

ownership, the supposition that

God gave the world to Adam and his successive *heirs*,
excluding all the rest of his posterity

makes it hard to see how anything can be owned except by one universal monarch. But I shan't rest content with that, and will try to show in a positive way how men *could* come to own various particular parts of something that God gave to mankind in common, and how this could come about without any explicit agreement among men in general. [Here and throughout this chapter, 'own' will often replace Locke's 'have a property in'.]

26. God, who has given the world to men in common, has also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience. The earth and everything in it is given to men for the support and comfort of their existence. All the fruits it naturally produces and animals that it feeds, as produced by the spontaneous hand of nature, belong to mankind in common; nobody has a basic right—a private right that excludes the rest of mankind—over any of them as they are in their natural state. But they were given for the use of men; and before they can be useful or beneficial to any particular man there must be *some* way for a particular man to appropriate them [= 'come to own them']. The wild Indians in north America don't have fences or boundaries, and are still joint tenants of their territory; but if any one of them is to get any benefit from fruit or venison, the food in question must be *his*—and his (i.e. a part of him) in such a way that no-one else retains any right to it. [The last clause of that is puzzling. Does Locke mean that the Indian can't directly get benefit from the venison except by *eating* it? That seems to be the only way to make sense of 'part of him'; but it doesn't fit well with the paragraph as a whole.]

27. Though men as a whole own the earth and all inferior creatures, every individual man has a property in his own person [= 'owns himself']; this is something that nobody else has any right to. The labour of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are strictly *his*. So when he takes something from the state that nature has provided and left it in, he mixes his labour with it, thus joining to it something that is his own; and in that way **he makes it his property.**

He has removed the item from the common state that nature has placed it in, and through this labour the item has had annexed to it something that excludes the common right of other men: for this labour is unquestionably the property of the labourer, so no other man can have a right to anything the labour is joined to—at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others. [Note Locke's statement that every man 'has a property in his own person'. He often says that the whole point of political structures is to protect 'property'; which might be sordidly mercantile if he weren't talking about the protection not just of man's physical possessions but also of his life and liberty.]

28. Someone who *eats* the acorns he picked up under an oak, or the apples he gathered from the trees in the forest, has certainly appropriated them to himself! Nobody can deny that the nourishment is *his*. Well, then, when did they begin to be his?

when he digested them?

when he cooked them?

when he brought them home?

when he picked them up under the tree?

It is obvious that if his first gathering didn't make them his, nothing else could do so. That labour marked those things off from the rest of the world's contents; it added something to them beyond what they had been given by nature, the common mother of all; and so they became his private right.

Suppose we denied this, and said instead:

He had no right to the acorns or apples that he thus appropriated, because he didn't have the consent of all mankind to make them his. It was robbery on his part to take for himself something that belonged to all men in common.

If such a consent as *that* was necessary, men in general would have starved, notwithstanding the plenty God had provided them with. We see the thesis I am defending at work in our own society. When there is some land that has the status of a *common*—being held in common by the community by agreement among them—taking any part of what is common and removing it from the state nature leaves it in creates ownership; and if it didn't, the common would be of no use. And the taking of this or that part doesn't depend on the express consent of all the commoners [= 'all those who share in the common ownership of the land']. Thus when my horse bites off some grass, my servant cuts turf, or I dig up ore, in any place where I have a right to these in common with others, the grass or turf or ore becomes my property, without anyone's giving it to me or consenting to my having it. *My* labour in removing it out of the common state it was in has established me as its owner.

29. If the explicit consent of every commoner was needed for anyone to appropriate to himself any part of what is given in common, children couldn't cut into the meat their father had provided for them in common without *saying* which child was to have which portion. The water running in the fountain is everyone's, but who would doubt that the water in the pitcher belongs to the person who drew it out? . . .

30. Thus this law of reason makes it the case that the Indian who kills a deer owns it; it is agreed to belong to the person who put his labour into it, even though until then it

was the common right of everyone. Those who are counted as the civilized part of mankind have made and multiplied positive laws to settle property rights; but even among us this original law of nature—the law governing how property starts when everything is held in common—still applies. [Locke concludes the section with examples: catching a fish, gathering ambergris, shooting a hare.]

31. You may object that if gathering the acorns etc. creates a right to them, then anyone may hoard as much as he likes. I answer: Not so. The very law of nature that in this way •gives us property also •sets limits to that property. God has given us all things richly. . . . But *how far* has he given them to us? To *enjoy* [= 'to use, to get benefit from'; this what 'enjoy(ment)' usually means in this work]. Anyone can through his labour come to own as much as he can use in a beneficial way before it spoils; anything beyond this is *more than his share* and belongs to others. Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy. For a long time •there could be little room for quarrels or contentions about property established on this basis: •there was an abundance of natural provisions and few users of them; and •only a small part of that abundance could be marked off by the industry of one man and hoarded up to the disadvantage of others—especially keeping within the bounds (set by reason) of what he could actually use.

32. But these days the chief issue about property concerns the earth itself rather than the plants and animals that live on it, because when you own some of the earth you own what lives on it as well. I think it is clear that ownership of land is acquired in the same way that I have been describing. A man owns whatever land he tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the products of. By his labour he as it were *fences off* that land from all that is held in common. Suppose someone objected:

He has no valid right to the land, because everyone else has an equal title to it. So he can't appropriate it, he can't 'fence it off', without the consent of all his fellow-commoners, all mankind.

