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THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF WILLIAM WOLLASTON

by

Yael Sofaer

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF WILLIAM WOLLASTON

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Adviser: Professor Stefan Bernard Baumrin

This dissertation provides the first thorough exposition of the moral theory proposed by William Wollaston in his treatise *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1724), and demonstrates it to be an innovative contribution to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' project of developing a moral theory by reason alone (in which lie the origins of contemporary moral realism); with the foundational principle of acting in accordance with nature as the standard of morality.

Wollaston's treatise contains an unrecognized innovation: the principle that rational agents express propositions by their actions—that, as propositions, have truth values—which makes it possible to determine the moral status of such actions by evaluating these truth values. The principle that actions express propositions to the same extent that verbal statements express propositions bridges the gap between ideas in the mind and the facts of the world (i.e., nature). It defines the deliberate actions of moral agents as natural events which can thus be evaluated in the same way that all natural objects and events are evaluated. Actions of moral agents can then be evaluated as to whether they are consistent or inconsistent with all other parts of nature. The correspondence between the truthfulness or falsehood of the propositions that moral agents express by their

deliberate actions, and the empirical facts of the world, provides a focused method of evaluating the moral status of such actions in accordance with the empirical standard of moral realism. Also, in Wollaston's system, as it is the nature of human beings to seek happiness, and as acting in accordance with nature is the means of attaining happiness, the production or destruction of happiness determines the degree of the moral rightness or wrongness of actions. The dissertation also demonstrates that the prevalent criticisms of *The Religion of Nature Delineated* which have caused it to be largely disregarded do not engage the theory and are often directed at straw men.

CONTENTS

Chapter I. Introduction.....	1
Chapter II. The Response to Wollaston’s Theory	20
A. The Eighteenth Century: Popularity and Influence	20
B. The Nineteenth Century: Decline and Dismissal	27
C. The Twentieth Century: Sporadic Interest	29
Chapter III. Wollaston’s Moral Theory	37
A. The Structure of <i>The Religion of Nature Delineated</i>	37
B. The Reliability of Reason: Section III, “Of Reason, and the Ways of Discovering Truth”	41
C. The Standard of Morality: Section II, “Of Happiness”	51
D. The Moral Theory of RND: Section I, “Of Moral Good and Evil”	62
E. The Extent of Moral Obligation: Section IV, “Of the Obligations of Imperfect Beings with Respect to Their Power of Acting”	88
Chapter IV. Wollaston’s Application of His Moral Theory	97
A. Religion: Section V, “Truths Relating to the Deity. Of His Existence, Perfection, Providence, etc.”	98
B. The Basis of Political Theory: Section VI, “Truths Respecting Mankind in General, Antecedent to All Human Laws”	102
C. Political Theory: Section VII, “Truths Respecting Particular Societies of Men, or Governments”	124

D. Domestic Life: Section VIII, “Truths Concerning Families and Relations”	143
E. Virtue and the Soul: Section IX, “Truths Belonging to a Private Man, and Respecting (Directly) Only Himself”	147
Chapter V. Wollaston’s Critics.....	166
A. The Misleading Observers Straw Man	167
B. Thomas Bott and His Followers.....	176
C. The “All Immorality Is Lying” Straw Man.....	180
D. Joel Feinberg’s Response to Hume.....	182
E. The Description Error.....	187
Chapter VI. Conclusion	191
Bibliography	202

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The Rev. William Wollaston (1659-1724) was one of the most famous and highly esteemed writers of his time, and yet in the century following his death, his reputation fell into sharp decline until he became an object of disrespect in the writings of Hume, Price, Bentham, and others. A fair-minded contemporary reader, I think, will find that Wollaston did have something important and original to say, however confused his manner of saying it, so that is one reason for reexamining his major work, *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1722)—Joel Feinberg.¹

William Wollaston, author of *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1724) (hereinafter referred to as RND), was a popular and highly regarded moral philosopher in the eighteenth century, yet in the nineteenth century he fell into disrepute. He was no longer read and his moral theory was ridiculed and dismissed. This view has persisted to the present.

In this dissertation I will provide the first thorough exposition of Wollaston's moral theory and demonstrate it to be an innovative contribution to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' project of developing a moral theory by reason alone (in which lie the origins of contemporary moral realism); with the foundational principle of acting in accordance with nature as the standard of morality. Also, that it contains a largely unrecognized innovation: the principle that rational agents express propositions by their actions—that, as propositions, have truth values—which makes it possible to determine the moral status of such actions by evaluating these truth values. I will also demonstrate that the prevailing dismissal of this theory is based on arguments which fail to engage it and instead attack straw men.

Wollaston's moral theory is usually classified as rationalist, but not clearly described. It is

1 Joel Feinberg, "Wollaston and His Critics," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 38, no. 2 (1977): 345.

most commonly, and incorrectly, described as being somehow similar to Samuel Clarke's theory of fitness,² with Wollaston sometimes labeled a disciple of Clarke and subject to descriptions such as this:

The moral rationalists claimed, for example, that moral distinctions are based on transcendental principles and immutable relations that oblige all rational creatures and that can only be discerned by the use of reason.... An exaggerated view of the power of reason leads the rationalist to suppose that reason can pierce its way into the realm of transcendental values.³

However, Wollaston had no such visions of transcendental normative realms nor does his theory resemble Clarke's doctrine of intuitively observable fitnesses; rather, he devised a rule for deriving moral judgments from propositions concerning empirical experience.

Wollaston fits into the category Stephen L. Darwall defines as *Empirical naturalist internalism*:

An *empirical naturalist* tradition, comprising Hobbes, Cumberland, Hutcheson, Hume, and, in most moods, Locke, was driven primarily by the desire to account for normativity in a way consistent with an empiricist epistemology and naturalist metaphysics.⁴

Central to Wollaston's theory is his innovative idea that agents express propositions by their actions as well as their words. This provides a means of assigning truth values to actions. Doing so enables judging actions morally on the basis of the foundational principle that the

2 Hume's description of rationalism as "affirm[ing] that virtue is nothing but a conformity to reason; that there are eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, which are the same to every rational being that considers them," best describes Clarke's thesis. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, Introduction by David Fate Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 294 (3.1.1.4).

3 David Fate Norton, "Hume, human nature, and the foundations of morality" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, edited by David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 156.

4 Stephen L. Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14.

standard of morality is accordance with nature; this is joined with the epistemic principle that the definition of truth is accordance with nature. This foundational principle of acting in accordance with nature originated in Stoicism and was the prevailing standard of moral theory.⁵ The idea that actions express propositions provides a systematic method of evaluating whether actions are in accordance with nature.

In addition, Wollaston offers a secondary justification for why acting in accordance with nature is right—because it is the method of attaining happiness. As happiness is the criterion of Epicureanism this makes Wollaston’s theory a fusion of Stoic and Epicurean elements, which adds to its interest. This fusion is accomplished in two steps. In the first, a rule for practicing the Stoic principle of acting according to nature is promulgated (RND Section I). In the second, it is established that seeking happiness is in accordance with human nature (RND Section II). As human nature is part of nature, this is encompassed within the Stoic principle of acting in accordance with nature. The Epicurean principle is made subordinate to the Stoic principle as Wollaston warns that acting in accordance with nature does not mean acting in accordance with the brutish part of human nature.

In the rationalist project, the Stoic principle of following nature was joined with the project of science, leading to the attempt to derive universal moral laws from nature in the same manner that scientists, especially Newton, derived universal physical laws from nature. The rationalist project was proposed by John Locke, who believed morality could be scientifically demonstrated.

I am bold to think, that morality is capable of demonstration, as well as

⁵ “[Wollaston’s] theory is...the prevailing deist-stoic theory of ‘living according to nature,’ and is in fact what Wollaston intended it to be, an interpretation and partial clarification of that ancient theory. Wollaston holds with the Stoics that actions are wrong because they are ‘contrary to nature.’” Feinberg, 347.

mathematics; since the precise real essence of the things moral words stand for may be perfectly known; and so the congruity or incongruity of the things themselves, be certainly discovered, in which consists perfect knowledge.⁶

A founding participant in this project was Richard Cumberland.

Cumberland was the first man to produce a full-fledged doctrine of natural law in which both the general methods and the specific findings of modern natural science, or natural science as it developed after Galileo, were used to define man's moral duties.⁷

Thus, Cumberland defines morality as being a subset of the laws of nature:

The laws of nature are the only solid foundations of all morality and civil polity.⁸
Cumberland's innovation was to bring logic to bear on moral issues. The principle he

developed is that an immoral action expresses a logical contradiction because it expresses two opposing propositions concerning the same category of being, namely human.

For, that rational agent most certainly contradicts himself, who prescribes one rule for his own private conduct, and a quite different rule for the conduct of other rational beings, who partake of the very same nature with himself (I.I.vi, p.17).

This differs from advocating the golden rule, or the general, widespread idea of fairness.

A person who affirms a proposition concerning conduct for himself, but denies the same proposition concerning someone else (or vice versa), while both are the same category of

6 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), III.11.16. Spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation have been modernized. All subsequent Locke quotes in this chapter are from the *Essay*.

7 Murray Forsyth, "The Place of Richard Cumberland in the History of Natural Law Doctrine," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (January 1982), doi: 10.1353/hph.1982.0007, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/hph/summary/v020/20.1forsyth.html>: 26.

8 Richard Cumberland, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Laws of Nature*, translated, notes, and appendix by John Towers (Dublin: Samuel Powell, 1750), <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, document no. CW3322449132, Prolegomena, section 1:ix. Subsequent references to this work are by part number, chapter number, section number, and page number. Spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation have been modernized. This is a translation of *De Legibus Naturae*, originally published 1672.

being—human, is thereby expressing a contradiction.⁹

For example:

P(1): It is wrong for a person to hit another person.

If when A is hit by B he says: “It is wrong of you to hit me,” he is thereby affirming P(1). If A then hits C and says: “It is right for me to hit you,” he is thereby denying P(1). He both affirms and denies P(1) and that is a logical contradiction.

If he claims that B and C are different, the answer is that they all belong to the same category, that of human being. That is, $A = H$, $B = H$, $C = H$, and therefore by commutation $A = B = C$.

Hence Cumberland’s principle of right conduct:

[I]t is essentially included in the notion of a person who judges right, to determine that the same things in a like case may lawfully be done by others, which such a person truly thinks either were or may be lawfully done by himself (I.II.vii, p.149).

His principle is summarized by Henry Sidgwick:

[W]hatever action any of us judges to be right for himself, he implicitly judges to be right for all similar persons in similar circumstances. Or, as we may otherwise put it, “if a kind of conduct that is right (or wrong) for me is not right or (wrong) for some one else, it must be on the ground of some difference between the two cases,

9 This also differs from Hobbes’s definition of injustice as an absurdity, in which a person denies a previous agreement. “[W]hen a man has in either manner abandoned or granted away his right; then is he said to be obliged or bound not to hinder those to whom such right is granted or abandoned, from the benefit of it; and that he ought, and it is his duty, not to make void that voluntary act of his own; and that such hindrance is injustice and injury, as being *Sine Jure*; the right being before renounced or transferred. So that injury or injustice in the controversies of the world is somewhat like to that which in the disputations of scholars is called absurdity. For as it is there called an absurdity to contradict what one maintained in the beginning; so in the world, it is called injustice and injury voluntarily to undo that which from the beginning he had voluntarily done.” Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), edited with an introduction by C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1968), Part I, Chapter 14, p. 191. Spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation have been modernized.

other than the fact that I and he are different persons.”¹⁰

There is a similarity between this principle and Kant’s categorical imperative.

There is therefore only a single categorical imperative and it is this: “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”¹¹

This principle was also reasserted in the twentieth century by R. M. Hare.

Universalizability can be explained in various equivalent ways; it comes to this, that if we make different moral judgments about situations which we admit to be identical in their universal descriptive properties, we contradict ourselves. By 'different', I mean 'such that, if they were made about the same situation, they would be inconsistent with one another'.¹²

In addition to his principle of moral non-contradiction, Cumberland originated this definition of the standard of right action:

All these [universal natural] laws may be comprehended under one single universal law...That the fullest, most vigorous endeavour of each and all rational agents, in promoting the common good of the whole rational system, contributes effectually to the good of each single part in such a system; under which whole, or system, the single, individual happiness of each, and all of us, is essentially contained (P.IX, p.xxv-xxvi).

10 Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1907; reprint ed., introduction by John Rawls, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981): 379.

11 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated by H. J. Paton (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 3rd ed., 1956; reprint ed., New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 1964): 421. The similarity between this view and Kant’s was noted by John Rawls, who, however, attributed it to Samuel Clarke (who was influenced by Cumberland) and did not mention Cumberland. John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Barbara Herman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 76. Christine M. Korsgaard does the same. Christine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 76n63. For Kant’s familiarity with Cumberland, see Allen W. Wood, “Kant’s History of Ethics,” *Studies in the History of Ethics* (June 2005), <http://www.historyofethics.org/062005/KantsHistoryofEthics.pdf>: 4-7.

12 R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981): 21.

Wollaston should be understood as a participant in the rationalist project of attempting to derive universal moral laws from nature, who continued the project of developing a system of ethics by demonstration, by building on Cumberland's principle of moral non-contradiction.

While Wollaston accepted and used Cumberland's principle that an immoral action constitutes a logical contradiction, he was dissatisfied with existing moral theories because he regarded them all as failing to provide definite means of determining what is the right action in a particular situation.

Wollaston states:

Others acknowledge, that there is indeed moral good and evil; but they want some criterion, or mark, by the help of which they might know them asunder. And others there are, who pretend to have found that rule, by which our actions ought to be squared, and may be discriminated; or that ultimate end, to which all ought to be referred; but what they have advanced is either false, or not sufficiently guarded, or not comprehensive enough, or not clear and firm, or (so far as it is just) reducible to my rule (I.ix).¹³

Wollaston's objections to other moral theories are either:

- 1) They do not have a means of determining what is good or evil, or,
- 2) They do have such means but these means are either:
 - A) False
 - B) Too broad
 - C) Too narrow
 - D) Not clear

13 William Wollaston, *The Religion of Nature Delineated*, 8th ed. (London: 1759). All quotes from RND will be referenced by upper case Roman numeral for section number and lower case Roman numeral for proposition number. Spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation have been modernized. All square-bracketed items within quotes are my additions unless otherwise stated.

E) Amount to RND's rule.

He considers the following moral theories:

1. Honestum (I.ix).

Criterion: The good is honestum, either as the cause or the end of actions.

Objections: This does not provide a means of determining what is honestum and what is inhonesta (Objection 1).

2. Following nature (I.ix).

Criterion: Treating things as they are (according to their nature).

Objection: If they mean this, it is right (and the same as RND) but that is not what they mean; if they mean for human beings to follow only their nature, that is, their inclinations (unlike RND which requires following all of nature) that is wrong because human nature includes a brutish part which will mislead them. Because their definition of following nature is unclear, this standard is unclear (objection 2D).

3. Right reason (I.ix).

Criterion: Actions are to be judged according to their conformity to right reason; those which conform to right reason are lawful and good; those which do not are unlawful and bad.

Objection: It is true that what is according to right reason is right and what is against right reason is wrong. However, if by right reason is meant what is discovered by the correct use of reason then that is the same as truth and therefore covered by RND's rule (objection 2E); however, this rule is not clear enough as everyone claims his reason is right (objection 2D). In addition, it does not account for obtaining truth by sense information and therefore does not constitute the rule of treating everything as what it is, regardless of the means by which one has obtained knowledge of what it is (either reason or sense) (objection2C). As Wollaston states in RND Section III "Of

Reason”:

Reason without observation wants matter to work upon: and observations are...no[t] to be aptly applied without the assistance of reason (III.xvi).

(For the exposition of RND Section III see Chapter III.B below.)

4. Common Sense (I.ix).

Criterion: The “common sense of mankind” and innate principles.

Objection: There are no innate moral beliefs; they are the result of education. Also, the beliefs of human beings are not “uniform and constant” hence they are not common (objection 2A).

5. Pleasure (I.ix).

Criterion: The only good is pleasure, the only evil is pain.

Objection: Those who advocate this cannot agree on what specifics constitute pleasure nor what brings it about. Also, people differ and therefore the same things cannot be pleasures to all, therefore it is not possible to judge particular actions by this standard. In addition, without restraints this view leads to “gross voluptuousness.” This standard is not unclear, it is false; only true pleasure, that is, happiness, is the ultimate good (objection 2A). (For RND’s happiness standard see Chapter III.C below.)

6. Aristotle (I.ix).

Criterion: Virtue is the mean between two wrong extremes.

Objection: While often a useful standard of behavior this only applies to those virtues that lie between extremes; it does not cover several obligations (objection 2C); also, it does not offer much more than the idea of moderation in general; and it is difficult to discern the mean (as Aristotle was aware) (objection 2D).

7. Plato (I.ix).

Criterion: Virtue as likeness to God.

Objection: Does not say how to accomplish this (objection 2D); unless it means practicing truth and not acting contrary to it (which is the principle expressed in RND) (objection 2E).

Wollaston sought to develop a moral rule which would not have such faults. Although he did not explicitly criticize Cumberland's principle that the standard of right action is the promotion of the common good, it would presumably also be subject to the criticism that it is too general a principle.

Wollaston went beyond Cumberland's principle that an immoral act is a self-contradictory act by the moral agent, and broadened it to the principle that an immoral act is one which contradicts nature itself and thus violates the foundational principle of acting in accordance with nature. He did so by originating the principle that the actions of rational agents express propositions (See Chapter III.D below).

A true proposition may be denied, or things may be denied to be what they are, by deeds, as well as by express words or another proposition (I.iii).

The propositions expressed by actions have truth values, just as the propositions expressed by words do. Thus the principle of contradiction can be applied to the actions of rational agents, not only to their statements.

In addition, actions have more moral import than words because actions create states of affairs, whereas words are merely symbolic expressions of mental states.

I lay this down then as a fundamental maxim, That whoever acts as if things were so, or not so, doth by his acts declare, that they are so, or not so; as plainly as he could by words, and with more reality. And if the things are otherwise, his acts contradict those propositions, which assert them to be as they are (I.iii).

Thus, in Wollaston's system words and acts are not two separate categories; rather, words are a subcategory of acts. Moral agents perform acts, some of which constitute the expression of words, and some of which are deeds. Both the word acts and the deed acts express propositions. The propositions expressed by the deed acts have greater moral import because they create states of affairs, whereas the word acts are symbols of mental states. (For the complete explanation see Chapter III.D below.) Thus the claim that Wollaston's system consists of defining all immoral acts as lying is false. E.g., Jeremy Bentham:

We have one philosopher, who says, there is no harm in any thing in the world but in telling a lie.¹⁴

Rather,

The force of this doctrine is not that acting is a special case of speaking (as his traducers have alleged), but that speaking is a special case of acting.¹⁵

Cumberland's definition of an immoral act as a logical contradiction does not state how the moral agent "prescribes" the rules he does. In most cases, people do not state in words, "I hereby declare that one rule applies to me and the opposite rule applies to others." It may be argued that it is implicit in Cumberland that these "rules" are being "prescribed" by actions.

Thus, in Wollaston's system, the standard of contradiction is broadened from Cumberland's standard of the contradictory prescriptions of a rational agent, to the contradiction being a contradiction of nature itself. A false proposition denies nature to be what it is, and thus is

14 Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chapter 2, section 14, note 8, in D. D. Raphael, ed., *British Moralists 1650-1800* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1991), volume 2, section 959.

15 Ralph Stedman, "The Ethics of William Wollaston," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 118, no. 702 (August 1935): 219.

contrary to nature. If a rational agent's action expresses a proposition which is false, then it is denying nature to be what it is. Hence, a rational agent who deliberately performs an action which expresses a false proposition denies whatever part of nature is under consideration to be what it is and thus acts contrary to nature. As the foundational principle of this moral theory is acting in accordance with nature, such an action is immoral.

Contrary to the prevalent misrepresentation of Wollaston's theory, this principle has nothing whatever to do with what opinion an observer might form of an action. It concerns the action's relation to nature (see Chapter III below for the full account of Wollaston's theory and Chapter V below for the discussion of his critics).

Wollaston defines the status of an immoral act as a logical contradiction and of a moral act as a logical non-contradiction as follows:

[T]he formal ratio of moral good and evil be made to consist in a conformity of men's acts to the truth of the case or the contrary (I.ix).¹⁶

He gives the following example, in which A promises B not to do X, then A does X.

If A should enter into a compact with B, by which he promises and engages never to do some certain thing, and after this he does that thing; in this case it must be granted, that his act interferes with his promise, and is contrary to it. Now it cannot interfere with his promise, but it must also interfere with the truth of that proposition, which says there was such a promise made, or that there is such a compact subsisting. If this proposition be true, *A made such a certain agreement with B*, it would be denied by this, *A never made any agreement with B*. Why? Because the truth of this latter is inconsistent with the agreement asserted in the former. The formality of the denial, or that, which makes it to be a denial, is this inconsistency. If then the behaviour of A be inconsistent with the agreement mentioned in the former proposition, that proposition is as much denied by A's behaviour, as it can be by the latter, or any other proposition. Or thus, if one

16 This argument is based on a correspondence theory of truth (RND I.ii) which is based on Locke's definition of truth as "ideas agreeing to things" (IV.5.8) and "real knowledge" as "ideas agree[ing] with the reality of things" (IV.4.18). See the exposition of RND Section III "Of Reason" in Chapter III.B below.

proposition imports or contains that which is contrary to what is contained in another, it is said to contradict this other, and denies the existence of what is contained in it. Just so if one act imports what is contrary to the import of another, it contradicts this other, and denies its existence (I.iii).

A promises not to do something, then he does it. That A made that promise can be expressed by a proposition. That proposition is true. If A were to say that he did not make that promise, he would be contradicting the true proposition that states that he made that promise. When A does the thing he promised not to do, his action can also be described by a proposition. That proposition also contradicts the proposition that describes his promise. This constitutes the formal contradiction his action expresses.

As follows:

A performs the act of promising not to do X:

$\text{Pr}\sim\text{X}$.

This action can be described by a true proposition:

$\text{P}(1) \text{Pr}\sim\text{X}$.

If A then expressed a proposition denying that he made the promise, it would be this:

$\text{P}(2) \sim(\text{Pr}\sim\text{X})$.

Proposition $\text{P}(2)$ contradicts proposition $\text{P}(1)$. In this case A has denied the true proposition $\text{P}(1)$ by expressing in words the contrary proposition $\text{P}(2)$.

If A performs act X, the action of performing X contradicts the action of promising not to do X:

$\text{X} = \sim(\text{Pr}\sim\text{X})$.

This action can be described by a proposition:

$\text{P}(3) \sim(\text{Pr}\sim\text{X})$.

This proposition also denies that the promise was made. Proposition P(3) is identical to proposition P(2). Hence, both the proposition expressed by words and the proposition expressed by the act (of doing X) deny the true proposition that the promise was made (proposition P(1)).

It is this denial that constitutes the formal contradiction, as both propositions P(2) and P(3) contradict true proposition P(1).

Nature, reason, truth, non-contradiction, the principle that actions express propositions, and happiness combine to form Wollaston's moral theory.

The foundational premise of Wollaston's moral theory is the principle, ultimately derived from Stoicism, that morality consists of acting in accordance with nature. Truth is coextensive with nature, as a true proposition is one which accurately describes nature (Section I of RND "Of Moral Good and Evil"; see Chapter III.D below). Human reason is a valid means of knowing nature; reason is also coextensive with truth, as it is the means of determining what is true, that is, deriving true propositions about nature by a combination of sense data and inferential deductions (Section III of RND "Of Reason"; see Chapter III.B below).

Rational observation of human nature leads to the conclusion that happiness, defined as an excess of pleasure over pain, is the goal of human life. It also leads to the conclusion that in order to attain happiness, it is necessary to act in accordance with truth, that is, nature and reason; therefore, happiness is coextensive with nature, truth, and reason (Section II of RND "Of Happiness"; see Chapter III.C below).

Human beings express propositions by their actions, as well as their words. The propositions expressed by actions are true or false, just as propositions expressed by words are true or false. To perform an action which expresses a false proposition is to deny truth and therefore to act contrary to nature (which is coextensive with truth), and is therefore immoral, in accordance

with the foundational premise (Section I); it also reduces happiness (which is coextensive with nature and truth) (Section II). The degree of immorality is determined by the quantity by which happiness is reduced. Therefore, in Wollaston's moral theory, happiness is the aim and standard, and truth is the means of attaining happiness. (For the explanation of Wollaston's moral theory, see Chapter III below.)

Wollaston defines his moral theory as natural religion, and natural religion as the union of truth, happiness, and reason.

[N]atural religion is grounded upon this triple and strict alliance or union of *truth*, *happiness*, and *reason*; all in the same interest, and conspiring by the same methods, to advance and perfect human nature: and its truest definition is, *The pursuit of happiness by the practice of reason and truth* (III.xii).

In Section I of RND natural religion is first defined as act obligations:

If there be moral good and evil, distinguished as before, there is religion; and such as may most properly be styled natural. By *religion* I mean nothing else but an obligation to do (under which word I comprehend acts both of body and mind...) what ought not to be omitted, and to forbear what ought not to be done (I.x).

And truth is defined as what is in accordance with nature:

Those propositions are true, which express things as they are: or, truth is the conformity of those words or signs, by which things are expressed, to the things themselves. Defin. (I.ii).

In section II of RND, happiness is demonstrated to be the aim of human nature; and acting in accordance with truth, that is, in accordance with nature, is demonstrated to be the means of attaining it. Which leads to the conclusion that:

[T]he way to happiness and the practice of truth incur the one into the other (II.xiv).

And that because they are coincident, they both constitute natural religion:

And since both these [the way to happiness, the practice of truth] unite so amicably, and are at last the same, here is *one* religion which may be called natural upon *two* accounts (II.xiv).

In Section III of RND, it is demonstrated that reason is the means of discovering truth:

There is such a thing as right reason: or, truth may be discovered by reasoning (III.ix).

And therefore,

To act according to right reason, and to act according to truth are in effect the same thing (III.x).

Which leads to the above conclusion of the union of truth, happiness, and reason as constituting natural religion.

Wollaston summarizes his argument as follows:

Whether any of those other foundations, upon which morality has been built, will hold better than these mentioned, I much question. But if the *formal ratio* of moral good and evil be made to consist in a conformity of mens acts to the *truth of the case* or the contrary, as I have here explained it, [in Section I of RND; see exposition of it in Chapter III.D below] the distinction seems to be settled in a manner undeniable, intelligible, practicable. For as what is meant by a true proposition and matter of fact is perfectly understood by every body; so will it be easy for any one, so far as he knows any such propositions and facts, to compare not only words, but also actions with them.¹⁷ A very little skill and attention will serve to interpret even these, and discover whether they speak truth, or not (I.ix).

Wollaston's moral rule can be summarized as follows:

It is wrong for a human being (a moral agent), knowingly ("designedly") to perform an action which asserts a proposition which is false and affects the happiness of himself or (an)other human being(s). It is right to refrain from doing so. It is right, and an obligation, to pursue happiness, defined as an excess of pleasure over pain (in the long run and according to reason, not mere sense), for both oneself and others, via actions which are in accordance with the above rule.

¹⁷ "Actions...can enter into logical relations with each other and with other bearers of meaning and implication: thoughts, words, beliefs, hopes and expectations." Renford Bambrough, "Thought, Word and Deed, Part I," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Suppl. LIV (July 1980): 107.

Wollaston's statement of his moral rule is:

That every intelligent, active, and free being should so behave himself, as by no act to contradict truth; or, that he should treat every thing as being what it is (I.xi).

Writing of this period Stephen L. Darwall says:

[T]he works of Cudworth, Cumberland, and Shaftesbury continue to be largely unread by all but the most dedicated specialists. It is my hope to make evident, however, both how central these texts are to one of the most exciting periods in the history of ethical thought and how enduring their intrinsic philosophical interest continues to be.¹⁸

This thought applies to RND as well. The roots of moral realism lie in eighteenth-century rationalism.¹⁹ However, moral realism is often defined as referring to external moral entities as in the Norton quote above, and this statement by Korsgaard:

Moral realism, then, is the view that propositions employing moral concepts may have truth values because moral concepts describe or refer to normative entities or facts that exist independently of those concepts themselves.²⁰

Contrary to this claim, Wollaston's theory does not consist of claims of knowledge of external normative entities, but rather of normative principles derived from rational analysis of empirical knowledge. There is a family resemblance between his theory and that of one of the most frequently cited contemporary works on moral realism, that of Peter Railton.²¹ (For a comparison of Wollaston's views with Railton's see Chapter VI below.) Wollaston's role in the history of

18 Darwall, 22.

19 E.g., "[Samuel Clarke's] work contains the first clear statement of the position we have come to know as moral realism." Christine M. Korsgaard, "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy," *The Journal of Philosophical Research*, Philosophy in America at the Turn of the Century, The Philosophy Documentation Center (2003): 99. As mentioned in note 12 above, Clarke's theory is influenced by Richard Cumberland's.

20 Ibid., 100.

21 Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *The Philosophical Review* 95, no. 2 (April 1986): 163-207.

rationalism/moral realism has long been neglected, as he has been dismissed with vague statements that he is a follower of Samuel Clarke, and his theory frequently replaced by straw men. An accurate exposition of his moral theory will add to knowledge of the development of rationalism and of the precursors of contemporary moral realism.

The dissertation consists of the following chapters.

Chapter II is a survey of the response to RND over three centuries, tracing its decline from initial enthusiasm and praise to dismissal and neglect. The section concerning the twentieth century also constitutes the literature review.

Chapter III is an exposition of Wollaston's innovative moral theory which is set forth in Sections I-IV of RND. I have reorganized the argument to make it clearer and more detailed and also spelled out connections which Wollaston did not. I have also responded to some of the criticisms raised against the theory at the relevant points.

Chapter IV is an exposition of the moral instruction portion of RND, Sections V-IX. I have focused on those parts which expand upon the argument in the first part, such as Section IX's more detailed account of moral obligation. In addition, I have provided an exposition of Wollaston's political theory, which is of interest for its possible influence on eighteenth-century American thought, and considered some issues it raises.

Chapter V examines the arguments offered by Wollaston's most prominent and/or influential critics. For the most part, they turn out to be attacks on straw men.

In Chapter VI I consider possible reasons why RND declined into such (undeserved) neglect and disrepute, and argue that it is of interest not only for its place in the history of rationalism, and as a precursor of contemporary moral realism, but also because Wollaston's overlooked innovation could serve as a method of carrying out moral realism's project of deriving

moral truths by empirical observation.

CHAPTER II. THE RESPONSE TO WOLLASTON'S THEORY

A. THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: POPULARITY AND INFLUENCE

Wollaston was popular and highly regarded as a moral philosopher in the eighteenth century. Ten thousand copies of RND were sold within a few years of its publication in 1724.²² It provoked immediate debate; several pamphlets attacking and defending it were published within a year of its publication.²³ An abridged version of RND was published in 1726 (at the request of Sir Richard Steele).²⁴ In the same year an edition was published in Ireland with a specially commissioned translation of the Hebrew footnotes²⁵ and also a French translation.²⁶ It went

22 [John Clarke], Preface to *The Religion of Nature Delineated* by William Wollaston, 8th ed. (London: 1759): xxiv; John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester...* vol. 4 (London, 1795-1815): 528, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, document no. CW103199282.

23 John Clarke, *An Examination Of the Notion of Moral Good and Evil, Advanced in a late Book, entitled, The Religion of Nature Delineated* (London, 1725), <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, document no. CW119839350; [Thomas Bott], *The Principal and Peculiar Notion Advanc'd in a Late Book, Intitled, The Religion of Nature Delineated; Consider'd and Refuted. In a Letter to a Gentleman* (London, 1725), <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, document no. CW123174468; [Joseph Spence], *A Defence of Mr. Wollaston's Notion of Moral Good and Evil; In Answer to a Letter, In Which It is said to be Considered and Refuted* (London, 1725), <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, document no. CW123094054; Anonymous, *A Brief Profession of Religion, as founded on Reason, Consistent with, and confirm'd by Revelation. Collected and drawn up in the present Form, by a Gentleman. To which are added, Some Thoughts, occasion'd by a late Remarker on the principal and peculiar Notions advanced in The Religion of Nature Delineated. And on A Letter to the Reverend Dr. C _____ Added to a late Essay towards a Demonstration of the Scripture-Trinity* (London, 1725), <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, document no. CW123274196.

24 Anonymous, *A Compendious View of the Religion of Nature Delineated. With an Appendix Concerning the Christian Religion* (London: R. Williamson, 1726), <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, document no. CW118784073.

25 [William Wollaston], *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (Dublin: George Grierson and George Ewing, 1726): iv-v, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, document no. CW119696965.

26 [William] Wollaston, *Ebauche de la religion naturelle* (La Haye: Jean Swart, 1726), <http://www.books.google.com>.

through eight editions by 1759.

The regard in which Wollaston was held in the decades following the publication of RND is expressed by John Conybeare.

I believe it will be allowed by every one, that this is the most complete system of moral principles and precepts, which hath been yet given us on the mere foot of natural reason....Surely those persons who have set so great a value on Mr. Woollaston's [sic] performance, have not mistaken matters so much, as to bestow the highest praise on him....Thus much I am sure may be concluded from the general applause with which this gentleman's book hath been received, that it was thought to contain something extraordinary.²⁷

Wollaston was thought to have made progress towards the goal of deriving moral principles by demonstration, a goal proposed by Locke, among others,

Though by the view I had of moral ideas whilst I was considering that subject, I thought I saw that morality might be demonstratively made out [Locke's Familiar Letters, p. 10.] [Brackets in original.]²⁸

Leslie Stephen states that RND “[was] quoted with profound respect by contemporary writers.”²⁹

Admiration of Wollaston reached the top of society. Among Wollaston’s admirers was Queen Caroline (consort of George II), who commissioned a translation of RND’s footnotes by John Clarke,³⁰ and who placed a bust of Wollaston alongside those of Robert Boyle, Isaac

27 John Conybeare, *A Defence of Revealed Religion, Against the Exceptions of a Late Writer, in His Book, Intituled, Christianity as old as the Creation* [1732], 4th ed. (Dublin: Grierson, McKenzie, and Moore, 1788): 169-179, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, document no. CW121916856.

28 Ibid., 169.

29 Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 3rd ed. [1902] (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962), vol. 1, ch. 3, sec. 38:109.

30 [Clarke], Preface, xxx.

Newton, John Locke, and Samuel Clarke in her Hermitage³¹— whose purpose was to “make an artistic statement of her belief that natural religion and the new science could be reconciled.”³²

The arrangement of the busts, Newton and Locke on one side, Samuel Clarke and Wollaston on the other, and Robert Boyle in the center, expressed the relation between natural philosophy and science—“Robert Boyle, an adept both of natural philosophy and Newtonian science, provided a link between the two pendant pairs of worthies and presided over the pantheon as a whole.”³³

Later in the Eighteenth Century RND was still sufficiently well-regarded to serve as a major influence on the decision rendered in a landmark intellectual property case in Britain (Donaldson vs. Becket, decided in 1774).³⁴ One of the judges in the case, Richard Aston, quoted RND's section on property extensively in his decision.³⁵ Wollaston's property rights theory went further than Locke's in its emphasis on property rights as emanating from the individual's ownership of himself.³⁶ (See Chapter IV.B below.) (This theory of self-ownership plays a major role in modern libertarian thinking.)³⁷ Aston's use of it emphasized the status of a literary work as

31 Judith Colton, “Merlin's Cave and Queen Caroline: Garden Art as Political Propaganda,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 1-20, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2737814>.

32 Ibid., 1.

33 Ibid., 2.

34 Gregory Hahn, “Anti-Copyright: 18th- and 20th-Century Arguments Against Copyright” (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1993): 138-143; Martin A. Kayman, “Lawful Writing: Common Law, Statute and the Properties of Literature,” *New Literary History* 27, no. 4, Literature, Media, and the Law (Autumn, 1996): 761-783, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057390>.

35 Hahn, 138-143.

36 George H. Smith, “William Wollaston on Property Rights,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1978): 217-224, http://mises.org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/journals/jls/2_3/2_3_2.pdf.

