scholarship and one of its most pressing issues concerns its fundamental role in morality. "'Where there is no property there is no injustice' is a proposition as certain as any demonstration in Euclid".[71] The right to preserve oneself, in Locke's account, corresponds to a natural law and extends to one's creations and the land on which one is working. In so far as it is created and enforced by God, this natural law can only be understood and freely followed by rational beings, for whom it is designed. In general, only people possessing a well-functioning mind can grasp moral principles and see them as a requisite for a virtuous and happy life.[72] Arguably, 1660's English writers have a general attitude of hostility towards the poor, no matter whether they are employed or not.[73] In Puritan and Calvinist churches, as well as on a secular level, the poor are considered neither as full members nor as citizens.[74] Their belonging to society makes them more the object of state policy than the possessors of civil rights, even though the economic value

68 LoLordo, "Locke on Moral Agency and Moral Agents", p. 373.
69 Baltes, *The Empire of Habit*.
70 For Locke, property includes property in oneself. T2, ch. V, § 27, p. 287.
71 Locke, *Essay*, IV.iii.18, p. 549.
72 Schneewind, *Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant*, pp. 183-84.
73 Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 241.
74 Macpherson, "The Social Bearing of Locke's Political Theory", p. 64.

of their work for the nation's wealth is assessed.[75] The natural right to preserve one's property, despite deriving from a natural law which is the foundation of justice and morality in civil society, is designed against the interest of the poor, who remain subjected to it. The social polarity between property owners and the rest of the people, based on Locke's understanding of the natural right to property, amounts to social fragmentation, because the interests of both social strata are in opposition.

By describing the cause of an economic fact such as poverty as being of a moral nature, Locke offers to resolve this social issue primarily by prescribing hard physical labour, which, when devoid of any educational-pedagogical dimension, is basically undistinguishable from a punishment.[76] At the same time, given his theory of education and the central role played therein by parents, teachers, and one's close social environment, it is reasonable to believe that rich people's offspring are bound to receive a better education, including about manners and moral principles. On the one hand, Locke insists on the moral education of upper-class children, and the need to preserve them from

> the ill Examples, which they meet with amongst the meaner Servants [...] For the contagion of these ill precedents, both in Civility and Vertue, horribly infects Children, as often as they come within reach of it.[77]

On the other hand, children who were born from poor parents usually do not benefit from the encouragement of 'maids' and 'tutors' in charge of their upbringing, and therefore are not bound to receive a proper (moral) education. One may contend, then, that forcing them to do long and hard physical work because of their involuntary economic and social condition seems unfair. Probably, Locke could not foresee that perceived social injustices can hinder personal development. His pedagogical interest in child education and his political concern about the poor in England arguably aim at promoting the culture of industry and at disciplining the idle, all of which converge towards his goal of maintaining a certain social order.[78] Even if we disagree with this strongly Foucauldian reading of Locke, the fact that Locke

[75] Ibid.

[76] Locke's notion of punishment includes forced physical labour and inflicted pain. Punishment constitutes a last resort measure to discipline children. He also stresses that any type of task should not be forced upon children, for this stiffens their character and usually prevents them from ever finding pleasure in said task, or honour in duty (Locke, *Education*, §§ 47-48, p. 33; §§ 72-73, p. 51).

[77] Locke, *Education*, § 66, p. 40.

[78] Baltes, *The Empire of Habit*, p. 21.

approaches economic issues with a moralizing lens and political measures, in the case of the poor and idle at least, shows that Locke's pedagogical interest in the cognitive development of people seems to be secondary, while his political goals are put at the forefront. This reinforces the view that Locke's framing of moral depravity as a moral issue is inadequate. Based on his disapproval of punishment in his pedagogical theory, it is obvious that strict political measures are not designed to engender moral development among the poor, but rather to diminish their impact on the economy. Poverty and poor education are thus better understandable as a social issue deriving from structural features in class society.

3.2. *The social reality of idleness and labour*

In Locke's view, when all human beings were free and equal in the state of nature, they appropriated unclaimed portions of land through their labour.[79] Once owned, their property rights would be inherited by all their children.[80] Locke's account of the law of property presupposes that natural resources are sufficient to meet the needs of humankind, even though properties are limited in space. So as not to spoil the fruit of labour, he proposed to restrict property to fit the needs of its owner.[81] Of course, with the circulation of money – a good that *can* be conserved –, the owner may sell surplus product, buy new land with the money earned, and hire additional labour to work on the new property, thereby delegating physical work and spending more time managing it.[82] Locke's account may thus be used to justify private capitalism.

