TOLERATING ON FAITH:

LOCKE, WILLIAMS, AND THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL TOLERATION

by

Owen Dennis Yeates

Department of Political Science
Duke University

Date:_______________________
Approved:

____
Michael A. Gillespie, Supervisor

____
Ruth W. Grant

____
Stanley Hauerwas

____
Michael C. Munger

____
Thomas A. Spragens, Jr.

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
Political Science in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2007

ABSTRACT

TOLERATING ON FAITH:

LOCKE, WILLIAMS, AND THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL TOLERATION

by

Owen Dennis Yeates

Department of Political Science
Duke University

Date:________________________
Approved:

____
Michael A. Gillespie, Supervisor

____
Ruth W. Grant

____
Stanley Hauerwas

____
Michael C. Munger

____
Thomas A. Spragens, Jr.

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
Political Science in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2007

Copyright by
Owen Dennis Yeates
2007

Abstract

Toleration is a core liberal ideal, but it is not an ideal without limits. To tolerate the intolerant would be to violate the principles and purposes underlying liberal societies. This important exception to the liberal ideal of toleration is dangerous, however, in that we may make it too exclusionary in practice. That is, we may mistakenly apply it to peaceful, beneficial members of our communities as well as to the truly intolerant. In particular, some contemporary liberals see religion either as inherently intolerant and dangerous or as violating standards of public discourse that they feel are necessary to uphold liberalism’s core ideals, including toleration.

This work argues that we risk violating the liberal ideal of toleration in a hasty over-generalization about religious belief. Through an examination of the arguments of Roger Williams and John Locke, this work argues that religious belief can be compatible with toleration, and that the practice and popular value of liberal toleration has at least in part a religious origin. These authors, and believers like them, defended toleration, partially as a result of their own experiences of intolerance, but also because they saw toleration as a theological necessity.

Thus, this work shows that we have misunderstood the relationship between religion and toleration. While some forms of religious belief may incite intolerance and violence, others provide a firm foundation for toleration. We must show care in distinguishing the two to avoid violating the fundamental liberal ideal of toleration. Moreover, it is important that we do so to foster civil comity and cooperation, as well as to sustain the other benefits that religious groups provide to liberal, democratic societies.

Contents

Abstract iv

1 Introduction 1

1.1 Meaning of toleration 3

1.2 Dangers of religious belief 8

1.2.1 Skepticism and the history of toleration 10

1.2.2 Contemporary liberalism and religion 21

1.2.3 Meaning and persecution 26

1.3 Conclusion 29

2 Roger Williams 31

2.1 Introduction 32

2.2 Historical background 38

2.2.1 Proliferation of religious groups 46

2.3 Arguments for religious liberty 55

2.3.1 The history of God's people as a nation in exile 55

2.3.1.1 Early Christianity and ancient Israel as a type of Christ 55

2.3.1.2 Scriptural justifications for persecution and exemplary exegesis 67

2.3.2 Origins and limits of civil authority 84

2.3.2.1 Christian duties and non-Christian rulers 94

2.3.3 Prudence 96

2.3.4 Truth 105

2.3.5 Soteriology 109

2.3.5.1 Conscience in the Thomist and Calvinist traditions 109

2.3.5.2 Williams and the nature of the conscience 113

2.3.5.3 The light of nature and revelation, and sin against conscience........... 121

2.3.5.4 Inefficacy of persecution.. 133

2.3.5.5 Christian freedom... 161

2.3.6 True Christianity 170

2.4 Conclusion 181

3 John Locke 191

3.1 Transition to toleration.. 193

3.2 Meaning of toleration... 206

3.3 Justifications for toleration 208

3.3.1 Prudential arguments for toleration 209

3.3.2 Separation of civil and ecclesiastical authority.. 218

3.3.3 Skepticism and religious knowledge 230

3.3.3.1 "Skepticism" as a means of recovering an authentic Christianity 244

3.3.4 Toleration as a requirement for salvation 249

3.3.4.1 The law of works and the necessity of belief.................................... 254

3.3.4.2 The problems of belief 259

3.3.4.3 Qualifications of sincere belief 276

3.3.4.4 Strauss and the conflict between reason and revelation...................... 299

3.3.5 Nature of true Christianity 322

3.3.5.1 Moving beyond mere toleration... 328

3.4 Conclusion 337

4 Conclusion 341

4.1 John Locke and Roger Williams 341

4.2 Toleration and religious liberty in early America 347

4.3 Religion and contemporary liberalism 368

Bibliography 379

Biography 390

1 Introduction

The ideal of toleration has become a hallmark of liberal democracy. It helps to sustain peace and social comity in pluralistic societies despite their deep and varied differences. Generally, however, the ideal of toleration does not require liberal regimes to tolerate the intolerant. Indeed, Locke suggests that liberal regimes cannot tolerate those who would use their freedom to violate others' rights and subvert the regime itself.[1] This said, some contemporary liberals fear that we do not sufficiently protect oppressed groups and society in general from the intolerant. If we act on this fear, however, we risk violating the ideal of toleration by making our practice of it too exclusionary. Perceived threats to the character or continued existence of a community have frequently been used as a justification for persecution. Thus, while still valuing the ideal of toleration, we must show care in understanding what that ideal means and in judging whether a group is truly intolerant. Failure to do so violates one of liberalism's most hallowed principles.

The role that religion plays in both supporting and endangering liberalism is much disputed. As Stephen Jay Gould has noted, religion has been the source of both the "most unspeakable horrors and the most heartrending examples of human goodness."[2] While often recognizing the positive role that religion plays in underpinning liberal regimes, a number of important American and European liberals have come in recent years to view religion as a danger to peace and freedom. As Damon Linker writes, "Analyzing the dangers of generic 'religion' to the nation's political life . . . has become a cottage industry in recent years."[3] Liberal theory treats religion as suspect because at its core it is committed to an unverifiable faith and a rigid system of values. That is, many liberals see religion as inflexible or fundamentalist in its adherence to basic beliefs and aspirations, and thus at least potentially intolerant and incompatible with liberalism.

---

[1] Karl Popper argues that liberal attachment to the ideal of toleration can be so strong that we feel the need to tolerate the intolerant, even though such toleration could destroy liberty and toleration itself. Karl Popper, "Toleration and Intellectual Responsibility," in *On Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus and David Edwards, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 17.

[2] Stephen Jay Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria," *Natural History* 106.2 (March 1997), available from http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=11168473&sid=3&Fmt=3&clientId=15023&RQT=309&VName=PQD; Internet; accessed 8 January 2007.

This negative view of religious belief paints religion in general with too broad a stroke, failing to distinguish the religious sects that have helped inspire our fundamental liberal and democratic values from the sectarians that have helped inspire some of the darkest moments in our history. In this dissertation, I argue that the fundamental liberal ideal of toleration is at least in part the product of religious faith, and that contemporary theorists underestimate the positive impact of religious belief on the ideal of toleration that is so central to liberal theory and practice.

The chapters that follow will challenge the claim that the dangers of intolerance are inherent to religious belief by examining the ideas of John Locke, Roger Williams, and later Christians inspired by Locke and Williams. They argue that toleration is necessary for peace and for sustaining the distinction between civil and ecclesiastical authority. They see toleration as essential to the search for truth but also believe that it is essential to the liberty of conscience that is itself a requirement for salvation. Although later liberals like Mill have made us more familiar with secularized forms of some of these arguments, a close examination of the thought of Locke and Williams reveals the religious or theological foundations to them all. Moreover, I will try to show that the religious arguments for toleration are often stronger in important ways than some of the secular arguments for toleration. I will also show in my discussion of Roger Williams that religious belief in the necessity of toleration is not merely "theoretical" but has a practical consequence in helping to establish and sustain religious liberty in real regimes.

---

[3] Damon Linker, "The Big Test: Taking Mormonism seriously," *The New Republic* (1 Jan 2007): 18.

1.1 Meaning of toleration

There are many different ways of managing conflict arising from the differences between individuals and groups.[4] Toleration is one of these, but it is clearly not the only one nor is it the most prevalent historically. In fact, societies have most often responded to differences in belief with an authoritarian dogmatism that rejects and persecutes contrary opinions. While rejecting such authoritarianism, some of our contemporaries have argued that toleration is not enough, we must instead respect and affirm all various beliefs. This relativistic position has problems of its own, prominent among them the difficulty of sustaining political order in the face of severe disagreements about fundamental matters of belief. Toleration lies between dogmatism and relativism as a response to difference; toleration allows people to dislike or even hate others' beliefs or characteristics without resorting to persecution. That is, toleration describes the practice of allowing others to have characteristics, or maintain beliefs or practices that one regards as wrong or repugnant. Such toleration may result from a variety of motives, including love of peace, love of truth, regard for the dignity of the individual, and religious principle.

---

[4] I am indebted to Waldo Beach for much of the ensuing discussion on the differences between toleration and the other responses to difference and dissent. Waldo Beach, "The Basis of Tolerance in a Democratic Society," *Ethics* 57.3 (April, 1947): 157-169.

Toleration is similar to three other practices but ought not to be confused with them. They are opportunism, indifference, and condescension. An opportunist endorses toleration merely as a strategy to gain power. That is, opportunists seek toleration for themselves and their beliefs when they are in the minority, but reject toleration once they feel they have sufficient power to exercise hegemony. For example, the colonists in New England were often accused of opportunism for persecuting others after gaining the freedom to live according to their own religion.[5] Moreover, before Vatican II, some Roman Catholics may have advocated toleration for opportunistic reasons. Waldo Beach, for example, has argued that the pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church demonstrates the basic principle of opportunism: "Accepting religious freedom as a minority, on the grounds of political expediency, it would deny it to others, as a religious necessity, if by any happenstance it should come into a position of majority dominance."[6] Thus, toleration as an opportunistic strategy provides little assurance to those who believe in toleration and liberty of conscience as rights.

The requirement that toleration involve dislike distinguishes it from indifference, which is closely related to relativism. The relativist approach to religion, for example, regards different religions as merely different languages for speaking with God, who understands them all. A person may feel that his or her religion is the best way to speak to God, but he or she also recognizes that others may feel the same way, and are justified in doing so.[7] That is, a relativist may feel strong emotional attachment to a particular perspective about an issue, but recognizes that attachment as nothing more than one among many preferences that are equally valid. Similarly, someone who is indifferent tolerates differences because he feels that they do not matter. While relativism develops out of a world-picture or system of belief that rejects the judgment involved in toleration, however, indifference develops more subconsciously. Thus, a person congratulating himself for his ability to tolerate something he or his culture once hated may not realize that he is tolerant simply because he does not care. This happened, for example, in the attitudes toward communism in the United States. Studies on toleration in America mistook the increasing indifference of Americans toward communism as a sign of the increasing tolerance of the American public, when in fact Americans had simply stopped caring about communism and started hating other things.[8]

---

[5] Such accusations, of course, presume that the Puritans requested religious liberty when they were in a minority. This ignores the history of the English Civil War and the battles over the Anglican Church preceding it, in which the high-church Anglicans and those they derided as Puritans all sought to establish their own understanding of Christianity, rather than freedom for their different religious perspectives. See Andrew Murphy, *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2001).

[6] Beach, 160. Indeed, according to George Carey, the Catholic intellectual and cleric Monsignor Ronald Knox argued that toleration was not a Catholic principle, but a principle of modern, secular states that Catholics endorsed only while it benefited the growth of the church. George Carey, "Tolerating Religion," in *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 50-51.

In elucidating the distinctions between toleration and indifference, we should not scorn the latter. Indifference to inconsequential diversity is crucial in pluralistic societies.[9] Nevertheless, while it is good that we can regard some things as indifferent, indifference disguised as toleration can be misleading. People may be so fixated on the objects that they once hated, but towards which they have now become indifferent, that they fail to see that they have merely become intolerant of something new.[10] Moreover, an exclusive focus on the benefits of indifference does not help us prepare for situations in which we confront genuine differences that are salient to us.[11] To be prepared for such situations, it is important to understand the true meaning of toleration and the arguments that will lead us to toleration when we discover genuinely irreconcilable differences.

---

[7] In addressing this topic, Bernard Lewis compares the case of religion to his love for the English language and its literature. "I know in my heart that the English language is the finest instrument the human race has ever devised to express its thoughts and feelings, but I recognize in my mind that others may feel exactly the same way about their languages, and I have no problem wit that." Bernard Lewis, "I'm Right, You're Wrong, Go to Hell," *The Atlantic Monthly* 291.4 (2003): 39.

[8] Sullivan, et al., argue that the intolerance of the American public remains remarkably constant across time and the ideology of the groups examined. Rather than becoming more tolerant, Americans simply refocused their intolerance toward new objects, which research had failed to anticipate and test for. J.L. Sullivan, J. Piereson, and G. E. Marcus, "An Alternative Conceptualization of Political Tolerance: Illusory Increases, 1950s-1970s," *American Political Science Review* 73 (1979): 781-794; and J.L. Sullivan, George E. Marcus, Stanley Feldman, and James E. Piereson, "The Sources of Political Tolerance: A Multivariate Analysis," *American Political Science Review* 75 (Mar. 1981): 92-106.

The attitudes and beliefs underlying condescension and persecution are largely the same. While condescension permits disagreement and even dissent, it does so only because the disagreement or dissent is insignificant. A dominant party may permit dissent only so long as it poses no danger to the character of the community. Rather than repressing the dissented, which might cause more harm than good, the community may belittle him and treat his beliefs as contemptible or indeed beneath contempt.[12]

Our toleration may take the form of condescension more often that we would like to admit.[13] Historically, Americans have generally condescended toward conscientious objectors. While the people who moved to Pennsylvania appreciated the freedoms the

---

[9] Beach, 160.

[10] For more information, see both pieces by Sullivan, et al.

[11] George Carey (46-47) writes, “People steeped in the laziness of mental or moral indifference sometimes pride themselves on their tolerance. They are not tolerant. . . . The indifferent exercise no self-restraint. They don’t have to cultivate humility when faced with a clash of values. They don’t have to balance the demands of their integrity against respect for the conviction of others. . . . true tolerance implies convictions and deeply held values.”

[12] Beach, 161.

[13] Beach, 162.

Quakers established there, they nonetheless sometimes objected to the pacifism that led the Quakers to establish those freedoms. For example, the Pennsylvanians fighting in the French and Indian War became so irritated with the Quakers and other pacifist groups that they marched against the pacifists who would not help them fight.[14] They were willing to tolerate what we now call conscientious objection only so long as it minimally affected them. The treatment of objectors during World War II even more clearly demonstrates such condescension. Although most objectors agreed to participate in public or military service of some sort, they were nonetheless regarded as a danger to the community. Accordingly, the government placed them in relatively isolated work camps, which would isolate them and their beliefs from the larger public.[15]

Perhaps the most obvious example of such condescension, however, is in race and ethnic relations in the United States. Americans have often demonstrated greater intolerance toward minority groups when they comprise a greater proportion of the community, which challenges the dominant group's political power and control. Thus, northern communities initially appeared to be more tolerant toward African-Americans after World War II because the African-American communities were much smaller there. In fact, this was just a form of condescension. Similarly, condescension at least in part explains the greater tolerance toward Asians and Asian-Americans in the east than in the west during the same period.

In some respects, all theories of toleration border on condescension. If we wish to create and maintain a society that protects life and liberty, then we cannot tolerate those who would take away others' life and liberty. Thus, defenses of toleration generally concede that we cannot tolerate the intolerant or those who would otherwise undermine society and its protections of our rights and liberties. Nevertheless, we must be careful that we do not use this exception to justify condescension toward or the persecution of tolerant, beneficial members of a community. We may make such a mistake through an inadequate understanding of others and through faulty reasoning. For example, Locke and many others believed that atheists could not be tolerated because their oaths could not be trusted. Moreover, we may mistakenly justify persecution when we are blinded by prejudice, as dominant groups have repeatedly done when they have feared that other groups would destroy their communities' characters and ways of life. In the following sections, we will see that misunderstandings or incomplete understandings of religious belief have led many contemporary liberals to overestimate the danger of religious belief. In an effort to promote toleration, liberalism itself has thus occasionally stepped over the line into intolerance. In the recent past, this has led to suggestions that certain Christian fundamentalist groups be excluded from the political process. In our current environment, such concerns have increasingly focused upon Islamicists.

---

[14] Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today. Revised Edition* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 88.

[15] Beach, 162.

1.2 Dangers of religious belief

Even a cursory glance at history shows that religious differences have played a role in countless wars and conflicts. Indeed, this history found its way into religious arguments for toleration in the 17th century. Even Christian proponents of toleration argued that persecution was the result of false or corrupt religion, in which violence and inferior motives of ambition, avarice, and indolence had become mixed with the true, pure and pacific religion. In the hands of Protestant thinkers like Roger Williams, these arguments merely built on the Reformation belief that the Christianity of the early, primitive church had become corrupted and needed to be restored. In the hands of the more radical Enlightenment thinkers and their heirs, these denunciations of corrupted religion increasingly became denunciations of religion in general

The conclusion that religion is inherently dangerous stems from a misunderstanding of the role of religion in history, and particularly its role in what are sometimes called the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Indeed, a broader view of human conflict reveals that these political conflicts resulted from a variety of factors, and that religion was sometimes a justification to conceal the ambition and avarice of those in power. Moreover, history demonstrates that believers and non-believers alike have persecuted and oppressed others, indeed that the perpetrators of some of the world's greatest tragedies have repudiated and persecuted all Biblically inspired religious belief. Thus, we have to acknowledge other sources of conflict, and that raises another question. Is religion necessarily a source of conflict? Or, has it been or can it be an ameliorating factor to other sources of conflict?

George Kateb has argued that religion is inherently a source of conflict because it is a reflection of the desire to make the stories of our lives into something meaningful. In a contingent world, the demand that things be made to make sense is itself irrational and thus dangerous. Humans can be so caught up in the beauty of their stories that they fail to realize and accept when the stories fail to represent reality, and will do anything to make the world match their imagination. In contrast to Kateb, I want to argue in what follows that the content of these stories matter, and that certain stories, including religious ones, can ameliorate the violence that sometimes results from our impulse to find meaning. Kateb provides one of the most sophisticated accounts about the dangers of religious belief, but it is only a more compelling form of the argument deployed by some contemporary liberal theorists.

1.2.1 Skepticism and the history of toleration

The modern age in general and the Enlightenment in particular understand the development of the modern world as the triumph of reason over superstition and of science over religion. From this point of view, toleration is the consequence and outgrowth of early modern skepticism.[16] Recent research into late medieval and early modern thought has cast doubt on this thesis, at least insofar as it regards skepticism as the *unique* source of toleration. Cary Nederman and John Christian Laursen in particular have done much to disprove what has sometimes been called the Locke myth, the belief that toleration began with John Locke and, at least by implication, that violence was endemic to the religion-suffused societies prior to his time and writings. Nederman and

---

[16] For discussions referring to the belief that toleration resulted from skepticism, see Maurice Cranston, "John Locke and the Case for Toleration," in *On Toleration*, eds. Susan Mendus and David Edwards (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 101-121; Ronald Massanari, "The Pluralism of American 'religious pluralism,'" *Journal of Church and State*, 40.3 (Summer 1998): 589-601; Susan Mendus, "Introduction," in *Justifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-19; Susan Mendus, "Introduction," in *On Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus and David Edwards (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1-16; Richard Tuck, "Scepticism and toleration in the seventeenth century," in J*ustifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21-35; Sanford Kessler, "John Locke's Legacy of Religious Freedom," *Polity* 17 (1984/1985): 484-503; Robert Kraynak, "John Locke: From Absolutism to Toleration," *American Political Science Review*, 72.1 (Mar., 1980): 53-69; Richard Sherlock, "The Theology of Toleration: A Reading of Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity,*" *Jewish Political Studies Review* 9 (Winter 1998): 19-49; Sam Black, "Toleration and the Skeptical Inquirer in Locke," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 28.4 (December 1998): 473-504; and Christopher Hill, "Toleration in seventeenth-century England: theory and practice," in *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 27-43.

One of the best works addressing the contributions of skepticism to toleration is Alan Levine, ed., *Early Modern Skepticism and the Origins of Toleration* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999).

Laursen, as well as the contributors to their volumes, have worked hard to demonstrate that "ideas of tolerance were in circulation long before the late seventeenth century and were found among disparate and even directly opposed conceptual frameworks."[17] Indeed, they show that a number of religious communities had achieved toleration long before Locke and the Enlightenment era.

This does not mean that religious belief has not contributed to violence and repression. Indeed, religion has been at least a contributing factor to violence and conflict for thousands of years. As Christopher Hill notes, English authorities punished heretics in the early seventeenth century by flogging them, branding them, splitting their ears, and burning them at the stake. By the late seventeenth century, the English authorities were merely hanging people for heresy and blasphemy. This reduced penalty resulted less from concern or pity for the accused than from fear of arousing sympathy for heretics and their doctrines.[18]

A. J. Ayer looks at the broader history of religious violence to reveal what he refers to as "the maleficence of Christianity."[19] Ayer admits that there are many sources of intolerance, including the contemporary prejudices that lead to racial intolerance, but he argues that religion has inspired the most violence historically.[20] He feels that Christian exclusivity—refusing to accept and worship any other god—leads Christians to be among the most intolerant of believers.[21] Indeed, he believes that we can find ample evidence of Christianity's maleficence in the extermination of the Abigenses, the Inquisition, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the 30 Years War, Calvinism, the conflict in Ireland, and attempts by American clerics to "stifle reason."[22]

---

[17] Nederman, Cary and John Laursen, ed., *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 5.

[18] Christopher Hill, 27-43.

[19] A.J. Ayer, "Sources of Intolerance," in *On Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus and David Edwards (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 84-85.

[20] Ayer, 83.

When we focus solely on Christianity's crusades against heretics and non-believers, it is easy to see it as a negative force. Moreover, after reflecting on the terrible things that so many others have done to serve their god or gods, we can understand why, for example, Richard Dawkins would conclude that religion is as dangerous as the smallpox virus.[23] This view of the malicious impact on human life of religion in general and Christianity in particular leads to the concomitant view that decreasing religiosity will lead to decreasing violence. To be more explicit, this attitude correlates with what Gerson Moreno-Riano declares to be a myth, that "the secularized values of the Enlightenment gave rise to tolerance," and consequently that they were the cure to religious violence.[24]

It is a myth, more often asserted or believed than proved, that skepticism and reason are the unique sources of toleration. Maurice Cranston noted this view among historians: "It has been suggested by some historians that religious intolerance in Europe declined because religious faith declined. The propagation of scepticism by the Enlightenment is thought to have done more to end persecution than the promotion of Christian tolerance by Christian writers such as Locke."[25] The theory that toleration results from skepticism is similarly found among political theorists. Thus, Margaret Canovan writes, "[toleration] is naturally linked to scepticism."[26] Similarly, Christian Smith notes, "we have been taught to think of secularization as the natural and inevitable by-product of 'modernization.'"[27] Moreover, contemporary theories linking toleration to skepticism support this conclusion. Susan Mendus writes, "It is often thought that there is at least an emotional kinship between toleration and scepticism, and belief in the connection between the two was powerful in the seventeenth century and persisted through the nineteenth century (in the writings of Mill), into the twentieth century (in the philosophy of Hannah Arendt)."[28]

---

[21] Ayer, 86. Ayer argues that Christianity, as a Jewish heresy, inherited its exclusivity from Judaism. While this exclusivity initially led the Romans to persecute them, inasmuch as they refused to engage in the mandatory emperor worship, it subsequently led them to persecute heretics and non-members, according to Ayer.

[22] Ayer, 84-85. Many people have made a similar argument about Islam in recent years.

[23] Richard Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion?" *The Humanist* (January/February 1997), available from www.thehumanist.org/humanist/articles/dawkins.html; Internet; accessed 3 February 2006.

[24] Gerson Moreno-Riano, "The roots of tolerance," in *The Review of Politics* 65.1 (Winter 2003): 111-129, available from proquest.umi.com; Internet; accessed 7 July 2003.

Nevertheless, the discovery that certain forms of skepticism lead to toleration does not justify the conclusion that skepticism in general leads to toleration or that skepticism is a necessary condition for toleration. This is not to assert that skepticism played no role in the development of toleration. One has only to examine the various papers included in Alan Levine's *Early Modern Skepticism and the Origins of Toleration* to see how absurd such an assertion would be. Rather, I want to assert that different paths—secular and religious—led to the development of toleration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the concomitant secularization of the public sphere.[29] That is, the establishment of religious liberty and the secularization of the political sphere in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries depended on a variety of factors, including propitious political circumstances.[30] Nevertheless, toleration's development also depended on those who felt that toleration was an important value, who labored to develop and to take advantage of the circumstances that made toleration possible. Among the most important of circumstances was the growth of multiple groups desiring toleration for different reasons: because toleration seemed to correlate with economic prosperity, because a minority church desired protection against larger groups, and because toleration accorded well with the principles of both Enlightenment skeptics and religious believers. Nevertheless, many contemporary liberals focus on some of the elements of the Enlightenment and modern thought that helped establish toleration as a value, and neglect the religious principles that also played a role.

---

[25] Cranston, 118.

[26] Margaret Canovan, "Friendship, truth, and politics: Hannah Arendt and toleration," in *Justifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 177.

[27] Christian Smith, "Introduction: Rethinking the Secularization of American Public Life," in *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life*, ed. Christian Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1.

[28] Mendus, "Introduction," *Justifying Toleration*, 3. Mendus (3) adds, "Scepticism is also a prominent feature of twentieth-century liberalism, which frequently bases its commitment to toleration on moral scepticism." Gutmann and Thompson similarly argue that the "more familiar, modern version of the argument for religious toleration [also] assumes a skeptical attitude toward religious belief." Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, "Moral Conflict and Political Consensus," *Ethics* 101.1 (Oct. 1990): 65.

---

[29] For an interesting discussion of how religious and secular forces combined to secularize public life in the late 19th century, see Christian Smith, ed., *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

William Lee Miller provides an excellent discussion of the coalitions necessary to establish religious liberty in Virginia. Miller's discussion of the ways in which James Madison manipulated the order of legislative bills, as well as his discussion of coalitions between Enlightenment skeptics and religious believers, is particularly interesting. See William Lee Miller, *The First Liberty: American's Foundation in Religious Freedom: Expanded and Updated* (New York: Knopf, 1986; Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

[30] For excellent discussions of the necessary circumstances for toleration, see Hill, 27-43; and Murphy, *Conscience and Community*. For a microeconomic analysis of the necessary factors for toleration, see Anthony Gill, "The Political Origins of Religious Liberty: A Theoretical Outline," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 1.1 (2005): 1-33.

Liberals who regard themselves as partisans of the radical materialistic Enlightenment often express the most extreme views about the dangers of religious belief. These partisans are by no means representative of liberals in general. Nevertheless, they and more moderate liberals like John Rawls respond to similar concerns about the irrationality and consequent danger of religious belief. For progressive liberals, religious believers often seem to be ignorant fanatics who are beyond reason and intent on restoring the Inquisition, rolling us back into the science, medicine, and violence of the Dark Ages.[31] They, like their conservative opponents, believe that they are engaged in a pervasive battle over to control the character of America. There is much evidence to contradict the belief that there is a battle for the heart and soul of America, a battle into which the progressive liberals and conservatives have conscripted much of the American population.[32] Nevertheless, even if that is a tremendous exaggeration, the battles between those parties have hurt those caught in between. As Morris Fiorina writes, "Most Americans are somewhat like the unfortunate citizens of some third-world countries who try to stay out of the crossfire while left-wing guerrillas and right-wing death squads shoot at each other."[33]

---

[31] For example, both the title and content of Gary Wills's "The Day the Enlightenment Went Out" make this point. Wills writes, "The secular states of modern Europe do not understand the fundamentalism of the American electorate . . . In fact, we now resemble those nations less than we do our putative enemies. Where else do we find fundamentalist zeal, a rage at secularity, religious intolerance, fear of and hatred for modernity?" Wills sees these attributes in Al Qaeda and Sunni insurgents in Iraq, rather than in the nations of Western Europe. Gary Wills, "The Day the Enlightenment Went Out," *New York Times* (New York), 4 November 2004.

[32] See Morris P. Fiorina, with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), 6-8; and Robert Booth Fowler, Allen D. Hertzke, Laura R. Olson, and Kevin R. Den Dulk, *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, culture, and Strategic Choices*, 3^{d} ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2004), 294.

[33] Fiorina, 8.

These partisans distinguish themselves from common citizens with their intensely held views and strident methods. Fiorina argues that these partisans "are completely certain of their views: they are right and their opponents are wrong. Moreover, their opponents are not just misguided or misinformed, but corrupt, stupid, evil, or all three. There can be no compromise because truth does not compromise with error."[34] The problem is not necessarily that they are certain of their views. As the later chapters will demonstrate, certainty about certain doctrines can lead to toleration. Moreover, compromise is not an unqualified good; it has sustained all kinds of social evils, including slavery. Nevertheless, the malevolence the parties perceive in one another prevents collective action to achieve the common good. As Robert Fowler argues, this disagreement, "undermines the possibility that adversaries may discover common ground. Compromise . . . is hard if one's opponents are enemies bent on destroying one's very way of life."[35]

Such rabid partisanship is broadly recognized on the American scene. In his work, Morris Fiorina quotes several public figures who express a caricatured view of "red America" and the potential hegemony of religious belief that it is supposed to represent. For example, Maureen Dowd praises the separation of church and state that was supposedly maintained during the 1960s, including the battles of the civil rights movement, while denouncing the contemporary use of religion by cultural conservatives. Even if it were the only use of religion during the 1960s, the tremendous use of religion during the civil rights movement belies any perspective of a purely secular politics during that period. Nevertheless, by downplaying religion's positive contributions she adds rhetorical advantage to the argument that the presence of religion in the public sphere leads to irrationalism and disaster. Thus, she declares that cultural conservatives are bringing about an integration of church and state by marshalling "the forces of darkness" and appealing to "isolationism, nativism, chauvinism, puritanism and religious fanaticism," and are thus ushering in a new "dark age."[36]

---

[34] Fiorina, 203-4.

[35] Fowler, 294.

Similarly, Jane Smiley asserts that red America is guilty of a bloodlust, a bloodlust manifested in both the institution of slavery and the cultural conservatism of the political right. She feels that their love of violence has led them to embrace both the religious rights and immoral capitalists, represented by Bush and Cheney respectively, who "know no boundaries or rules," and "are predatory and resentful, amoral, avaricious, and arrogant." Moreover, she links the supposed bloodlust of red America with irrationalism, declaring that the inhabitants of red America follow people like Bush and Cheney because they "don't know which end is up."[37]

The works of Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins demonstrate an even stronger belief in the irrationalism and danger of religious belief. Harris writes, "Competing religious doctrines have shattered our world into separate moral communities, and these divisions have become a continual source of human conflict."[38] While this might be just another manifestation of the conflict that results from in-group/out-group behavior,

---

[36] Maureen Dowd, "Rove's Revenge," *New York Times* (New York), 7 November 2004, available from LexisNexus; Internet; accessed 29 December 2006.

[37] Jane Smiley, "Why Americans Hate Democrats—A Dialogue: The Unteachable Ignorance of the Red States," 4 November 2004, available from http://www.slate.com/id/2109218/; Internet; accessed 29 December 2006.

[38] Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 79.

Harris claims that religion exacerbates this behavior because it "casts the differences between people in terms of eternal rewards and punishments."[39] Similarly, Richard Dawkins calls the god of the Old Testament, Yahweh, "an appalling role model," a god that inspires actions "morally indistinguishable from Hitler's invasion of Poland, or Saddam Hussein's massacres of the Kurds and the Marsh Arabs."[40]

Harris candidly tells his readers that, although he sees a distinction between fundamentalist and liberal Christians and sees the former as the greatest danger, he feels that liberal Christians aid and abet fundamentalist Christians. In demanding respect "for their own religious beliefs," they give "shelter to extremists of all faiths." Moreover, he holds even liberal Christians responsible for contributing to the "religious divisions in our world" and for violating the autonomy of children by raising them to be believers of a particular faith.[41] Indeed, he endorses the claim that "[r]eligion is an insult to human dignity. With or without it, you'd have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, it takes religion."[42]

---

[39] Harris, Letter, 80. Several other authors have argued that a belief in the afterlife is a cause of religious violence. See Hill, 27-43, and D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

This thesis, of course, contradicts the other criticisms of religion, particularly Marxist criticisms, that belief in the afterlife acts as a pressure valve, pacifying the masses and preventing them from engaging in a revolution.

[40] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 248; 247. Dawkins generally focuses on the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, in his efforts to prove the dangers of using the Bible as a source of moral guidance. When he finally turns to the New Testament of the Christian Bible, he responds to the claim that Christ reformed Old Testament morality with an argument that is largely an *ad hominem* attack on Christ as a person, describing him as a sadomasochistic cult leader who by no means sustained family values. Dawkins, Delusion, 250-253.

[41] Harris, Letter, ix.

[42] Dawkins, Delusion, 249. The quotation belongs to Steven Weinberg, an American physicist and winner of the Nobel Prize.

Not only do such statements indicate a strong undervaluation of religion and its beneficial attributes, but it is part of a conversation in which the participants increasingly vilify one another and see each other as close-minded.[43] It is understandable that Dawkins and Harris would react strongly to religion given the believers, particularly self-professed Christians, who keep contacting them in response to their earlier works. In describing the responses to his first book, *The End of Faith,* Harris notes that he has received thousands of letters telling him that he is "wrong not to believe in God." Of those letters, he claims that Christians send the most hostile, demonstrating that they are "deeply, even murderously, intolerant of criticism."[44] Similarly, Dawkins declares that the "nastiest" responses to his works come from believers. Moreover, he asserts that "unchristian abuse is commonly experienced by those who are perceived as enemies of Christianity."[45] After making a film advocating atheism, the film-maker received a letter from a self-professed Christian who declared, "I'd love to take a knife, gut you fools, and scream with joy as your insides spill out in front of you. You are attempting to ignite a holy war in which some day I, and others like me, may have the pleasure of taking action like the above mentioned."[46] Similarly, another letter says, "Please die and go to hell . . . I hope you get a painful disease like rectal cancer and die a slow painful death, so you can meet your God, SATAN."[47] In writing such letters, extreme religious fanatics create more, and more bitter, enemies, enemies who feel confirmed in their beliefs that religion in dangerous. To take these extreme examples as the measure of all believers, however, is equivalent to portraying all those who have questioned the limits of private property as Stalinist murderers. Indeed, in the case of the scientists such judgments are deeply at odds with their own careful empirical methodologies.

---

[43] Dawkins and Harris admit that religion does some good things, but easily dismiss it. The title of one of Harris's columns is very explanatory, "Do We Really Need Bad Reasons to Do Good?" In that column, Harris states, "But in this case [pious Christians helping in Sudan], religion gives people bad reasons for acting morally, where good reasons are actually available." Sam Harris, "Do We Really Need Bad Reasons to Do Good?" *Boston Globe* (Boston), October 22, 2006, available from http://richarddawkins.net/article,226,Do-We-Really-Need-Bad-Reasons-To-Be-Good,Sam-Harris--Boston-Globe; Internet; accessed 29 December 2006.

Indeed, not only do Harris and Dawkins criticize religion as giving insufficient or poor reasons for doing the good things it inspires believers to do, but they find those reasons to be harmful. The believers who do good things merely make it harder to criticize the extremists. See Harris, Letter, 33-4; and Harris, Letter, ix.

[44] Harris, Letter, vii.

[45] Dawkins, Delusion, 211.

The continual exacerbation of this conflict between evangelical Christians and evangelical secularists has led both sides tend to dehumanize and dismiss the other as disingenuous or insane. As James Davison Hunter writes, "the individuals who inspire various forms of social action tend to be presented as extremists, demagogues, and even opportunists for their own personal causes and special interests."[48] In the heated rhetoric, we lose sight of the fact that many of the parties involved are "philosophically or religiously reflective," indeed that they are acting based on "prior moral commitments" of what they believe "is true, just, good, and in the public interest."[49] We fail to see others as sincere and honestly seeking for a better world.

---

[46] Letter to Brian Flemming, "author and director of *The God Who Wasn't There,"* dated 21 December 2005; quoted in Dawkins, Delusion, 211.

[47] Letter to the Editor of *Freethought Today*; quoted in Dawkins, Delusion, 212-213. Other passages in the letter are filled with a great deal of profanity and hate speech.

[48] James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 33.

[49] Hunter, 32.

One might dismiss both of these groups as extremists, but the danger is that this debate will increasingly polarize those in the middle through "mutual stereotyping, polarization, and inflamed passions."[50] Such an outcome would undermine the general sense of comity that is crucial to the continued functioning of our pluralist society. One of the chief goals of the argument that follows is thus to demonstrate that the differences between the secular and religious on such crucial issues as toleration are not as great or decisive as we often imagine, and in this respect to remind us of religion's contributions to our most important values of citizenship in a pluralist, liberal democracy.

1.2.2 Contemporary liberalism and religion

While more moderate liberal theorists are less likely to adopt such a radically anti-religious attitude, they do in many instances still overestimate religion's danger to democratic society and often underestimate its contributions to the democratic traditions that we value. John Rawls' work is indicative of at least one powerful strain of liberal thought and reveals many of contemporary liberalism's presuppositions about religion.

Rawls was already critical of religion in *A Theory of Justice,* but with the criticism of this view by a number of scholars, he was forced to confront the question more directly in *Political Liberalism.* In this work, Rawls focuses on the legitimate use of the state's coercive power in a democracy and necessary democratic ideals. To use coercive power legitimately, Rawls declares that we must be able to explain our reasons for doing so in terms that others can accept, i.e., according to the values of public reason.[51] Rawls hopes that this requirement will pull us closer to an "ideal of democratic citizenship."[52] According to this ideal, we do not vote or do anything in the public sphere according to our personal interests or comprehensive systems of belief. Rather, we should govern our decisions and actions in the public sphere according to the standards of public reason.[53] This concept of public reason, as Rawls notes, is reminiscent of Rousseau's understandings of the general will and of ideal democracy.[54] When we are restricted to deliberating and acting according to public standards of reason, our deliberations and actions should result in some semblance of the common good rather than the will of a minority or majority party.

---

[50] Fowler, 294.

Rawls anticipates the objection that the requirements of public reason would lead to a shallow or even hypocritical public deliberation, in that everyone would discuss and pretend to make decisions about public issues according to values that are not their truest, or most deeply held, reasons. Rawls believes that this is not a problem for *reasonable* comprehensive systems because these will already incorporate the vocabulary of public political values required by standards of public reason. Since these public political values are sustained and strengthened by the deeper reasons of a person's comprehensive system of beliefs, that person does not violate his or her comprehensive doctrine when giving public reasons solely in terms of those public political values.

---

[51] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 217.

[52] Rawls, 244n33.

[53] Rawls, 218-219.

Rawls (213) gives three ways in which reason is public. "As the reason of citizens as such, it is the reason of the public; its subject is the good of the public and matters of fundamental justice; and its nature and content is public, being given by the ideals and principles expressed by society's conception of political justice, and conducted open to view on that basis."