37 Ibid.

an expression of its creator.³⁸

RND was sufficiently familiar for one of its central premises to be cited in a moral manual for tradesmen: “persons may *act* as well as speak a lie: for, words are but the mode of expressing our apprehensions, which may as strongly be signified by actions.”³⁹

RND was on a list of 156 books on moral philosophy and metaphysics which were “recommended or in use” at Cambridge in 1730.⁴⁰

RND was also popular and influential in America. “[T]he two moralists whose writings were probably more widely approved of in Britain and America in the second quarter of the century than those of any other philosophers: William Wollaston and Francis Hutcheson.”⁴¹

RND was part of the curriculum at Harvard and was in the Harvard library by 1725. As conflict with Britain increased, it was one of the texts used to support arguments in favor of the contractual basis of the state.⁴² Myers states: “Hooker, Selden, Taylor, and Wollaston are not titles that have been seen as basic to the formation of the American political mind, yet their presence in Johnson's syllabi of readings should alert modern scholars to their possible subtle

38 Kayman, *Lawful Writing*, 774.

39 Isaac Watts, *The Religious Tradesman: or, Plain and Serious Hints of Advice for the Tradesman's Prudent and pious Conduct; from his Entrance into Business, to his leaving it off*. (London: T. Field, 1792): 96, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOME>, document no. U102370463. This is an adaptation of a 1684 work by Richard Steele.

40 A. Rupert Hall, “Cambridge: Newton's Legacy,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 55, no. 2 (May 2001): 218, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/532096>.

41 Norman S. Fiering, “Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 2 (April-June 1976): 205, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708821>.

42 Minor Myers, Jr., “A Source of Eighteenth-Century Harvard Master's Questions,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series 38, no. 2 (April 1981): 261-267, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1918778>.

influence.”⁴³

At Yale, RND was a central ethics text during Thomas Clap's presidency (1740-1766).⁴⁴ Clap regarded RND as “the best of the ‘many Treatises which contain good Rules of external Conduct’” and Yale students were “thoroughly drilled in Wollaston.”⁴⁵ RND continued to be used as a text under the presidency (1777-1795) of Ezra Stiles, who had studied it while an undergraduate at Yale. Stiles taught the senior year moral philosophy course.⁴⁶

Some American intellectuals wrote ethics treatises which were based on RND. James Logan “one of the three or four most considerable men in colonial America,”⁴⁷ (and a mentor of Benjamin Franklin), first read RND “with great excitement in the autumn of 1726.”⁴⁸ A decade later, Logan began writing a treatise on ethics, “[t]aking Wollaston's *Religion of Nature Delineated* as his model.”⁴⁹ (He did not complete it.) Wollaston’s views on biology also led Logan to conduct notable experiments in botany.⁵⁰ Samuel Johnson, the first president of King’s College (later Columbia University) from 1754-1763, wrote a treatise on ethics that was influenced by

43 Ibid., 266.

44 Fiering, “Irresistible Compassion,” 206n31.

45 Leon Howard, *The Connecticut Wits* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1943): 10, 26.

46 Gladys Bryson, “The Emergence of the Social Sciences from Moral Philosophy,” *International Journal of Ethics* 42, no. 3 (April 1932): 304-323, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2989580>.

47 Frederick B. Tolles, *James Logan and the Culture of Provincial America*, The Library of American Biography, ed. Oscar Handlin (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1957): 6.

48 Frederick B. Tolles, “Philadelphia's First Scientist: James Logan,” *Isis* 47, no. 1 (March 1956): 20-30.

49 Tolles, *James Logan*, 208-9.

50 Tolles, “Philadelphia’s First Scientist,” 28; Tolles, *James Logan*, 200-202.

RND and explicitly referenced it.⁵¹ Jonathan Edwards may also have been somewhat influenced by RND. He mentioned Wollaston briefly in his treatise *The Nature of True Virtue* (not published in his lifetime).⁵² A commentator states: “Here Edwards is subconsciously verging on the doctrine of William Wollaston that vice consists in acting contrary to truth and not treating things as they are.”⁵³

RND’s political theory (see Chapter IV.B-C below for the similarity between Wollaston’s political theory and revolutionary ideas), among others, influenced the American Revolution.⁵⁴ Richard Bland, a prominent member of the government of Virginia, cited RND in his 1766 pamphlet *Inquiry Into the Rights of the British Colonies*.⁵⁵ Thomas Jefferson owned a copy of RND⁵⁶ (Wollaston defines natural religion as “The pursuit of happiness by the practice of reason and truth” (III.xii.3)). John Witherspoon, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and an early and influential president of Princeton (1768-1794) listed RND in the bibliography of his

51 James W. Woelfel, “William Wollaston’s Religion of Nature and Samuel Johnson’s System of Morality,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 34 (1965): 239-264.

52 Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue* [1755], ch. 3, sec. 4, <http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/texts/edwards/virtue.htm>.

53 A. Owen Aldridge, “Edwards and Hutcheson,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 44, no. 1 (January 1951): 43n14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1508416>.

54 Herbert Lawrence Ganter, “Jefferson’s ‘Pursuit of Happiness’ and Some Forgotten Men,” *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine* 2nd ser. 16, no. 4 (October 1936): 558-585, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0043-5597%28193610%292%3A16%3A4%3C558%3AJ%22OHAS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-E>; also Myers, “Harvard Master’s Questions.”

55 Richard Bland, *An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies*, ed. Earl Gregg Swem (Richmond [VA]: Appeals Press, Inc. for the William Parks Club, 1922): 9, 10, <http://www.books.google.com>.

56 Ganter, “Jefferson’s ‘Pursuit of Happiness.’”

published lectures.⁵⁷ RND was present in a significant portion of American libraries.⁵⁸

57 Francis Broderick, "Pulpit, Physics, and Politics: The Curriculum of the College of New Jersey, 1746-1794," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 6, no. 1 (January 1949): 42-68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1921859>.

58 David Lundberg, Henry F. May, "The Enlightened Reader in America," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2, Special Issue: An American Enlightenment (Summer 1976): 262-293, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-0678%28197622%2928%3A2%3C262%3ATERIA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-G>.

B. THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: DECLINE AND DISMISSAL

In the nineteenth century, RND gradually fell into disrepute. By 1807, Timothy Dwight, president of Yale from 1795-1817, who had been one of the undergraduates “drilled in Wollaston,” was (according to a student’s notes) dismissing RND in his ethics lectures as “Mr. Wollaston asserts that all sin is telling a lie, and all virtue is truth. A very absurd assertion.”⁵⁹

Although RND had been out of print since the eighteenth century, there is evidence it was still read and met with mixed reactions. An 1849 book on crime and punishment begins the chapter on punishment by quoting extensively Wollaston’s views on how people should be treated (Section II, proposition i, observations 5, 6, and 7 in their entirety).⁶⁰

On the other hand, it was also subject to contemptuous dismissals such as this:

It will suffice on these subjects if I remark, that we are told by a much venerated authority, that it is not what enters into a man—not what he eats and what he drinks—but the words which come out of him that defile him; and that such was the well-weighed conviction of a philosopher of some celebrity of the last century, that he represented, and with great though not perfect truth, all immorality and all crimes to be nothing more than telling lies or giving a false representation of things.⁶¹

More serious historians of ethics or philosophy dealt with RND briefly in entries ranging from a sentence to a page or two, of varying accuracy. They sometimes listed him as a follower of

59 Vincent Freimarck, “Rhetoric at Yale in 1807,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 110, no. 4 (August 23, 1966): 241, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/985686>.

60 R[obert] Hovenden, *Crime & Punishment; Or the Question, How should we Treat our Criminals? Practically Considered* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1849): 58, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOME>, document no. U106870508.

61 Thomas Hodgskin, “‘Peace, law, and order,’: a lecture delivered in the hall of the National Association on September 29, 1842,” *Hume Tracts* (1842): 3-4, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60207083>.

Samuel Clarke and categorized his theory as a variation of Clarke's theory of fitness.⁶²

Late in the century Leslie Stephen's influential history of eighteenth-century thought⁶³ propagated Bentham's straw man. That, and Hume's straw man, became the prevailing view of RND which by that time had been out of print for over a century.

L. A. Selby-Bigge's collection of texts by British moralists was, by then, the most readily available version of RND, but as it contained only portions of the first two chapters, it presented readers with only the theoretical portion of the book, and only a part of that.⁶⁴

62 F. C. Schlosser, *History of the Eighteenth Century and of the Nineteenth Till the Overthrow of the French Empire; With Particular Reference to Mental Cultivation and Progress, Volume I*, trans. D. Davison (London: Chapman and Hall, 1843): 46, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOME>, document no. U106293628; Friedrich Ueberweg, *History of Philosophy: From Thales to the Present Time, Vol. II: History of Modern Philosophy*, 4th ed., trans. Geo. S. Morris with additions by the translator. An appendix on English and American Philosophy by Noah Porter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1873; 1909 reprint edition): 91, 382-3, <https://archive.org/details/historyofphiloso02uebeuft>; Johann Eduard Erdmann, *A History of Philosophy, Volume II: Modern Philosophy*, translation edited by Williston S. Hough (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1890): 119-121, <http://www.books.google.com>; Wilhelm Windelband, *History of Philosophy, Volume II: Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Modern*, trans. James H. Tufts (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901; reprint edition, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958): 504; Noah Porter, *The Elements of Moral Science: Theoretical and Practical* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885): 422, <http://books.google.com>.

63 Stephen, *History of English Thought*, 109-12. Most of Stephen's comments on RND consist of an attack on Wollaston's argument for an afterlife.

64 L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed., *British Moralists, Being Selections from Writers principally of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1897; reprint ed., intro. Bernard H. Baumrin, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964). Another anthology containing excerpts from RND was published early in the twentieth century: Benjamin Rand, *The Classical Moralists: Selections Illustrating Ethics from Socrates to Martineau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), <http://books.google.com>.

C. THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: SPORADIC INTEREST

This section also constitutes the literature review.

In the Twentieth Century, occasionally a philosopher would encounter RND, conclude that Wollaston’s theory was interesting and worth consideration, and write a paper recommending discussion of it. This was done by Ralph Stedman in the 1930s, Stanley Tweyman, and Joel Feinberg in the 1970s, and Olin Joynton in the 1980s. However, these attempts did not succeeded in generating more widespread consideration of Wollaston’s moral theory.

RND...in its ethical portions is one of the subtlest treatises on morals in the language.⁶⁵

.....

[A] thinker who could...so acutely analyse the ethical situation that on several of the crucial points he anticipates, in so far as he does not actually influence, the two greatest moralists of the eighteenth century [Butler and Kant], deserves a better fate than his countrymen have accorded him.⁶⁶

.....

Wollaston will be found to be a moral philosopher with important things to say, and therefore to be a moral philosopher with a theory worth taking seriously.⁶⁷

.....

A fair-minded contemporary reader, I think, will find that Wollaston did have something important and original to say, however confused his manner of saying it, so that is one reason for reexamining his major work, *The Religion of Nature Delineated*.⁶⁸

65 Ralph Stedman, “The Ethics of William Wollaston,” *The Nineteenth Century and After* 118, no. 702 (August 1935): 217.

66 *Ibid.*, 225.

67 Stanley Tweyman, “Truth, Happiness and Obligation: The Moral Philosophy of William Wollaston,” *Philosophy* 51 (1976): 35.

68 Feinberg, “Wollaston and His Critics,” 345.

Ralph Stedman's paper "The Ethics of William Wollaston"⁶⁹ is primarily a corrective to the straw-man attacks on Wollaston from Hume to Leslie Stephen. In the limited space of a paper, he discusses briefly many important points of Wollaston's theory. Aside from correcting specific misrepresentations of Wollaston's theory, he notes a distinction between the form of the theory, which is rationalistic, and its content, which he likens to Aristotelian *phronesis*; and the distinction between the dominance of reason, which is absolute, and its scope, which is more modest. The result is to make probability the primary guide of life. He argues that Wollaston's theory does not depend on theism, but only some of his specific positions do. He also notes that Wollaston was so widely read in the Eighteenth Century that his ideas were "public property" and may have influenced Kant. (Kant's contemporary Garve said that "the Kantian principle, if strictly and consistently applied, was bound to lead to the doctrine of Wollaston."⁷⁰ Clifford Griffeth Thompson⁷¹ says that German historians of philosophy regarded Wollaston as a precursor of Kant but his references for this are unreliable. Arthur N. Prior says, "[M]any subsequent ethical theories have been adumbrations of [Wollaston's] central idea. It is present, for example, in Kant's well-known view that a right action must be one which we can 'without self-contradiction' imagine as performed by every rational being."⁷²)

Stanley Tweyman, who edited a facsimile edition of RND, discusses the question of why

69 Ibid.

70 This quote is a summary of Garve's position from Alexander Altmann, "William Wollaston: English Deist and Rabbinic Scholar" [1948] in *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969): 212n5.

71 Clifford Griffeth Thompson, *The Ethics of William Wollaston* (Boston: Richard G. Badger, The Gorham Press, 1922).

72 Arthur N. Prior, *Logic and the Basis of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949): 56.

RND eventually faded from consideration in his Introduction.⁷³ He suggests that Wollaston's death soon after its publication meant he could not defend it, nor could he elaborate what he regarded as only a rough draft (delineation means rough draft).

In his paper Tweyman⁷⁴ summarizes the relationships of truth, happiness, and obligation in Wollaston's theory. Both truth and happiness are criteria of right action. The harmony between them is guaranteed by God. Both self and others are beings that naturally seek happiness. Inasmuch as that is human nature, there is a duty to make oneself happy, which is thus an obligation. The obligations which follow from happiness are the same as the obligations which follow from reason.

Joel Feinberg's paper "Wollaston and His Critics"⁷⁵ is based on his interpretation of Wollaston's theory as focusing on the expressive function of actions, an interest that Feinberg shares. His interpretation of RND follows Hume's claim that Wollaston's theory concerned an action's effect on the perception of onlookers;⁷⁶ it thus omits consideration of Wollaston's happiness criterion and therefore leads him to claim that Wollaston's theory cannot explain why some acts are worse than others and that it assumes moral principles that are distinct from it. It also leads him to discuss the difficulties of determining the characteristics of an act merely from observing it.

Feinberg refutes Hume's claim (based on his straw man) that if a natural event or a mistake

73 Stanley Tweyman, Introduction to *The Religion of Nature Delineated*, by William Wollaston (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1974).

74 Tweyman, "Truth, Happiness and Obligation."

75 Feinberg, "Wollaston and His Critics."

76 That this claim constitutes a straw man is discussed in Chapter V.A below.

causes a false perception then that event or mistake would be immoral, and responds to Hume's criticism of Wollaston's theory as circular.

Feinberg regards Wollaston as reworking the Stoic ideas of following nature. He is interested in Wollaston's position that some actions can express propositions because it supports Feinberg's position that there are cases in which people experience a feeling of violated truth that is distinct from feeling sympathy for the victim of an injury. (For a discussion of Feinberg's paper see Chapter V.D below.)

Olin Joynton⁷⁷ responds to Feinberg's paper, arguing that Feinberg misinterpreted Wollaston as making the deontological claim that making false assertions is wrong in and of itself. In order to do so, Feinberg regards Wollaston as claiming that all actions are declarative. Joynton claims this is a misinterpretation and argues that Wollaston regarded only those actions which would be understood by an observer to be declarative and that this means he cannot account for actions which are nondeclarative.

In his second paper,⁷⁸ Joynton addresses the criticism of circularity that has been directed at RND, namely, that the totality of truths includes moral truths, hence they are being assumed. Joynton argues that happiness and truth have different roles in Wollaston's system. Happiness is the aim of morality and acting according to truth is the rule for obtaining happiness. Wrong actions are wrong because they threaten happiness, not because they interfere with truth. Thus, while all truth-violations are wrong, the degree of wrongness is determined by the amount of harm

77 Olin Joynton, "Wollaston's Theory of Declarative Actions," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 19 (Winter 1981): 439-449.

78 Olin Joynton, "The Problem of Circularity in Wollaston's Moral Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22 (October, 1984): 435-43.

to human happiness.

The reason truth rather than happiness-diminishment is the criterion, is that knowledge is clearer than hedonistic judgment, individuals vary, and pain and pleasure are conscious states knowable only to the subject. The hedonic calculus is not useful because of its subjectivity. Finding the propositions in actions and testing their truth is a better procedure for identifying the moral qualities of actions than predicting their effect on happiness (which can only be subjectively known).

In a recent paper⁷⁹ John J. Tilley argues that Tweyman's and Feinberg's criticisms of Hume's criticism of RND overlook and thus do not refute an error by Hume, which is his failure to recognize that “[t]he fact that two properties, W and S, are necessarily coextensive in a certain domain does not imply that in every domain in which S occurs, it shares its extension (in whole or in part) with W” (93). Hume's argument depends on assuming that in RND falsehood is identical to moral wrongness and that this extends to all domains, including inanimate objects.

In another paper⁸⁰ he argues that Bott's, Hutcheson's, and John Clarke of Hull's criticisms of RND are successful, unlike better-known ones by Hume, Bentham, etc., and are the reason interest in RND faded. (See Chapter V.A below for more on this.) On the other hand, in another paper,⁸¹ he argues that Hutcheson's and Clarke's claims that RND is inconsistent are not successful but Thomas Bott's claim is successful. (See Chapter V.B below for more on this.)

79 John J. Tilley, “Physical Objects and Moral Wrongness: Hume on the ‘Fallacy’ in Wollaston's Moral Theory,” *Hume Studies* 35, nos. 1-2 (2009): 87-101, doi: 10.1353/hms.2009.0006.

80 John J. Tilley, “Wollaston's Early Critics,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, no. 6 (2012): 1097-1116, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2012.731239>.

81 John J. Tilley, “The Problem of Inconsistency in Wollaston's Moral Theory,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (July 2012): 265-280.

Other twentieth-century sources are discussed below.

A Ph.D. dissertation on Wollaston was written by Clifford Thompson in 1922 (at Yale).⁸² He discusses the views of many nineteenth-century historians of philosophy and various issues raised by Wollaston's theory.

Alexander Altmann's monograph *William Wollaston: English Deist and Rabbinic Scholar*, traces the influence of Jewish philosophers on Wollaston's thought using the Hebrew footnotes in RND. Wollaston's Hebrew references are from an extraordinarily wide range of sources and show great biblical and rabbinic scholarship. Altmann concludes, "There is hardly any important topic in Wollaston's exposition of Natural Religion in which the influence of medieval Jewish philosophy does not make itself felt in some degree."⁸³ He also notes that Wollaston is expressing the humanist idea of the unity of knowledge by quoting from many different sources in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

The nature of Wollaston's religious views is discussed by James Woelfel and Chester Chapin. In "William Wollaston's Religion of Nature and Samuel Johnson's System of Morality," Woelfel argues that Wollaston's views were in accord with Anglican belief. He classifies Wollaston as "orthodox, albeit very latitudinarian" and characterizes his "understanding of prayer and worship" as "idiosyncratically Anglican."⁸⁴ Chapin, in "Was William Wollaston (1660-1724) a Deist?"⁸⁵ argues against the view espoused by Leslie Stephen that Wollaston should be classified as a deist. Chapin argues that Wollaston was "orthodox in a distinctively

82 Thompson, *The Ethics of William Wollaston*.

83 Altmann, "William Wollaston: English Deist," 228.

84 Woelfel, "William Wollaston's Religion of Nature," 249.

85 Chester Chapin, "Was William Wollaston (1660-1724) a Deist?" *ANQ* (April 1994): 72-76.

Anglican manner”⁸⁶ because he was not regarded as a deist by his contemporaries and he affirmed several Anglican doctrines.

RND’s political theory appears in discussions of property rights. George H. Smith’s paper⁸⁷ (see Section A above) summarizes Wollaston’s theory of property rights and argues that it anticipates twentieth-century libertarian theories of property rights. The influence of Wollaston’s property rights theory in the eighteenth century is also discussed by Hahn and Kayman (see section A above).

Some books and papers mention Wollaston briefly.

In his book *Logic and the Basis of Ethics*, Arthur Prior compares Wollaston with Kant: a right action must be one that we can imagine “without self-contradiction” as performed by every rational being.⁸⁸ Prior discusses Wollaston primarily as a transitional figure between Samuel Clarke and later moral philosophers.

In his book *The Logic of Saint Anselm*,⁸⁹ Desmond Henry briefly compares Anselm and Wollaston and speculates whether Wollaston read Anselm.

Renford Bambrough⁹⁰ discusses Wollaston as part of his paper on the relationships of thoughts, words, and actions. He argues that because actions express propositions they can have the logical relations of propositions. Thus, thoughts, words, and deeds may all agree or conflict with each other. He also argues that logical and moral thought are closely related although this is

86 Ibid., 73.

87 Smith, “William Wollaston on Property Rights.”

88 Prior, *Logic and the Basis of Ethics*, 56.

89 Desmond Paul Henry, *The Logic of Saint Anselm* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967): 230-240.

90 Bambrough, “Thought, Word and Deed, Part I.”

not commonly recognized. R. F. Holland's paired paper⁹¹ discusses a straw man, not RND.

An exchange by Alan Brinton⁹² and Alan Millar⁹³ concerning Butler briefly mentions Wollaston. Brinton makes a passing reference to Wollaston as proponent of the idea that, "moral good and evil (and virtue) are a function of the nature of things in a larger sense, which goes beyond human nature,"⁹⁴ and Millar notes that Butler was concerned by a criticism by Wollaston of the idea of following nature as encompassing all parts of human nature including the brutish ones (rather than limiting it to reason).

Lastly, Oliver Johnson's paper, "Hume's Refutation of—Wollaston?"⁹⁵ makes an interesting argument concerning the criticism Hume directed at Wollaston. Johnson argues that Hume claims that Wollaston argued that immorality consists of creating false judgments in an observer. Hume's argument against this position is that it takes the issue of morality or immorality away from the action, leaving it entirely in the (rational) reactions of the observer. But Hume's theory of ethics is that judgments of morality and immorality are solely (emotional) reactions in an observer. Therefore, Hume's argument against Wollaston refutes his own moral theory.

91 R. F. Holland, "Thought, Word and Deed, Part II," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Suppl. LIV (July 1980): 119-132.

92 Alan Brinton, "'Following Nature' in Butler's Sermons," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 31, no. 164 (1991): 325-332.

93 Alan Millar, "Reply to Brinton," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 169 (October 1992): 486-491.

94 *Ibid.*, 331-2.

95 Oliver Johnson, "Hume's Refutation of—Wollaston?" *Hume Studies* 12 (November 1986): 192-200.

CHAPTER III. WOLLASTON'S MORAL THEORY

A. THE STRUCTURE OF *THE RELIGION OF NATURE DELINEATED*

The moral rule is stated in the first section, "Of Moral Good and Evil." Section II, "Of Happiness," sets forth happiness as the standard for the moral rule. Section III, "Of Reason, and the Ways of Discovering Truth," is an argument for the validity of reason. Section IV, "Of the Obligations of Imperfect Beings with Respect to Their Power of Acting," defines the extent of moral obligation.

The rest of the book consists of application, that is, of establishing true statements about certain issues. Section V, "Truths Relating to the Deity. Of His Existence, Perfection, Providence, etc." consists of arguments for the existence of God and discussion of some related issues. This is the longest chapter in the book. Section VI, "Truths Respecting Mankind in General, Antecedent to All Human Laws," begins with what Wollaston terms a "principle of individuation" which leads to equality of rights. In modern terms, it's a theory of individual rights. As the title indicates, these rights are inherent in human beings and precede all government. Section VII, "Truths Respecting Particular Societies of Men, or Governments" is a theory of legitimate government. Human beings are social. Government is created by mutual consent, its purpose is the common welfare, and its laws must be in accordance with natural justice. Section VIII, "Truths Concerning Families and Relations." Views concerning marriage, children, and other relations. Section IX, "Truths Belonging to a Private Man, and Respecting (Directly) Only Himself." Views on the proper way to lead one's life (rational and virtuous), the nature and immortality of the soul, etc. This is the second longest section in the book

This chapter of the dissertation constitutes an explication of Wollaston's moral theory which is presented in the first four chapters of RND. In the next chapter I will discuss the

remaining application sections of RND.

The complexity of the argument in RND makes it difficult to follow. The order in which the argument is presented is the reverse of the structure of the argument. The moral rule which is the conclusion of the argument is presented first, in section I. The premises on which the moral rule depends come after it. When the premises are presented, the moral rule is not repeated, and the connection between the moral rule and its premises is not clearly stated. The standard of the moral rule, i.e., happiness, is presented in Section II, after the rule itself. The argument for the validity of reason is presented in Section III, following the argument for the moral rule in Section I, and the standard for the rule in Section II. Yet it underlies the entire argument, which is that this moral rule can be derived by reason alone.

Thus, the conclusion which is presented in the first section depends on principles established in both the second and third sections, and the principle established in the second section depends on the principle established in the third section. Because the premises follow the conclusion it is easy for readers to overlook them and miss the structure of the argument. It can also be difficult to keep track of the intricate connections among truth, reason, happiness, and nature.

In addition, Wollaston regards nature, truth, reason, and happiness as coextensive, which also obscures the order of the argument. In some propositions Wollaston states that any and all denial of truth is wrong. This obscures the argument that it is only denial of truths concerning the happiness of human beings that is the subject of the moral rule.

The first premise of the theory is the validity of reason, which is presented in Section III. Reason is also demonstrated to be coextensive with truth (that truth is coextensive with nature is stated in Section I). In Section II, rational observation is used to evaluate human nature and reach

the conclusion that happiness, defined as an excess of pleasure over pain, is the goal of human life. Furthermore, truth is demonstrated to be the means of attaining happiness and thus coextensive with happiness. In Section I, reason and happiness (both coextensive with truth) are used as the standards to devise the moral rule. Section I also contains the definition of nature, of truth, and of human actions as expressions of propositions.

In order to make the argument easier to follow I will present it in this reverse order, proceeding from Section III to Section I. (Section IV remains last.)

A note on terminology

Wollaston considers truth, reason, and happiness to coincide. He uses many terms to describe their relationship.

Happiness “abet[s] the cause of truth,” “[i]s...allied to it,” “they cannot...be parted” (II).

Happiness and truth “incur the one into the other,” are “consistent and coincident,” are “met together, and embrace each other,” “unite...amicably,” “are...the same” (II.xiv).

Happiness and reason “fall in each with [the] other” (III.xii).

Reason, truth, and happiness are “the same thing,” a “triple and strict alliance or union,” are “in the same interest,” “conspir[e] by the same methods” (III.xii), “always keep close together” (IX.iii.7).

I will use the term “coextensive” to refer to this relationship.

B. THE RELIABILITY OF REASON: SECTION III, “OF REASON, AND THE WAYS OF DISCOVERING TRUTH”

The question Wollaston addresses in Section III is the validity of human cognition—whether reliable knowledge is possible. The answer he offers is that reason is indeed a means of obtaining reliable knowledge. However, by reason he means all deliberation, not only logical deductions. He defines reason not only as a system of logical deductions from given premises but as a faculty of deducing reasonably reliable, good-enough-for-living, probable conclusions from a combination of sense information and axioms. His epistemological view is influenced by John Locke and Richard Cumberland.

Although he uses reason to deduce the moral rule, even that deduction is based on empirical observation of nature in general and human nature in particular. The definition of nature as a system of identities in relations (see discussion of RND Section I in section III.D below) is deduced from observation, as is the happiness standard of the moral rule (see discussion of RND Section II in III.C below), which is deduced from observation of human experience.

The role of truth within this theory is as the standard of knowledge. A true proposition is one which accurately describes the world, that is, gives an accurate account of nature. (For the definition of nature see section III.D below.) Therefore, truth is coextensive with nature.

Those propositions are true, which express things as they are: or, truth is the conformity of those words or signs, by which things are expressed, to the things themselves. Defin. (I.ii).

This view is similar to Locke.

Real truth is about ideas agreeing to things....But then it is they contain real truth, when these signs are joined, as our ideas agree; and when our ideas are such, as we know are capable of having an existence in nature: which in substances we cannot

know, but by knowing that such have existed.⁹⁶

Wherever we perceive the agreement or disagreement of any of our ideas, there is certain knowledge: and wherever we are sure those ideas agree with the reality of things, there is certain real knowledge.⁹⁷

And Cumberland:

[T]he truth, the rectitude, the reality of propositions, entirely depends upon their conformity, their agreement with things themselves.⁹⁸

Wollaston's view is that while some human knowledge consists of intuitively known axioms which cannot be doubted and therefore constitute certainly true propositions, in most cases the contents of a true proposition are obtained by empirical examination of the world. Truth is a standard, not an end in itself, nor the abstract source of intuited moral principles.

Wollaston is usually classified as a rationalist and subject to criticisms such as this:

It seems that they had created unnecessary problems for themselves by blinding [sic] adhering to one very arbitrary assumption: that reason is a strictly theoretical or speculative faculty, whose essential business is to determine the truth or falsity of propositions. None of the rationalists conceived of reason as a practical faculty whose main task is to direct action, or to determine the ends of conduct, through imperatives rather than propositions. This stubborn insistence upon seeing reason in a theoretical rather than a practical role made them formulate their criterion of morality in terms of truth and falsehood rather than universalizability.⁹⁹

This is ascribed to a “deeply conservative political ideology” in which “‘truth’ was the fact of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century British society.”¹⁰⁰ Thus Wollaston is depicted as

96 Locke, *Essay*, IV.5.8.

97 *Ibid.*, IV.4.18.

98 Cumberland, *Laws of Nature*, part 1, chapter 2, section 5:146.

99 Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996):321. For Wollaston's position on universalizability see Chapter IV.B, proposition iii below.

100 *Ibid.*, 319.

“an extreme rationalist in ethics, desiring to give to contemporary moral judgments the force of a priori ethical intuitions.”¹⁰¹

However, Wollaston’s definition of reason is instrumental and in his moral theory its use is primarily empirical. Furthermore, he regards most knowledge as being merely probable (in various degrees) and is thus very far from an idealized rationalistic certainty. (As to political ideology, see Wollaston’s radically libertarian political philosophy in RND Sections VI and VII, chapter IV.B-C below.)

This is Wollaston’s definition of reason:

That power, which any intelligent being has of surveying his own ideas, and comparing them; of forming to himself out of those, that are immediate and abstract, such general and fundamental truths, as he can be sure of; and of making such inferences and conclusions as are agreeable to them, or to any other truth, after it comes to be known; in order to find out more truth, prove or disprove some assertion, resolve some question, determine what is fit to be done upon occasion, etc. the case or thing under consideration being first fairly stated and prepared, is what I mean by the faculty of reason, or what entitles him to the epithet rational. Or in short, reason is a faculty of making such inferences and conclusions, as are mentioned under the preceding proposition, from any thing known, or given (III.viii).

Furthermore, Wollaston regards reason and sense experience as equally valid sources of knowledge.

[W]e are not only to respect those truths, which we discover by reasoning, but even such matters of fact, as are fairly discovered to us by our senses. We ought to regard things as being what they are, which way soever we come to the knowledge of them (I.ix).

In fact, he regards them as inseparable.

Reason without observation wants matter to work upon: and observations

101 Ralph E. Stedman, “Review of ‘Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason: A Study in the History of Thought’ by Ernest Campbell Mossner,” *Mind* NS 46, no. 184 (October 1937): 518. Stedman argues against this view.

are...no[t] to be aptly applied without the assistance of reason (III.xvi).¹⁰²

With the caveat that this knowledge is mostly probable, not certain.

Upon this account it is, that I add the word *given* at the end of my description of reason (III.viii.nl).

Because this information is “given,” that is, sense information, as stated in the definition of reason above, most of it is only probable. However, good reasoning produces knowledge that is good enough for human purposes. It is also the only knowledge that is available to human beings, unlike God’s divine knowledge.

The Supreme being has no doubt a direct and perfect intuition of things, with their natures and relations, lying as it were all before Him, and pervious to His eye: or at least we may safely say, that He is not obliged to make use of our operose methods by ideas and inferences; but knows things in a manner infinitely above all our conceptions (III.viii).

Thus, human knowledge is not intuitive, nor certain, but laboriously obtained by sense data (“ideas”) and reasoning (“inferences”).¹⁰³ However, some of it does have a very high degree of probability.

Wollaston’s moral theory depends on the reliability of reason.

It is necessary to consider whether there is a means of true and certain knowledge. If not [Section I, “Of Moral Good and Evil” and Section II, “Of Happiness” are] useless (III).

That means is reason and thus he presents an argument for the validity of reason and a response to the denial of the validity of reason (III.ix).

102 Compare with “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind....The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their unison can knowledge arise.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965): A51:B75.

103 Whether revelation is a source of knowledge is not addressed in RND. Presumably, it would have been addressed by a treatise Wollaston was composing at the time of his death.

The argument may be summarized as follows: an intelligent being is defined as one who “[has] some immediate objects of his understanding; or at least a capacity of having such” (III.i). We have certain knowledge of the contents of our minds, that is, our immediate (unmediated) ideas. (Wollaston’s immediate ideas are equivalent to Locke’s sensations.) Because they are immediate they must be perceived truly (III.iii). There are also relations of immediate ideas which are themselves immediate and thus also known immediately, e.g., the relation of whole and part. Such relations are intuitively known axioms and cannot be doubted (III.iv). From these immediate ideas and relations, non-immediate relations may be discovered by a chain of reasoning (III.vii). As long as each step in such a series is true, the knowledge thus discovered is reliable, e.g., theorems (III.v). The mind also contains immediate abstract and general ideas (III.ii). (Wollaston’s abstract ideas are equivalent to Locke’s reflections.¹⁰⁴) We have ideas that are not about any particular, such as logical and mathematical ideas with which we reason and demonstrate (III.ii). The abstract ideas and the capacity for abstract thinking are innate. They are not sense information, although sense information triggers their use (III.xiii). Reasoning is done with these abstract ideas and with species (specific and abstract ideas), not with particulars. Reason is a general, universal instrument which is applied to particular cases (III.ii).

The ideas are different from “things in themselves” (III.iii). While the perception of immediate ideas is always correct there can be mistaken perception of things which are not immediate but are represented by some media, e.g., the senses. The mediate ideas provided by the senses can generally be relied upon, but are subject to correction by reason (III.xiii). If there is

104 “This is called abstraction, whereby ideas taken from particular beings, become general representatives of all of the same kind; and their names general names, applicable to whatever exists conformable to such abstract ideas....and thus universals, whether ideas or terms, are made.” Locke, *Essay*, II.XI.9.

no reason to doubt sense information that is reason enough to believe it¹⁰⁵ (III.xiv).

Reason is the means of obtaining true information. An objection to the reliability of reason is the considerable quantity of false reasoning that can be observed. This false reasoning is due to various errors.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the term “right reason” is used to distinguish true from false reasoning. Reason cannot discover truth in all cases but human knowledge may be greatly increased by it (III.ix). By definition, a conclusion reached by right reason is true. If it is not true then it is not right reason.

That reason, which is right (by the meaning of the words) must conclude rightly: but this it cannot do, if the conclusion is not true, or truth (III.x).

His view is similar to Cumberland’s.

[W]hosoever determines things different from what they really are, does not determine according to right reason, neither does he employ his judgment right. [W]hosoever...either affirms or denies, just as the nature of the thing is, pronounces his judgment according to right reason.¹⁰⁷

Because reason is the faculty which discovers truth, acting according to reason is coextensive with acting according to truth.

105 Compare with Locke: “And thus our simple ideas are all real and true, because they answer and agree to those powers of things, which produce them in our minds, that being all that is requisite to make them real, and not fictions at pleasure. For in simple ideas (as has been shown) the mind is wholly confined to the operation of things upon it; and can make to itself no simple idea, more than what it has received.” Locke, *Essay*, II.30.2.

106 The principal causes of the errors people make in their reasoning are: lack of faculties (having opinions about what they don’t know or denying truths because they can’t understand them); lack of reflection (not thinking about their ideas, using words without meaning, or words which do not correspond to any internal idea); lack of proper qualifications (ignorance or speculating outside one’s area of expertise); lack of knowledge of how to determine a consequence; false memories (memory should not be absolutely relied upon); excessive reliance on sense; lack of retirement (not spending time alone thinking and considering one’s ideas); emotions and prejudices; and stating the question badly or not defining the terms clearly (III.xvi).

