ABSTRACT: This paper describes how Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* was read in Britain from Josiah Tucker to Peter Laslett. It focuses in particular upon how Locke's readers responded to his detailed and lengthy engagement with the patriarchalist political thought of Sir Robert Filmer. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the debate between Locke and Filmer continued to provide the framework within which political obligation was discussed. A hundred years later that had changed, to the point where Locke's readers found it unintelligible that he argued against Filmer and not Hobbes. I explain this in terms of the development in nineteenth-century Britain of a new conception of the history of political philosophy, the product of interest in the Hegelian theory of the state. The story told here is offered as one example of how understandings of the history of philosophy are shaped by understandings of philosophy itself.

KEYWORDS: Locke, John; Filmer, Sir Robert; Hobbes, Thomas; Burke, Edmund; political obligation; Laslett, Peter

1. Locke versus Hobbes versus Locke versus Filmer

By the mid-twentieth century a particular reading of John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* had become a regular feature of Anglophone histories of political philosophy. Locke's project, it was said, was to provide a theoretical justification of the Glorious Revolution and of the constitutional settlement that followed. In other words, the *Two Treatises* was written to vindicate the legitimacy of a system of limited government and mixed sovereignty, and, as a direct consequence, to vindicate also a right of resistance that had been exercised when that system had been threatened by the actions of James II. Limited government and mixed sovereignty were vindicated by showing that it was only such a system of government that could be said to have the consent of the governed. The argument, it was further said, was obviously intended as a reply to Hobbes. For Hobbes had used the same conceptual machinery as Locke -- the state of nature, natural liberty, consent, and contract -- to defend political absolutism, and to deny the existence of a right of resistance. On one version of this reading of Locke, the lengthy engagement with Filmer in the First Treatise was not to be taken as indicative of the nature of Locke's actual purposes. It was, perhaps, meant to distract the casual reader from how much Locke and Hobbes have in common, while leaving it obvious to the more philosophically sophisticated initiate that the important issues were the ones that divided Locke from the author of *Leviathan*.¹ On another version of this reading, the criticism of Filmer could be taken at face value, but to the detriment of Locke's own appreciation of what was necessary in the wake of Hobbes's

¹ This was the reading of Locke's political thought developed by Leo Strauss, who claimed that 'Locke had the good sense to quote only the right kind of writers and to be silent about the wrong kind, although he had more in common, in the last analysis, with the wrong kind than with the right' (*Natural Right and History*, 165). 'It is on the basis of Hobbes’s view of the law of nature', according to Strauss, 'that Locke opposes Hobbes’s conclusions' (231).
attempt to put political thought on a new, scientific footing. The real issues, again, were between Locke and Hobbes, and if Locke did not see that, then he should have done. Either way, according to the established reading, the First Treatise was irrelevant to understanding what is most fundamentally at stake in Locke's political thought. Only the Second Treatise mattered. Furthermore, according to most exponents of this reading of Locke, the uncomfortable truth was that Locke failed in his attempt to provide a refutation of Hobbes's solution to the timeless problem of establishing the moral basis of political power. Another approach entirely was needed, perhaps the one indicated by Hume's refutation of consent theory in toto, and his suggestion that it should be replaced by a philosophy of politics grounded in the concept of utility.

This reading of Locke's Two Treatises was challenged by Peter Laslett in an article in The Cambridge Historical Journal in 1956, and, more comprehensively still, in the critical edition of the Two Treatises that Laslett published in 1960 (Laslett, 'English Revolution'; Laslett ed., Two Treatises [1960]). First, Laslett questioned the assumption that the book had been written as an ex post facto justification of the Revolution of 1688. Both Locke's extensive refutation of Filmer and careful attention to the details of the text, along with the dates of the texts referred by Locke in the course of his argument, suggested that, on the contrary, the Two Treatises was written before 1683, and probably between 1679 and 1681. It was written, in other words, as a contribution to the controversy at that time over where sovereignty lay, whether with the monarch or with parliament, in respect of the determination of the line of succession. More specifically, it was written to provide support for the earl of Shaftesbury's attempt to exclude Charles II's Catholic brother James from the throne. As Laslett put it, in a memorable phrase, 'John Locke's Two Treatises is an Exclusion Tract, not a Revolution Pamphlet' (Laslett, 'English Revolution', 52). Filmer's writings, republished in 1679 and then again, with Patriarcha included, in 1680 were an important part of the Exclusion debate, and this meant, as Laslett emphasised in the introduction to his 1960 edition, that Filmer, not Hobbes, had to be recognised as Locke's main target. 'It is almost as mistaken to suppose that he was arguing deliberately against Leviathan', Laslett asserted, 'as to believe that he wrote to rationalize the Revolution' (Laslett 'Introduction', 67). Again, historical evidence was marshalled against the idea that answering Hobbes could have been important to Locke in the early 1680s -- or, indeed, at any other time. This idea, furthermore, was born of a misunderstanding of the kind of text that Two Treatises is. Unlike, say, Leviathan, Two Treatises was not really a work of philosophy at all. There was no connection to speak of between it and the philosophy expounded in An Essay concerning Human Understanding. 'Locke the doctor rather than Locke the epistemologist', Laslett wrote, 'is the man we should have in mind when we read his work on Government. To call it "political philosophy", to think of him as "political philosopher", is inappropriate' (Laslett, 'Introduction' [1960], 85). Locke's project was in fact to cure a political sickness -- the sickness of divine-right absolutism that was being, as he