The most pressing issue here is to establish who engages in physical labour and who engages in intellectual labour, who must work for a living and who lives to cultivate themselves. Echoing the Protestant ethics of the seventeenth century, labour and industry are recurrent themes in Locke's political writings. Idleness is frowned upon, but not always for the same moral reasons. There is a double standard in Locke's view on idleness. When it comes to the adult poor living on alms and hospitality like "begging drones, who live unnecessarily upon other people's labour", no matter whether they are healthy or injured,[83] Locke

79 T2, ch. V, §§ 25-36, pp. 286-92.

80 T1, ch. IX, §§ 87-89, pp. 206-7, § 91, p. 209, § 93, p. 210.

81 T2, ch. V, § 36, pp. 292-93.

82 Day, "Locke on Property", pp. 122-23.

83 Locke, "An Essay on the Poor Law", in *Political Essays*, p. 186: "[A]ll men begging in maritime counties without passes, that are maimed, or above 50 years of age [...] shall be sent to the next house of correction, there to be kept at hard labour for three years".

is favourable to their suppression or to force them to work in a house of correction.[84] But despite being closely related to the unemployed poor, the issue of idleness concerns "the good and the virtuous" as well, who should dedicate a portion of their time to "honest labour" to be "preserved from the ills of idleness or the diseases that attend constant study in a sedentary life". Thus, as for "the Lazy dames of Citys" who have no occupation, he is concerned about their suffering from the inconvenience of a nervous illness, to which they are inclined, and prescribes them to find some activity that may keep them busy.[85] When it comes to "the rich and the noble" who spend their time "at their books or their pleasure", Locke is first concerned about their physical decay at a mature age and, only then, about their consequent uselessness in business. Locke himself admits complementing his study and business with hunting and "other innocent diversions" that help him avoid the ills of idleness.[86]

> Let the gentleman and scholar employ nine of the twelve [hours] on his mind in thought and reading and the other three in some honest labour. And the man of manual labour nine in work and three in knowledge. [...] And mankind be much more happy than now it is.[87]

While a portion of the population can freely choose to focus on cultivating their mind, supervising their businesses, and governing the country, another portion must spend most of their time away from such self-building activities, even though, theoretically, they have property of their own self.[88] As Tabb points out, exercising one's mental faculties to form "true ideas and justified beliefs" requires "attention and effort"; it is also a condition for freedom and a duty towards God.[89] This type of rational activity cannot, if it should become a habit, be pursued unsystematically. Locke's double standard concerning idleness and his ambiguous notion of 'work' all seem to point at the assumption that the poor's mind, despite being fit for study, is destined to careless

84 Ibid., p. 184.

85 MS. Locke, Bodleian Library, Oxford, c. 42, 182: "Idle and delicate women who haveing little business to take up their time and thoughts give way to their imaginations and phansys, have more longings & more marked & monstruous children than women either of strong mindes or constant imployment. Therefor the Lazy dames of Citys are more subject to the inconveniencys than the strong country labourers" (quoted in Dewhurst, *John Locke (1632-1704), Physician and Philosopher*, p. 162).

86 Locke, "Thus I Think" [1686-1688], in *Political Essays*, p. 297.

87 Locke, "Labour" [1963], in *Political Essays*, p. 328.

88 See above note 70.

89 Tabb, "Habituation and the Association of Ideas", p. 393.

thinking. This, despite the inborn faculties that nature supposedly has given to everyone, and which they should employ to improve themselves like every other citizen aspiring to the knowledge of God's laws. This second tension addressed in Locke's account of human nature reflects his assumption concerning the "class character of society".[90] It weakens altogether his argument that idleness results from corrupted manners, for the following reason. If civil society should, by the law of God, be organized in such a way that a vast portion of the political community is oblivious to that very law, there cannot be any informed consensus or social contract that would naturally stimulate spontaneous cooperation. And under the enforcement of executive justice without the rational consent of the people, idleness is arguably one of the mildest natural side effects of this very kind of social structure.