Rawls equivocates regarding the extent to which public reasons are necessary. He declares we should first consider the most important case, that concerning fundamental issues of constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice. If the ideal of public reason were unnecessary when deciding those issues, then it would never be necessary (215). Thus, Rawls later declares that "the requirements of public reason belong to an ideal of democratic citizenship and are limited to our conduct in the public political forum and how we are to vote on constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice" (244n33). He nonetheless leaves open the possibility that such reasons would be required whenever making public policy.

Furthermore, Rawls notes that abiding by the ideal of public reason is a moral rather than a legal duty (217). He repeats this comment later, writing, "I stress that the limits of public reason are not, clearly, the limits of law or statute but the limits we honor when we honor an ideal" (253). Rawls thus avoids the criticism that he is attempting to set up a thought police or to control others' consciences. Since he is establishing standards of public reason, however, it is not unreasonable that others might think, eventually, that those standards should be enforced or taught through mandatory public education.

[54] Rawls, 219.

Creating standards of public reason appears to be harmless until it comes to actually defining what is reasonable and what reasons are to be allowed. The New England Congregationalists believed that they were acting entirely according to simple and universally available truths. As we will see in our discussion of the debates between Williams and the Congregationalists, these truths were presented by the light of nature, whereby all people became guilty for sin, and even more clearly by revelation. Furthermore, if a person failed to seek these truths out for himself, these truths were so clear and convincing that they compelled him to recognize their veracity once others presented them to him. Subsequent dissent revealed that a person was consciously rejecting the truth and fighting against his conscience, the inner tribunal that judged a person's actions according to the principles of morality. Thus, law required that a dissenter first be taught the truth; the punishment for subsequent dissent was not persecution, but the execution of the punishment decreed by that person's own conscience.

Despite their self-assurance that they were merely acting according to readily available standards of truth, indeed to uphold that truth, the New England "Puritans" became infamous for persecution and the violation of others' consciences. Moreover, it is instructive to note that they did not begin by hanging Quakers, but worked up to that point as their frustrations grew and as increasingly severe measures failed to keep out ideas that might subvert their ideal political order.

Furthermore, although many standards of public reason include a notion of reciprocity, they sometimes fail to be truly reciprocal. Rawls explains that the liberal duty of civility requires that a person be able to explain how the positions he or she advocates are sustained by "the political values of public reason." Furthermore, the duty also demands that a person be willing to listen to others and that he or she be fair-minded in weighing the competing reasons.[55] As Rawls discusses earlier in *Political Liberalism,* the concept of reciprocity is implicit to this duty of civility. There, Rawls contrasts those who willingly uphold the ideal of reciprocity with "unreasonable" people, those who are "unwilling to honor, or even to propose, except as a necessary public pretense, any general principles or standards for specifying fair terms of cooperation."[56]

If we are true to the meaning of the term reciprocity, we should seek to give reasons that others can accept. At the very least, we should seek to explain ourselves as much as possible despite perhaps incommensurable languages of justification and ways of thinking. This striving to engage in conversation, each person giving and taking, is essential to the notion of reciprocity. We limit reciprocity when we force everyone to speak in a single language of justification, however. General principles or standards of reason more likely reflect the ideas of a particular comprehensive doctrine or class of comprehensive doctrines than to be truly universal or general.[57] A full discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, as William Galston argues, when liberal theorists invoke standards of public reason or invoke theories of reciprocity that are laden with such standards, they endanger expressive liberty and moral and political pluralism.[58] In attempting to achieve an ideal of democratic deliberation in which people come together to deliberate and work for the common good, they create standards that would exclude many who would otherwise uphold many of their democratic ideals, although the latter would uphold those ideals for reasons that may not translate into the required standards of justification.[59] As we will see in this work, authors like Locke and Williams argued for and sustained their commitment to fundamental democratic values, but using reasons that would not be "rational" by standards like that of Rawls because they are rooted in particular religious traditions. By creating narrow "rationalist" standards, we risk excluding people who otherwise support democratic ideals from political participation. Moreover, depending on the relative size of these groups, we risk the stability of the political system itself. As Locke and Williams argued, one of the primary foundations of religious violence is the inequitable treatment of religious groups and their reactions at perceived infringements of their rights.

---

[55] Rawls, 217.

[56] Rawls, 50.

---

[57] For example, Patrick Neal criticizes theories of neutrality as being neutral only between concepts of the good that fit within a particular conceptualization of the good.

[58] William Galston, *Liberal Pluralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 115-116.

[59] Rawls notes this problem with respect to the religious arguments of the abolitionists and the civil rights movement. He explains that Lawrence Solum and Amy Gutmann alerted him to this potential exclusivity in correspondence. Their concerns about abolitionism and the civil rights movement reveals that the exclusivity of theories about public reason is not as circumscribed as their proponents would desire.

Rawls works to overcome these problems by elaborating "exclusive" and "inclusive" views. The exclusive view represents his unmediated theory, in which anything but public reasons would be excluded from public deliberation. The inclusive view, however, would allow non-public reasons that are rooted in comprehensive doctrines when those reasons would strengthen the ideal of public reason (247). We would alternate between the exclusive and inclusive views depending on "which view best encourages citizens to honor the ideal of public reason and secures its social conditions in the longer run in a well-ordered society" (248). This assumes, however, that others have the right to stand above public debate and decide what reasons a person may give and when he or she may give them. That, however, returns us to the dangers of public reason already discussed. Moreover, there is something unsatisfactory about a standard of justification that rejects a class of reasons as unacceptable by their very nature, unless they lead to an end that we admire.

1.2.3 Meaning and persecution

In his efforts to protect the individual and the individual's freedom, George Kateb develops one of the most ardent critiques of religious belief. According to Kateb, totalitarianism is the consequence of the attempt to find meaning in the world. If we understand the quest for meaning correctly, we can see that "the quest for meaning can turn inhuman, and that therefore the quest for meaning must be held under continuous suspicion."[60] He draws here on Arendt but ultimately disagrees with her. Arendt tries to distinguish ideology from religion (and biblical religion in particular) by arguing that the latter is true, at least according to her understanding of what it means for something to be true. Kateb, however, argues that ideology and religion are functionally the same. The purpose of both is to provide meaning, and for an unbeliever "religion is just another meaning-conferring mode."[61] Indeed, although their content may differ, all meaning-conferring modes share the same nature. Ideologies, "fictional stories, historical stories, personal stories, myths, legends, religion, and metaphysical systems" are all dangerous inasmuch as they attempt "to confer meaning on reality."[62] These stories take the chaos and misery out of life and encourage a person to change reality to instill it with this meaning.[63] At the same time, the story converts a person, making him or her see all other considerations as subservient and thus allowing him or her to become "merciless in defending or spreading a doctrine."[64]

---

[60] George Kateb, "Ideology and Storytelling" *Social Research* 69.2 (Summer 2002): 326.

[61] Kateb, 348.

[62] Kateb, 355.

The distinguishing factor between the different kinds of stories is their content. For Kateb, however, the content does not really matter when we are weighing the dangers of fanaticism and totalitarianism. He declares, ". . . almost any content that is apparently innocuous can turn lethal."[65] Excluding fictional stories, he writes, "Practically any specimen of any of the other modes has induced and can induce fanaticism, the ruthless will to realize the ambition to make the world over in accordance with the aesthetic imperatives of the murderous fiction or story about the world or picture of it." The only solution that Kateb can see to the problems of fanaticism and totalitarianism is to avoid stories that impart meaning and to embrace meaninglessness.[66]

Kateb's concerns strike to the heart of the problems of toleration and persecution, although he is concerned with the most extreme instances of the latter. Indeed, if Kateb's claims are true, if religion is merely another meaning-conferring mode that inherently carries the risk of violence and misery, then perhaps we do need to learn to live with meaninglessness. Such a conclusion, however, assumes that we can live without any meaning. But is this true? In arguing that the world is meaningless and that we should all learn to embrace that meaninglessness, are we not creating a story to explain the nature of the world and encouraging others to live accordingly? When we presume that we simply relate facts, that we are not imposing some type of story upon the world, we ignore the danger that we all pose.

---

[63] Kateb, 351.

[64] Kateb, 351.

[65] Kateb, 355.

[66] Kateb, 356.

Are we all equally dangerous, though? If we follow Kateb and admit that all stories by their very nature may carry the risk of intolerance, fanaticism, and even totalitarianism, it does not necessarily follow that we should reject (or exclude) all believers from political life. This in fact would likely drive them underground and make them more dangerous. Even if we accept Kateb's (extremely) negative view of religion, we should want not to eliminate religion but to limit it. It is not as if the demand for meaning is going to disappear. The fact that we tell stories to make sense out of our lives is essentially human. What we have to insist on, however, is that the content of these stories makes a difference.

A particular meaning-conferring mode may explain the world in such a way that it leads its adherents to believe that they should be tolerant and that they should impose a tolerant political order on the world, or at least on their community.[67] In that case, the content of a story is critical, because it may ameliorate the dangerous tendencies of the stories that we all use to understand the world around us. Most people admit that religion has a profound ability to shape a person's heart and mind. Consequently, religion serves as Kateb's standard when he discusses ideology and religion's effects on individuals: "The story [of an ideology] changes the hearts of those who succumb to it. Falling under the spell of an ideology is just like undergoing a religious conversion and remaining devout."[68] Indeed, Kateb argues that, "under the spell [of religion and ideology], leaders, their associates, and their followers may in some conditions be merciless in defending or spreading a doctrine" because they are convinced "that their way of life is superior and irreplaceable."[69] It might be better to describe them as zealous than as merciless, however. While a zealous person may become merciless and intolerant, when moved by stories with a different content or stories that are interpreted differently, such a person may also become one of the most ardent defenders of toleration. I will argue in what follows that this is true in the cases of John Locke and Roger Williams. Both tell a Christian story, but they tell it in such a way that toleration plays a central role. We will thus examine in the following chapter their stories which are variations of Christian doctrine that make their believers feel that toleration is necessary for salvation and that intolerance and coercion in matters of faith and conscience is unchristian

---

[67] Of course, this leads to a number of liberal paradoxes, such as whether to tolerate the intolerant. Is liberalism itself a totalitarian regime, and toleration merely another element of the story that we coerce others to fulfill? Indeed, is totalitarianism then ever escapable?

1.3 Conclusion

There are a number of liberal views about religion, as well as many religious liberals. The dominant liberal view, however, is that religion based on revelation is more dangerous than religion based on reason alone. Moreover, within this liberal view, we find those who go even further, arguing that religion in general is dangerous. The continuing religious violence around the world demonstrates that their fears are not unfounded. Nevertheless, these views are based on an incomplete picture of religion and its effects. As Stephen Gould points out, religion is also the source of some of "the most heartrending examples of human goodness in the face of personal danger." People's religious beliefs lead them to fight for religious freedom around the world, to fight against slave raids, massacres, and ethnic cleansing in the Sudan and to advocate for the victims of those atrocities, to fight against sex trafficking, to work for AIDS funding for Africa, and to work for debt relief for developing nations.[70] Moreover, their religious beliefs lead people to generously support charitable causes at home and around the world.[71]

---

[68] Kateb, 351.

[69] Kateb, 352.

Above all, I hope to show in what follows that we have misunderstood the relationship between religion and toleration. Some forms of religious belief may indeed incite intolerance and violence, but many others provide a firm foundation for toleration. In the chapters that follow, we will see that religious belief from a very early period was a principal source of the doctrine of toleration for people like Locke and Williams. In this respect they were as much believers as thinkers. I also hope to show or at least to suggest that religious belief was similarly important to those coalitions that established toleration as a political value and practice in the modern world.

---

[70] See Fowler, 182-188.

[71] According to a recent study by economist Arthur C. Brook, religiously active people are 25% more likely to donate money than others, donate nearly four times as much when they do give money, and are 23% more likely to donate their time. Moreover, religious people are more likely to give to non-religious causes than are more secular people. Arthur C. Brook, "Religious Faith and Charitable Giving," *Policy Review* 121 (Oct-Dec 2003): 41; 43. See also John Stossel, "Cheap in America: Who Gives? Who Doesn't?" *20/20* 29 November 2006, available from LexisNexis; Internet transcript; accessed 8 January 2007. On the *20/20* special, Brooks argues that when we factor in the contributions of individual Americans, America gives far more aid than any other country. Comparing American citizens to those of Western European countries, which are far more secular, Americans give far more than their counterparts.

2 Roger Williams

On March 29, 1676, at the height of King Philip's War, Roger Williams approached a group of Indians who had just finished lighting the town of Providence on fire.[1] Rhode Island had largely remained neutral in the conflict, and Williams in particular had long befriended and argued for the rights of the Indians. Williams asked this group, comprised of "Nipmucks, Pokanokets, Pocassets, Narragensetts, and Connecticut River valley Indians," why they had "assaulted us with burning and killing who ever were [kind] neighbors to them," emphasizing that his own home, "now burning before mine eyes hath lodged kindly some thousands of you these ten years."[2] Williams, in a letter to his brother, wrote that he subsequently told them that "they . . . had forgot they were mankind and ran about the country like wolves tearing and devouring the innocent and peaceable. . . . They confessed they were in a strange way." Finally, he offered them his services as a peacemaker, which services they replied they might use after burning Plymouth colony for another month.

Williams, who maintained uncompromising religious convictions, including a belief in original sin and each person's utter dependence on Christ for salvation, nonetheless retained a belief that all humans are capable of peaceful coexistence, despite the strongest differences in identity. In the case of King Philip's War, Williams did not dismiss the violence leading to the burning of his home as inherent to the character of the

---

[1] King Philip's war was generally a conflict between English colonists and native groups, although whole tribes fought for both sides.

[2] Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War* (New York: Viking, 2006), 301.

Native Americans. Rather, as someone who defended the Indians as often more humane than the Europeans, Williams wondered how they could have forgotten that "they were mankind," attacking the "innocent and peaceable." As we will see in this chapter, Williams's belief in humanity's depravity, his belief in the human capacity for peaceful coexistence, and the right to liberty of conscience are closely related in his theology.

2.1 Introduction

Richard Dawkins, in an acceptance speech for the American Humanist Association's Humanist of the Year award, declared, ". . . I think a case can be made that *faith* is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate. Faith, being belief that isn't based on evidence, is the principal vice of any religion. And who, looking at Northern Ireland or the Middle East, can be confident that the brain virus of faith is not exceedingly dangerous?"[3] Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist, exemplifies the view that religion is not only superfluous, when compared to reason and empiricism's power to answer the fundamental questions of existence, but dangerous.[4]

Many people since the Enlightenment have seen history as a progressive liberation from religious superstition and its oppressive authorities. Moreover, those who see history as such a liberation have frequently looked at influential scientists and philosophers, both those they admire and those they condemn, to recreate the story of these developments.[5] Accordingly, as we will see in the next chapter, many scholars have argued that faith and reason are incompatible in Locke's thought. Indeed, they point to Locke's harsh criticism of the Christian practices and authority of his time to sustain this argument. Criticism, however, is not the same as rejection. Many scientists, for example, are critical of certain scientific practices, but this does not mean they reject science. Moreover, the Reformation demonstrates that those who love Christianity have frequently been its harshest critics.

---

[3] Richard Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion?" *The Humanist*, January/February 1997, available from www.thehumanist.org/humanist/articles/dawkins.html; Internet; accessed 3 February 2006.

[4] Indeed, in a public discussion between Dawkins and Steven Pinker, a professor in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at MIT, Dawkins declares that science is better than religion in providing the answers, the meaning to life, that others frequently praise religion for providing. See Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker, "Is Science Killing the Soul," The Guardian-Dillons Debate at Westminster Central Hall, London, 10 February 1999, available from http://www.edge.org/documents/archive/edge53.html; accessed 3 February 2006.

Despite such criticism, I will argue that Locke was a sincere, although probably heterodox, Christian. In this respect, he was similar to many other prominent scientists and philosophers who have sought in different ways to balance their faith with their more secular pursuits. Moreover, we will see that Locke's capacity to sustain a belief in both reason and revelation was important to the development and justification of his notion of toleration.

---

[5] As Loup Verlet discusses, even when the contributions of a particular person were critical to the development of a particular way of thought, such as Newton's contributions to a religious-free science, that person may have little in common with that movement. In Newton's case, those interested in protecting a secular and objective science concealed his religious writings for generations. See Loup Verlet, "'*F = MA*' and the Newtonian Revolution: An Exit from Religion Through Religion," *History of Science* 34 (1996): 303-346.

We should remember that many scientists of the 17th and 18th centuries sustained religion, revelation, and miracles alongside their scientific pursuits. As Peter Harrison writes, "Leading scientists of this era, almost without exception, had a dual commitment on the one hand to a science premised upon a mechanical universe governed by immutable laws of nature and on the other to [an] omnipotent God who intervened in the natural order from time to time." Peter Harrison, "Newtonian Science, Miracles, and the Laws of Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56.4 (Oct. 1995): 531. See also Peter Harrison, " 'Science' and 'Religion': Constructing the Boundaries," *The Journal of Religion*, 86.1 (Jan. 2006): 83-87.

In this chapter, we will examine Roger Williams, who was far more vehement than Locke was in criticizing contemporary Christianity.[6] Moreover, Williams was especially critical of the effects of religious enthusiasm, because of the personal experience and difficulty of leading a colony of dissenters who defied both religious and civil authority. In fact, as we will see, the danger of religious enthusiasm was one of the principal themes of his debates with the Quakers. Nevertheless, despite his criticism of both religious enthusiasm and religious orthodoxy, among other aspects of contemporary Christianity, Williams was undeniably sincere in his religious convictions. Furthermore, Williams's notion of toleration was more inclusive than that of Locke, defending the religious liberty of even those groups Locke thought too dangerous to tolerate.

---

[6] I will cite the works by Roger Williams in the following manner:

The Complete Writings of Roger Williams, ed. Samuel L. Caldwell, vol. 3, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*, (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), will be cited as BT, followed by page number.

The Complete Writings of Roger Williams, ed. Samuel L. Caldwell, vol. 4, *The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), will be cited as YMB, followed by page number.

The Complete Writings of Roger Williams, ed. Samuel L. Caldwell, vol. 5, *George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrowes* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), will be cited as Fox, followed by the page number.

The Complete Writings of Roger Williams, ed. Samuel L. Caldwell, vol. 7, *Christenings make Not Christians* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), will be cited as Christenings, followed by page number.

The Complete Writings of Roger Williams, ed. Samuel L. Caldwell, vol. 7, *The Examiner—Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), will be cited as Examiner, followed by page number.

The Complete Writings of Roger Williams, ed. Samuel L. Caldwell, vol. 7, *The Hireling Ministry None of Christs* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), will be cited as Hireling, followed by page number.

Williams's works plainly reveal that he was sincerely religious.[7] Indeed, the more realistic charge, if we must make one, is that he was too unrelenting in his religious convictions. One scholar has noted that Williams approached Puritanism "with a theological stringency that sometimes made John Cotton and the Massachusetts Bay Colony establishment look like capitulating religious liberals."[8] Indeed, the Puritans at Massachusetts Bay held Williams's religious training and piety in sufficiently high regard that they offered him the prominent and powerful position of pastor for Boston's congregation, the very position from which John Cotton, Williams's chief antagonist in the debates over religious liberty, would wield great influence in both England and America. Williams refused the position and moved to Salem, however, because he regarded the Boston congregation as too impure. Moreover, Williams developed a cogent scriptural theology to criticize the New England Puritans, and it was partly because of his piety and scriptural knowledge that these Puritans began to see him as so dangerous.

---

[7] The only scholars ever to disagree on this point were the Progressive historians of the early twentieth century. As inveterate critics of Puritanism, they found in Williams an early critic of the Puritans and assumed he must have shared their views. Thus, for them, Williams became the prototype of Jefferson, whom they saw as a secular, Enlightenment democrat. Williams thus became a prophet of the future, a man born a hundred years too early, and someone who represented all of "America's true ideas" at its inception. William Lee Miller writes, autobiographically, that the works of these Progressive historians created an image of Williams "so attractive and so well pruned to fit a twentieth-century democratic mind as to bring many, reading him when young . . . enthusiastically to attribute to Roger Williams all their own opinions." William Lee Miller, *The First Liberty: American's Foundation in Religious Freedom: Expanded and Updated* (New York: Knopf, 1986; Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 143. To be quickly disabused of this perspective, however, a person need only open one of Williams's works. As an anonymous author notes, students opening Williams's works "under the impression that they are going to meet a familiar figure . . . shut it hastily again with the feeling that there has been some mistake" (144).

[8] James Calvin Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams: Christian Conviction and Public Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), xi.

In this respect Williams shows us how it is possible to be ardently Christian and yet condemn the actions and form of Christian ecclesiastical authority. Indeed, we will see that Williams predicates religious liberty on the rejection of existing form of Christian authority, which he called Christendom. The illegitimacy of contemporary religious authority is for him, however, only a minor, although vehement, argument in his defense of religious liberty. Williams argues that religious liberty is a requirement of true Christianity, and believes that we may discern this through proper scriptural exegesis. Exemplary exegesis, the study and literal application of biblical example, was critical to Puritan thought, including that of Roger Williams. Indeed, for Williams, the examples of Christ and his early followers clearly demand religious liberty, as do the examples of many rulers in the Old Testament. The difficultly in developing a scripturally based argument for toleration is that many Old Testament passages describe the theocratic collaboration of civil and ecclesiastical powers in enforcing faith. As we will see, although Locke's writings are much more systematic than Williams's, Locke for the most part ignores the challenges presented by the Old Testament. Williams, by contrast, actively confronts them using typological exegesis, another form of biblical interpretation that allows him to distinguish between examples that continue to have relevance and those that do not.

Moreover, Williams like Locke rejects the argument that political prudence requires religious uniformity, arguing that civil peace is only possible when the state grants and protects religious liberty. Williams, however, calls for a much broader recognition of religious liberty than does Locke.[9] Both Williams and Locke decry license posing as liberty and call for the state to maintain civil peace, but Williams goes further, arguing that the ability to govern oneself is inherent to all men, not just to those who believe in God and reject the supreme civil and ecclesiastical authority of someone like the Pope. Williams, like Locke (and later Mill) also argues that toleration is necessary to truth, but, as we will see, he justifies this claim not on merely prudential or utilitarian grounds, but on a scriptural foundation.

All this said, I will argue that the core of Williams's argument derives from his understanding of Christian soteriology. For Williams, persecution is finally and certainly irrational because the conscience does not respond to the will. The state cannot coerce belief because belief is a gift of God and thus not something that an individual can be forced to *have* or *will*. To understand Williams's argument on this crucial point, we will examine his notion of predestination, which he uses to argue that the conscience does not respond to the will and, thus, that persecution is irrational. Furthermore, Williams argues that the terrible effects of persecution are thus senseless and accordingly immoral.

Moreover, Williams precedes Locke in attributing persecution to the ambition and avarice of ecclesiastical and civil leaders, but he goes beyond Locke in his discussion of the effects of persecution on the persecuted. The sincerity of his rhetoric is attested by the fact that it often exceeds that which is prudent in maintaining a dialogue with his antagonists, but this very fact reveals the depths of his feelings about religious freedom and the fundamental respect that he felt was due to each individual. At the end of the day, Williams was convinced that toleration was essential to Christianity because Christian freedom was necessary to true conversion. Williams in this sense reveals the deep roots of toleration, not in skepticism or in a non-Christian doctrine of reason or science, but in religious belief and practice.

---

[9] Locke insinuates that certain groups, like atheists, Roman Catholics, and Muslims, may not be tolerated. He argues that we cannot trust the promise of an atheist because the fear of God does not sustain their word, such that they endanger civil society. Locke fears Roman Catholics and Muslims because, he claims, they owe allegiance to foreign princes—the Pope or the civil ruler of Constantinople through his control over the Muslim clerics, respectively. It should be noted, however, that Locke does not advocate the persecution of these groups on religious grounds. He argues that these groups cannot be tolerated because they would endanger the state and thus others' natural rights, including toleration. Williams does not single out any group to be controlled by the state. Indeed, he refers to Jews, Catholics, Muslims, and pagans as groups whose liberty of conscience should be protected. Like Locke, however, he argues that the state cannot grant complete free exercise of religion—individuals cannot use religion as a pretext to violate others.

2.2 Historical background

As Williams graphically describes in his writings, civil and ecclesiastical leaders spilled a lot of blood in England, as elsewhere, in the cause of religion in the century prior to his birth. In 1534, Henry VIII rejected the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and established the Church of England based on an Erastian Protestantism that nonetheless retained much of Roman Catholic doctrine, liturgy, and hierarchy. Each of his children, as they succeeded to the throne, emulated him in using state power to control religion according to his or her own theological and political needs. Edward VI (or at least those who guided him) was more committed to the Reformed tradition than his father was, and, during his short reign, he acted to reform and unify the Church of England's rituals and ceremonies. By seeking to return England to Catholicism during her short reign, Edward's sister "Bloody" Mary provided the fodder for John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, one of England's most widely read books in the 17th century.[10] Elizabeth I's compromise between Geneva and Rome relieved some of her subjects, but offended many Protestants by retaining elements of Catholic theology, ritual, and hierarchy and tolerating private Catholic worship. The dissenters from the Elizabethan settlement came to be called Puritans. The Puritans agreed on the need to purify the Church of England of Catholicism, but splintered over a number of issues, in particular the correct form of governance. Of these dissenters, the most prominent were the Presbyterians and the Independents, or Congregationalists. The Presbyterians wished to replace the Church of England's episcopal polity, or church governance by bishops, with a presbyterian form of government, or one composed of governing assemblies.[11] The Independents, on the other hand, felt that the true polity of the Christian church was one in which each congregation governed itself.

---

[10] Edwin M. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 4.

The Puritans anticipated the reign of Scotland's James VI, thereafter James I of England, who ascended to the English throne after Elizabeth's death. Although Scotland had also recently experienced Catholic-Protestant conflict, the Protestant Church of Scotland had more closely adopted the worship, doctrine, and institutions of the Reformed tradition than had the Church of England. James's mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, was Catholic, but Protestant nobles seized power early in his life and raised him in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition. For a variety of reasons, James retained his allegiance to the Presbyterian Church of Scotland when he assumed the full power of the monarchy, and many Puritans, particularly Presbyterians, hoped for further reforms of the Church of England when he ascended to England's throne. James, however, rejected their demands for reform and enforced the High Church elements of the Elizabethan settlement, in large part because of the strength that form of Church government gave to the monarchy.

---

[11] William Lee Miller, 132-3; Gaustad, 3-5; 11-14.

During this period of persecution, many Puritans, especially Congregationalists, began to feel that they could no longer conscientiously conform to the hierarchy, ritual, and doctrine of the state church while waiting for the chance to reform it from within. These Separatists became one of the most persecuted of the Protestant religious groups, for in rejecting the Church, they also rejected the head of the Church—the king. The most famous of the Separatist groups, the Pilgrims, left England for Holland in 1607. Fearing the loss of their English culture, however, they subsequently moved to America in 1620. Because of Williams's later connection with the Baptist faith, it is important to note that other Separatists, who either never immigrated to Holland or who returned from it, soon established the first English Baptist churches.[12]

Williams was likely born in 1603, the year that James I assumed England's throne.[13] Williams later indicated his conversion to the more Reformed or Calvinist doctrines characteristic of most Puritan sects when he was about 10 years old, writing that, at that time, "the Father of Light and Mercies had touched my soul with a love to himself, to his only begotten and true Lord Jesus and to his Holy Scripture."[14] Several years after his conversion, under the patronage of the eminent jurist Sir Edward Coke,

---

[12] Gaustad, 14-17. John Smyth, who believed that the corruption of the Church of England invalidated the baptisms it performed, established the first English Baptist Church in 1609. The Baptists following him adopted a confession stipulating that the church consisted of the congregation of true believers, who entered it by declaring their faith and being baptized. They chose their leaders from among themselves, arguing that no one had spiritual authority over one another. Moreover, they argued for toleration and the separation of civil and ecclesiastical authority. Thomas Helwys and John Murton subsequently assumed leadership of the General Baptists, who were distinguished by the belief that Christ had redeemed each person. Calvinist or Particular Baptists formed in 1633, adopting the belief of baptism by immersion for believers and rejecting the belief that Christ's atonement extended to all humans.

[13] The records of Williams's birth were destroyed by the Great Fire of London in 1666.

[14] James Ernst, *Roger Williams: New England Firebrand* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), 7; Gaustad, 6.

Williams attended Charterhouse Grammar School and Pembroke College at Cambridge University. Many Anglican bishops with High Church sympathies, as well as many of their Puritan opponents, received their training at Pembroke, which "was a particular center of the religious thinking and arguing of the time."[15]

At Pembroke, Williams took part in the "religious and social protests of the Puritans and reformers."[16] Changing political conditions, however, soon made such protest even more dangerous. Charles I, who desired a hierarchy and ritual similar to that of Catholicism, assumed the throne in 1625. He found strong allies in High Church Anglicans like William Laud. Laud disagreed with the Puritans in more than church liturgy and organization, however. While most Puritans were ardent Calvinists, Laud supported Arminian doctrines.

Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch theologian who, although he studied under Calvin's successor, rejected many of Calvinism's doctrines as too severe. His followers, who called themselves Remonstrants but were called Arminians by their Calvinist antagonists, systematized their theology into five points of difference between themselves and the more strict adherents of Calvin's version of Reformed Christianity. Among other points, they disputed the doctrine of unconditional election, irresistible grace, and limited atonement. Thus, they left a greater role for the individual's will in his or her salvation. They believed that the individual indeed depends on Christ's grace for salvation, and can effect nothing without it, that person can still resist and even fall from his grace and salvation. In Holland, the soteriological differences between the Arminians and

---

[15] William Lee Miller, 134.

[16] Ernst, 31.

Calvinists were sufficient to cause heated disputes and, between 1618 and 1639, the state persecution of Arminians.

To Calvinists, Arminian doctrines seemed to be a slide away from the fundamental doctrines of the Reformation. When Laud and his High Church allies combined these doctrines with their liturgy and church organization, High Church Anglicanism seemed to be little more than a disguised Catholicism, or at least a major step toward it. Neither the High Church Anglicans nor the Puritans were advocates of religious liberty, especially at this time. With the support of Charles I, who sympathized with Laud as a High Church Anglican, Laud became Bishop of London in 1628 and Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. Laud used these positions, and other powers given him by Charles, to purge the church, including the universities, of Puritan doctrine and clergy. These clerics, however, initially found refuge as the private chaplains of powerful Puritan families. Thus, in 1629, Williams left Cambridge to be the chaplain for the family of Sir William Masham.

Williams did not long remain with the Mashams, however. Laud wanted to eliminate any trace of Puritanism, and he began to eliminate the chaplaincies under which the Puritan clergy had taken refuge. The increasing persecution soon led many Puritans, who nonetheless wished to remain part of the Anglican Church, to the conclusion reached by the Pilgrims a decade earlier. They began to hold meetings to organize the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It is likely that Williams attended one of these meetings in 1629, where he met John Winthrop, John Cotton, and Thomas Hooker, and where he was encouraged to serve as a pastor in the new colony.[17] John Winthrop and the first colonists left for Massachusetts in April 1630. Eight months later, Williams left with his wife, whom he met and married while living with the Mashams.

The Puritans in Boston, upon Williams's arrival, received him as a "godly minister" and offered him a job as chief minister of their congregation. By this time, however, Williams had become a Separatist. Discovering that the Boston congregation maintained communion with the Church of England, theoretically in New England and by attending Anglican services on trips home, Williams rejected the offer and accepted a position as assistant pastor in Salem.

As if his rejection of their offer, with the rejection's imputation against them of impurity and heresy, was not enough, Williams found other ways to aggravate the colonial leadership consolidating in Boston. Williams began to denounce their intermingling of civil and ecclesiastical functions and powers; he declared that the state should not require oaths to God in civil matters, as it violated men's consciences and blasphemed God, and that the state should only concern itself with civil matters. Furthermore, he argued that their titles to the land were false; the land belonged to the Indians, and the king did not have the right to grant it to the colonists until he or they purchased it from the Indians.[18]

Several relocations punctuated William's disputes with the leaders of the Bay colony. Salem served as the capital of both a previous colony and the Bay colony until Winthrop arrived and made Boston the new capital. Its church, also established prior to the arrival of the Bay Puritans, appealed to Williams because it established itself with a liberal charter based on separatist model like that of Plymouth.[19] Salem soon withdrew their offer under pressure from Boston. In August 1631, Williams and his wife left for the separatist community of Plymouth Colony. They remained in Plymouth for only two (crucial) years. While in Plymouth, Williams acquainted himself with the local Indians, learning their language and gaining their trust. The Separatists of Plymouth had fled from England to Holland to America to preserve their nationality and their beliefs. Despite their separatist past, members who traveled back to England nonetheless attended Anglican services while there, without reprimand from their church at home. Williams concluded that they too were not separate enough and, after some disagreements, returned to Salem in 1633.[20] Salem again received Williams, and, in 1635, the members of the Salem congregation made him their "official Teaching Elder."[21]

---

[17] Ernst presents Williams's attendance as fact, while Gaustad argues that it was probable but not conclusive.

[18] See William Lee Miller, 137; Gaustad, 31-45.

When he first arrived, Williams offended the Bay leadership with his views on their congregation's impurity and on the magistrate's right to enforce religious laws. By the time he became head pastor in Salem, Williams had disputed the official positions of civil and ecclesiastical leaders on a variety of issues, including the propriety of religious oaths in civil matters, the propriety of women wearing veils in church and in "public assemblies," the right of the king to give anyone title to the Indians' lands, and the propriety of maintaining St. George's cross in their flag.[22] The Massachusetts General

---

[19] Gaustad, 26.

[20] Indeed, within several decades, the principle difference between Puritan and Pilgrim was the decade one came to the Western Hemisphere, not any difference in religious principles. See Philbrick, 175.

[21] Gaustad, 35-36.

[22] Gaustad, 32-38. The use of St. George's cross in the English flag had been bestowed by the Pope.

Court finally resorted to a form of extortion in its efforts to get rid of Williams. Although the Puritans in Massachusetts were Congregationalists, meaning that each congregation was largely separate and self-governing, the General Court refused to grant Salem's petition for a tract of land until their congregation fired Williams. Williams then urged the Salem congregation to separate officially from the other Bay congregations, and in so doing alienated some of the members of even this more separatist-leaning congregation. Fearing that Williams would not only undermine their religious experiment, but also the authority necessary to survive in the wilderness, and knowing that the support for Williams had waned in Salem, the General Court finally decided to expel Williams.[23] In October 1635, they gave him 6 weeks to leave, during which time he was to be silent about the issues in contention.

Williams, tenacious as ever, continued to share his opinions with anyone that came to his home.[24] In January, the court decided to "enlarge" Williams immediately out of the colony. Before the captain of the vessel that was to take him to England could arrive at his home, Williams fled, having been forewarned of the sentence by friends, including Governor John Winthrop. Williams fled, despite the frigid New England winters of the "Little Ice Age," and spent the next 14 weeks traveling to friends among the Indians around Narragansett Bay. After trying one location on the east side of the bay, Williams moved to the west side, securing deeds to the land from sachems of the

---

Williams's position in the veil controversy demonstrates that he was neither the Enlightenment figure nor the Progressive democrat that some scholars, particularly Progressive historians, have made him out to be. While others in the colony argued that women should wear veils in church, he argued that they should wear them there as well as in public meetings.

[23] See Gastaud, 27; 38.

[24] Gaustad, 45.

Narragansett Indians, Canonicus and Miantonomo.[25] Providence Plantation, a haven for those seeking liberty of conscience, was established.

2.2.1 Proliferation of religious groups

Before closing this section, we should note that the battles over religion, rhetorical and literal, continued to rage in both England and New England. Moreover, although the High-Church Anglicans on the one hand and the Presbyterians and Independents on the other both began the Civil War intending to establish the national church after their own fashion, their conflict disrupted the state's regulation in religious matters and allowed an even greater proliferation of religious sects. By the time the Protectorate ended in 1659, the dissenting religious groups included the General and Particular Baptists, Levelers, Quakers, Seekers, Socinians, Unitarians, and, among the more radical sects, Diggers, Fifth Monarchy Men, and Ranters. In addition, there were Catholics and, generally under the Anglican umbrella, Erastians, Arminians, and Anglo-Catholics.

The Baptists found their beginnings in the Congregationalist/Independent and Separatist movements. While both believed in the principle of believer's baptism, or credobaptism, they differed in their soteriology. The General Baptists developed first, and originated with Separatists who were influenced by Arminian Calvinism while in Holland. In particular, they adopted the belief in a universal atonement, by which Christ offered salvation to all people. The Particular Baptists were more closely tied to the Congregationalists and thus rejected Arminianism in favor of a more rigid Calvinism.

---

[25] Gaustad, 48.

Alan Houston notes that scholars most frequently focus on the Leveler's political goals, particularly franchise expansion.[26] Additionally, they demanded an end to monopolies, equality before the law, parliamentary reform, and a written constitution that would guarantee, among other rights, the right to a trial by jury.[27] The Levelers, however, drew much of their support from the more radical churches in and around London. Accordingly, the religious goals of disestablishment and religious freedom were among their primary demands. Indeed, Houston argues that expanding the franchise, contrary to much of the scholarship on the Levelers, was not their most important goal. Thus, among the primary demands in their manifesto, the *Agreement of the People*, were calls for freedom of conscience and religious liberty.[28] Reformed doctrine held that Christ alone is the king of one's conscience, and like Williams, the Baptists, and many other dissenters steeped in Calvinism, the Levelers understood this to mean that the conscience cannot be forced, and that coercion only leads an individual to sin against his conscience. With their popular support in and around London, as well as their prominence in Cromwell's New Model Army, the Levelers were a potent force in creating the conditions under which a degree of religious liberty was to be enforced by Cromwell.[29]

---

[26] Alan Craig Houston, "Monopolizing Faith: The Levellers, Rights, and Religious Toleration," in *Early Modern Skepticism and the Origins of Toleration*, ed. Alan Levine (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999), 148.

[27] Houston, 147.

[28] Houston, 148-9.

[29] Although Cromwell and the Rump Parliament crushed the Leveler movement in late 1649 (Houston, 148), the Levelers were prominent among those calling for the king's execution and effecting Pride's Purge. Thus, although the Cromwell and the Rump Parliament crushed the Levelers, the Levelers played a significant role in creating that Parliament and thus setting into motion the events that would make Cromwell Lord Protector and thus establish a degree of religious freedom. See Andrew Murphy,

The Diggers, First Monarchists, Ranters, and Quakers were among the more radical sects of the period. These groups maintained such beliefs as Christian communitarianism, including land redistribution, and apocalyptism, believing that the Civil War was preparing the way for Christ's return and reign. Many of these radical sects also had a penchant for creating social disturbances—by interrupting the services of other churches, walking around naked, etc. The membership in the radical sects was fluid, such that tracing the exact origins of any religious group during the Interregnum is difficult. As the Restoration approached, the Quakers continued to draw members from the other dissenting groups, including the General Baptists and Seekers, but also began to distinguish themselves through their peace principle. The more established religions, however, saw them as identical to the other dissenting groups, whom they blamed for excesses and violence of the Interregnum. The established groups saw the peace principle as mere rhetoric, and the Quakers refusal to take oaths and their continuing practice of witnessing against wickedness by disturbing the peace did little to help their cause (even Roger Williams berated them for their public disturbances, particularly for going around naked when the prompted by the Spirit).