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2 It was in this spirit that John Plamenatz simply ignored the First Treatise in his chapter on Locke in Man and Society, and discussed the Second Treatise as if it was, in essence, a reply to Hobbes (Man and Society, vol. i, 209-52).  
3 This quotation is from the Introduction to Laslett's revised 'Student Edition' of the Two Treatises, published in 1988. In the original 1960 edition Laslett wrote that 'The mistake of supposing that [Locke] was arguing deliberately against Leviathan is almost as common as the chronological error that we have just examined [i.e., the error of supposing that the book was written after the Revolution]' (67).
put it in the Preface of the *Two Treatises*, 'publickly owned' in the pulpit and turned into 'the Currant Divinity of the Times' (Locke, *Two Treatises*, 'The Preface').

Laslett admitted that he was not the first to question the assumption that the *Two Treatises* was written in the wake of William of Orange's successful bid for the crowns of England and Scotland. In his 1876 biography of Locke, Henry Fox Bourne had argued that the First Treatise, at least, must have been written in the early 1680s, and that the bulk of the Second was probably drafted while Locke was still in exile in Holland (Fox Bourne, *Life of John Locke*, vol. ii, 166). Moreover, Laslett's own dating of the composition of the book -- he sought to show that the First Treatise had been written after the Second -- has since been challenged by, among others, Richard Ashcraft, John Marshall, and David Wootton. But the dating, for my purposes, is not the central issue. What I am interested in is the question of what kind of writer on politics Locke should be supposed to be, and how the deeply engagé political activist recovered by Laslett turned, over the course of two centuries or so, into a dispassionate political philosopher who sought to elevate himself above the political mêlée and to debate an eternal philosophical problem with the only other great political mind of the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes.

I shall begin my narrative with the first full length discussion of Locke's philosophy, Josiah Tucker's *The Notions of Mr. Locke ... Examined and Confuted*, published in 1778 but very soon afterward rewritten to be included in Tucker's 1781 *Treatise concerning Civil Government*. What we learn from Tucker is that almost one hundred years after the publication of *Two Treatises*, Locke is not yet the Locke of the first half of the twentieth century. He is still in debate with Filmer, not Hobbes -- and the argument with Filmer remains a live one. The issues that divided Locke and Filmer continued to matter. As Laslett showed in his work both on the immediate context of the *Two Treatises* and on Filmer and his legacy (Laslett (ed.), *Patriarcha and Other Political Works of Sir Robert Filmer*; Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*), and as J. C. D. Clark confirmed in his reconstruction of the moral culture of Britain between the Restoration and the Great Reform Act (Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832*), engagement with Filmer and the question of the family's place in the shaping of political attitudes, was a pre-eminent issue, both in the 1680s and throughout the eighteenth century. This changed during the first half of the nineteenth century, such that Locke's debate with Filmer became almost unintelligible. Taken as a whole, the *Two Treatises* came as a result to look like, as Fox Bourne puts it, an ungainly combination of a strictly philosophical treatise and a mere political pamphlet (Fox Bourne, *Life of John Locke*, vol. ii, 180). It no longer made sense that Locke should have taken Filmer so seriously. And it seemed strange, to the point of being culpable, that he should have made no explicit reference to Hobbes. I shall make a suggestion as to what it was that changed the way in which Locke's political philosophy was interpreted. In conclusion I shall draw from the narrative I have constructed a moral concerning the history of the history of political philosophy. The change in the way in which Locke is read described here is an example, I claim, of how the definition of the history of political philosophy depends on the definition of political philosophy itself. 4

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4 I do not address in what follows the question of how Locke was turned in the early twentieth century into a (if not the) founding father of liberalism. That is a story admirably told in Stanton, 'John Locke and the Fable of Liberalism'. 
2. Late eighteenth-century Locke