3.3. *The moral high ground of rationality*

Locke's assumption that human beings are rational is a commonplace. It is less clear, however, what the proportion is between innate and acquired rational capacity, and, within acquired rational capacity, how much is education-based and experience-based. These distinctions matter in so far as Locke associates proper thinking with moral responsibility by framing the phenomenon of erroneous thinking as a moral issue.

In the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Locke writes:

> He that believes, without having any Reason for believing, may be in love with his own Fancies; but neither seeks Truth as he ought, nor pays the Obedience due to his Maker, who would have him use those discerning Faculties he has given him, to keep him out of Mistake and Errour. [...] [H]e that makes use of the Light and Faculties GOD has given him, and seeks sincerely to discover Truth, by those Helps and Abilities he has, may have this satisfaction in doing his Duty as a rational Creature.[91]

Madmen and religious enthusiasts suffer from erroneous thinking due to habit, chance, or overwhelming passion. Tabb points out that the moral responsibility attending rational actions of the understanding concerns the intellectual labour exerted by thinking beings.[92] And because accountability depends on free intellectual activity, people acting on their "pathological" thoughts cannot

90 Macpherson, "The Social Bearing of Locke's Political Theory", p. 60.
91 Locke, *Essay*, IV.xvii.24, p. 688.
92 Tabb, "Madness as Method".

be the target of moral criticism. However, because Locke sees every human being as possessing the same inborn faculty of reason, "pathological" and "healthy" thinkers all have the duty to work on their ideas and beliefs. "It is [...] all too easy to form bad habits, both in the sense of unfortunate mental dispositions that lead to lazy and carless thinking and in the sense of habituated judgments that let faulty ideas persist without correction".[93]

The third tension that needs to be addressed in Locke's account of human nature is his idea that humans in general are rational beings, in so far as they are born so, but most of them are irrational because they do not invest as much effort into their mental faculties. This problem particularly concerns Locke in his later writings, and he concludes that it is essential to educate children early on to avoid crafting wrong associations of ideas that are so difficult to undo.[94] The emphasis on child education shows that the duty of rational thinking is primarily the responsibility of parents, and that adults who were deprived of a proper education during childhood cannot be held entirely accountable for their mental defects.

Not all rational agents can be virtuous or reasonable to the same degree. Locke's notion of state of equality between human beings assumes that they are moral agents, and his concept of moral agency involves various types of cognitive capacities, including abstract thinking and the freedom to act or suspend action. According to LoLordo, the power to suspend action "marks a sort of half-way point between moral agency and agency *simpliciter*".[95] Children who lack the power to suspend, and other beings deprived of the cognitive tools to understand natural law would then belong to the category of non-moral agents.[96] Arguably, several social groups belong to this category: mad people, who are not in full control of their actions because they are induced by their pathology; religious enthusiasts, whose disordered thinking is induced by excessive passion; and "the labouring class", who is also "incapable of a fully rational life" given the priorities belonging to their social role.[97] For Locke, natural law "can be known by natural reason alone because it is propagated to us through the proper exercise of our mental powers and senses as rational and free agents".[98] Therefore, people lacking the time, ability, or dis-

93 Tabb "Habituation and the Association of Ideas", p. 393.
94 Ibid., p. 392.
95 LoLordo, "Locke on Moral Agency and Moral Agents", p. 375.
96 Ibid.
97 Macpherson, "The Social Bearing of Locke's Political Theory", p. 72.
98 Garrett, "Locke's Metaethics", p. 343.

position to engage in sustained intellectual activity cannot develop a rational understanding of the laws of nature and thereby fail at observing their moral duty towards God. As in the case of poverty and idleness, erroneous thinking is better framed as a social issue than as a moral one.

4. *Meaning and purpose of Locke's medical metaphors*

Locke's use of metaphors in his philosophy of mind has been characterized as being illustrative, symptomatic, or constitutive.[99] This taxonomy is useful to our analysis. First, the class of illustrative metaphors is clear in that it aims at giving examples. Symptomatic metaphors, however, depend more on one's interpretation and broadly include stylistic choices made by an author to formulate a theoretical claim. Finally, constitutive metaphors have explanatory intentions and provide a specific approach to a problem.[100] Following this classification, I argue that Locke's use of medical metaphors is constitutive, in that it offers a clinical approach to the phenomenon of moral depravity based on the notion of a 'body politic', thereby formulating hypotheses as to the causes of moral depravity and justifying pedagogical measures and public policies to address its effects.