107 Cumberland, *Laws of Nature*, part 1, chapter 2, section 5:146.

To act according to right reason, and to act according to truth are in effect the same thing. For in which sense soever the word reason is taken, it will stand either for truth itself, or for that, which is instrumental in discovering and proving it to be such (III.x).

Reason is part of human nature and thus it is part of nature. It is also the nature of human beings to be governed by reason—it is not possible for human beings to decide not to act according to reason¹⁰⁸ (III.xi).

The phenomenon of rationalization demonstrates that reason commands. People may act in ways that are contrary to reason, but that they find it necessary to provide a supposed reason, however specious, for such actions, shows that they acknowledge the requirement to act according to reason. As reason is part of human nature, and thus of nature, and as it is the nature of reason to command, therefore, acting according to right reason is acting in accordance with nature.

The same holds for sense information. As it is reasonable to believe sense information when there is no reason to disbelieve it, then to act in accordance with reasonable sense information is to act according to reason and therefore according to nature .

In this case to act according to them (i.e. as taking the informations of sense to be true) is to act according to reason (III.xv).

There are thus two ways of being assured of truth, or sufficient certainty to choose one's actions. Reason, and sense subject to reason—supported, or at least unopposed, by reason. By reason we discover speculative truths; by sense, or by sense and reason together we discover matters of fact (III.xv).

However, most reasoning is only probable. It is possible to reason from premises which

108 Either one has a reason for deciding this, or not. If one has no reason then there is no basis for the decision and it fails. If one does have a reason then one is acting according to reason. Therefore, reason must govern (III.xi). Also, an argument against right reason is either without reason and meaningless, or uses reason and thus disproves itself (III.ix).

are only probable (or from those which are false). In that case the results are only probable (or false).

[O]ne may reason truly from that, which is only probable, or even false....But then what follows, or is concluded from thence, will be only probable, or false, according to the quality of that proposition, or those propositions, from which the inference is made (III.viii).

To “reason truly” means the procedure followed is a true deduction from premises. However, except for axioms, the premises may be only probable or false, although some of the products of reasoning may be very highly probable.

If the premises are true then the conclusion is true. If the premises are hypothetical then the conclusion is hypothetical or conditional.

That is...if the principles and premises from whence it results are true, and certainly known to be so, the conclusion may be taken as certain and absolute truth: but otherwise the truth obtained at the end of the argument is but hypothetical (III.x).

It is reasonable to act according to probability when certainty is not available—which is the case most of the time.

To conclude, that we ought to follow *probability*, when certainty leaves us, is plain; because then it becomes the only light and guide we have. For unless it is better to wander and fluctuate in absolute uncertainty than to follow such a guide; unless it be reasonable to put out our candle, because we have not the light of the sun, it must be reasonable to direct our steps by probability, when we have nothing clearer to walk by (III.xvi).

In reasoning concerning probable things, the following three rules should be used.

Rule 1: What is in accordance with nature is probable.

Rule 2. What has been constantly true may be assumed to be true unless there is definite evidence to the contrary, e.g., mortality.

Rule 3. If the above are not available, then one should use the most knowledgeable and reliable reports.

Rule 1 is the most important. The application of all three rules together produces the highest probability (III.xvi).

What reasoning based on probability provides is something that approximates to truth, and for practical purposes serves as truth.

Here then is another way of discovering, if not truth, yet what in practice may be supposed to be truth. That is, we may by this way discover, whether such propositions as these be true, *I ought to do this, rather than that; or, to think so, rather than the contrary* (III.xvi).

Human beings have an obligation to act according to reason. Because (right) reason is coextensive with truth, and truth is an accurate description of nature and thus coextensive with nature, then acting according to reason is coextensive with acting in accordance with nature.

From this it follows that

the dictates of it [reason] in particular cases are the particular laws, to which they [human beings] are subject (III.xi).

That is, acting according to nature means acting according to whatever reason (rightly) concludes in every case. Also, as it is reasonable to act according to the merely probable knowledge which is what we have most of the time “we are obliged to do it” (III.xvi).

To summarize, Wollaston’s view of reason is primarily empirical, not rationalistic. Far from believing that one can obtain certain knowledge by finding some certain premises and making rational deductions from them, he regards nearly all knowledge as merely probable, though some of it is very highly probable. He believes that for the purpose of existence as a human being, relying on this probable knowledge is reasonable and feasible, and that no matter how much one may yearn for God-like certainty, it just isn’t to be had. Human beings should act according to such knowledge as they can acquire and not give that up because it is not perfect. Unfortunately, most of them have little knowledge and poor reasoning ability, due to lack of

education and other obstacles. As the validity of reason (and sense data subject to evaluation by reason) is the foundational premise of his moral theory, his definition of reason as the means of obtaining empirical and probable knowledge means that his moral theory is based on empirical observation of nature in general and human nature in particular and does not constitute a series of rational deductions from given premises. Nor does it contain claims about “a priori ethical intuitions.”

In this section (III), Wollaston argues that reason is coextensive with truth. In Section I, he argues that truth is coextensive with nature. Hence, reason is coextensive with nature and truth. Therefore, acting in accordance with reason constitutes acting in accordance with truth and in accordance with nature.

C. THE STANDARD OF MORALITY: SECTION II, “OF HAPPINESS”

In section II Wollaston argues that happiness, which is good, is also coextensive with truth.

That, which demands next to be considered, is happiness; as being in itself most considerable; as abetting the cause of truth; and as being indeed so nearly allied to it, that they cannot well be parted. We cannot pay the respects due to one, unless we regard the other. Happiness must not be denied to be what it is: and it is by the practice of truth that we aim at that happiness, which is true (II).

His argument can be summarized as follows. It is a self-evident fact of human nature that pleasure is good and pain is evil, and that happiness consists of an excess of pleasure over pain. In order to attain happiness, it is necessary to perform the mathematical calculation of pleasures and pains. However, one can attain happiness only if one performs the calculation correctly. Otherwise, one may do things which one may regard as leading to happiness but which do not lead to happiness because the calculation was incorrect. Furthermore, this calculation must be done prospectively, that is, one must be able to calculate correctly the means of causing pleasure and avoiding pain.

Thus, in order to obtain happiness, one must accurately calculate what will produce pleasure and what will produce pain, how much pleasure and/or pain it will produce, and the means by which to obtain whatever produces pleasure and avoid whatever produces pain.

Only if one calculates accurately will the result be more pleasure than pain—which constitutes happiness. That is, all the propositions that constitute the calculation must be true propositions. One’s propositions concerning what causes pleasure must be true; one’s propositions concerning what causes pain must be true; one’s propositions concerning how much pleasure or pain the items under consideration cause must be true; one’s propositions concerning how to get whatever causes pleasure and avoid whatever causes pain must be true. Only then will one succeed in producing more pleasure than pain, that is, happiness. That is why happiness and

truth are coextensive. Only when all one's propositions (including those propositions expressed by actions) are true will one attain "true" happiness, that is, more pleasure than pain.

Alternatively, if one's propositions are false, one will not succeed in producing an excess of pleasure over pain, and thus produce unhappiness.

The argument has five steps. 1. He defines pleasure and pain (propositions i, ii, iii) and notes that perceptions of pleasure and pain are subjective. 2. The quantity of pleasure and pain is calculable (propositions iv, v, vi). The net result of this calculation is true pleasure or pain. 3. Happiness is defined as the true excess of pleasure over pain (propositions vii, viii). 4. There follows a demonstration that seeking happiness is acting in accordance with nature (propositions ix, x). 5. Attaining happiness by acting in accordance with nature requires taking actions which express true propositions concerning the natures of things (this draws on propositions from Section I), which leads to the conclusion that truth and happiness are coextensive (propositions xi, xiv).

1. Definition of Pleasure and Pain

Pleasure is a consciousness of something agreeable, pain of the contrary: & v.v. the consciousness of any thing agreeable is pleasure, of the contrary pain (II.i).

Pain considered in itself is a real evil, pleasure a real good (II.ii).

By the general idea of good and evil the one [pleasure] is in itself desirable, the other [pain] to be avoided [Brackets in original] (II.iii).

1A. Pleasures and pains are relative to the sensitivity of the subject

Pleasures and pains are proportionable to the perceptions and sense of their subjects, or the persons affected with them. For their consciousness and perception cannot be separated (II.i.obs.1).

Whatever increases the power of perceiving, renders the percipient more susceptible of pleasure or pain (II.i.obs.2).

The causes of pleasure and pain are relative things: and in order to estimate truly their effect upon any particular subject they ought to be drawn into the degrees of perception in that subject (II.i.obs.3).

2. Pleasure and Pain are calculable

The quantity of pleasure and pain can be calculated, therefore there is “moral arithmetic” (II.i.obs.3).

The calculation consists of three parts. Calculating the perceptivity of the subject, the quantity of the experienced pleasures and pains, and the total result of the combination of pleasures and pains produced by an experience (and finally, by an entire life).

Calculation 1: perceptivity.

The experience of pleasure and pain is subjective. How much pleasure and pain is experienced by an individual varies depending on the perceptivity of the individual. Therefore, the same experience does not produce the same quantity of pleasure and pain in different individuals. Hence, pain and pleasure are relative.

The causes of pleasure and pain are relative things: and in order to estimate truly their effect upon any particular subject they ought to be drawn into the degrees of perception in that subject (I.i.obs.3).

The effects of pleasure and pain on an individual are calculated by multiplying the quantity of pleasure and pain by the degree of perceptivity. Wollaston gives these examples:

P = external stimuli; R = receptivity of individual.

Case of A & B:

A: $P \times R = 1$.

B has double the receptivity of A, and experiences half the stimulus:

B = $\frac{1}{2}P \times 2R = 1$.

B received half the stimulus of A, but because his receptivity is double, his subjective experience is of the same quantity.

Case of C & D:

C has 2 degrees of perceptivity and D has 3 degrees of perceptivity.

C: $P \times 2R = 2$, D: $P \times 3R = 3$.

Therefore the perceptivity of D is 50% greater than perceptivity of C, and if the quantity of stimulus on D is doubled then,

C: $P \times 2R = 2$; D: $2P \times 3R = 6$.

The experience of D is tripled (compared to C) because D is 50% more sensitive than C.

He gives the following as a practical example: if a rich man steals a sheep from a poor man the measure of the loss is not what such a loss would be to the rich man— insignificant, but what it is to the poor man, devastating; and adds that if the rich man regarded the severity of his action by his own perceptivity, then “[he] must be very defective in moral arithmetic, and little understood the doctrine of proportion” (II.i.obs.4).

From this it follows that there is no universally applicable formula for judging happiness, because the calculation for each individual depends on his subjective experience:

Every man's happiness is *his* happiness, what it is to him; and the loss of it is answerable to the degrees of his perception, to his manner of taking things, to his wants and circumstances (II.i.obs.4).

Calculation 2: quantity.

The quantity of pleasure or pain consists of the intensity multiplied by the duration.

$P = I \times D$.

The products of the calculations of pleasures and pains are in a ratio to each other.

Pleasures can be compared with pains, pleasures with pleasures, pains with pains,

all may be equal, more, or less. Because all the moments of the pleasure must bear some respect or be in some ratio to all the moments of pain: as also all the degrees of one to all the degrees of the other: and so must those of one pleasure, or one pain, be to those of another. And if the degrees of intenseness be multiplied by the moments of duration, there must still be some ratio of the one product to the other (II.iv).

Ratio = $(Pl = I \times D) : (Pn = I \times D)$. Or, $R = Pl : Pn$.

Calculation 3: total of pleasure and pain.

To get the total, pleasures and pains are compared. Equal pleasures and pains cancel each other, giving a total of zero. When one of them exceeds the other, the calculation gives the “true quantity” of either pleasure or pain resulting from the matter under consideration.

Wollaston provides some sample calculations.

Nine units of pleasure and nine units of pain cancel out. $9Pl - 9Pn = 0$.

Nine units of pleasure minus three units of pain produces a total of six units of pleasure. $9Pl - 3Pn = 6Pl$ “net and true.”

Nine units of pain plus three units of pleasure produces a total of six units of pain.

$9Pn - 3Pl = 6Pn$ “net & true” (II.v).

Thus the entire calculation is:

Net = $R \times ((Pl = I \times D) - (Pn = I \times D))$.

Alternatively, if the intensity is determined by the receptivity then:

Net = $((Pl = (I \times R) \times D) - (Pn = (I \times R) \times D))$.

And this constitutes true pleasure or pain. It is “true” because only when the correct total has been arrived at does one have an accurate view of the result of an action.

However, the calculations are complicated.

As therefore there may be true pleasure and pain: so there may be some pleasures, which compared with what attends or follows them, not only may vanish into

nothing, but may even degenerate into pain, and ought to be reckoned as pains; and v.v. some pains, that may be annumerated to pleasures (I.vi).

Pleasures may lead to pains, pains may prevent greater pains, and so forth. Also, for most people, a little pain outweighs much pleasure. It may follow that there can be pains so great that no pleasure outweighs them as the pain is so great that it reduces the pleasure to practically nothing (i.vi).¹⁰⁹¹¹⁰

That the above is true is demonstrated by human behavior. People constantly make these pleasure/pain calculations and seek to get a positive ratio of pleasure over pain. That they make mistakes in their calculations does not refute that they are making these calculations. They accept pains for the sake of greater pleasures; they prefer some pleasures (and pains) to others. Introspection also shows that we are indifferent to many pleasure/pain combinations which indicates that in such cases the pleasure and pain are equal, (a zero ratio) (I.iv).

3. Definition of Happiness (as the result of the Pleasure/Pain calculation)

Happiness differs not from the true quantity of pleasure, unhappiness of pain. Or, any being may be said to be so far happy, as his pleasures are true, etc.

That cannot be the happiness of any being, which is bad for him: nor can happiness be disagreeable. It must be something therefore, that is both agreeable and good for the possessor. Now present pleasure is for the present indeed agreeable; but if it be not true, and he who enjoys it must pay more for it than it is worth, it cannot be

109 Some version of this argument goes as far back as Plato's *Protagoras* (351b-358d).

110 Also compare this with Locke: "[W]hat is apt to produce any degree of pleasure, be in it self *good*; and what is apt to produce any degree of pain, be *evil*; yet it often happens, that we do not call it so, when it comes in competition with a greater of its sort; because when they come in competition the degrees also of pleasure and pain have justly a preference. So that if we will rightly estimate what we call *good* and *evil*, we shall find it lies much in comparison: For the cause of every less degree of pain, as well as every greater degree of pleasure, has the nature of *good*, and *vice versa*." *Essay*, II.21.42.

for his good, or good for him. This therefore cannot be his happiness. Nor, again, can that pleasure be reckoned happiness, for which one pays the full price in pain: because these are quantities which mutually destroy each other. But yet since happiness is something, which, by the general idea of it, must be desirable, and therefore agreeable, it must be some kind of pleasure: and this, from what has been said, can only be such pleasure as is true. That only can be both agreeable and good for him. And thus every one's happiness will be as his true quantity of pleasure (II.vii).

The result of the calculation above was: $Net = R \times ((Pl = I \times D) - (Pn = I \times D))$ or

$Net = ((Pl = (I \times R) \times D) - (Pn = (I \times R) \times D))$. Happiness is defined as the Net Amount of the calculation if the Net Amount is positive. A negative Net Amount is defined as unhappiness.

Happiness by definition is good, agreeable, and "some kind of pleasure" (II.vii). A present pleasure is agreeable, so does it constitute happiness? Not necessarily. A particular pleasure may lead to a pain that is greater than the pleasure and therefore the net total of that experience is pain, which is bad. Also, a particular pleasure may lead to an equal pain and the net total of that experience is zero, which is not happiness.

In order for an experience to produce happiness, it must be a pleasure. But because a pleasure which leads to an equal or greater amount of pain is not a pleasure it must be a pleasure which is still a pleasure after all the associated pain has been subtracted. Only then would it fulfill the criteria of being desirable, agreeable, and good. That is, the net amount of the pleasure/pain calculation must be positive.

For an entire life, whether a person is happy or unhappy is determined by the grand total of all the pleasure/pain calculations.

That being may be said to be ultimately happy, in some degree or other, the sum total of whose pleasures exceeds the sum of all his pains: or, ultimate happiness is the sum of happiness, or true pleasure, at the foot of the account. And so on the other side, that being may be said to be ultimately unhappy, the sum of all whose pains exceeds that of all his pleasures (II.viii).

4. Happiness is coextensive with Nature

From self-evident propositions II.ii, that pleasure is agreeable and a real good, and pain is disagreeable and a real evil, and II.iii that pleasure is desirable (because good) and pain undesirable (because bad), and II.vii that happiness equals the quantity of true pleasure and unhappiness equals the quantity of true pain he deduces, as also self-evident, that making oneself happy is a duty.

To make itself happy is a duty, which every being, in proportion to its capacity, owes to itself; and that, which every intelligent being may be supposed to aim at, in general (II.ix).

As pleasure is naturally good and pain naturally evil, in seeking the excess of pleasure over pain that is happiness (and avoiding unhappiness, which is an excess of pain), an intelligent being is acting in accordance with its nature. As it is one's duty to act according to nature, it is one's duty to seek happiness.

The same principle applies to others. They are intelligent beings who by nature seek happiness and avoid unhappiness. Therefore, treating human beings as beings who experience happiness and unhappiness and who desire happiness and are averse to unhappiness constitutes treating them as they are, that is, in accordance with their nature.

We cannot act with respect to either ourselves, or other men, as being what we and they are, unless both are considered as beings susceptible of happiness and unhappiness, and naturally desirous of the one and averse to the other (II.x).

To summarize the argument to this point, why is happiness coextensive with nature?

It is natural, that is, a characteristic of human nature, to experience pleasure as good; it is natural to experience pain as evil; it is natural to seek pleasure; it is natural to avoid pain; the naturally sought-after condition of more pleasure than pain is defined as happiness; therefore, by

definition, it is natural to seek happiness, and it is natural to avoid its contrary, unhappiness. The seeking of happiness is coextensive with nature because it is the nature of intelligent beings to seek happiness.

If the seeking of pleasure is natural, then why is not pleasure, rather than happiness, coextensive with nature? That pleasure is good and pain bad is clear only when they are considered as abstract terms,

What is here said, respects mere pleasure and pain, abstracted from all circumstances, consequences, etc. (I.iii).

The complexity of experience means that the pleasures and pains produced by actions are mixed; because a pleasure can lead to a pain, a pain can lead to a pleasure, a pain can prevent a greater pain, and so forth. This necessitates calculating the total result of this mix of pleasures and pains so as to produce more pleasure than pain. Thus, only successful pleasure-seeking is the natural (though not necessarily successful) goal of human behavior, and this successful pleasure-seeking is not the same as a discrete, momentary pleasure which may turn out to be part of an ultimately painful experience, and thus successful pleasure-seeking requires a definition distinct from discrete pleasures, that definition being happiness.

5. Happiness is coextensive with Truth

Thus far, it has been established that it is the nature and therefore the duty (4 above) of human beings to seek happiness. How is that to be done successfully? It can be accomplished only by acting in accordance with the nature of things (the nature of all things in addition to human nature.) What constitutes acting in accordance with the natures of things? Taking those actions which express true propositions concerning the nature of things.

As the true and ultimate happiness of no being can be produced by any thing, that interferes with truth, and denies the natures of things: so neither can the practice of truth make any being ultimately unhappy (II.xi).

In Section I, a true proposition was defined as one which accurately describes the nature of things.

Those propositions are true, which express things as they are: or, truth is the conformity of those words or signs, by which things are expressed, to the things themselves. Defin. (I.ii).

Also, a central premise of this theory was stated, that propositions are expressed by actions, as well as words.

A true proposition may be denied, or things may be denied to be what they are, by deeds, as well as by express words or another proposition (I.iii).

(For the full discussion of this, see section III.D below.) Hence, the deliberate actions one takes constitute expressions of propositions. Only if the propositions expressed by one's actions are true, that is, constitute an accurate description of the natures of things, can one obtain happiness. This is "the practice of truth," which consists of "conforming [one]self to truth, and owning things and the relations lying between them to be what they are," and "act[ing] according to nature and reality" (II.xi).

Happiness can be produced only by actions that produce a net positive amount in the pleasure/pain calculation. Actions can produce a net positive amount only if they are in conformity with the natures of things. Actions are in conformity with the natures of things if they express propositions that are true. A true proposition is one that describes the natures of things accurately. Hence, the conclusion that happiness is coextensive with truth.

To conclude this section, the way to happiness and the practice of truth incur the one into the other (II.xiv).

Wollaston addresses the problem of the suffering of good people and the well-being of evil people within his arguments concerning God (RND Section V) and the immortality of the soul (RND Section IX). He offers several solutions to this problem—see Chapter IV.A, page 100-1 below on Section V, and Chapter IV.E, pages 163 below on Section IX. However, his principle argument is that this problem serves as proof of the existence of an afterlife, because as it cannot be that God is unreasonable, and as there are clearly cases of “oppressed innocence and flourishing wickedness” (IX.viii.4) it follows that there must be an afterlife in which this is corrected. Furthermore, it is likely that God has arranged matters in this way in order to provide proof of an afterlife (IX.viii.4).

In this section (II) Wollaston argues that seeking happiness constitutes acting in accordance with (human) nature. In Section III (discussed above) he argued that reason is coextensive with truth. In Section I (discussed below), he argues truth is coextensive with nature. Hence, the conclusion of Section III was that acting in accordance with reason, acting in accordance with truth, and acting in accordance with nature are coextensive. In this section he argues not only that seeking happiness is in accordance with nature but that in order to seek happiness successfully it is necessary to act in accordance with nature, which means acting in accordance with reason and truth (which are coextensive with nature). Which leads to the conclusion that happiness (and happiness-seeking) is coextensive with nature, reason, and truth.

D. THE MORAL THEORY OF RND: SECTION I, “OF MORAL GOOD AND EVIL”

In Section I Wollaston develops the moral rule.

The foundation of religion lies in that difference between the acts of men, which distinguishes them into good, evil, indifferent. For if there is such a difference, there must be religion; & *contra*. Upon this account it is that such a long and laborious inquiry hath been made after some general idea, or some rule, by comparing the foresaid acts with which it might appear, to which kind they respectively belong. And tho men have not yet agreed upon any one, yet one certainly there must be. That, which I am going to propose, has always seemed to me not only evidently true, but withal so obvious and plain, that perhaps for this very reason it hath not merited the notice of authors: and the use and application of it is so easy, that if things are but fairly permitted to speak for themselves their own natural language, they will, with a moderate attention, be found themselves to proclaim their own rectitude or obliquity; that is, whether they are disagreeable to it, or not. I shall endeavour by degrees to explain my meaning (I).

What does it mean that “if things are but fairly permitted to speak for themselves their own natural language”? This refers to Wollaston’s definition of nature as a system of identities in relations.

“Nature” is constituted of everything that exists. Whatever exists has identity—to exist is to have identity—not having an identity constitutes non-existence.

Designedly to treat things as being what they are not is....flatly to deny the existence of any thing. For nothing can be true, no thing does exist, *if things are not what they are* (I.iv).¹¹¹

Because nature and existence are coextensive, and existence and identity are coextensive, nature and identity are coextensive, and thus the identity of anything constitutes its nature.

Identities stand in relations to each other which are determined by their natures.

[T]his relation (or, if you will, the nature of this relation) is determined and fixed by the natures [identities] of the things themselves (I.iv).

The natures of identities and their relations are as fixed and certain as mathematical

111 Compare with Locke: “[W]hatever exists any where at any time, excludes all of the same kind, and is there it self alone.” *Essay*, II.27.1.

propositions, (though not as knowable as mathematics).

And, beside this, they bear certain respects to things, which are not arbitrary, but as determinate and immutable as any ratio's are in mathematics. For the facts [identities] and the things they respect [relations] are just what they are, as much as any two given quantities are; and therefore the respects [relations] interceding between those must be as fixed, as the ratio is which one of these bears to the other: that is, they must remain the same, and always speak the same language, till things cease to be what they are (I.iii).

The relations among identities are fixed and certain, not *a priori* but *a posteriori*. At any time T, there exists a state of affairs which consists of all identities and the relations in which they stand to each other. For any moment of existence that has occurred, once it has occurred, the nature of the identities that existed at that moment and their relations are fixed permanently. This does not mean that this arrangement of identities and relationships is permanent, it is not, as nature is a flux. The relation's existence is not permanent, but the relation having existed is permanent.

What would constitute a description of this state of affairs, of all the identities and their relations, is also fixed permanently. It is in this sense that things "speak." At time T and at all subsequent times, it is possible to describe the identities and their relations by propositions.

How does a proposition describing relationships of identities compare with a proposition describing a mathematical statement? An example of a proposition describing a mathematical statement is:

$$P(1) \ 1 + 1 = 2.$$

This "ratio" is fixed and immutable. It is always true.

An example of a proposition describing relations of identities is:

P(2) At time T, X put a pen on a table.

The "ratio" of X, the pen, the table, and the action at time T are as fixed and immutable as the mathematical statement. This does not mean that the relation of X, pen, and table is permanent, it

can change a moment later, if X picks up the pen and moves it again. However, once the existence of this relation—that at time T, X placed this pen on this table—has been established, its having existed is fixed and immutable and that P(2) constitutes a description of this relation is fixed and immutable. Hence, P(2) is always true, at and subsequent to time T.

The certainty of a possible description that could be made of identities and their relations is distinct from the possibility of identities and relations being knowable certainly by human beings. Although every and all identities and their relations which exist at every and all moments are fixed and certain, they are not knowable certainly by human beings. Human knowledge is probable, not certain (III.xvi).

The gulf between the certainty of a description of a state of affairs and the limits of human knowledge may be illustrated by the following example. Consider the relations among the leaves of a tree being blown by a breeze. There is an almost infinite set of propositions that would describe the relation of every leaf to every other leaf at every moment. The descriptions of the ever-changing positions of the leaves and their relations are definite even though they are nearly infinite. Knowing them, however, is beyond human capacity.

That the nature of identities and their relations are as fixed and certain as those of mathematics (though not known to human beings as certainly as mathematics) leads to Wollaston's argument that a moral rule that is derived rationally from nature is possible.

His argument can be summarized as follows. Actions express propositions and do so with "more reality" than words, because actions create states of affairs, whereas words are merely symbolic expressions of mental states. The propositions expressed by actions are true or false just as the propositions expressed by words are true or false. Actions which express propositions which are false deny the identities and relations which constitute nature to be what they are, and

therefore are contrary to nature, and therefore wrong. As it is the nature of human beings to be happiness-seekers, an act which expresses a false proposition and affects human happiness denies human nature and is immoral. (It was established in Section II that “The way to happiness and the practice of truth” (II.xiv) are coextensive; therefore, such an act will diminish human happiness.) The rule is negative: it is wrong to perform any action which denies things to be what they are when such an action affects human happiness. However, there is also a moral duty to act in accordance with human nature by seeking happiness.

The argument consists of the following steps. 1. Define what is a moral being (proposition i). 2. Define truth (correspondence definition of truth) (proposition ii). 3. Deliberate actions express propositions (proposition iii). 4. The propositions expressed by actions have “more reality” than those expressed by words because they create states of affairs (proposition iii). 5. The moral rule is stated in its first form: an act which deliberately denies the nature of anything, that is, denies “what is,” is wrong (proposition iv). 6. Omissions may also constitute denials of “what is” (proposition v).¹¹² 7. Moral good and evil are equivalent to right and wrong (propositions vii, viii). 8. Happiness is the standard by which the moral status of actions is calculated; the degree of wrongness or rightness is determined by the degree of unhappiness or happiness they bring about (proposition ix). 9. The definition of natural religion as moral obligation is stated (proposition x). 10. The moral rule is stated in its final form: a moral being should not act so as to contradict truth nor deny the nature of anything (proposition xi).

112 Proposition vi is discussed in subsections 10.1 and 10.2, below.

1. Define what is a moral being

A moral being is one that is possessed of reason and free will.

That act, which may be denominated morally good or evil, must be the act of a being capable of distinguishing, choosing, and acting for himself: or more briefly, of an intelligent and free agent (I.i).

Actions can be judged to be good or evil only if they are truly acts. There is a distinction between what can act and what cannot act. In order to act a being must be able to distinguish, choose, and act for itself from an internal principle. Whatever does not possess these capacities cannot be said to act—it is only acted upon. What is only acted upon is the same as inert matter and therefore is not subject to moral appraisal. Only the actions of intelligent and free agents are truly acts and thus can be judged to be morally good or evil (I.i).

2. Define truth

A correspondence definition of truth:

Those propositions are true, which express things as they are: or, truth is the conformity of those words or signs, by which things are expressed, to the things themselves. Defin. (I.ii).¹¹³

A true proposition is one that accurately describes nature. Truth is an accurate description of the identities and their relationships, and hence of nature.

(For the exposition of this see Section B, above.)

113 Compare with Cumberland: “From hence necessarily it follows, that the truth, the rectitude, the reality of propositions, entirely depends upon their conformity, their agreement with things themselves. And it is as confessedly acknowledged also, that the truth of our apprehensions must be taken from the same correspondence.” *Laws of Nature*, part 1, chapter 2, section v:146.

3. Actions express propositions

A central premise of this theory is that deliberate actions express propositions.

A true proposition may be denied, or things may be denied to be what they are, by deeds, as well as by express words or another proposition (I.iii).

The argument may be broken down into these steps.

1. Actions, like everything that exists, have a nature consisting of identities in relations.

(See beginning of this section above.)

2. The deliberate actions taken by rational agents express propositions, just as the words spoken by rational agents express propositions.

There are many acts of other kinds [not gestures], such as constitute the character of a man's conduct in life, which have in nature, and would be taken by any indifferent judge to have a signification, and to imply some proposition, as plainly to be understood as if it was declared in words (I.iii).

Natural language acknowledges that deliberate actions express propositions, that is, signify, by classifying some actions as “insignificant.”

In common speech we say some actions are insignificant, which would not be sense, if there were not some that are significant, that have a tendency and meaning (I.iii).

3. The content of the propositions that deliberate actions express is determined by the nature/identity/relations of the actions, not by the knowledge (or intentions) of the agent. The content of the proposition is determined by the state of affairs the actions have created.

The truth or falsehood of this affirmation doth not depend upon the affirmer's knowledge or ignorance (I.iii).

4. The propositions expressed by actions have a truth value, just as the propositions expressed by words have a truth value.

Now what is to be understood, has a meaning: and what has a meaning, may be either true or false: which is as much as can be said of any verbal sentence (I.iii).

5. The truth value of the propositions expressed by actions is determined by their nature/identity/relations, not by the mental state of the agent.

An example he gives is of friendly fire.

If a body of soldiers, seeing another body approach, should fire upon them, would not this action declare that they were enemies; and if they were not enemies, would not this military language declare what was false? (I.iii).

An objection offered to this is that soldiers are supposed to fight and therefore it is natural to suppose that the soldiers are firing on enemies; that is common sense.

A pertinacious objector may perhaps still say...it is natural to conclude, that they are enemies against whom we see soldiers defending themselves....Ans. If it be natural to conclude any thing from them, do they not naturally convey the notice of something to be concluded?....[I]f this signification is natural and founded in the common principles and sense of mankind, is not this more than to have a meaning which results only from the use of some particular place or country, as that of language doth? (I.iii).

Wollaston responds that if it is natural to conclude thus, then the actions are naturally conveying the information leading to those conclusions. Furthermore, if it is natural to draw conclusions from actions, then it follows that actions naturally convey the information from which the conclusions are drawn; which means the actions are signifying the information (just as words signify information); if this signifying of information is universal (which is implied by claiming that it is natural to draw those conclusions from those actions) then it is a conveyance of information which is universal, unlike culturally determined communications, such as language, symbols, and gestures.

To expand upon Wollaston's statement, saying something in a language conveys a meaning that is only meaningful to a speaker of that language. But an action conveys a meaning that is meaningful to everyone. Hence the propositions expressed by actions are universally

understandable, unlike the propositions expressed by language. This does not imply that everyone necessarily has the knowledge to interpret the propositions expressed by an action—it means actions are understandable, not that everyone is in a position to understand every action. Nor does it constitute a claim that actions can be understood simply by viewing them.

The identities and relations of acts are part of nature. They are not arbitrarily determined by the agent. Whereas language and customs are arbitrary social constructs, the identities and relations of actions, and the propositions expressed by them, are determined by their nature and are therefore unchangeable, and are not subject to social custom. Therefore, the content of the propositions which actions express is determined by the nature/identity/relations of the actions, not by the knowledge (or intentions) of the agent.

The truth or falsity of the proposition is determined by the nature of things, not by the knowledge of the person performing the act. In the friendly fire example, the soldiers who fire on a “body of troops” are asserting by that action the proposition that the soldiers they fire upon are enemies. If those soldiers are not enemies, then the proposition expressed by the action is false. Its falsehood is determined by the nature of things, in this case, by the identity of the soldiers. The belief of the soldiers who fire does not determine the truth or falsehood of the proposition that “those are enemy soldiers.” What if it is a mistake? It is still a false proposition regardless of the belief of the agent or speaker. A person may express a false proposition while sincerely believing it to be true.

If an agent expresses the same proposition in words as he expresses in action then the truth value of both propositions is the same. If he says, “Those are enemy soldiers,” he is expressing the proposition,

(1)P(Words) Those are enemy soldiers.

If he fires at those soldiers, he is expressing the proposition,

(2)P(Action) Those are enemy soldiers.

Both propositions, the one expressed by words, and the one expressed by action, are the same.

Therefore, their truth value is the same. In this case, both are false.

To summarize the argument to this point, actions have a nature—like everything that exists they are identities in relations. Actions also express propositions. Propositions have truth values. The truth value of propositions is determined by nature (identities in relations). A true proposition is one which constitutes an accurate description of nature. Therefore, true propositions are in accord with nature; actions which express true propositions are in accord with nature; truth is coextensive with nature. From this it follows that actions which express false propositions are denying nature; they are denying the identities and relations which constitute nature to be what they are.

It is by this means that the connection between nature, truth, and the actions of rational beings is established. Rational beings and the actions of rational beings are part of nature and thus have the character of all things which exist in nature, that is, they have an identity and they stand in relation to other identities. The identities of actions are determined by their nature, not by the mental states of the agents performing them. The actions express propositions. The propositions expressed by the actions of rational beings have a truth value. The truth value of the propositions expressed by the actions of rational beings is determined by whether they constitute an accurate description of nature, that is, of the relevant identities and relations. An action that expresses a proposition which is false is therefore denying identities and relations to be what they are and is contrary to nature.

4. Propositions expressed by actions have “more reality” than propositions expressed by words

Actions have more reality than words because they create states of affairs, whereas words are merely symbolic expressions of mental states. Also, words are social constructs, as are customs. Both words and actions express propositions about nature, but the actions create new states of affairs (although words may create a new mental state in a person; and performatives may constitute an action).

All actions are part of nature and thus constitute identities in relations. The propositions they express are determined by the identities and relations, not by the mental state of the agent.

Words are but arbitrary signs of our ideas, or indications of our thoughts... but facts may be taken as the effects of them, or rather as the thoughts themselves produced into act; as the very conceptions of mind brought forth, and grown to maturity; and therefore as the most natural and express representations of them (I.iii).

I lay this down then as a fundamental maxim, That whoever acts as if things were so, or not so, doth by his acts declare, that they are so, or not so; as plainly as he could by words, and with more reality. And if the things are otherwise, his acts contradict those propositions, which assert them to be as they are (I.iii).

Actions express propositions concerning identities and relations with more reality than verbal propositions. If the actions express propositions which are false, then they contradict the true propositions which describe the identities and relations as they are. Actions which express false propositions about identities and relations, and thus about nature, are therefore denying identities and relations, and therefore nature, to be what they are.

5. First statement of the moral rule: an act which “interferes” with a true proposition or denies what is, is wrong

An act which expresses a false proposition “interferes” with the relationships in nature and therefore it is unnatural. Because:

1. Nature consists of identities in relations.
2. A true proposition is one which constitutes an accurate description of nature (I.ii).
3. An act expresses a proposition (I.iii).
4. If the act expresses a false proposition then it,
 - a. denies identities and relations to be what they are,
 - b. and therefore denies nature,
 - c. and therefore is unnatural, contrary to nature,
 - d. and therefore is wrong in nature.

This is Wollaston's definition of acting according to nature: refraining from taking any action which expresses a proposition that denies the identities and relations which constitute nature to be what they are.