Tucker's critique of Locke was born of the political crises of the 1760s and 1770s, and was a response to the use of Locke made by radicals such as Joseph Priestley and Richard Price in their justifications of the American cause. Tucker was no unthinking reactionary. He shared Priestley's and Price's view that America should be granted independence. But, like Hume, he believed this for purely pragmatic and economic reasons. He was prompted to write against Locke by the fact that it had been asserted by the radicals that, as he put it, 'no Man can object to Mr. Locke's Essay on the true Origin of Civil Government, but with a View of justifying the arbitrary Measures of a tyrannical Prince, and of instilling the slavish Principles of unlimited passive Obedience into an oppressed People' (Tucker, *Notions of Mr. Locke*, 3). Tucker's view was that Locke had successfully defended the cause of liberty against 'the Filmers, and the Hickes's of the age' (Tucker, *Notions of Mr. Locke*, 5). George Hickes was a non-juror who had defended a purely hereditary and therefore Stuart right to the crown in the 1690s. Locke, Tucker accepted, had contributed to the demolition of the government of James II. But, in his appeal to an original contract, he had failed to provide foundations for the new government that had followed the Revolution. On Tucker's view, while it was true that 'no Man is born the Subject of another' (Tucker, *Notions of Mr. Locke*, 22), it was quite implausible to suppose that society and government were the products of 'chicane and artifice'; rather, social and political life were natural, the work of '[t]he Instincts of Nature', instincts which all men could feel 'kindly leading them towards associating, or incorporating with each other' (Tucker, *Notions of Mr. Locke*, 39). The Revolution had not returned Englishmen and Scots to a pure state of nature in which all political arrangements were suspended until a majority of the people refashioned them. Fundamental, customary, and natural principles of rank and property had remained in place. These were principles fashioned by the 'Hand of Providence' itself. For the truth was that 'Government and Mankind were, in a Manner, coeval; and ... had grown up together from small Beginnings, or a Kind of infantine State, 'till they had arrived at a maturer age' (Tucker, *Notions of Mr. Locke*, 66). Tucker never mentions Hobbes in either the *Notions* or the *Treatise concerning Civil Government*. The fundamental issue for him is not whether Locke has an answer to Hobbes, but whether Locke gives us the right kind of alternative to Filmer. Filmer, as Tucker would have known, also insisted on the naturalness of society and government. The question was whether that could be disentangled from patriarchal absolutism.

Some of Tucker's readers were sure that it could not be. The dissenter Joseph Towers remarked in a reply to Tucker that 'The misrepresentations of the great principles of liberty by that eminent advocate for tyranny, Sir Robert Filmer, and those of Dr. Tucker appear to be extremely similar'. 'Had Dr Tucker lived in the days of Filmer', Towers added, 'he would probably have been one of his disciples' (Towers, *Vindication ... of Mr. Locke*, 31). At the bottom of the disagreement between Locke and Tucker, according to Towers, is the meaning and import of the doctrine of natural freedom and equality. Tucker's acceptance of the principle that no man

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5 Pocock describes Tucker's attack on Locke as 'the first major refutation of Lockean politics since that of Charles Leslie, the nonjuror, nearly eighty years before' ('Josiah Tucker on Burke, Locke, and Price', 160). In general, according to Pocock, Tucker 'is less concerned with the structure of Locke's argument than with conclusions derived from and (in his opinion) compatible with it' (168).
is born the subject of another is qualified, to the point of meaninglessness, by what he himself reads into the fact that 'there is a prodigious variety even in the natural endowments, both of body and mind, belonging to the several individuals of the human species' (Tucker, *Notions of Mr. Locke*, 125; quoted by Towers, *Vindication of Mr. Locke*, 71). On Tucker's view, men may not be born the subjects of another, but they grow up into being subjects, and there is no role for consent in turning power that one is naturally subject to into power that has a legitimate claim on one's obedience. A view similar to Tucker's was articulated by Soame Jenyns in his 1782 *Disquisition 'On Government and Civil Liberty'.* '[I]t may easily be shewn', wrote Jenyns, 'that man, by the constitution of his nature, never subsists a free and independent Being, from the first to the last moment of his residence of this terrestrial globe' (Jenyns, *Disquisitions on Several Subjects*, 124). A man begins in slavery to his parents, and continues their slaves until 'he is obliged to commence an involuntary slave of some civil government; to whose authority he must submit, however ingeniously he may dispute her right, or be justly hanged for disobedience to her laws' (Jenyns, *Disquisitions on Several Subjects*, 125-6). This shows in turn 'that man was never designed by [our Creator] to be an independent and self-governed Being, but to be trained up into a state of subordination and government in the present life, to fit him for one more perfect in another' (Jenyns, *Disquisitions on Several Subjects*, 126). Where Jenyns did not refer to Locke by name, the similarly minded Baptist Noel Turner did, in his own rejection of the principles of natural equality and liberty. Hooker himself, whom Locke appeals to so often, asserts, according to Turner, '[t]hat we are naturally subjects, without our own explicit consent' (Turner, *Candid Suggestions*, 133). We see in all these texts that the question that most deeply divides Locke and Filmer, as to whether or not we are naturally free, and whether or not there is anything natural to our subjection to government, remains a live one. What is in dispute is how Filmerian -- and not Hobbesian -- absolutism is best refuted.