Another distinction has been made between the realist and instrumentalist uses of descriptive and explanatory metaphors in science.[101] A realist metaphor is anchored in theoretical language to the point that metaphorical terms become identical to the object they describe or explain. An instrumentalist metaphor acts as an instrument to describe or explain an object without implying a relation of identity to it. This classification was not designed to be applied to early modern theorists because it stems from the debate on empiricism and realism at the turn of the 20th century. Therefore, it is not inconsistent to claim that Locke's metaphors are both realist and instrumentalist, as I will explain hereafter.

Based on his moral and biblical explanations of moral depravity, there are several ways in which Locke's constitutive use of medical vocabulary may be interpreted. Here I will present and exclude two possible readings before defending the third and most probable one.

99 Demeter, "Locke and Metaphors", pp. 75-88.
100 Ibid., pp. 78-82.
101 Gigerenzer and Sturm, "Tools=Theories=Data?".

(1) First, medical metaphors may be aiming at diminishing moral agency and emphasizing, instead, the embeddedness of evil in human nature due to the heredity of original sin according to Paul's teaching. This would amount to a deterministic reading of Locke's medical metaphors. In this view, the medical metaphors exclude moral agency, stressing on the congenital aspect of evil. But this reading is inadequate for two main reasons. On the one hand, Locke's belief in the doctrine of the original sin is not a universal consensus among the experts. On the other hand, moral agency is a crucial aspect of Locke's moral theory. Moral agents are rational beings who exert their reason appropriately to grasp the laws of nature. In this view, reason as a faculty is not to blame for its unproper functioning. Moral agents are also free beings, and with this freedom comes the responsibility for making a proper use of their faculties. "Who does Violence to his own Faculties, Tyrannizes over his own Mind and usurps the Prerogative that belongs to Truth alone, which is to command Assent by only its own Authority, *i.e.* by and in proportion to that Evidence which it carries with it".[102] Therefore, one can hardly adopt the deterministic reading.

(2) Second, following the Foucauldian interpretation adopted by Baltes, medical metaphors may be intended to bypass the moral dimension altogether and create a distance between the moral physician and the undisciplined patient, thereby dehumanizing vicious people as a burdensome disease that should be 'cut off' for the good of society. This reading is supported by certain passages, like the following:

> [*Political*] *Power* can have no other *end or measure*, when in the hands of the Magistrate, but to preserve the Members of that Society in their Lives, Liberties, and Possessions; [...] [The] *Power to make Laws* [can] annex such *Penalties* to them, as many tend to the preservation of the whole, by cutting off those Parts, and those only, which are so corrupt, that they threaten the sound and healthy, without which no severity is lawful. And this *Power has its Original only from Compact* and Agreement, and the mutual Consent of those who make up the Community.[103]

While a strong formulation like this one would support a Foucauldian reading of Locke's medical vocabulary, it does not constitute sufficient evidence, because medical metaphors also appear in non-political, pedagogical discourses related to the corruption of manners, where they do not aim at bypassing the

[102] Locke, *Essay*, IV.xix.2, p. 698.
[103] T2, ch. XV, § 171, p. 382.

moral dimension of the phenomenon and the corresponding shared responsibility.[104] Furthermore, Baltes's reading may be qualified as ideologically biased, since it recasts Locke's entire philosophy of habit, in his moral, pedagogical, and political aspects, through the lens of Foucault.

