

John Locke and the ethics of belief

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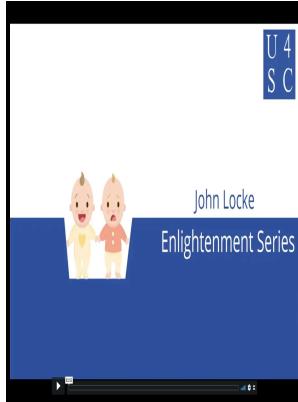
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There, Locke asserts that in order to judge moral success or failure, we need a rule by which to measure and judge action.

John Locke and the Ethics of Belief by Nicholas Wolterstorff, Paperback

Reasoned Freedom: John Locke and Enlightenment.

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This book discusses the ethics of belief that Locke developed in the last book of his Essay: how we ought to govern our opinions, especially on matters of religion and morality.

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When objects are close to us, it is easy to determine their size. However, far from thinking that such disagreement casts doubt on the existence of the law, he takes the presence of disagreement about the law as evidence that such a true and objective law exists.

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Indeed, Locke also gestures towards, but does not elaborate on, this kind of thought in the Essay. This latter power is defined as the power of perceiving ideas and their agreement or disagreement with one another. Locke notes that drinking to excess leads to pain in the form of headache or nausea.

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Despite failures to comply, the normative force of morality is undeniable, for Locke, on these teleological grounds. According to the interpretation of Clifford presented above, there is a strong connection between the epistemic and the moral types: the fact that there is an epistemic norm to believe always and only on sufficient evidence entails that there is an analogous moral norm. And what are the objects of evaluation in this context—believers, beliefs, or both? However, because these ends are putatively set for us not by a contingent act of will but rather by our nature as morally engaged, knowledge-seeking beings, some philosophers regard them as categorical rather than instrumental imperatives.

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