This remains the case when one turns to the early architects of what would later be called utilitarianism. In a manuscript probably dating from the early 1780s, Bentham declares that 'Filmer's origin of government is exemplified everywhere: Locke's scheme of government has not ever, to the knowledge of any body, been exemplified any where'. 'In every family there is government,' he continues, 'in every family there is subjection, and subjection of the most absolute kind: the father, the sovereign: the mother and the young children, subjects' (Bentham, 'Filmer and Locke', 107). Locke, Bentham complains, somehow forgot his own state when he was born, and completely mischaracterizes the first and natural condition of human beings. 'Under the authority of the father, and his assistant and prime minister the mother', Bentham writes, 'every human creature is enured to subjection, is trained up into a habit of subjection' -- and '[i]t is in the bosom of the family that men serve an apprenticeship to government' (Bentham, 'Filmer and Locke', 109). Filmer derived incredible conclusions from these truths, but, Bentham says, even so his system 'affords a compleat refutation to the doctrine of universal and perpetual equality', in so far as it shows 'that subjection and not independence is the natural state of man' (Bentham, 'Filmer and Locke', 113). This was where political argument, and the design of a system of political liberty, had to begin. According to Paley, too, '[a] family contains the rudiments of an empire' (Paley, *Principles*, 281). Having been conditioned from the first to the acceptance of subordination, we are easily persuaded to submit ourselves to government. The pressing question, though, was whether or not there was an argument that ran from the naturalness of such submission to the moral authority of the power submitted to. Locke,
needless to say, rejected such an argument, but his own way of establishing the magistrate's claim to our obedience, by way of contract and consent, was incoherent, lacking in historical plausibility, and generated 'conclusions unfavourable to the improvement, and to the peace, of human society' (Paley, Principles, 296). The better course to take, Paley argued, was via a consideration of 'the will of God as collected from expediency' (Paley, Principles, 298).

During the eighteenth century, among his admirers as much as among his detractors, Locke's carefully crafted equivocations and ambiguities, his refusal to commit himself to any substantive practical political principle (other than that the English had been justified in installing William III in place of James II), disappeared from view, to be replaced by a much more straightforwardly radical figure -- a figure who, as spoken for by Richard Price, understood political liberty to amount to self-government, and who, as spoken for by Thomas Paine, proclaimed that all civil rights were derived from the inalienable rights of man, and that no generation was bound by the laws and customs accepted by previous generations. By the 1790s, thanks in large part to Paine, Locke had become a spokesman for the absolute sovereignty of the people, with the result that it became possible to present the great issue of the age, the French Revolution, as a battle between traditionalist monarchical absolutism on the one hand, and Lockean-Rousseauian popular absolutism on the other. This is the clear implication of a series of 'Reflections on the Influence of Mr. Locke's System' published by the virulent anti-Jacobin John Bowles in 1798 (Bowles, Retrospect, 290-323). 'The source of those erroneous and ruinous systems, which, in modern times, have assumed the dignified name of Philosophy', Bowles began by declaring, 'is a mistaken idea respecting the origin of Government, and, indeed, of society' (290-91). The idea in question was Locke's notion of a state of nature in which mankind were supposed to be 'in a condition of perfect liberty, equality, and independence, bound by no laws, connected by no ties, subject to no authority, and totally independent each of the rest' (291). The theory of government that followed from this idea -- government as 'merely a trust, created by the People, which they, at all times, are intitled to recal, and to best, at their discretion, in other hands' (292) -- had, according to Bowles, proved fatal to the 'repose and happiness' of the entire world. For, despite its author's supposed concern with the vindication of the liberty of the individual, the theory served only to give the will of the majority an absolute supremacy, to the obvious detriment of the rights of individuals and minorities. The revolution in France had shown how Locke's ideas 'afford[ed] a ready pretext to artful and turbulent men to excite the multitude to discontent and insurrection' (300), with entirely predictable, and disastrous, results.

To the Irish Episcopalian Thomas Elrington, on the other hand, the way in which Locke had come to figure in the debate over the French Revolution showed that something had gone seriously wrong in the interpretation of Locke's Two Treatises. Also in 1798 Elrington published an edition of the Second Treatise, together with numerous notes to the text, intended to differentiate the real Locke from 'the system of citizen Thomas Paine, by whom we are told that whatever the people have a mind to do, they have a right to do' ([Elrington ed.], Essay, iv). Elrington introduced his edition by arguing that the ideology of French Revolution was merely a secularized, populist version of the Filmerian absolutism that Locke had taken as his target in the 1680s and '90s. 'The divine right of doing wrong is no longer indeed acknowledged in monarchs,' Elrington remarked, 'but this terrible privilege has been recognised by modern politicians as the birth right of the people, in whose hands it seems not less formidable' (iv). Locke, in speaking about the sovereignty of the people, may have occasionally expressed himself in unfortunate
ways, but 'an accurate examination' of his argument would show that 'the word people was used by him in a sense far more limited than by the followers of Paine'. It would show, in fact, that by 'people' Locke meant 'only those who were possessed of such property as was sufficient to secure their fidelity to the interests of the state, and to make it probable that they were qualified to judge of those interests as far as was requisite for the due performance of the duty entrusted to them' (v). Moreover, the sovereignty of the people, along with the supremacy of the majority, was always qualified by the obligations imposed by the law of nature. In his notes Elrington sought to show that Locke was wholly in agreement with Montesquieu's observation that a democracy is not necessarily a free state. The condition of liberty is the rule of just law, not the people's being able to choose what laws they live under. 'The true reason why each individual is bound to submit to the will of the majority', Elrington explained, '... is the probability that the decrees made by such a majority are conformable to the law of nature, and do really tend to promote the public good' (87, note to §95). Elrington was compelled to admit, though, that Locke stood in need of correction at a number of points. He should not have appeared to endorse a right to resist on the part of the individual. And with respect to the people's right to resist, '[i]t would have been better had he stated, that the right of changing their government depended, not on the mere will of the people, but on their reason, dictating the necessity of it as the only means of removing evils greater than those the change itself would produce' (192, note to §223). 6