No act (whether word or deed) of any being, to whom moral good and evil are imputable, that interferes with any true proposition, or denies any thing to be as it is, can be right (I.iv).

It should be noted here that the qualification "a being, to whom moral good and evil are imputable," applies not only to whom the rule applies as actor, but also to whom the rule applies as subject. That is, it only applies to actions which affect human beings. (Although he discusses how animals should be treated in view of their being sensitive beings.)

Those propositions, which are true, and express things as they are, express the relation between the subject and the attribute as it is; that is, this is either affirmed or denied of that according to the nature of that relation. And further, this relation (or, if you will, the nature of this relation) is determined and fixed by the natures of the things themselves. Therefore nothing can interfere with any proposition that is true, but it must likewise interfere with nature (the nature of the relation, and the nature of the things themselves too [their identities]), and consequently be unnatural, or wrong in nature (I.iv).

To deny identity is to deny existence and therefore to deny nature.

Designedly to treat things as being what they are not is the greatest possible absurdity....It is to subvert all science, to renounce all sense of truth, and flatly to deny the existence of any thing. For nothing can be true, nothing does exist, if things are not what they are.

To talk to a post, or otherwise treat it as if it was a man, would surely be reckoned an absurdity, if not distraction [confusion]. Why? because this is to treat it as being what it is not. And why should not the converse be reckoned as bad; that is, to treat a man as a post; as if he had no sense, and felt not injuries, which he doth feel; as if to him pain and sorrow were not pain; happiness not happiness. This is what the cruel and unjust often do (I.iv).

Why is it the case that to act so as to deny what things are, that is, to perform an act which expresses a proposition which is false constitutes a denial of existence?

To deny an entity's identity is to deny its existence, because identity and existence are inseparable. To exist means to have an identity. To have an identity it is necessary to exist. Hence, to deny the identity of an existent thing is to deny its existence. The example given is one in which the identity of an object is denied by claiming, via the propositions asserted by the agent's behavior, that it is a different object whose identity is exclusive of the object denied.

There are two objects, X(person) and Y(post), whose identities are exclusive, $X \neq Y$.

The existence of object X may be denied by a proposition that asserts that there is no object without specifying X:

(P1) There is nothing here.

Its existence may be denied by a proposition that asserts a specific denial that X exists:

(P2) There is no X here.

Its existence may be denied by a proposition that asserts that the object has an identity other than X, where that identity excludes X:

(P3) There is object Y here.

It is the third case which is given as the example.

Asserting an identity excludes, and therefore denies, all other contradictory identities. (It does not mean that an object cannot have more than one description, nor that its identity cannot be complex (see 10.1 below.) Thus, the proposition:

(P4) X is a rational being

does not deny that X also has the identity of a happiness-seeking being, but proposition (P3) does deny the identity of X, the rational, happiness-seeking being, because the identity of being a post excludes the identity of being a rational, happiness-seeking being.

As previously defined (proposition ii), true propositions are those that accurately describe the identities of existing things. Hence, to express false propositions about existing things (whether by words, or as here, by actions) is to deny their identities and therefore to deny their existence.

To deny an essential characteristic or part of an entity's identity has the effect of denying its identity altogether and hence is a denial of its existence. To treat a post as a man means to deny the existence of the post. Conversely, to treat a man as a post denies the existence of the man. Such an action expresses proposition (P3).

To deny identity is also to deny nature, because the identity of an existing thing constitutes its nature. (See beginning of this section above.)¹¹⁴

In the case of human beings, to deny human identity is to deny human nature (which is part of nature) and therefore to deny nature. In Section III of RND "Of Reason," it was established

114 To put this in Kantian terms, to treat a person as an means and not an end is to treat him as an object (post) and not as a happiness-seeker (an end). Objects, such as posts, are used, they are merely means, to the end, which is human happiness.

that human beings are rational beings, and in Section II of RND “Of Happiness,” that human beings are happiness-seekers. Therefore, in the case of persons, to deny either that they are rational, or that they are happiness-seekers is to deny their identity, and therefore to deny their nature, and therefore is to act contrary to nature.

An objection that has been made to this theory is that if one expresses with words a proposition that constitutes a true description of the action of treating a person as what he is not, then one has met the requirement of not acting in such a way as to express a proposition that denies the nature of things.¹¹⁵

The objector may claim that he acknowledges that a human being is a human being while treating him as a post. That is, he says, “I hereby acknowledge that you are a human being but I am going to treat you as though you are a post.”

If the objector claims a post can talk he is asserting what is false. If he claims a man is a piece of wood, e.g., does not feel pain, he is asserting what is false. If he claims that a man does feel pain but it is of no consequence, he is denying the nature of the man— that he desires to avoid pain—and thus is asserting what is false.

If the objector claims that there is no reason he should care that a man feels pain and desires not to, then he is appealing to reason. It was established in Section III of RND, “Of Reason,” that reason is coextensive with acknowledging truth. The objector then does have a reason for caring

115 Feinberg states this objection using Hume’s straw-man example. “Suppose Hume, to make things perfectly clear to his neighbor’s wife, shuts the windows, pulls the blinds, and then announces: ‘I hereby declare that I am not your husband and you are not my wife, and that I am not about to treat you as if you were my wife, but rather I am going to act as if you are what you are in fact, namely, my mistress,’ and then proceeds to ‘take his liberties.’ It would be difficult to see in what way, then, Hume could be accused of acting ‘contrary to truth.’” Feinberg, “Wollaston and His Critics,” 349. For more on this see Section V.E below.

that the man feels pain which he desires to avoid—that is the accurate description of the situation and therefore constitutes the rational view of it.

If the objector then claims that he does not intend to act according to reason but only in accordance with his wishes, and therefore reason is not an argument against his actions, then he is asserting that he is irrational. But acting contrary to reason is acting against nature, because it is the nature of human beings to act according to reason and because reason consists of acknowledging nature. (See section III.B above for the argument as to why reason governs.) Because his actions deny nature, specifically, the rational nature of human beings (in his case), and the happiness-seeking nature of human beings (in the case of the other person), he is acting contrary to nature.

Such an action denies both the rational nature of human beings, because it rejects reason, and the happiness-seeking nature of human beings.

6. Omissions may also constitute denials of “what is”

In addition, sometimes omissions, that is, deliberate choices not to act, may constitute a denial of true propositions.

What has been said of acts inconsistent with truth, may also be said of many omissions, or neglects to act: that is, by these also true propositions may be denied to be true; and then those omissions, by which this is done, must be wrong for the same reasons with those assigned under the former proposition (I.v).

Actions express propositions only concerning those things to which they have a relation. It is therefore much more difficult to judge omissions. Whether not performing an action expresses a proposition that is false is far more difficult to determine than the truth or falsity of a proposition expressed by an action. But in some cases, not performing an action expresses a

proposition that is false.

But yet there are some neglects or refusals to act, which are manifestly inconsistent with it [truth] (or, with some true propositions) (I.v).

For example, if a person promises to do something but deliberately does not do it, he is expressing the false proposition that he did not make the promise. (But see section 10.2 below on conflicting obligations.)

Refraining from avoiding unhappiness and seeking happiness, and from taking those actions which would bring this about, constitutes denial of human nature and the nature of happiness, and thus constitutes the expression of false propositions concerning them.

Again, there are some ends, which the nature of things and truth require us to aim at, and at which therefore if we do not aim, nature and truth are denied. If a man does not desire to prevent evils, and to be happy, he denies both his own nature and the nature and definition of happiness to be what they are. And then further, willingly to neglect the means, leading to any such end, is the same as not to propose that end, and must fall under the same censure (I.v).

It is difficult to know how to seek happiness and avoid unhappiness. The ability and opportunity to seek happiness vary considerably and some people have no chance of doing so. Lack of knowledge of how the world works, and luck, make it difficult. However, not doing what one is able to do constitutes an omission.

In the case of some types of actions, not performing a particular instance of such an action does not constitute the expression of a false proposition but never performing that particular type of action does constitute the expression of a false proposition.

There are omissions of other kinds, which will deserve to be enumerated to these by being either total, or notorious, or upon the score of some other circumstance (I.v).

The examples he gives are, for a person of means not to give charity to a particular poor person does not express a false proposition, but for him never to give charity expresses false propositions

concerning the condition of the poor and of himself. Not to pray at a particular time or in a particular manner does not express a false proposition, but never praying does express a false proposition (that God does not exist). Not helping someone in an emergency when one is able, denies human nature (as a happiness-seeker and a social being) and also denies what one would want if the situation were reversed.

7. Moral good and evil are equivalent to right and wrong

When any act would be wrong, the forbearing that act must be right: likewise when the omission of any thing would be wrong, the doing of it (i.e. not omitting it) must be right. Because *contrariorum contraria est ratio* (I.vii).

Moral good and evil are coincident with right and wrong (I.viii).

The standard of morality is conformity to nature. In preceding propositions it was established that nature consists of identities in relations, that a true proposition is one which constitutes an accurate description of nature, and that actions express propositions. From this it followed that if an action expresses a false proposition then it denies identities and relations to be what they are; as nature consists of identities in relations, denying identities and relations to be what they are constitutes denying nature; what denies nature is, by definition, unnatural or contrary to nature; what is contrary to nature is wrong in nature; what is in accordance with nature is right in nature. The actions of intelligent and free agents are subject to classification as good or evil (proposition i). Therefore, if an intelligent and free agent's actions are in accordance with nature (express true propositions), that is, are right in nature, then they are morally good. If an intelligent and free agent's actions are contrary to nature (express false propositions), that is, are wrong in nature, then they are morally evil.

8. Happiness is the standard by which the moral status of actions is calculated

Because the nature of human beings is that of happiness-seekers, the degree of wrongness of an action which expresses a proposition which is false, i.e., denies nature, is determined by the quantity of happiness it reduces.

Every act therefore of such a being, as is before described, and all those omissions which interfere with truth...are morally evil, in some degree or other (I.ix).

While all truths are equally true, they vary in importance, that is, in the degree of unhappiness their denial produces. Thus while all denials of truth are equally false, they are not all morally equal, because their moral importance is judged by the amount of unhappiness they cause.

An example Wollaston offers is a comparison of the amount of happiness affected by the theft of a book with that affected by the theft of an entire estate. The book provided some pleasure and the owner was deprived of that. The loss of the estate deprives him of all his pleasures, and also deprives his family and his heirs. It is therefore a much greater loss of happiness to the owner (and his heirs).

This answers an objection that has been made to this theory, that, under it, all denials of truth are morally equal because all truths are equally true.

I think his notion of moral good and evil makes all truths not only moral, but equally so; or, in other words, all truths are in themselves of equal importance, according to his definition; and the agreement or disagreement of our actions with them, equally moral or immoral.¹¹⁶

If then significancy of falsehood be the very same with moral evil, all crimes must be equal.¹¹⁷

116 [Bott], *Principal and Peculiar*, 9.

117 [Francis Hutcheson], *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, 4th ed. (London: W. Innys, etc., 1756): 274, <http://www.books.google.com>. Spelling, capitalization, and italicization have been modernized.

The true defects in Wollaston's theory of violated truth as the essence of all immorality are the same as those of the ancient Stoic systems of which it is an explication. The theory cannot explain why some immoral acts are worse than others, and presupposes in still other ways antecedent moral principles that are irreducibly distinct from it.¹¹⁸

Wollaston explicitly rejects this part of the Stoic view:

This may serve for an answer to Chrysippus, and them who say 'That if no one truth be greater than another truth, nor no one falsehood greater than another falsehood; then neither is one fraud nor one sin greater than another' (I.xi.nn).

The degree of wrongness is determined by the quantity of harm to human happiness done by the action.

The rule is negative. It says what not to do—deny truth, by taking as action which expresses a proposition which is false and which affects human happiness and thus denies the happiness-seeking nature of human beings.¹¹⁹

The rule does not call for "acting according to truth."

Acting according to truth, as that phrase is used in the objection,¹²⁰ is not the thing required by my rule; but, so to act that no truth may be denied by any act (I.xi).

9. The definition of natural religion as act obligation is stated

If there be moral good and evil, distinguished as before, there is religion; and such as may most properly be styled natural. By religion I mean nothing else but an obligation to do (under which word I comprehend acts both of body and mind...)

118 Feinberg, 351.

119 This negative approach is somewhat prefigured by a statement by Francis Bacon "And in this latter sense chiefly does the soul partake of some light to behold and discern the perfection of the moral law, a light however not altogether clear, but such as suffices rather to reprove the vice in some measure, than to give full information of the duty." Quoted in Forsyth, "Place of Cumberland," 35.

120 "If I want money, don't I act according to truth, if I take it from some body else to supply my own wants? And more, do not I act contrary to truth, if I do not?" (I.xi.obj.3).

what ought not to be omitted, and to forbear what ought not to be done (I.x).

10. Final statement of the moral rule

That every intelligent, active, and free being should so behave himself, as by no act to contradict truth; or, that he should treat every thing as being what it is (I.xi).

Treating things as being what they are means treating them in accordance with their nature.

Inasmuch as truth, that is, true propositions, constitutes an accurate description of nature, not contradicting truth means not contradicting nature. The rule then, is to act in accordance with nature by treating everything as it is, that is, in accordance with its nature, which is done by not performing acts that express false propositions and thereby contradict truth and nature.

Acting in accordance with nature (treating things as what they are) requires:

1. Considering all the relevant attributes of the identities and relations in question (i.e., their nature).
2. Dealing with cases of conflicting moral obligations.
3. Recognizing the limited nature of one's reason and knowledge.
4. Acting in accordance with the happiness-seeking nature of human beings.

1. Considering all the relevant attributes of the situation.

Treating things as what they are, that is, acting in accordance with their identities and relations that constitute their nature, requires taking into consideration all the attributes of the situation that are relevant to the action being considered, and only those that are relevant.

In order to judge rightly what any thing is, it must be considered not only what it is in itself or in one respect, but also what it may be in any other respect, which is capable of being denied by facts or practice: and the whole description of the thing ought to be taken in (I.vi).

The responses to two objections demonstrate how relevance and irrelevance are to be considered.

Objection 1:

If every thing must be treated as being what it is, what rare work will follow?
For...to treat my enemy as such is to kill him, or revenge myself soundly upon him
(I.xi.obj1).

Objection 2:

To use a creditor, who is a spend-thrift, or one that knows not the use of money, or has no occasion for it, as such, is not to pay him (I.xi.obj2).

The answer to Objection 1 is, inasmuch as all the relevant identities and relations concerning a situation must be considered, that E is an enemy is not the only relevant fact concerning him. Other relevant facts are that he is a human being, and therefore to be treated according to common humanity. He is also a fellow-citizen, and so to be treated according to the laws which include the social contract not to engage in private vengeance. Objector is also a member of the society, and hence of the social contract and is subject to these laws. If Objector treats E contrary to these laws, he denies their existence. Therefore, Objector should treat E as a complex being who is “a man, a fellow-citizen, and an enemy” (I.xi).

The answer to Objection 2 is that Objector is claiming to be a judge over the creditor (i.e., entitled to deprive him of property), which is a false assertion. Objector is also claiming what cannot be true, that he knows certainly the creditor’s future as well as present circumstances. He denies the creditor’s money to be his, which is a false proposition. If he is a creditor then the money is owed to him; if it is owed to him, then he has a right to it; if he has a right to it, it is his. If Objector (the debtor) keeps the money, he treats it as if it were his own, which asserts a false proposition. To pay the creditor asserts only the proposition that the money is due to him—it is

not expressing a proposition about anything else (such as his lifestyle) (I.xi).

It may appear that the responses to Objections 1 and 2 contradict. Should one consider all true propositions concerning identities and relationships, or not? The answer is that one must consider all the relevant true propositions. All the true propositions that are relevant to the issue under consideration, not all true propositions under the sun. To disregard relevant true propositions produces a wrong result. But to consider irrelevant true propositions also produces a wrong result.

In the case of the first objection, that the enemy is a human being, and that there is a social contract, are relevant true propositions that must be considered in order to arrive at a correct evaluation of the situation.

In the case of the second objection, as the issue is whether to pay money owed, the relevant question is whether it is a true proposition that the money is owed. The action of paying the creditor asserts only the proposition that he is owed the money (the money is his) and that proposition is true. As paying him the money does not assert propositions about any other identity or relation, propositions about other identities (e.g., he is a spendthrift) or relations (how he relates to money) are not relevant.

An objection that may be raised is that the rule does not answer the question of how the relevant facts are to be determined. But that question is not particular to this moral theory—it applies to all moral theories and to human cognition in general. Every moral theory requires selecting the relevant facts in order to make a judgment. In the case of Kantian ethics, how does one determine which element of the situation is to be universalized?¹²¹ In the case of Aristotelian

121 “[Kant’s] rule about universalizable maxims is useless without stipulations as to what shall count as a relevant description of an action with a view to constructing a maxim about it.” G. E.

ethics, how does one decide which virtue applies? In the case of utilitarianism, how does one calculate the greatest happiness for the greatest number in the face of the practically infinite variables involved?

The problem of relevance applies to all human cognition. The world is indeed a blooming, buzzing confusion, and in order to reason about any topic it is necessary to determine what are the relevant elements of the subject under consideration. At this point it becomes a question of epistemology.

Acting in accordance with nature means taking into account the relevant identities and relations in all their complexity and excluding those that are irrelevant. There is no question that this can be very difficult. Wollaston acknowledges this in the last objection:

Lastly, how shall a man know what is true: and if he can find out truth, may he not want the power of acting agreeably to it? (I.xi).

He addresses the first part of the question in Section III of RND "Of Reason, and the Ways of Discovering Truth" (see section III.B above) and the second part in Section IV "Of the Obligations of Imperfect Beings with Respect to Their Power of Acting" (see section III.E below).

2. Conflicting moral obligations.

All truths are true, therefore they cannot contradict each other. However, there can be truths which support conflicting positions.

[T]here are not indeed opposite truths, but there are truths on opposite sides (I.vi).

M. Ancombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 no. 124 (January 1958): 2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3749051>.

Moral obligations may be, indeed, often are, conflicting. In the case of conflicting obligations the principle stated above applies. All the relevant truths concerning the identities and relations have to be considered for a correct moral decision to be reached.

Here the importance of the truths on the one and the other side should be diligently compared (I.vi).

The importance of the truths is evaluated by their effect on the happiness of the persons involved.

Wollaston's position is summarized by Ralph Stedman:

First, we may note the divergence of this view from that of [W. D. Ross], which, in a way, it anticipates. According to the latter, the conflict is between some few or more of a definite number of intuitively discerned '*prima facie* duties,' whereas for Wollaston—who seems to me closer to actual moral experience—the conflict is between the demands of an indefinite number of elements in a complex situation, to each of which (could they be dissevered) taken alone the 'truthful' or 'appropriate' act would not be obscure, but which taken together offer a problem of well-nigh insurmountable difficulty. Wollaston is almost painfully aware of the hindrances in the way of the discovery of the 'just right' act in any really serious moral situation.¹²²

3. Epistemic continence.

Treating things as being what they are includes treating one's knowledge in accordance with its nature, that is, limited.

In the mean time I shall only say, that if in any particular case truth is inaccessible, and after due inquiry it doth not appear what, or how things are, then this will be true, that the case or thing under consideration is *doubtful*: and to act agreeably unto this truth is to be not opinionative, nor obstinate, but modest, cautious, docile, and to endeavour to be on the safer side. Such behaviour shows the case to be as it is (I.xi).

The limitations of knowledge are discussed in Section III of RND "Of Reason and the Ways of Discovering Truth" (see section III.B above), and the obligations incurred with that limited

122 Stedman, "Ethics of Wollaston," 223.

knowledge are discussed in Section IV of RND “Of the Obligations of Imperfect Beings with Respect to Their Power of Acting” (See section III.E below) and in Section IX of RND “Truths Belonging to a Private Man, and Respecting (directly) Only Himself” (See Chapter IV.E below).

4. The positive moral obligation.

While the moral rule is negative—not to act in such a way as to deny the nature of anything, both the nature of human beings as happiness-seekers, and the nature of anything else which affects their happiness—there is also a positive moral obligation to act in accordance with one’s nature by seeking happiness. Not acting to seek happiness amounts to not desiring happiness and not desiring happiness constitutes not acting in accordance with human nature. Thus, human beings have self-regarding duties.

There is a positive moral obligation to act in accordance with one’s nature, which is that of a happiness-seeker, by seeking happiness.

To make itself happy is a duty, which every being, in proportion to its capacity, owes to itself; and that, which every intelligent being may be supposed to aim at, in general (II.ix-x).

There is also an obligation to treat other human beings in accordance with their nature, which is that of happiness-seekers.

We cannot act with respect to either ourselves, or other men, as being what we and they are, unless both are considered as beings susceptible of happiness and unhappiness, and naturally desirous of the one and averse to the other (II.ix-x).

To act in accordance with one’s nature as a happiness-seeker requires taking those actions which promote happiness and avoiding those actions which promote unhappiness. Not to do so amounts to not seeking happiness.

[W]illingly to neglect the means, leading to any such end [happiness], is the same

as not to propose that end, and must fall under the same censure (I.v).

What then constitutes morally good behavior? Not taking any action which expresses a proposition which denies any truth which affects the happiness of a human being. Taking those actions whose omission would assert a proposition which denies any truth which affects the happiness of a human being. Also, taking those actions which bring about one's happiness.

In addition, some acts may have so little effect that their moral significance is almost non-existent.

[T]hough to act against truth in any case is wrong, yet, the degrees of guilt varying with the importance of things, in some cases the importance one way or the other may be so little as to render the crime *evanescent* or *almost* nothing (I.xi.ans5.1).

Any act which is neither a denial of truth nor required by duty may or may not be done (I.ix).

E. THE EXTENT OF MORAL OBLIGATION: SECTION IV, “OF THE OBLIGATIONS OF IMPERFECT BEINGS WITH RESPECT TO THEIR POWER OF ACTING”

Section IV of RND, “Of the Obligations of Imperfect Beings with Respect to Their Power of Acting,” defines the extent of moral obligation. It is a response to the last objection in Section I: whether someone who knows the truth may not be able to act according to it.

The question was this, If a man can find out truth, may he not want the power of acting agreeably to it? (IV).

In the preceding section (Section III of RND, Chapter III.D) the foundational principle of acting in accordance with nature was used as the basis of the development of the moral rule. To recapitulate:

Moral good and evil are defined as acting in accordance with or contrary to nature. Those acts which are in accordance with nature are morally good. Those acts which are not in accordance with nature are morally evil. Acts which are morally good are right and acts which are morally evil are wrong by the definition of the terms (I.viii).

The standard for determining which acts are in accordance with nature and which are not is truth. That is because true propositions describe nature as it is (I.ii) and therefore are in accordance with nature and false propositions deny nature and therefore are contrary to nature; nature and truth are coextensive.

Intelligent and free agents express propositions by their actions (I.iii). These propositions have a truth value. Actions which express true propositions are therefore in accordance with nature and actions which express false propositions are contrary to nature (per proposition I.ii).

It therefore follows that as actions which express true propositions are in accordance with nature, and acting in accordance with nature is morally good and therefore right, then actions

which express true propositions are morally good and therefore right; and, actions which express false propositions are contrary to nature, and as acting contrary to nature is morally evil and therefore wrong, then actions which express false propositions are morally evil and therefore wrong (I.iv). (See Section D.7 above.)

The term “acts” refers only to actions performed by beings which are intelligent and free agents, that is, which can act from an internal motive, because everything else does not act but is merely acted upon.

That act, which may be denominated morally good or evil, must be the act of a being capable of distinguishing, choosing, and acting for himself: or more briefly, of an intelligent and free agent (I.i).¹²³

It is this ability to act from an internal motive that is the source of moral obligation.

[A human being] is conscious of a *liberty* in himself to act or not to act; and...therefore he is...a being whose acts may be *morally good or evil* (IX.ii.5).

This ability creates the necessity of choice because deliberate human action is not determined. The necessity of choice in turn makes it necessary to have some basis on which to make choices. That basis is acting in accordance with nature (this includes the defining characteristics of human nature: rationality (RND Chapter III, see Section III.B above) and happiness-seeking (RND Chapter II, see Section III.C above)). Only undetermined human beings have a choice as to whether to act in accordance with nature or contrary to it. All other beings are determined and hence “act” in accordance with their nature and with nature in general. Thus, it is human nature itself (which is a part of nature) which is the source of moral obligation and accordance with nature which constitutes the definition of moral good and evil. Those actions

123 Compare with Locke: [No]thing can be capable of a law that is not a free agent. *Essay*, I.3.14.

which are in accordance with nature are morally good. Those actions which are contrary to nature are morally evil.

However, while intelligent and free agents can act from an internal motive, and only acts performed from such a motive constitute acts, and thus only such acts can be morally good or evil, intelligent and free agents are not free in all aspects of their existence; in some parts of their existence they are acted upon, just as inanimate objects, plants, and animals are (this is discussed in detail in Section IX of RND, see Chapter IV.E below). Like inanimate objects they are subject to physical forces (IX.ii.1); like plants and animals, they experience growth, decay, and death and have physical needs which must be met in order to survive (IX.ii.2); like animals they have senses, feelings, and their actions affect their well-being (IX.ii.3).

Thus, as their moral obligation is derived from their ability to act from an internal motive, and is coextensive with it, and as their ability to act from an internal motive is not absolute but limited, then it follows that the extent of their moral obligation is also not absolute but limited and is therefore coextensive with the capacity to act from an internal motive.

Wollaston's argument is that obligation is a property of the capacity to act. If the capacity to act does not exist then it can have no properties because non-existence has no properties. Hence a capacity which does not exist cannot have the property of being obligatory.

Thus, Wollaston's definition of the extent of moral obligation is a form of the principle that "ought implies can."¹²⁴

124 Compare the following discussion with Kant's statement "The action to which the 'ought' applies must indeed be possible under natural conditions." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A548:B576. While both Wollaston and Kant define human beings' freedom as the source of moral obligation, their definition of freedom differs, as for Wollaston empirical observation is the source of the definition of the human capacity for free choice (see quote from IX.ii.5 above) while Kant derives freedom from the distinction between noumenal and phenomenal nature while

The argument consists of seven propositions. 1. What does not exist cannot incur an obligation (proposition i). 2. What does not have a power to act cannot incur an obligation to act (proposition ii). 3. Objects do not have a power to act and animals do not have a power to act above sense, therefore they cannot incur an obligation to act (proposition iii). 4. Intelligent beings have a power to act deliberately, therefore they incur an obligation to act which is equal to their power to act (proposition iv). 5. That power to act is called endeavour, which is doing as much as one can (proposition v). 6. Therefore, the moral obligation of an agent is to endeavour, that is, do as much as one can (proposition vi). 7. Final definition of moral obligation in accordance with the preceding Sections (proposition vii).

The argument in this section is based upon the premises stated in proposition I.i. The existence or non-existence of the capacity to act is the starting point, in accordance with the definition of agency.

Nothing is capable of no obligation. For to oblige nothing is the same as not to oblige (IV.i).

In order for an obligation to exist, the capacity to perform the obligatory act must exist; if the capacity does not exist, then because what does not exist has no properties, it is not possible for non-existence to have the property of having an obligation. Therefore,

So far as any being has no power, or opportunity of doing any thing, so far is that being incapable of any obligation to do it...For that being, which has not the faculties or opportunity necessary to the doing of any thing, is in respect of that thing a being utterly unactive, no agent at all, and therefore as to that act nothing at

rejecting empirical observation as the source for morality. Cumberland also expresses a view similar to Wollaston's: "[A]ccording to the laws of both natural and moral philosophy, no other assistances towards an happy life are required from us, as we are accountable agents, than as such natural and moral laws concern the rules of free actions, and of such objects to them (i.e., to free actions) respectively belonging, as lie within the capacity or sphere of human freedom." *Laws of Nature*, part 1, chapter 1, section 4:10.

all (IV.ii).

The first proposition in RND established the standard for moral obligation as the capacity to act from an internal motive, that is, of being “an intelligent and free agent” (I.i); it was also established that only such internally motivated acts constitute acting at all and that all other beings do not act but are determined. From this it follows that human action constitutes action only when it is from an internal motive and that in those cases where the person does not have the capacity to act from an internal motive, that person is “inactive,” not acting, but determined just as all non-human beings are determined. Because the capacity to act from an internal motive is the standard for moral obligation then in cases where that capacity does not exist moral obligation does not exist. Where action—defined solely as internally generated—is not possible, then an agent, which by definition is what can act, does not exist either, hence is “nothing” (or to put it in current terms, agency does not exist).

The definition of the capacity to act is somewhat Newtonian.

To require or command one to do any thing is to require him to apply a power superior to the resistance to be met with in doing it (IV.ii).

Where the capacity to act does not exist, it is nothing, nonexistent, and what does not exist cannot incur obligations.

But if he has no such power, then his power of that kind and degree is nothing: and it is *nothing* that is required to be applied (IV.ii).

Concerning an act which is impossible for a being to perform, the being is not an agent. If the capacity to act does not exist, that is, it is nothing, then the requirement is nothing, that is, does not exist. Wollaston gives the following example:

It is just the same, as if a man was commanded to do something with his third hand, when he has but two; which would be the same as to bid him to do it with no hand, or not bid him do it (IV.ii).

A corollary of proposition IV.ii (and I.i) is that because inanimate objects do not have a capacity to act, they cannot incur an obligation to act; and as animals do not have a capacity to act above sense, they also cannot incur an obligation to act.¹²⁵

Inanimate and unactive beings are capable of no obligation: nor merely sensitive [animals] of any obligation to act upon principles, or motives above sense (IV.iii).

The second corollary of propositions IV.ii and I.i is that as intelligent beings (agents) have a capacity to act deliberately they therefore incur an obligation to act which is coextensive with their capacity to act.

The obligations of beings intelligent and active must be proportionable to their faculties, powers, opportunities; and not more (IV.iv).

The term for acting in accordance with one's capacity to act is "endeavour," which is defined as doing as much as one can. This is the extent of moral obligation as defined in proposition iv.

To endeavour may fitly express the use of all the opportunities and powers, that any intelligent and active, but imperfect, being hath to act. For to endeavour is to do what one can....so none can do more (IV.v).

However, while there is an obligation to use the capacities one has, there is no certainly as to the success of the use of those capacities.

One may exert his endeavours with greater advantage or success, than another; yet still they are but endeavours (IV.v).¹²⁶

125 "[Animals] perceive by moments, without reflection upon past or future, upon causes, circumstances, etc." (II.i.obs.8).

126 Compare this with Cumberland. "First, this self-evident truth, that the propensity towards effecting any end, cannot be stronger and more operative than the determined purpose and inclination of the agent, to act, in all cases, to the very best of his abilities." *Laws of Nature*, part 1, chapter 1, section 6:15.

As obligation is coextensive with the capacity to act, and acting to the extent of one's capacity to act is endeavour, then a moral agent's obligation is to endeavour.

The imputations of moral good and evil to beings capable of understanding and acting must be in proportion to their endeavours: or, their obligations reach, as far as their endeavours may (IV.vi).

Thus, the definition of moral obligation in accordance with all the preceding Sections is:

They who are capable of discerning truth, though not all truths, and of acting conformably to it, though not always or in all cases, are nevertheless obliged to do these, as far as they are able: or, it is the duty of such a being sincerely to endeavour to practice reason; not to contradict any truth, by word or deed; and in short, to treat every thing as being what it is (IV.vii).

The question answered by this Section was asked at the end of Section I, in which the moral rule was stated. The question was whether, even when a person knows what would constitute acting in accordance with a rational assessment of a situation, and in such a manner that his actions do not express a proposition which is false, and thus treat the identities and relations involved as what they are, is it not possible that he may be unable to act in accordance with this knowledge?

The answer is that it is indeed possible, and therefore, the moral obligations of human beings are defined and delimited by their capacities. Their obligation to act is coextensive with their capacity to act. However, it is not less than their capacity to act and thus they have a moral obligation to make their best efforts to fully use their capacity to act.

Every one can endeavour: every one can do what he can. But in order to [do] that every one ought to be in earnest, and to exert himself heartily; not stifling his own conscience, not dissembling, suppressing, or neglecting his own powers (IV.vii).

Thus there is a moral obligation to develop one's capacities, including reason, to use one's reason to learn what constitute true descriptions of relevant identities and relations, and develop one's capacities to carry out the conclusions reached by reason.

The extent of this obligation is discussed in detail in Section IX, proposition iii (See Chapter IV.E below). It will be summarized briefly here.

There is an obligation to improve one's reason (IX.iii.6). As reason is the distinguishing characteristic of human nature, by improving our rational faculties we become more rational and thus improve our nature. However, people's opportunities and capacities for improving their reason can be limited. Therefore, the extent of one's obligation to improve one's reason is determined by one's opportunities—as established in proposition ii above.

There is an obligation to learn from others (IX.iii.7). This acknowledges true propositions concerning one's nature—that one has limited knowledge and capacity, is fallible, and that it is possible for someone else to be more knowledgeable. (To deny these true propositions would violate the moral rule.) Everyone can get information from others. The less a person knows the more he should seek to learn from others.

This does not mean following blindly the opinions of others, who are also fallible human beings, but listening to their arguments and using one's own reason to determine what is reasonable to believe.

There is an obligation to overcome one's prejudices (IX.iii.[8]). One should work to eliminate preconceptions which prevent one from reasoning correctly and impartially. Everyone begins life in ignorance and then tends to be influenced by irrational ideas and eventually becomes set in them. It is therefore necessary to work to clear one's mind of them because they hinder good reasoning. By doing so one makes one's reason fit for use.

The way to find out the extent of one's capacities is to use them, as opposed to preemptively claiming one does not have them.

The short way of knowing this certainly is to try. If he can do nothing, no labor

can be lost; but if he is capable of acting, and doth not act, the consequences and blame must be justly chargeable upon himself (IV.vii).

Virtue consists in using rightly whatever capacities one has. There is a distinction between virtue and good fortune. People have beneficial characteristics such as good looks, wealth, health, fortitude, etc., by nature. Because they are given by nature they are not virtues but advantages. Those who lack these beneficial characteristics are not therefore lacking in virtue when they do not use capacities that they do not have (per proposition IV.i). Therefore, the extent of a person's virtue depends on the extent to which he uses his capacities rightly—a person who has less of a beneficial characteristic and does as much as he can with it is as virtuous as one who has more and does the greater amount that he can with it (IX.iv).

The universalization of morality

Wollaston also uses his system to derive the universalization of moral principles by applying the principle that morality consists of treating things as they are. This is in Section VI of RND and is discussed in Chapter IV.B below. Meanwhile, here is an illustrative quote.

Let us suppose some rule, by which if all mankind would agree to govern themselves, it would be in general good for the world: that is, such a practice would be agreeable to the nature and circumstances of mankind. If all men should transgress this rule, what would be the consequence of such an universal revolt? A general evil, or something disagreeable to our nature and the truth of our circumstances (VI.iii).

CHAPTER IV. WOLLASTON'S APPLICATION OF HIS MORAL THEORY

In the remaining sections of RND (V-IX), Wollaston applies his moral theory to derive principles of religion (Section V), political theory (Sections VI and VII), and personal conduct (Sections VIII and IX).

Wollaston's positions fall within the views of his era; however, he uses his moral rule to derive them. His views on religion (Section V) are conventional; Chapin, for instance, characterizes them as "orthodox in a distinctively Anglican manner."¹²⁷ His political theory (Sections VI and VII) lies within the tradition of natural law and natural equality that flows from Aquinas and the prominent Anglican theologian Richard Hooker through Locke and Cumberland. His approach differs from Locke's as it constitutes a deduction from premises which does not use historical examples, and has a different starting point for property rights. His views on family life (Section VIII) have an emphasis on marriage as a means of happiness for the married couple that extends beyond marriage as primarily a means of procreation. His account of obligation (Section IX) is based on the definition of human beings as rational, and the definition of obligation and its extent that were presented in Sections I and IV respectively.

127 Chapin, "Was Wollaston a Deist?" 73.

A. RELIGION: SECTION V, “TRUTHS RELATING TO THE DEITY. OF HIS EXISTENCE, PERFECTION, PROVIDENCE, ETC.”

In Section V Wollaston develops his views concerning God. He offers two proofs for the existence of God—first cause and design, deduces conclusions about the nature of God, argues against some different views, for particular providence, provides answers to the problems of prescience and evil, and sets forth the proper attitude human beings should have towards God.