The term Seeker refers to those who took the Separatist, Puritan, and even Reformation spirit to the extreme. Those whom we identify as Seekers generally came to believe that the truth and/or authority of the early Christian church had been lost.

Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2001), 91-95.

Accordingly, they had to seek the truth or, as in the case of Williams and John Milton, wait until Christ fully restored it.[30]

The name Socianian properly applies to those who followed the teachings about Christ and Christianity of Faustus Socinus and his uncle Laelius Socinus. While their movement began in Italy and gained great strength in Poland during the 16th century, it spread, in part through persecution, to other parts of Europe in the early 17th century. Without reference to those who were truly followers of Socinus and the Racovian Catechism, the epithet of Socinianism was commonly thrown against anyone who did not believe in the Trinitarian creed or otherwise departed from orthodoxy.[31] Moreover, defenders of orthodoxy like John Edwards accused anyone who questioned orthodox doctrines, like that of the Trinity, as extra-scriptural as sliding down the slippery slope toward atheism.[32] Apart from Trinitarianism, people were accused of Socinianism for denying original sin, predestination, the atonement, the eternal punishment of the wicked, and Christ's existence before the virgin birth, as well as for setting reason above revelation and unburdening "the Christian conscience of the obligation of faith."[33]

Whether their power derives from numbers or from the support of the state, members of established and powerful churches frequently appropriate the title

---

[30] See John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in *Areopagitica and Other Poltiical Writings of John Milton*, ed. John Alvis (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1999), 38.

[31] The Racovian Cathechism was the statement of Socinian faith developed by the Socinians in Poland after Faustus Socinus's death.

[32] Victor Nuovo, "Introduction," in *John Locke and Christianity: Contemporary Responses to "The Reasonableness of Christianity,"* ed. Victor Nuovo (Briston, England: Thoemmes Press, 1997), xi.

[33] David Wootton, "John Locke: Socinian or natural law theorist?" in *Religion, secularization, and political thought: Thomas to J.S. Mill*, ed. James E. Crimmins (London: Routledge, 1990), 45; Nuovo, Introduction, xiii.

"orthodox." Meanwhile, they describe everyone else as heretics, pagans, the ungodly, the reprobate, etc. Furthermore, while nearly everyone develops names to distinguish those with whom they disagree, particularly when they are involved in struggles between members of the same sects or groups, the names that the orthodox have given to those they regard as heretics, names that frequently parody and belittle their doctrines, have stuck.[34] Thus, while many Christian dissenting groups have known themselves as Christians, the elect, the people of God, or Israel, the established churches have given them names like Anabaptists, Levelers, Puritans, and Quakers. In turn, because we share similar prejudices with those established churches, because we descend from them, or because we would find it difficult to analyze history if the only name we had for each of these groups was "the Christians," we have frequently adopted the names given these groups by their enemies. In studying the past, however, we should show care in not adopting the prejudices that frequently accompany those names, i.e. the belief that those groups are false believers and even hypocrites and dissemblers hiding a true atheism. Rather, many of the dissenting groups, including the Socinians, regarded themselves not only as believers in a god, but also as the true Christians.

The Socinians denied elements of the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, such as Christ's birth as a divine being and his consubstantiality with the God the Father, as well as the doctrines of original sin, predestination, and Christ's satisfaction.[35] Many of them did not, however, deny Christ's miraculous birth to a virgin, the divinity of his office, his resurrection and promise of a return, and his mission as a revelator.[36] Indeed, although historians and more orthodox Christians alike see Socinianism as reducing Christianity to a "simple, rational creed," their interpretation of Socinianism leads them to misunderstand one of the core beliefs of Socinianism.[37] The Socinians emphasized the use of reason in carefully studying scripture, and placed reason and their careful exegesis of scripture above tradition. They did not, however, place reason above revelation or "unburden the Christian conscience of the obligation of faith."[38]

---

[34] This statement relies on a particular meaning for heresy, one that refers to those who derive their belief from a common tradition with the orthodox, but who disagree with the orthodox in matters that the latter deem too fundamental for continued communion.

[35] See Nuovo, Introduction, xii; and Wootton, Socinian, 45.

As David Wootton writes, "Socinianism . . . hinged upon the claim that natural reason could not establish the immortality of the soul or the content of the law of nature; hence the necessity of Christ's teaching and of the resurrection."[39] Individual morality was a primary motivation for the Socininians, just as it had been for Erasmus, the Pietists, and many others intent on reforming Christianity, and Christ's resurrection contributed to this in demonstrating the existence of life after death and thus of eternal rewards. Moreover, although Socinians rejected the more orthodox view of Christ's atonement, they did not deny a role for Christ in human salvation. Indeed, there was, and continues to be, disagreement among Christians regarding the exact mechanisms of Christ's atonement, e.g. whether Christ actually suffered for each individual's sins. Christ's office was to offer "immortality, and with it God's grace, which would make obedience to the law easy, and which would also make sin, in those who both believed and sought to obey, forgivable. Thus, Socinians did not deny Christ or the need to have faith in Christ and his doctrines; rather, they wished to recover the correct doctrines and understandings of Christ to have the proper faith necessary for forgiveness and thus salvation.

---

[36] Nuovo, Introduction, xiii; and Wootton, Socinian, 45.

[37] Wootton, Socinian, 44.

[38] Nuovo, Introduction, xiii.

[39] Wootton, Socinian, 46.

Defining Unitarianism is even more difficult that defining Socinianism, both because of the historical development of the faith and because the term itself was an umbrella, along with terms like "deist" and "atheist," to describe anyone who departed from the concept of the Trinity as espoused by the Nicene and Athanasian creeds. In the latter sense, the term would have been used to describe Socinians, as well as people who believed that Christ was divine but not coeternal with God the Father and people who believed that Christ became divine through his office.[40] It would also have included religious groups that denied Christ's divinity but affirmed his role as a messenger or prophet. Moreover, in line with the historical development of the faith, it would have included those who affirm the belief in a divine power but little else from Christian theology.

Finally, although they worshipped in secret or disguised themselves within the Church of England, Roman Catholicism maintained a small presence in England. Indeed, although the Church of England officially rejected the Pope's authority and established the monarch as Christ's representative and the Church's leader, it retained much of Roman Catholic doctrine, polity, and liturgy, even after the Elizabethan Settlement. Several groups found common cause opposing the rigid Calvinism of those who wished to reform the Church of England's theology and even polity in the Reformed tradition. These groups included Erastians, Arminians, and Anglo-Catholics, as well as Roman

---

[40] The Arians and Isaac Newton are examples of the latter beliefs, respectively.

Catholics. Erastianism entered Anglican theology soon after the Church of England's split from Rome, partially through Thomas Hooker, one of Anglicanism's preeminent theologians. While Erastus merely believed that the sovereign had a responsibility to punish both civil and spiritual offenses, English Erastianism elaborated the doctrine of the sovereign's supremacy over the church.[41] It was a doctrine well-suited to the Church as it was set up to meet the requirements for Henry VIII's continued marriages and the consolidation of royal power under subsequent monarchs.

Moreover, many High-Church Anglicans believed that episcopalian polity was the true form of Christian church government, descending in apostolic succession from the early Church. This view was shared by both Roman Catholics within the Church, who hoped for reconciliation with Rome, and by Anglo-Catholics who pointed to a long tradition of Christianity in England, a tradition that they believed to have predated the rise of Rome's pretended authority over all of Christianity. Inasmuch as the English church participated in this early Christian church, which itself derived its authority directly from the missionary endeavors of the apostles and their successors, it was part of the Catholic or universal church, but not necessarily subject to Rome. Furthermore, many of these High-Church Anglicans, such as William Laud, adopted elements of Arminian theology to dispute the theology as well as the polity advocated by their more rigidly Calvinist opponents.[42]

While Williams came from a High-Church Anglican family, he rejected that tradition at an early age in favor of the Calvinist theology characteristic of most Puritans.

---

[41] Hobbes might be seen as one of the culminating thinkers of Erastianism in the English tradition.

[42] The English Arminians did not, however, follow Arminius's followers in the Netherlands, who called themselves Remonstrates, in generally advocating toleration.

During and subsequent to his time at Cambridge, he affiliated with the Congregationalist/Independent tradition that is generally known as Puritanism, especially in the United States. By the time he arrived in America, however, he had joined the more radical Puritan tradition, espousing Separatist ideals that put him at odds with the Puritans in Boston who were then consonant with the Independent/Congregationalism in England. Finally, by the time he returned to England to secure Rhode Island's charter and publish his works on religious liberty, he had briefly become a Particular Baptist and then a Seeker.

Moreover, by this time, the Independents in England had moved away from their alliance with the Presbyterians and toward a belief in toleration. In this way, the New England Puritans became somewhat divided from Independent thought during the Protectorate. Thus, a battle of publications ensued in England between Williams and John Cotton. Williams and others indicted Cotton and the New England Puritans with the English presses, describing their scriptural and Christian errors, as well as the horrors of persecution in the most graphic terms, to demonstrate that true Christians should be tolerant. With the changes in Independent thought, and thus the thought of those ruling England, toward toleration, John Cotton felt the need to defend himself and the Puritan "city on a hill," which was supposed to demonstrate to the world that the elect could establish a truly righteous nation, fulfilling the reformation to true Christianity initiated by the Luther and Calvin. The battle, in both England and the New World, was between rival versions of true Christianity, one that required a uniformly righteous nation and one that demanded religious liberty.

2.3 Arguments for religious liberty

Williams's understanding of Christian history is a critical to the rest of his thought. Like many other Protestants, including the Puritans, Williams believed that Christianity went astray. The purpose of the Reformation, of course, was to reform Christianity, to purify it of deviant doctrines and practices. Such a goal required an understanding of Christianity's errors and a vision of Christianity as it should be. Toleration was inherent to Williams's understanding of the Christianity of Christ and his apostles, and he ascribed the long history of Christian violence toward others to the un-Christian elements supposedly introduced by those succeeding the apostles. Williams presented his understanding of this history in his conflict with those who maintained persecution through what he regarded as the unholy alliance of religious and civil authority—Christendom.

2.3.1 The history of God's people as a nation in exile

2.3.1.1 Early Christianity and ancient Israel as a type of Christ

John Cotton and the New England Puritans were not Williams's only opponents in the debates about religious liberty. Williams did not publish his works in London merely because he could not get them published in Boston. Except for *George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrowes*, Williams published all of his principal works during trips he made to London between 1643 and 1644 and between 1652 and 1654.[43] The works he published during these trips joined the considerable debates underway at the time about the proper nature of the church and its relation to the state. Having deposed the king and the ecclesiastical hierarchy the king sustained, Parliament and its agents vociferously debated whether the national church should be congregational or Presbyterian. Williams responded with *Queries of Highest Consideration* and *the Bloudy Tenent*, telling both parties that they were mistaken, that there should be no national church. Parliament had *the Bloudy Tenent* publicly burned by the hangman, and, responding to his and other works, restored the licensing act and its censorship, which provoked John Milton to write the *Areopagitica*. Furthermore, Williams still considered himself English strategically and culturally. The power of England, whether exercised by king, Parliament, or Lord Protector, was an important restraint on the neighboring colonies, which would have gladly consumed Rhode Island and its religious liberty in their thirst for land and their desire to eliminate such an example of social and religious deviance. Moreover, the events in New England were for Williams merely part of England's long history of religious persecution. He, however, hoped that England could overcome this history and become an example of religious liberty.[44]

---

[43] Williams published *George Fox* in Boston. While the American Puritans disliked his works on religious liberty, they did not mind a work opposing the theology of the Quakers, several of whom they had executed in preceding years. Williams, of course, gave them sanctuary in Rhode Island, but felt it was his duty to witness against their false beliefs.

Those who defended religious liberty and those who advocated the use of civil power in religious affairs both sought scriptural warrant for their positions. Perhaps not surprisingly, they disagreed about the meaning of corresponding Biblical passages. One place this conflict played out was on the question of Israel's national church. Both Williams and the Massachusetts Puritans used a method of scriptural interpretation known as typological exegesis to explain the relation of church and state in ancient Israel.

---

[44] BT, 9; YMB, 10-11.

According to this method, prior persons and events become symbols or types pointing to persons or events that will follow, which are called antitypes, and those types achieve their true meaning only when understood in relation to the antitypes in which they are fulfilled.[45] The Puritans in Massachusetts saw themselves as the antitypes fulfilling the national church of ancient Israel.[46] Their mission in the New World was to become God's new chosen people.[47]

Williams had to confront the self-understanding of the Massachusetts Puritans as God's chosen people, who saw themselves as fulfilling the Old Testament type of a national covenant and church. Williams argues to the contrary that Christ, not the Bay Colony, was the true antitype of Israel's kings, and that the Puritans ignore Christ and his mission when they make themselves the antitypes. Moreover, he presents Christ and the members of the early Christian church as God's new chosen people, and thus the example that the elect should follow subsequent to Christ's Incarnation. Williams argues that persecution, including the conjunction of civil and ecclesiastical power generally necessary to persecution, violates the teachings and examples of Christ and his disciples. Thus, he feels that true Christians should not persecute others.

---

[45] James P. Byrd, Jr., *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution, and the Bible* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 38.

[46] There has been substantial disagreement in the history of the scholarship on Williams and the Puritans regarding typological exegesis. Scholars, particularly Perry Miller, up through the mid-twentieth century saw the typological exegesis in Williams's writings, but not in those of the Puritans. Later scholars, beginning with Sacvan Bercovitch, argued that typological exegesis was a dominant form of interpretation in the thought of all Puritans, not just that of Williams. According to James Byrd, this form of interpretation was important to Williams and the Massachusetts Puritans, but it was accompanied by other forms of interpretation. For more on these disputes, see Byrd, 36-47.

[47] To become this chosen people, the Puritans believed that they had to govern every aspect of their lives by scriptural example. Indeed, Byrd notes that, according to Williams Perkins, acting without scriptural example for any action was sinful (50). Accordingly, "dress, social manners, speech, pleasures, and duties were minutely regulated in accord to the Will of God revealed in Scripture" (Ernst, 89). Remembering that their goal was to become God's chosen people, a people who could accept the covenant that England and the rest of Europe was no longer worthy to maintain, it is understandable that the New England Puritans would make particular recourse to the Old Testament (Byrd, 53). Accordingly, James Ernst argues that, for the Puritans, the "state, civil laws, Sabbath, rules of conduct, justice, and equity in life and thought must derive sanctions from the Old Testament in which . . . God had revealed for all time in its entirety all true religion, a revelation absolute and final" (Ernst, 89). While Ernst perhaps over-exaggerates the importance of the Old Testament, it was still very important to them.

Throughout his works, Williams attacked the Puritans' use of the Old Testament as an affront to Christ. He agreed that the kings of Judah and Israel had a duty to establish the church and sustain the spirituality of God's people. This included using civil power to enforce God's commandments in spiritual matters, what Williams and his contemporaries refer to as the "first table," in reference to the first half of the Ten Commandments, as well as those commandments that deal with more temporal or civil concerns.[48] Moreover, he agreed that, after Saul, the Lord "appointed the government of Israel" in a "Covenant of Succession" of kings. Indeed, both Williams and the New England Puritans agreed that Israel, including her kings and national church, was a type or model of things to come. They differed, however, in the antitypes to these historical precedents, and thus characterized God's people in very different ways.

While the Puritans saw themselves as the antitype to Israel, with her kings and church, Williams's writings focus on the kings of Israel, which he portrays as types of Christ. The kings succeeding Saul were to follow the pattern and precedent of Christ that he established in David. Thus, Christ is Israel's antitype, and everything about Israel, her kings, and her national church point toward Christ, and we can only understand them properly when we see them in relation to Christ. Thus, after Christ's incarnation, we cannot properly follow Israel's example except as it is understood through Christ.

---

[48] BT, 239.

Moreover, if we do follow Israel's unmediated example, we will defy God's will. In this way, Williams argues, we reject Christ and treat him as if he had never existed.

Consequently, Williams chastises the New England Puritans for rejecting Christ when they see themselves and their community as Israel reborn. For example, in *the Bloudy Tenent*, Williams declares that the New England Puritans are constructing "a *strange Model* of a Church and Commonwealth after the Mosaical and Jewish pattern."[49] While the pattern was valid prior to Christ, inasmuch as it pointed toward Christ and his mission, his mission fulfilled the law and ended its requirements. Thus, Williams writes that Christ "fulfilled the former types, and dissolved the National state of the Church, and established a more Spiritual way of worship all the World over, and appointed a Spiritual government and governors."[50] Christ's coming thus abolished "the shadows of that ceremonial and typical Land of Canaan," and the New England Puritans err in attempting to reestablish Israel.[51] Anyone who wishes to be part of God's people after Christ's incarnation must instead follow the example of Christ and his followers, heeding the Old Testament types only as they are realized in the teachings and examples of Christ and his followers. Thus, by following Israel's pattern, Williams concludes that the New England Puritans deny "Jesus yet to have seen the Earth."[52]

---

[49] BT, 221. Emphasis added. Williams refers here to both the system or model of government the Massachusetts Puritans set up, as well as the explanation and defense of this system created by a group of their ministers, which they called the "Modell of Church and Civil Power" (Byrd, 58). In quoting Williams, I have substituted s for the s stylized as f. At times, almost every noun is italicized in the original. I have eliminated most of this.

[50] BT, 239. In BT, 131, Williams declares that the Jews, after being God's chosen people, finally came to reject Christ and his servants. Accordingly, as they would no longer respond to his calls, "the Lord cast them out of his sight, destroyed that national church, and established the Christian church."

[51] YMB, 494.

[52] BT, 221. He states that it "wakens Moses from his unknown Grave."

The manner of anointing Israel's kings and priests provides another important example of typological exegesis in Williams's writings. An argument for the interdependence of church and state might be seen in the prophets anointing, and sometimes choosing, those who were to be Israel's kings. If the New England Puritans were indeed the new Israel, and if its leaders had all of the powers, rights, and responsibilities of the ancient kings whose type they were fulfilling, then they had the power and duty to maintain a national church, but also to ensure that the entire state remained pure as the public manifestation of that church.

Williams, however, argues that the anointing of Israel's kings by her prophets shows in fact the opposite—that ecclesiastical and civil power must be separate. To show us this, Williams examines the meaning of the word Christ and the significance of Christ's incarnation. Williams explains that the Greek and Hebrew words for Christ, respectively χρίστος and םשיאק, mean that Christ "was and [is] the Anointed of god."[53] Thus, when the kings were anointed as rulers over Israel, or God's chosen people, they merely prefigured Christ, who, as the "Anointed of god," is king of the elect—God's chosen people in all times. Consequently, to mix civil and ecclesiastical powers after Christ's incarnation is to ignore Christ as the anointed king over the elect in all nations, not just one.[54]

---

[53] Christenings, 33. Williams's education from 1621 to 1624 at Charterhouse Grammar was in Greek and Latin grammar (Gaustad, 5). While the students at Pembroke College were taught in Latin, they were "encouraged to converse in Greek and Hebrew" (Ernst, 31). William Lee Miller notes that Williams "was an able, passionate student," and demonstrated a talent for the acquisition of languages (134). He later demonstrated this talent in his relations with the American Indians, as well as when he acted as Milton's tutor in Dutch.

[54] This does not mean that the anointing of Israel's kings has no personal value for Christ's followers. Rather, Williams argues that it has even more significance for God's people once they used Christ to mediate the concept. In becoming Christ's followers, they took upon themselves his title as Christians, or

Williams thus argues that, after Christ, we cannot use Israel's kings to justify the state's use of its powers to control its people's religion. Furthermore, Williams denies that we can use Israel's example to justify the creation of a nation of the elect, such as the city on the hill of the New England Puritans. For Williams, the kingdom of Israel ceases to have significance for civil institutions; after Christ's ministry, Christ's kingdom exists only as a spiritual entity. This is true for both doctrinal and practical reasons.

Williams understands a nation to be a people formed according to ethnic, linguistic, or religious characteristics. He agrees with his antagonists that, prior to Christ, states could be formed along national lines, including religious. Thus, the nations were divided politically between God's people and all others, between the Jews, the "only People and Nation of God," and the heathen.[55]

Williams argues that Christ's ministry and the passage of time disrupted this typology. The distinction between God's people and the heathen ceases to correspond to that between Israel's descendants and all the other nations of the earth.[56] Christ

---

χριστιαυοι. Accordingly, they had to follow "the anointed one in all his Offices" and "partake of his anointings" (Christenings, 33). Aaron's anointing as a priest acts as a type for the elect in their duty to partake of Christ's "anointings." Just as the ordinance of anointing covered all of Aaron's garment, so must everyone in the community of believers, who represent Christ's garment, be anointed so that Christ's anointing "[descends] to the skirt of his garments." Furthermore, Williams uses the example of Aaron's anointing to further substantiate his argument, which we will address later, about the absence of Christ's authority through the sentence of death decreed for those who would take them without authorization.

[55] Christenings, 32. Although his contemporaries derided the natives of America as heathens—frequently regarding them as uncivilized, pagan barbarians, Williams declares that this use of the term is incorrect. The term has nothing to do with how civilized a people is, referring only to one's status as one of the elect.

Moreover, Williams argues that it is incorrect to malign the American Indians as the heathen. That is, they are no more heathen than most Europeans, and in some ways much less. The Europeans, a category in which Williams includes all the Europeans in America, are equally impure in their religion, despite their Christian façade. Furthermore, Williams regards the American Indians as frequently more humane, and thus more civilized, than the Europeans.

[56] BT, 323-4; Christenings, 32-3. In Hireling, 157, Williams writes, "the Lord Jesus hath broken down the Wall of Division between the Jews and the rest and the Nations of the World, and sent forth his Ministers . .

established a "more Spiritual way of worship;" he sent his messengers to seek the faithful in all the nations, among which they were scattered and where they would continue to sojourn.[57] Thus, those that "fear God in every Nation" comprise a "New-born Israel" without geographical boundaries, and, inasmuch as these elect are scattered among all nations, they form a people and a kingdom only in a spiritual sense.[58]

Moreover, Williams argues that all contemporary nations fall short of the conditions necessary to become a covenant people like ancient Israel. Israel was a nation established through covenants that God made with their ancestors. Williams emphasizes the difference between a covenant as a contract between two parties and an oath made by one party to another. The former requires the affirmation or ratification of each party, whereas the latter consists of a promise made only by one. As Locke does nearly half a century later, Williams denies that any contemporary community could point to scriptural evidence that God had ratified a covenant with it. In his style of making statements through questions, Williams declares, "But where hath the God of Heaven in the Gospel

---

. unto all Nations, to bring in (by the Gospel's Invitation) Proselytes, Converts, Disciples, such as should be Eternally saved, to begin that heavenly and Eternal Communion in Heaven, here in an holy and visible Worship on the Earth."

[57] BT, 239.

[58] BT, 324. Williams references Acts 10:35. Moreover, even the terms associated with Israel faced redefinition. The Jews would no longer be those descended from Jacob. The "true Jews" became those that worship Christ, whether they are ethnically or culturally heathen or Jew, civilized or uncivilized (Christenings, 32). On the other hand, those who reject Christ, even those who are the "natural Jews," become the "Heathens, Nations, or Gentiles."

Building on the belief that the elect are scattered among all the world's nations, Williams gives an additional, although weaker argument that a national church is impossible. Williams defines a nation as a group of people bound together by a common language, culture, or ancestry, e.g. Israel as a people bound together by the covenants made to their ancestors. Williams argues, though, that the nations of his time were too much of a "mixed seed" to legitimately claim to be the same type of nation as Israel (BT, 323). Accordingly, no nation of his time could legitimately claim that Israel's example would justify their establishing a national church. This argument, of course depends on such a strict notion of a nation or a community that it loses much of its strength.

separated whole Nations or Kingdoms (English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, &c) as a peculiar people and Antitype of the people of Israel? Yea where the least footing in all the Scripture for a National Church after Christ's coming?"[59]

Williams looks to the early Christian church to contest further the notion that there is any evidence, scriptural or otherwise, for a Christian national church. Williams rejects the belief that Christ established an incomplete, infant church, one that blossomed through the efforts of his later servants. Rather, he believes that Christ established a complete organization, one characterized by two types of servants. To watch over those who were already members of the church, there were teachers and pastors.[60] To bring new members into the church, Christ ordained apostles, or messengers. The latter servants were necessary, according to Williams, because a person must receive an invitation from someone with Christ's authority to join his people.[61] Thus, the ecclesiastical authorities of the early church comprised the teachers and pastors who were to care for the flock, and the messengers, or apostles, who were to take Christ's gospel to all nations.

Williams believes that Christ also established the means by which these servants, particularly the apostles, were to carry out their callings. Referencing Christ's parable of the sower, Williams declares that the apostles were to "preach Christ Jesus to the three sorts of bad ground, to labor to turn them into good ground."[62] They were to transform people's souls into good ground, in which the seeds of the gospel could take root and grow, through "meek and peaceable Invitations and persuasions of [Christ's] peaceable" wisdom.[63] By preaching the word, the Spirit could work upon the hearts of those to whom the apostles preached, calling them and allowing them through the Spirit to become God's new creation.[64] Thus, Williams believes that Christ established his church with the means necessary to propagate and preserve it.

---

[59] BT, 324.

[60] YMB, 132.

[61] BT, 293-4. Williams here limits the doctrine that "two or three Godly persons may join themselves together, make officers, send them forth to preach, to convert, baptize, and gather New Churches" (293). Those two or three must first be invited, baptized, and organized by someone who has been sent by God, with his authority. The scriptures cannot take the place of the messengers sent by God.

Given his belief that the early Christian church was complete organizationally, representing everything that characterizes the Christ's true church, Williams argues that any evidence for a national church should be readily apparent at its inception. Had Christ intended the magistrate to maintain the church, Christ would have established this authority from the beginning.[65] If civil officers were to punish those who offended in spiritual matters, we should see evidence of structure to enforce and punish God's laws in the teachings of Christ and his apostles. For example, if Christ had created a "holy and Christian Magistrate" to enforce his religion, we would also read of "holy Constables, holy Sergeants, holy Prisons, holy Stocks, holy Whipping Posts, holy Gibbets, and holy

---

[62] YMB, 133. See Matthew 13: 3-9, 18-23; Mark 4: 3-9, 14-20; and Luke 8: 4-8, 11-15. In this parable, the sower sowed seed onto four types of ground: the way side, stony places, among thorns, and good ground. Birds ate the seeds in the first case, the sun scorched and killed the plants springing from the seeds in the second, and weeds/thorns grew up around and choked the plants spring from the seeds in the third. Only in the final case, that of the good ground, did the seeds bear fruit. Christ subsequently explains that the first case regards those people who disregard Christ's word when they hear it. The second case deals with those who receive Christ, but abandon him when they are persecuted or are offended. In the third case, the individuals hear the word, but lose it among the cares of the world. The final case, regarding the person who "received seed into the good ground," regards the person who hears and understands the word, which subsequently bears great fruit.

[63] YMB, 494.

[64] Christenings, 39. See also Ernst, 483.

[65] BT, 239.

Tyburnes."[66] These, "together also with holy Hangmen," would have to exist as the "Spiritual Instruments and Officers of Christ Jesus, for the Executions of his holy punishments upon Apostates, Heretics, Blasphemers, Idolaters, Seducers, &c." That we have no record of such authorities or institutions indicates to Williams that Christ never gave spiritual authority to civil leaders.

Although we lack any record of Christ ordaining officers of the state with authority to use civil power in religious matters, we do have records about the characters of that era's civil authorities. Given his understanding of the Roman emperors, Williams cannot believe that Christ would have given them power over his church. Williams likens granting such authority to giving one's children and sheep to wolves, one's wife to adulterers, and one's jewels to thieves and robbers.[67] Indeed, in giving spiritual authority to civil rulers, Christ would have turned his church over to those trying to destroy it—to those who executed him and many of his followers.

Williams believes that it would be absurd for Christ to have given spiritual authority to wicked Roman officials. Ignoring the incompatibility that he sees between the wickedness of Roman rulers and the ability to exercise God's spiritual authority, Williams sees an even greater problem in the calling of the Apostles. In making civil rulers the ultimate authorities in spiritual matters, the Apostles and their callings would be superfluous and superseded. Williams declares that the Apostles "were called the foundation of the Church" and the "ordinary Officers of the Church," and that they were

---

[66] YMB, 349.

[67] BT, 243.

"appointed to be the Shepherd or Keepers of the Flock."[68] Thus, "[if] the Roman Emperors were [the] Keepers" of the Church, then the Apostles would have been redundant, or at least inferior. Nevertheless, if Christ had replaced the Apostles with civil magistrates as the church's keepers, Williams expects to find records of the Apostles seeking the help and assistance of the magistrates.[69] Williams asserts that we have no record of the apostles appealing to the magistrates in spiritual matters because they would have overthrown their "own Apostleship and Power given [them] by Christ Jesus in Spiritual things," in which they were to be "above the highest Kings or Emperors of the world."[70]

Finally, Williams does not merely rely on logical contradictions to support his thesis that civil magistrates lack ecclesiastical power. He declares that, "since the coming of the King of Israel, the Lord Jesus," "God's people . . . have openly and constantly professed, that no Civil Magistrate, no King nor Caesar have any power over the Souls or Consciences of their Subjects."[71] Rather, "Kings and Kaisers are bound to subject their own souls to the Ministry and Church, the Power and Government of this Lord Jesus, the King of Kings." Using phrases like king of kings, Williams displays his usual rhetorical flair to demonstrate the supremacy of Christ and his servants in spiritual matters. Williams does not cite any writing of the early, Apostolic church—the church before its supposed loss of authority and truth—to prove that the early Christians denied the spiritual authority of civil rulers. He sees proof for this claim, though, in the charge that, in Christ, they affirmed a king other than Caesar.[72] Inasmuch as this charge referred to a king exercising civil power and authority, Williams declares that it was false. Williams argues that Christ rejected all civil authority whenever others urged him to take it. As the charge regards spiritual matters, however, Williams argues that it is true that Christ's followers affirmed a king other than Caesar. Indeed, Williams asserts that "the sum of all true preaching of the Gospel or glad news" is that "God anointed Jesus to be the sole King and Governor of all the Israel of God in spiritual and soul causes."[73]

---

[68] BT, 240.

[69] BT, 243.

[70] BT, 244. Williams anticipates that those advocating civil force in religious affairs would respond with the example of Paul. Williams, however, argues that when Paul called on Caesar, he did not do so for aid in deciding a religious matter, but for protection from the "civil violence and murder which the Jews intended against him." For a detailed analysis of Williams's use of Paul, see Byrd, 126-153.

[71] BT, 76.

2.3.1.2 Scriptural justifications for persecution and exemplary exegesis

We have seen, in his recapitulation of the Apostolic era, Williams denied that Christ granted any authority or responsibility to civil magistrates to act in spiritual matters. Moreover, we have seen that, inasmuch as Christ is the only lens through which we may correctly perceive the Old Testament, Williams denies that the Old Testament sustains the legitimacy of the Puritan systems in New England. Does this mean, however, that the Old Testament lacks any relevance beyond the insight it gives us into Christ's mission? Can we use it in any way as a guide in living our lives? Moreover, if the marriage of civil and ecclesiastical authority defies Christ's teachings, how did Christians come to wed the two? For Williams, the answers to these questions are interrelated.

---

[72] Williams cites Acts 17:7. Acts 17:5-7 states, "But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus."

[73] BT, 77. Williams notes, however, that Christ did not "manage" this power in "His own Person," but delegated it "Ministerially" to messengers "sent forth to preach and baptize" those who accepted what they preached.

As William Byrd notes, Williams divides the stories of the Old Testament into two categories.[74] The first category encompasses those occasions during which Israel had kings and a national church. As seen above, Williams denies that this category holds any value as an example for contemporary behavior, unless we use Christ to mediate its meaning. Williams, however, reminds his readers that foreign kings, who were not part of God's covenant with Israel, frequently ruled and sometimes oppressed the Israelites. Moreover, he argues that, since Christ, God's people have been ruled by those who more closely resemble the pagans who governed Israel during its periods of exile than the kings who worshipped Israel's God. Finally, Williams argues that the Old Testament prophets properly praised the legitimate uses of civil power by pagan rulers. Accordingly, Williams declares that pagans whom the Old Testament prophets singled out for praise are the best examples for the legitimate use of civil power in the post-Apostolic era.

Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius, and, particularly, Artaxerxes were important to Williams as examples. They showed mercy to God's people, giving them varying degrees of religious liberty. Their mercy, according to Williams, frequently resulted from their fear of God's wrath and the "fits and pangs" "of an affrighted Conscience" rather than from principle or any particular allegiance to Israel's God.[75] Their status as idolaters who rejected Israel's God, however, was important to Williams in establishing them as legitimate examples for the use of civil authority in the post-apostolic world. As they were idolaters, and accordingly could not be part of God's covenant with Israel, Williams contends that we can neither regard them as a type of Christ nor claim that they could possibly have held God's authority in spiritual matters. Thus, we would err in using anything they did in spiritual matters to justify the state's involvement in religion.[76]

---

[74] See Byrd, 57-71, for a more complete discussion of Williams's exemplary exegesis of Old Testament rulers.

[75] Examiner, 227; BT, 266.

While Israel's kings could concretely point to their ordination to civil and spiritual authority through God's prophets, Williams asserts that both the ancient pagan kings and contemporary rulers have authority only in civil matters. The shared conditions between the ancient pagan kings and contemporary rulers, however, means that the ancient pagan kings are better examples than Israel's kings regarding the proper extent and use of civil power. That is, inasmuch as those ancient kings properly exercised their civil power, they provide valuable examples to contemporary rulers, particularly in the relationship between church and state. Thus, Williams claims that it was appropriate when the prophet Ezra praised God for inspiring Artaxerxes, who had released Israel from bondage and its return to Palestine.[77] Moreover, Williams emphasizes the restraint in Artaxerxes's actions. Artaxerxes neither prohibited worship other than that of his religion nor prescribed the worship of Israel's God. Indeed, he maintained his own form of worship, which the Israelites, as well as Williams and his contemporaries, considered idolatrous. Artaxerxes was praiseworthy, though, because he permitted freedom of worship. Indeed, Williams claims that we should praise God whenever rulers act as Artaxerxes did, providing for what Williams variously calls soul freedom or liberty of conscience.[78]

---

[76] This interest was partially due to the Puritans' use of Artaxerxes to justify the state's involvement in religious matters. They claimed that Artaxerxes enforced the worship of Israel's God, and that his example was one of those that they should follow. In addition to the reasons that follow, which Williams gave to show that Artaxerxes' example indeed supported the practice of toleration, Williams also argued that Artaxerxes was an idolatrous king, foreign to God's covenant, who thus lacked any authority from God to enforce his covenant (Examiner, 227).

[77] BT, 266. Williams notes that Artaxerxes also gave them special favors to aid the Israelites' return to Palestine and allowed them to enforce their national religion; the enforcement was legitimate, Williams claims, because God had already established the national church, which was to stand until Christ's incarnation. Moreover, Williams claims that the Israelites, not Artaxerxes' civil authorities, enforced the national religion.

Nevertheless, a Christian might believe that Constantine, in making Christianity the state religion, freed God's people from their exile and restored the national covenant. Williams, however, sees the union of civil and ecclesiastical authority initiated by Constantine as a corruption of Christianity. To distinguish this union of state and Christianity from what he understands to be Christ's true church, Williams appropriates the term "Christendom" to describe the former. For Williams, Constantine lacked the authority to restore the national covenant. Thus, Christendom did not end the exile of God's people. Rather, Christendom was merely another state religion, created by powerful individuals to establish themselves and their beliefs in the place of God. Accordingly, Williams believes that Christendom was merely a new form of state-imposed idolatry, one whose proponents perpetuated the long history of persecution against God's true followers.

Williams attributes the rise of Christendom to two sources, the greed and ambition of the wicked, including those cloaking themselves with a false Christian piety, and the good intentions of mistaken people. Of the latter, Williams writes, "Doubtless those holy men, Emperors and Bishops, intended and aimed right, to exalt Christ," but they did not "[attend] to the Command of Christ Jesus, to permit the Tares to grow in the field of the World."[79] Williams here refers to the New Testament parable of the wheat and the tares. In this parable, after the owner of a field sowed seeds of wheat, his enemies secretly sowed seeds of a weed—tares—among the good seed.[80] After the plants had grown and begun to show fruit, the owner's servants discovered the tares and asked him whether they should remove them. The owner, warning the servants that uprooting the tares would also harm the tender wheat, instructed them to leave the tares alone until the harvest. At that time, he would instruct the reapers to gather and burn the tares and then bring the wheat into the barn.

---

[78] Examiner, 227; BT, 267.

While the Reformed tradition deeply influenced Williams, he reinterprets this parable in opposition to that tradition's predominant use of the parable in justifying persecution. He believes that a literal interpretation of the parable, one using Christ's explanation of its meaning, provides a powerful defense of toleration. Calvin's interpretation sees the field as the church and the servants as ecclesiastical rather than civil leaders.[81] Accordingly, the command that the servants leave the tares alone represents a prescription to tolerate hypocrisy and even immorality within the church. The church, until Christ's return, would always include those who act immorally. Our revulsion to their sin neither justifies our leaving the church nor our convulsing the church in our zeal to tear it out.[82]

---

[79] BT, 184.

[80] Matthew 13: 24-30.

[81] For this discussion of the parable of the wheat and the tares, I am indebted to William Byrd, 92-95.

[82] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vol. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV.i.13, available at http://pastmasters2000.nlx.com/; accessed 21 June 2006.

While this caution protects immorality, it does not protect heresy according to Calvin. A person harms only himself with his moral failings, but heresy threatens the church. Later interpreters who persecuted heresy would incorporate the distinction between heresy and immorality into their interpretation of the parable using the identities of the tares and the wheat, arguing that the tares represented weeds hard to distinguish from the wheat, and thus dangerous to pluck out. When a weed was easily distinguished, as in the case of those who visibly separated themselves from true belief through heresy, it could be plucked out without worry. Calvin, however, simply distinguished between the two using the identities of the field and of the servants. Since the field represents the church rather than the world and the servants represent ecclesiastical leaders rather than civil magistrates, according to Calvin, the parable does not restrain the actions of those magistrates, particularly in their dealings with those who have placed themselves outside of the church through heresy. Indeed, Calvin argues that heretical beliefs are so dangerous that Christ could not possibly have meant the parable to call for their preservation, and that the great danger they pose to others justifies and calls for their elimination.