3. Nineteenth-century Locke

Part of Bowles's case against Locke is an argument to the effect that Locke went wrong in representing paternal and political power as essentially different and distinct from each other. 7 As with Bentham, and Paley, and Tucker, the proper adjudication of the debate between Locke on the one hand and Filmer remained for Bowles a live political problem. Thus, while it is unlikely that Locke's critics in the later eighteenth century regarded themselves as Filmerians, Filmer was still taken to ask difficult questions of Locke's political thought. Out of Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France, however, issued a rather different challenge to Lockean political philosophy. The Reflections had their proximate cause in Burke's outrage at the radicalized Lockeanism on display in Price's Discourse on the Love of Our Country. Burke's response was that Price's interpretation of the principles of 1688 betrayed a complete misunderstanding of the constitutional settlement that had followed the Revolution. According to Burke's reconstruction of the Lockean idea that civil society is the offspring of a convention, it was axiomatic that 'Men cannot enjoy the rights of an uncivil state and of a civil state together'. 'That [man] may obtain justice,' Burke claimed, 'he gives up his right of determining what is in most points the most essential to him. That he may secure some liberty, he makes a surrender in trust of the whole of

6 The texts discussed in this section are usefully collected in Volume 4 of Goldie, The Reception of Locke's Politics.
7 See Bowles, Retrospect, 302-10, where Bowles rejects Locke's distinction between paternal and political power.
it' (Burke, Reflections, 52). But what Burke went on to ask his reader to consider was, in effect, the more general question of whether philosophy of any kind had a role in the preservation of a politics of liberty. As defined by Burke, such a politics had no philosophical foundation. It had no foundation, this was to say, in abstract principles of right. Rather, liberty was grounded in prescription, the traditions of common law, and a culture of piety animated by the national religion. These things together, according to Burke, constituted a repository of wisdom upon which the English had always been content to found their politics. 'All your sophisters', he told the French addressee of the Reflections, 'cannot produce anything better adapted to preserve a rational and manly freedom than the course we have pursued, who have chosen our nature rather than our speculations, our breasts rather than our inventions, for the great conservatories and magazines of our rights and privileges' (30-31). What presaged disaster for France was, precisely, the idea that the science of politics might be taught a priori, that the scheme of government appropriate to a country might be deduced from general first principles. The words 'philosophy' and 'philosophical' -- always closely connected with 'metaphysics' -- are mostly used in the Reflections as pejorative terms. The Reflections is one of the sources of the idea, popular in the century that followed, that it was philosophy -- or, at least, the philosophy of the Enlightenment -- that was to blame for a crisis that had subverted peace and order not only in France, but in all of Europe.⁹

The ultimate consequence of the Burkean argument was that political philosophy needed to be redefined, or resituated, as operating at a safe remove from the business of politics itself. This shift in political philosophy's understanding of itself seems to have taken place in two historical stages. First, in the decades that followed the French Revolution, there was an acceptance that, in the circumstances, discussion of first principles in politics was neither prudent nor respectable. The study of politics became, in effect, argument as to how best to characterise the virtues of the British constitution. As Stefan Collini, Donald Winch and John Burrow observe, it was Montesquieu, not Locke, who provided the inspiration for this discussion. Out of Montesquieu issued a tradition that 'stressed mixture, balance, and separation of powers', and that had 'appeared in varying guises in the writings of Blackstone, De Lolme, and Paley' (Collini, Winch, and Burrow, That Noble Science of Politics, 21). This was the tradition that informed, to take a particularly influential example, the 'theory of government' part of Dugald Stewart's lecture course on political economy. According to Stewart, in the published version of the lecture course, 'the mistaken notions concerning Political Liberty which have been so widely disseminated in Europe by the writings of Mr. Locke, have contributed greatly to divert the studies of speculative politicians from the proper objects of their attention' (Stewart, Works, vol.

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⁸ As Pocock notes in his edition of the Reflections, this part of Burke's argument 'is Lockean enough' (Burke, Reflections, p. 221). Even so, it remains a puzzle why in the Reflections Burke never mentions Locke by name. On Burke's complicated, but fundamentally negative, attitude toward Locke's political philosophy, see Bourke, Empire and Revolution, 682-5; and also Pocock, 'Josiah Tucker on Burke, Locke, and Price, 186-7.