He presents the first cause proof of the existence of God (V.i, V.ii, V.iii) and then makes deductions about the nature of God. God is eternal (V.iv), infinite (V.iv), incomprehensible (V.v), perfect (V.vi, V.xvi), and singular (V.vii). All beings depend upon him for their existence (V.viii), and therefore he is the author of nature (V.ix).

He argues against some other conceptions of God. God cannot be corporeal (V.xi), for if he were, neither matter nor motion could exist (V.xiii). He cannot be

infinite space, nor infinite duration, nor matter infinitely extended, or eternally existing, nor any, nor all of these taken together (V.xii)

as this would lead to various unreasonable conclusions (such as Spinoza’s (V.xii.nn)).

Nor can other terms substitute for God. Neither “chance” nor “fate” constitute causes. “Nature” is used carelessly and has several meanings none of which constitute a cause, except when it is used as a metonymous term for God, but that does not constitute a replacement for God (V.xiv).

He also presents the argument from design for the existence of God (V.xiv, V.xv, V.xvii).

He offers an argument for particular providence—that God acts in the world. As God’s knowledge and understanding are perfect, he knows the future, including the acts of free agents. It is not impossible that God could a) design particular cases without disrupting the general laws of

nature; b) knowing how people will freely act, arrange to put them in the world in such a place that their actions not only fit a general plan but affect particular individuals; c) influence people's minds without interfering with free will via "insinuations and impressions;" and d) may have means of acting in particular cases that are beyond human knowledge and do not disrupt the general laws of nature.

God treats everything as what it is. Therefore, the natural laws governing material objects treat them as they are—always the same—and are therefore simple, few, and constant. But "intelligent, active, free beings" must be ruled differently. Because they are beings who can choose to behave as they should, or not; are susceptible to pleasure and pain; are aware that they owe their existence to God, or not; and whose cases vary greatly (unlike inanimate objects), therefore, how God acts towards them must be different from the way he applies natural laws to matter. For particular cases to be treated as they are—virtuous or vicious—is reasonable. As God is perfect, he must act according to reason, otherwise he would have the imperfection of being unreasonable. As his knowledge and power are perfect he must be able to do so. What is not impossible must be possible for God. Therefore, if it is possible that there is particular providence then it must be (V.xviii).

However, this leads to the problem of prescience. If God knows the future, he knows it certainly, therefore it is certain, therefore there is no freedom. The answer is that

the nature of a thing is not changed by being known, or known before hand
(V.xviii).

The example he gives is that if he sees something, it is certain it is there, but it is not there because he sees it, he sees it because it is there. Therefore,

it is a future choice of the free agent, that determines the prescience, which yet may be infallibly true (V.xviii).

Another example is that some individuals can predict what will happen much better than most people due to their greater understanding,

Observe what sagacity there is in some men, not only in respect of physical causes and effects, but also of the future actings of mankind (V.xviii).

Therefore God, with his infinite understanding, can predict the future freely-chosen acts of free agents without determining them (V.xviii).

God's perfection also leads to the problem of evil. Wollaston denies Manicheism—there is no independent existence of evil. Not being able to account for the existence of evil is caused by our ignorance. Some things seem evil because we cannot see the whole picture and some physical evils are necessitated by physical goods. Matter cannot be perfect and therefore must have some evils. Therefore, to ask why God permits evil is the same as asking why he permits a material world and human beings to exist. Many evils are caused by wrong behavior and are therefore the fault of the agent. They may also be means to happiness that cannot be obtained otherwise. There are more good than evil things in the world (V.vii).

In response to the objection that good people suffer and evil people flourish and therefore the world is not ordered according to God's reason, he answers that we don't know certainly who is good or bad, nor what is good or bad for other people, what they experience, how they experience it, and what it leads to. Furthermore, people are part of larger groupings such as families, nations, and humanity. This is a condition of their being which leads to great inequalities. The good may suffer and the bad may gain from large scale events because the good of the whole takes precedence over individual cases when they conflict (V.xviii).

Lastly, this problem is rectified in the afterlife in which the good are compensated and the bad punished. That an afterlife is necessary to do this serves as proof that there is an afterlife.

If what is objected be in many instances true, this only infers the *necessity* of a future state (V.xviii).

This happens so often in order to convince us of the certainty of a future state, because denying a future state means asserting that God is unreasonable, which is impossible (V.xviii). (Wollaston addresses this issue further in Section IX, propositions vi-xvii; see Section E below.)

Behaving correctly towards God means a) not representing him by images; b) when speaking and thinking of God being very careful about our choice of words and understanding them in their sublimest sense; c) worshiping God as best we can, acknowledging what he is and what we are by a solemn and proper act of thoughtfully composed prayer; and d) having a correct, rational, non-superstitious view of God (V.xix).

B. THE BASIS OF POLITICAL THEORY: SECTION VI, “TRUTHS RESPECTING MANKIND IN GENERAL, ANTECEDENT TO ALL HUMAN LAWS”

In Sections VI and VII Wollaston develops a political philosophy¹²⁸ by applying his moral rule to humanity in general, beginning with human beings in a state of nature in Section VI—“Truths Respecting Mankind in General, Antecedent to all Human Laws,” and then the development of society in Section VII—“Truths Respecting Particular Societies of Men, or Governments.”

This section defines the rights human beings have in a state of nature. However, the conditions of human beings in a supposed state of nature are not the basis of the argument; rather, their rights are deduced from the nature of their existence as rational, sensitive beings.

Wollaston’s views concerning the state of nature for human beings are discussed in Section VII of RND (see Section C below).

The idea of property is central to his political philosophy. However, property in this theory is a concept that comprehends far more than material goods. Property begins with the person, who has property in his life, body, and actions, which are activities of the self. These actions include labor, by means of which this right to property extends outward to material goods. A person’s property therefore includes any interactions, whether trade or other, which he has with the world and other persons. Thus, property here means freedom, the freedom to act in the world, including interactions with other people, not only with material goods. This conception of property is seamless; it proceeds from the self, to the actions of the self, and to external goods;

128 There are also elements of economic theory and moral psychology in his discourse.

there is no cleavage between individual rights and property rights—they are all the same right. This theory begins with the nature of human beings as individuals; rather than start with land or society it begins with personhood and proceeds outwards.

Wollaston's theory of natural equality is in the tradition of Aquinas, Hooker, and Locke, but developed in more detail than Locke's. His property rights theory is a departure from Locke's in its emphasis on property rights as emanating from the individual's ownership of himself, rather than Locke's focus on distribution of land originally granted by God to all humanity. He also develops the consequences of individuation leading to property at considerably more detail than Locke's mixing theory.¹²⁹ His social compact theory is derived explicitly from the application of his moral philosophy, of the truth and happiness standards, including the right to pursuit of happiness.

Note: the headings below are mine.

Proposition i—Individuation

Every man hath in himself a principle of individuation, which distinguishes and separates him from all other men in such a manner, as may render him and them capable of distinct properties in things (or different subjects of property) (VI.i).

Individuals exist so distinctly that any property which one possesses cannot be possessed by another. This is self-evident—

The proof of this I put upon every man's own conscience (VI.i).

This leads to the question of whether there is anything which truly belongs to someone.

129 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Mark Goldie (London: Everyman, 1993), *Second Treatise*, ch. 5, sec. 27:128.

Proposition ii—Self-possession

There are some things, to which (at least before the case is altered by voluntary subjection, compact, or the like) every individual man has, or may have, such a natural and immediate relation, that he only of all mankind can call them his (VI.ii).

Life and body belong so much to a person they are indistinguishable from his self. The labor of a person is his because it is the product of his body and capacities; his labor cannot be that of another, any more than his body can be the body of another.¹³⁰ From this it follows that to claim the labor of another is a denial of truth, as it denies the labor to be that of the one who performed it. (It was established in Section I that it is wrong to perform an act which expresses a proposition which is false, that is, denies things to be what they are.)

This immediate relation to one's life, body, and the products of one's labor constitutes the individual's property rights. What if others claim this property? All of their claims are equal—equally invalid. That is, if B performs some labor, and C then claims it, so can D, E, F, etc. Because all their claims are equal they cancel each other and only B's property right remains.

Proposition iii—Universal Good

A general rule for human beings may be deduced from human nature. In Section II it was established that it is the nature of human beings to seek happiness and that the means of attaining happiness is acting in accordance with nature. In Section I it was established that acting in accordance with nature is coextensive with acting in accordance with truth, that is, performing acts which express propositions which are true.

130 Compare with Locke: “[E]very man has a property in his own person. This nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his.” Ibid.

From this follows a universal rule—that the purpose of society and laws is human happiness.

Whatever is inconsistent with the general peace and welfare (or good) of mankind, is inconsistent with the laws of human nature, wrong, intolerable (VI.iii).

Those maxims may be esteemed the natural and true laws of any particular society, which are most proper to procure the happiness of it. Because happiness is the end of society and laws (VI.iii).

If happiness is not the end of society and laws then unhappiness is; that would imply that unhappiness is desirable. However, it was established in Section II that the seeking of happiness is human nature; therefore the seeking of unhappiness would be contrary to nature and hence truth.

What is true for particular societies is also true for humanity at large, which may be considered as one global society.

And what is said of a particular society is not less true, when applied to the universal society of mankind (VI.iii).

In which case,

Now those things are most apt to produce happiness, which make the most men happy (VI.iii).

Those laws which promote the happiness of humanity are the true laws of humanity (because they are in accordance with human nature as defined before). Those laws which interfere with human happiness are contrary to nature (human nature) and truth (they deny the happiness-seeking nature of human beings). Laws which favor some people at the expense of others cannot be general laws of human nature because they treat some human beings differently from others even though all human beings have the same nature.

It is contradictory to say, that any thing can be a general law of human nature, which tends only to favor the pleasures of some particulars to the prejudice of the

rest, who partake of the same common nature (VI.iii).¹³¹

Which leads to a somewhat utilitarian argument.

As a million of men are more than one; so, in fixing the public laws of human nature, and what ought to be, or not to be, they must in reason be more regarded by a million of times; for here we consider men only as men. (VI.iii).

In considering all of humanity which is made up of individuals who are rational animals, the global society may be considered as a rational animal as well.

For if mankind may be said in general to be a rational animal, the general welfare of it must be the welfare of a rational nature; and therefore that, and the laws which advance it, must be founded in reason; nor can be opposed by any thing, but what is opposite to reason, and consequently to truth (VI.iii).

At times, Wollaston considers a society to be an entity, as in,

[T]he society may be considered as one body, that has common interests and concerns (V.xix.3).

His argument is that the global society of all human beings, all of whom have the nature of being rational animals, may be considered, for the purpose of deriving universal laws, as an entity, which, being made up of rational animals, is a rational entity, and that therefore, universal human welfare is the welfare of a rational entity. Therefore, its well-being is that of a rational nature.

From this it follows that the laws governing it must be based on reason—and thus be in accordance with its nature. It was established in Section III that reason is the means of discovering truth.

Thus, a law that is contrary to reason is contrary to truth, that is, it expresses a false proposition.

131 Compare with Cumberland's argument (in response to Hobbes) that if reason dictates that A's happiness consists of seeking to take everything from B and C, then it also dictates that B's and C's happiness consists of taking everything from A. This constitutes a contradiction. Therefore, one's private happiness and only one's own, cannot be the ultimate end. "The private happiness prescribed by reason for each individual to prosecute, is essentially connected and joined with the happiness of others. And this is the common good which, we argue, ought to be pursued by all." *Laws of Nature*, part 2, chapter 5, section 16:328-9. That is the only ultimate end which is consistent with the happiness of all the individuals, and produces it.

In Section I it was established that an action which expresses a false proposition is morally wrong. Hence, a law which is contrary to reason is “wrong and morally evil” (VI.iii).

This leads to universal rules. (In the following paragraph I have inserted numbers to key to the explanation which follows.)

[1] Let us suppose some rule, by which if all mankind would agree to govern themselves, it would be in general good for the world; that is, such a practice would be agreeable to the nature and circumstances of mankind. [2] If all men should transgress this rule, what would be the consequence of such an universal revolt? A general evil, or something disagreeable to our nature and the truth of our circumstances....[3] And as wrong it would be in any one man; because all the individuals have equal right to do it, one as much as another; and therefore all as much as any one. [4] At least it is certain, that whoever should violate that rule, would contribute his share towards the introduction of universal disorder and misery; [5] and would for his part deny human circumstances to be what they are, public happiness to be what it is, and the rule to be what it really is, as much as if all others conspired with him in this iniquity and madness (VI.iii).

1. If there is a rule which is good in general it would be so because it is in accord with the nature of human beings in general, hence, it would be in accordance with nature. It was established in Section II that acting in accordance with nature is necessary to attain happiness, therefore, such a rule would establish happiness in general. Thus, if everyone follows this rule everyone’s good would result and it would be in accordance with the “nature and circumstances” of human beings.

2. If everyone broke such a rule the result would be general unhappiness. To act in such a way as to bring about unhappiness is contrary to the human nature of happiness-seeking; it is therefore contrary to nature. In Section I it was established that acting contrary to nature is contrary to the moral rule.

3. If it is wrong for one person to act contrary to nature or to a rule that is in accordance with nature (as established in Section I), then it is wrong for more than one or for all of them to do

so, and therefore it is wrong in all cases.

4. Whoever violates such a rule (one that tends to general happiness) is acting in such a way as to increase unhappiness. And thus is acting contrary to the happiness-seeking nature of human beings, hence contrary to nature, hence contrary to the moral rule.

5. A person who does this (violates a rule which tends to general happiness) by such acts denies human circumstances, that is, that human beings are happiness-seekers and that happiness is attained by acting in accordance with nature (Section II); denies that general (public) human happiness is attained by following such a rule; and denies the existence of the rule by taking an action which expresses a proposition which contradicts the rule.

To summarize, if there is a rule which is good in general, is in accordance with the nature of human beings (is rational and true and tends to happiness), then if everyone violated it, the result would be general unhappiness—which would be contrary to nature (of human beings as happiness-seekers) and truth (true propositions about human beings). It would be wrong for an individual to do so because such an act would deny that all individuals have an equal right to (pursuit of) happiness, deny human nature (true propositions about human nature and that human beings are happiness-seekers), and deny what the rule is (by action).

A person who acts so as to violate such a universal rule is pitting his desires against the happiness of all humanity. He disregards everyone else's good and separates himself from it and therefore excludes himself from humanity. Therefore, such a person should be regarded as and treated as

an alien and enemy to the common happiness and tranquility of our species (VI.iii).

Proposition iv—Reciprocity

A rational view of human beings leads to a principle of reciprocity.

Whatever is either reasonable or unreasonable in B with regard to C, would be just the same in C with respect to B, if the case was inverted (VI.iv).¹³²

In Section III, proposition ii it was established that reasoning is conducted by abstract ideas, not by particulars. Hence,

reason is universal, and respects cases, not persons. (See sect. III, pr. [ii]) (VI.iv).

From this it follows that a good way to judge other people is to consider how we would view things in their place (VI.iv).¹³³

A rational view of human beings also leads to a principle of equality (and a response to Hobbes).¹³⁴

Proposition v—Equality

In a state of nature men are equal in respect of dominion (VI.v).

(There is an exception for children. The explanation is in RND Section VIII which deals with

132 Compare with Cumberland: “It necessarily therefore follows that he who determines, concerning the right of another, otherwise than what he determines as to his own right, contradicts himself in a matter most notoriously well known.” *Laws of Nature*, part 2, chapter 5, section 16:332.

133 See also: “Should I, in the last place, find a man grievously hurt by some accident, fallen down, alone, and without present help like to perish, or see his house on fire, no body being near to help, or call out: in this extremity if I do not give him my assistance... by this refusing to do it according to my ability, I deny his case to be what it is; human nature to be what it is; and even those desires and expectations, which I am conscious to myself I should have under the like misfortune, to be what they are” (I.v).

134 Compare with Cumberland: “[C]ontradictory propositions, concerning the right of any two individuals to the same things or persons, cannot possibly be the dictates of right reason. And this is the principal support of all Mr. Hobbes’s doctrine.” *Laws of Nature*, part 1, chapter 2, section 6:148.

family relations (proposition vi). See Section D below.)

In a state of nature, with no laws, people can only be considered as individuals of the same species, who therefore all come under the same definition of their identity. Therefore, their relations are reciprocal, and they are equal. B's relation to C is the same as C's relation to B.

B has no more dominion over C than C reciprocally has over B; that is, they are in this regard equal (VI.v).

Individuals' possession of greater or lesser abilities or defects do not change this equality for the following reasons.

1. Who would judge who has the superior qualities? To claim that someone has the power to judge this asserts he already has dominion over whomever he is judging and that is begging the question.

2. Greater endowments, whether natural or acquired, do not take away the property of the less-endowed in the possession and use of their endowments (per proposition ii—self-possession).

[T]his does not deprive those, who have less, of their title to what they have; or, which is the same, give any one, who has greater abilities, a right to take it, or the use of it from them (VI.v).

This holds for intellectual abilities.

The case would be parallel to this, if B should happen to have better intellectual faculties than C (VI.v).

The individuality of reason was discussed earlier, in Section III—"Of Reason."

[T]hat which is to be regarded in judging of right and truth is *private*; that is, every one must judge for himself...One man can no more discern the objects of his own understanding, and their relations, by the faculties of another, than he can see with another man's eyes...They must be his *own* faculties and conscience, that must determine him. Therefore to demand another man's assent to any thing without conveying into his mind such reasons, as may proceed a sense of the truth of it, is to erect a tyranny over his understanding (III.xii.obs.).¹³⁵

135 Compare with Locke: "For however it [the understanding] may often mistake, it can own no

It also holds for physical strength.

And further, if B should be stronger than C, he would not yet for that reason have any right to be his lord. For C's less degree of strength is as much his, as B's greater is his; therefore C has as much right to his, and (which is the natural consequence) to use his, as B has to use his; that is, C has as much right to resist, as B has to impose or command, by virtue of his strength; and where the right (though not the power) of resisting is equal to the right of commanding, the right of commanding or dominion is nothing (VI.v).

3. Power and right are two different things and the one does not imply the other.

4. If power gives a right to dominion then it gives a right to everything that opposes it and then nothing is wrong—it leads to a contradiction: to oppose one with (greater) power as far as one has power is not wrong, but if he has a right to dominion it would be wrong, as he has a right not to be opposed.

5. The claim that someone has the right to do whatever he has the power to do is contrary to the “peace and general good of mankind” (VI.v) and therefore contrary to proposition iii—universal good.

6. It is also what the powerful would not want if they were weak, and therefore unreasonable by proposition iv—reciprocity.

Proposition vi—Right to (pursuit of) Happiness

From equality of dominion it follows that,

No man can have a right to begin to interrupt the happiness of another (VI.vi).

because

other guide but reason, nor blindly submit to the will and dictates of another.” *Essay*, IV.xvi, 4.

it supposes a dominion over him, and the most absolute too that can be (VI.vi) which is contrary to proposition v—equality. It is also contrary to proposition iv—reciprocity—an aggressor would think an aggression unreasonable if the case were reversed.

The example Wollaston gives is of B taking something from C, who has never done any harm to B. At the beginning—that is, the starting position—C’s right to keep his property is at least as good as B’s right to take it; as they cancel each other, there is no basis for B to claim a superior right to take it. Therefore, things should stay as they are.

[S]ince it is supposed, that C has never invaded the happiness of B, nor taken anything from him...but the whole transaction begins originally from B...C can have nothing that is B’s; and therefore nothing, to which C has not a least as good a title as B has; or, in other words, nothing, which C has not as much right to keep as B to claim. These two rights being then at least equal, and counterpoising each other, no alteration in the present state of things can follow from any superiority of right in B: and therefore it must of right remain as it is; and what C has must, for any right that B has to oppose this settlement, remain with C in his undisturbed possession (VI.vi).

Furthermore, C has a stronger case because he has a right to his own happiness greater than any other person can have by proposition ii—self-possession.

[S]uch a property in his own happiness, as is mentioned in prop. [ii]. such a one as no other can have (VI.vi).

From this follows a right to self-defense.

Proposition vii—Right to Self-defense

Though no man can have a right to begin to interrupt another man’s happiness, or to hurt him; yet every man has a right to defend himself and his against violence, to recover what is taken by force from him, and even to make reprisals [get restitution], by all the means that truth and prudence permit (VI.vii). All this is supposed to be in a state of nature and the absence of human laws (VI.vii.nw).

Many reasons are offered for this. Here are some.

1. In proposition iii—universal good, it was established that whatever is contrary to general happiness is contrary to human nature and hence nature. A great deal of the happiness of humanity depends on being able to save the innocent from aggressors and self-defense is the most important part of this. Therefore, to deny the use of that ability of self-defense is contrary to the laws of nature.

2. If human beings have no right to self-defense it would follow that they have no right to anything, because if they do not have a right to keep what they have then they do not have a right to it.

[S]ince that cannot be his right, which he may not maintain to be his right (VI.vii).

3. In proposition vi—right to happiness, it was established that there is no right to interrupt someone else's happiness. But if there is no right to self-defense then it follows that there is a right to aggression, which is contrary to proposition vi. Also, as by the same proposition beginning to violate the happiness of another is wrong, stopping it is right by the terms (right and wrong).

4. In Section II, proposition ix it was established that there is an obligation to pursue happiness. Therefore human beings not only have a right to defend their happiness but an obligation to do so.

5. The owner, in treating the property as his, is acting in accordance with truth. The taker, in treating it as his, is acting contrary to truth which is wrong by the “fundamental proposition, sect. I prop. IV.” (“No act (whether word or deed) of any being, to whom moral good and evil are imputable, that interferes with any true proposition, or denies any thing to be as it is, can be right.”)

The right to self-defense must be exercised in accordance with truth (Section I) and one's happiness (Section II). It should not be pursued rashly—people should try to prevent damage if

possible; attempt to persuade an aggressor not to engage in aggression; or withdraw. If these are not possible then they should “confront force with force” (VI.vii). Not to do so constitutes denying happiness to be what it is (per Section II).

The consequences of self-defense are entirely the fault of the aggressor as they are the effects of his own act.

He, who begins, is the true cause of all that follows; and whatever falls upon him from the opposition made by the defending party, is but the effect of his own act; or, it is that violence, of which he is the author, *reflected* back upon himself. It is as when a man spits at heaven, and the spittle falls back upon his own face (VI.vii).

Though the defender must not “act rashly, or do more than the end proposed requires” (VI.vii).

The right to self-defense includes the right to recover what has been wrongly taken.

Proposition v—equality, established that the power to take something does not give the right to take it; therefore the right to possess it remains with the original owner. From this it follows that a taking that is not undone constitutes a continuous act of aggression as the owner is continually deprived of the use of what was taken.

If the victim cannot get back what was taken he has a right to recover the value of what was taken, and the cost of recovery. (This is what Wollaston means by “reprisal.”)

The preceding discussion began with a right to one’s self and the labor of one’s self. How is the right to external things, especially land, to be established? Wollaston proposes a theory that differs from Locke’s as it is based on first possession and on deductions from the moral rule and the preceding propositions, whereas Locke’s much lengthier discussion in Chapter 5 “Of Property,” of the *Second Treatise*¹³⁶ utilizes many particular examples.

136 Locke, *Second Treatise*, ch. 5, secs. 25-51:127-40.

Proposition viii—Right to First Possession

The first possession of a thing gives the possessor a greater right to it, than any other man has, or can have, till he and all, that claim under him, are extinct (VI.viii).

For the following reasons.

1. First possession is by God’s providence, in effect donation by God.
2. Taking what is unowned does not deny any truth concerning someone’s ownership and does not interrupt someone’s happiness. Therefore it is not wrong (per Section I).
3. There is a positive obligation to take possession of things because that is necessary in order to pursue happiness. It was established in Section II proposition ix that there is an obligation to pursue happiness. Thus, not to pursue happiness by obtaining material things is wrong and therefore to do so is right. If it is right, that means that someone who has done so is the “rightful possessor” (VI.viii).
4. Many things cannot be possessed without cultivation, especially land, which is the most prominent possession. Once someone has done so, if an intruder deprives the owner of the fruit of his labor he treats it as though it were the result of the intruder’s labor—this is a denial of truth (moral rule, Section I) and contrary to proposition ii—self-possession.
5. To deny that first occupancy gives right to possession contradicts proposition iii—universal good, as it leads to perpetual warfare.
6. As power does not give right, in accordance with proposition v—equality (third reason), the only alternative is first possession.
7. One who seeks to dispossess another would regard the reverse as unreasonable; therefore dispossession is contrary to reason and proposition iv—reciprocity.
8. To expel someone from his property by force is the same as to assert a right to command

him to do so; this constitutes a claim to dominion over him. It was established in proposition v—equality, that there is no such right to dominion.

9. To expel someone from his property constitutes an interruption of his happiness. This is contrary to proposition vi—pursuit of happiness. From this follows that the first possessor has a permanent right of possession.

Proposition ix—Right to Transfer Property (free trade)

The right to property includes the right to dispose of it in various ways.

A title to many things may be transferred by compact or donation (VI.ix).

The right to dispose of property is the same as the right to use it and belongs to the owner. If an owner of property exchanges or gives it to another, no truth is denied, as the recipient is treating the property as what it is, the owner's.

Trade is beneficial to human beings.

When a trade takes place, the items traded may be equivalent; or they may each be equivalent in value to the parties respectively even though they differ; or they may be respectively preferable to the parties. Therefore, both parties gain an advantage and neither one is hurt. In making a trade they are acting according to the moral rule because they are treating things as what they are, that is, as to how the traded items relate to themselves, and promoting their happiness by obtaining something they prefer to the status quo.

Indeed he, who receives the value of any thing, and what he likes as well, in effect has it still. His property is not diminished; the situation and matter of it is only altered (VI.ix).

From this, and proposition iii—universal good, it follows that there is a right to free trade.

Mankind could not well subsist without bartering one thing for another; therefore

whatever tends to take away the benefit of this intercourse is inconsistent with the general good of mankind (VI.ix).

Human beings cannot exist above extreme poverty without trade; therefore, interference with trade is contrary to the general welfare of humanity and thus is contrary to proposition iii—universal good; it is also contrary to proposition v—equality, as those who interfere with trade are asserting dominion over the life and property of others; and it is contrary to proposition vii—right to happiness, as it constitutes interrupting the happiness of others.

As stated in proposition xv below, attempts to obtain material goods by just means contribute to happiness, are in accordance with truth, and are therefore virtuous.

Proposition x—Right to Property (I)

From propositions ii—self-possession, viii—right to first possession, and ix—right to transfer property, it follows that there is a right to property.

There is then such a thing as property, founded in nature and truth; or, there are things, which one man only can, consistently with nature and truth, call his (VI.x).

Proposition xi—Right to Property (II)

From which follows a right to keep one's property.

Those things, which only one man can truly and properly call his, must remain his, till he agrees to part with them (if they are such, as he may part with) by compact or donation (VI.xi).

Or until they are destroyed, or he dies. If someone takes property which belongs to another he is treating what is not his as his, which constitutes not treating things as they are which is contrary to truth (and the moral rule, Section I), because:

Proposition xii—Property Equals Use

To have the property of any thing and to have the sole right of using and disposing of it are the same thing; they are equipollent expressions (VI.xii).

That is, “Propriety without the use...is an empty sound” (VI.xii).

Inasmuch as the use of property is the same as the ownership of property, using property asserts ownership of it.

Proposition xiii—Use Asserts Property

He, who uses or disposes of any thing, does by that declare it to be his (VI.xiii). 253

The use of something constitutes a declaration that one owns it (under the principle that actions have more reality, per Section I).

The borrowing or renting of property does not contradict this because it is one of the means by which an owner can dispose of his property; it constitutes giving permission for its use for a certain time.

Proposition xiv—Definition of Justice and Injustice

The conclusion of all the preceding propositions is the definition of justice and injustice; justice constitutes respecting the property rights of persons, which include and begin with the first right—to self-possession (proposition ii); violating them constitutes injustice.

To usurp or invade the property of another man is injustice; or, more fully, to take, detain, use, destroy, hurt, or meddle with any thing that is his without his allowance, either by force or fraud or any other way, or even to attempt any of these, or assist them who do, are acts of injustice. The contrary, to render and permit quietly to every one what is his, is justice. Def. (VI.xiv).

Proposition xv—Injustice Is Contrary to Truth

He that would not violate truth, must avoid all injustice; or, all injustice is wrong and evil (VI.xv).

Injustice as defined in proposition xiv above—interfering with property in any way, with property defined as including the person himself—violates truth by denying the following true propositions.

“It denies men to be subjects capable of distinct properties,” that is, it denies individuation (contradicts proposition i) and persons’ property in themselves, including in their bodies, life, and labor (contradicts proposition ii). Because it is destructive of general peace and happiness, it denies proposition iii—universal good. Those who commit unjust acts would think such acts unreasonable if they were done to them, hence such acts deny proposition iv—reciprocity. By committing such acts, those who do so are claiming dominion over those against whom they commit them and thus deny “our natural equality,” that is, deny proposition v. Also, committing such acts constitutes a claim to a “right to begin to disturb the happiness of others” and this denies proposition vi. Lastly, it denies the right to property established in proposition x (VI.xv).

It was established in Section I that to act so as to assert false propositions which affect human happiness is morally wrong. Hence, injustice, which constitutes a denial of truth, is morally wrong. Therefore, to attempt or assist an injustice is also wrong; it

is being in the wrong as much as one is able to be (VI.xv).

In addition, the desire to do injustice is morally evil; the evil act is the product of an evil desire. If an evil desire is prevented from being carried out it is still evil—it constitutes an obstructed evil act.

Various forms of the desire to obtain material goods have been lumped together under the negative term “covetousness.” However, this term should be distinguished into three definitions

whose moral status differs. 1. Taking material goods from others—that is wrong as stated above. 2. Obtaining material goods justly but hoarding them—this denies the truth of what is needed for happiness and therefore constitutes a vice. 3. Attempting to obtain material goods by just means—this contributes to happiness, is in accordance with truth, and is therefore virtuous.

Sympathy and Human Nature

The preceding argument established a definition of justice based on the nature of the existence of human beings as individuals. However, human sympathy is also part of the nature of human beings. From this follows that acting in accordance with sympathy is also acting in accordance with nature and hence truth.

Proposition xvi—Definition of Cruelty, Unmercifulness, Mercy, and Humanity

When a man cares not what sufferings he causes to others, and especially if he delights in other men's sufferings and makes them his sport, this is what I call cruelty. And not to be affected with the sufferings of other people, though they proceed not from us, but from others, or from causes in which we are not concerned, is unmercifulness. Mercy and humanity are the reverse of these (VI.xvi).

Cruelty: indifference to the suffering one inflicts and especially enjoyment of it. Opposite is mercy.

Unmercifulness: indifference to the sufferings of others. Opposite is humanity.

Proposition xvii—Cruelty and Unmercifulness Are Contrary to Nature and Truth

He, who religiously regards truth and nature, will not only be not unjust, but (more) not unmerciful, and much less cruel (VI.xvii).

Unmercifulness and cruelty are contrary to nature and truth. They are contrary to truth

because they constitute denial of true propositions concerning the cases of others—to be unaffected by the sufferings of others is to deny the truth concerning what is happening to them and to deny their nature as sensitive, happiness-seeking beings. To know of the sufferings of others is to have some representations of them in one’s mind, which means being conscious of them. To be unaffected by them is to deny one’s knowledge and consciousness.

Unmercifulness and cruelty are contrary to nature because they constitute a denial that sympathy is a part of human nature.

There is something in human nature resulting from our very make and constitution, while it retains its genuine form...which renders us obnoxious to [affected by] the pains of others, causes us to sympathize with them, and almost comprehends us in their case. It is grievous to see or hear (and almost to hear of) any man, or even any animal whatever, in torment. This *compassion* appears eminently in them, who upon other accounts are justly reckoned amongst the best of men; in some degree it appears in almost all (VI.xvii).

It is therefore according to nature to be affected with the sufferings of other people; and the contrary is inhuman and unnatural (VI.xvii).

Various circumstances can vitiate it this natural sympathy—it can be

altered by vicious habits...perverted by transports of revenge or fury, by ambition, company, or false philosophy...oppressed by stupidity and neglecting to observe what happens to others (VI.xvii).

The circumstances of human beings are difficult. For them to be compassionate and help each other is good for the majority of humanity. From which follows that not being compassionate denies proposition iii—universal good and is thus wrong.

Imagine being in the place of someone who is suffering. What would you think if nobody helped you? What you would think reasonable for yourself is reasonable for others in accordance with proposition iv—reciprocity.

Unmercifulness is a defect of humanity but cruelty is “diametrically opposite to it

[humanity].” It not only has no regard for the suffering of others but causes it, delights in it, and worst of all, mocks the victims. While unmercifulness fails to do good, cruelty actively does evil. That cruelty is contrary to nature is demonstrated by the propensity of cruel people to deny their cruelty,

And no man, how cruel soever in reality he was, has ever liked to be reckoned a cruel man; such a confession of guilt does nature extort; so universally doth it reject, condemn, abhor this character” (VI.xvii).

To summarize: compassion is part of human nature; therefore to be unmerciful, or worse, cruel, is contrary to nature. Also, it denies the truth of the human condition, general welfare, and reciprocity.

Proposition xviii—Justice and Mercy Are Right

As injustice, unmercifulness, and cruelty are wrong, their opposites are right.

The practice of justice and mercy is just as right, as injustice, unmercifulness, and cruelty are wrong (VI.xviii).

This follows from the nature of contraries (VI.xviii).

This concludes the definition of justice in a state of nature. However, Wollaston adds a discussion of some particular instances of justice and injustice.

Proposition xix—Particular Cases of Justice and Injustice

Here I might end this section; but perhaps it may not be improper to be a little more particular, therefore,

From the foregoing propositions may be deduced the heinousness of all such crimes, as murder, or even hurting the person of another any how, when our own necessary defence does not require it (it being not possible, that any thing should be more his, than his own person, life and limbs); robbing, stealing, cheating, betraying, defamation, detraction, defiling the bed of another man, etc., with all the

approaches and tendencies to them (VI.xix).

Such acts are unjust, violate truth, and are often cruel. This is obvious concerning such acts as murder, robbery, cheating, slandering, etc.; this is especially so if one considers oneself in the place of the victim in accordance with proposition iv—reciprocity. As such acts are unjust, acts which tend to, associate with, or excuse them are also unjust in varying degrees.

Unfaithfulness to friends, violating obligations, ingratitude, and lying are unjust but are widely recognized to be so, so they are included under the etc., above. They are widely recognized to be denials of truth, against the general good, contrary to reciprocity, and as wronging the victim.

Various other damaging acts are wrong, such as innuendo, defamation, mockery, inciting quarrels, meddling, and urging viciousness on others.

C. POLITICAL THEORY: SECTION VII, “TRUTHS RESPECTING PARTICULAR SOCIETIES OF MEN, OR GOVERNMENTS”

In Section VII, Wollaston proposes a theory of government based on the preceding section’s propositions concerning the moral status of human beings in a state of nature.

It presents some difficulties as the explicit statement of rights and the view of society as a Platonic organism are in conflict. He regards society as a natural outgrowth of human nature and circumstances, hence, rather than being in opposition to a theoretical state of nature, it is the state of (human) nature. As in the preceding section, he uses ideas derived from the natural law tradition of Aquinas, Hooker, and Locke, as well as Cumberland, and combines them with his moral rule. Cumberland argues that property rights are antecedent to society¹³⁷ and Wollaston establishes property rights first, in Section VI, as antecedent to government, which is defined in this section. While there are many similarities between Wollaston’s views and those of Locke, Wollaston does derive these principles from his moral rule.

Note: the headings below are mine.

Proposition i—People need society to live beyond bare survival, or at all

Man is a social creature: that is, a single man, or family, cannot subsist, or not well, alone out of all society (VII.i).

137 "We have deduced the original constitution of all civil society from two laws of nature, which...must be considered in a close, essential conjunction—as for example—in the first of these two laws there is strictly enjoined the settlement of a separate, distinct right and dominion over property, possessions, and the effects produced by personal industry, employment and labour. These rights are supposed even before the civil establishment of society; and therefore, the very moment every such society begins to exist, these rights and properties must be preserved distinct and inviolable, as means essentially necessary to the common good of the whole." Cumberland, *Laws of Nature*, Prolegomena 26:lxviii.