English Separatists such as John Barrow, however, disputed Calvin's identification of the field with the church.[83] Barrow objected to two elements of Calvin's interpretation: Calvin either rejected or treated as figurative Christ's explanation that the field represents the world; Calvin argued that we should tolerate the wicked within the church. Having accepted Christ's declaration that the field represents the world, the Separatists could not agree with Calvin's identification of the servants in the field with ecclesiastical authorities. Rather, if the field represents the world, they argued that the servants must represent civil magistrates, those with power to act in the world. Accordingly, the parable's teachings apply to the magistrates as a restriction against persecuting sinners.

---

[83] Byrd, 99-104.

The Separatists did not move far from Calvin's position on persecution, however. Their ultimate concern was the purity of the church, not the status of sinners in the world. As Separatists, they were primarily concerned with the church's purity. Indeed, their name derives from the decision to separate from their mother churches after concluding that reforms in the latter were not readily forthcoming. Thus, they did not reinterpret the parable with an eye to expanding the domain of toleration, but to explain why the parable does not forbid them from leaving the established churches and why they are allowed to strictly police the purity of their members. Moreover, despite the persecution they suffered and the voluntarism implied in their own separation, the Separatists did not object to the state taking a role within the church. Indeed, they believed that passages in the Bible, other than the parable we have been exploring, enjoin magistrate's assistance in purifying the church and those within it.

Thus, the parable of the wheat and the tares had a history of interpretive significance for the relationship between church and state long before the debates between Williams and the New England Puritans. In explaining the relationship between church and state, John Cotton adopted Calvin's interpretation of the parable.[84] He saw the field as Christ's work—the church, and believed that the owner commands his servants to leave the tares alone because the tares so closely resemble the wheat that the servants would find it hard to distinguish the two. Cotton concluded that the tares represent only the wicked persons and wrong doctrines that are hard to distinguish from the righteous and the truth. Since the tares thus represent hypocrites and doctrines that differ only in subtle ways from orthodox beliefs, Cotton argued that the parable does not protect persons and doctrines that openly depart from orthodoxy, as the latter are weeds that we can easily distinguish from the wheat. Rather, he concluded that we have a duty to weed out such persons and doctrines.

---

[84] Byrd, 104-110.

Roger Williams, however, believes that a proper interpretation of the parable, a literal reading that makes use of Christ's explications of the parable's different elements, argues against persecution.[85] Williams argues that the field represents the world and not the church. Moreover, Williams points out that the servants first distinguish the tares among the wheat and advise their master of the tares' presence. Accordingly, if the servants so quickly and easily recognize the tares, Cotton and Calvin are mistaken in arguing that it is difficult to distinguish the tares, and the people they represent, from the wheat. The tares, according to Williams, are those who act immorally and who openly reject the church's teachings, not the hypocrites who disguise themselves as the faithful. Thus, if the tares represent even the worst forms of wickedness, Williams argues that the parable proscribes persecution.

The failure of sincere Christians to heed these distinctions and eschew persecution results from a lack of faith. Williams asserts that many Christians run to the

---

[85] After giving the parable, Christ explained that he was the sower, the field was the world, the good seed were the "children of the kingdom," the tares were the "children of the wicked one," the enemy was the devil, the harvest was "the end of the world," and the reapers were angels (Matthew 13:36-43). For Williams's references to the parable, see BT, 97-119; BT, 184-5; YMB, 114-155. For a succinct description of Williams's interpretation, see Byrd, 110-121.

"civil sword" because they lack confidence in the "spiritual sword;" they combine church and state, using the state's coercive power in religious matters, because they doubt the power of preaching their beliefs.[86] Williams admits, however, that some persecutors "intended and aimed right" in their desire to "exalt Christ."[87] These magistrates and ecclesiastical leaders, despite their good intentions, nonetheless fail to obey Christ's instructions to leave the tares alone.[88] Their failure to do so, according to Williams, has several consequences.

Williams shares the Separatist belief that it is important to maintain the purity of Christ's church. Persecution, however, induces those who have not felt God's call to dissemble and join the community of believers even when they cannot believe. Christians should not persecute, then, because persecution drives immorality into the church and conceals it. Furthermore, persecution harms God's people. In the parable, Christ commands his servants to leave the tares alone because plucking them would also harm the wheat. Similarly, Williams asserts that, while they may do so unintentionally, persecutors inevitably persecute the "good wheat," or God's people, when they confuse the "Garden of the Church" with the "Field of the World." Moreover, the "zealous mistakes" of persecutors harm God's people because they ignite and inflame "commotions and combustions about religion;" in these combustions, many types of people are killed, including "thousands of [God's] precious stalks."[89]

---

[86] YMB, 219; see also YMB, 133.

[87] BT, 184.

[88] BT, 184.

[89] BT, 184-5.

While Williams concedes that some persecutors, while mistaken, nonetheless "intended and aimed right," he feels that many other persecutors act on far less honorable motives. He asserts that avarice and the desires for honor and dominion lead both civil and ecclesiastical leaders to combine church and state. Anticipating Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, Williams argues that the ambitious created the world's conceptions of justice and religion and set them up as the pillars of the state to establish and maintain their power.[90] While Williams excuses the power-hungry for using justice in this way, he condemns such a use of religion. He feels that the former is justified because no state can survive without a conception of justice. He objects to the state's use of and involvement in religion, however, because it is counterproductive. The amalgamation of church and state is a mutually harmful relationship. Williams believes that, when the state gets involved in religion, it invariably persecutes and impedes religious belief and practice, particularly that of God's people. Moreover, Williams distrusts the character of any ecclesiastical leader who would combine his power with that of the state. Williams sees such ecclesiastical leaders as more interested in money and power than God and, as persons who would use the ecclesiastical power entrusted to them for their own gain, thus as particularly untrustworthy. Any civil ruler who would ally himself with ecclesiastical authorities risks betrayal and even the loss of his prior, civil authority.[91]

Williams generally focuses his criticism on the ambitions of ecclesiastical rather than civil leaders. The title of one of his first works, *The Hireling Ministry None of Christs*, reveals a great deal about his attitude toward ecclesiastical leaders who "run for the civil sword." For Williams, Christ's true servants do not seek remuneration for their service. This was true for Christ's apostles, and it is a model that Williams attempts to follow.[92] For Williams, the "hireling ministry" does not consist of honest laborers, but of those who "bed [for] the glittering preferments of this present evil world, and the wages of Balaam."[93] Moreover, he characterizes them as people who steal though "fraud, oppression, extortion, &c."[94]

---

[90] YMB, 222. The religions of the world, of course, do not include true Christianity or Israel before Christ's incarnation, according to Williams.

[91] BT, 389. See also BT, 383-384.

Referring to Christ's admonitions that we be wary of false prophets who are "ravening wolves" dressed as sheep, Williams identifies the ecclesiastical leaders we have just discussed—both Catholic and Protestant, as such "Antichristian Wolves."[95] What is even worse about these "Antichristian Thieves and Robbers," according to Williams, is that they pretend to be not only the "harmless sheep of Christ," but even his "tender and careful Shepherds."[96] Williams asserts that they become thieves and robbers because they suffer from indolence and pride combined with avarice and ambition. Since they "cannot dig" and are ashamed to beg, they "find it best to steal and rob, whole Parishes and Provinces, whole Nations, &c. for Livings." As evidence that these ministers serve themselves rather than God, Williams points out that these ministers call on the state to tithe the people for their personal maintenance before they give any thought to "God Himself."[97] Indeed, Williams feels that the clergy are willing to set both the Roman and Protestant worlds on fire "to obtain . . . warm and soft and rich seats and saddles," such that they never have to "stand or go on foot, or creep, or beg, or Starve."

---

[92] For example, Williams responds to criticisms about the poor state of his writing compared to that of others who write about religious matters by arguing that he attempts to be a true minister in the apostolic vein by working to support himself and his family.

[93] YMB, 104.

[94] YMB, 104.

[95] YMB, 422. See Matthew 7:15.

[96] YMB, 422.

Furthermore, Williams suggests that the creation of national religions is "an invention of Satan," and that the "Profession of Christ" by those who create these religions is in truth "a denial of Christ."[98] In commingling Christianity with the state, they create a new religion, a "State-Religion," and simultaneously transform the "ministry thereof . . . [into that of] state Ministers."[99] Moreover, Williams asserts that this conversion into a state-religion also involves a transformation of the object of their worship. "Kings and Queens, Parliaments and Princes" become the "Gods of the Nations," setting up the "Images and Representations" of their own "minds and wills" as their nations' "ways of Worship and Religion" and robbing "the true God of his honour."[100] Consequently, the civil and ecclesiastical leaders turn their worship into idolatry and their parish churches into "Idol Temples."[101]

---

[97] YMB, 302-3.

[98] Hireling, 184.

[99] Hireling, 184.

[100] Examiner, 214.

[101] Hireling, 184. See also, Examiner, 234-5. It is interesting to compare Williams's comments about state religion becoming idolatry to James I's "The Trew Law of a Free Monarchy." A defense of the divine right of kings, the "Trew Law" argues that "monarchy is the true pattern of divinity" and that "Kings are called Gods" because they sit on God's throne on earth. While James sees the monarch as God's direct minister on earth, and thus God's servant, one can see how someone like Williams, a Puritan's Puritan, could interpret opinions like those of James as bordering on idolatry. See James I, "The Trew Law of a Free Monarchy," 1598, available from: http://personal.pitnet.net/primarysources/stuart.html; Internet, accessed 19 August 2006.

Williams decries both the "Religious" idolatry we have just discussed, which includes the worship of "false Deities . . . Gods, or God-heads," and "moral idolatry."[102] Moral idolatry refers in particular to that covetousness in our hearts and minds by which we are lead to worship anything other than God, including "Gold and Silver, House and Lands."[103] This form of idolatry afflicts all of the world's religions, including Christianity since the time of Constantine. As we saw above, Williams feels that Constantine and other Roman Emperors may truly have desired to aid Christianity. He singles out Constantine, however, because Constantine's "superstitious zeal [laid] the Foundation for [later] Usurpations and Abominations."[104] According to Williams, Constantine began to attach honors and salaries to ecclesiastical offices, resulting in a hireling ministry.[105] Once ecclesiastical offices became positions of honor and wealth, Williams asserts that a new type of person began to seek ecclesiastical office, and that these new ecclesiastical authorities transformed that which the church taught people to value. People began seeking the "gain, and preferment of Religion," mistaking "Gain and Gold for Godliness."[106] Williams fears for those who follow the examples of these ecclesiastical authorities rather than those of Christ's first messengers. They forsake the hope of an eternal reward, and they will be among those whom Christ will reject, saying that he does not know them despite their claim to have served him.[107]

---

[102] Examiner, 239.

[103] Examiner, 239-240.

[104] YMB, 412.

[105] Hireling, 190.

[106] Hireling, 182.

[107] See Matthew 7: 21-23.

Williams argues that Constantine and the Christian emperors who succeeded him harmed Christianity through their friendliness and well-intentioned mistakes. In *On Liberty*, J. S. Mill argues that we can never cease tolerating debate and error, even when we are certain of the truth, because truth needs to be challenged to maintain its power over our hearts. When we cease to challenge truth, although it may be universally accepted, we cease to think about it and it loses its power to control our actions. Although he lived two centuries before Mill, Williams sees a similar process at work in what he regards as the decline of Christianity. He compares Christianity prior to Constantine to the aromas released when spices are "pounded and beaten in mortars."[108] Thus, because of the persecution by earlier emperors, such as "the raging fury of the most bloody Neroes," the "Christians were sweet and fragrant."

Williams cannot say that the problems he posits in Christianity resulted from the privileged position it assumed with Constantine, because the emperor and the forces of self-proclaimed orthodoxy continued to challenge different beliefs. These "good Emperours" subsequently caused great confusion, sometimes persecuting "good wheat" in their "zealous mistakes" to get rid of "Tares," sometimes persecuting "erroneous persons" like Arius, sometimes advancing the professors of partial truths about Christ, such that many truths were "lost in those times," and "maintaining their Religion by the material Sword."[109] Accordingly, "Christianity was eclipsed . . . the Professors of it fell asleep, . . . Babel or confusion was ushered in, and by degrees the Gardens of the

---

[108] BT, 184.

[109] BT, 184. In BT, 367-368, Williams adds, "under Constantine, Christians fell asleep on the beds of carnal ease and Liberty," and that "the Church, the Christian State, Religion, and Worship, were most corrupted" under Constantine and the later emperors who were friendly to Christianity.

Churches of Saints were turned into the Wilderness of whole Nations, until the whole World became Christian or Christendom." Thus there arose an "Apostasy, and [an] interrupting of the first ministry and order."[110] Since this apostasy, William argues, the "Church and people of God . . . is an Army routed."[111] In this apostate state, the antichrist rules over Christendom and Christianity, the church and God's people, "can hardly preserve and secure itself, much less" effect the conversion of the world's other peoples. Thus, even the friendliness and good intentions of the emperors after Constantine harmed Christianity once the state began to take a role in religious affairs.

While Williams is not representative of Christianity in his extreme views of a Christian apostasy, he is in no way unique in decrying immorality and corruption in Christianity. Erasmus, a lifelong and faithful Catholic, perceived abuses in his church that he hoped to reform gradually, peacefully, and authoritatively. The Reformation itself is the most obvious example of theologians, philosophers, clerics, and moralists decrying the abuses, immorality, and errors in their mother churches. They hoped to eliminate the false beliefs and practices that others had added to Christianity over the centuries, thus returning to the true beliefs and practices of the primitive church.

As a member of the Reformed tradition, Williams rejected Catholicism. Indeed, as a Puritan, he desired to reform a Protestant institution, the Church of England, of its High-church, or Catholic, elements. By the time he reached America, however, his reformist impulses had led him to reject all ties with the Church of England, i.e., to become a separatist. Moreover, soon after he helped establish America's first Baptist church in 1639, these same impulses led him to reject all extant sects of organized religion. He did this, not because he believed that God is better sought outside of religion or because he rejected organized religion as such, but because he believed that Christianity had lost the truths, gifts, and authority given by Christ. Accordingly, he felt that he should not participate in the worship practices of churches that lacked Christ's authority. Rather, he felt that he, and anyone who was a true follower of Christ, should study the Bible, lead a good life, and stand as a witness against the corruptions of Christianity until Christ came again. Moreover, his view of Christianity as overcome by an apostasy led him to believe that, while a Christian can witness against the corruptions of Christianity to fellow Christians, he should forego evangelism since it would be to assume false authority and to convert them to a false faith. As we will see, this viewpoint only reinforced his opinion that persecution is out of the question.

---

[110] Hireling, 155.

[111] Hireling, 167.

Williams's understanding of Christian history does not mean that God's people will forever be without the truth. Nor does he negate the New Testament prophecies that the Gospel would be taken to all nations. Rather, he believes that these events must await the eschaton, or end times, when Christ will return to the earth. Williams believes that at, at that time, the earth will be cleansed, but not of non-Christians. Christ will cleanse the earth of Christendom, overthrowing the "antichrist" who has ruled Christianity, and restore his truths and authority to the earth. After Christ establishes his church as in its first days, the elect in all nations will hear and accept the Gospel.

Thus, according to Williams, religious liberty will be sustained even in the end times. He regards Christendom is the principal representative of the antichrist that fights against Christ, and, while Christendom may include heretics and unbelievers, it is particularly composed of intolerant, self-proclaimed Christians. It is made up of those Christians who have wrested church and state, in reality forcing others to worship them and their ideas as the gods of the state. Williams imagines that such individuals are those who will be destroyed when Christ returns. Moreover, at that time, Christ's gospel will not spread to all the earth through coercion. The elect everywhere will hear Christ's gospel and convert because Christ will have restored the true gospel, because Christ will have given power and authority to new messengers to carry his message, and because the structures of oppression that control religion and impede God's messengers will be gone.

Thus, as we have seen, Williams intertwines the history and historical analysis of God's people with his thought on toleration. Williams defends toleration through his interpretation of Israel, her prophets and kings, and her periods of exile, as well as by calling upon the teachings of Christ and the apostolic era; the example of a Christianity in exile between the apostolic era and the end times, or eschaton; and the concept of the eschaton itself. Williams's historical understanding of God's people does not span or circumscribe his doctrine of toleration, however. Williams's seekerism, as his rejection of organized religion is sometimes known, was fully developed by the time he began publishing his works in the 1640s. He was, however, already a proponent of liberty of the conscience, and of the separation of church and state that he believed was necessary to it, when he was provoking the Boston establishment as a mere separatist in the 1630s. Thus, while his understanding of history and his belief in religious liberty sustained one another, and his changing understanding of history necessarily redefined and strengthened parts of his belief in religious liberty, the arguments for the latter should be examined in their own right. In what follows, we will examine his views on legitimate civil and ecclesiastical authority, prudence, truth, salvation, and true Christianity. We will see that religion, particularly a concern for his and others' souls, was the primary influence in his efforts to establish a community embracing religious liberty.[112] Moreover, we will see that one of his strongest arguments for religious liberty, which he bases on his soteriology, depends not on his radical break with the Reformed tradition, but with his uncompromising stance on one of its most important doctrines, predestination.

2.3.2 Origins and limits of civil authority

In looking at Williams's view of history, we begin to see how he justifies toleration, especially regarding his distinction between civil and ecclesiastical authority. The calling and example of the Apostles indicates to him that Christ did not give any ecclesiastical leader the power to use the state's coercive power to compel others in religious matters. Moreover, the disappearance of the apostles, according to Williams, took the authority to preach and convert others from the earth, such that anyone who undertakes missionary work since then is usurping God's authority. Conversion through coercion is thus completely out of the question.

Williams's view of Christian history also precludes civil authorities from assuming ecclesiastical functions or powers. Christ gave the authority to spread his gospel and to tend the existing flock to those within his church, not to those persecuting him and his followers. Moreover, the disappearance of this authority and thus of anyone authorized to pass it on does not, for Williams, give us the right to establish alternate mechanism to obtain it. To emphasize this point, Williams singles out and denies several of the Protestant foundations for ecclesiastical authority: scriptural study, divinity school, or even being called by those gathered to worship in Christ's name.[113]

---

[112] Indeed, it was one of the first political communities to embrace religious liberty as it is distinguished from toleration. Although other communities, like France under the Edict of Nantes, sustained toleration, they did so merely as a modus vivendi. For Williams and Rhode Island, liberty of conscience was a right, and as such to be limited only as it violated other rights.

When Williams declares that the magistrate cannot claim spiritual authority or power, he does not tell us much, however, about the origin, source, and extent of the magistrate's legitimate authority. Given Paul's declarations in Romans 13, which can be used to justify the divine foundation of civil authority, the origin, source, and extent of civil authority were important topics in both Reformed theology and William's works. Regarding the "civil state," Williams argues that, "from the beginning of the World, God hath armed Fathers, Masters, Magistrates, . . . to judge, and accordingly to punish such sinners as transgress against the good and peace of the Civil state."[114] This declaration does not mean that magistrates have a divine right to rule in non-religious matters, however. While Williams agrees that Romans 13 teaches us that government is ordained of God, he argues that any conclusion beyond this is unjustified. While civil government is God's gift to humans, such that civil rulers are God's servants, civil rulers do not receive any spiritual authority merely because of that service.[115] Indeed, God's appointment of civil and ecclesiastical authority does not imply expansive donations of power, much less that Christ divided all of his authority between civil and ecclesiastical rulers, or that he gave all or supreme authority to either one.[116] Williams believes that both civil and ecclesiastical rulers received limited grants of authority from Christ.

---

[113] Williams thus argues that, absent the calling and authority of the Apostles, not even schooling can give one the authority to preach the Gospel or govern his church. See Hireling, 157-163, 169, and 171-2.

[114] BT, 108. Williams reiterates this point, stating that "civil Government is an Ordinance of God, to conserve the civil peace of people, so far as concerns their Bodies and Goods" (BT, 249).

[115] YMB, 282.

In particular, Williams declares that it requires torturous logic to sustain the argument that civil rulers receive more than civil power and authority merely because God ordained civil government. Williams explains his point with an analogy, comparing the situation to that of a nobleman who appoints some servants to care for his sheep and others to care for his children. In giving the shepherds the authority and responsibility to care for his sheep, the nobleman does not give them authority or responsibility in rearing his children. Similarly, the servants tasked with raising his children thereby receive neither responsibility to care for his sheep nor authority over the shepherds. The nobleman gives power to each type of servant within an exclusive sphere of authority, and no servant may surpass the sphere of authority to which he has been assigned merely because his authority comes directly from the master. Similarly, Williams believes that the divine ordination of government does not give civil rulers authority outside the civil sphere in which they have received power to act. Thus, Williams writes, “Magistracy is of God, but yet no otherwise than Marriage is, being an estate merely civil and human, and lawful to all Nations of the World, that know not God.”[117]

Williams similarly does not believe in the divine right to rule. He agrees that God created government “in general” to preserve “Mankind in civil order and peace.”[118]

---

[116] Indeed, as we saw above, Williams asserts that Christ and his apostles were persecuted and sometimes executed for asserting that Christ was the king of kings in spiritual matters. Moreover, he asserts that Christ denied all civil power, and that God gave all spiritual authority to Christ, such that his servants exercise it “Ministerially.” See footnote 73. **In final draft, verify footnote number!**

[117] YMB, 282.

[118] BT, 398.

Otherwise, the world would have become like the sea, "wherein Men, like Fishes would hunt and devour each other, and the greater devour the less." God ordained government so that civil rulers, within their sphere of authority, could suppress violations of the good and peace "as may best conduce to the public safety."[119]

While Williams agrees that government in general is ordained of God, he argues that the people receive the power from God to establish their preferred type of government.[120] In the foundation of individual governments, "the fountain and original of all Authority and Rule is the People, consenting and agreeing in their several Combinations, by themselves or their Deputies, for their better subsistence in Peace."[121] Thus, as Locke argues nearly half a century later, Williams declares that the consent of the ruled is the foundation of all power and authority. Furthermore, one can compare Williams to Locke in the process the latter imagines for the creation of society and the subsequent creation of the state. Locke believes that individuals first combine to form a people and then, having become a people, choose the form of government that will rule over them. Thus, the people constitute a sovereign power before even the creation of the state. Similarly, Williams argues that civil power is distinct from the government and that "the Sovereign, original, and foundation" of this power "lies in the people."[122]

---

[119] BT, 108-9. Williams writes, "therefore neither disobedience to parents or magistrates, nor murder nor quarreling, uncleanness nor lasciviousness, stealing nor extortion, neither ought of that kind ought to be let alone, . . . but seasonably to be suppressed, as may best conduce to the public safety."

[120] BT, 398.

[121] Examiner, 209-210.

[122] BT, 249. Williams later adds a corollary to this principle. In BT, 354-5, he asserts that, inasmuch as the magistrate derives his or her authority from the people, a ruler's authority is not increased or diminished by being a Christian or a non-Christian, respectively. Furthermore, he adds that a Commonwealth is not more or less of a commonwealth because it's people are or are not Christians.

Consequently, he argues that the people "may erect and establish what form of Government seems to them most meet for their civil condition."

Furthermore, Williams closely ties the continued possession and exercise of civil authority to the approbation of the people. He declares, "All lawful Magistrates in the World, . . . (excepting those unparalleled typical Magistrates of the Church of Israel) are but Derivatives and Agents immediately derived and employed as eyes and hands, serving for the good of the whole."[123] In laying this foundation for civil authority, Williams limits the power a government may wield to that which its people can and do give it. The magistrates "have and can have no more Power, than fundamentally lies in the Bodies or Fountains themselves, which Power, Might, or Authority, is not Religious, Christian, &c. but natural, human, and civil." Furthermore, Williams elsewhere argues that the foundation of authority in the people constrains the duration as well as the extent of the magistrate's power. "Governments as are by them erected and established, have no more power, nor for no longer time, than the civil power or people consenting and agreeing shall betrust them with."[124] This conclusion, it seems to Williams, is "clear not only in Reason," but is demonstrated by the experience of all commonwealths in which the people have not been "deprived of their natural freedom by the power of Tyrants."[125]

We see another striking similarity between Williams and Locke in the argument that the magistrate has no more power than that which the people can and do give it. A magistrate cannot receive spiritual power or authority from the people, because, according to Williams, they lack the power to govern the church.[126] To claim that the members of a nation hold this power, even collectively, would "pull God and Christ, and Spirit out of Heaven, and subject them unto natural, sinful, inconstant men, and so consequently to Satan himself, by whom all peoples naturally are guided." Since the people do not naturally hold this power, and magistrates and civil officers derive their authority from the people, no civil ruler can legitimately claim power or authority in religious matters.[127] Consequently, magistrates usurp any power and authority that they claim in spiritual matters.[128]

---

[123] BT, 398.

[124] BT, 249-250. See also Examiner, 209, where Williams writes, "Kings and Queens, and other Princes, receive . . . all their Power and Authority from the several and respective Peoples who . . . empower them to their several and respective Services."

[125] BT, 250.

We have seen Williams argue that God ordained "civil Government . . . to conserve the civil peace of people, so far as concerns their Bodies and Goods," and that God endowed the people with the civil power to "erect and establish" the form of government most appropriate to them.[129] This leads to two sources for both the duties of and constraints on government. Government has neither more power nor duration of power than given it by the civil power, which rests in the people. Humans create government to preserve the peace, to protect their bodies and goods, and to serve the good of the whole in all things that are “natural, humane, and civil.”[130] Accordingly, people retain their liberty of conscience because they cannot and do not give spiritual authority to civil magistrates. They cannot, as we saw above, because God retains ultimate spiritual authority. Moreover, as we will see, God retains all power over whom he will convert and save. The lack of authority to govern in religious matters does not mean, however, that the magistrate’s duty in religious matters extends merely to non-interference in the liberty of his subjects. Dissenters are also persecuted for “conscience sake” when their fellow citizens, not just magistrates, violate their bodies and goods. Magistrates, as agents of the people, have a duty to maintain civil peace and protect their subjects’ bodies and goods. Hence, magistrates must protect liberty of conscience by preventing harm to anyone in his or her body and goods for any cause, including religious difference, i.e., they have a duty to enforce toleration.

---

[126] BT, 250.

[127] Williams frequently made statements in the form of questions in which he asks something doubtful. For example, he writes (Examiner, 210), "Whether have the Nations and People of the world, in their mere natural and national capacities, any one job of Spiritual and Divine power, with which to betrust their Magistrates and Officers?" In another place (Examiner, 213), he similarly writes, "I answer, and ask, (as before) Whether since Civil Magistracy is merely civil, and the power thereof derived from the People, the fountain of it; it will not appear, that the Magistrate can no more judge authoritatively what is the doctrine of Grace, & what is the doctrine of Godliness, no more (I say) than the people of each Nation, in its national and nature capacity, can be the primitive and original Judges thereof, and may therefore rightly delegate such a Spiritual power unto their Officers or Magistrates?"

[128] Examiner, 210.

[129] BT, 249-250.

Although governments are created by and accountable to their people, Williams believes that government is also accountable to God as a particular manifestation of his creation. The “civil state is bound before God to take off that bond and yoke of Soul-oppression, and to proclaim that free and impartial Liberty to all the people [in England] . . . to choose and maintain what Worship and Ministry their Souls and Consciences are persuaded of.”[131] Next, Williams declares that the state has a duty to provide for the “security of all the respective consciences, in their respective meetings, assemblings, worshippings, preachings, Disputings, &c. and that civil peace, and the beauty of civility and humanity be maintained among the chief opposers and dissenters."[132]

---

[130] BT, 398; Examiner 209-210; and BT 249. Williams does not explain his ideas with the brevity and aesthetic flourish of Locke’s “life, liberty, and property,” but he expresses similar sentiments throughout his works.

[131] Hireling, 183.

Williams does not believe that these duties are a call to inaction, *i.e.*, that they are an excuse for a Christian magistrate to do nothing in spreading Christ's gospel. Rather, for Williams, they are the best way for the magistrate to fulfill the scriptural prophecy that kings and queens will be nursing fathers and mothers.[133] When challenged that his teachings would prevent the fulfillment of that prophecy, Williams elaborates on the actual requirements of those duties. First, he declares that magistrates should remove "the Civil Bars, Obstructions, Hindrances, in taking off those Yokes, that pinch the very Souls and consciences of men." Such bars and hindrances include paying tithes, maintaining ministers, forcing religious oaths, and mixing religious elements into civil ceremonies such as marriages and burials.[134] Moreover, magistrates must secure "a free and absolute permission of the consciences of all men," including Jews, Muslims, Catholics or Pagans, "in what is merely spiritual."[135] Thus, although those duties are quintessentially liberal in calling for government to protect us from harm and to limit itself in all other matters, Williams nonetheless regards those duties as requiring great effort and their accomplishment as a great fete.

---

[132] Williams adds a third duty. He argues that it "is the duty of all that are in Authority, and of all that are able, to countenance, encourage, and supply such true Volunteers as give and devote themselves to the service and Ministry of Christ Jesus in any kind." By this, Williams could be arguing for the temporal support of the ministry. In a work whose title declares that a paid ministry is not Christ's, such an interpretation seems unlikely. Indeed, Williams's use of the word "volunteers" implies that he does not refer to a paid ministry in this passage. A more likely interpretation is that all those who have the ability should use the means available to them to procure and encourage volunteers.

In *the Bloody Tenent*, 372-3, Williams further explains the magistrate's duties using a four-case typology. The cases are defined according to a religion's perceived and true epistemological status. If the magistrate's "conscience is persuaded" that a religion and its worship are true, and they actually are, Williams asserts that the magistrate has three duties to it: "approbation and countenance, a reverent esteem and honorable Testimony . . . with a tender respect of Truth, and the professors of it;" "Personal submission of his own Soul to the power of the Lord Jesus in that Spiritual Government and Kingdom;" and "Protection of such true professors of Christ, whether apart, or met together, as also of their estates from violence and injury." As we can see, Williams combines both the magistrate's personal duties and his duties as a magistrate for the case of a true religion that the magistrate believes to be true.

If a religion is false and the magistrate dares not join it because he has recognized its error, he still owes it several duties in the capacity of a civil ruler. First, although the magistrate does not owe "approbation . . . to what is evil," both scripture and a desire for public peace and quiet command permission of that religion. "Secondly he owes protection to the persons of his Subjects, (though of a false worship) that no injury be offered either to the persons or goods of any."

Although Williams sets up the cases of a false religion in which the magistrate is a believer and a true religion that the magistrate disbelieves, he does not explicitly address them. In his explication of the other cases, however, he does guide us in how to address them. If the magistrate believes in a false religion, he is likely to treat it exactly as if it were true; inasmuch as his conscience is persuaded of its truthfulness, he does not that there is any difference between this and the case of a true religion that he believes to be true. The only difference is that his approbation is not deserved inasmuch as that religion is "evil." Similarly, in the case of a true religion that the magistrate perceives to be false, he still has the duty as a servant of the people to protect them from injury in their persons and goods, and a duty to permit their worship according to the Bible, if he is a Christian, and according to the dictates of prudence.

[133] Hireling 178-9. Williams makes these claims when challenged that his doctrines would prevent kings from fulfilling that prophecy. See Isaiah 49:23 and Isaiah 60:16.

Furthermore, Williams argues that civil rulers most closely approximate nursing fathers and mothers when they fulfill their duties to separate church and state and to protect liberty of conscience.[136] As we have already seen, Williams believes that Christ will destroy Christendom when he returns and establishes his kingdom on the earth. Williams asserts that, even before this destruction, Christ has sent and will continue to send witnesses, or prophets, to warn us concerning the "Antichrist's" wickedness, including Christendom.[137] Civil leaders act as nursing fathers by separating church and state and protecting freedom of conscience, thus creating the conditions in which these prophets can act as the "breath of [the Lord's] Mouth" and testify against the Antichrist. If magistrates do anything for religion beyond establishing and maintaining religious liberty, they generally impede Christ's servants and, ironically, cease to be the nursing fathers and mothers they intended to be. Thus, in Williams's opinion, merely removing the state's interference in religion would be "fair progress in promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ."[138]

---

[134] Hireling, 178.

[135] Williams thus goes beyond Locke in his argument of those to whom toleration is due. Some authors have argued that this represents the distinction between religious liberty argued for by Williams and the toleration argued for by Locke. The problem with this distinction is that Locke does not argue that several of these groups should not be tolerated because of their religion per se, but that they cannot be tolerated because their religious beliefs call them to undermine the state and others' rights. Both Williams and Locke acknowledge that the state must punish those who violate others' rights, including their liberty of conscience. Williams, however, saw these groups as much less of a threat to the state. Thus, there may be little more to the distinction between religious liberty in Williams and toleration in Locke than a difference in their appraisal of the danger posed by different groups. Moreover, we should remember that Locke referred to toleration as a natural right in his *Third Letter*, and it was described as a natural right in Popple's translation of the *Letter* (the Latin text spoke of the law of toleration in the passage in which Popple translates it as a natural right).

[136] In connection with his view on the eschaton, Williams seems to assert that the prophecy that kings and queens will be nursing fathers, inasmuch as those prophecies refer to establishing "Glory and Honor" in the "new Jerusalem," lacks contemporary relevance. His reference to the new Jerusalem implies a belief that they are to completely fulfill this capacity only in conjunction with the end times, when Christ returns. Thus, in BT, 371, he tells us that it is futile to even speculate about that prophecy's fulfillment because no one can discern how long it will be until it is fulfilled. Moreover, Williams asserts that, even when the prophecy is fulfilled, those rulers will still lack any spiritual authority. Rather, such rulers will be "judged

Moreover, to sustain his argument for religious liberty, Williams does not merely rely on the empirical claim that rulers generally impede religion in trying to help it. For reasons that we will later discuss, Williams believes that using civil power to spread Christ's gospel "[robs] the God of Heaven of his Rights, the consciences of his subjects their heavenly Rights and Liberties." As we will see, Williams believes that the duties of protection and non-interference are not just pragmatic considerations; they are normative duties in respecting God and others' consciences.

---

and ruled," inasmuch as they are members of Christ's church, "by the power of the Lord Jesus therein" (BT, 372).

[137] Prophets and apostles are thus distinct to Williams. As discussed earlier, Williams regards Apostles as people given express authority by Christ to preach his gospel and establish his church. These messengers, according to Williams, have not existed since the times of Christ's Apostles. Williams believes that people have been inspired to act as prophets, or witnesses, when apostles have been absent and witnesses are necessary to testify of the wickedness that impedes the spreading of God's word. Thus, Williams regards Calvin and Luther, among other reformers, as prophets.

[138] Hireling, 179.

2.3.2.1 Christian duties and non-Christian rulers

We might wonder how a non-Christian ruler, inasmuch as he or she would be unaware of the scriptures Williams invokes and the magisterial duties therein taught, could ever fulfill all of the duties that Williams believes God to have given them as his servants in civil matters. Although he knew of rulers like Artaxerxes, Williams was acting within a Christian context, one where kings, parliaments, protectors, and governors were all Christian, and he wrote to these audiences. Inasmuch as these rulers acted from at least a façade of Christian piety in balancing the relationship between church and state, Williams wants to explain and call them to what he understands to be true Christianity, with its concomitant teachings about that relationship. Given his audience and goals, he could easily justify spending little time admonishing non-Christian rulers or explaining how they could know the duties God has given them. Nevertheless, as we will see in our discussions of conscience, natural law, and prudence, Williams has great faith in the abilities of non-Christians to govern themselves by moral principles and live peacefully with one another. Indeed, he sometimes claims that they are more moral and that, over thousands of years, they have proven themselves more capable of civil existence than many of the Christians in Christendom. Moreover, inasmuch as Williams trusts any ruler, he trusts non-Christians as well as he trusts Christians. As we have seen, Williams believes that non-Christians can serve as examples of the proper roles and duties of civil rulers. Moreover, as we will discuss shortly, Williams believes that many great civilizations exist and have existed without a Christian populace or government.

Before closing this section on the proper extent and bounds of civil authority, we should note that, for Williams, civil rulers who are also Christians have an even greater duty, because of their belief, to limit their power in spiritual matters and protect liberty of conscience. Williams argues that Christ, whom Williams calls "the meek Lamb of God" to add rhetorical strength to his argument, came, "not to destroy the bodies of Men, but to save both bodies and souls."[139] Thus, Williams argues that a Christian magistrate, unless he is ignorant of the purpose of Christ's coming or does not partake of Christ's spirit, "is bound to be far from destroying the bodies of men." Moreover, Williams argues that magistrates who truly partake of Christ's spirit are forbidden, both by Christ's explicit command and a remembrance of Christ's purpose, to "procure or inflict any corporal judgment upon" those who refuse Christ.[140]

As we have seen, Williams believes that, while God created government as a gift for man and ordained its use for our peace and protection, he left supreme civil authority in our hands. Accordingly, while civil rulers are God's servants and thus accountable to him, they are also accountable to us inasmuch as we choose the form civil government will take and give those within it their power. Moreover, we have seen that, inasmuch as they are accountable to both God and people, rulers are obligated to respect the differences between civil and spiritual authority, as well as protect liberty of conscience by preserving the people from harm in body or goods. Furthermore, in creating this dual accountability, Williams forestalls the objection that the people could give rulers spiritual authority. Williams contends that it is only by God’s will that the people form a sovereign power, and that God does not give them spiritual authority in that capacity. God retains spiritual power and delegates it ministerially to those he calls to be his servants. Finally, we have seen that civil rulers, according to Williams, best fulfill their duties to God, as well as fulfill Biblical prophecies, when they respect their limits and protect liberty of conscience.

---

[139] BT, 132. In this chapter, Williams is using the example in Luke 9: 51-56, in which the people of a Samaritan city refuse to receive Christ. His disciples suggest that Christ call down the fires of heaven to destroy the city, and Christ rebukes them for partaking of an evil spirit. He tells them that he has come to save lives, not destroy them.

[140] Williams adds, as before, that as the magistrate "is bound to preserve the civil peace and quiet of the place and people under him," he is also bound by his conscience to "suffer no man to break the Civil Peace, by laying hands of violence upon any, though as vile as the Samaritans for not receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ."

2.3.3 Prudence

Williams published his defenses of the liberty of conscience between 1643 and 1644 and in 1652, in the context of the Thirty Years War, which lasted from 1618 to 1648, and of the English Civil War, which lasted from 1642 until 1651. Like anyone else defending religious liberty during that period, he had to confront the beliefs that dissent and religious difference inevitably lead to religious strife and that coercion is justified by the peace that supposedly comes with uniformity. Moreover, he argued that neither Christians nor non-Christians inherently destroy civil peace. In responding to the accusations based on the preceding beliefs, Williams precedes Locke in arguing that religious diversity, and the protection thereof, preserves rather than destroys civil peace.