⁹ In 1798 the Anglican cleric William Jones claimed that Locke was 'the oracle to those who began and conducted the American Rebellion; which led to the French Revolution; which will lead (if God permit) to the total overthrow of Religion and Government in this kingdom, perhaps in the whole Christian world' (Letter to the Church of England, 31). As Goldie puts it in his Introduction to The Reception of Locke's Politics, after the French Revolution 'Locke fell victim to the Counter-Enlightenment' (vol. i, p. xxxix).
Stewart argues that political liberty is of value only as a means of obtaining the happiness of the people. It is, moreover, only one means of obtaining that end; and where happiness is obstructed by unjust and inexpedient laws, the political power of the people, so far from furnishing any compensation of their misery, is likely to oppose an insurmountable obstacle to improvement, by employing the despotism of numbers in support of principles of which the multitude are incompetent to judge' (Stewart, *Works*, vol. 8, 23). Tyranny is best avoided by a constitution which adequately secures the political privileges of the governed; and those privileges can be secured under a variety of forms of government. It followed that 'politics proper' (the study of constitutional forms) was less important, to the extent that human happiness was the main consideration, than political economy. Locke figures in Stewart's *Lectures on Political Economy* as the author of works on money and on interest rates, not as the author of *Two Treatises of Government*. In Collini, Winch and Burrow's study of the nineteenth-century British 'science of politics' that developed out of the work of Stewart and his pupils, Locke does not figure at all.

The second stage of the redefinition of political philosophy came with the eventual reaction against the fact that, as Henry Sidgwick put it, the followers of Adam Smith had managed 'to separate almost entirely the study of the industrial organisation of society -- under the name of "Political Economy" -- from the study of its political organisation' (Sidgwick, *Elements of Politics*, 4-5). The theory of politics, according to Sidgwick, needed to be reinstated as an object of inquiry equal in importance to the science of society. Locke, however, was as peripheral to Sidgwick's attempt 'to set forth in a systematic manner the general notions and principles which we use in ordinary political reasonings' (*Elements of Politics*, 7) as he was to Stewart's political economy. He -- along with the question of the origin, nature and extent of political obligation more generally -- appears to have regained a place in political philosophy in the context of argument concerning the notion of the state propounded by British exponents of Hegelian Idealism (see Simhony, 'The Political Thought of the British Idealists'). According to the Idealist conception of the state, as described by, for example, T. H. Green in *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, the state is taken to be the 'objective' realisation of freedom. As Green puts it, liberty is actualised in the state 'because in it the reason, the self-determining principle operating in man as his will, has found a perfect expression for itself (as an artist may be considered to express himself in a perfect work of art); and the man who is determined by the objects which the well-ordered state presents to him is determined by that which is the perfect expression of his reason, and is thus free' (Green, *Lectures on Political Obligation*, 6). The idea of freedom in a state of nature, prior to and independent of the political state, was directly at odds with such a conception of freedom, as was the idea of an original contract in which individuals exchanged natural rights for rights conferred by citizenship. Natural rights theory, along with the theory of the social contract, had therefore to be overcome and shown to be internally incoherent as part of the vindication of the Hegelian concept of liberty. This was an especially pressing task given the fact that, as Green admitted, Hegel 'thinks of the state in a way not familiar to Englishmen' (6). Hobbes and Locke, along with Spinoza and Rousseau, needed to be presented as leading the way, ineluctably, to the Hegelian overcoming of the dichotomy of the

Stewart went on to say that he would consider 'Locke and his followers' in a chapter on 'allegiance'. It would seem, though, that the chapter was either lost or never written, for there is no discussion of allegiance in the published text.
coercive power of the sovereign on the one side, and the individual possessed of natural rights on the other. This was the task Green set himself in the Oxford lecture courses on which his book on political obligation was based.

Needless to say, not every political philosopher in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century was a Hegelian. But the debate between the Idealists and their opponents introduced a new level of abstraction into British political thought. It introduced also a sense that the most fundamental questions of politics had been under debate for millennia, since Plato and Aristotle. The Hegelian way of thinking about the state may have been unfamiliar to Englishmen, but it was, according to Green, 'not unlike that in which Greek philosophers thought of the πόλις' (Lectures on Political Obligation, 6). Political philosophy was in Green's hands disconnected from the historical circumstances in which individual political philosophers lived and wrote, and repositioned in a timeless philosophical present, such that Kant and Hegel, and Hobbes and Locke, and Plato and Aristotle, could all be understood to be in conversation with each other. And the problem of political obligation, discussed in this way, was a significantly different kind of problem from the problem that faced Locke in his debate with Filmer. Green introduced his Lectures with a definition of political obligation. 'I mean that term to include', he explained, 'both the obligation of the subject towards the sovereign, of the citizen towards the state, and the obligations of individuals to each other as enforced by a political superior' (29). Philosophical investigation into political obligation, as conducted by Green, would be entirely general and abstract, a consideration of the obligation of the citizen as such towards the state as such. This was not the question which Locke addressed in the late seventeenth century. Locke's question was urgent and practical and local. It was the problem of whom, out of two (or more) rival claimants to the highest authority, deserved the allegiance of the subject. 'The great Question', Locke observed in the First Treatise, 'which in all Ages has disturbed Mankind, and brought on them the greatest part of those Mischiefs which have ruin'd Cities, depopulated Countries, and disordered the Peace of the World, has been, Not whether there be Power in the World, nor whence it came, but who should have it' (Locke, Two Treatises, I §106). This is the question that the Two Treatises was both written and published to answer. But it was a question that was no longer at issue in Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century; and it was also the kind of question that, since the French Revolution, British political philosophy had declined to raise.