In order for human beings to survive, and to have a somewhat pleasant life, requires more than one person can produce. Even a simple life requires more than can be produced by one person.

More things are necessary to sustain life, or at least to make it in any degree pleasant and desirable, than it is possible for any one man to make and provide for himself merely by his own labor and ingenuity. Meat, and drink, and clothing, and house, and that frugal furniture which is absolutely requisite, with a little necessary physic [medicine], suppose many arts and trades, many heads, and many hands (VII.i).

Even if an individual could live by foraging, he would be helpless when he got sick or old.

If a couple live alone, although their capacity for work is doubled, so are their needs, and when they have children their needs increase greatly. Even if a couple with grown children live together, engage in some agriculture or animal husbandry (which would be hard without other people to trade with and from whom to obtain other goods); such an existence would provide only for physical survival and would provide nothing for the mind.

[Y]et still it is only the *cortex* of the man, which is provided for; what must become of the interior part, the *minds* of these people? How would those be fed, and improved? Arts and sciences, so much of them as is necessary to teach men the use of their faculties, and unfold their reason, are not the growth of single families so employed (VII.i).

For people to spend their time solely occupied by keeping their bodies functioning is contrary to their nature as rational beings.¹³⁸

Even if these objections were removed, as the population increased, an increasing number of small farmers would eventually come into conflict over land. Also, some men are predatory

138 Compare with Hooker: “But forasmuch as we are not by ourselves sufficient to furnish ourselves with competent store of things needful for such a life as our nature doth desire, a life fit for the dignity of man, therefore to supply those defects and imperfections which are in us living single and solely by ourselves, we are naturally induced to seek communion and fellowship with others.” Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Books I-IV*, Introduction by Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1888), bk. 1, ch. 10:91, <http://www.books.google.com>.

and attack others. Others are ambitious and would use any advantage in power they have to encroach on others.

These problems would cause families to form alliances, and as the problems increased, to form stronger and more detailed agreements until they become a society.

Under so many wants, and such apprehensions, or present dangers, necessity would bring some families into terms of friendship with others for mutual comfort and defence; and this, as the reason of it increased, would become stronger, introduce stricter engagements, and at last bring the people to mix and unite (VII.i).

Once this takes place the weak want to be protected by the stronger or more competent, and people sort into social positions according to their capacities, and thus a society arises. This is inevitable as people cannot live otherwise.

And then the weak being glad to shelter themselves under the protection and conduct of the more able, and so naturally giving way for these to ascend, the several sorts would at length settle into their places, according to their several weights and capacities with respect to the common concern. And thus some form of a society must arise; men cannot subsist otherwise (VII.i).

Even if people can survive in family groups, life is infinitely better if they can enjoy the resources of living in a society: the economic benefits of trade, mutual help, protection of laws and law enforcement, protection from invasion by an army, and the use of discoveries made by others—both material and intellectual. Also, the improvement of their minds by learning from others which enables them to develop fully as human beings.

Even in a society we are barely able to be secure and safe; how terrible would it be without it, exposed to the violence of predatory persons and having no haven? Even in society with friends and conveniences we experience pains and sorrows; how bad would it be if we had no help or consolation in trouble?

Lastly, people desire society despite the problems it causes because permanent solitude is

“hideous.” It is therefore human nature to live in society.

Thus the social life is natural to man; or, what his nature and circumstances require (VI.i).

Thus, living in a society is living in accordance with human nature and hence in accordance with nature and thus is in accordance with the moral rule (Section I).

Proposition ii—The end of society is universal good (per VI.iii)

The end of society is the common welfare and good of the people associated (VII.ii).¹³⁹

This follows from the preceding proposition. Because people cannot survive or live well alone, they form societies. Therefore, the purpose of a society is a better existence, that is, more happiness. To the extent that a society improves the members’ lives it is fulfilling its purpose.

[A]nd by how much their manner of living becomes better, by so much the more effectually is this end answered (VII.ii).

Proposition iii—Society requires agreed-upon laws and a means of changing them

A society, into which men enter for this end, supposes some rules or laws, according to which they agree all to be governed, with a power of altering or adding to them as occasion shall require (VII.iii).

A group of people living together with no rules are an “irregular multitude” in which each one is a law unto himself and thus they interfere with each other.

[N]or can such a concourse of people be any thing different from an indigested chaos of dissenting parts, which by their confused motions would damnify [damage] and destroy each other (VII.iii).

This is because people differ in the extent of their understanding, their manner of thinking, the

139 Compare with Locke “The end of government is the good of mankind.” *Second Treatise*, ch. 19, sec. 229:231.

influence of their education, their manner of living, and other circumstances.

The result of all these conflicting and disordered desires is “confusion and unhappiness.”

In order to attain universal good and promote happiness, people must be made compatible with each other by rules.

Such a combination of men therefore, as may produce their common good and happiness, must be such a one as, in the first place, may render them compatible one with another; which cannot be without rules, that may direct and adjust their several motions and carriages towards each other, bring them to some degree of uniformity, or at least restrain such excursions and enormities, as would render their living together inconsistent (VII.iii).

Therefore, there must be express rules concerning property (per Section VI, property refers to the person as well as to material goods) and title established by “common consent” so that disputes can be settled by applying the rules to which the members of the society have agreed.

In order to maintain this arrangement securely there must be a means of preventing foreign invasion. In addition, punishments for violations of the rules must be established; they must be intelligible, honestly established, agreed to by the members of the society, and published—these constitute the laws and social compact of a society.

These rules, methods, and appointments of punishments, being intelligibly and honestly drawn up, agreed to, and published, are the mutual compacts under which the society is confederated, and the laws of it (VII.iii).

In conclusion, for people to be able live together, to be secure in their property, and to be safe and quiet, is a condition that promotes universal good (per VI.iii). In order for this to be accomplished, laws are necessary; therefore, a society must have such laws.

The “public interest and welfare” require occasionally adding to, changing, or repealing laws. Doing so is legitimate as it repeats the original social compact. The end for which society is established, the common or universal good, continues to be the end of the society at all times, not

only when it is first established.

Proposition iv—These laws must be in accordance with natural justice

These laws and determinations must be such, as are not inconsistent with natural justice (VII.iv).

A law which is contrary to natural justice declares that what is unjust is just and thus contradicts truth, because justice is coextensive with truth (per Section VI, proposition xv), and is “everywhere the same”—as truth is coextensive with nature and hence the world. Also, to ordain what is contrary to truth is the same as to declare that what is true is false, or vice versa, which is absurd.

To establish injustice is contrary to universal good (per Section VI, proposition iii). It is also contrary to happiness (per Section II, happiness is the end of human life) because being treated unjustly causes unhappiness. It is therefore contrary to the purpose of society (which is universal good and happiness, proposition ii above) and thus denies the true proposition of what the purpose of society is. It is therefore morally evil in accordance with Section I—because injustice denies truth (truth is coextensive with justice) and brings about unhappiness.

Proposition v—Laws require government

A society limited by laws supposes magistrates, and a subordination of powers; that is, it supposes a government of some form or other (VII.v).

Where there are laws there must be persons a) to judge when the laws have been broken, to what extent, and to decide unclear cases; b) authorized to carry out judgments, punish offenders, prevent evils, and do various things for the public good; c) authorized to change, repeal, or make new laws; and d) to protect the public from sudden danger.

If there are no persons authorized to execute the laws, then the laws are not executed; if the laws are not executed, they are, in effect, nonexistent; and as a society requires laws, without laws it is not a society.

Guardians and executors of laws are therefore the *vitals* of a society, without which there can be no *circulation* of justice in it, no care of it taken, nor can it continue (VII.v).

As one person can only be in one place at a time there must be a number of these functionaries in proportion to the population and area of the society. The laws and concerns of a society vary and thus require functionaries with different abilities which vary hierarchically. Therefore there must be a hierarchy which terminates in the legislative power.

[T]ill at last the ascent is terminated in some head, where the legislative power is deposited, and from whence spirits and motion are communicated through the whole body (VII.v).

Government functionaries must also be subject to supervision; they are only men—something they are prone to forget.

[S]ince not only private men want to be inspected, but even magistrates and officers themselves, who (though they often forget it) are still but men; and since the whole society is to be one, one compact body (VII.v).

Proposition vi—People may give up some, not all, of their natural rights in order to gain the protection of a law-governed society

A man may part with some of his natural rights, and put himself under the government of laws, and those, who in their several stations are intrusted with the execution of them, in order to gain the protection of them, and the privileges of a regular society (VII.vi).

To give up some rights to gain the benefits of society is in accordance with the preceding sections and propositions. It constitutes an exchange for something which is equivalent in value or of greater value and thus is in accordance with Section VI, proposition ix (right to transfer property).

It is consistent with truth as one is exchanging one's own liberties and natural rights and therefore not denying anyone else's property. Also, it does not deny the nature of happiness (as the end of human beings) because the purpose of making the exchange is to gain happiness. Not making the exchange would constitute denying truth (that one has the right to make the exchange) and happiness (that the exchange improves one's situation). Lastly, it promotes universal good per Section VI, proposition iii because one's happiness coincides with general happiness as an individual's happiness constitutes a part of the universal good.

What natural rights may a person give up and to what extent? Those rights which are "essential to our being," and those which we do not have the power to give up, may not be given up. Beyond those, one may give up only what is consistent with the end (of happiness) and not more, because to go beyond would constitute a contradiction—as it would reduce happiness rather than increase it.

As to the rest, he may depart from them so far as it is consistent with the end, for which he does this; not further, because beyond that lies a contradiction (VII.vi).

Thus one cannot give away one's entire property in order to preserve it, but can consent to give up some in order to preserve the rest, if otherwise all would be lost; and similarly one may share in the danger of national defense rather than be certainly destroyed, etc.

Proposition vii—Members of a society give their assent explicitly or implicitly

Men may become members of a society (i.e., do what is mentioned in the foregoing proposition) by giving their consent, either explicitly, or implicitly (VII.vii).

Persons may consent to the social contract by themselves, by proxy, i.e., elected representatives, or

by their behavior—by conforming to the laws and accepting the benefits of the society.¹⁴⁰ The first two are explicit, the third, implicit. Subsequent generations may express consent by explicit acts. When no explicit consent has been given, implicit consent is assumed on the ground that one must have some love for one's birthplace, gratitude for the constitution that protected one's parents while they brought one up, and regard for the obligations they imposed.¹⁴¹ In addition, taking an inheritance or otherwise acquiring property by law, which one would not be able to keep in a state of nature, means accepting the laws by which one obtained it.¹⁴²

As the laws securing one's person and rights constitute an equivalent trade for one's submission to them (per proposition vi above and Section VI, proposition ix), one cannot accept them without paying for them.

Indeed since the security he has from the laws of the country in respect of his person, and rights, whatever they either are, or may happen to be hereafter, is the general equivalent for his submission to them, he cannot accept that without being obliged in equity to pay this (VII.vii).¹⁴³

Where a person lives is determined by chance or choice (VII.vi); however, to stay or settle in a place shows that one likes it or prefers it to others or thinks under one's circumstances one is

140 This is similar to Locke, *Second Treatise*, ch. 8, sec. 119:176.

141 This is similar to Locke, *Second Treatise*, ch. 6, sec. 73:150-1.

142 This is similar to Locke, *Second Treatise*, ch. 8, sec. 120:176-7.

143 This principle of political obligation as repayment differs from Locke's doctrine of tacit consent. However, Simmons argues that Locke's argument implies it. "The 'enjoyments' of benefits of government (which Locke mistakenly classifies as acts of tacit consent) may very well generate political obligations, as Locke believed; these obligations would not, however, fall under principles of fidelity or consent. There are, of course, other sorts of obligations than those generated by consent, and Locke seems to rely on them while, as a consent theorist, officially denying their existence. Thus, some of Locke's consent-implying enjoyments might in fact bind us to political communities... under some...principle of repayment." A. John Simmons, "Tacit Consent and Political Obligation," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 5 no. 3 (Spring 1976): 291, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2264884>.

better off staying. This constitutes consent.

Proposition viii—Two things a member of a society is obligated to do as such

When a man is become a member of a society, if he would behave himself according to truth, he ought to do these things (VII.viii).

1. A member of a society should consider that property is founded not only in nature (per Section VI), but also by the laws of the society, and that one has accepted these laws (per proposition vii) and that this strengthens the right to property and renders it “more inviolable and sacred.”

2. A member of a society is obligated, when he is wronged, to act in accordance with the law and not as he would in a state of nature. The definition of law includes the observance of it.

For it is contained in the idea of a law, that it is intended to be observed (VII.viii).

Therefore, a person who is a part of a society based on law, who willingly breaks the law, is denying what the law is, and denying that he is a member of the society (by his actions), and therefore is denying the preceding true propositions.

Proposition ix—Individuals remain in a state of nature when a) there is no law; b) the law is not in effect; or c) the law is contrary to natural law

In respect of those things, which the laws of the place take no cognizance of, or when if they do take cognizance of them, the benefit of those laws cannot be had...he who is a member of a society in other respects retains his natural liberty, is still as it were in a state of nature, and must endeavour to act according to truth and his best prudence (VII.ix).

a) Concerning all cases which are not addressed by a law, one should act according to truth and nature.

b) This is also the case if the law is not in effect, as, for example, when a person is attacked and no help from authorities is available. In such a case, because there is no way for the law to operate, it does not exist, and the person is back in a state of nature.

[I]t is the same as if there was nothing; since in effect there is no law, where no effect or benefit from it is to be had (VII.ix).

c) A law which is contrary to natural law is not a law.

There is a third case, which perhaps may demand admission here; and that is, when laws are plainly contrary to truth and natural justice. For though they may pass the usual forms, and be styled laws; yet, since no such law can abrogate that law of nature and reason, to which the Author of our being hath subjected us, or make falsehood to be truth; and two inconsistent laws cannot both oblige, or subsist together; one of them must give way; and it is easy to discern, which ought to do it (VII.ix).

He adds a quote from Cicero in a footnote:

That's very foolish indeed, to imagine that all those things are just, which are established by the decrees and laws of the people. If right were made by the ordinances of the people, by the decrees of princes, or by the sentences of judges, it would be right to rob on the highway; it would be right to commit adultery; it would be right to forge wills; supposing all these were allowed by the majority, and by the decrees of the populace. Cic. (VII.ix.nl).

The implications of this are discussed in the commentary below.¹⁴⁴

Proposition x—Societies may engage in war for self-defense; aggressive war is wrong

The societies intended in this section, such as kingdoms and commonwealths, may defend themselves against other nations; or, war may lawfully be waged in defence and for the security of a society, its members and territories, or for reparation of injuries (VII.x).

In a state of nature there is a right to self-defense (VI.vii). Societies are in a state

144 Locke discusses this issue at much greater length than Wollaston in Chapter 8, "Of Tyranny," in the *Second Treatise*.

of nature regarding each other, therefore the persons allied within a society have that right of self-defense (unless the societies have limited their rights by agreements). A war may be regarded as every individual member of a society defending himself with the assistance of the rest and therefore falls under the same principle as individual self-defense. (The individuals' rights to self-defense join together.) The interest in self-defense of a society is greater than that of an individual because the number of persons concerned is greater. In a state of nature an individual is entitled to defend himself by whatever means are in accordance with truth; as nations are in a state of nature, the justice of a war can be determined using the principles established in Section VI. Mutual defense is a great, or the greatest end of society.

As the legitimate purpose of war is self-defense, wars conducted from ambition and for conquest are wrong,

condemned by all true philosophy and religion (VII.x).

The only legitimate purpose of war is the establishment of peace.

Commentary on Sections VI and VII

The question Sections VI and VII raise is, what sort of society did Wollaston have in mind? He expresses two apparently conflicting views. One is of society as a voluntary association of rights-bearing individuals with limited cession of those rights; the other is of society as a body into which individuals are subsumed. The former view is a step by step deduction from the individual and his rights to happiness obtained by trade and mutual cooperation; the latter may be a reflection of Cumberland's view that the good of the individual is obtained by pursuing the common good, and that society is a sort of organism.

This is Cumberland's view:

We are bound down by a strict obligation to pursue the common good, when, from the nature of things exposed to our observation and senses, we are given to understand, (and more especially when such a knowledge as this arises from rational causes) that, acting for this end is the cause necessarily requisite to constitute our own complete, perfect happiness.... And, in the same manner, that the health of one limb depends upon the health of the whole animated living body, or, just in like manner, as the preservation of those powers, naturally lodged in our hands, cannot prove effectual or of any use, unless regard be first had to that life, and those powers in general which are dispersed, diffused, and intimately blended through the whole body (II.5.27, p. 359).

Whereas Wollaston describes the development of a society as a historical process which occurs as follows:

And then the weak being glad to shelter themselves under the protection and conduct of the more able, and so naturally giving way for these to ascend, *the several sorts would at length settle into their places, according to their several weights and capacities* with respect to the common concern. And thus some form of a society must arise; men cannot subsist otherwise (VII.i) [italics added].

Does this mean that people may continuously sort into different positions in a free society in accordance with their inclinations and capacities, or that such a sorting takes place once and then becomes hereditary, that is, maintained by force? The propositions in Section VI, especially

proposition ix, which asserts the right to free trade, indicate the former.

Alternatively, this may be a historical account of the process by which a hierarchical society arose, and which should be superseded by a society organized in accordance with natural justice.

Natural justice requires a society because without a social order people are like atoms colliding with each other at random (an “irregular multitude” engaged in “confused motions”) and causing each other harm and destruction. This brings about much “confusion and unhappiness.” A society brings the chaotic social atoms into order by rules. By doing so it increases happiness and thus is in accordance with the moral rule. What would such rules be like? They are intended to “render [people] compatible” and “direct and adjust their several motions and carriages towards each other.” This does not imply an authority directing people’s actions; rather, the rules may be like traffic laws; they say how to go, not where and when to go; this would be in accord with Section VI.

Wollaston clearly rejects moral relativism and states that natural justice is universal.

To pretend by a law to make that to be just, which before and in itself was unjust, is the same as to ordain that which interferes with truth; because justice is founded in truth (as before), and everywhere the same (VII.iv.2).

This is supported by a footnote quote from Aristotle:

Justice is founded in nature, is unalterable, and is equally in force everywhere; in the same manner as the fire burns here and in Persia. Arist. (VII.iv.nf).

As nature is the same everywhere (nature is the world), natural justice is the same everywhere.

Therefore, this would not appear to uphold the existing social order simply because it happened to be the established order in the society in which RND was written.

However, when he describes government in society he uses a body metaphor that is almost

Platonic. The terms used are of the physiological theories of the time such as vitals, circulation, and [animal] spirits.

A disordered group of people is described as “indigested chaos.” Government functionaries are:

the *vitals* of a society, without which there can be no *circulation* of justice in it...nor can it continue (VII.v).

The supreme power is a head which animates the body:

[T]ill at last the ascent is terminated in some *head*, where the legislative power is deposited, and from whence spirits and motion are communicated through the whole body (VII.v).

And the society as a whole is described as a body:

[S]ince the whole society is to be one, one compact body (VII.v).

On the other hand, government functionaries are men like all others (this sentence immediately precedes the one above):

[S]ince not only private men want to be inspected, but even magistrates and officers themselves, who (though they often forget it) are still but men (VII.v).

On the one hand the society is like a body with only some persons having the role of head, which implies the others play subordinate roles in this body. On the other hand government functionaries are men like all the rest and subject to the law like all the rest. Does this mean a body in which all the parts are equal? It is not clear.

Adding to the problem is a statement in Section V—“Truths Relating to the Deity,” in favor of establishment of religion which also refers to society as a body.

For a man may be considered as a member of a society, and *as such* he ought to worship God....Or the society may be considered as one body, that has common interests and concerns, and *as such* is obliged to worship the Deity, and offer one common prayer (V.xix).

The reason for this is that religion is necessary to maintain order by inculcating virtue.

And further, toward the keeping mankind in order, it is *necessary* there should be some religion professed, and even established; which cannot be without some public worship. And were it not for that sense of virtue, which is *principally* preserved (so far as it is preserved) by national forms and habits of religion, men would soon lose it *all*, run wild, prey upon one another, and do what else the worst of savages do (V.xix).

This is in accordance with the definition at the beginning of RND of religion as equivalent to morality.

The foundation of religion lies in that difference between the acts of men, which distinguishes them into good, evil, indifferent. For if there is such a difference, there must be religion, & contra (I.i).

The purpose of establishing a religion is the teaching of morality to and maintenance of virtue in a public, many members of whom have no other means to learn moral principles.

Beside, there are many, who know not of themselves, how to pray; perhaps cannot so much as read. These too must be taken *as they are*, and consequently some time and place appointed, where they may have suitable prayers read to them, and be guided in their devotions (V.xix).

The context suggests that Wollaston regarded the establishment of religion as primarily the means of providing moral instruction to the general public, rather than the maintenance of particular theological doctrines. It cannot be determined from this whether Wollaston, who was an ordained, non-practicing Anglican minister, was supporting that established religion. This recommendation of establishment follows the development of Wollaston's unique definition of religion in RND Sections I-V. The proposition quoted above, which is the last in Section V, contains a very lengthy discussion of the proper attitude human beings should have towards God—a very abstract one—which leads to the paragraph quoted.

The issue of how society should be organized is not clarified by proposition vi, in which he states that people may give up some rights but not all their rights in order to gain the benefits of a

society. However, what may be given up and what not is not clear. The standard stated is that rights “essential to [one’s] being” may not be given up and that a net benefit to the individual must result; that is, the happiness gained by the protection afforded by the society must be greater than the pain caused by the loss of the rights which are given up. What rights are essential is not stated.

But he concludes¹⁴⁵ with the proposition (ix) that laws which are contrary to natural justice are not laws at all and that with regard to unjust laws individuals are back in a state of nature.

[H]e who is a member of a society in other respects retains his natural liberty, is still as it were in a state of nature, and must endeavour to act according to truth and his best prudence

Presumably, this means that individuals have a right to disregard such unjust laws, though they may not have the power to do so, hence “prudence.”

The argument in favor of society as a mutual association of rights-bearing individuals who give up a limited portion of their rights in order to secure greater happiness and who cannot ever be said to have given up anything which is not in accordance with natural justice is developed throughout Sections VI and VII, premise by premise.

The view of society as a body which can be regarded as acting as an entity, and into which individuals must then be subsumed is not supported by premises but simply appears in two propositions (VII.v, V.xix). No connection is made between this view and the happiness calculation or the moral rule. That is, there is no argument offered that being subsumed in a society that is a singular entity is the means to the most happiness for those subsumed. In addition, such an arrangement is not consonant with the detailed working out of the means to happiness through individual rights which constitutes most of Sections VI and VII.

145 The last proposition (x) concerns the relations of societies, not the individual to society.

Nor is an argument offered that such an arrangement is in accordance with the moral rule. For that to be so it would be necessary to demonstrate that the arrangement constitutes treating individuals as what they are, which would in turn require an argument establishing that it is the nature of human beings to be cells in a social body. Not only is such an argument not offered, it would be contrary to the definition of human nature in a state of nature that is presented throughout Section VI. It would also be necessary to demonstrate that such an arrangement is treating society as what it is, and that would require demonstrating that it is the nature of society to be an individual-subsuming, body-like entity; such an argument is also not offered and would also be contrary to most of the argument presented in Section VII.

In conclusion, the argument developed in Sections VI and VII is for the definition of human beings as rights-bearing individuals; for a universal definition of justice that is derived from human nature and is not culturally determined; and for a society formed by these rights-bearing individuals for the increase of their happiness; towards which end they give up only so much of their rights as is consonant with increasing their happiness and without ever giving up their right to natural justice. The statements concerning society as a body are not consonant with this argument.

What views Wollaston had on how to get from the existing society to something more consonant with the views expressed in RND and how much change that would have required is impossible to determine. There are statements in RND that indicate he did not think that society was acceptable as is, e.g.,

It is contradictory to say, that any thing can be a general law of human nature, which tends only to favor the pleasures of some particulars to the prejudice of the rest, who partake of the same common nature (VI.iii).¹⁴⁶

146 In addition, in Section VIII, proposition vi, he offers an argument against Robert Filmer's

Eighteenth-century references to RND indicate that it is its libertarian implications which were influential.¹⁴⁷ An interesting example is a 1744 pamphlet defending the pawn-brokering profession.¹⁴⁸ It first cites RND's moral principle:

[I]f it be a sin or vice by our words, actions, or omissions...to contradict or counteract the truth of any known proposition whatever; or, in other words, to act a lye*, in which the very formal nature of vice consists...

(*footnote reference cites RND I.iii,iv,etc.) (8).

And later explicitly references the propositions concerning the supremacy of natural justice in Section VII.

But, if any man thinks the statute against usury and extortion of such vast consequence to the safety and happiness of the community, that he cannot forgive the least violation of a tittle, jot, or letter therein contained, he would do well to consult the great Mr. Locke's discourse, entitled, *Considerations of the Lowering of Interest, and Raising the Value of Money*; and afterwards to read Sect. 7th, Prop. 4th and 9th, of *The Religion of Nature delineated* (65).

Patriarcha (See Section D below).

147 See e.g., Bland and Ganter in Chapter II.A above.

148 Pawn-broker, A, *An Apology for the Business of Pawn-Broking* (London, 1744), <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOME?af=RN&ae=U100829160&srchtp=a&ste=14>, document no. U100829160.

D. DOMESTIC LIFE: SECTION VIII, “TRUTHS CONCERNING FAMILIES AND RELATIONS”

In Section VIII Wollaston applies his theory to family relations. The starting point of all relations is a married couple (VIII). The purpose of marriage is the continuation of the species and the happiness of the married couple (VIII.i). Marriage requires a performative act (VIII.ii). Marital relations, the combination of property, and children all strengthen marriage (VIII.iii). From this it follows that marrying when it is likely that such a bond will not form is wrong (VIII.iv). Parents have an obligation to take care of their children (VIII.v). Parents have authority, but not dominion, over their children (VIII.vi).¹⁴⁹

The argument in this proposition leads to a refutation of Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha*.

In Section VI—“Truths Respecting Mankind in General, Antecedent to All Human Laws,” Proposition v—equality, it was stated that while

In a state of nature men are equal in respect of dominion (VI.v).

However, there is an exception for children.

I except for the present the case of parents and their children.

The explanation for this is that,

In order to the good of children, their education, etc. there must be some authority over them lodged by nature in the parents (VIII.vi).

At the beginning of life, children cannot survive if they are not fed, clothed, etc. The parents have a duty to do so, per the preceding proposition. They must do it according to their judgment and these actions constitute authority.

[T]his is plainly an act of *authority*, to order and dispose of another according to

149 Locke makes a similar argument in Chapter 6, “Of Paternal Power,” in the *Second Treatise*.

one's judgment (VIII.vi).

It is a fact of nature that children need the care of the parents, that the care must be done according to the judgment of the parents, and that parents are therefore, de facto, in a state of authority over a child.

This—that the child needs care by the parents, and that the parents must use their judgment to decide the care—continues to be the case as the child grows older, until maturity. A toddler has no knowledge and still requires care. Later, the child's senses have developed but not his knowledge and judgment which need much time and practice to develop. Adults do not find it easy to know the world, and children do not know it at all. Children are subject to peer pressure and as their peers are as ignorant as they are the effect is to multiply bad judgment.

[T]hus folly mingles with folly, and increases prodigiously (VIII.vi).

Lastly, because the position of children in the world depends upon their parents, their parents must govern their affairs and direct them. Thus, the judgment of the parents must guide the children through infancy, childhood, and youth.

However, this parental authority does not constitute dominion (dominion was defined in VI.v) because the purpose of this authority is only the good of the children and does not extend beyond that end. Parental authority is limited. It does not mean that parents may order their children to do evil—if they do so, the children should not obey. Nor does it mean that parents may do whatever they please to children, such as kill, maim, or abandon them. Also, when the children are adults and possess property (per Section VI, property includes the person), their parents have no more right to this property than anyone else. Whereas dominion consists of a lord commanding whatever he wants and its only criterion is the lord's pleasure; it is not for the

subject's good and is unlimited. Therefore, the principles of rights established in Section VI are not overthrown by the case of parents and children.

Against Filmer, Wollaston argues that the patriarchal justification for absolute monarchy is false. Parental authority is not "despotic or absolute power." As parental authority is only for the good of the children and only when they are incapable of caring for themselves, monarchical power would only be justified if it were for the good of the subjects and only if they were incapable of taking care of themselves. Therefore, a monarch, as the putative father of a country, cannot be said to have absolute power, as parents do not have absolute power.

The authority of parents goes not this length (VIII.vi).¹⁵⁰

Also, from a parent's authority over children it does not follow that the eldest son has this authority over his siblings; still less that an heir of a parent should have it over collateral relations in succeeding generations. The family relation declines geometrically over the generations (see proposition x)¹⁵¹ and soon vanishes, and Filmer's argument along with it.

The remaining propositions in the Section state that children should acknowledge they owe

150 This is similar to the argument in Locke, *Second Treatise*, ch. 15, sec. 170:202.

151 In proposition x Wollaston argues that relations decrease in a geometrical progression; the grandchildren have $\frac{1}{2}$ their "blood" in common, the next generation $\frac{1}{4}$, the generation after that $\frac{1}{8}$, and so on. Therefore, over time, the relationship becomes "inconsiderable." This geometric calculation of heredity was reinvented in the late nineteenth century by hereditarians. "[T]he 'law of ancestral heredity,' laid out in principle by Francis Galton and modified and so-named by Karl Pearson, which states generally that to any offspring 'each parent contributes on average one-half, or (0.5), each grandparent one-fourth, or (0.5)², and so on.'" Rachel A. Ankeny, "Marvelling at the Marvel: The Supposed Conversion of A. D. Darbishire to Mendelism," *Journal of the History of Biology* 33 no. 2 (Autumn 2000): 318. The references are to Francis Galton, "The Average Contribution of Each Several Ancestor to the Total Heritage of the Offspring," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London* 61 (1897): 401-413 and Karl Pearson, "Mathematical Contributions to the Theory of Evolution: On the Law of Ancestral Heredity," *Proceedings of the Royal Society* 62 (1898): 386-412.

their existence to their parents (VIII.vii); children have duties towards their parents (VIII.viii); the natural affection between parents and children should be followed (VIII.ix); and the natural affections of other relations towards each other should be followed but they decrease in degree as the relation decreases (VIII.x).

E. VIRTUE AND THE SOUL: SECTION IX, “TRUTHS BELONGING TO A PRIVATE MAN, AND RESPECTING (DIRECTLY) ONLY HIMSELF”

Section IX has two parts. In the first, consisting of propositions i-iv, Wollaston provides a detailed account of how to act in accordance with the moral principles developed in the first four sections of RND, that is, how to live virtuously. In Section IV—“Of the Obligations of Imperfect Beings with Respect to Their Power of Acting” (see Chapter III.E above), Wollaston presented a general account of the extent of moral obligation. Here, he expands the discussion of moral obligation into enumerated obligations, in keeping with the moral rule stated in Section I—“Of Moral Good and Evil” (see Chapter III.D above), as well as the principles established in Sections II—“Of Happiness” (see Chapter III.C above) and III— “Of Reason” (see Chapter III.B above). In the second part, consisting of propositions v-xviii, he presents arguments for the immortality of the soul. This section relies on Cartesian dualism for some of its arguments.

Note: the headings below are mine

Part I—Virtue

Proposition i—an individual knows himself best

Every man knows (or may know) best, what his own faculties, and personal circumstances are, and consequently what powers he has of acting, and governing himself (IX.i).

Because he only of all mankind has the internal knowledge of himself, and what he is; and has the only opportunity by reflection and experiments of himself to find, what his own abilities, passions, etc. truly are (IX.i).

The qualification “may know” is added because many people “seem to be without reflection, and almost thought” (IX.i.ny).

Proposition ii—an individual who examines himself carefully will make the following true observations about his nature

He, that well examines himself, I suppose, will find these things to be true (IX.ii).

1. Human commonality with matter.

A person has things in common with inanimate matter, such as being subject to gravity and physical injury.

2. Human commonality with plants and animals.

A person has things in common with plants and animals, such as growth from a seed, the need for nutrition, having a network of vessels, and undergoing the process of

ripen[ing], flourish[ing], wither[ing], decay[ing], [and] d[ying] (IX.ii.2).

Like them, a person can be sick, injured, or killed, and needs nourishment, suitable habitation, protection from injuries, etc.

3. Human commonality with animals.

A person has things in common with animals such as receiving information of external things by the senses; feeling one's body and experiencing pleasures and pains from it—not only being subject to negative and positive things but also feeling them. Also, being able to move and act and having the power to greatly affect one's enjoyments and sufferings by one's actions.

4. Human uniqueness: reason.

A person has other faculties which are neither in matter, vegetables, nor animals; which he

uses to

investigate truth or probability and judge whether things are agreeable to them or not, after the manner set down in [S]ect. III or, in a word, that he *is animal rationale* (IX.ii.4).

(See Chapter III.B above.)

5. Human power to act from an internal motive.

A person is

conscious of a liberty in himself to act or not to act; and that therefore he is such a being as is described [in] [S]ect. I, prop. [i], a being whose acts may be morally good or evil (IX.ii.5).

As stated in Section I (“Of Moral Good and Evil”), proposition i, only a being which can act from an internal motive is subject to morality whereas everything else is merely acted upon (See Chapter III.D above).

6. Human internal motives.

A person is conscious

[t]hat there are in him many inclinations and aversions from whence flow such affections as desire, hope, joy, hatred, fear, sorrow, pity, anger, etc.; all which prompt him to act this or that way (IX.ii.6).

7. Human limitations.

A person is aware that he has great defects and limitations in his reason and his ability to act on many occasions. Also, that his feelings are frequently prone to go wrong and be excessive, that he is in many respects fallible and infirm (IX.ii.7).

8. Human desire for happiness.

A person desires to be happy. (As established in Section II (“Of Happiness”); see Chapter III.C above.)

Proposition iii—moral obligations deduced from proposition ii observations

If he doth find these things to be so, then if he will act as he ought to do (that is, agreeably to truth and fact) he must do such things as these (IX.ii).

1. Obligation to be rational.

He must subject his sensual inclinations, his bodily passions, and the motions of all his members to reason; and try every thing by it (IX.ii.1).

As vegetation is more than matter, sense is more than vegetation, and reason is more than sense, it follows that reason is the uppermost faculty. Therefore, as established in Section III (“Of Reason”), proposition xi, a person is a being that is subject to the law that he must be governed by reason. This is proven by one’s own experience—one cannot do what there is more reason against doing than for doing. People err against reason because they do not use it, or will not use it, or not use it enough; or because they have defective faculties.

As established In Section III, proposition x, acting according to reason is coextensive with acting according to truth, that is, acting so as not to deny any truth, which was established in Section I (“Of Moral Good and Evil”) to constitute acting right. Therefore, acting right requires acting according to right reason. Not to subject one’s sense inclinations to reason is to deny that one is rational or that reason is the uppermost faculty, which constitutes denying one’s humanity.

If an animal stopped acting according to sense and lay in one spot expecting to live like a plant it would be like (though not as bad as) a person giving up his reason and living like an animal,

which is what he does if he gives up reason and pursues only physical desires.

For as in that case the brute neglects the law of his nature, and affects that of the order below him; so doth the man disobey the law of his nature, and put himself under that of the lower animals; to whom he thus makes a defection (IX.iii.1).

Those who not only reject the government of reason in order to act according to their feelings and desires, but use reason to serve these desires, and not to consider whether their ends and means are “just or unjust, right or wrong,” are violating “the order of nature” and denying truth (the truth of what their nature is). They are inverting nature and are worse than animals—they become animals with reason, which are the worst brutes. An animal acting according to “sense and bodily appetites” is acting according to its nature, but a person acting so is acting contrary to his nature.

[W]hen he makes his rational powers to serve the brutish part, to assist and promote it, he heightens and increases the brutality, enlarges its field, makes it to act with greater force and effect, and becomes a monster (IX.iii.1).

A person who is conscious of the truth of proposition ii above, will examine things carefully and will never pursue a physical desire at the expense of reason; he will ensure that his desires and angers are rationally directed. Directing everything in life by reason constitutes virtue.

Every word and action, every motion and step in life should be conducted by *reason* (IX.iii.1).