Williams cites John Cotton as claiming that dissenters frequently preach “with such arrogance and impetuousness, as of itself tends to the disturbance of civil peace.”[141] Williams cautions Cotton that his accusation merely repeats the charges that Satan has always inspired people to make against God’s people, which accusations have commonly been made against “the meekest of the Saints and Witnesses of Jesus.”[142] Consequently, Williams selects and attempts to refute six cases in which “God’s people” have been accused of creating civil disturbances through their arrogance and impetuousness. First, God’s people have been accused of being arrogant and impetuous in declaring something other than the traditional religion. Second, God’s people have been accused of arrogance and impetuousness for being so bold and zealous as to confront even kings with the truth. Thirdly, God’s people have been accused of arrogance and impetuousness when they “have been immoveable, constant, and resolved to the death, in refusing to submit to false Worships, and in preaching and professing the true worship, contrary to express command of the public Authority.”[143] Fourthly, Williams declares that God’s people since the coming of . . . Jesus, have openly and constantly professed, that no Civil Magistrate . . . [has] any power over the Souls or Consciences of their Subjects, in the matters of God and the Crown of Jesus.” Rather, God’s people have taught that even kings “are bound to subject their own souls to the Ministry and church, the Power and Government of” Christ as “the King of Kings.”[144] Fifthly, rulers have accused God’s people of endangering and overthrowing the civil state. Such rulers feel that, when God’s servants have “[delivered] the Mind and Will of God concerning the Kingdoms and Civil States where they have lived,” they have sometimes discouraged the nation’s army and thus weakened the land in its defense.[145] Finally, God’s people, according to Williams, have been denounced as occasioning contentions, divisions, tumults, and uproars through their preaching and disputing.

---

[141] BT, 71.

---

[142] BT, 75.

[143] BT, 76.

[144] BT, 76. We should remember, however, that this kingdom was in spiritual and soul causes, of a people drawn out of all nations, and not a kingdom in a civil sense.

[145] BT, 77.

Williams declares that none of the opinions and practices of God's people makes them guilty of the civil strife, real or imagined, listed in these cases. Williams acknowledges that even the truth may be presented in such a way as to disturb civil peace. Such is the case when people hold forth the truth with "railing or reviling, daring or challenging speeches, or with force of Arms, Swords, Guns, Prisons, &c."[146] There are other cases, however, when a person preaching may be entirely peaceful and yet be met with violence. In such cases, those who react are at fault for the breach of public peace, not those who were preaching. Williams insists that God's people, in the six cases he outlines, fall into the second category rather than the first. Thus, although God's people may have been impetuous, the "matter and manner" of their preaching was "pure, holy, peaceable, and inoffensive."[147] Accordingly, although God's people were involved in "cases of great opposition and spiritual hostility, and occasions of breach of civil peace," they were not guilty of any wrongdoing.

Williams declares that two causes are responsible for the "civil dissensions and uproars about matters of Religion," particularly in the cases outlined above.[148] First, he claims we are seldom happy when others confront us with our errors.[149] Many people violently suppress, or would like to suppress, those who confront them with their mistakes. Second, Williams argues that people may preach even “false and idolatrous practices” without producing any “breach of civil peace from the doctrine or practice,” or from its manner of evangelization.[150] Rather, the violence surrounding their heresy results from the “wrong and preposterous way of suppressing, preventing, and extinguishing such doctrines or practices by weapons of wrath and blood, whips, stocks, imprisonment, banishment, death, &c.”

---

[146] BT, 78.

[147] BT, 78-9.

[148] BT, 79.

[149] He writes, "When a Kingdom or State, Towne or Family, lies and lives in the guilt of a false God, false Christ, false worship: [it is] no wonder if sore eyes be troubled at the appearance of the light, be it never so sweet."

To illuminate his claim that religious violence results more from persecution than from anything inherent to most religious doctrines, Williams examines John Cotton’s claim that heretics and heathens are spiritual wolves from whom the righteous must protect Christ’s sheep. Williams cites Cotton as claiming that these heretics and heathens, by nature, cannot “be peaceable and obedient, unless restrained.”[151] Williams contends, however, that Cotton’s doctrine leads to a serious consequence. If those whom we consider heretics have such corrupted natures that we cannot trust them to be peaceable or obedient to the law, then we should never trust them with the state’s coercive power in making and executing law.[152] If given civil power, they would be even more likely to tear and burn “the poor sheep of Christ.”[153] Consequently, Williams believes that Cotton’s doctrine wrongly allows a person of one faith to overthrow kings, queens, and parliaments merely because they belong to another faith.

---

[150] BT, 80.

[151] YMB, 241.

[152] YMB, 241-2.

[153] YMB, 242.

A civil war, properly, is a war between different parties for control of the state. While civil wars can be bloody, Williams fears that even worse upheavals result from the conviction that those who think or believe differently cannot be peaceable or obedient. Not only are the bonds between ruler and ruled broken, but the bonds between all the inhabitants in a society are severed. Civil society becomes impossible because a believer could no longer trust the promises and character of his fellow, unbelieving citizens. Thus, a believer would soon come to regard it as "unlawful" to live in an "idolatrous" and "spiritually whorish" nation, even if he could do so "with freedom to his own conscience." Accordingly, Williams argues that civil upheavals and murder result from doctrines asserting that the members of other faiths are spiritual wolves. Such doctrines "pluck up the roots of all states and peoples in the world, as not capable to yield civil obedience, or exercise civil authority, except such people, Magistrates, &c. as are of" one's own religion.[154]

For Williams, another group's religious differences, including disbelief in Christ, do not cause violence and civil strife. The cause of religious violence is the persecution that results from the belief that we can and should control another's religion. The world's peoples—Jews, Moslems, Catholics, and Protestants—could all live together in peace, "notwithstanding their differences in Religion, were it not for the bloody Doctrine of Persecution, which alone breaks the bounds of civil peace, and makes Spiritual causes the causes of their bloody dissensions."[155] Persecution is a "cut-throat of all civil relations, unions, and covenants between Princes and people, and between the people and people."[156]

---

[154] Williams additionally warns magistrates that those who preach the "bloody Tenent of persecution" see magistrates as merely a means to an end. They borrow the magistrate's sword, or turn him into their executioner, and are more than willing to turn upon the magistrate once they decide that he too is "heretical, Apostate, [and] blaspheming" (YMB, 204-5). In BT, 177-8, Williams also warns magistrates that those who preach the bloody doctrine only wish to use the magistrate as a step and stirrup to "ascend and mount up into their rich and honorable Seats and Saddles."

Moreover, as we have just seen, Williams believes that the "bloody Doctrine of Persecution" does not merely lead to "Grand oppression," it is "a Powerful occasion, both of Civil Insurrections, and Soul mischiefs."[157] People will react when they are oppressed, when their corporal freedom and liberty of conscience are violated. Thus, the result has been the "blood of so many hundred thousand souls of Protestants and Papists, spilt in the Wars of present and former Ages, for their respective Consciences."[158] Accordingly, Williams makes the rather large claim that the "Doctrine of persecution for cause of Conscience, is proved guilty of all the blood of the Souls crying for vengeance."

Furthermore, Williams argues that history provides evidence that civil peace demands neither uniform nor Christian belief. To those who claim that "Civil peace cannot stand where Religion is corrupted," i.e. where there are unbelievers or heretics, Williams responds that "many stately Kingdoms and Governments in the World have long . . . enjoyed civil peace and quiet" even though they have never even heard of Christ.[159] He declares that "every Historian, Merchant, Traveler, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and even Jesus," can testify that states can flourish in peace and quiet without knowing of Christ. Indeed, he argues that the periods of toleration in Holland

---

[155] YMB, 70.

[156] YMB, 207.

[157] Hireling, 190.

[158] BT, 3.

[159] BT, 251. See also YMB, 314.

and England demonstrate the great “success and temporal prosperity” that develops when “mercy and freedom” are given to “oppressed Consciences.”[160]

Williams believes that freedom of conscience, with its concomitant religious pluralism, can coexist with civil peace because of the differences between civil and religious government. According to Williams, a church is a company of worshippers, an entity comparable to a guild, a merchant company, or any other type of society.[161] Moreover, he claims that it need not affect a city’s peace when a society has internal dissension, enforces its rules, divides, or even completely dissolves. Societies may experience total convulsion without affecting the city because the “essence or being of the City, and so the well-being and peace thereof is essentially distinct from those particular societies.” The city and the societies that exist within it have distinct courts, laws, and punishments that are appropriate to each. Moreover, the city “stands absolute and entire” when any of the societies within it cease to exist because it existed prior to, and thus independently of, any of the societies formed within it. The differentiation between the civil estate and religious societies, according to Williams, enables “spiritual oppositions in point of Worship and Religion” without “breach of Civil peace” or even the “least noise . . . of any Civil breach.”[162] It is only necessary that “Men keep . . . the Bond of Civility” upon which the community was first established.[163]

---

[160] YMB, 407. Williams elsewhere accuses Holland of not going far enough in the freedom of conscience that it protects (YMB, 10).

[161] BT, 73.

[162] BT, 74.

[163] In Hireling, 180, Williams declares that only uncivil opinions and practices are “the proper Object of the Civil Sword.” It is interesting that Williams does not elaborate on what initially leads to the bonds that establish society and thus to how group identities develop.

Since, according to Williams, different faiths can coexist as long as no one attempts to literally force his beliefs on another, he declares that civil rulers should forswear coerced "uniformity in religion."[164] Such coercion, in distinction to pluralism, is "sooner or later . . . the greatest occasion of civil war, ravishing of conscience, persecuting of Christ Jesus in his servants, and of the hypocrisy and destruction of millions of souls."[165] Having already made many of the arguments that we have discussed or will yet address, Williams reminds the Christian magistrates in his audience that, through persecution, they "confound the civil and religious, [deny] the principles of Christianity and civility," and deny Christ's purpose in coming. Indeed, he warns them that they commit "Blasphemy against the God of Peace, the God of Order" when they start wars by destroying others' "Civil Beings and Subsistences."[166]

Williams urges civil rulers, in this case England's Parliament, to avoid such persecution, as well as its consequences.[167] He presses them, to borrow Puritan vocabulary, to be a light to their neighbors. He claims that they should frame "a safe communication of freedom of Conscience in worship" to all those that will sustain the civil peace, as such freedom of conscience is as due to them as to any other.[168] Williams declares that this freedom of conscience will prove, contrary to the beliefs of many, beneficial and "marvelously advantageous." He thus urges Parliament, in sustaining freedom of conscience, to “out-shoot and teach their Neighbors” through their “piety and policy.”

---

[164] YMB, 440.

[165] YMB, 440.

[166] YMB, 493.

[167] YMB, 10.

[168] YMB, 11.

In arguing that the dictates of prudence condemn persecution and enjoin toleration, Williams anticipates Locke and Madison in arguing that it is not the fact of religious pluralism, or even generally the character of those different from us, but our reaction to pluralism that leads to religious violence. We have seen that Williams uses examples from history and world culture to demonstrate that non-Christians, and anyone else who does not conform to a particular standard of truth and orthodoxy, are capable of civil existence. While Williams’s argument, to this point, appeals to the more rational, empirical evidence of history and world cultures, we will see that he also sustains it with a religiously informed understanding of the conscience.

Furthermore, we have seen that Williams resorts to strong rhetorical arguments to enjoin prudence in dealing with religious dissent. He appeals to the pride of civil leaders, encouraging them to be an example to all other nations in demonstrating the advantages of toleration. Moreover, with his characteristic flair, Williams wraps persecution in bloody, repugnant vocabulary. He refers to “weapons of wrath and blood, whips, stocks, imprisonment, banishment, [and] death” in relation to the execution of persecution, and he argues that persecutors are “guilty of all the blood of the Souls crying for vengeance.”[169] Williams uses such terminology, though, not because he wishes to overpower truth and reason by inflaming our passions, but he feels that every person’s conscience may see that, according to truth and reason, persecution is utterly wrong.

---

[169] BT, 80; 3.

2.3.4 Truth

Williams believes that both God and men have jumbled truth with falsehood. He declares, “it has been the common way of the Father of Lights, to enclose the Light of his holy Truths, in dark and obscure, yea and ordinarily in forbidden Books, persons, and Meetings.”[170] Moreover, Williams believes that many of Christianity’s truths, as well as the authority to act as Christ’s messengers and officiate in Christianity’s ordinances, were lost. According to Williams, Christianity was corrupted and its truths lost partially through the actions of those who sincerely intended to serve Christ. More generally, however, Williams ascribes Christianity’s corruption to the desire to dominate and oppress others—the same motives that, according to Williams, led to the creation of the world’s—as opposed to God’s—religions.[171] Because of these factors, the “Truths of Jesus” are, like God’s people, “wrapped up confusedly even in Babylon itself.”[172]

Since the truths of eternity have diffused among the world’s lies and errors, according to Williams, they are similar to precious jewels that one must extract from dross. We must tolerate and not roughly remove error from the world because, in thus expurgating error, we would lose many truths.[173] On the other hand, by tolerating error, we may enrich ourselves by straining the world’s errors for the precious truths we lack. Moreover, Williams’s love of truth is not driven by mere intellectual curiosity. Williams sees a fire for truth and truthfulness as essential to the Christian faith. He writes, "it is a glorious Character of every true Disciple or Scholar of Christ Jesus, to be never too old to learn."[174] Indeed, Christ commands his disciples to seek truth by trying "all things," not just studying scripture.[175] Moreover, the "Liberty of trying what a Friend [and] . . . an (esteemed) Enemy presents, hath ever . . . proved one especial means of attaining to the truth of Christ."[176]

---

[170] YMB, 29.

[171] Examiner, 214.

[172] Examiner, 272.

[173] In BT, 165, Williams declares, “Evil is always Evil, yet permission of it may in case be good.” In BT, 169, Williams argues that permitting the tares, which “are indeed evil,” is for the good of the wheat and of the whole world.

It is possible that a religious defense for toleration could simply rely on a divine commandment that we should not persecute error. As with his many of his other arguments for toleration, Williams's defense of liberty of conscience using truth's value shows that a religious argument can be much more complex that a list of scriptures proclaiming divine commands. Moreover, Williams's argument here is interesting because a defense of toleration based on truth's value can be entirely secular. J.S. Mill's argument in *On Liberty* provides a secular analogue to many of the religious arguments given by Williams and other authors of the 17th century, who thus might be said to anticipate Mill. Nevertheless, while the religious overtones of Williams's argument might sacrifice its acceptability to wider audiences, to those who do not accept his religious preconceptions, those religious elements provide a response to one of the problems that generally plagues arguments for toleration based on truth—the belief that we need no longer tolerate once we have the truth.

---

[174] YMB, 29.

[175] YMB, 29.

[176] YMB, 29. I have not substituted "special" for "especial," although the former is generally used in contemporary usage for the former, because of the additional nuances of meaning the latter has held in the past. It has been used to mean "Pre-eminent, exceptionally distinguished," and "Belonging pre-eminently to a particular person or thing" ("Especial, a.," Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2d Edition, 1989, available at http://dictionary.oed.com/; Internet; accessed 7 Nov 2005).

Williams believes that persecution so harms the truth that anyone who is truth-loving, including a true Christian, should avoid using the civil sword to fight error. Williams regards personal ambition as a corrupting influence on Christianity and a primary motivation in the creation of other religions. Many civil and ecclesiastical leaders mold religion to sustain their power and support their indolence.[177] Nevertheless, Williams believes that there is another type of persecutor; this second type consist of those who intend well but are mistaken, deceived by those who manipulate religion to their own ends.[178] According to Williams, we can explain the behavior of most of the world's leaders by recourse to these two types. Either they have been deceivers, corrupting religion and persecuting others to serve their own ends, or they have themselves been deceived into sustaining persecution. In Williams's opinion, both types of leaders, whether deceived or not, have been guided by "the Father of lies and murder from the beginning."[179] Consequently, "the nations of the world have [seldom] persecuted or punished [anyone] for error." Rather, they have persecuted or punished others "for the truth," which they have "condemned for error." Moreover, Williams asserts that the elect cannot claim a special exemption because of their status, that they will not persecute truth because they have the truth; God's people must be careful because even they become "deluded and . . . confident" in that which is false.[180]

---

[177] Indeed, Williams argues that there is little difference between civil rulers assuming spiritual functions and religious leaders assuming civil power. The latter, he concedes, might be a little better, but it still resulted in "many Antichristian abominations" (BT, 370).

[178] See YMB, 222; BT, 336; and BT, 374-5.

[179] YMB, 283. See also YMB, 34. Williams believes that there are battles about God's truths, fought by all of the holy angels, including Michael the Arch-Angel, and "the Messengers and Witnesses of his Truth," and by the "great red Dragon," with his "bloody Followers, Devils and men of all sorts and Nations." In this passage, Williams singles out the "Roman Emperor" and the "Roman Popes" as having "sucked the Blood and broke the Bones, and devoured the Flesh of so many hundred thousand, thousands of" God's people.

The harm that persecution inflicts on the truth should be particularly poignant, Williams believes, to the true followers of Christ. He argues that, when we examine the history of persecution against Christ's true followers, we can particularly see that persecution harms rather than protects the truth and its proponents. Williams believes that those who "fear God, [including] Christ Jesus and his Messengers and Ministers . . . have always been and are accounted, the chiefest heretics, Blasphemers, Deceivers, and Seducers in this World."[181] Thus, seeing Christ and his followers as heretics and seducers, persecutors have thrown them into the "Furnace." Rather than focusing on the sympathy that a Christian should feel toward all those who might share the same fate as Christ and his Apostles, Williams looks at the identity of the persecutors. Thinking that they were persecuting error, sincere Christians could be persecuting truth, and even Christ. Although they feel certain that they have the truth, they might be misled by the "light of a deceived conscience."[182] Christ declared that he would turn away many, even those who claimed to serve him, because they had persecuted him in their treatment of others.[183] Thus, in persecuting the weak and the afflicted, Christians may unwittingly persecute Christ and bring God's condemnation on themselves.

---

[180] BT, 272. We will see the reasons for this in our later discussion of predestination.

[181] YMB, 457.

[182] YMB, 272.

[183] YMB, 517. See Matt. 25: 31-46.

Thus, Williams sees many arguments for toleration surrounding the love of truth. Truth's fragmented and scattered state requires the freedom to explore and sift the truth from even the most obscure sources. Moreover, Williams sees a strong argument for toleration when one considers that persecution carries with it the risk of fighting the truth, as well as when a Christian considers the long history in which persecution had been used to suppress certain Christian beliefs.

2.3.5 Soteriology

Williams frequently framed his arguments for what we call religious liberty in terms of "liberty of conscience" and "persecution for cause of conscience." Williams does not use the phrase "liberty of conscience" as a mere synonym for religious liberty to reduce repetition; he uses that terminology because his defense of religious liberty depends on the character, limits, and value of the conscience. The conscience is bound to the knowledge that enables social existence and good citizenship, as well as to the belief involved in one's salvation. Thus, we will begin our examination of the soteriological grounds for toleration in Williams's thought by examining the conscience.

2.3.5.1 Conscience in the Thomist and Calvinist traditions

To understand Williams's presentation of the conscience, it is helpful to review two concepts frequently associated with the conscience, divine judgment and moral self-judgment. God knows and judges each person according to his actions and the character that he develops. Moreover, each individual judges the rectitude or iniquity of his actions, thoughts, and being according to what he or she perceives to be the standards of morality. Furthermore, the individual's perception of divine approval or disapproval may affect his self-judgment.

The capacity for self-evaluation is implicit to Williams's argument, which we saw earlier, that all people, regardless of creed, are capable of civility. People are capable of civil existence, and do not need to be Christians or adherents to a particular form of Christianity, because each person's conscience can perceive and follow the principles of morality according to natural law. For Thomas Aquinas, the concept of the conscience was split into two parts, *synderesis* and *conscientia*.[184] *Conscientia* refers to the individual's capacity to take first practical principles of moral behavior and use them to judge in particular circumstances, including the correctness of an action one intends to take and the incorrectness of an action already taken. *Synderesis* is the "special natural habit" whereby we obtain the first practical principles from nature.[185] Both *synderesis* and *conscientia* fall within the realm of natural law; the principles of morality are attained without divine aid through *synderesis*, and *conscientia*'s application of those principles is part of practical reason.

According to Aquinas, *synderesis* cannot err inasmuch as it is a passive capacity whereby the individual *receives* the first practical principals. The conscience is nonetheless fallible because humans can err in their application of first principles. As they come from natural law, the first principles for moral behavior are available to all humans. Thus, although they may occasionally make mistakes, all humans are capable of the guidance and judgment provided by the conscience. Consequently, moral behavior and civil society are possible.[186]

---

[184] For an eloquent discussion of *synderesis* and *conscientia* in Aquinas, Calvin, William Ames, and William Perkins, see Davis, 72-8.

[185] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* trans. English Dominicans (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1912-36; New York: Christian Classics, 1981), 1.Q79.A12.Body.

As we move from Thomism to Calvinism, many of Thomas's concepts regarding the conscience are retained. Although the emphasis on the fall of Adam led Calvin and others who were influenced by him to see even human reason as corrupted, it was not a corruption that completely debilitated man's moral capacity.[187] While many Calvinists rejected any form of intellectualism that would bind God by the dictates of reason, they did not subscribe to a voluntarism of arbitrary, capricious will. They believed that God's mind exhibited a rational order, and that God had imposed this order upon the world during its creation. Included in this rational order were the principles of morality. While Adam had violated this morality and plunged mankind into the Fall, corrupting man and making him incapable of salvation through his works, the principles of natural morality remained in effect and available to each person.

This understanding of natural law and the morality it enjoins are critical to Reformed soteriology. Each person is aware of the law and its dictates. Accordingly, he is accountable for the laws that he will inevitably violate and merits condemnation. Indeed, it is partially through the individual's awareness of his shortcomings and guilt that he realizes his need for grace. This does not mean that the fall had no effect on the individual's reason—that sin does not partially obscure that light he can receive. The fall diminished human reason, but human reason at least retains the capacity for civil existence and partially moral behavior. The fall, however, profoundly affects human motives for pursuing the good.

---

[186] This does not mean, however, that all people are saved. As will be discussed momentarily, the principles of natural law, including those of moral living, belong to the moral order established at creation. After Adam's fall, these principles only condemn man. Justification now comes through the redemption, which was established after the creation. Consequently one's moral behavior under natural law has no positive effect on one's salvation; the terms of salvation after the fall are established only through revelation.

[187] In this discussion, we may see many similarities to, and a potential source for, Locke's understanding of reason and the fall.

The corruption of our motives for virtuous behavior is one of the falls' most important effects, particularly regarding Williams's use of the conscience to defend toleration. The fall leads man to pursue moral actions for the wrong reasons—for self-interest and personal glory rather than for the love and glory of God. Thus, even our good works are not good; our expectations for reward infect even our good works. The corruption of our motives for doing good, combined with our inability to be completely good even for the wrong reasons, means that no one is worthy of salvation. All are reprobate, and it is only through God's freely given mercy that any person is saved.

Because of each person's inherent sinfulness, everyone should always have a bad conscience, a conscience that declares that a person is guilty according to the dictates of natural law. This is relieved, however, when a person feels God's call and realizes that he has become one of God's elect. Through his call and justification, an elect person subsequently participates in righteousness through Christ. Although there is no righteousness in him, he is righteous through his participation in Christ.[188] Thus, the individual's consciousness of his election, despite his sinfulness and his consciousness of that sinfulness, enables him to have a good conscience.

---

[188] Moreover, he will gradually become righteous through the process of sanctification that begins with his justification. He may never be completely righteous in this life, however, such that he must always depend on Christ's grace.

Thus, for Calvin and those of the Reformed tradition, the conscience plays multiple roles. Through our, albeit limited, capacity of reason and our limited ability to apprehend and apply the principles of natural law through our consciences, we become capable of civility and social existence. When we consider our status before God, however, natural law becomes a source of guilt and anxiety. Relief from this anxiety comes only through grace, whereby we give up pursuing justification through the law and rely wholly on the grace that God gives to the elect.[189]

2.3.5.2 Williams and the nature of the conscience

When discussing the liberty of conscience defended in Williams's writings, it is easy to reduce it to "a freedom from religion, a freedom for religion."[190] Those freedoms, subject to the restriction that no one violates a limited conception of the civil good, are the practical consequences of Williams's doctrine. Reducing Williams's doctrine to freedom for and from religion, however, conceals several important questions: Why did Williams continually use the phrase "liberty of conscience" when terms like toleration and religious liberty are so much simpler? More importantly, and related to the first question, why does the *conscience* require and justify religious liberty?

Williams uses the phrase "liberty of conscience" rather than "religious liberty" because he regards an individual's conscience as something much more deeply engrained than his religion. Moreover, the conscience is much more universal than a particular religion, belonging to individuals regardless of their faith.[191] Moreover, when he compares religion to the conscience, religion appears too ephemeral. The people pass from one religion to another according to which party has "the longest sword" and "the strongest Arm" carrying it.[192] Williams regards the conscience, on the other hand, as a durable characteristic of the individual, one that it not that is not easily altered by "Arguments or Torments," even when it is "groundless, false, and deluded." The conscience is "a persuasion fixed in the mind and heart of a man, which enforceth him to judge . . . and to do so and so, with respect to God, his worship, &c."[193]

---

[189] Ralph Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), 124. Hancock notes that, according to Calvin, our certainty of salvation is destroyed and we return to a state of anxiety if we begin to focus on the good works that we do; in returning to our works, we also see that our works are also evil, and with that consciousness returns the realization that we are wicked.

[190] Gaustad, 146.

In Williams's understanding of the conscience, we can see strong elements of conscience as self-judgment. In *The Examiner Defended*, he declares that natural wisdom consists of two parts, that which belongs to everyone, even the most vulgar, and that which is refined by experience, study, education, and "Animal Spirits."[194] This natural wisdom, which acts as the "Candle or Light remaining in man," may give us knowledge of God's existence and work in "Creating, Ruling, and Ordering all things," as well as a conviction of divine approval or disapproval.[195] Consequently, as Williams explains in the *Bloody Tenent*, we can use this knowledge to judge ourselves.[196] As Williams writes, a person who sins "wanders from the path of Truth, and is condemned by himself . . . that is, by the secret checks and whisperings of his own conscience, which will take God's part against a man's self, in smiting, accusing, &c."[197]

---

[191] Williams repeatedly assures his Christian readers that non-Christians also have consciences.

[192] YMB, 508.

[193] YMB, 508.

[194] Examiner, 241.

[195] Examiner, 241-2.

[196] BT, 89.

In these passages, however, we begin to see that the conscience does not consist merely in the human activity whereby we condemn or justify ourselves using first moral principles. Williams refers to "secret checks and whisperings" that "take God's part" in our trials. In the *Examiner's* passage on natural wisdom, Williams argues that natural wisdom is insufficient for salvation. History and experience demonstrate that even the greatest philosophers cannot use natural reason to develop "a Spiritual and saving knowledge of God;" a love of God; or an understanding of redemption, true worship, or the "mystery of the Father and of the Son."[198] Knowledge of these things comes only through "the Revelation of the Word and Spirit of God, out of his absolute, free, and peculiar Grace and Mercy in Christ." God thus plays a role in the conscience, and we cannot ignore the role that divine judgment plays in the conscience if we are to fully understand how religious liberty is related to the conscience in Williams's theology.

To understand Williams's defense of the conscience's liberty, it is helpful to examine the persecution-sustaining doctrines he rejects. First, we will look at Puritan's use of injunctions about idolatry in the Old Testament to justify persecution. Secondly, we will examine Puritan arguments that, in punishing dissent, they were sustaining rather than persecuting the dissenter's conscience.

Although Williams secured a Parliamentary charter for the colony in 1644, the independence and integrity of the colony was in sufficient danger that he had to leave for

---

[197] BT, 89. Moreover, Williams declares that these "checks of conscience we find even in God's own dear people."

[198] Examiner, 242.

England again in 1651. During this second trip, Williams encountered two anonymous pamphlets. The first defended religious liberty in a work entitled *Zeal Examined*. The response to this pamphlet, *the Examiner Examined*, rejected religious liberty and sustained the state's responsibility to guide religious belief. In addition, John Cotton had since replied to Williams's *The Bloody Tenent* with *the Bloody Tenent Washed and Made White Through the Blood of the Lamb*. During this second trip, Williams published four new works, three of which addressed the topic of religious liberty. The works on religious liberty included a response to *The Examiner Examined*, which Williams entitled *The Examiner—Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer* (hereafter referred to as *Examiner Defended*), and a response to Cotton's work, which Williams entitled *the Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody . . . .*[199]

---

[199] The full title of Williams's response is *The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody: By Mr. Cottons endevour to wash it white in the Blood of the Lambe; Of whose precious Blood, spilt in the Blood of his Servants; and Of the blood of Millions spilt in former and later Wars for Conscience sake, That Most Bloody Tenent of Persecution for cause of Conscience, upon a second Tryal, is found now more apparently and more notoriously guilty*.

While Williams made great use of John Cotton as his foil in defending religious liberty, we must remember that Williams was not merely advocating religious liberty in the New World. After he was "enlarged" out of the existing colonies of New England and established his own colony as an enclave of religious liberty, Williams nonetheless continued to defend religious liberty against authorities in both England and New England. While his correspondence and public debate with Cotton demonstrate his desire to push for religious liberty among the Puritan colonies, it is important to note that all of his works save the last were published in London and were frequently addressed to Parliament and other leading figures. Moreover, we should remember that England was still Williams's country. Indeed, as David Hackett Fischer argues in *Albion's Seed*, the colonists' love of their home country intensified rather than diminished with their distance from it. As a result, their language, customs, dress, and other matters of culture solidified on reaching New England, creating a lasting cultural snapshot that led later English travelers to remark that a journey through English-speaking America was like a journey through England's history.

When he left the territory belonging to the Massachusetts Bay Company, Williams obtained land from the Native Americans and established his own colony. He did not, however, establish his own nation. Rather, he went to England and obtained a charter from its ruling power, Parliament. Later, when the other colonies and disgruntled citizens of Rhode Island endangered the colony's charter, Williams again returned to England to ensure the old charter or get a new one.

The Examiner Examined, which was organized as a series of questions, is particularly interesting in the way in which it relates persecution to the workings of the conscience. Williams summarizes the thirteenth question in *the Examiner Examined* as: "Whether since Idolatry was punished by the light of Nature (as Job acknowledged, *Job* 31:28.) the Magistrate ought not much more to punish it in the Gospel-light."[200] Many in the Reformed tradition (often drawing on Paul's famous argument in *Romans*) believed

---

Undoubtedly, Williams sought a charter from the king in part to protect himself and his colony from the king's other subjects. Some Native American tribes similarly made themselves subjects of the king, seeking their own charters in London, to protect themselves from the encroachments of the Puritan colonies. See Tad Walch, "Pilgrims and Savages? No!" *Deseret Morning News*, 24 November 2005, for a discussion of Jenny Hale Pulsipher, *Subjects Unto the Same King: Indians, English, and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). Apart from these strategic considerations, Williams thought of England as his home and of himself as an Englishman

While this work has focused on Williams's condemnation of the pursuit of a national church in New England, and some authors see Williams as rejecting any concept of creating a city on a hill, his address to Parliament in the introduction to *Yet More Bloody* demonstrates his belief that a nation can be an example to all others. Moreover, it demonstrates his desire that England, his nation, be that example in matters of religious liberty. He writes, "But why should not such a parliament as England never had, (and who knows whether ever will the like) why should not the piety and policy of such Statesmen out-shoot and teach their Neighbors, by framing a safe communication of freedom of Conscience in worship, even to them to whom with good security of Civil peace) it is as due as to any other Consciences or Worshippers in the World . . ."(YMB, 11). Although the debates between Williams and John Cotton seem to be an American affair, Williams was pursuing liberty of conscience in the much larger context that included England, Scotland, and Ireland. Indeed, the debates inevitably became part of that larger context, if only because of Cotton's preeminence among Independents in both America and England. Furthermore, *the Examiner Defended* is interesting because it shows him entering the English debates outside of the immediate context of the squabbles about religious liberty and persecution in America. As a result of the vagaries of our own nationalism and national view of history, we are prone to think of "New England" with greater emphasis on the newness and its connection to post-Revolution America. The Puritans, by contrast, thought of America as a renewal of England and a vehicle by which the Reformation of England could be achieved.

[200] Examiner, 237. Job 31: 26-28, KJV, states, "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also *were* an iniquity *to be punished by* the judge: for I should have denied the God *that is* above" (italics in original). "In the KJV italics identify words that are necessary in English to round out and complete the sense of a phrase, but were not present in the Hebrew or Greek text of the manuscript used. Such additions were necessary because in some instances the manuscript was inadequate, and the translators felt obliged to clarify it in the translation. In other instances italics were necessary in cases where the grammatical construction of English called for the use of words that were not needed to make the same thought in Hebrew or Greek." "Bible Dictionary," *Appendix*, 600-793, *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments, Translated out of the Original Tongues: and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised, By His Majesty's Special Command, Authorized King James Version* (Salt Lake City, UT: Intellectual Reserve, 1979), 708. See also Gerald A. Larue, "Another Chapter in the History of Bible Translation," *Journal of Bible and Religion*, 31.4 (Oct, 1963), 309.

that God's commandments are clear to everyone, not merely by revelation but through the light of nature or reason. To this argument for persecution, the author of *the Examiner Examined* added another that was popular among many of the more orthodox theologians in the Reformed tradition, the need for social order.[201]

For Williams's antagonists, persecution was needed to sustain the social order and to mete out justice. For many New England Puritans, dissent resulted from either ignorance or a willful denial of the truth. In either case, the state had a responsibility to present the truth to the dissenters, *i.e.* force them to hear the truth from true ministers of God. Through such teaching, the Puritans felt that they would avoid punishing someone whose only fault was ignorance, as well as giving every dissenter a chance to abandon his or her error. Moreover, by teaching a person, rather than coercing him as the first step to reclaim him from error, these Puritans saw themselves as showing the dissenter that they sought "his healing, rather than his hurt."[202] Finally, they felt that this procedure would obviate the criticism that they persecute dissenters for their consciences.

Several assumptions about the way in which the conscience learns were at the foundation of the Puritan belief that they did not persecute consciences. The Puritans assumed that truth's power and clarity was such that, whenever the conscience is presented with the truth, it must acknowledge the truth's veracity. "[In] fundamental and principal points of Doctrine or Worship, the Word of God . . . is so clear, that [one who is admonished] cannot but be convinced in Conscience of the dangerous Error of his way, after" he is once or twice "wisely and faithfully" admonished.[203] Thus, once a person has been taught the truth, continued dissent could result only from the dissenter's conscious rejection of the truth or the self-manipulation of his conscience to accept error as truth. Such a person thus sinned against his conscience, and to punish him was not to persecute him "for Cause of Conscience, but for sinning against his Own Conscience."[204]

---

[201] See Davis, 88. The fourteenth question argues that idolatry should be punished because it will bring down great plagues upon the people (Examiner, 247-8).

[202] BT, 271.

Indeed, once a person had been taught the truth, he was even more accountable for his errors. As William Byrd notes, the Puritans like almost all other Calvinists (and Lutherans) believed that the conscience was made free when it received the truth.[205] Accordingly, when a person was taught the truth, he became entirely accountable for his own sins. Thus, when a dissenter is punished for dissent, once he has been taught the truth, his punishment is the just execution of a sentence dictated by his own conscience.[206]

Williams, of course, rejects the distinction that justifies persecution for sinning against one's own conscience. While Williams does not use the terms *synderesis* and *conscientia*, the concepts are useful in analyzing the functions of the conscience he invokes to dispute the individual's control over his conscience, and thus the justice of persecuting someone for error.[207] To the extent that anyone plays a part in developing the principles underlying the conscience, the conscience is, for Williams, a matter of the intellect and not the will.[208]

---

[203] BT, 42.

[204] BT, 42. Williams quotes liberally from both the "Modell of Church and Civil Power" and from a letter Cotton sent him as they disputed the matter. The "Modell," as the letter from Cotton here quoted, distinguishes between persecution for cause of conscience and punishment for sinning against one's own conscience.

[205] Byrd, 80. The seminal defense of this position in the Reformation was Luther's "On Christian Liberty."

[206] BT, 271. Indeed, Byrd reiterates the Puritan contention, inasmuch as a sinner violates his own conscience, his or her punishment is a requirement rather than a violation of that person's conscience (Byrd, 81n59).

Williams describes the conscience as a "persuasion fixed in the mind and heart of a man, which enforceth him to judge . . .and to do so and so, with respect to God, [etc.]."[209] As this description of the conscience suggests, an intellectualist understanding of the individual plays a strong, although finally only partial, role in Williams's defense of liberty of conscience.[210] This role is clearly apparent in *George Fox*, a work in which Williams discusses the way in which we learn the truth. Williams declares that "All Light," whether it is "Natural, Civil, or Divine [Truth] . . . comes from without, and is received by the Internal Faculty according to the Capacity, Nature and measure of it."[211] Our "Fancy or Comprehension" act as the receptive capacities for any "Truth or falsehood" that comes before us. Our faculties for reason, common sense, and experience then examine those perceptions for truth or falsehood. Subsequently, our memories keep a record of our judgments and the actions taken upon them.

---

[207] While Williams does not use the terms, that does not mean that the concepts themselves, or at least the functions embedded in them, had no influence on him. Indeed, Davis argues that the Thomist understanding of the conscience had a strong effect on the Puritans, including Williams.

[208] James Calvin Davis provides an excellent account of the intellectualist elements of Williams's view of the conscience. For the discussion that follows, I am deeply indebted to him. See Davis, 82-90.

[209] YMB, 508.

[210] While James Calvin Davis overemphasizes the role intellectualism plays in Williams's defense of religious liberty, his analysis of Williams's use of intellectualism is very valuable in understanding the role that the concept nonetheless plays. I am deeply indebted to Davis's work for the following discussion of intellectualism.

[211] Fox, 370-1.

As James Calvin Davis notes, the learning process described in *George Fox* leaves little room for the individual's will to play a role. The conscience depends on the individual's use of reason to perceive truth and falsehood, and someone who would like to change another's convictions must persuade him with arguments and evidence. Consequently, the claim that an individual wills his conscience to accept error is inconceivable. Such a doctrine, as Williams notes in a later work, "is but a Figleaf to hide the nakedness of" the bloody tenent of persecution.[212] In a wonderful metaphor, Williams declares that it is "Light alone, even Light from the bright shining Sun of Righteousness, which is able, in the souls and consciences of men to dispel and scatter such fogs and darkness."[213] This light is not, however, universally efficacious; it does not, according to Williams, enlighten all people at all times with all the truth.

2.3.5.3 The light of nature and revelation, and sin against conscience

In *The Examiner Defended*, Williams is concerned with the assertion that the light of nature and the light of the Gospel clearly reveal the idolatry of false beliefs and worship. From this assertion, the author of *The Examiner Examined* builds an argument sustaining persecution. Contending that the light of the Gospel is even clearer than that of nature, and that idolatry was punished according to the Old Testament as an offense against nature's dimmer light, the author declares that God's people now have an even greater responsibility to punish false beliefs and practices.

---

[212] YMB, 474.

[213] BT, 80-1. The reference to the "fogs and darkness" that beset human being until they are given Christ's light with their election. While Williams does not see the world as one of utter darkness—all humans are still capable of some degree of peaceful coexistence, especially with the help of government, they still live in a murky world whose darkness can only be dispelled completely for the elect through Christ's power.