I suggest that it was at least in part a result of these changes in the nature of philosophizing about politics that, when one turns from the texts discussed in Section Two above to nineteenth-century accounts of Locke's political thought, one finds recurrent expressions of surprise and regret at the effort expended by Locke in his answer to Filmer. 'The first part of the treatise, which is a refutation of Sir Robert Filmer,' wrote Fitzjames Stephen, 'is in the present day a mere weariness to the flesh, and in no degree worth reading. To judge, indeed, from Locke's account of it, Sir Robert Filmer's doctrine must have been so monstrously absurd that the wonder is how it could ever have been thought to deserve a refutation' (F. Stephen, Horae Sabbaticae, vol. ii, 141). Leslie Stephen complained of the wearisomeness of Locke's treatment of 'poor Sir Robert Filmer'. Filmer's was 'an argument which, without the

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11 It was written, as Laslett made clear, to arbitrate a struggle for supremacy between Charles II and parliament. It was published in order to show that, since William III had been set on the throne by a parliament backed by the consent of the people, he had an authority that was de jure as much as it was de facto (see Goldie, The Revolution of 1689).
assaults of Locke and Sidney, would have died a natural death at the revolution' (L. Stephen, *English Thought*, vol. ii, 135-6). It was odd, Stephen added, that Locke failed to engage with Hobbes, when it was in fact Hobbes's ideas that he was challenging. In his 1890 *Introduction to the Science of Politics* Frederick Pollock went straight from Hobbes to Locke, ignoring Filmer altogether, and explicitly using Hobbes as the frame of reference for his treatment of the Second Treatise. The eighteenth century as a whole, according to Pollock, went wrong in failing to take Hobbes seriously. 'Instead of making the doctrine of sovereignty the starting point of fresh criticism and construction', he complained, 'they endeavoured to avoid Hobbes's consequences by devising a different sort of original contract as the assumed foundation of society' (Pollock, *Introduction*, 63). In the *Lectures on Political Obligation*, Green found it unnecessary so much as to mention Filmer. Having discussed Hobbes, he moved on, like Pollock, directly to Locke and the Second Treatise. The First Treatise disappeared from view altogether. Thus the scene was set for the textbooks that followed in the early twentieth century, for instance by Harold Laski, and by George Sabine. Laski complained about the 'longwinded rhapsodies of Filmer', and dismissed the First Treatise as 'detailed and tiresome'. It was troubling that Locke 'should have wasted the resources of his intelligence upon so feeble an opponent': 'The book of Hobbes lay ready to his hand; yet he almost ostentatiously refused to grapple with it' (Laski, *Political Thought in England*, 9, 32, 33). Sabine claimed that the First Treatise 'had no permanent importance', and repeated the charge that Locke went wrong in choosing to answer Filmer rather than Hobbes (Sabine, *History of Political Theory*, 523-4). This was precisely the kind of thing that Laslett had in his sights in his 1956 article and in his edition of the *Two Treatises*.12

4. Methodological conclusion

We saw above, in Section One of this article, that Laslett's diagnosis of what had gone wrong in the study of the *Two Treatises of Government* was that it had been taken, wrongly, to be a work of political philosophy. Hobbes, according to Laslett, was undoubtedly a political philosopher in the proper sense of the word. Hobbes, in other words, analysed politics in the context of a fully worked out system, and presented, as Laslett puts it, 'a view of the world which proceeded from an account of reality to an account of knowledge, and so to an ethic and to politics' (Laslett, *Introduction* [1960], 87). Hobbes 'created a general determinist system, where political obligation, even the form and function of the state, was made to follow from a new definition of natural law' (87). The Locke of the *Two Treatises*, by contrast, showed little interest in establishing clear definitions as his point of departure, and, quite generally, showed little interest in relating his theory of politics to what he had achieved in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Most notably of all, he showed little interest in reconciling his theory of natural law with the *Essay's* attack on innate moral principles. 'It is pointless', according to Laslett, 'to look upon [ Locke's work] as an integrated body of speculation and generalization, with a general philosophy at its centre and as its architectural framework' (87). The author of the *Two Treatises* was 'the writer of a