2. Obligation to pursue happiness.

He must take care not to bring upon himself want, diseases, trouble; but, on the contrary, endeavour to prevent them, and to provide for his own comfortable subsistence, as far as he can without contradicting any truth (IX.iii.3).

This is in accordance with the obligation to seek happiness which was established in Sections I (“Of Moral Good and Evil”) and II (“Of Happiness”). (See Chapter III.D.10.4 above.)

This obligation must be pursued in accordance with the moral rule. In Section I (“Of

Moral Good and Evil”), proposition ix, an objection was offered which is addressed again here.

If I want money, don't I act according to truth, if I take it from somebody else to supply my own wants? And more, do not I act contrary to truth, if I do not? (I.ix.obj3).

For example, a person has needs such as hunger and in order to supply his needs he takes a neighbor's property. He says he is acting as what he is—someone subject to hunger, etc., and therefore, not to take the neighbor's property would be to act contrary to truth. However, this does not justify him because the rule requires taking care of oneself without contradicting truth.

The grand rule requires, that what he does, should interfere with no truth; but what he does interferes with several (IX.iii.2).

He denies facts (the neighbor's ownership of the property), and truths that were established in Sections VI (“Truths Respecting Mankind in General”) and VII (“Truths Respecting Particular Societies of Men”); (these sections established the right to property; see Sections B and C of this chapter, above). By not taking from someone else he would not be denying that he is subject to hunger, etc., but by doing so he would be denying the neighbor's rights.

Not taking from another man his money by violence is a forbearance, which does not signify, that I do not want money, or which denies any truth. But taking it denies that to be his, which (by the supposition) is his. The former is only as it were silence, which denies nothing; the latter a direct and loud assertion of a falsity (I.xi.ans3).

A person can provide for himself by means which do not deny truths.

[T]here are ways of expressing this want, or acting according to it, without trespassing upon truth. The man may by honest labor and industry seek to supply his wants; or he may apply as a suppliant, not as an enemy or robber, to such as can afford to relieve him; or if his want is very pressing, to the first persons he meets, whom truth will oblige to assist him according to their abilities (I.xi.ans3).

(For the obligation to help in emergencies in accordance with one's capacity, see discussion of Section I (“Of Moral Good and Evil”), proposition v, in Chapter III.D.6 above.)

Thus, a person can only be said to be denying his needs and thus denying true propositions concerning his nature, if he does not attempt to meet his needs by those means which are available to him and which do not express propositions which deny truths concerning other persons.

In acting to avoid suffering or danger a person must use his reason. If he does not, if he acts contrary to reason (impulsively or unthinkingly), he is acting as a sensitive being only and not as a sensitive-rational being, and thus contrary to his nature, and thus is denying his nature.

In general, it is rational to regard oneself as a being who requires various things and needs to take various actions in order to pursue happiness and avoid unhappiness. It is therefore rational to take such actions, unless there is a reason not to take them. A person who does not act so as to avoid bad things or improve his life when such actions are not contrary to reason is denying his nature and his circumstances to be what they are, and thus is acting contrary to his nature and the moral rule. All the more so if he takes actions which harm himself.

Certainly when a man may without transgressing the limits prescribed consult his own safety, support, and reasonable satisfaction, and does not; and especially when he takes a counter-course, and exposes himself, he forgets many of the foregoing truths, and treats himself as not being what he is (IX.iii.2).

Rationally pursuing happiness also requires considering the future. (This is in accordance with the calculations in Section II (“Of Happiness”); see Chapter III.C above). The extent of consideration of the future should be commensurate with the quantity of future; present pleasures should not be pursued in such a way as to prevent greater ones later. (The context of this calculation includes the belief in the afterlife which is argued for in part II below.)

Those evils which cannot be prevented should be borne “patiently and decently;” such an attitude serves to mitigate them. They should, as much as possible, be reduced if they cannot be prevented altogether. Being mentally prepared to deal with bad things helps to deal with them,

especially in the case of death.

3. Obligation to consider feelings and desires.

He must consider even bodily and sensual affections, passions, and inclinations as intimations, which many times he not only may, but ought to hearken to (IX.iii.3).

It must always be remembered that feelings and desires must be subject to reason.

However, when they are regulated by reason they are performing their natural function—providing inclinations to act—without which we would not act, and they constitute just motives and good arguments to act upon (IX.iii.3).

That the inferior appetites exist is just as true as that superior reason exists is true. Like everything else, they must be treated according to their nature, as what they are—though not as more than they are. When reason is against them, they are disabled by it; however, when it is not against them, they are

unfettered and free, and become governing principles (IX.iii.3).

It was established in Section III (“Of Reason”), proposition xiv that when there is no reason against sense information, that constitutes a reason for it; and in proposition xv, that it follows that acting in accordance with credible sense information is in accordance with reason and therefore in accordance with nature and therefore obligatory. This applies to feelings and desires, which also constitute sense information—when there is no reason against an inclination it becomes the ruling principle and “takes the commanding post;” in that case, acting in accordance with rationally-supported feelings and desires constitutes acting in accordance with one’s nature.

Inasmuch as there is an obligation to act in accordance with one’s nature then

a man must act as being what he is in n.3 under prop. [ii] of this section (IX.iii.3).

Feelings and desires are what motivate human beings to act; they are part of human nature; to act in accordance with them—always under the guidance of reason—is to act according to nature.

The springs of all human actions are in fact, either a sense of duty, or a prospect of some pleasure or profit to be obtained, some evil or danger to be avoided; that is, either the reasonableness of what is done, or the manner, in which something doth or is like to affect the agent; and that is again, human actions are founded either in reason, or passion and inclination. (I need not add they may be in both.) This being so, what should hinder, when reason does not work, but that the inferior springs should retain their nature, and act? (IX.iii.3)

Feelings and desires, when they are subject to reason and provide it with information, are good and can tend to noble ends; human beings could not exist without them. It follows that they are a part of human nature in order to provide a motive for action when reason alone would not. When they are properly managed, that is, controlled by reason, they are positive characteristics and not defects in human nature. Therefore, those philosophers who advocate complete indifference as a goal are advocating what is contrary to nature and thus contrary to the moral rule.

Love of that which is amiable, compassion toward the miserable and helpless, a natural abhorrence and resentment of that which is villainous or vicious or base, fear of evils, are things, which duly tempered, have laudable effects; and without them mankind could not well subsist. By which it appears, that the Author of nature has placed these *conatus*'s, these tendencies and reluctancies in us, to dispose us for action, when there are no arguments of a higher nature to move us. So far are they, rightly managed, from being mere infirmities. And certainly the philosopher, who pretends to absolute apathy, maims nature, and sets up for a half-man, or I don't know what (IX.iii.3)¹⁵².

However, our feelings are very likely to become too strong and therefore attempting to

152 Compare with Locke: "A perfect indifferency in the mind, not determinable by its last judgment of the good or evil, that is thought to attend its choice, would be so far from being an advantage and excellency of any intellectual nature, that it would be as great an imperfection, as the want of indifferency to act, or not to act, till determined by the will, would be an imperfection on the other side." *Essay*, II.21.48.

weaken them somewhat is a way of preventing this; or else, when considering the mean between extremes, moving away more from the worse extreme. Although feelings are to be acted upon when not contrary to reason, that does not mean they should be enabled to run wild—they are only to be heard.

It follows from this that people are entitled to choose what they prefer, as long as it is “innocent;” as well as pursue their well-being prudentially and lawfully, in accordance with Section II (“Of Happiness”), proposition xiii:

Those pleasures are true, and to be reckoned into our happiness, against which there lies no reason (II.xiii).

If gratifying a desire is against reason and truth, then denying it constitutes treating it as what it is; if it is not contrary to reason and truth, then complying with it constitutes treating it as what it is, hence acting in accordance with the moral rule.

However, there is an

4. Obligation to self-improvement.

He must use what means he can to cure his own defects, or at least to prevent the effects of them; learn to deny temptations, or keep them at a proper distance; even mortify, where mortification is necessary; and always carry about him the sense of his being but a man (IX.iii.4).

A person who does not engage in self-improvement is acting contrary to proposition ii, note 7—that human beings are “fallible and infirm.” That constitutes denying true propositions about his nature. It also constitutes a wrongful omission, as established in Section I (“Of Moral Good and Evil”), proposition v.

Therefore, persons have an obligation to figure out what their weaknesses are and how to compensate for them. This does not contradict note 3 above, because that established that when

reason is against an inclination the inclination should not be followed; an inclination may only be followed if reason is not against it.

(To be clear about what he means by mortification, he states

[n]o monkery, no superstitious or fantastical mortifications are here recommended (IX.iii.4.nf.)

The last clause of this note, that a person should

always carry about him the sense of his being but a man (IX.iii.4)

covers a lot of ground. If people think of what they and others are, namely, the same kind, they will not be conceited, not so critical, punitive, and vengeful, but rather be modest. They should seek to

not...be proud, conceited, vain; but modest, and humble, and rather diffident of themselves; not to censure the failings of others too hardly, not to be over-severe in punishing or exacting justice, and particularly not to be revengeful; but candid, placable, mansuete [civilized], and so forth (IX.iii.4).

5. Obligation to self-examination and repentance.

He ought to examine his own actions and conduct, and where he finds he has transgressed, to repent (IX.iii.5).

If he has harmed another, he should make reparations. If reparations are impossible, or he has wronged himself, he should repent, and act in a way that shows he wants forgiveness—which shows that he wishes it undone. He should take every means to avoid relapsing.

These actions are what a rational mind includes in the definition of a fault or wrong action. What is contrary to truth is unreasonable, wrong, or a fault; A rational mind cannot approve of what is unreasonable and therefore must disapprove of it. A rational animal acts according his nature and truth and the definition of wrong if he avoids committing wrong, and, if he has committed it, attempts to undo it, or at least repent. A criminal does not behave as a rational

animal and deliberately opposes truth. A person who has done wrong treats himself as what he is by regarding himself as in danger of relapsing.

6. Obligation to improve one's reason.

He must labor to improve his rational faculties by such means, as are (fairly) practicable by him, and consistent with his circumstances (IX.iii.6).

If it is a disadvantage to be subject to error and act in ignorance then it follows that it is an advantage to know truths that prevent this; and the more knowledge the greater the advantage.

Reason is the means of obtaining knowledge (true descriptions of the world per Section I, proposition ii); therefore, improving the functioning of one's reason constitutes improving one's means of obtaining true information about the world. Not to seek to improve the means of obtaining true information constitutes denying the nature of true information—that it is the means of pursuing happiness.

By improving our rational faculties we become more rational, improve our nature, and become more attentive to rational enjoyments (IX.iii.6).

The means of improving the mind are

the instruction of able men, reading, observation, meditation (IX.iii.6).

Not everyone has the opportunity or capacity for making use of these, or has them only to a limited extent. One's obligation is determined by one's opportunities as established in Section IV ("Of the Obligations of Imperfect Beings with Respect to their Power of Acting"), proposition ii

So far as any being has no power, or opportunity of doing any thing, so far is that being incapable of any obligation to do it; or, no being is capable of any obligation to do that, which it has not power or opportunity to do (IV.ii).

That is why the qualification "by such means as are...practicable" is included above.

In order to survive people need material goods. Without them the rational part “cannot dwell easy” and the pursuit of knowledge is interrupted. It is therefore rational to conclude that the pursuit of material goods

which tends to the preservation and happiness of the whole (IX.iii.6)

is necessary and important. However, this takes time and effort which may preclude the development of reason except for those whose occupation is learning.

People’s opportunities for developing their reason vary considerably depending on their circumstances. Those who are “more free from worldly cares” or whose work brings them some literacy can only have partial knowledge. Some people have health, early education, encouragement, useful acquaintances, and no problems. Others have disadvantages which force them

to be their own guides, and make their way as well as they can (IX.iii.6).

Nevertheless,

every man may in some degree or other endeavour to cultivate his nature, and possess himself of useful truths (IX.iii.6).

Not to do this is to reject reason—which is always unreasonable, give up one’s humanity, and fall into an animal existence. (However, in Section I he acknowledged that,

our abilities and opportunities are not equal; some labor under disadvantages invincible (I.v).)

7. Obligation to learn from others.

He must attend to instruction, and even ask advice; especially in matters of consequence.

Not to do so is to deny the true propositions concerning one’s nature: that one has limited knowledge and capacity, is fallible, and that it is possible for someone else to be more

knowledgeable. Everyone can get information from others and the less a person knows the more true it is that he should learn from others. Outside their area of expertise, people should get information from those who are expert. In human society there is a trade of knowledge, as well as of goods and services.

There is or should be a commerce or interchange of counsel and knowledge, as well as of other things; and where men have not these of their own growth, they should thankfully receive what may be imported from other quarters (IX.iii.7).

This does not mean following blindly the opinions of someone else, who is also a fallible human being; but listening to his arguments and using one's own reason to determine what is reasonable to believe. Simply to follow another without thinking is to give up reason and be like an animal.

[B]ut by the assistance of another, and hearing what he has to say, to *find out* more certainly on which side reason, truth, and happiness (which always keep close together) do lie. And thus it is indeed a man's *own reason* at last, which governs.

He, who is governed by what another says (or does) without understanding it and making the reason of it his own, is not governed by his own reason, and that is, by no reason that he has. To say one is led by the nose (as we commonly speak) gives immediately the idea of a brute (IX.iii.7).

8. Obligation to overcome one's prejudices.

He must labor to clear his mind of those preoccupations and encumbrances which hang about it and hinder him from reasoning freely and judging impartially (IX.iii.[8]).

Everyone begins life with no knowledge and then tends to acquire irrational ideas and eventually becomes set in them.

We set out in life from such poor beginnings of knowledge, and grow up under such remains of superstition and ignorance, such influences of company and fashion, such insinuations of pleasure, etc.; that it is no wonder if men get habits of thinking only in one way; that these habits in times grow confirmed and obstinate; and so their minds come to be overcast with thick prejudices, scarce penetrable by any ray of truth or light of reason (IX.iii.[8]).

One must work to clear one's mind of these prejudices and habits which hinder good reasoning. Not to do so, that is, not to make one's reason fit for use, constitutes a declaration that one does not intend to use reason and therefore constitutes a declaration that one is irrational. This contradicts proposition ii, note 4 above—a human being is a rational animal.

Conclusion of proposition iii:

[I]t is the duty of every man...to behave himself in all respects...as far as he is able according to reason (IX.iii).

From which follows,

Proposition iv—obligation to live virtuously and piously

Every man is obliged to live virtuously and piously (IX.iv).

Living virtuously and piously is coextensive with living according to reason (see Section III—"Of Reason," chapter III.B above) and truth (see Section I—"Of Moral Good and Evil," chapter III.D above).

The preceding sections demonstrated that to live virtuously and piously means being reverent and dutiful towards God (Section V—"Truths Relating to the Deity," section A above); just with regard to other people's property (Section VI—"Truths Respecting Mankind in General," section B above, and Section VII—"Truths Respecting Particular Societies of Men," section C above); and pursuing happiness without impiety and harm to oneself and others (propositions i-iii above).

The most important virtues concerning oneself are prudence—which is "the queen of virtues," and constitutes the exercise of reason; temperance—pursuing physical pleasures only when they are consistent with our well-being and never treating them as the sole purpose of our

existence; chastity—it does not deny the “tender passions” but does mean not indulging them contrary to reason, nor giving up the man to satisfy the animal, nor hurting others for one’s pleasure; and pursuing them lawfully and privately; frugality—considering one’s family’s present and future, keeping in mind that the future is always uncertain, saving for the future and refraining from extravagance; it permits generosity and even magnificence when they are in accordance with a true assessment of one’s circumstances. There are other virtues which it is not necessary to list.

There are methods to improve one’s judgment of what constitutes virtuous behavior. One is to imagine one has already taken the contemplated action and consider what one would think of it then, while keeping in mind that the lengthy regret one might feel afterwards will be much greater than the short-term pleasure. Another is to imagine someone else performing the contemplated action and consider how one would regard it; this works because we see others’ faults better than our own. Also, when a virtue is a mean between two bad extremes, it is sometimes better to incline more toward one of these extremes than the other.

Living virtuously tends to happiness.

Since then to live virtuously is to practice reason and act conformably to truth, he, who lives so, must be ultimately happy, by sect. II. prop. [xiv], and therefore not only the commands of reason, but even the desire of happiness...will oblige a man to live so (IX.iv).

Experience shows that the virtuous life is the happier life; virtuous pleasures are truer than vicious ones; the vicious life is dangerous and ends badly. However, virtue does not make a person happy when he is subject to terrible suffering; nor does it guarantee good fortune; it does make a person less unhappy and brings inner tranquillity.

One should consider the question of which is better, a virtuous life which naturally tends to

happiness or a vicious one which naturally tends to unhappiness?

In brief, virtue will make a man here, in any given circumstances, as happy as a man can be in those circumstances; or however it will make him happy hereafter in some other state; for ultimately, all taken together, happy he must be (IX.iv).

(This includes the assumption that the virtuous will be rewarded in the afterlife, which is the subject of part II of this section, below.)

An objection that is raised to this argument is that if virtue is supposed to make people happy, how is it that there are virtuous people who are miserable? The answer is that in ordinary cases virtue has a natural tendency to produce happiness but it does not follow

that there are no perturbations in human affairs (IX.viii.4).

Virtue can be overpowered by bad things; it does not make people invulnerable; nor can it control bad things which affect both the virtuous and the vicious. Conversely, vice may provide more pleasure than pain, contrary to its natural tendency, because a vicious man may have good fortune that causes him more pleasure than the pain which naturally follows from his vices.

In addition to virtue and vice, people's circumstances affect their pleasures or sufferings; no one claims that only the natural tendencies of virtue and vice affect people and not the natural tendencies of their circumstances. Virtue only

tends to make men happy in proportion to their circumstances; and vice does the contrary (IX.viii).

That is, virtue produces the happiness that is within one's power; makes people happier than they would otherwise be—in their circumstances; it tends to improve their circumstances but does not completely correct them; nor does it ensure that their enjoyments exceed their sufferings; nor does it ensure that vicious people's vices, although they do cause them pain, will cause their sufferings to exceed their enjoyments (IX.viii).

Good fortune does not constitute virtue. There are various beneficial characteristics, such as good looks, wealth, health, fortitude etc., which people have by nature. Because they are given by nature they are not virtues but advantages. In their case the virtue consists in using them rightly. The same principle applies to lacks of these beneficial characteristics—it is not a lack of virtue not to have them and therefore not to use what one does not have. A person who has less of a beneficial characteristic and does as much as he can with it has as much virtue as one who has more and does the greater amount that he can with it (IX.iv).

Part II—The soul

Part II of Section IX consists of arguments for the immortality of the soul. Numerous arguments are offered for the following propositions, which I have omitted.¹⁵³

One has a consciousness of one's own existence, of one's intellectual capacities, and of one's power to begin and stop motions in one's body (IX.v). The subject of one's self-consciousness must be different from the body—it is the soul (IX.vi). The soul cannot be mere matter (IX.vii). (He offers many arguments for this among which are references to Cartesian dualism and a quote from Locke.) The soul is immortal. That good people suffer and bad people flourish means that there must be an afterlife in which this is rectified; otherwise, it would mean that God is not rational and this is contrary to what was established in Section V. It is possible that these instances were established by God in order to prove the existence of an afterlife. Irrationality is so prevalent in this world that there must be one in which reason prevails (IX.viii). The soul, when it leaves the body, will go to a state that is in accordance with its nature (IX.ix). In

153 Alexander Altmann traces several of the arguments in this section to medieval Jewish philosophers. Altmann, "William Wollaston," 236-8.

this state, souls will be positioned in accordance with their differing degrees of perfection (IX.x). These differences are the same as the differences in reasonableness (IX.xi). It is reasonable to suppose this (IX.xii). The positions of the reasonable and virtuous will be better than those of the foolish and vicious (IX.xiii). The condition of the souls in the future state will also depend on the happiness and unhappiness they experienced in life (IX.xiv). If the immortality of the soul cannot be demonstrated, its mortality certainly cannot (IX.xv). Even if the immortality of the soul is considered merely probable, or only a chance, a virtuous life is still preferable to a vicious one (IX.xvi). Therefore, to act in accordance with what is true, in addition to considering one's present state and providing for one's happiness in it, one must also consider that there will be an afterlife and provide for one's happiness there (IX.xvii).

RND concludes with this final statement of how to behave ethically:

For a conclusion of the whole matter; let our conversation in this world, so far as we are concerned, and able, be such as acknowledges every thing to be *what it is* (what it is in itself, and what with regard to us, to other beings, to causes, circumstances, consequences); that is, let us by no act deny any thing to be true, which is true; that is, let us act according to *reason*; and that is, let us act according to the *law of our nature*. By honestly endeavouring to do this we shall express our duty to Him, who is the Author of it, and of that law; and at the same time prosecute our own proper happiness (the happiness of rational beings); we shall do what tends to make us easy here, and be qualifying ourselves and preparing for our removal hence to our long home; that great revolution, which, at the farthest, cannot be very far off (IX.xvii).

CHAPTER V. WOLLASTON'S CRITICS

The established view of Wollaston's moral theory is that it is nonsensical, and that it was thoroughly refuted long ago. However, an examination of the arguments that supposedly devastated Wollaston's moral theory reveals most of them to be attacks on straw men, and all of them fail to engage the theory. Hume's prominent attack on Wollaston turns out to be closely adapted from a straw man invented by John Clarke of Hull; Clarke's straw man was also utilized by Hutcheson and Price. Hume's and Bentham's claims concerning the contents of RND are so far-fetched that they lead to the conclusion that neither of them read it. The more obscure criticisms by Thomas Bott also do not seriously engage Wollaston's theory.

That the established view is unjustified has been notably recognized by Joel Feinberg, who writes:

[A]fter discovering in various commentaries the amount of scorn and ridicule that have been heaped on his now forgotten theory, and the shocking misrepresentations and sophistries used in 'refuting' it, I am moved (out of a simple sense of justice!) to set the record straight.¹⁵⁴

(See Section D below on Feinberg's paper.)

154 Feinberg, "Wollaston and His Critics," 346.

A. THE MISLEADING OBSERVERS STRAW MAN

The attack which probably has most damaged the reputation of the moral theory espoused by William Wollaston in *The Religion of Nature Delineated* is David Hume's claim that Wollaston's moral theory defines an immoral act as one that causes a false belief in an observer.¹⁵⁵

That this claim is a straw man has been recognized by some prominent commentators.

Hume has simply misread Wollaston. Nowhere does Wollaston claim that the essence of all wrongdoing is telling a lie and thus deceiving others. Rather he holds that all wrongdoing is an offense against the truth, whether or not any observer is present to be deceived. What makes an act wrong, according to Wollaston, is not that it misleads others or causes false belief, but rather that it violates truth, which is quite another thing....Thus, Hume sets out to refute a theory Wollaston never held.¹⁵⁶

The comparison with another eighteenth-century British rationalist position, that of William Wollaston, is instructive here. Wollaston argues in *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (London, 1722) that actions aim to represent reality – but the natural and social world of ordinary life rather than the intuitionists' normative metaphysical order. For Wollaston, immoral actions are contrary to reason for the simple reason that they assert plain falsehoods. Thus, he thought that theft is contrary to reason because the thief implicitly asserts that what he takes is not the property of another, and that is false. Wollaston's rationalism might be called *reductive*, since it seeks to reduce moral categories to those of truth and falsehood. From even this cursory description it should be clear, by the way, that Hume's "refutation" of Wollaston in the *Treatise* is directed at a straw man (*THN*.461-62n).¹⁵⁷

Any reading of RND makes it difficult to discern how Hume arrived at his farfetched claim that Wollaston asserts that immorality consists of creating a false belief in an observer, given that the moral rule espoused in RND is that an act is immoral if it expresses a proposition which is false and thereby denies things to be what they are, thus denying nature.

155 Hume, *Treatise*, 296-7 (3.1.1.15 & note 68).

156 Feinberg, 347.

157 Darwall, *British Moralists*, 327n14.

No act (whether word or deed) of any being, to whom moral good and evil are imputable, that interferes with any true proposition, or denies any thing to be as it is, can be right.

.....
Those propositions, which are true, and express things as they are, express the relation between the subject and the attribute as it is; that is, this is either affirmed or denied of that according to the nature of that relation. And further, this relation (or, if you will, the nature of this relation) is determined and fixed by the natures of the things themselves. Therefore nothing can interfere with any proposition that is true, but it must likewise interfere with nature (the nature of the relation, and the nature of the things themselves too), and consequently be unnatural, or wrong in nature (I.iv).

His moral rule is

That every intelligent, active, and free being should so behave himself, as by no act to contradict truth; or, that he should treat every thing as being what it is (I.xi).

The source of Hume's claim can be found in the argument against RND in John Clarke's¹⁵⁸ pamphlet "An Examination of Moral Good and Evil, Advanced in a Late Book, Entitled, *The Religion of Nature Delineated*."¹⁵⁹

Clarke's argument against RND can be summarized as follows. First, Clarke denies a central premise of RND—that actions express propositions.

A true proposition may be denied, or things may be denied to be what they are, by deeds, as well as by express words or another proposition (I.iii).

Clarke argues:

Affirming and denying are actions, which in strict propriety of language are only applicable to agents; so that actions, whether words or deeds, can not be properly said to affirm or deny any thing; the Agent only can be properly said to affirm or deny truth by his actions, whether words or deeds. This though it may seem a nice

158 This John Clarke (1687-1734), identified on the title page as "Master of the public grammar-school in Hull" is to be distinguished from the John Clarke who wrote the introduction to later editions of RND.

159 Clarke, *Examination*. Spelling, italics, and capitalization have been modernized. All square-bracketed items within quotes are my additions.

distinction, yet is not more nice than necessary; for in order to a person's affirming or denying the truth, an intention to affirm or deny is required, without which he cannot be said to affirm or deny it. A man is then, and then only, said to affirm or deny a thing, when he conveys a proposition in his own mind to the minds of others; as expressing his own sense, apprehension or persuasion of the agreement or disagreement of things (6-9). [The original page numbering skips from page 6 to page 9.]

Clarke maintains that actions cannot express propositions. Clarke interprets Wollaston as saying that actions themselves express propositions, not that rational agents express propositions via their actions, although the first proposition in RND states that only the actions of rational beings are under consideration.

That act, which may be denominated morally good or evil, must be the act of a being capable of distinguishing, choosing, and acting for himself: or more briefly, *of an intelligent and free agent* (I.i).

Wollaston's position is that a being can be said to act only if it acts from an internal principle; whatever does not do so does not act—it is only acted upon. Thus, only the actions of intelligent and free agents are truly acts and subject to moral judgment (I.i).

Clarke also maintains that agents can express propositions only when they intend to do so, and only by words (or by agreed-upon signals), and that they can only affirm or deny truth when they intend to do so (9-10).

At this point, Clarke could argue that since a major premise of RND (that actions express propositions) is false, then the conclusion is false. However, that is not the argument he makes. Instead he claims that the meaning of RND's argument is entirely different from what is stated in the text, and dogmatically asserts that it must mean that immorality consists of conveying false impressions by actions.

[W]hereas he means no more, but that actions or omissions denominated immoral, have a natural meaning or signification, inconsistent with some truth; and that

therefore the immorality of any action, or omission, does not lie in the intention, but in the natural tendency or signification of the action or omission to deny some truth, in a fitness to raise, or excite, in the minds of such as see or hear of it, propositions contrary to the truth (12).

And again:

The only reasonable and true sense therefore that can be put upon Mr. Wollaston's general assertion, that men may by their actions or omissions deny truth, is this, that actions, even such as are not by compact or agreement made expressive of, and equivalent to propositions, may yet convey propositions into the minds of such as may see, or otherwise come to the knowledge of them, inconsistent with, or contrary to some truth, even where a person has no intention by his action or omission of conveying any such sense or proposition to the minds of others....We are now therefore to examine his doctrine according to this sense of his words (19-20).

In both paragraphs Clarke merely asserts dogmatically that RND means what he declares it to mean. In the latter he announces that he intends to proceed to “examine” RND in accordance with his assertion. However, notwithstanding his assertion, there is nothing in RND that could be interpreted to mean what Clarke claims it means and therefore his claim is very much a straw man and the doctrine he “examines” bears no relationship whatever to the moral theory proposed in RND.

Clarke's argument is not that since a major premise of RND (that actions express propositions) is false, then the conclusion is false, but that since the premise is false the argument means whatever Clarke declares it to mean, which is, that immorality consists of performing an action which leads to someone else having a false belief.

A comparison of Hume's statements with Clarke's shows that Hume's statements closely parallel Clarke's claims about RND, his arguments, and his examples.

Hume writes:

As to those judgments which are the *effects* of our actions, and which, when false, give occasion to pronounce the actions contrary to truth and reason; we may

observe, that our actions never cause any judgment, either true or false, in ourselves, and that 'tis only on others they have such an influence. 'Tis certain, that an action, on many occasions, may give rise to false conclusions in others....In this respect my action resembles somewhat a lye or falsehood; only with this difference, which is material, that I perform not the action with any intention of giving rise to a false judgment in another (3.1.1:296).

Hume here is following Clarke:

This though it may seem a nice distinction, yet is not more nice than necessary; for in order to a person's affirming or denying the truth, an intention to affirm or deny is required, without which he cannot be said to affirm or deny it (6-9).

Hume continues with Clarke's claim that Wollaston is asserting that actions themselves express propositions, not that agents express propositions via their actions:

It causes, however, a mistake and false judgment by accident; and the falshood of its effects may be ascrib'd, by some odd figurative way of speaking, to the action itself.

And then with Clarke's straw man:

But still I can see no pretext of reason for asserting, that the tendency to cause such an error is the first spring or original source of all immorality (3.1.1: 296-7).

Continuing in a footnote he writes:

One might think it were entirely superfluous to prove this, if a late author [Wollaston], who has had the good fortune to obtain some reputation, had not seriously affirm'd, that such a falshood is the foundation of all guilt and moral deformity (3.1.1: 297n68).

In addition to the similarity between Hume's and Clarke's central claim there is also considerable similarity between Hume's and Clarke's particular examples. As part of his "examination" of RND, Clarke offers the following argument:

Does a man lie with his neighbor's wife? He by that action impudently denies her to be his neighbor's, and affirms her to be his own; though the circumstance of secrecy, with which that kind of gallantry is usually carried on, visibly implies the quite contrary, *viz.* that she is not his own; which being a truth, some people may perhaps be thankful to our author for the notable argument his doctrine furnishes them with, to prove the innocence of adultery (16).

Hume uses Clarke's example:

[A]nd that a person, who thro' a window sees any lewd behaviour of mine with my neighbour's wife, may be so simple as to imagine she is certainly my own (3.1.1:296).

As well as Clarke's argument that secrecy would obviate the immorality:

Add to this, that if I had us'd the precaution of shutting the windows, while I indulg'd myself in those liberties with my neighbour's wife, I shou'd have been guilty of no immorality; and that because my action, being perfectly conceal'd, wou'd have had no tendency to produce any false conclusion (3.1.1:297n68).

Hume's argument concerning criminals also closely resembles Clarke's. Wollaston's argument is that immorality consists of actions which express propositions which deny truth. In the case of theft or robbery, the truth being denied is that the taken item belongs to the person from whom it is taken. (Wollaston derives a right to property from human existence in a state of nature in Section VI of RND. See Chapter III.B above.)

If a man steals a horse, and rides away upon him, he may be said indeed by riding him to use him as a horse, but not the horse of another man, who gave him no license to do this. He does not therefore consider him as being what he is, unless he takes in the respect he bears to his true owner (I.vi).

In keeping with his straw man, Clarke argues that the issue is whether a criminal's action leads an onlooker to believe falsely that the stolen items belong to the thief, and then to assert that this will likely not happen, because the nature of the action will be clear to an onlooker. Clarke's example is of armed robbery:

He [the robber] never so much as dreams of the denial of any such thing, nor has his action any such signification, but quite the contrary. For men do not use to claim their own in that violent manner, but rogues frequently take that method to deprive honest people of their own; and therefore the thought that would naturally arise in the mind of a spectator upon it, that is, the natural meaning or signification of the action would be, that the money certainly belonged to the traveler, and not the highwayman (11).

Hume's similar argument changes robbery to burglary:

For the same reason, a thief, who steals in by a ladder at a window, and takes all imaginable care to cause no disturbance, is in no respect criminal. For either he will not be perceiv'd, or if he be, 'tis impossible he can produce any error, nor will any one, from these circumstances, take him to be other than what he really is (3.1.1: 297n68).

Hume's argument that Wollaston's position that theft is immoral is circular because it assumes a right to property is also very similar to Clarke's.

Clarke:

Yet our author is not at liberty to suppose, there is such a thing as property in the world, or that any man can be truly said to have a property in any thing; because such a supposition, is taking the thing for granted, which it is the design of this first section of his book to prove (30-31).

(As noted above, Wollaston's theory of property rights is in Section VI of RND.)

Hume:

Besides, we may easily observe, that in all those arguments there is an evident reasoning in a circle. A person who takes possession of *another's* goods, and uses them as his *own*, in a manner declares them to be his own; and this falshood is the source of the immorality of injustice. But is property, or right, or obligation, intelligible, without an antecedent morality?

Hume does apparently originate the equally dogmatic claim that the straw man version of RND would lead to the claim that inanimate objects can be immoral. This claim has been thoroughly addressed by Joel Feinberg—see Section D below.

There is no evidence that Hume read RND. There is nothing in Hume's statements concerning RND which evince any familiarity with its contents. Hume neither quotes from it nor refers to anything that appears in it, unlike Clarke who quotes passages from RND. While Clarke discusses examples that appear in RND, Hume's examples come solely from Clarke.

The similarities between Hume's argument and Clarke's are persuasive. Hume repeats

Clarke's central claim, his objections, and his examples. The conclusion to be drawn from a comparison of Clarke's and Hume's arguments against RND (and with RND itself) is that Hume never read RND but only Clarke's pamphlet, from which he borrowed almost all of the elements of his attack on RND. It is Clarke who is the source of this peculiar mischaracterization of RND, though its prevalence is due to its having been propagated by Hume.

Prior to Hume¹⁶⁰, Frances Hutcheson¹⁶¹ also utilized Clarke's straw man to criticize Wollaston.

[T]his quality in actions, whether we call it significancy or not, that only true propositions can be inferred from them by just reasoning, be moral goodness? And may it not be the very idea of moral evil in actions, that some false conclusions can by just consequence, be deduced from them? (268-9).

This is not proper signification. A judicious observer never imagines any intention to communicate opinions in some of the most important actions, either good or evil (272).

Hutcheson's chapter on Wollaston consists primarily of such arguments about signification. The only source for this claim is Clarke's straw man. Hutcheson's references to arguments that are supposedly in RND are spurious, as is the one sentence that is presented as a direct quote from RND (266).

After Hume, Richard Price, in his *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* (1758)¹⁶² also utilized Clarke's straw man, that is, the claim that Wollaston asserts that immorality consists of creating a false belief in an observer. (That this claim is derived directly from Clarke and not from Hume is indicated by Price's referring, in a paragraph not quoted here, to a statement that

160 Hutcheson's *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* was first published in 1728 and thus predates Hume's *Treatise*.

161 [Hutcheson], *Illustrations*. Spelling, capitalization, and italicization have been modernized.

162 Raphael, *British Moralists*.

appears in Clarke but not in Hume.)

The evil of ingratitude and cruelty is not the same with that of denying truth, or affirming a lie: nor can the *formal ratio and notion* of it (as Mr. Wollaston speaks) be justly said to consist in this; because there may be no intention to deny any thing true, or to produce an assent to any thing false. Ingratitude and cruelty would be wrong, though there were no rational creatures in the world besides the agent, and though he could have no design to declare a falsehood; which is a quite distinct species of evil (727).

In a recent paper, responding to the papers by Tweyman, Feinberg, and Joynton, et. al., (see Chapter II.C above), John J. Tilley¹⁶³ states that their argument is that “Wollaston’s moral theory has long been ignored owing not so much to its flaws as to the abuse it received from its most famous critics, beginning with Hume and continuing with Bentham, Stephen, and others” (1099). Tilley states that this argument “stresses weak, unfair criticisms, found in prominent works, published many years after Wollaston’s book appeared” and argues that Clarke’s, Hutcheson’s, and Bott’s (see below) criticisms are “fair” and “potent” (1099). However, inasmuch as Hume’s arguments incorporate Clarke’s, and Tilley has already admitted that Hume’s arguments are “weak” and “unfair,” it can hardly follow that the same criticism by Clarke is successful.