Williams's first argument against this question relies upon differences in translation. He argues that the use of Job 31:28 to sustain the magistrate's involvement in religious matters depends on words added by the translator. Working from the *Septuagint*, Williams writes that a better rendering of the verse would be, "*For this would have been* accounted, judged or esteemed, the greatest, or a very great *iniquity*," which translation would destroy much of the passage's support for the magistrate's involvement in religious matters.[214] Moreover, to use this passage to condemn idolatry, an earlier verse had to be interpreted as a condemnation of particular religious practices, those of sun or moon worship. Williams denies this interpretation, arguing instead that Job 31:26 refers to Job's rejection of his own pride and self-conceit. Second, Williams argues that even if Job lived before Moses and that the Gospel gave more light than that available naturally to Job, the Gospel ended the national covenants existing before Christ, so that the passages do not give any legitimacy to the magistrate's involvement in civil affairs. Third, Williams distinguishes between two types of idolatry, religious and moral. The former characterizes worshipping false gods. The latter is worshipping things other than God in our hearts, and includes covetousness, pride, self-love, ambition, and whoredom (240). According to Williams, those who profess Christ's name are just as guilty as, and even more odious than, the earth's other inhabitants. The thrust of this argument is that, since we are all idolaters, no one should be quick to judge and punish another for his idolatry.

In Williams's fourth response to the question, he attacks the notion of natural law upon which it is based. He begins by declaring that the expression "Light of Nature" can be a snare for our understanding of the conscience. He acknowledges that the "Nature of God's Children is Light," and that the scriptures declare that the Righteous will be guided by Christ's and scripture's light. Williams feels, however, that this nature and source of light are irrelevant in his time. He asks, "But what is this to corrupt Nature, to dark Nature?"[215] Even "that which we call Light in men," he feels, is still great darkness.[216] Consequently, one should be cautious in any claims made about reason's power and the accountability we derive from it.

---

[214] Examiner, 237. See footnote 200.

Williams responds to those who would reply that scriptural passages from Job and Paul indicate that reason—the light of nature available to all—"discovers idolatry," by questioning whether the scriptures expressly declare that reason reveals idolatry, or whether that conclusion follows only from his antagonist's interpretation and interpolation.[217] Moreover, even if Job had truly argued that the light of nature reveals idolatry, Williams argues that such evidence is irrelevant in the contemporary context. Job's declarations, Williams argues, only apply to the "corporal judgments" existing prior to Christ and his Gospel.[218] Thus, although Solomon could declare that the "Spirit of a man is the Candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the Belly," acting as "an Excuser and an Accuser; a Secretary, a Sergeant, an Adversary, A Judge, and Executioner, within the bosom of all mankind," Williams declares that the search enabled by this candle is limited. He questions its ability to deeply examine our hearts and reveal the truth about "true or false Deities, and their respective Worships."

---

[215] Examiner, 240.

[216] Particularly after the rise of the Anabaptists and the Peasants' War, there was great debate among Reformation thought about the role of trained clergy, particularly those with extensive knowledge of Biblical languages and of forms of Biblical exegesis. After the War, Luther became a much stronger advocate of the need for a trained clergy. Following Luther, many Protestants believed that scripture was not self-revealing, but requires a painstaking explication by a highly framed and divinely inspired reader who is always able to skillfully convey this meaning to those less able to understand it. On the other hand, the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light emphasized the direct connection each person, even those without formal, theological education, had with God.

Williams did not clearly stake out a position in this debate. The tenor of his writings, with their frequent attack on paid clergy and their emphasis on the apostolic church and the apostles, who, with the important exception of Paul, were generally not learned men, shows that Williams did not adopt the former position. Indeed, Williams's writings are such that Vernon Parrington, one of the Progressive historians who interpreted Williams as a proto-Jefferson, typified Williams as a leveler. See William Lee Miller, 143-4.

To make Williams into a Leveler, an Anabaptist, or a Quaker would be inaccurate, however. Throughout his works, Williams demonstrates a great appreciation for knowledge of ancient languages, and the importance of understanding subtle but important distinctions in meaning. Indeed, in his debates with the Quakers, he demonstrates his belief about the importance of painstaking interpretation of scripture in his utter rejection of the doctrine of the Inner Light and the importance he places in the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura.* Furthermore, we see it in his indignation when one of his interlocutors refers to the meaning of the Bible in one of its original languages after rebuking him for attempting to use his knowledge of these languages and his training in scriptural exegesis, implicitly treating them as a higher authority than their Inner light.

Although Williams ultimately disregards the persecution-sustaining passages of the Old Testament as tied to the law of works and thus as irrelevant to the Gospel and its terms for salvation, he still had to address certain writings in which Paul also seems to argue for a natural religion. He does this by juxtaposing two seemingly contradictory statements from Paul, one sustaining the idea of natural religion and one refuting it.[219] To explain this contradiction, Williams defines two types of natural wisdom, one that "is Common to all mankind in general" and one that is "more Noble and High." This second kind of natural wisdom is developed through a process of refinement, "by Education, by Study, by Observation, [and] by Experience." Since this wisdom is available to anyone, it makes it possible to declare that anyone who practices idolatry is accountable for it.

---

[217] See footnote 200. **Verify footnotes in final draft!**

[218] Examiner, 241.

[219] He cites 1 Corinthians 1, which he paraphrases verse 21 to state, "The World by Wisdom knew not God," and Romans 2, which can be used to signify a knowledge of God among those who do not know him as the one God. Of particular interesting in sustaining a natural religion are verses 12-15.

Nevertheless, according to Williams, this form of wisdom is fundamentally limited. He declares that even the "Princes of natural knowledge, Plato, Seneca, Aristotle, &c." could, through their reason, discover only the notions of a deity that creates, rules and orders all things and of the "Blessedness" of being in the favor and the "Cursedness" of "Disunion" from this deity.[220]

Williams thus argues that natural reason cannot develop anything more than these basic notions of God. He feels that only a doctrine of free will, ignoring the problem of depraved human nature, could demonstrate that reason has any power to advance beyond these basic notions. This is particularly true when people claim that reason can teach us how to institute a religion and worship this deity. Williams, however, is convinced that history and experience teach us that reason lacks the ability to do nay such thing and can reveal nothing more than simple notions about God. In particular, simply by the light of nature, we cannot "attain a Spiritual and saving knowledge of God," or attain "a love unto God."[221] These and other notions come only through the "Revelation of the Word and Spirit of God, out of his absolute, free, and peculiar Grace and Mercy in Christ Jesus."

For Williams, toleration and freedom of conscience are not synonyms with indifference, relativism, or theories of recognition and respect. While Williams sustains others' liberty of conscience, he still believes them to be gravely in error. He shows us this through his understanding of the true fruits of reason in creating natural religion. He declares that this "Corruption of Nature," whereby we presume that reason can reveal anything beyond basic notions about God, has led “the wisest Nations, Councils, [and] Parliaments” to develop “monstrous opinions about the Gods” and “many monstrous and horrible and some ridiculous kinds and ways of worship.” Indeed, it is here that Williams turns the light of nature gleaned from Paul’s writings to man’s condemnation. Citing Romans 1, Williams declares that the “wisest of the Sons of men” did not glorify God and were not thankful when they knew him, giving his glory as “the Creator to the Creature.”[222] Consequently, “God delivered them up to . . . moral filthinesses and defilements.” Inasmuch as they rejected “the Truth in the Love of it, God delivered them up to strong delusion, to believe lies,” and from these lies and delusions they fell into great sins of uncleanness, whoredom, cruelty, and murder.[223] On this basis, Williams then suggests that these practices of “uncleanness and Whoredom,” even practices of human sacrifice, have sometimes resulted not from a desire to do evil but from sincere dictates of conscience.[224]

---

[220] Examiner, 242.

[221] Examiner, 242.

Pushing his rhetorical argument against natural religion even further, Williams discusses the self-mutilation involved in many religions. Indeed, as an example of the most “horrid Worship,” he raises the issue of human sacrifice, particularly that of infant sacrifice in both the old and the new worlds. For Williams, the fruit of natural religion is sin, and the originator of natural religion, reason, cannot be credited with discovering anything valuable in religion beyond the most basic notions of God. Williams thus argues that it is wrong to judge a person for idolatry according to the light of nature, because he argues that this light is very limited and clouded in matters relating to God.

---

[222] Examiner, 242.

[223] Examiner, 243.

[224] When these practices involve “Incivilities,” i.e. when they violate others in civil matters, the civil sword must, according to Williams, restrain them despite their conscientious nature.

Williams thus demonstrates that he is one of the strictest Puritans in insisting upon the priority and power of scripture over and against natural reason. He declares that it is only in scripture that we find the light necessary "to dispel and scatter [the] fogs and darkness" that are "in the souls and consciences of men."[225] As we saw above, Williams believes that Christ divided the servants of the early Church into two groups, the messengers—who were to convert others by sharing Christ's gospel—and the pastors—who were to feed and nourish those who had already been called.[226] Thus, before any group can constitute a church, Williams believes that those who would like to be its constituents must first be called "by the word" and received "into fellowship with God" by those whom Christ has authorized to preach.[227] As they carry out their calling to teach, they are not to make use of the civil sword. "Civil weapons are most improper and unfitting in matters of the Spiritual state and kingdom, though in the Civil state most proper and suitable."[228]

Rather than the civil sword, Christ's messengers, according to Williams, are only to use the spiritual weapons that God has provided. Williams argues that, "to recover a Soul from Satan by repentance, and to bring them from Antichristian doctrine or worship, to [Christian] doctrine or worship . . . , that only works the All-powerful God, by the sword of the Spirit in the hand of his Spiritual officers."[229] Although it eschews physical coercion, Williams feels that the spiritual sword is nonetheless powerful. It is, he contends, "A sword of two edges carried in the mouth of Christ, . . . which is of strong and mighty operation, piercing between the bones and the marrow, between the soul and the spirit."[230] Elsewhere, Williams describes this "two-edged sword coming out of the mouth of Christ in his true ministers" as a type of compulsion effected by "powerful argument and persuasion," by which the true ministers invite the "poor sinners to partake of the Feast of the Lamb of God."[231]

---

[225] BT, 80-81.

[226] BT, 288-289.

[227] BT, 293-294. In Christenings, 39, Williams declares that a true conversion follows the pattern of the early Church. The first characteristic of this pattern is that it "must be by the free proclaiming or preaching of Repentance and forgiveness of sins . . . *by such Messengers as can prove their lawful sending and Commission from the Lord Jesus*, to make Disciples out of all nations: and so to baptize or wash them . . . into the name or profession of the holy Trinity" (emphasis added).

[228] BT, 147. See also BT 147, 148, 160, 199, 267, and 301.

Williams uses the Biblical lexicon of the word as a spiritual sword, despite the militant connotations of the terminology, as a rhetorical strategy to sustain toleration. He is arguing that Christ's Gospel, expressed through his messengers, is strong enough, indeed is the only means, to convert all those who are God's elect. The use of the spiritual sword terminology, however, is merely one maneuver in Williams's rhetorical battle for toleration.[232] One of these other strategies was to stress the peaceable nature of Christ's gospel. Thus, while he describes Christ's word as a powerful instrument, something like a two-edged sword that can penetrate and cleave even the bone, Williams emphasizes that this powerful instrument nonetheless works through peaceful means. He declares that it is through the "meek and peaceable Invitations and persuasions of

---

[229] BT, 136.

[230] BT, 160. Williams also writes that "God's cause, Christ's Truth, and the two-edged sword of his Word, never stood in need of a temporal Sword, or an human Witness to confirm and ratify them. If we receive the witness of an honest man, the witness of the most holy God is greater" (BT, 267).

[231] BT, 301.

[232] In speaking of a rhetorical strategy, I do not mean to impute any insincerity on Williams's part.

[Christ's] peaceable" wisdom that his messengers prepare another person for Christ's call.[233]

Turning to the Biblical parable of the good and the bad ground, and yet another Biblical vocabulary, Williams compares Christ's messengers and their work to a farmer and his efforts. Just as a farmer works to transform arid land into fertile soil, through Christ's word his messengers "labor to turn bad ground," those who are not Christ's, "into good ground."[234] Until the Spirit comes to a person, however, that person is as one who is dead or sleeping in his sins.[235] It is only through the Spirit that a person wakes up from his sin and is brought into a new life.[236]

In Williams's discussion of a dissenter's continuing dissent, we begin to see why he believes that we cannot justly punish a person for sinning against his conscience, even after teaching him the established church's truth. Williams asserts that the darkness of nature's light impedes our reliance on it as a source of true, saving knowledge in spiritual matters. Furthermore, according to Williams, even the light of revelation, as it is received through scripture and from Christ's messengers, cannot illuminate the soul without the presence of the Spirit. Thus, although a Christian must satisfy a number of conditions to participate in another's conversion, such as having authority, a facility with that person's language, and knowledge of Christ's gospel, that conversion will only take place according to God's will.

---

[233] YMB, 494.

[234] YMB, 133.

[235] BT, 125-6; 138. Williams writes, "But Faith it is that gift which proceeds alone from the Father of Lights, . . . and till he please to make his light arise and open the eyes of blind sinners, their souls shall lie fast asleep . . . in the dungeons of spiritual darkness and Satan's slavery" (138).

[236] In Christenings, 39, Williams writes that the second characteristic of a true conversion, following the pattern of the early Church, is that it "is a turning of the whole man from the power of Satan unto God . . . Such a change, as if an old man became a new Babe . . . yea, as amounts to God's new creation in the soul . . ."

Moreover, Williams claims that, even when God changes a person's heart and makes him one of the elect, that person receives only limited light and may make many errors in belief and practice. He disputes the premise that the "fundamentals [of the Christian religion] are so clear, that a man cannot but be convinced in Conscience, and therefore that such a person not being convinced, he is condemned of himself, and may be persecuted for sinning against his conscience."[237] Even when extraordinary efforts have been made to preach Christ's Gospel to someone, such that he has been taught everything necessary to convince him of its truthfulness, that person may remain unconvinced.[238] Williams believes that a person's conscience may continue to indicate that his previous beliefs were true and his former worship and way of life correct. That is, a person's conscience may have a conviction that false beliefs are true, and he may be confident in that error.[239] Accordingly, Williams repeatedly declares that a persistent dissenter does not necessarily sin against his conscience, but may be following the dictates of a sincere, albeit mistaken, conscience.

---

[237] BT, 70.

[238] BT, 70. Williams writes, "I observe that God's people may live and die in such kinds of worship, notwithstanding that light from God publicly and privately, hath been presented to them, able to convince: yet not reaching to their conviction and forsaking of such ways."

[239] BT, 272. Williams uses the idea that the conscience may hold a conviction of error's truthfulness to explain how "Idolaters after light presented, and exhortations powerfully pressed, either Turks or Pagans, Jews or Antichristians, strongly even to the death hold fast (*or rather are held fast by) their delusions*" (emphasis added). Indeed, Williams further declares that these delusions of the conscience are not restricted to those who are not God's elect. He writes, "Yea God's people themselves, being deluded and captivated are strongly confident even against some fundamentals, especially of worship, and yet not against the light, but according to the light or eye of a deceived conscience."

Cotton and the New England Puritans had adopted the doctrine that they punished people for sinning against their own consciences to avoid the apparent injustice of persecuting someone for not believing in something that they did not and could not believe, as well as the injustice of persecuting persons for believing in something their consciences indicate to be true. As we will discuss shortly, Williams used elements of the Reformed tradition from which they all drew to refute their doctrine, arguing that that dissenters who maintain their prior beliefs and practices, despite the Church's efforts to correct them, were quite possibly sincere. Thus, Williams contradicts the Puritan assertion that persecution is the embodiment of Christian charity and justice, arguing instead that such persecution contradicts both justice and Christ's love. This is what Williams in a highly rhetorical manner calls the "bloudy tenent of persecution."

Williams opens *The Bloudy Tenent* with a discussion of "blood of so many hundred thousand souls of Protestants and Papists, spilt in the Wars of present and former Ages."[240] He continues by declaring that "the blood of the Souls" who have been murdered for their conscience is "crying for vengeance under the Altar." Following this "Preface," in a dedicatory letter to Parliament, Williams grows more graphic. He refers to the "oppressing, plundering, ravishing, murdering, not only of the bodies, but the souls of Men" by those who endorse "Persecution for cause of Conscience." He praises the members of Parliament, and declares that they have pleased God and received a guard of men and angels, for having "broke the jaws of the Oppressor, and taken the prey out of their Teeth."[241] Williams declares, however, that, in their present safety, peace, and freedom, England has only been "reprieved," not "pardoned." For England to receive this pardon, Williams declares that Parliament must remove the "greatest yokes yet lying upon English necks," which he declares "are of a spiritual and soul nature."[242] Indeed, he tells them that "soul yokes, soul oppression, plunderings, ravishing, &c. are of a crimson and deepest dye, and . . . the chief of England's sins," and also the cause of her "present sorrows."[243]

---

[240] BT, 3.

[241] BT, 6.

To demonstrate the evils descending from persecution, Williams reminds Parliament of England's long history of religious persecution. Throughout this history, successive Parliaments have escaped persecution by rising to power themselves, merely to change "these yokes according to their consciences." Rather than perpetuating this cycle, whereby each new Parliament removes its "soulyoke" and places it on another, Williams urges Parliament's members to "ease the Subjects and Yourselves from a yoke . . . which neither Your nor your Fathers were ever able to bear."

Furthermore, to these appeals to civic duty and equity, Williams adds another, the concern that England's leaders should have for their eternal welfare. In graphic terms, he reminds Parliament's members that their ignoble fathers and predecessors, those responsible for creating and perpetuating England's system of "soul oppression," "are moldered, and moldering their brains, their tongues, &c. to ashes in the pit of rotteness." In thus reflecting on the dead, Williams hopes that these "Noble Senators" realize that it will not be long before then join their predecessors in standing before God's judgment bar. At that time, Williams assures them, they will not be unhappy to have listened "to the cries of Souls, thousands oppressed, millions ravished by the Acts and Statues concerning Souls, not yet repealed; of Bodies impoverished, imprisoned, &c. for their souls belief, yea slaughtered on heaps for Religion's controversies in the Wars of present and former Ages."[244] These declarations, in the first few pages of *The Bloudy Tenent*, are but a sampling of the charges Williams levies throughout his works. The reader repeatedly confronts references to persecution, oppression, idolatry, superstition, soul prison, soul rape, ravishing, and blood.[245] And, as if these terms were insufficient, Williams modifies them with adjectives emphasizing their inhumane, idolatrous, and unchristian nature, and with declarations regarding the thousands or millions of souls crying to God for vengeance. Williams wants his readers to see the bloody and inhumane nature of religious persecution, and to remind them that, in supporting persecution, they were more like the soldiers who made "blood run down" Christ's head with the "Crown of Thorns" than like Christ himself.[246]

---

[242] BT, 6-7.

[243] BT, 6.

2.3.5.4 Inefficacy of persecution

Williams uses such rhetoric to shock those who persecute in Christ's name while professing love for those they persecute, pointing out the great injustice of their actions. Furthermore, Williams seeks to convince the persecutors that their methods are incompatible with their goals—that persecution is an ineffective means to another's conversion and salvation. Williams believes that persecution never results in true conversion. That does not mean, however, that it has no effect. He feels that persecution either drives a person to hypocrisy or hardens him in error and sin. Williams declares that, although the magistrate sends a heretic to "a true Church, to heal his Conscience," persecuted heretics are either "desperately hardened by such cruel courses" or, "through fear and terror," forced "to practice gross hypocrisy even against their consciences."[247]

---

[244] BT, 7.

[245] He even refers to the "cutting off by the Sword other Consciences and Religions" as "the bloody mother of all those monstrous mischiefs . . . both to the souls and bodies of men," and declares that it provokes God as a violation of his will concerning the tares" (BT, 285).

[246] BT, 374.

John Calvin Davis's analysis helps us understand why Williams believes such persecution leads the conscience to hypocrisy or hardening. Davis argues that we can only understand the Puritan view of the conscience in the context of intellectualism/voluntarism dichotomy. For intellectualists, a heretic's problems in moral decision-making result from an improper understanding of the good and not from a desire to be bad. For voluntarists, on the other hand, misdirected loves lead the will to reject the good. Davis argues that the Puritans embraced neither a pure intellectualism nor a pure voluntarism. Rather, while they generally inclined toward intellectualism, they were generally caught up in the tension between the two concepts.[248]

According to Davis, Williams follows the Puritans in leaning toward intellectualism while maintaining voluntarist notions. John Cotton's defense of persecution depends on the voluntarist belief that the will can both defy and alter the conscience. Williams, however, denies the will's power over the dictates of the conscience.[249] The conscience is ultimately subject to the individual's reason, not his will. Thus, according to Davis, the conscience's corruption in Williams's theology results from improper understanding rather than willful error.

---

[247] BT, 275-6. The ironic result, according to Williams, is that in attempting to heal the conscience, persecutors only "wound them deeper." This is similar to Locke's argument that the magistrate through persecution only adds to the condemnation of the heretic by adding hypocrisy to his sins.

[248] Davis, 82. William Ames, according to Davis, was the chief exception. Davis argues that Ames "reconceived moral psychology in a voluntarist mode, borrowing from Calvin and Augustine (as well as possibly the medieval theologian John Duns Scotus) to do so."

Davis sees evidence for this intellectualism in William's descriptions of the conscience. Williams turns the conscience into an intellectual rather than voluntary capacity when he describes it as a "persuasion" or a "light." Such references to light imply the necessity of search and examination in matters of the conscience.[250] The term "persuasion" goes even further, according to Davis, requiring not just the reception of knowledge but also personal deliberation. Thus, "[conscientious] conviction is subject only to the rules of understanding, which effect change on belief not by force of will, but by persuasion, education, argumentation, and 'Search and Examination.'"[251] Davis thus concludes that Williams anticipates Locke by arguing that coercing the conscience is both "impractical and irrational."[252]

Williams also presents the argument that persecution is counter-productive inasmuch as it reinforces the individual's prior conceptions and hardens him in his convictions. Indeed, Davis argues that this hardening under persecution demonstrates two unusual characteristics of Williams's formulation of the conscience. The first of these is that the conscience both condemns "transgressions of natural law" and confirms

---

[249] Davis, 84.

[250] Davis, 79.

[251] Davis, 86.

[252] Davis 157n59; 86. The argument that persecution is ineffective because the individual cannot will himself to believe or disbelieve anything, that the individual cannot direct his conscience with his will, is well-known in the Lockean literature on toleration.

"acts and beliefs that are consistent with the law."[253] Thus, the conscience is both an instrument of self-correction and a brace to strengthen us in our convictions. The second aspect of the conscience that Davis sees as peculiar to Williams is its capacity for both prospective and retrospective judgment. The conscience is not just a tribunal that judges actions one has already taken; it is also an "active inner voice or 'persuasion' capable of testifying to the moral appropriateness of a course of action before it actually had been undertaken."[254] Furthermore, Davis argues that the positive aspect of the conscience—its ability to judge whether actions and beliefs are right as well as wrong—works with both the conscience's prospective and retrospective abilities to judge whether proposed as well as past actions and beliefs are consistent with natural law.

This conjunction of the conscience's capacity for positive and negative judgment with the capacity for prospective and retrospective judgment gives us a partial framework for answering several important questions about William's thought. We have already seen that Williams argues that heretics and "idolaters" will hold fast to or be held by their delusions even after being taught and "powerfully pressed," and that even "God's people" are deluded in fundamental matters "according to the light or eye of a deceived conscience."[255] Furthermore, Williams claims that dissenters' consciences "walk on confidently and constantly even to the suffering of death and torments, and are more strongly confirmed in their belief and conscience, because such bloody and cruel courses of persecution are used toward them."

---

[253] Davis, 80.

[254] Davis, 80.

[255] BT, 272.

The properties underlying the intellectualism advanced by Davis's interpretation of Williams help us explain, in part, why dissenters maintain their beliefs even after someone teaches them the "truth." Coercion does not change them, although they may bow to it, because the conscience can only alter its convictions through the force of reason. Nevertheless, as we will see, Williams believes that the intellect cannot fully explain the conscience's resistance. Moreover, this intellectualism does not fully explain how the elect can be deluded "according to the light or eye of a deceived conscience." The conscience, from an intellectualist standpoint, should accept the light of truth once it has been educated—hence Cotton's claim that dissenters must be willfully fighting the truth. For Williams, we must ultimately look beyond the intellectualist/voluntarist model as it pertains to the individual to understand how the elect, who should have the truth before them and easily accept it, can have a "deceived conscience" that views error as truth. Finally, we will see that the answer to our third quandary, how coercing the truth can actually strengthen the conviction of error's truthfulness, follows our answer to the first, relying in part upon Williams's intellectualist notions.

As Davis explains, we find Williams's answer to the third question partially in the relationship between the conscience's prospective and retrospective capacities for judgment, which are not independent. The conscience must maintain consistency between them, and persecution only strengthens that relationship. "Persecution justifies the conscience in its judgments of past acts and beliefs, which simply encourages it to evaluate future circumstances in a consistent manner."[256] Applying this analysis of the conscience, Davis argues, "Williams believed that neither the dull interference of civil institutions nor the intense discomfort of persecution could sway a resolute conscience." The conscience is immovable under persecution because "its headstrong ways come from confidence in its own deliberations, its recognition of authority only in moral law, and its connection to God as its source of 'light' and direction."[257]

---

[256] Davis, 81.

The intellectualist mechanism Davis proposes to explain the conscience's stubbornness in retaining convictions despite persecution also applies to what Williams regards as an even more dangerous side effect of persecution. Earlier, we saw that Aquinas splits the conscience into the faculties of *synderesis* and *conscientia*. *Synderesis* is the faculty that apprehends moral first principles. *Conscientia* is the faculty that deduces new moral principles from the first principles and then applies them all to particular circumstances. While Williams does not use Thomas's terms in his discussion of the conscience, we may, as Davis points out, discern the capacities underlying Thomas's terms in Williams's thought.

In particular, the capacity underlying *conscientia* contributes to the conscience's hardening, which Williams repeatedly emphasizes as one of the consequences of persecution. Some dissenters "walk on confidently and constantly [in their consciences] even to the suffering of death and torments, and are *more strongly confirmed* in their belief and conscience, because such bloody and cruel courses of persecution are used toward them."[258] The repugnant nature of persecution only reinforce dissenters' perceptions that they have correctly developed and applied the principles of morality.

---

[257] Davis, 81.

[258] BT, 272. Emphasis added.

Thus, while a persecutor cannot force another to change his belief, the perceived immorality of the persecutor's actions may confirm the prior beliefs of the persecuted.

Whether it is a function of *conscientia* or a separate capacity of the conscience, another important component of Williams's conscience, one that can be affected by persecution, remains to be discussed—the conscience's ability to control the individual. While persecution cannot control belief, it can lead to hypocrisy. The persecuted may pretend disbelief in their true convictions and cease to fulfill the worship and practices dictated by their consciences. They may also feign belief in the convictions and fulfill the worship and practices of their persecutors, contrary to the dictates of their consciences.

Although Williams treats hypocrisy as a morally repugnant state on its own, its undesirability is augmented by its tendency to weaken the conscience's ability to control the individual. "This binding and rebinding of conscience, contrary or without its own persuasion, so weakens and defiles it, that it (as all other faculties) loseth its strength, and the very nature of a common honest conscience."[259] This degradation of the conscience is, according to Williams, inherently dangerous to society. As we have seen, Williams regards the conscience as central to civil existence; through its connections to natural law, the conscience enables each person to know and live according to the moral law that makes social existence possible. In breaking the conscience's power over action and outward appearance, persecution thus endangers the state.

Williams appeals to history to substantiate his claim about the dangers of persecution. He declares, "even our own histories testify, that where the civil sword, and carnal power, hath made a change upon the consciences of men, those consciences have been given up, not only to spiritual, but even to corporal filthiness, and bloody, and mad oppressing each other, as in the . . . bloody times" of Mary Tudor.[260] Moreover, Williams hints that persecution may damage not just the ability of the conscience to control the individual, but also the conscience's ability to maintain its underlying convictions. He declares that when people are forced to sin against their consciences by temporizing or turning "from their Religion," they become "not only hypocrites, but Atheists, and so fit for the practice of any evil murders, adulteries, treasons, &c."[261]

---

[259] YMB, 209.

Indeed, when Williams declares that persecution cannot save men's souls, he does not imply that persecution has no effect on one's salvation. To see this, however, we will briefly return to Williams's belief in Christianity's apostasy. For Williams, true conversion requires that a person be called through the preaching of the gospel by those to whom God has given authority to preach and effect the ordinances of the Gospel. Indeed, as Williams reveals in *Christenings make not Christians*, he believes that this call from the Spirit can only come when properly ordained servants have both the true message and a meticulous fluency in the language of the persons whom they teach.

While Williams believes that Christ ordained special ministers to spread his gospel—the apostles, he also believes that the authority to act as such a minister disappeared during Christianity's first centuries, possibly only to be restored when Christ returns. Accordingly, despite his facility with the language of local Native Americans, and despite a professed desire to spread Christ's gospel, Williams rejects even evangelism on his own part due to a lack of authority to preach.[262]

---

[260] YMB, 210.

[261] YMB, 230.

Williams's decision not to preach, however, also results from two additional factors. Despite his proficiency with indigenous languages, which equaled or surpassed that of his fellow Englishmen, he felt that he lacked the necessary proficiency to participant in a true conversion.[263] He claims that it would require "a great deal of practice, and mighty pains and hardship," for him or anyone else who evangelizes to attain the "degree of the Language" necessary to "open matters of salvation to them."[264] Williams does not deny the ability to effect a type of conversion, however. Indeed, he boasts that his language skills, as well as his friendship with the American Indians, are sufficient to convert many more "Natives" than were compelled by the Spanish. In such conversions, however, his language would not be sufficient to allow the spirit, through his words, to convert their hearts and bring about their election.

Moreover, according to Williams, Christianity's apostasy involved both a loss of authority and a loss and perversion of Christianity's doctrines; the resulting religion, as we saw earlier in the chapter, was no longer Christianity for Williams, but Christendom. Furthermore, it is important to note that, unlike other Protestants, Williams believes that this apostasy affected all those who considered themselves Christians, both Protestants and Catholics. Accordingly, given the non-existence of what he considered to be true Christianity, Williams fears that he would sin in attempting to convert anyone. He fears that he would convert them to a false religion. He writes,

---

[262] Christenings, 40. See also Hireling, 176. While Williams denies that there have been messengers authorized to spread Christ's truths since the times of early Christianity, he does believe that God has called witnesses through Christianity's long Apostasy to testify against its errors. Christ calls these witnesses to "prophecy against false Christs, false Faith, false Love, false Joy, false Worship, and Ministrations, false Hope, and false Heaven, which poor souls in a golden dream expect & look for" (Hireling, 176).

[263] Williams, on his first trip back to London, wrote *Key to the Language of America*, a book on the language and culture of the Narragansett Indians that is still considered valuable and accurate by anthropologists (William Lee Miller, 172).

[264] Christenings, 40. See also Hireling, 176.

> woe be to me, if I call light darkness, or darkness light; sweet bitter, or bitter sweet; woe be to me if I call that conversion unto god, which is indeed subversion of the souls of Millions in Christendom, from one false worship to another, and the prophanation of the holy name of God, his holy Son and blessed Ordinances.[265]

At this time, to convert others even by persuasion would be to lead them into false worship.

More importantly for Williams, converting others during Christianity's apostasy, whether by persecution or persuasion, gives those converts a false faith and a false hope that they have been saved. Thus, we not only "Blaspheme [Christ's] Name, and grieve his spirit" when we take it upon ourselves to spread his word, we also "hinder and harden poor souls against Repentance, when by fellowship in prayer with them as with Saints, we persuade them of their (already) blessed state of Christianity."

In *Christenings make not Christians*, another of Williams's works with a self-explanatory title, he argues that the history of the Europeans in the Western hemisphere demonstrates the actuality of false conversion. He writes,

> If the reports . . . be true, what monstrous and most inhumane conversions have they made; baptizing thousands, yea ten thousands of the poor Natives, sometimes by wiles and subtle devices, sometimes by force compelling them to submit to that which they understood not, neither before nor after such their monstrous Christening of them.[266]

---

[265] Christenings, 37.

[266] Christenings, 36.

Such coerced or manipulated conversions, according to Williams, lack any saving power. When a conversion leads only to another false form of worship—particularly one that mixes the worship of false gods with that of "the God of Israel," when it consists only of external submission, or when it is otherwise coerced, it is a false conversion with no saving effect on one's soul.[267] True conversions must involve free teaching by "Messengers [who] can prove their lawful sending and Commission," and it must be "a turning of the whole man from the power of Satan unto God."[268] Such a conversion "amounts to God's new creation in the soul."

Thus, Williams considers all coerced conversions, and perhaps even other contemporary conversions, to be false. Those who carry out these conversions lack a lawful commission from God. They effect the conversions through coercion or deceit rather than the persuasion of all Christ's truths necessary for true conversion. Moreover, inasmuch as these conversions come by a human timetable, mechanism, and authority, they do not carry with them the spirit necessary to work a change in a person's heart. Thus, although a convert may feel certain that he has been saved, he has not been. By thus deceiving a convert, those teaching him blaspheme and sin against God. More importantly, such conversion impedes true conversion. When someone comes with truth and authority to teach these converts, they will not listen, believing that they have already been saved.

As we will see, people have criticized Locke's defense of toleration for failing to uphold toleration inasmuch as belief can be coerced. Neither Locke nor Williams were unaware of the power that self-serving rulers wield in controlling opinion, and the fear of this power is central to Williams's concerns about false conversion. Belief can be manipulated by controlling the information that a person receives. Williams admits that we can be deceived, even about the state of our souls. It is in this respect that interpreting the conscience with a typology of voluntarism and intellectualism fails to sustain toleration. Davis argues that Williams's belief in an intellectualist rather than voluntarist conscience supports toleration because, inasmuch as coercion works on the will and the will cannot direct our convictions, we must rely on persuasion to effect another's conversion. The convictions of our consciences can be manipulated, however, and an intellectualist understanding of the conscience is thus insufficient to defend toleration.

---

[267] Christenings, 38.

[268] Christenings, 39.

Nevertheless, both Locke and Williams continue to deny that we can force another person to have saving belief. Williams indeed uses intellectualist elements in his understanding of the conscience to defend toleration. His defense of toleration, however, relies on both an intellectualist understanding of the individual and a partially voluntarist notion of God. While the activities associated with *conscientia*—applying moral principles to specific situations and judging actions and beliefs—may be intellectual and thus partially immune to the will, we must still account for the roll of will in other aspects of the conscience.[269] Of particular interest is the acquisition of our moral first principles and the divine judgment that frequently accompanies the conscience's tribunal of self-judgment.

---

[269] I say partially because, as we saw in our discussion of Locke, the decision to engage in judgment may indeed by affected by the will.

We have seen that, for Williams, only those whom Christ properly ordains may act as his messengers and convert others, and that these messengers must convert others only by preaching Christ's words. They must work to bring that message to the hearts of those who do not believe. This mode of conversion, as well as other elements we have seen of Williams's thought, might lead us to believe that Williams does follow a form of intellectualism. We have been discussing a restricted form of the debate between intellectualism and voluntarism, however. We have focused on which of the individual's capacities, the will or the understanding, has more control over the conscience. The relationship of will and reason in God is just as important as the manner in which will and reason relate to one another in human beings. Indeed, in Williams's account, God's will supplements intellectualism's defects in sustaining toleration.

While Williams feels that it is critical that an individual be taught and persuaded of the Gospel, neither the individual nor the one teaching him has ultimate control over that person's belief or state of salvation. It is through the preaching of the word that a person hears the call of God's spirit.[270] It is God's choice, however, whom he will call to salvation. God allows some to believe and causes others to remain in darkness. Despite an individual's utmost efforts to persuade others, some will remain unbelievers. The latter remain reprobate because God gives them "strong delusions, so strong and efficacious, that they believe a Lie and that so Confidently, and some so Conscientiously, that Death itself cannot part between the Delusion and their Conscience."[271] Thus, some people will “hold fast” to, or be “held fast by,” their delusions despite the best efforts to persuade them.[272]

---

[270] BT, 80.

[271] BT, 273.

Looking at the causes of belief rather than those of disbelief, Williams builds on the Reformed doctrine that faith is a gift. He writes, “Faith is that gift which proceeds alone from the Father of Lights, . . . and till he please to make his light arise and open the eyes of blind sinners, their souls shall lie fast asleep . . . in the dungeons of spiritual darkness and Satan’s slavery.”[273] “[Only] the finger of God,” which Williams describes as “the mighty power of the Spirit in the Word” and the “Light from the bright shining Sun of Righteousness,” can dispel and scatter the “fogs and darkness” in the “souls and consciences of men.” Thus, the power in the word that converts is not under our control.[274] Accordingly, in one of his many marginal notes, Williams declares that “Christ is King alone over [the] conscience.”[275] Only when Christ acts on the individual, effecting “God’s new creation in the soul,” can that person really believe.[276]

Like Locke, Williams distinguishes the belief of one of the saved from the mere assent to a proposition that anyone, even a devil, can give. To do so, Williams first distinguishes between natural and supernatural questions, and then further distinguishes the types of answers that someone can give to the latter. When Christ asked his disciples how many loaves of bread they had, it was an example of the former, a question to which

---

[272] BT, 272.

[273] BT, 138. See also Fox, 190.

[274] BT, 80-1.

[275] BT, 77.

[276] Christenings, 39.

"their Natural Faculty or Reason could give an answer."[277] Christ's query, "whom do Men say that I the Son of man am," however, is an example of "a Divine and Supernatural Question."

A person may answer "a Divine and Supernatural Question" using the natural faculty of reason to, although that answer will lack any saving power. Thus, when Christ queried his disciples concerning his identity, they could partially answer that he was the "Son of God" using their "Natural . . . Birth Powers or Faculties."[278] Williams asserts, however, that the "Devils could Answer as well as the Disciples" in thus recognizing Christ as the "Son of God." Such an answer does not reflect the belief of a true Christian, the belief given to the elect when God changes the individual's heart. Williams writes, "to give a believing and an affectionate Answer as Peter did, this requires a Faculty and Power which Flesh and Blood could not reach to."[279] Rather, "the Spirit or secret working Power of God . . . wrought Peter's heart and the Disciples hearts, and to this day all Believers Hearts to receive and welcome all truly Divine and Heavenly Doctrines." Thus, in his debates over the Quaker faith, Williams denies the doctrine of the inner light, whereby each person innately partakes of the divine and is able to receive and accept the truth immediately upon hearing it.[280] Rather, Williams declares that "the natural man perceives no spiritual matter" until "he is born again."

---

[277] Fox, 371.

[278] Fox, 371-2.

[279] Fox, 372.

[280] While Williams felt it was his duty to condemn the false elements of the Quaker faith, as he felt it was a Christian's duty to witness against all false beliefs and practices in Christianity, he felt that they, like everyone else, had a right to liberty of conscience as long as they did not violate others' rights. Thus, Quakers soon came to have a strong presence in Rhode Island, and at times to control the colony's government.