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12 Another example of the history of political philosophy written as if Locke's main interlocutor simply had to be Hobbes, even if Locke himself was unaware of the fact, is Graham, *English Political Philosophy from Hobbes to Maine*. 
work of intuition, insight and imagination, if not of profound originality, who was also a theorist of knowledge' (86). Surprisingly enough, a precedent for Locke's approach to politics was to be found in Machiavelli. Like Machiavelli, Locke offered political advice rather than political philosophy, and, like Machiavelli and other writers of political advice, 'discuss[ed] politics and its theory outside the area of philosophy' (87). Hobbes demanded to be answered by philosophical argument. Filmer did not. This was precisely because Filmer, or rather those who had reissued his works in 1679 and afterwards, had proved so successful, so much so that he was, in Laslett's words, 'the man of the moment, a formidable and growing force with those whose political opinions mattered, and representing in himself the ipsissima verba of the established order' (67). Filmer's political theory had to be discredited, and prevented from having consequences dangerous to the liberties of Englishmen; but that was not the same thing at all as the setting out of a systematic philosophy of politics in the manner of Leviathan.

What is striking in this characterization of the Two Treatises is the fact that Laslett appears to have accepted the basic terms of the nineteenth-century critique of Locke's engagement with Filmer. If Locke had been a better philosopher, the two Stephens say, along with Fox Bourne and Pollock, he would have engaged with Hobbes, not Filmer. Locke (in the Two Treatises) was not a philosopher at all, Laslett replies, and that is why he engages with Filmer, not Hobbes. Another possible reply -- but one that Laslett does not seem to have entertained -- was that nineteenth-century frustration with the intensity of Locke's interest in Filmer, and with his comparative lack of interest in Hobbes, had its origin in a misunderstanding of the kind of political philosopher that Locke was. Nineteenth-century criticism of Locke was, it could be said, in essence a matter of the imposition upon a writer of the mid-to-late seventeenth century of a conception of political philosophy that only gained wide currency two hundred years later. In Section Three above I suggested that a very general question concerning political obligation as such, the kind of question addressed by Green in the lectures that formed the basis of his Principles of Political Obligation, was not the question that Locke was addressing in the Two Treatises. One could go further, and suggest that for the entire early modern period, for Hobbes and for Hume just as much as for Locke, the problem of allegiance was the practical problem of how to decide between the competing claims of two (or possibly more) rival claimants to authority.13 This, surely, was Hobbes's question, in Leviathan taken as a whole, and, especially, in the 'Review, and Conclusion'. According to Hume in the essay 'Of the Original Contract', the question 'to whom is allegiance due? And who is our lawful sovereign?' is 'often the most difficult of any, and liable to infinite discussions' (Hume, Essays, 481). No one at this time, it might plausibly be said, was discussing political questions entirely in the abstract, in the manner of Green in his lectures on political obligation at Oxford. And the idea that it must follow that one should read Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, along with their contemporaries, as, to use Laslett's distinction, dispensers of political advice rather than as political philosophers is, to put it mildly, unmotivated. The kind of careful historicism practised by Laslett himself would seem to lead to the thought that 'philosophy' itself, and with it 'political philosophy', might be an object of historical inquiry, such that 'philosophy', and 'political philosophy', might turn out to have been different things, with different methods and goals, in different times and places.

13 As Deborah Baumgold puts it, 'Legitimation arguments answer the question of who to follow, as contrasted to the question of whether to follow at all' (Hobbes's Political Theory, 27).
A particular definition of philosophy will entail a particular conception of the history of philosophy. How the history of philosophy looks will change when the definition of 'philosophy' changes. In Section Three I offered a hypothesis to explain how one understanding of the history of political philosophy came to take hold amongst readers of Locke in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century. On this understanding, the history of political philosophy is an ongoing debate about the most general issues that arise in political life as such, a debate that was, perhaps, started by Plato and Aristotle, and that has been carried on since by speculative, systematic thinkers operating at a remove from the exigencies of everyday practical politics. Hobbes has a secure place in this history of philosophy. Locke has a place only in so far as he can be construed as engaging with Hobbes. Filmer has no place at all. In Section Two I presented a brief account of how Locke was treated one hundred years earlier, in the second half of the eighteenth century, in order to make it clear that this was not how Locke had always been read. The understanding of the history of political thought that Laslett reacted against had, in other words, its own history -- a history that Laslett seems not to have interested himself in. Laslett's work on Filmer and Locke was, by their own admission, a significant influence on those who replaced the nineteenth and early twentieth century understanding of the history of political philosophy with an understanding on which there is no clean distinction to be drawn between political philosophy on the one hand, and politics on the other. The history of political philosophy, on this understanding, is the history of the interaction between political thought and political action. And the key to understanding how political thought issues in political action is the concept of authorial intention, as divined by close attention to historical context. There is, of course, and in turn, a historical account to be given of the development of this understanding of the history of political philosophy, and of its success.14

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14 For one such account, which discusses others, see James, 'J. G. A. Pocock and the Idea of the "Cambridge School"'. 