That is wrong. When God gave the world in common to all mankind, he •commanded man to work, and •man needed to work in order to survive. So •God and •his reason commanded man to subdue the earth, i.e. to improve it for the benefit of life; and in doing that he expended something that was his own, namely •his labour. A man who in obedience to this command of God subdued, tilled and sowed any part of the earth's surface thereby joined to that land something that was •his property, something that no-one else had any title to or could rightfully take from him.

33. This appropriation of a plot of land by improving it wasn't done at the expense of any other man, because there was still enough (and as good) left for others—*more* than enough for the use of the people who weren't yet provided for. In effect, the man who •by his labour• 'fenced off' some land didn't reduce the amount of land that was left for everyone else: someone who leaves as much as anyone else can make use of does as good as *take nothing at all*. Nobody could think he had been harmed by someone else's taking a long drink of water, if there was the whole river of the same water left for him to quench his thirst; and the •ownership issues concerning• land and water, where there is enough of both, are exactly the same.

34. God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit and for the greatest conveniences of life they could get from it, he can't have meant it always to remain common and uncultivated. He gave it for the use of the reasonable and hard-working man (and labour was to be his title to it), not to the whims or the greed of the man

who is quarrelsome and contentious. Someone who had land left for *his* improvement—land as good as what had already been taken up—had no need to complain and ought not to concern himself with what had already been improved by someone else's labour. If he *did*, it would be obvious that he wanted the benefit of someone else's work, to which he had no right, rather than the ground that God had given him in common with others to labour on. . . .

35. In countries such as England •now•, where there are many people living under a government, and where there is money and commerce, no-one can enclose or appropriate any part of any common land without the consent of all his fellow-commoners. That is because land that is held in common has that status by compact, i.e. by the law of the land, which is not to be violated. Also, although such land is held in common by some men, it isn't held by all mankind; rather, it is the joint property of this county or this village. Furthermore, after such an enclosure—such a 'fencing off'—what was left would not, from the point of view of the rest of the commoners, be 'as good' as the whole was when they could all make use of the whole. This is quite unlike how things stood when that great common, *the world*, was just starting and being populated. The law that man was under at that time was *in favour of* appropriating. God ordered man to work, and his wants forced him to do so. That was his property, which couldn't be taken from him wherever he had fixed it [those five words are Locke's]. And so we see that •subduing or cultivating the earth and •having dominion [here = 'rightful control'] are joined together, the former creating the right to the latter. . . .

36. Nature did well in setting limits to private property through limits to how much men can work and limits to how much they need. No man's labour could tame or appropriate

all the land; no man's enjoyment could consume more than a small part; so that it was impossible for any man in this way to infringe on the right of another, or acquire a property to the disadvantage of his neighbour. . . . This measure confined every man's possessions to a very moderate proportion, such as he might make his own without harming anyone else, in the first ages of the world when men were more in danger of •getting lost by wandering off on their own in the vast wilderness of the earth as it was then than of •being squeezed for lack of land to cultivate. And, full as the world now seems, the rule for land-ownership can still be adopted without harm to anyone. Suppose a family in the state people were in when the world was first being populated by the children of Adam, or of Noah: let them plant on some vacant land in the interior of America. We'll find that the possessions they could acquire, by the rule I have given, would not be very large, and even today they wouldn't adversely affect the rest of mankind, or give them reason to complain or think themselves harmed by this family's encroachment. I maintain this despite the fact that the human race has spread itself to all the corners of the world, and infinitely outnumbers those who were here at the beginning. Indeed, the extent of ground is of so little value when not worked on that I have been told that in Spain a man may be permitted to plough, sow and reap on land to which his only title is that he is making use of it. . . . Be this as it may (and I don't insist on it), I venture to assert boldly that if it weren't for just one thing the same rule of ownership—namely that every man is to own as much as he could make use of—would still hold in the world, without inconveniencing anybody, because there is land enough in the world to suffice twice as many people as there are. The 'one thing' that blocks this is the invention of *money*, and men's tacit agreement to put a value on it; this made it possible, with men's consent, to have larger

possessions and to have a right to them. I now proceed to show how this has come about.

37. Men came to want more than they needed, and this altered the intrinsic value of things: a thing's value originally depended only on its usefulness to the life of man; but men came to agree that a little piece of yellow metal—which wouldn't fade or rot or rust—should be worth a great lump of flesh or a whole heap of corn. Before all that happened, each man could appropriate by his labour as much of the things of nature as he could use, without detriment to others, because an equal abundance was still left to those who would work as hard on it. •Locke now moves away from the just-announced topic of money, and won't return to it until section 46. • To which let me add that someone who comes to own land through his labour doesn't •lessen the common stock of mankind but •increases it. That's because the life-support provisions produced by one acre of enclosed and cultivated land, are (to put it very mildly) ten times more than what would come from an acre of equally rich land that was held in common and not cultivated. So he who encloses land, and gets more of the conveniences of life from ten •cultivated• acres than he could have had from a hundred left to nature, can truly be said to *give ninety acres to mankind*. For his labour now supplies him with provisions out of ten acres that would have needed a hundred •uncultivated• acres lying in common. I have here greatly understated the productivity of improved land, setting it at ten to one when really it is much nearer a hundred to one. [Locke defends this by comparing a thousand acres of 'the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America' with 'ten acres of equally fertile land in Devonshire, where they are well cultivated'.]

[He then starts a fresh point: before land was owned, someone could by gathering fruit or hunting animals come to own those things, because of the labour he had put into them.