Moreover, Williams argues that, when God justifies the elect, he neither reforms their hearts nor informs their consciences completely. Williams believes that even "God's people" can be "deluded and captivated . . . against some fundamentals, especially of worship. . . according to the light or eye of a deceived conscience."[281] Indeed, even "pious ministers" may be so deluded that they accept that which other equally pious ministers reject.[282] Thus, Williams ultimately accepts that a person may be one of the elect and yet lack the fundamental beliefs regarding salvation.

In his defense of the state's involvement in religious belief, John Cotton distinguishes between fundamental doctrines, those in which we must believe for salvation, and circumstantial doctrines. People may differ in their beliefs regarding circumstantial doctrines with no prejudice to their salvation. Accordingly, while the state should protect its citizens in matters of fundamental doctrines, it need do nothing concerning those that are circumstantial. Like Locke, although on different grounds, Williams rejects this distinction.[283] Williams cannot admit that an individual will be damned because he falls short of correct beliefs. The distinction between fundamental and circumstantial beliefs, with the additional proposition that salvation requires belief in fundamental doctrines would, Williams declares,

> everlastingly condemn thousands, and ten thousands, yea the whole generation of the righteous, who since the falling away (from the first primitive Christian state or worship) have and do err fundamentally

---

[281] BT, 272.

[282] BT, 26. See BT, 375.

[283] Locke sustained toleration because he came to believe that no belief or act of worship was indifferent; one's sincerity was critical to one's acceptance before God.

> concerning the true matter, constitution, gathering and governing of the Church.[284]

Despite his belief that Christianity had fallen into an apostasy since its earliest times, Williams cannot believe that many Christians would be condemned because of their incomplete and false practices and beliefs. Indeed, he declares that it would be far "from any pious breast to imagine that they are not bound up in the bundle of eternal life."

The continuing discussion in the *Bloody Tenent* reveals Williams's belief in four foundations of the early Christian church and, as part of the fourth foundation, six doctrines necessary to a "true profession of Christ."[285] These principles include: "Repentance from dead works, Faith towards God, the Doctrine of Baptism, Laying on of Hands, the Resurrection, and Eternal Judgment." Williams declares, however, that Christianity has been ignorant about baptism and the laying on of hands for hundreds of years, and that the first practices regarding these doctrines remain in obscurity.

To understand how Williams reconciles the existence of principles necessary to a "true profession of Christ" with his belief that those ignorant of such principle will not all be damned, we need only look at the first of these necessary doctrines—repentance from dead works. According to Reformed doctrine, a person cannot save himself through his works. Indeed, while they believe that we are saved by faith alone, Williams and some Protestant theologians claim that we cannot even claim responsibility for our faith. God's grace alone saves one of the elect; this grace, in freeing the elect from their sins and making a new creation within them, is uniquely responsible for their faith and concomitant good works. Consequently, Williams argues that we cannot hold true beliefs until God has changed our hearts and thus enabled us to accept those beliefs.

---

[284] BT, 64.

[285] BT, 65.

Williams believes, however, that lack of knowledge does not mean that a person is condemned. God alone determines those whom he will save or damn, just as he controls whether a person will have true, saving belief. The reprobate are not alone in lacking true faith; the elect may also fall short of true belief, especially in times of apostasy. Thus, Williams declares that "God's people may err from the very fundamentals of visible worship," and that "God's people in their person, . . . in the life of personal grace, will yet be found fast asleep in respect of public Christian Worship."[286] Thus, while "God's people (in their persons) are His, most dear and precious," they may yet be mingled "amongst the Babylonians" in respect to true "Christian Worship."[287]

In respect to the question of the fate of those who have never heard of Christianity, including that which Williams regards to be the true doctrines and practices of Christianity, Williams regards the doctrine of predestination as a doctrine of God's mercy—at least for the elect. More importantly, in the context of this work, Williams turns predestination into a doctrine of toleration and religious liberty. Using the doctrine of predestination, Williams answers even more clearly than Locke why we cannot coerce saving belief. We cannot coerce belief because Christ alone is "the king of our consciences." While Christ empowers ministers to spread his word, which acts as the medium through which God's spirit effects conversion, it is only according to God's will that the word may be effectual in converting the heart of the elect. Accordingly, it is heretical to believe, and to act on the belief, that we can force or command God "to give faith to open the heart."[288]

---

[286] Marginal note, BT, 64; BT, 65.

[287] BT, 65.

Williams's contention that the truths of Christianity and the authority to spread them had been lost was largely an extrapolation of one of the Reformation's core contentions, that the Roman Catholic Church had corrupted the basic beliefs and practices of Christianity.[289] Williams, however, carried these contentions to the conclusion that the corruption was so great that their restoration required God's intervention, perhaps even Christ's return to the earth.[290] For the many Christians who are certain of their faith, Williams's beliefs about a Christian apostasy are false and his arguments for toleration lose much of their credibility.[291] Williams gains traction among many Christians, however, through his argument based on predestination. The principles of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, that we are saved only through faith and grace, as well as the corollary that we cannot even love God or have correct intentions until God has worked a change in our hearts, were central to the doctrines of the Reformation. Williams's beliefs will thus resonate with those who maintain more traditional Protestant notions of predestination and grace, and his arguments for toleration, particularly the argument that a person should not be punished for disbelieving something that only God can help him believe, will demand their attention.[292]

---

[288] BT, 258.

[289] See, for example, John Calvin, "Reply to Sadoleto," in *A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply, with an Appendix on the Justification Controversy*, ed. John C. Olin (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1966), 57; and John C. Olin, "Introduction," in *A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply, with an Appendix on the Justification Controversy*, ed. John C. Olin (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1966), 21.

[290] Despite his utter contempt for Catholicism, however, on the issue of authority he did draw nearer to its teachings. He ultimately rejected the idea that authority to create a church and ordain ministers could come from believing or from the congregation of believers. He argued, as we have seen, that authority must come directly from God. He thus denied the foundation for ministerial authority in most of Protestantism using a line of argument more closely aligned to that of Catholicism. He rejected the authority of the latter, however, following the Protestant contention that it had become corrupted and the tool of Satan. Williams thus became a Seeker and resolved to live a good life until Christ should restore the Church as in its original institution.

[291] Williams was, simultaneously with his defense of toleration, attempting to convince other Christians of the corruptions in their faith.

Moreover, Williams works to attenuate the perceived need to eliminate false beliefs when he asserts that even the elect may hold false beliefs.[293] When Williams argues that no pious person could imagine that all the erring Christians since the early Christian church are damned, he states, "God's people may err from the very fundamentals of visible worship."[294] This comment addresses a much larger issue: the fate of those who lacked the opportunity to hear of Christ's gospel. Williams argues the elect are found among the multitudes of people who have never heard of Christ.

---

[292] Davis explains that Calvin's thought regarding the conscience and the respect that was to be given to it was sufficiently ambiguous that two strands of Reformed thought formed from it, a conservative strand that emphasized conformity and allowed persecution and a more "progressive," radical strand that granted religious liberty. Calvin "tended to place priority on conformity to institutional authority over allegiance to individual conscientious conviction, considering the former itself a sign of a healthy conscience. . . . At the same time, however, Calvin was not entirely consistent and sometimes suggested that there are occasions when following the dictates of conscience, even in defiance of institutional authority, is proper, and that the freedom to do so ought to be respected and protected" (88). The burning of Michael Servetus in Calvin's Geneva and the persecution, and even execution, of dissenters in Massachusetts are representative of the former tradition. Davis insists, however, that although Calvin himself endorsed the persecution and execution of dissenters, Williams and others in the liberal, radical, or progressive tradition were "as representative of Reformed theology on this matter as the more conservative approaches of Baxter and the Massachusetts establishment" (89).

While Davis sees the difference between those who supported liberty of conscience and those who allowed persecution in the Reformed tradition as resulting from the different weights they gave to the relative importance of conformity and respect for conscience, as well as the different origins for the conscience's errors, William James Butler sees the differences as resulting from the level at which those in Reformed tradition believed the elect were to form their covenant with God. Those who believed that the covenant had to be made at the state level endorsed persecution; those who believed the covenant was formed at the covenant level endorsed toleration; and those who believed that the covenant was an individual matter endorsed religious liberty. See Charles James Butler, "Religious Liberty and Covenant Theology" Dissertation, Temple University, 1979).

[293] Indeed, that God may cause them to hold false beliefs.

[294] BT, 64.

Following certain strains of Calvinism, Williams believed that these were already the elect, even though they have never heard of Christ, and they were merely waiting to be called.[295] The elect who are deluded and captivated, such that they conscientiously hold to false beliefs and worships, would include, however, not just those who have never heard of Christ, but also those Christians who are nonetheless mistaken in certain beliefs and practices.[296] Thus, the elect, whether or not they have yet received their call through the word, are saved regardless of the errors in their beliefs. Such salvation relates to another of Williams's beliefs, that heretics cannot "murder" the souls of the elect.

For a predestinarian like Williams, the belief that a heretic can destroy another soul is as dubious as the belief that the state can effect a person's salvation by coercing belief. Williams treats two cases, those whose souls are still "dead in sin" and those who have been converted. For Williams, it is absurd to believe that heretics can harm those who are already "dead in sin," because "Dead men cannot be infected."[297] Indeed, this consideration does not apply merely to individuals. Williams declares that both "the civil state" and "the world" are "in a natural state[,] dead in sin," such that it is "impossible [that they] should be infected."[298]

The potential effects of false beliefs, according to Williams, require more careful examination when we consider the church and those who have already been converted. As we saw earlier in the chapter, Williams argues for a disengagement of church and state to maintain the church's purity. In the present discussion, after declaring that heresy cannot harm those who are already dead in sin, Williams concedes that "the living, the believing, the Church and spiritual state, that and that only is capable of infection."[299] Since only the church and true believers are alive in Christ, only they are vulnerable to an infection that could conceivably hurt or kill their souls.

---

[295] BT, 65-6.

[296] See BT, 272-4.

[297] BT, 125.

[298] BT, 125-6.

Williams discounts the need to fear such infection, however. Williams argues that, in both plagues of the body and the soul, God has appointed and strictly numbered those who will live and those who will die. There is, consequently, no need to worry about the souls of the elect, because their "names are taken, not one elect or chosen of God shall perish, God's sheep are safe in His eternal hand and counsel." Indeed, revealing the extent to which Williams adopts the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, he declares, "none fall into the Ditch . . . but such as were ordained to that condemnation, both guide and followers."[300] Thus, we need not fear that heresy will destroy the souls of God's people. Furthermore, if heresy can ultimately do no harm to the salvation of the elect, the state need not protect "believers" from dissidents and unbelievers.

The belief in predestination is not, however, a call to inaction on Williams's part. Williams anticipates the objection that, notwithstanding God's control over those who live and die during a plague, we retain the duty to do all we can to prevent infection and "preserve the common health."[301] Likewise, some would argue that we have an obligation to protect the community's spiritual health. Williams's first response to this objection coheres with his discussion of the correct methods for spreading Christ's gospel. According to Williams, Christ eschewed coercion and selected preaching and persuasion as the methods by which the elect were to be called. Williams believes that Christ was no less attendant to the needs of the elect who have been called from sin than to the needs of the elect still in sin, preparing means to preserve the former as well as reclaim the latter. Williams writes, "the great and good Physician Christ Jesus . . . hath not been unfaithful in providing spiritual antidotes and preservatives against the spiritual sicknesses, sores, weaknesses, dangers of his Church and people."[302] Thus, when Christians turn to the state to protect the church, Williams argues that they reject Christ's commandments and show themselves to be already infected with heresies that divide them from true Christianity. They are in "bondage" and "captivity . . . to Babylonish or confused mixtures in Worship, and unto worldly and earthly policies."[303]

---

[299] BT, 126.

[300] BT, 126. This statement shows that Williams at least flirts with the Calvinist doctrine of double-predestination.

[301] BT, 126.

In a later passage, Williams moves beyond what he sees as the spiritual defects of those who call for the state's protection of the church to explain Christ's mechanisms for protecting it. The immediate cause of Williams's discussion in this passage is the contention that heretics merit "temporal death" inasmuch as they murder others' souls, thus putting "men to everlasting death."[304] Williams first disputes the persecution, much less execution, of heretics as "soul murderers" by noting that, while we rarely consider it worthy of punishment, the conduct of most Christians is far more conducive to the deaths of others' souls. Indeed, he claims that the Bible uses the term soul-killing to mean both the “teaching of false prophets” and the “offensive walking of Christians.”[305] Through such “offensive walking,” “a true Christian may be guilty of destroying a soul for whom Christ died.” Williams classes persecution as one of the most offensive actions that a Christian can take toward another person. Thus, for Williams, persecution is not only unchristian and inhumane, it is one of the greatest impediments to others’ salvation. Accordingly, he declares that Cotton and other persecutors should punish themselves with the same sentence they decree for heretics, namely, they should “be hanged, burned, &c.” as “soul murderers.”

---

[302] BT, 127.

[303] BT, 127.

[304] BT, 207.

Moreover, Williams finds additional arguments against the persecution of “soul-killers” in his understanding of Christian eschatology. As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, Williams disagrees with a few aspects of the way in which his antagonists interpret the New Testament’s parable of the wheat and the tares. Whereas Calvin and many of those influenced by him emphasized inclusiveness in the church, indeed sustaining persecution to force others into the church, Williams follows the Separatist tradition in emphasizing the church’s purity over its inclusiveness. Accordingly, Williams argues that heretics, as well as other “Soul-killers” and “Soul-grievers,” have no place in the church. To maintain the church’s purity, they should be excommunicated.[306]

More important to his argument on toleration, however, is the way in which Williams interprets the parable regarding the status of “soul-killers” in the civil sphere. While Williams feels that they have no part in the church, he believes that the parable proscribes their persecution. Their fate, and any punishment they are to receive, belongs to Christ and the angels that he will send during the end-times. Until then, they are to "be suffered and permitted to be and live in the World." Otherwise, as the parable warns, the result will be "civil combustions and bloody wars about religion" in which "thousands and millions of souls and bodies" will be murdered.[307]

---

[305] BT, 207.

[306] BT, 208.

Furthermore, Williams posits a difference between corporal and spiritual death that has a profound effect on the seriousness of "soul-murder." Williams argues that our mortal bodies, when they are slain, can be "slain but once."[308] The case is different, however, with the soul, presumably because the soul is not permanently condemned until the day of judgment.[309] Accordingly, Williams declares that the "similitude" between infections that kill the body and those that kill the soul does not "prove that every false teaching or false practice actually kills the soul, as the body is slain."[310] He cites 1 Corinthians 5, Galatians 5, and 2 Timothy 2 as evidence that souls that have been "infected or bewitched may again recover."

Williams declares that, to restore the souls of his people from "soul-killings, . . . soul-woundings and grievings," Christ prepared a number of remedies.[311] First, we are protected by Christ's words, that "two edged sword [that comes] out of his mouth . . . to cut down Heresy and . . . to punish his [the Heretic's] soul everlastingly."[312] Moreover, Williams believes that the "Ordinances" Christ has appointed will "maintain and cherish" the souls of those who are alive in Christ by providing them with "Armor of proof able to defend them against men and devils."

---

[307] BT, 208; BT, 208.

[308] BT, 207.

[309] This claim is related to William's distinction in *Fox*, where, in response to the Quaker's assertion that he is damned, he argues that there are two types of damnation or condemnation. The first is the condemnation that lies upon the whole human race as a result of original sin, by which no one is holy. The second condemnation is that which will fall upon the reprobate in the day of judgment. Williams does not mind the assertion that he would be condemned in the first sense, but takes umbrage if the Quakers asserts he is damned in the second sense.

[310] BT, 207.

[311] BT, 207-208.

In concluding the argument underlying much of the preceding discussion, Williams returns to the concepts of predestination and irresistible grace. As we have seen, Williams divides people into two categories, those who are dead in sin and those who are alive in Christ. Moreover, as part of this argument, he reiterates the belief that we need not worry about the influence of heresy on those who are dead in sin because, inasmuch as they are already dead, they cannot be infected or killed.

Using Williams's earlier arguments, however, we might still conclude that heretics threaten the elect, including the elect who are still dead in sin. The elect cannot feel God's call, with its attendant joy and freedom, until Christ's messengers have ministered to them. A heretic may harden an elect person's heart and prevent him from truly hearing the Christ's word when it is finally presented to him by teaching him that he has already saved. In this, and perhaps other ways, heretics may prevent another from receiving "the means of Spiritual life."[313]

Williams's first response to this counter-argument is that, while those considerations are valid, they provide an even stronger argument against persecution than for it. According to Williams, the state's involvement in religious matters is a far greater threat to the call of the elect than any teaching or action of a heretic. Williams sees the state's involvement in religion as inevitably tending to the "bloody tenent of persecution," which in turn impedes a person's election in two ways. First, the "force of a material sword" may "[imprison] the Souls of men in a State or National Religion, Ministry, or Worship." By "imprisoning" someone within the official religion and beliefs of the state, and preventing that person from even hearing the truth, the state impedes Christ's spirit from working in that person's heart and making him alive in Christ.[314] Second, persecution impedes others' salvation because it generally results in conflict and bloodshed. Not only does such persecution arouse revulsion toward persecutors' beliefs, impeding belief in even a true faith, but the resulting "Civil wars and combustions for [religion's] sake" cut men "off without [further chance] of Repentance." Thus, in comparing the dangers posed by heresy and those posed by persecution, Williams concludes that the latter are a greater threat to the elect. Consequently, he argues that we should eschew persecution and endure error. As he declares in *the Bloudy Tenent*, "Evil is always Evil, yet permission of it may in case be good."

---

[312] BT, 208.

[313] BT, 208.

Whereas the preceding considerations suggest that we should not persecute heresy because persecution is a greater threat to the elect than any heresy it might prevent, Williams uses the Reformed doctrine of irresistible grace to argue that heresy actually poses no threat to the final status of the elect. As we have already noted, Williams believes that the elect who do not hear Christ's word during their lives will, in some way, be saved. Furthermore, he argues that heretics do not endanger the elect who have already been called because "the Soul once alive in Christ, is like Christ himself, . . . alive forever, . . . and cannot die a spiritual death."[315] Indeed, according to the doctrine of irresistible grace, the grace that transforms the hearts of the elect provides a continual pull toward reform and righteousness. Thus, recalling our earlier discussion of Christ's ordinances acting as armor against wickedness, Williams argues that "the blessed Spirit of Life and Regeneration" is sufficient to preserve God's people "from falling, and to reform and restore them from all their Backslidings and declensions."[316]

---

[314] Of course, to be consistent with Williams's other writings, the elect who are prevented from hearing Christ's word and having the spirit work within them must have another way to receive it, even if after death. While Williams would have condemned the idea of Purgatory as a Catholic doctrine that depended on the doctrine of free will, it is conceivable that the spirit could work on a person's soul after he has died but before the Day of Judgment. Something similar must occur according to Williams, but this thought conflicts with his belief that persecution is bad because it kills people "without [further chance] of Repentance" (BT, 208). The inconsistency between these two ideas may result from the tensions within Christianity regarding God's mercy and justice.

Finally, Williams notes that even the worst heretics may turn from soul-killers to "soul-savers." Consequently, using the teachings and example of the Apostle Paul, Williams argues that we should not harm heretics. Paul, according to Williams, "calls for meekness and gentleness toward all men, and toward [heretics who oppose Christ] . . . because . . . God may give them Repentance."[317] Indeed, all people who have not been called lie in a fallen state and thus fight against God. The elect, prior to their callings, were as guilty of opposing God as anyone else. Understanding their own guilt and experiencing the joy of God's grace, a grace they received freely and undeservedly, the elect should be merciful to and patient with those who fight against Christ but may yet join him. Thus, in his forceful, rhetorical fashion, Williams reminds the reader that Paul was the worst of heretics, "a false Teacher, . . . a Balaam, a Spiritual Witch, a Wolf, a Persecutor," one who breathed "out blasphemies against Christ" and participated in the

---

[315] BT, 209.

[316] Examiner, 221.

[317] BT, 92.

"slaughters" of his followers.[318] Nevertheless, in his conversion, Paul became one of the greatest saints. Similarly, those "who appear Soul-killers today, by the grace of Christ may prove . . . Soul-savers tomorrow." In persecuting a heretic, however, we may prevent his conversion into a great servant of Christ. Furthermore, in thus preventing the conversion of those whom we regard as sinners through persecution, we may also inadvertently murder the souls of those whom those sinners-become-saints would convert.

2.3.5.5 Christian freedom

At this point, one might wonder how Williams's notion of predestination fits with his notion of freedom and a voluntary church. Understanding how they relate will also help us understand the substance underlying his rhetoric about soul-rape and soul-prison. We must first clarify, however, how Williams the concept of Christian freedom. The Puritans frequently conceived of liberty as the ability to obey God's will.[319] This notion of freedom may partially explain why, after fleeing persecution and seeking religious liberty in the new world, they persecuted others. Understanding true liberty as obedience to God's will, they saw persecution of immorality and religious heterodoxy as neither a violation of that person's conscience nor a violation of that person's liberty.

---

[318] BT, 209.

[319] For example, see John Winthrop's "A Little Speech on Liberty," 13-14, in *Political Thought in America: An Anthology*, ed. Michael B. Levy (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1988). Winthrop declares that there are two types of liberty, the natural liberty of depraved human nature, which is license, and the civil, federal, or moral liberty. This liberty exists only in connection with God's authority and the "covenant between God and man," inasmuch as it is the liberty to do only that "which is good, just, and honest" (14).

In their ideas about Christian freedom, the New England Puritans drew on the teachings of the Reformed tradition. For Calvin, Christian freedom was largely freedom from the law of works.[320] He believed that, because of Adam's fall and the sin that thereby infuses every human being, it is impossible to obey all of God's commandments. Moreover, even if a person were to enjoy a life devoid of offense toward others, even a self-less and self-sacrificing life in the service of others, he would still violate the law. The fall affected the core of our identities, corrupting our intellects and depraving our desires. Thus, without Christ's grace, even the greatest saints would be sinners; their obedience and sacrifice would follow from the desire to justify and glorify themselves, not from a love of God and his glory. We all fall short of loving "God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength."[321]

According to Calvin, grace frees us from the condemnation of sin, but also from the need to worry about the law as a condition of salvation. Grace frees our consciences from the guilt of sin and our consciences of the fear of God's condemnation, and thus from a preoccupation with works righteousness. Furthermore, our hearts turn to God with love, which love results both from the changes grace effects in our hearts and from our gratitude for the mercy that Christ freely gives to us. Moreover, the spirit augments both our capacity to obey and the quality of our obedience. True, complete obedience is impossible on our own, especially since natural obedience does not follow from a love of God. The spirit pulls us toward righteousness and makes true obedience possible by awakening us to our complete dependence on Christ and by enabling a true love of God, a love that inspires us to glorify him rather than ourselves through our works.[322]

---

[320] Hancock, 40.

[321] Calvin, 4:836; quoted in Hancock, 40.

Thus, for Calvin, Christian freedom consists in freedom from dependence on others and ourselves.[323] Our salvation, as well as our certainty of salvation, depends neither on our own works nor on the ordinances, rites, or interpretations of others. It depends uniquely on the grace Christ gives to the elect, whom he chose before the creation of the world—prior to any of our insignificant efforts.

Calvin avoids the danger of antinomianism by arguing that there are two kingdoms, consisting of a spiritual and a temporal realm within each person.[324] In the spiritual realm, the elect depend on no one but Christ, and are thus free. In the temporal realm, however, a strong government is necessary, not only because of the reprobate but also because of the elect, whose election does not fully regenerate or sanctify them. Moreover, the civil government may also intervene in ecclesiastical affairs, although it should not do so to enforce its views or usurp spiritual authority. It has a duty, however, to ensure that there is public worship among Christians, that the church is clean of impurities, and that there is order and discipline within the church.[325]

In supporting such state action, however, Calvin does not see himself as sustaining works righteousness. While grace frees us from the law, the law is not without purpose. In showing us that we continually fall short of perfect righteousness, the law serves as a continual reminder of the need for grace and our complete dependence on Christ.[326] Accordingly, the state's coercive power, like the church's teachings, rebukes, and excommunications, serves to remind the elect of their complete dependence on Christ. Moreover, the state's coercive power also serves a role in the sanctification that begins when Christ calls and justifies the elect. Justification does not automatically produce sanctification.[327] Rather, Christ justifies them in their sins, and their justification arouses in them a desire to be pure of all sin. The state's coercive power aids a person's sanctification, according to Calvin, by sustaining his faith, reminding him of his guilt and constant need for Christ, and adding additional incentives for reform.[328]

---

[322] On the latter point, see Hancock, 40.

[323] Hancock, 44.

[324] See Hancock, 43. See also Hancock, 55. Antinomianism is a corollary doctrine that has sometimes been derived from the doctrines of free grace and man's complete dependence on God. The doctrine asserts that, since none of our actions can affect our salvation, either to secure it or to harm it, we are free to ignore the law and rely only on our faith. In its more extreme form, especially when it is used as a charge thrown against heterodox faiths, it is synonymous with libertinism.

[325] Hancock, 56.

Williams joins others in the Reformed tradition, like the early Baptists, in rejecting Calvin's collusion of church and state. They advanced what we would see as a different and perhaps more liberal notion of Christian freedom. As we saw above, persecutors and defenders of religious liberty used the parable of the wheat and the tares to sustain their respective doctrines. The contradictory uses of the parable were possible because they interpreted characters and elements within the parable differently. The identity of the field is particularly important in these differing exegeses. Calvin and the Puritans understood the field to represent the Church, and the commandment to leave the tares as a call for tolerance toward the petty sins and iniquities within the church. Williams argues that this interpretation is false, because it contradicts Christ's explanation that the field is the world. Moreover, it offends Williams because it simultaneously adulterates the church with petty iniquities and sanctions the persecution of the heterodox.

---

[326] Hancock, 59.

[327] The exact relationship between justification and sanctification, including when the latter takes place, has been a prominent debate in Christian theology.

[328] Hancock, 51.

For Williams, the Separatists, and many early Baptists, a voluntary church was necessary to preserve the purity of God's kingdom. While Williams believed that we should tolerate anything in the civil sphere that did not upset the civil peace and violate others' rights, he was intolerant of sin within the community of the elect.[329] People should not be forced into the church because, inevitably, the reprobate would become members. The things of God would thus be "prostituted to every prophane and unclean lip," and the church would not be a community of the elect.[330] Rather, the church should be a community of believers, and they should only admit those believers who have clearly felt God's call. Keeping the reprobate within the church would thus not only violate God's commandments about the purity of his church, their presence might also impede the Christian freedom of the elect, which depends on their ability to worship and believe as God commands.

---

[329] Williams uses the term "rights," although rarely. For example, see Hireling, 179. The concept of rights was not unknown to him, however. Davis notes that, in the conflict with the king, an alliance formed between the Puritans and the gentry. The former approached their conflict with the king using arguments founded in natural law, while the latter approached the conflict using the natural rights implied by Coke's common law. Referring to William Haller's *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution*, Davis argues that these natural law and natural right arguments were combined to form "a major political and philosophical alliance" (62; 152n49). As we saw above, Williams formulated a sophisticated account of the nature and origins of civil government, one that anticipated Locke's philosophy in everything but the name "natural rights." In formulating his account of government, which he advanced in the context of the above debates, as well as in creating his own government in Rhode Island, he would have been familiar with the natural law and natural rights arguments underlying those debates. Moreover, he would have been familiar with the natural rights arguments, and the common law on which they were based, through his early patron and mentor, Sir Edward Coke.

[330] Hireling, 171.

Moreover, Williams argues that state involvement in belief and worship is dangerous to true Christianity and Christian freedom. Few rulers, in his opinion, have ever been true Christians.[331] Accordingly, Williams argues that a ruler would likely prescribe a false manner or object of worship if he were to exercise spiritual authority. Thus, Williams argues that it would be dangerous to give rulers authority over such matters. Indeed, recalling our discussions of apostasy and authority, Williams believes that Christianity's truths have been so fragmented, dispersed, and lost, that any attempt to enforce Christian worship would also enforce idolatry. The very combination of civil and ecclesiastical authority necessary to enforce worship would in fact be one of the strongest manifestations of Christianity's fallen state. Christendom—the union of civil and ecclesiastical powers—is a false manifestation of Christianity, and any control it exercises over religion is thus not merely persecution, but idolatry. Thus, to protect ourselves and others from the dangers of false belief and worship, Williams argues that we should never give the state authority over spiritual matters.

Furthermore, Williams develops a notion of compassion and dignity out of the relationship of the conscience and the doctrine of predestination. We have seen that, for Williams and others influenced by Calvinism, Christ alone is the king of our consciences. Only persuasion and the workings of Christ's spirit may alter the principles and convictions at the foundation of our consciences. Consequently, the convictions underlying our consciences are free from the control of any person, including ourselves.

---

[331] BT, 180; 245; and 379. Indeed, Williams argues that few Christians, who are generally called out of the lowly and the poor rather than the rich and powerful, are qualified to be rulers. See BT, 414-5.

To conclude our discussion of the conscience, let us return to the beginning. Williams sustains freedom of conscience using capacities that, following Aquinas, we could call *synderesis* and *conscientia*. As stated above, *synderesis* refers to the faculty whereby we receive our first moral principles from nature and from God, while *conscientia* refers to the faculty whereby we apply those principles to specific circumstances and act upon them. Under *synderesis*, for Williams, we would also include the capacity to perceive God's approbation or disapprobation. Williams's arguments for toleration are related to *synderesis* inasmuch as God alone can make an individual one of the elect, and alone can make that person belief or disbelieve in Christianity after hearing the word.

Williams also using intellectualism to sustain toleration through the faculties underlying what we might call *conscientia*. He tells us that, when we force others to act or profess against the dictates of their consciences, we either harden or soften their consciences. In the first case, we push people to become immune to our teachings and the concomitant working of Christ's spirit. In the second case, we weaken the conscience's ability to control the individual, such that these persecuted individuals become a true danger to society. More importantly to Williams, however, we violate Christ's commandments concerning the conversion of others to his gospel and disrespect their "Rights and Liberties," given them by Christ, to live according to the dictates of their consciences.[332] Thus, while the freedom to follow God's will is important to Williams, so is "equal freedom" for all "Consciences and Assemblies."[333] This equal freedom does not mean that all people, dissenters and orthodox alike, are free under the law to obey, but not free to disobey, Christ's true commandments. Rather, Williams declares that "all these Consciences . . . ought freely and impartially to be permitted their several respective Worships, their Ministers of Worships, and what way of maintaining them they freely choose."[334]

---

[332] Hireling, 179.

[333] Hireling, 154.

We are now in a better position to understand the strength Williams gives to his rhetoric about persecution. Persecution violates the core of a person's being—the principles by which a person understands and judges himself and the world and the foundation upon which he acts. Even if an enforced religion is true, Williams argues that forcing it upon others violates their consciences, hearts, and souls. "[A] natural Father" or "the Father of the Commonwealth" may with "ten thousand fold" less sin force his daughter or the "maidens in a Country to the marriage beds of . . . men whom they cannot love," according to Williams.[335] Williams takes the analogy, and its emotional content, much further than arranged marriage, however. He declares that forcing a person's "Conscience is a Soul rape," and "that a Soul or spiritual Rape is more abominable in God's eye, than to force and ravish the Bodies of all the Women in the World."[336]

Many today would object to Williams's comparison of persecution to rape, if only that, in their minds, this would cheapen that incredible crime and make it more acceptable. The welfare of the soul, however, was for Williams the most serious of considerations, beyond anything that can happen to our bodies. Moreover, he argues that we force a person into anguish and suffering when we proscribe the worship and practices he believes God commands, or when we enforce worship and practices that his conscience condemns as against God's will. Thus, to help us feel the onus of persecution, Williams declares that state control over the conscience is a "false Imprisonment . . . not only of the sensible and outward man, but of the most noble and inner part, the mind, the spirit, and Conscience."[337] Moreover, he argues that a palace or even one's home, "though dear and familiar, most intimate to him," will become prisons to a person who is constrained to abide within them. For Williams, the intensity of the punishment only increases in moving from mundane to spiritual affairs. Thus, he declares that it is "most woefully found evident, that the best Religion . . . yea the most holy and pure and only true Religion and Worship, appointed by God himself, is a Torment to that Soul and Conscience, that is forced against its own free love and choice, to embrace and observe it." Consequently, Williams concludes that "the soul and mind and conscience of man, that is indeed the man, ought to be left free."[338] Such freedom is required by the compassion that a true Christian should feel, as well as of the respect that one should have for the freedom and dignity that Christ has given to the individual and his conscience.

---

[334] Hireling, 181. The Jews, Muslims, Catholics, and "Pagans," whom Williams earlier includes among those whose consciences are not to be "excepted" when liberty of conscience is given, would also be included here in this passage. See Hireling, 178.

[335] BT, 258-9.

[336] BT, 182. See also YMB 324-5.

---

[337] YMB, 439. Indeed, Williams declares that the persecuted will be able to take "Action" before Christ's tribunal against Cotton and other persecutors.

[338] YMB, 440. Completing the analogy made in the *Bloudy Tenent*, Williams argues that our free choice in our "heavenly and spiritual" marriage is ten thousand times more important than in our "Earthly marriage."

2.3.6 True Christianity

As we have seen, Williams denounces the New England Puritans for repudiating Christ through their prominent use of the Old Testament in their theology and institutions. The laws and literal examples of the Old Testament are invalid, he argues, because Christ fulfilled those laws and types, replacing them with a new law and his example. Moreover, Christ established a new method to join his people. Furthermore, Williams argues that the true Christian faith will be identical in its doctrines and practices to early Christianity.

Of the characteristics of early Christianity that Williams outlines, the organization of ecclesiastical authority is one of the most important to his defense of religious liberty. In the early church, according to Williams, Christ called and authorized certain individuals to spread his message and others to watch over those converted by the former. Williams believes that the former authorities, Christ's messengers or apostles, received their authority directly from Christ or by apostolic succession, and that visible signs, like miracles of healing, accompany their ministries.[339] We saw that, according to Williams, this authority long ago disappeared from the Earth, although he looks forward to the day, perhaps when Christ personally returns to the Earth, for its restoration. Williams declares that the lack of apostolic authority precludes any efforts to convert others, inasmuch as one would convert them with false authority into a false church. A coerced conversion would be completely out of the question.

---

[339] It is interesting that, although he is primarily directing his comments at the Catholic contention that Protestants, such as the Anglicans, err when they give government of Christ's church to civil rulers, Williams declares that the Roman Catholics are "nearer to the Truth concerning the government of the Church then most Protestants." See BT, 346. On miraculous gifts, see Examiner, 220.

A defense of toleration based on the absence of Christianity's truth and authority is easily undermined. It shares the weakness of any defense of toleration based entirely on the love of truth. The love of truth requires the freedom to voice and sift through different opinions only until the complete truth has been discovered. At that point, to protect the truth gained, the love of truth may require the persecution of even partially false opinions.[340]

Thus, one might ask Williams if Christianity requires religious liberty, or Christians only need to support toleration temporarily, while Christianity remains in its purportedly incomplete and corrupted state. That is, did Christ require toleration of his ministers and followers, or is toleration necessary only because Christians lack authority to act in Christ's name and have a convoluted understanding of the truth that the state should otherwise protect? Furthermore, even if Christ did require toleration of his ministers and followers, might he have done otherwise, and might he command persecution in the future?

We have seen that, while Williams believes that Christianity's current state requires toleration, he also believes that toleration follows from Christ's commandments, his example and the examples of his disciples, and Christian theology. Toleration is part of God's method to save humans. Thus, Williams seems to believe that Christ could not have commanded otherwise, and will not do so. In the *Examiner*, Williams imagines a situation in which Christianity stood upon an unquestionable foundation of "a Creed composed by the twelve Apostles of the Lamb" and of "Forms of Worship, Ordinations, Ministries, Maintenance, &c" given to us through "a Synod of heavenly Angels."[341] Even in the case of this perfectly formed and grounded church, Williams challenges his readers to find any rule from Christ's teachings that prescribes the coerced belief of Christian doctrines.

---

[340] In *On Liberty*, J.S. Mill works to circumvent this problem by arguing that truth's vitality requires that it continually be tried against error. In *the Nature and Destiny of Man*, Reinhold Neibuhr takes a different approach using Christian eschatology, in particular a rejection of the eschaton's immanentization. Niebuhr argues that we will neither achieve complete knowledge of the truth nor achieve our own salvation while we remain in history. Those things must await Christ and the end of history. See footnote 148.

Williams partially explains the absence of any such rule or example through God's knowledge of man's imperfection. In the *Bloudy Tenent* he declares, "so unsuitable is the commixing and entangling of the Civil with the Spiritual charge and Government, that . . . the Lord Jesus, and his Apostles, kept themselves to one."[342] Indeed, Williams argues that no one would have been more capable of managing both civil and spiritual governments, and that Christ even had the right to the civil government as a descendant of David. Despite these considerations, Williams declares that Christ refused to become king, even when some importuned him to that effect, because he did not want to give a precedent for anyone else to assume that authority.

More importantly, Christ left no scriptural example of coercion, according to Williams, because God desires that our belief be free and not coerced. He feels that "it is not the will of the Father of Spirits, that all the consciences and Spirits of this Nation should violently . . . be forced into one way of worship, or that any Town or Parish . . . be disturbed in their worship (what worship soever it be) by the civil sword."[343] Rather he conceives "that it is the will of the most High, and the express and absolute Duty of the civil powers to proclaim an absolute freedom" to enjoy the worship that people's souls desire. In the *Examiner*, Williams even more clearly declares this point, writing, "Christ's Interest in this Commonweal (or any) is the freedom of the souls of the People."[344]

---

[341] Examiner, 273.

[342] BT, 367.

[343] HM, 174.

We might ask how Williams reconciles the seeming paradox of the belief that Christ refused civil government and wishes us to be free with the belief that Christ will be a king. In the *Bloudy Tenent*, Williams warns those who sustain persecution to remember that Christ's crown will not "consist of outward material gold."[345] We should not, according to Williams, try to force Jesus to be "a temporal King, and a temporal Judge," which positions Christ refused, proclaiming that "his Kingdom is not of this World."[346] This claim does not mean, however, that Christ is not the "King of Israel."[347] It only requires us to understand the true nature of Israel. According to Williams, there is no contradiction between these statements because Christ is not a king "in any temporal or worldly respect . . . but in an absolute spiritual consideration, respecting the souls and consciences, the Religions and Worships of the children of men."[348]

Although Williams abandoned all extant churches, which he came to believe universally lacked God's authority, soon after he helped found one of the first Baptist churches in American, it is helpful to remember that he founded and was briefly a member of a Baptist congregation because he agreed with many of their doctrines and practices. This is particularly true as we examine Williams's view of Christ's kingship. The Baptists, as is implied in their names, distinguished themselves from other Christian sects by the mode and purpose they assigned to baptism. Although the different Christian denominations gave various reasons for baptism, a person's baptism traditionally took place as an infant.[349] For the Baptists, baptism acted as an outward sign of one's election, received not at birth but after receiving one's call and being transformed by Christ's spirit into a believer. For the Baptists of the early 17th century, such a notion of baptism required a voluntary church.[350] They believed that a person should not join the community of believers through baptism until Christ's spirit made him a believer and he felt the accompanying desire to be part of that community.