163 Tilley, “Wollaston's Early Critics.”

B. THOMAS BOTT AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Thomas Bott¹⁶⁴ made several criticisms of RND, some of which were later utilized by other critics. Bott states that his criticism is based on Section I, Proposition ix, in which Wollaston states that happiness (the causation of unhappiness) is the standard by which the degree of wrongness of a denial of truth is measured. Apparently because the happiness standard is presented in Section II, after the statement of the moral rule in Section I, Bott regards the happiness standard as having been unjustifiably added onto the moral rule and even as contrary to it.

Here therefore he takes into his notion of morality, not only the practice of truth, but the influence also of that truth upon the welfare and happiness of mankind (6).

Yet how such a concession as this, is consistent with the definition of moral good and evil...it will be very hard to say; or rather, any one must plainly perceive an absurdity and inconsistency (7).

In addition Bott argues that if the definition of immoral acts is that they are contrary to truth then all truths *must* affect happiness, otherwise acting in accordance with or contrary to truth could not affect happiness.

For sure, if the very essence of moral good and evil lies in the mere agreement or disagreement of our acts with truth, all truth must be supposed to be moral, and to have, in its tendency an influence upon human happiness: otherwise, the practice or neglect of it could no ways affect human happiness (7).

Bott's error is to regard the happiness standard as added onto or contradicting the moral rule, rather than as the standard of the moral rule, with the moral rule as the means of attaining happiness. This leads him to reverse Wollaston's position and claim that all truth affects happiness, rather than that only those truths which affect happiness are the subject of the moral rule.

164 [Bott], *Principal and Peculiar*. Spelling, capitalization, and italics have been modernized.

Bott also argues that as all truths are equally true the denial of any truth is morally equal to the denial of any other truth.

I think his notion of moral good and evil makes all truths not only moral, but equally so; or, in other words, all truths are in themselves of equal importance, according to his definition; and the agreement or disagreement of our actions with them, equally moral or immoral (9).

This objection also depends on not recognizing the role of happiness as the standard of truth-violation. (See Chapter III.D.8 above.)

This argument was picked up by Hutcheson.

If then significancy of falsehood be the very same with moral evil, all crimes must be equal (274).

Lastly, Bott argues that there is no difference between asserting true or false propositions by words or by deeds and therefore there is no moral difference between them.

A meets B, a poor wretch at the point of starving, takes notice of his case, says every thing that is right about it, and goes his way. C comes immediately after, sees what B's case is, gives him relief and departs. Here A's words and C's action, are supposed perfectly to agree with B's circumstances...therefore...because the agreement is equal, the moral goodness of their acts must be equal too (11-12).

This disregards RND's principle that propositions expressed by actions have more reality than those expressed by words and therefore greater moral import. (See Chapter III.D.4 (RND I.iii) above.)

Bott's argument depends on focusing selectively on a few statements in RND and disregarding essential parts of Wollaston's theory.

Later in the century John Brown¹⁶⁵ reiterated one of Bott's arguments. Brown argued that

165 John Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics* (1751) in D. H. Monro, *A Guide to the British Moralists*, Fontana Philosophy Classics, general ed. A. M. Quinton (London: Wm. Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1972): 159-170. Capitalization has been modernized.

the various criteria of moral goodness offered by earlier moral philosophers, such as virtue, beauty (Shaftesbury), fitness (Clarke), or truth (Wollaston) were not the definition of moral goodness but were only the means to the actual moral good which is ‘the voluntary production of the greatest happiness’ (166) (Cumberland).

As Bott did, Brown argued that Wollaston plainly uses happiness as his criterion of moral good and therefore truth cannot be the criterion of moral goodness.

Mr Wollaston is no less explicit in this particular: For in every instance he brings, the happiness of man is the single end to which his rule of truth verges in an unvaried manner (163).

Brown does not address Wollaston’s use of truth as the means of attaining happiness and his view that truth and happiness are coextensive. Wollaston argued that rules such as Brown’s (derived from Cumberland), are too general to provide a means of making moral decisions. (See Chapter I above.)

In a recent paper¹⁶⁶ John J. Tilley argues that another objection by Bott is successful in refuting RND. This objection is that if an act conflicts only with unimportant truths then it is not wrong; from this it follows that some acts that conflict with truth are not wrong, and therefore RND’s rule is denied.

This is the statement by Bott as quoted by Tilley:

[Wollaston] speaks . . . of important truths, truths of weight, etc., which, I think, may be fairly understood as allowing that there are truths of no importance; (as it is very certain there are a great many . . .). Yet how such a concession as this, is consistent with the definition of moral good and evil . . . it will be very hard to say; or rather, anyone must plainly perceive an absurdity and inconsistency. (Bott, 7) (274).

Tilley’s argument is that if a truth lacks “a positive degree of importance” then there is no

166 Tilley, “*Problem of Inconsistency*,” 265-280.

“positive degree of wrongness.”

- It is possible that the truths with which some acts conflict (assuming that acts can conflict with truths) lack any positive degree of importance.
- If every truth with which an act conflicts lacks a positive degree of importance, then the act has no positive degree of wrongness, which is to say that it’s not wrong.
- Therefore, it is possible that some acts that conflict with truths are not wrong (274).

And thus RND’s rule is denied.

However, how “positive degrees” are defined is not explained. Aside from using this term Tilley does not offer an argument for why even an infinitesimal wrong is the same as no wrong at all. Wollaston clearly stated that some wrongs are insignificant (see Chapter III.D above), but however insignificant they are, insignificance is not the same as nonexistence. The standard of “positiveness” is invented by Tilley.

C. THE “ALL IMMORALITY IS LYING” STRAW MAN

From Clarke’s claim that RND’s position concerns the significance of actions, Hutcheson derived the claim that RND’s moral rule is that all immoral acts are lies.

Never was bare significancy of falsehood made the idea of moral evil (263).

This view, that Wollaston’s moral rule concerns making true or false statements, was reiterated by

Price:

It is well known that Mr. Wollaston...places the whole notion of moral good and evil in *signifying* and *denying* truth (727).

By the time of Jeremy Bentham, the claim that RND’s principle is that all immorality consists of telling a lie had been elaborated still more. Bentham’s criticism of RND is:

We have one philosopher, who says, there is no harm in any thing in the world but in telling a lie: and that if, for example, you were to murder your own father, this would only be a particular way of saying, he was not your father. Of course, when this philosopher sees any thing that he does not like, he says, it is a particular way of telling a lie. It is saying, that the act ought to be done, or may be done, when, in truth, it ought not to be done.¹⁶⁷

In Wollaston’s system, what is wrong with murdering anyone is that it denies his nature (and one’s own) as a rational, happiness-seeking being (see Chapter III above).

Bentham’s straw man was perpetuated in Leslie Stephen’s prominent history of eighteenth-century thought:

Thirty years’ profound meditation had convinced Wollaston that the reason why a man should abstain from breaking his wife’s head was, that it was a way of denying that she was his wife. All sin, in other words, was lying.¹⁶⁸

One should note that Bentham followed Wollaston in seeking a single rule that would

167 Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ch. 2, sec. 14, note 8, in Raphael, *British Moralists*, sec. 959.

168 Stephen, vol. 1, ch. 3, sec. 39:109.

produce human happiness, and that Wollaston considered something akin to Utilitarianism's rule of the greatest good for the greatest number, and rejected it on the grounds that the uniqueness and variability of individual experiences of pain and pleasure mean that a rule that applies the same standard to all persons will produce unequal and unjust results.

Men's respective happinesses or pleasures ought to be valued as they are to the persons themselves, whose they are; or according to the thoughts and sense, which they have of them; not according to the estimate put upon them by other people, who have no authority to judge of them, nor *can* know what they are; may compute by different rules; have less sense; be in different circumstances; or such as guilt has rendered partial to themselves.

.....

Every man's happiness is *his* happiness, what it is to him; and the loss of it is answerable to the degrees of his perception, to his manner of taking things, to his wants and circumstances (I.ii.obs.4).

The Bentham/Stephen view continued into the twentieth century. Hence, Alistair MacIntyre characterizes Wollaston's position as:

All wrongdoing is a species of lying, and lying is saying or representing what is false.¹⁶⁹

And in introducing a selection from RND in his anthology of British moralists, D. H. Monro says:

Most of the problems of moral philosophy would be solved if moral propositions could be shown to be ordinary empirical statements, subject to the same tests of truth or falsity. Wollaston tried to show that they were just that.¹⁷⁰

The excerpt of RND that Monro reprints is proposition I.iii, which states that actions express propositions. Monro apparently regards this as constituting Wollaston's moral rule, even though it is the means of determining whether actions are in accordance with nature, which is the foundational principle of RND's moral theory.

169 Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966): 170.

170 Monro, *A Guide to the British Moralists*, 316.

D. JOEL FEINBERG'S RESPONSE TO HUME

Joel Feinberg argues that Wollaston's views deserve a reexamination.

The Rev. William Wollaston (1659-1724) was one of the most famous and highly esteemed writers of his time, and yet in the century following his death, his reputation fell into sharp decline until he became an object of disrespect in the writings of Hume, Price, Bentham, and others. A fair-minded contemporary reader, I think, will find that Wollaston did have something important and original to say, however confused his manner of saying it, so that is one reason for reexamining his major work, *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1722) (345).

Feinberg's interest is in Wollaston's premise that actions declare propositions.

What I take to be the most suggestive point in Wollaston, namely, that certain actions can 'in a manner declare or affirm' propositions (350).

Although he recognizes that Clarke/Hume's claim that Wollaston's moral theory is that immorality consists of creating a false belief in an observer is a straw man, he is still sufficiently influenced by it to interpret Wollaston's premise as claiming that actions express propositions symbolically, and therefore have to be understandable by an observer in order to do so. (Feinberg read the excerpts from RND Sections I-II in the Selby-Bigge anthology of British Moralists, not a complete edition (345n1).)

Most actions suggest nothing at all beyond what an observer would be entitled to infer on the shakiest inductive grounds, which is to say they make no "declaration" whatever (349).

And the error in Wollaston's bold theory of declarative actions is simply that of uncritically extending a plausible account of the symbolic effect of *some* actions to cover the heterogeneous class of *all* actions (351).

(For the explanation of Wollaston's premise that actions express propositions by creating states of affairs see Chapter III.D.3-4 above.)

Feinberg therefore interprets Wollaston's premise as being similar to his ideas concerning the expressiveness of actions.

I have still another reason [for an interest in RND]. Elsewhere, I have found it useful to speak of the “symbolic aspect” of actions¹⁷¹ and to claim even that some actions can “express judgments.”¹⁷² In all the modern history of moral philosophy, Wollaston is the writer who has taken these notions most seriously, so it might well be instructive to reconsider his views (345).

Feinberg regards Wollaston’s position as akin to his own belief that there are cases in which people experience a feeling of violated truth that is distinct from feeling sympathy for the victim of an injury.

When *those* actions declare to the world some proposition which is in fact false and defamatory, then the person defamed has been unfairly treated. Our shock and outrage at such treatment, which is characteristic of our reaction to perceived injustice generally, has a righteous and impersonal quality about it that is explained by our special allegiance to truth. The sense of violated justice in this case is one and the same as the sense of violated truth, hence its peculiar tone of impersonal objectivity, as if it were experienced on behalf of the truth itself (351-2).

Feinberg’s view is similar to Wollaston’s view that violations of truth are offensive in and of themselves.

Much might be added here concerning the *amiabile* nature, and great *force* of truth. If I may judge by what I feel within myself, the least truth cannot be contradicted without much reluctance: even to see other men disregard it does something more than displease; it is *shocking* (I.iv.5).

Feinberg regards Wollaston’s theory as an attempt to improve upon Stoicism’s standard of acting in accordance with nature—immoral actions treat things as if they are not what they are and are therefore contrary to truth.

But the theory is no worse in this respect than the prevailing deist-stoic theory of “living according to nature,” and is in fact what Wollaston intended it to be, an interpretation and partial clarification of that ancient theory. Wollaston holds with the Stoics that actions are wrong because they are “contrary to nature,” not because

171 *Doing and Deserving* (Princeton, 1970): 68-70, 98-105.

172 “Noncomparative Justice,” *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 3 (July 1974): 297-338, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2183696>.

they may have a tendency to deceive possible observers (347).

Feinberg argues that RND does not overcome the objections raised against Stoicism, especially that it does not provide a standard by which to measure degrees of wrongness.

Wollaston's theory...needs supplementation by criteria of relative "worth" and "importance," and also criteria of relevance for descriptions of actions and things represented or affected by actions (345).

(See beginning of Chapter III.D, III.D.8, and III.C above for RND's use of happiness as the standard of wrongdoing.)

Feinberg characterizes the established criticisms of Wollaston as "dead wrong" and "shocking misrepresentations and sophistries." (See the introduction to this chapter above.)

He characterizes Hume's criticism of Wollaston as follows:

Hume has simply misread Wollaston. Nowhere does Wollaston claim that the essence of all wrongdoing is telling a lie and thus deceiving others. Rather he holds that all wrongdoing is an offense against the truth, whether or not any observer is present to be deceived. What makes an act wrong, according to Wollaston, is not that it misleads others or causes false belief, but rather that it violates truth, which is quite another thing....Thus, Hume sets out to refute a theory Wollaston never held (347).

He also deals with Hume's claim that RND implies that inanimate objects can be immoral.

At this point I must interrupt Hume's argument to point out how sophisticated it has become. It surely goes without saying that in order for an action to be "vicious and immoral," it must in fact *be* an action! Natural objects erupt, explode, tumble, and fall, but they do not act. *A fortiori*, they cannot act viciously and immorally. Wollaston's question was the same as that raised by all moral theorists, namely: What distinguishes the class of *human actions* that are morally wrong from the class of *human actions* that are not morally wrong? No answer to that question could possibly commit a theorist to the absurd consequence that inanimate objects sometimes act immorally. Hume's argument not only fails to touch the theory he wrongly ascribes to Wollaston, but it also can be directed just as well against any moral theory, including the utilitarian theory that Hume himself held, for if the production of pain and suffering is the basis of immorality, and natural objects by erupting, exploding, falling, and tumbling, cause pain, then it could be said to follow (by Hume's logic and on Hume's own moral theory) that inanimate objects

can be vicious and immoral.¹⁷³

Hume seems to anticipate this reply, for he goes on to say that “‘Tis in vain to urge, that inanimate objects act without liberty and choice,” but no reason is given to show why this natural rejoinder is “in vain,” but only the dogmatic reiteration that “If the tendency to cause error be the origin of immorality, that tendency and immorality would in every case be inseparable” (348).

To Hume’s objection that Wollaston assumes truth as a first principle Feinberg responds:

This is precisely the challenge that can be leveled at a partisan of any first principle of morals, and of course, there is no conclusive way of meeting it. One cannot prove a first principle without assuming it in its own proof. Thus, one might challenge the hedonist to explain why it is wrong to cause pain, and the only cogent reply he can make is to question the ingenuousness of the query. The “falsehood principle” seemed as evident to Wollaston as the pain principle did to Bentham (350).

(RND’s foundational principle is that human beings should act in accordance with nature; as truth corresponds to nature, acting in accordance with truth constitutes acting in accordance with nature.

See Chapter III.D above, and RND I.i.)

Feinberg’s paper is a useful corrective to some of the prevalent misrepresentations of Wollaston. However, the incomplete source he used leads him to misunderstand RND’s claim that actions express propositions as applying to symbolic expression rather than to the creation of states of affairs, and to miss the connection between Sections I and II which presents happiness as the standard for evaluating the relative moral status of actions.

Feinberg recognizes that Wollaston’s theory that persons express propositions by their actions is a notable development—he characterizes it as “the most suggestive point in Wollaston.” However, despite his recognition that Hume’s attack on Wollaston is directed at a straw man—he states “Hume sets out to refute a theory Wollaston never held”—his discussion of Wollaston’s

173 Tilley argues that Feinberg only asserts this and does not offer an argument explaining why Hume's argument is wrong. Tilley, “Physical Objects,” 92.

theory is affected by this claim and leads him to think Wollaston is speaking of actions as “symbolic” and that actions are meaningful only if an observer can interpret this meaning; he then discusses the difficulties of interpreting the nature of actions merely by viewing them (351).

He recognizes that Wollaston’s moral standard is acting in accordance with nature, but not the connection between nature and truth, that is, that true statements describe nature accurately and that truth and nature therefore are coextensive; instead, he interprets Wollaston as regarding violation of truth as an offence against truth itself in similarity to his own view.

His statement that Wollaston’s theory lacks “criteria of relative ‘worth’ and ‘importance’” indicates that he overlooked that Wollaston’s happiness standard, which is stated in Section II or RND, does provide these criteria, even though his source does contain excerpts from RND Section II.

Feinberg’s paper is an important step towards replacing dismissals of Wollaston based on straw men with consideration of his actual ideas.

E. THE DESCRIPTION ERROR

A persistent criticism of RND claims that RND's moral standard can be met by expressing a proposition about an immoral action that is true; because the proposition accurately describes the action it constitutes a true proposition and thus meets the standard which is allegedly that of taking actions which express true propositions. However, this criticism is based on misunderstanding what RND's rule is.

This argument was first made by John Clarke of Hull, who said that actions can be interpreted in various ways to express any truth desired, and that vicious actions can be said to express some truth, especially concerning the desires of the actor. So that, for instance, breaking a bargain constitutes

an affirmation of this proposition, that the breach of the bargain was a likely means to rook his chapman of some money,¹⁷⁴

and that

every [immoral] action or omission does as well affirm truth as deny it; for instance this truth, that the person concerned proposes or promises to himself some interest or advantage.¹⁷⁵

And because the propositions that constitute these descriptions of the actions are true, then the actions are virtuous.

This argument has been revived by modern commentators such as Beiser:

Hence a mugger who points his knife at me in an alley signifies by his action the true proposition "If you do not hand over your money, then I will stab you."¹⁷⁶

174 Clarke, *Examination*, 15.

175 Ibid., 17.

176 Beiser, *Sovereignty of Reason*, 303.

And Tilley (who cites Clarke):

Unless Wollaston gives us a non-capricious method for identifying the proposition(s) an action signifies, it seems to be anyone's guess whether an action—the breach of a bargain, say—signifies the falsehood “The bargain was not made” or instead signifies the truth “To breach this bargain is a way of cheating so-and-so.”¹⁷⁷

The argument is that an immoral action may be described by a true proposition, and that because the proposition is true the action is moral because it allegedly meets RND's rule, that rule being defined as acting according to truth. However, RND's rule is negative—it requires *not* performing any action which expresses a proposition which is false (and which affects human happiness)—it does not constitute a requirement to express true propositions.

Wollaston anticipated this objection and addressed it in his third objection and answer.

He states the objection thus:

If I want money, don't I act according to truth, if I take it from some body else to supply my own wants? And more, do not I act contrary to truth, if I do not? (I.xi.obj.3).

And responds to it:

Ans. to *objection* the 3d. Acting according to truth, as that phrase is used in the objection, is not the thing required by my rule; but, so to act that *no truth* may be *denied* by any act. Not taking from another man his money by violence is a forbearance, which does not signify, that I do not want money, or which denies any truth. But taking it *denies* that to be his, which (by the supposition) *is his*. The former is only as it were silence, which denies nothing: the latter a direct and loud assertion of a falsity; the former what can contradict no truth, because the latter does.

Hence, in the examples given by the critics, that the action may be expressing a true proposition of evil intent or effect, does not meet the moral rule. Only *not* expressing a proposition which denies what is true meets the moral rule, and these actions do all express

¹⁷⁷ Tilley, “*Problem of Inconsistency*,” 279n8.

propositions which deny truths, such as, that the property belongs to the other person, that the person is a rational, sensitive, happiness-seeking being, or that the statements made to the person are false (the cheat makes statements which deny the truth that the statements he makes are false).

A variation on this argument is made by using the existence of terms which refer to immoral acts to argue that the agent is asserting a proposition which correctly uses that term and therefore is expressing a truth.

For example, Feinberg argues:

Suppose Hume, to make things perfectly clear to his neighbor's wife, shuts the windows, pulls the blinds, and then announces: "I hereby declare that I am not your husband and you are not my wife, and that I am not about to treat you as if you were my wife, but rather I am going to act as if you are what you are in fact, namely, my mistress," and then proceeds to "take his liberties." It would be difficult to see in what way, then, Hume could be accused of acting "contrary to truth" (349).

Feinberg's argument depends on the existence of a term for describing that particular wrong action. It may be made clearer if one unpacks the term "mistress." That a woman is married means she has taken a solemn oath to have relations only with her husband. What would constitute treating her as what she is, namely, a woman who has taken a solemn oath to have relations only with her husband? Not having relations with her. To have relations with her means to deny (by action) that she has taken a solemn oath to have relations only with her husband. To express by words an acknowledgment that she has taken that oath does not counter the action which denies it, because actions create states of affairs, whereas words merely express mental states (see Chapter III.D.4 above). The term "mistress" actually constitutes an acknowledgment that she has taken that oath, and that she is *not* being treated as someone who has taken that oath. Thus, the term itself acknowledges that the relationship with her constitutes denying a truth—that she is married to another man—and that therefore engaging in this relationship is immoral.

The argument is based on misconstruing RND's rule as being met by stating propositions which accurately describe an action, whereas the rule requires not performing acts which express propositions which are false and thus deny things to be what they are, and which affect human happiness.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated that Wollaston's moral theory is an interesting attempt to create a rule for carrying out the foundational principle of acting according to nature by defining conformity to truth as conformity to nature, and by devising the innovative principle that rational agents express propositions by their actions. As the truth values of the propositions that are expressed by actions can be evaluated, and as the truthfulness of the propositions expressed by the actions constitutes their conformity to nature, and as conformity to nature is the definition of morality, this enables judgment of the moral status of the actions (see Chapter III above).

Wollaston's innovation is the idea that actions express propositions. This makes it possible to assign truth values to actions. This is joined to the principle that truth is coextensive with nature, which is based on defining a true statement as one that describes nature accurately. (This is a foundational principle that is stated in the second proposition of RND (I.ii).) From which it follows that expressing true propositions constitutes acting in accordance with nature and expressing false propositions constitutes acting contrary to nature. The propositions that actions express are true or false, and therefore the propositions that actions express are either in accordance with nature (if true) or contrary to nature (if false). This, then, provides a method of determining whether actions are in accordance with nature. An action is in accordance with nature if the proposition it expresses is true and therefore in accordance with nature as defined in proposition I.ii, and an action is contrary to nature if the proposition it expresses is false and therefore contrary to nature. Given the foundational principle that the standard of morality is accordance with nature, then actions which express true propositions (which, being true, are in accordance with nature) are morally right, and actions which express false propositions (which, being false, are contrary to nature), are morally wrong. Also, as it is the nature of human beings to

seek happiness, and as acting in accordance with nature is the means of attaining happiness, happiness sets the standard by which the degree of the moral rightness or wrongness of actions is evaluated. The greater the unhappiness caused by a morally wrong action the greater the immorality.

In addition, I have also demonstrated that the prevalent criticisms of RND which have caused it to be largely disregarded do not engage the theory and are often directed at straw men (see Chapter V above).

Why did RND prove so vulnerable to straw men? How did the philosopher who at one time was regarded as having made considerable progress towards the task of deriving morality demonstratively, via natural reason, come to be mocked, discarded, and forgotten? There are a number of reasons which probably led to this outcome.

As discussed in Chapter III.A above, the argument of RND is difficult to follow because the order in which the argument is presented is the reverse of the structure of the argument. The moral rule which is the conclusion of the argument is presented first, in section I, and its premises are presented in Sections II and III. When the premises are presented, the moral rule is not repeated, and the connection between the moral rule and its premises is not clearly stated.

The standard of the moral rule, i.e., happiness, is presented in Section II, after the rule itself. Much material is interposed between the two, and the proposition which states that happiness is the moral standard occurs in the middle of Section II (II.x). This arrangement leads some critics to miss the connection between the two sections, overlook the argument that happiness is the standard for the moral rule, and thus to claim that the argument is circular because it assumes moral standards

The argument for the validity of reason is presented in Section III, following the argument

for the moral rule in Section I, and the standard for the rule in Section II. Yet it underlies the entire argument, which is that this moral rule can be derived by reason alone.

Thus, the conclusion which is presented in the first section depends on principles established in both the second and third sections, and the principle established in the second section depends on the principle established in the third section. Because the premises follow the conclusion it is easy for readers to miss the connections.

It is also difficult to keep track of the connections among nature, reason, truth, and happiness because the presentation of the argument lacks clarity. Important parts of it, such as the definition of nature, are presented in scattered statements and sometimes expressed only briefly, and the connections among the different parts of the argument are not always made explicit.

In addition, Wollaston does sometimes equate truth, reason, and happiness (he argues that they are coextensive), which also obscures the order of the argument and makes it difficult to tell which has priority, which part justifies which, and also leads to criticism that the argument is circular. This difficulty is illustrated by the twentieth-century literature on Wollaston, in which three commentators reach three different conclusions about the relative priorities of truth and happiness within Wollaston's theory. Thompson¹⁷⁸ argues that truth has priority over happiness. Joynton¹⁷⁹ argues that happiness has priority over truth. Tweyman¹⁸⁰ argues that they have equal weight.

In some propositions Wollaston states that any and all denial of truth is wrong. This obscures the argument that it is only denial of truths concerning the happiness of human beings

178 Thompson, *Ethics of Wollaston*, 4.

179 Joynton, "Problem of Circularity."

180 Tweyman, "Truth, Happiness and Obligation."

that is the subject of the moral rule. This may lead to the claim that his rule is about making false statements, that is, lying, rather than taking actions which deny the true state of affairs concerning human beings.

This problem was recognized soon after RND's publication. In the introduction to the abridgement of RND that was published in 1726, the anonymous abridger states:

And if this Author has somewhere laid too much stress on abstracted truth, and determined too rigorously (more rigorously perhaps than his own principles in the main might require) in an instance or two...; it may be an argument that he is not infallible, but is no diminution of the truth of his principles...; he has made further amends by what he has said of happiness and reason; and by his doctrine that the degrees of guilt arising from the violation of truth vary with the importance of things.¹⁸¹

RND is not a fully developed work. The term "Delineated" in the title indicates that it was a rough draft.¹⁸² Statements at the beginning and end of it indicate it was written at the request of an individual and was addressed to him, and not intended as a public treatise.¹⁸³ Wollaston's death soon after the publication of RND meant that he could not defend it nor revise it to meet objections by making the argument clearer.

I have found no evidence that Wollaston attracted any followers who developed his theory, nor evidence that after 1725 there were published any refutations of the straw men that were presented as his theory, which allowed these misrepresentations to prevail over time.

The initial acceptance and popularity of RND may have been superficial. Wollaston

181 *Compendious*, A2-3. This quote begins on an unnumbered page between A2 and A3. Spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and italics have been modernized.

182 "Sensible how unfinished this performance is, I call it only a *Delineation*, or rude draught" (RND, [Preface]).

183 An explanation of the circumstances which led to a slightly corrected public edition is in the "Advertisement" at the beginning of RND.

combines ethical theory and ethical instruction in one book. The four chapters in which the theory is explicated are followed by five chapters in which Wollaston presents arguments concerning God, political theory, family relations, and personal conduct, including lengthy arguments for the existence of God and the immorality of the soul; these five sections constitute nearly three-quarters of the book.

Chapin characterizes Wollaston's views on religious issues as "orthodox in a distinctively Anglican manner,"¹⁸⁴ and specifically notes that he

argues for a future state of rewards and punishments, for the immateriality and immortality of the soul, for a particular providence, and for the efficacy of prayer. He gives a thoroughly orthodox "answer" to the problem of evil, and his position on free will, eschewing the predestinarian doctrines associated with seventeenth-century Puritanism, is that of the great majority of eighteenth-century Anglicans.¹⁸⁵

Woelfel, who was an Episcopalian minister, describes Wollaston's views as "orthodox, albeit very latitudinarian."¹⁸⁶

Thus, RND may have been accepted as arguing for established religious views,¹⁸⁷ with Wollaston's innovative moral rule not really understood and the argument for it not analyzed and considered apart from the moral instruction. The praise of Wollaston is often general—of his moral views as good and of his character as virtuous, learned, and pious—but this does not constitute a discussion of the argument for his moral rule.

184 Chapin, "Was Wollaston a Deist?" 73.

185 Ibid.

186 Woelfel, "William Wollaston's Religion of Nature," 249.

187 For example, Bott, in his conclusion, praises Wollaston's "particular excellencies...the principal of them...his dissertation concerning a providence...where he has discovered a great reach of thought; and what he says concerning a future state" (22).

His political theory (in Sections VI and VII of RND), may have been more influential. As discussed in Chapter II.A above, his property rights theory was cited in a major copyright case, at a time when the principle of copyright was being established. The similarity between the views expressed by Wollaston in Sections VI and VII of RND (see Chapter IV.B-C above) and the views expressed in the Declaration of Independence, and the presence of RND in the curricula of the colleges that educated many of the leaders of American society (see Chapter II.A above), suggest that his political theory may have had some influence on American thought.

Over time generational shifts took place. At the beginning of the nineteenth century RND was 75 years old and natural religion had ceased to be a source of moral theory.

RND was read less and less and Hume's and others' misrepresentations of Wollaston's argument (see Chapter V above) prevailed. The views expressed by some subsequent commentators give the impression that they are based on the straw men rather than on Wollaston's actual position.

By the twentieth century received opinions concerning RND were that it was worthless and had been refuted and so it was not studied seriously (only excerpts of it were available in anthologies¹⁸⁸), which let the received opinions stand. Hume's prominence led his attack on RND to be regarded as authoritative, although Hume did not read RND and his attack is on a straw man (see Chapter V.A above).

188 The anthology of British moralists edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge was first published in 1897. Another anthology, edited by Benjamin Rand, of philosophers ranging from ancient to modern, was published in 1909. A more recent anthology of British moralists, edited by D. D. Raphael, first published in 1969, is still in print. All of these anthologies printed excerpts of Sections I and II of RND. In 1974 a facsimile edition of RND in its entirety, edited by Stanley Tweyman, was published. In the last few years, electronic scans of eighteenth-century editions of RND have become readily available. See the Bibliography below and Chapter II above.

This is unfortunate, because in addition to its intrinsic interest for its innovative attempt to provide a way to evaluate the moral status of actions by reason, and its largely unrecognized position in the history of rationalism, RND is also of interest as a precursor of contemporary moral realism and offers an interesting addition to it.

Eighteenth-century rationalism is considered to be the precursor of contemporary moral realism.¹⁸⁹ It is therefore interesting to compare in what ways Wollaston's views prefigure those expressed in one of the most cited papers in contemporary moral realism, Peter Railton's "Moral Realism".¹⁹⁰

Railton is an advocate of "naturalized moral epistemology" (200). He holds that moral inquiry is an empirical inquiry and that moral properties supervene on natural properties and may be reducible to them.

Wollaston holds that moral properties can be deduced from natural facts:

[I]f things are but fairly permitted to speak for themselves their own natural language, they will, with a moderate attention, be found themselves to proclaim their own rectitude or obliquity; that is, whether they are disagreeable to it, or not (I).

And that these properties are relational:

In order to judge rightly what any thing is, it must be considered not only what it is in itself or in one respect, but also what it may be in any other respect, which is capable of being denied by facts or practice: and the whole description of the thing ought to be taken in (I.vi).

Similarly, Railton defines his approach thus:

189 Christine M. Korsgaard, "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy," *The Journal of Philosophical Research*, Philosophy in America at the Turn of the Century, The Philosophy Documentation Center (2003): 99.

190 Peter Railton, "Moral Realism."

I will argue for a form of moral realism which holds...that moral properties are objective, though relational; that moral properties supervene upon natural properties, and may be reducible to them; that moral inquiry is of a piece with empirical inquiry (165).

The idea of causal interaction with moral reality certainly would be intolerably odd if moral facts were held to be *sui generis*; but there need be nothing odd about causal mechanisms for learning moral facts if these facts are constituted by natural facts, and that is the view under consideration (171).

Railton's method of arriving at a realist account of morality is to begin with a realist account of non-moral values—what is desirable or good for a person; this constitutes an objective account of subjective interest (176). What satisfies an objective interest of a person is non-morally good for that person. Subjective interest is related to objective interest via a process in which people adjust their desires to their interests through trial and error, that is, their opinion of what course of action is good for them is subject to change based on the results their actions produce. This process of adjustment may be done either through active reflection or without reflection. People's objective interests supervene upon natural facts (183).

This is consonant with Wollaston's position that a person's good (defined as happiness) can only be attained by treating things as what they are, that is, acting in accordance with nature:

As the true and ultimate happiness of no being can be produced by any thing, that interferes with truth, and denies the natures of things: so neither can the practice of truth make any being ultimately unhappy (II.xi).

[T]he way to happiness and the practice of truth incur the one into the other (II.xiv).

Railton argues that the same feedback process of adjusting behavior operates socially as well as individually. It is characteristic of morality that it expresses a social point of view. This viewpoint is not subjective or arbitrary—it expresses what is “rational from an impartial point of view” (202). Ideally, morality would express what would be agreed upon were all persons' interests to be considered equally and rationally (190). Over time, it is likely that practice and

observation lead to adjusting social criteria of morality so as to move them closer to the rational ideal (196-7).

Similarly, Wollaston's theory leads to the position that the interests of all human beings have equal moral weight:

Whatever is either reasonable or unreasonable in B with regard to C, would be just the same in C with respect to B, if the case was inverted (IV.iv).

Whatever is inconsistent with the general peace and welfare (or good) of mankind, is inconsistent with the laws of human nature, wrong, intolerable (VI.iii).

(Also see Chapter IV.B above.)

Railton argues that there is evidence in favor of this view. For instance, over time the generality of moral views has increased—the definition of a human being has been successively expanded from one's own tribe to encompass all of humanity (197). Also, a process of humanization of morality has taken place—human well-being has become the primary source of moral justification as there has been a corresponding move away from other sources (197-8). How then to account for moral disagreement objectively rather than subjectively? The subject matter of morality is complex and quite far removed from direct observation (195). Also, as a social creation it is less subject to external correction than individual behavior (196).

Wollaston's view is that human nature (acting within all of nature) is the foundational source of morality:

Again, there are some ends, which the nature of things and truth require us to aim at, and at which therefore if we do not aim, *nature* and *truth* are denied (I.v);
as

[t]ruth is but a conformity to nature (I.iv).

Likewise, Railton concludes:

We are natural and social creatures, and I know of nowhere else to look for ethics

than in this rich conjunction of facts (207).

Thus, both Wollaston and Railton, despite the two and a half centuries difference between them, propose moral theories which are based on establishing correspondence between human behavior and the facts of the world as the means of attaining what Wollaston defines as happiness and Railton as the good for persons.

Wollaston's overlooked innovation, the principle that actions express propositions,¹⁹¹ offers possibilities for a different method of evaluating the moral status of actions which could serve as a means of more fully realizing moral realism's project of empirical moral inquiry by providing a more precise connection between actions and moral conclusions of the sort that Railton, for example, argues for.¹⁹²

The principle that actions express propositions to the same extent that verbal statements express propositions bridges the gap between ideas in the mind and the facts of the world (i.e., nature). It defines the actions of moral agents as natural events which can thus be evaluated in the same way that all natural objects and events are evaluated. These actions of agents can then be evaluated as to whether they are consistent or inconsistent with all other parts of nature. The correspondence between the truthfulness or falsehood of the propositions that moral agents express by their actions and the empirical facts of the world, provides a focused method of evaluating the moral status of such actions in accordance with the empirical standard of moral realism. In addition, the principle that actions express propositions with more reality than verbal

191 Feinberg characterizes this as "the most suggestive point in Wollaston." "Wollaston's Critics," 350.

192 "I will argue for a form of moral realism which holds...that moral properties are objective, though relational; that moral properties supervene upon natural properties, and may be reducible to them; that moral inquiry is of a piece with empirical inquiry" (165).

propositions, because actions create states of affairs, provides a method to judge the moral status of actions by agents when they conflict with verbal statements expressed by those agents.

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