(3) The third and most probable interpretation, I argue, is that by emphasizing on the notion of infection, Locke's use of medical metaphors intends to represent evil as an abnormal phenomenon spreading from dispersed sources, as opposed to being part of the default settings of human condition after the fall from grace. Unlike the 'good', which springs from the laws of nature, Locke sees 'evil' as something exogenous that spreads and contaminates throughout the social fabric. Without committing to the claim that Locke believed in the doctrine of the original sin, we can mention that in his biblical cosmology, the 'good' was always there, and then 'evil' *happened*. Despite being originally exogenous to nature when God created it, evil became endogenous to human nature by infecting Adam and his offspring. With time, it has become so rooted in human nature, that the cause can no longer be removed, and only its symptoms can be tackled with topical remedies. This suggests two purposes in Locke's use of medical metaphors: an instrumentalist, probably conscious purpose, and a realist purpose that the author is in no position to acknowledge. (1) First, Locke's medical vocabulary is designed to convey a sense of urgency and trigger prompt action against the contagiousness of evil. This corroborates Locke's deviating the attention from the ontology of evil and focusing on treating the moral issue as if it were a health-related one. In this view, the medical metaphors are used instrumentally and aim at prompting Locke's readership to take moral matters as seriously as their own health. (2) Second and more importantly, in the light of part 3 of this article on the tensions within Locke's moral account of moral depravity, this third reading suggests that medical metaphors are used in a realistic manner due to Locke's endorsement of the idea that society *is* a living entity. And because the medical metaphors jeopardize Locke's moralizing approach, they indicate that moral depravity cannot be framed as a moral issue. If the sources of evil are multiple, contagious, afflict society at large, and essentially consist in corrupted individuals mostly within the lower class of society, this means that Locke is facing a structural social issue and is short of conceptual means to address it.

[104] See Locke's emphasis on the responsibility of fathers, mothers, tutors, and maids in the education of children in Locke, *Education*, § 10, pp. 14-15, §§ 123-27, pp. 95-98.

5. *Conclusion*

In this paper I proposed to interpret Locke's use of medical metaphors in the context of his moral account of corruption in society. I argue that the medical metaphors derive from his conception of society as a living entity or 'body politic', comparable to the human body. Tensions between his methodological commitments as a physician and a moral philosopher were emphasized. On one hand medical anatomy and experimental philosophy lead to hypotheses about the mechanisms of the human body. In Locke's view, hypotheses do not provide any secure basis for clinical treatment and can at best prevent drawing wrong conclusions about cause-effect relations. The physician's mission is thus to develop useful remedies based on their observation of the patient, rather than developing theories based on experiments in a laboratory for the sake of knowledge. On the other hand, Locke sees moral science as a form of deductive reasoning based on universal principles rationally abstracted from the laws of nature. At the same time, he reckons that human cognitive capacities represent an obstacle to any successful project of demonstrative moral science. And since moral conventions depend *de facto* on cultural contingencies that vary greatly in space and time, the laws of nature have little to no impact on ethics, unlike the law of fashion. Given the uncertainty of medical hypotheses and the contingency of moral practices, it is irrelevant to even distinguish between physical health and 'moral health', because they cannot be strictly defined by either medical or moral scientifical standards. So, Locke is better off distancing himself from a theoretical approach to health and morality. Analogously to his loss of enthusiasm for anatomy and the experimental method in medicine, Locke resorts to a clinical approach and offers topical 'remedies' as well as a preventive long-term treatment consisting in pedagogical measures and political tracts. At the same time, the political part of Locke's solution concerning the poor is the most critical and creates a dissonance with respect to his deontology as a physician, according to which human lives are not to be experimented on.

The effects of the corruption of manners identified by Locke all bear a moral connotation in so far as they are described in relation to the duty of rational beings towards God. Based on our analysis of Locke's moral account of corruption, we saw that this phenomenon cannot be framed as a moral issue, mainly because the analogy between society and a living body subjected to 'contamination' and 'infection' removes the emphasis from the moral respon-

sibility of each person. The phenomenon of moral depravity boils down to a more fundamental issue of social fragmentation that hinders the establishment of an encompassing system of ethics. In other words, one can adopt, like Macpherson, an anachronistic perspective and argue that Locke's theory of human nature is biased by his social assumptions. Is poverty the sign that the political economy is flawed? Is idleness a side-effect of a malfunctioning social structure? Are madness and religious enthusiasm reactions to rationalistic Enlightenment ideals, and to the social challenges of political liberalism? Locke is in no position to ask these questions and thus, to grasp the social nature of the phenomenon of moral depravity.[105]

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Abbreviations

T1	Locke, John, *First Treatise* [1690], in Id., *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, University Press, Cambridge 1988, pp. 141-263.
T2	Locke, John, *Second Treatise* [1690] in Id., *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, University Press, Cambridge 1988, pp. 265-428.

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