---

[344] Examiner, 204.

[345] BT, 89.

[346] Examiner, 238.

[347] Examiner, 231.

[348] Examiner, 231-2.

Through the concept of the voluntary church we can better understand Williams's conception of Christ as king. We have already seen that Williams disputed the manner in which his contemporaries used the term heathen. He argues that the Israelites originally used the term "heathen" to mean "the others," all those who were outside of God's covenant and hence not his people. Consequently, using the term according to its original understanding rather than as a synonym for "non-European," almost all of the world's people, including most Europeans, are heathens. God's people—his "New-born Israel"—does not coincide with any geographical or national entity.[351] Christ is the king of Israel, according to Williams, but Israel now comprises a people called out of many nations. The subjects of this kingdom are to separate themselves, not by moving to a new place, but by becoming "holy or set apart to the Lord" in all that they do. Thus, Christ is not king over a nation that he subdues and subjugates, but over a nation that, like a voluntary church, is composed of those who accept him as their king and lawgiver.[352] Williams thus argues that true Christianity is, in its essence, a thoroughly voluntary religion. A person must join it voluntarily, accepting Christ as his king and asserting himself to obey Christ's laws. Coercion, as well as the civil institutions that wield coercive power, have no part in Christ's church, and true Christians do not coerce others to believe as they do.

---

[349] For some denominations, like the Roman Catholic Church, baptism was necessary for salvation and accordingly a sacrament of the church, whereby grace cleanses a person of his sins, including the original sin inherited from Adam. For others, although baptism was a sign of a covenant with God, it was a corporate covenant whereby households entered the covenant together and believing parents could make the covenant for their children.

[350] The Particular, Calvinist, or Reformed Baptists differed from the General Baptists in their continued adherence to the Reformed tradition's belief in predestination and the doctrine that Christ's grace is extended only to the elect.

[351] BT, 324.

In Williams's understanding of a voluntary church, we encounter the last of the characteristics that Williams believes are necessary for true Christianity. This characteristic is fundamentally related to the notion of grace and the changes that it effects in our hearts. For Williams, humans can do nothing to merit salvation. Each person is saved solely through the mercy of Christ's grace. He writes, "that Soul that is lively and sensible of mercy received to itself in former blindness, opposition and enmity against God, cannot but be patient" toward others, including Jews, Muslims, "Antichristians," and Pagans, "in sense of its own former opposition, and that God peradventure may at last give repentance."[353] Indeed, for Williams, a true Christian is not merely tolerant. Rather, an elect person is cognizant of his own former wickedness and the mercy that Christ freely gave him. Accordingly, he will not just be "patient" with another's false belief and worship, but will "earnestly and constantly pray for all sorts of man, that out of them Gods elect may be called to the fellowship of Christ Jesus."[354] Williams, however, believes that the heart of the elect will call him to more than mere prayer. His interest in others will cause him "not only [to] pray, but [to] endeavor (to [his] utmost ability) their participation of the same grace and mercy."

---

[352] Indeed, we should remember that for Williams even those who preach the Gospel are "Voluntary Laborers," receiving neither salary nor remuneration for their efforts (HM, 190). As we see in *Hireling*, Williams believes that these laborers fulfill their calling out of a love for God, with the attendant desire to serve him. Williams repeatedly emphasizes that, in this spiritual kingdom, Christ has an undisputable "Monarchical power, "the power of making Laws, and making Ordinances to his Saints and Subjects" (BT, 348).

We understand the reasons why true Christians would act this way when we recall that a person's election calls him to increasingly become like Christ. Williams follows Calvin in denying that, when we are saved, Christ is within us.[355] Nevertheless, this does not mean that Williams denies the union of the elect with Christ. Late in his life, Williams challenged George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, to a debate. Fox never received, or chose not to respond to, this challenge, but several prominent Quakers in Rhode Island did accept it in Fox's place. One of the points of contention in their debates, the manner in which Christ dwells in believers, illustrates Williams's understanding of the nature of the union between Christ and his elect.

---

[353] BT, 92. He writes that one of the elect cannot "but be patient and gentle toward the Jews, who yet deny the Lord Jesus to be come, and justify their Fore-fathers in murdering of him: Toward the Turks, who acknowledge Christ a great Prophet, yet affirm [him] less than Mahomet. Yea to all the several sorts of Antichristians, who set up many a false Christ instead of him. And lastly to the Pagans and wildest sorts of the sons of men, who have not yet heard of the Father, nor the Son" (92-3) Williams tries to be comprehensive of those who deserve toleration and love, juxtaposing what is required of the elect with sentiments and rhetoric that would otherwise enflame them.

[354] BT, 93.

[355] Fox, 72; 79; and 95.

Williams believes that the Quaker doctrine of the Inner light denies Christ's outward, corporeal existence, both as it constituted his nature during his ministry and subsequent to his Resurrection.[356] If Christ really were to dwell within us as the Inner light, according to Williams, Christ could not have a physical existence. The situation, Williams feels, is comparable to a "King and his Palace." "[If] his person be without, his person at that time is not within, though he be within by his Right, Authority and Influence: if his Person be within the Palace at that time it is not without." Similarly, although Christ is not physically within us, he is within us through his "Right, Authority and Influence." If Christ were physically within humans, since no person can be in two places at once, Christ could not have physically existed during his ministry in Palestine. Williams claims that, when confronted with the problem of reconciling the Christ within and the Christ without, the Quakers declare their meaning to be "mystical." Furthermore, he claims that they have no answer, other than that Christ is within us, when asked if the "Light within" did and suffered everything the scriptures claim Christ to have done and what has become of the "Man" who "thus suffered" there.[357]

Williams's interpretation of Quaker doctrines is unimportant here, except as its contrast helps us understand Williams's views of the union with Christ. Williams does not deny this union, but he does not believe that Christ actually enters the elect. That is because Williams believes that Christ shares both the divine and the human nature, and that, as part of his human nature, he shared the same type of body that is common to all humans.[358] Thus, as in the analogy of the king and the palace, Williams insists that we must distinguish "between Christ's Spiritual presence and his bodily."[359] We can have his authority and influence within us even though his person is not. Thus, there is a difference between the manner in which God was "manifested in the Flesh and Bones of that Man Christ Jesus," and the way in which he is "manifested in the Flesh and Bones of Believers . . . ."[360] The failure to acknowledge these differences while focusing on Christ's presence within, according to Williams, results in grave heresies. The person who advances these doctrines turns Jesus into a "Whimsical Christ" and "that Man that died at Jerusalem [into] a Babylonian Fancy."[361] Even worse, according to Williams, is that, in preaching that Christ is within them, the Quakers preach "the Lord Jesus to be Themselves."[362] Apart from the idolatry and blasphemy that Williams implies with this charge, Williams also positions the Quakers in contradiction to some of the principal tenets of the Reformation, man's depravity and the need for grace.

---

[356] Fox, 72-4.

[357] Fox, 72-3. Indeed, Williams later accuses the Quakers of denying the human and thus dual nature of Christ (Fox, 79-80).

The union of Christ and the elect was critical to the notion of justification and sanctification in the Protestant tradition, but it took a particular form in Calvin's thought.[363] Calvin saw man as utterly sinful, performing even his good works to gratify his self-love. Nothing in man merits grace or gives him any degree of righteousness. To believe otherwise, for Calvin, is to entrap ourselves in the doctrine of works and thereby lose our assurance and certainty of salvation. We fall into this trap, according to Calvin, through an improper understanding of the union of the elect with Christ. In this union, Christ does not become a part of the person. Otherwise, if Christ became a part of the elect and dwelt within them, then the elect could claim that they were righteous. Such a doctrine, however, verges on the notion of works righteousness, and hence, for Calvin, is opposed to a true understanding of grace and our concomitant reliance upon and confidence in Christ. The righteousness that justifies the elect always remains external to them, in Christ.

---

[358] Fox, 80.

[359] Fox, 85. It is interesting to note that Williams distinguishes between men's "sinful Flesh and Bones, and the sinless Flesh and Bones of that Man Christ."

[360] Fox, 85.

[361] Fox, 84.

[362] Fox, 72.

[363] For the discussion of Calvin that follows, I am deeply indebted to Ralph Hancock, Ralph Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*.

Although Williams sometimes disagreed strongly with Calvin, he was influenced by Calvin's notion of the union between the elect and Christ. Williams characterizes the Quaker doctrine of the Inner light, with its concept of Christ dwelling within each individual, as a heresy. He derides them, declaring that they "preached not Christ Jesus but Themselves, yea they preached the Lord Jesus to be Themselves."[364] Clearly, while Williams is undoubtedly distorting Quaker doctrines and distorting their words, taking them to the most heterodox extremes, he shares Calvin's disapproval of the idea that Christ actually resides within us.[365]

Williams does, however, argue that "(. . . Christ may dwell in your hearts by Believing) not that the Divine Being or Essence and Nature or Godhead is communicable to a finite Creature."[366] We come to participate in "the Divine Nature . . . by receiving Christ Jesus, by believing in him."[367] Moreover, Williams declares that when, in this manner, Christ dwells in a person's heart by faith, there is "a nearer union between Christ Jesus, and a Soul believing on him, than between a Man and his Wife, and between the Soul and the Body."[368] This union, which "is eternal in God's Decrees and Counsels," calls "his chosen out of the World, to Repentance and belief" in Christ.[369] The repentance brought about by this union with Christ is tied to the notion of the "regeneration and sanctification."[370] This "regeneration and sanctification" is effected through the "Holy Spirit of God," which works "Holiness . . . in the Soul by the finger of power of God; so that the knowledge of God, the fear, the love, the trusting to and in God . . . is natural to all God's Children."[371]

---

[364] Fox, 72.

[365] Indeed, he later challenges the Quakers that if God is within them and teaches them directly through their Inner light, such that they "know all things as God, then why are not the Quakers Omnipotent and Almighty as well as Omnicient" (Fox, 128-9). Moreover, if they are omniscient and omnipotent, he asks why have they not done much more for humanity.

Thus, while Williams opposes the belief that justification endows the elect with any righteousness of their own, he nonetheless believes that Christ's spirit changes an elect person's heart and makes sanctification possible. Because of the changes wrought in the hearts of the elect—the true believers, more is expected of them. Williams reveals his understanding of a Christian's true character in the introductory comments to *the Hireling Ministry None of Christs*. There, he prays that we may all "cry and endeavor . . .

---

[366] Fox, 79.

[367] For Calvin, at least, we would note that we participate in the divine nature in an external relationship to us, and the divine nature does not participate in us.

[368] Fox, 71.

[369] Fox, 71.

[370] Fox, 119.

[371] Fox, 119.

more and more for participation of the divine Nature in the purity and holiness of the spirit of God," lament the divided nature of Christianity, increasingly "press after love and all possible communion with God's people in the midst of many differences," "abound in mercy and compassion," love, and strive for peace.[372] Williams thus reveals what he understands to be the true character of the elect and hence of the Christian faith. Through the "regeneration" of God's spirit, they are to increasingly reflect Christ in his love, peace, and mercy toward those who are not among the saved. In other words, they must be tolerant to the essence of their being.

2.4 Conclusion

During Williams's first return to London, Parliament acted to secure Scotland's aid against the king by instituting a Presbyterian form of church government and allying itself with the Church of Scotland.[373] Furthermore, fearing the incipient disorder in the religious realm that had already arisen, Parliament enacted measures to control religious belief. They enacted a Puritan Sabbath, which prohibited games, sports, trade, and travel, and they required licenses for both preaching and printing. Nevertheless, Cromwell's army, which had engendered some of the greatest concern, was soon transformed into the New Model Army. It was a model in more than one sense. It not only replaced the aristocratic officer corps with a system of leadership built on competence and merit, but also adopted a radical belief in religious liberty and egalitarian democracy. By 1649, members of the New Model Army had grown weary of Parliament's control over religion, of failed promises to give them their pay, and of the king's intrigues. Consequently, they purged Parliament of all royalists and those who refused to act against the King. The Rump Parliament, as the remnants of the Long Parliament was known, sentenced and executed Charles I in 1649.

---

[372] Hireling, 156.

[373] See Gaustad, 68.

With Charles's execution, the Rump Parliament established a republic governed by a council of state, with Cromwell as a member. By 1653, however, Cromwell had grown so frustrated with the Rump Parliament that he disbanded it and summoned a new one. This new Parliament soon collapsed, and Cromwell assumed the role that he was to hold until his death in 1658, as Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Toleration somewhat increased during this period. To be sure, the Rump had abolished compulsory attendance in the Church of England, but it still sought to control the more radical Protestant sects. Thus, it passed laws to make blasphemy illegal and to require licenses to preach. Cromwell, however, favored a greater degree of religious freedom. While he feared Roman Catholicism, and resented the Irish Catholics for supporting the King, he believed that all Protestant sects, however heterodox, should be tolerated. Furthermore, Cromwell invited the Jews (whom Edward I banished in 1290) back to England.[374] The transformation in England was not echoed in the New World, where Calvinists remained fixed in their orthodoxy. Indeed, they were becoming increasingly rigid in their efforts to attain their spiritual goals. Thus, as Edwin Gaustad points out,

---

[374] Cromwell is still remembered for the massacre of the Irish Roman Catholics, who had sided with the king, at Drogheda.

England was becoming more tolerant just as New England was becoming increasingly less so.[375]

In 1651, John Clarke (who would soon travel to England with Williams to secure Rhode Island's second charter) and two other Baptists traveled to Massachusetts to preach and minister. The Bay authorities, however, had banned their faith in 1645, and anyone convicted as a Baptist was to be banished. This punishment, of course, had no teeth for anyone whose home was not in Massachusetts. Thus, the Bay authorities created a new punishment for Clark and his colleagues—they were to pay a fine or be lashed. Holmes refused to pay and did not allow any of his friends to pay for him, and as a result received 30 lashes. Williams admonished his old ally, the Bay's Governor Endicott, over this incident, and subsequently published his letter to Endicott as an appendix to *the Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*. Clark also published a pamphlet decrying the episode. These had such an effect that Cotton felt the need to defend himself and Massachusetts in front of the English parliament, the English Independents/Congregationalists, and English public opinion.[376]

For Massachusetts, sadly, this was only the beginning. After the first Quakers arrived in 1656, Massachusetts made it a crime for any Quaker to be in Massachusetts, for anyone to shelter a Quaker, and for anyone to transport a Quaker to the colony.[377] As the Quakers were tenacious, the colony soon established harsher penalties. Any Quakers caught returning would receive a series of punishments. For each of the first two offences, an ear would be cropped. For a third offence, a hole would be made through the Quaker's tongue with a hot iron. After 1658, returning to the colony became a capital offence, and, in 1660, a Rhode Island Quaker named Mary Dyer and three others were hanged.[378]

---

[375] Gaustad, 120.

[376] See Gaustad, 120-121.

[377] Gaustad, 177.

Throughout this period, Williams continued to sustain universal liberty of conscience, even when he disagreed vehemently with their convictions. Consequently, Rhode Island became a haven for Jews, a variety of Baptists, Quakers, and almost every other Protestant sect.[379] Indeed, Cotton Mather was later to remark, without appreciation, that Williams founded a colony consisting of "Antinomians, Familists, Anabaptists, Antisabbatarians, Arminians, Socinians, Quakers, Ranters—everything in the world but Roman Catholics and real Christians."[380]

The prejudices of the Puritan orthodoxy in New England did not change the magnitude of what Williams accomplished. Williams did not establish a new place where only his views were orthodox and allowed. Rather, he invited anyone to come and enjoy liberty of conscience. Many of those who followed proved difficult to lead, disliking civil authority almost as much as they disliked religious authority, but Williams, John Clarke, and others managed to protect the colony from their overbearing, English neighbors. Indeed, Rhode Island showed that a colony founded on religious liberty could survive, and several of the later colonies at least initially imitated Rhode Island on the issue of religious liberty.

---

[378] Gaustad, 177.

[379] See Gaustad, 175-6.

[380] Gaustad, 200.

Like many of those who followed him to Rhode Island, Williams felt that such liberty was necessary to true religion. As we have seen, Williams appealed to a variety of considerations to defend liberty of conscience. Williams argued that religious liberty was the only way to civil peace. Indeed, like Lord Shaftesbury and the proprietors of Carolina, who were to adopt much of the language in Rhode Island's charter regarding religious liberty, Williams saw that religious liberty was conducive not just to peace, but to a commonwealth's prosperity. Williams also defended the ability of all people, not just Christians, to cooperate and live civilized lives. While Williams pointed to history to substantiate these views, he also defended them based on his understanding human nature and the conscience, an understanding profoundly indebted to the Reformed tradition and Christianity in general.

Williams also employed what later became the familiar liberal argument that our pursuit of truth requires toleration. This argument takes on a secularized form in J.S. Mill, but finds a very religious flavor in Williams's thought. Indeed, he founds it upon a peculiar reading of Christian history. Not only does Williams argue that God scattered truth among the errors of the world, leaving it to us to seek them out, but also that the truths that Christ gave during his ministry were scattered and lost because of an apostasy in Christianity. Williams asserts that it is also our duty to seek out these truths, and consequently that it is our duty to tolerate error, both for the truths hidden among it and to avoid destroying truth that we mistake for error. Furthermore, this duty of toleration will last the duration of the earth, according to Williams, inasmuch as he doubts a full restoration of Christianity until Christ returns.

Furthermore, Williams's peculiar reading of Christianity creates additional arguments for toleration. Interpreting scripture using the method of typological exegesis, Williams denies any relevance for the examples in the Old Testament when civil and ecclesiastical power were combined. Moreover, he interprets contemporary Christianity as meeting only the conditions in which examples of Israel in exile, completely dispossessed of civil authority, are applicable. He also denies the possibility of any change in this lack of civil authority by asserting that the combination of civil and ecclesiastical powers would require God's permission through direct communication.

Finally, his interpretation of Christian history denies even spiritual authority to contemporary Christianity. In addition to many of Christianity's precious truths that were lost through an apostasy, Williams asserts that the authority to convert and establish Christ's church was also lost. Without the authority to even preach Christ's words, according to Williams, no one can claim the additional right or authority to convert others through coercion, a means that Christ denied even to his apostles.

Williams also walks a narrow line in arguing that, while government is ordained of God, God did not give spiritual authority to civil rulers. He thus lays out a theological argument for the separation of church and state. For him, God has placed the sovereign power in the people, and they have the right and power to institute the form of government that they wish. In this way, Williams lays the theological groundwork for a political doctrine similar to that of later English liberals like Locke. He argues that the people are free to establish the form of government they desire in civil matters, and that government is always accountable to the people and limited to the power they give it. Furthermore, while God made the people the sovereign power in civil matters, with the attendant right to establish government and its ministers, he did not grant this power in spiritual matters. According to Williams, God alone has the power to choose who will be his ministers in spiritual matters, and the people thus lack the right, even if they wished to do so, to give civil rulers authority in ecclesiastical matters.

Williams's interpretation of Christian soteriology provides one of his more telling arguments for toleration. In the liberal tradition, the view that we should establish toleration because the conscience cannot be coerced is commonplace. Moving from "cannot" to "should not," requires a number of intervening steps that have been challenged. Indeed, literature on Locke and toleration reveals, even the claim that the conscience cannot be coerced has been repeatedly subjected to criticism and occasionally denied. Throughout his works, Williams works to establish the connection between the empirical statement and the normative proscription. He does so by maligning the motives and impugning the character of persecutors, by pointing to the pain caused by persecution and appealing to the persecutor's humanity, by arguing that persecution is ineffective, and by arguing that such persecution opposes God's will and thereby brings God's condemnation on the persecutor.

Moreover, Williams uses the Reformed doctrines of free grace and predestination to argue that true belief cannot be coerced because it is a gift that comes only from God and that, through God's power, transforms human nature. Grace leads an individual away from self-seeking, self-interested pursuits, even from a self-interest in which we pursue good works for the benefits we will thereby accrue. The individual becomes someone who loves God, and thereby pursues good works toward God and other humans as a manifestation of that love and of the desire to glorify God. Moreover, inasmuch as

God alone determines who will receive this grace, regardless of their efforts or beliefs, Williams argues that we need not fear the effect that heresy will have on others.

Moreover, Williams relies on the Reformed doctrine of grace's transformative character to argue that true Christians do not persecute. Calvinists, and especially the Congregationalist Puritans of New England, were noted for their ardent efforts to demonstrate good works. Although good works in their view did not contribute to their salvation, which depends solely on Christ's freely given grace, the production of good works could be a sign that God's grace has transformed an individual. Williams is no less ardent about grace's transformative power. For Williams, Christ and his disciples demonstrate only love and concern for others, and anyone who has received Christ's grace should similarly demonstrate this love and concern. Persecution defies any notion of love and concern, according to Williams, and is thus unbecoming of anyone who has received grace.

Stephen Hopkins, who signed the Declaration of Independence and was governor of Rhode Island, as well as a member of the Quaker faith that Williams so emphatically criticized, praised Williams highly as "the first legislator in the world . . .that fully and effectively provided for and established a free, full, and absolute liberty of conscience."[381] Williams received similar praise from Isaac Backus, a New England Congregationalist who became a Baptist pastor and a major activist for religious liberty in both New England and the new nation. As William Lee Miller points out, Backus was a "passionate supporter" of the American Revolution; he believed its purpose was to secure both political and full religious liberty, and declared to the Massachusetts delegation at the First Continental Congress, including John Adams, that religious liberty "was a matter of conscience and no natural, God-given human right."[382] Backus, in his efforts to secure religious liberty and the separation of church and state, praised Williams as "The first founder and supporter of any truly civil government upon earth."[383]

---

[381] Gaustad, 201.

The claims made by Hopkins and Backus were certainly exaggerative. Other communities, even in the Western tradition, have practiced toleration.[384] Rhode Island, however, was the first colony in America to do so, and it survived. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, Rhode Island acted as the first home and refuge for religious sects with subversive ideas about religious liberty and the separation of church and state. Unlike Lord Shaftesbury and many others who have supported toleration, Williams's goal was never to become rich.[385] His goal was to create a place where he and anyone else could live their lives completely as their conscience, and consequently as God, dictated. That is, he was a pietist, “one who counted the presence of God in his life as more valuable than all the world’s riches and honors.”[386] Gaustad writes,

---

[382] William Lee Miller, 178.

[383] Gaustad, 203.

[384] For descriptions of some of these communities, see Cary Nederman and John Laursen, eds., *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996); and Cary Nederman and John Laursen, eds., *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

[385] Indeed, rather than becoming rich, Williams's efforts and concern for his colony led him to die in relative poverty. Although he could have become a great proprietor, Williams did not reserve to himself large amounts of property. Rather, for the sake of the Native Americans and later people seeking religious liberty, he continually urged restraint in settling the lands in Rhode Island (Gaustad, 153; 171). He never received a salary for his government service, and even had to sell his beloved trading post to pay the debts incurred on behalf of the colony on his trips to London. Even his home was lost to him as a result of King Philip's War, which raged from 1675-1676. Accordingly, we find Williams making what Edwin Gaustad refers to as a "humiliating plea" in a 1676 letter on Indian affairs to the governor. He writes, "Sir, since I am oft occasioned to write upon the Public business, I shall be thankful for a little paper upon the Public account, being now near destitute" (Gaustad, 189).

> Like the Puritans and the Separatists, [Williams] never forgot that he was the puny creature of an omnipotent Creator. He never forgot that the purpose of the Christian life, as opposed to the purpose of the civil state, was to cultivate the closest relationship possible with that God, to please him through obedience, to serve him through love, to suffer for him when called upon to do so, and to rejoice that he had shown love first.[387]

Williams’s chief goal was to live his life attuned to the will and love of his God. Establishing religious liberty, for which generations of historians and proponents of religious freedom have praised him, resulted from an urge remarkably similar to that of almost every other group founding a community, to achieve some conception of the good. In Williams’s case, however, his vision of the good, his desire to involve God in every facet of his life, required religious liberty—freedom of conscience—for himself and everyone else.

---

[386] Gaustad, 163.

[387] Gaustad, 162.

3 John Locke

In Dan Brown's *Angels and Demons,* we enter Robert Langdon's mind as he contemplates religion and the murder of a scientist, thinking, " . . . Holy wars were still making headlines. *My God is better than your God.* It seemed there was always close correlation between true believers and high body counts."[1] Langdon's sentiments reflect those of many contemporary liberals, who share a deep fear that religion is invariably intolerant. Locke's writings, because of their importance in the development of the liberal value of toleration and of liberalism in general, reveal the irony in their position. Locke is frequently understood as supporting toleration based on the impossibility of coercing belief. According to this interpretation, religion is ancillary to Locke's argument—any type of belief could be substituted in religion's place. In this chapter, I will show that this is only part of the story: that Locke's arguments for toleration largely flow from his religious experience.

Locke began his career as an opponent of toleration and later became its advocate, but he did so not because he was un- or anti-religious. Rather, he came to advocate toleration because of the particular character of his religious convictions. Moreover, Locke's justification of toleration itself has a theological foundation, and the arguments he develops are deeply rooted in his religious beliefs. In this chapter, I analyze Locke's defense of toleration by dividing it into five categories. The first is a prudential argument, one that is not especially religious, whose purpose is to persuade opponents of toleration that religion is not inherently violent. The remaining four arguments defend

---

[1] Dan Brown, *Angels and Demons* (New York: Atria Books, 2000), 38-39.

Locke's assertions that true Christianity is tolerant and that persecution really results from ambition and avarice. These arguments for toleration depend upon divine commandments, the example of Christ and his disciples, and a soteriology—or doctrine of salvation—that requires sincere, personal choice in the development of a specific character. After discussing these arguments, we will examine the principal arguments raised against Locke's defense of toleration, which focus on his contention that the magistrate lacks power, dominion, and authority over our souls, to show why they are inadequate.

But before we turn to these matters it is first necessary to explain how and why Locke changed from an opponent to an advocate of toleration, and what toleration meant to him. By contrasting his early writings in opposition to toleration with the arguments he makes on its behalf in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, I will argue that the change in Locke's thinking resulted from his development of a new understanding of human psychology and from basic changes in his own religious beliefs.[2] Specifically, Locke came to believe that a person must embrace correct belief, with all its attendant demands, to be saved. For God to accept this belief as a substitute for perfect obedience to the law of works, however, the individual had to accept it sincerely. That in turn requires religious liberty, which God established and people retained as a natural right.

---

[2] I will cite John Locke's works in the following manner: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. with a forward by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), will be cited as Essay, followed by book, chapter, and paragraph numbers—e.g. Essay IV.xv.2.

An Essay Concerning Toleration, in *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), will be cited as Toleration, followed by page number.

"From: 'Question: Whether the civil magistrate may lawfully impose and determine the use of indifferent things in reference to religious worship. Answer: Yes' (*First Tract on Government*)," in *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), will be cited as First Tract, followed by page number.

A Letter Concerning Toleration, trans. William Popple, in *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), will be cited as Letter, followed by page number.

Of the Conduct of the Understanding, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. with an introduction by Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), will be cited as CU, followed by section number.

"'Preface to the Reader' from the *First Tract on Government*," in *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), will be cited as Preface, First Tract, followed by page number.

3.1 Transition to toleration

In 1656, Locke had little sympathy for Quaker dissenters he saw being led to trial. Writing about it shortly afterward, he told his father that members of the crowd had acted well in knocking off one man's hat because "it was 'dangerous for such mad folks' to keep their heads too hot."[3] In 1660, he continued to fear the effects of religious violence and wrote two essays in support of government interference in religious matters, despite the effect on innocent dissenters. Only a year later, however, Locke had begun to work out new thoughts on toleration in his commonplace book. This change in thought was largely complete by 1667, when his new employer, Lord Ashley, the Earl of Shaftesbury, urged him to write a philosophical defense of toleration. He never published this essay,

---

"'Question: Can the civil magistrate specify indifferent things to be included within the order of divine worship, and impose them upon the people? Answer: Yes' (*Second Tract on Government*)", trans. David Wootton, in *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), will be cited as Second Tract, followed by page number.

The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures, ed. George W. Ewing, with a new foreword by Harold O.J. Brown (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1997), will be cited as Reasonableness, followed by paragraph number.

Two Treatises of Government, student ed., with an introduction and notes by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), will be cited as 1T followed by a paragraph number when the reference is to the *First Treatise* and as 2T followed by a paragraph number when the reference is to the *Second Treatise*.

I have take the method of citation for the *Two Treatises*, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* from Ruth W. Grant, *John Locke's Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987; 1991), 3.

[3] Maurice Cranston, *John Locke: a biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1968), 41.

but, as J. W. Gough writes, it already contained many of the arguments Locke later made in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*.[4] This about face was so drastic that he criticized the intolerance of William Penn's "Frame of Government," which formulated one of the most tolerant societies of the time.[5] Locke had changed to such an extent that he not only tolerated, but also freely associated with and emulated those who differed from him confessionally. In Holland, he lived for two years in the home of John Furly, who had been a Quaker extremist, and associated with much of the Quaker society there. Moreover, although Locke still disagreed with Quaker doctrine, he now admired these "mad folks" enough that he formed a plan to develop a Christian society shaped by their influences.[6] Why did Locke now embrace toleration and demonstrate respect for other groups? Those who study Locke have presented a variety of explanations for the change in Locke's attitude toward toleration.

To understand why Locke changed, it is helpful to look at Locke's early arguments against toleration. Between 1660 and 1662, Locke wrote two essays, one in English and one in Latin, in response to a pamphlet on toleration by Edward Bagshaw, Jr.[7] In the Preface to the English essay, now known as the *First Tract* of the *Two Tracts*

---

[4] J.W. Gough, "The Development of Locke's Belief in Toleration," in *John Locke, A letter concerning toleration in focus*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (New York: Routledge, 1991), 57-77.

[5] Cranston, 261-262. His comments came when he read the document in 1686. The system allowed people to be punished for prophaning God's name and created a program for public schooling, which Locke felt would suppress liberty of conscience and dissenting opinions.

[6] Cranston, 297. Of this society, Cranston says there was "something distinctly Quakerish." Locke planned to call it the "Society of Pacific Christians."

[7] *The Great Question Concerning Things Indifferent in Religious Worship*. Although Locke was preparing the essays for publication, they were never published. Cranston notes that George Morley, then Bishop of Worcester, published a response to Bagshaw and that Bagshaw was expelled from his Studentship of Christ Church before Locke's response was ready for the press. Locke, then, may have quit the project since the author's ideas had been refuted and were not flourishing.

on Government, Locke declares that "no one can have a greater respect and veneration for authority than" he does because of the "storm" that had dominated his life up to that point.[8] Duty and gratitude, Locke writes, compelled him to sustain the new peace by convincing others to obey the government that had established it.[9] This peace had been destroyed, placed beyond hope even, by the "giddy folly" of religious enthusiasm run amuck in the heady atmosphere of religious liberty.[10] He fears that the inevitable product of "free and unlimited exercise of" religion is an unbounded desire to "destroy all that are not of their [religious] profession."[11] Moreover, looking back at the history of the English Civil Wars, Locke concludes that religious liberty is at fault; "liberty for tender consciences was the first inlet to all those confusions and unheard of and destructive opinions that overspread this nation."[12]

Locke regrets the persecution of "sincere and tender-hearted Christians" that would result from the coerced uniformity he advocates in the *Two Tracts*. Their sacrifice is necessary, however, because the costs of allowing others to conceal and protect their ambition under a facade of faith-justified toleration were too high. He feels that people have used religion to disguise even the most wicked designs, adopting a pretence of reformation to convulse the state and grab power. "All those flames that have made such havoc and desolation in Europe, and have not been quenched but with the blood of so many millions, have been at first kindled with coals from the altar, and . . . blown with the breath of those that attend the altar."[13]

---

[8] Preface, First Tract, 148.

[9] Preface, First Tract, 148.

[10] Preface, First Tract, 148.

[11] First Tract, 143.

[12] First Tract, 144.

Thus, to create a policy that would curb the problems of religious enthusiasm without detriment to anyone's salvation, Locke divides religious worship into matters that are either indifferent or necessary to salvation and applies state control to the former.[14] The state can exercise broad control in religious matters, according to Locke, because the domain of things necessary to salvation is very small, and the domain of *adiaphora,* or things indifferent to our salvation, is large. The matters necessary to our salvation comprise only "those inner virtues of which God is the object, such as the love, reverence, fear, [and] trust of God," and the public expression of those inner virtues, including "public prayers, ceremonies of thanksgiving, the singing of psalms, participation in the sacraments, [and] the hearing of the divine word."[15] All of the circumstances and context of worship, including time, place, appearance, and behavior, are indifferent, and the magistrate may freely control them, both prescribing and proscribing aspects of worship to secure public peace.

As the *Two Tracts* reveal, up through 1660 Locke believed that the magistrate could legitimately control religion. Subsequently, however, Locke became one of the preeminent advocates of toleration. Theorists studying Locke have posited several explanations for this change in his thought.[16] One theory is that the intolerance Locke advocated as an Oxford student resulted from his restricted world and limited experience. As a young man, he could not see beyond the religious distinctions of the conflicting parties during the Interregnum, and thus blamed the pervasive disorder and violence surrounding him on the mere fact of religious difference. After leaving Oxford, however, he was confronted by new perspectives that forced him to see deeper causes for and alternative solutions to the religious violence of his youth. Thus, John Dunn writes, "having escaped from the musty world of the Oxford don into the glamour and excitement of Shaftesbury's service, Locke considered these questions a second time from a very different angle and came to markedly different conclusions."[17]

---

[13] First Tract, 144.

[14] In this, Locke seems to substantiate Leo Strauss's position that Locke, once one clears away the façade of his exoteric writing, adopts a Hobbesian position. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 195. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes also argues for the state's control of public religious practice, considering it indifferent to one's salvation. As we will see, this correspondence between Locke and Hobbes does not exist in Locke's mature thought.

[15] Second Tract, 155; 156.

Moreover, according to this theory, trips Locke took prior to joining Ashley contributed to his developing thought on toleration. By 1665, Locke had grown weary of Oxford and accepted a position as Sir Walter Vane's secretary on a diplomatic mission to Brandenburg. Vane's mission failed, but it did give Locke the chance to see the positive relations between Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists in Cleves. He wrote,

> They quietly permit one another to choose their way to heaven; and I cannot observe any quarrels or animosities amongst them on account of religion. This good correspondence is owing partly to the power of the magistrates, and partly to the prudence and good nature of the people, who, as I find by enquiry, entertain different opinions without any secret hatred or rancour.[18]

---

[16] Some authors believe that there is very little difference between the views. See Robert P. Kraynak, "John Locke: From Absolutism to Toleration," *American Political Science Review*, 72.1 (Mar. 1980): 53-69.

[17] John Dunn, *Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 25.

[18] John Locke, "Letter to Robert Boyle, 12/22 December 1665," vol. V, *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, (London: A. Miller, 1744), 565-6); quoted in Cranston, 82.

The peaceful relations between these groups thus forced Locke to see that a policy of toleration could succeed without degenerating into civil war.

These factors do not adequately explain the development in Locke's thought, however. Prior to writing the *Two Tracts,* he had already confronted well-developed arguments for toleration and had knowledge of places in which toleration had been successful. John Owen, who was the Dean of Christ Church Cathedral at Oxford and even preached his views on toleration from the pulpit, called for the freedom to think and worship as one pleased as long as one did not disturb the peace.[19] Locke gave Owen's ideas "serious thought," but ultimately rejected them because he felt that the risk of renewed violence was too great.[20] Another author sent Locke a copy of his book defending toleration. After reading it, Locke responded with his gratitude and his hope for a second edition. Significantly, inasmuch as it indicated his knowledge of successful policies of toleration, Locke suggested that the author include the history of toleration in France, Holland, and Poland to strengthen the work. Nevertheless, he told the author that a policy of toleration was still too dangerous to adopt.[21] Shortly thereafter, Locke argued against toleration in his *Two Tracts*, whose proximate cause was a pamphlet by Edward Bagshaw advocating the complete non-interference of the magistrate in religious matters. Thus, despite Locke's earlier exposure to theories on toleration and knowledge of toleration in other nations, he continued to see religious difference as too great a danger to civil peace.

---

[19] Cranston, 41. Cranston notes that many saw Owen as unusual in that he argued to toleration despite his membership in the party in power.

[20] Cranston, 41.

[21] Gough, 59.

Furthermore, inasmuch as Locke began to reconsider his views on toleration soon after writing the *Two Tracts,* and several years before leaving Oxford, we must reconsider the view that simply escaping Oxford sufficiently explains his changing thought. Indeed, the chronology of this development indicates the power of ideas, particularly new beliefs resulting from his continuing religious studies, over his changing views on toleration. In 1661, the writings in his commonplace book indicate that he had begun to reform his thoughts on the causes of religious violence and the necessity of individual choice in worship. In the section entitled *Sacerdos*, Locke argues that the magistrate may not direct matters of worship because they are not related to civil affairs.[22] In addition, in the section entitled *Ecclesia*, Locke declares that we join churches because the light of reason instructs us that we must do so to worship God.[23] More importantly, Locke writes that although these churches deal with supernatural matters, people join them as voluntary societies.[24] Furthermore, Locke anticipates his later, complete rejection of *adiaphora* in denying that the magistrate can impose ceremonies not clearly defined by revelation. Thus, Locke's commonplace book indicates that Locke's ideas on toleration were in flux several years before he left Oxford.

Locke's continuing preoccupation with civil peace reveals an additional shortcoming in entirely attributing Locke's changing views on toleration to his departure from Oxford. Throughout the seventeenth century, people used the value of civil peace as a justification for both toleration and coerced religious uniformity.[25] If peace were the primary goal, depending on the circumstances, prudence could dictate either toleration or persecution. Hobbes's *Behemoth*, for example, argues that the magistrate should be tolerant at times, when conditions are such that persecution would only cause greater rebellion. Nevertheless, *Behemoth* goes on to state the widely accepted idea that using the state's power to maintain unity was generally more prudent.[26] Thus, the goal of peace and security, which Locke consistently maintains as one of the state's primary goals, does not necessarily sustain the liberty of conscience he later upholds. Accordingly, we must look for another factor or factors that made religious difference seem less dangerous to him.

---

[22] Gough, 65.

[23] Gough, 65-66.

[24] Gough, 66. Gough notes that here we can see the development of several of the ideas important to Locke's later thought, namely, the "voluntary character of societies" and the relationship "between God's will and natural reason."

I will argue in what follows that new understandings of religion and of the causes of religious violence led him to see toleration and religious difference per se as innocuous. In addition, he comes to see the inequitable treatment of religious groups as one of the primary causes of religious violence, and toleration as the only means to civil comity. Furthermore, his changing theology leads him to go beyond the assertion that we need toleration merely as a means to peace to the assertion that it is a natural right. Thus, although this work does not make the mistake of arguing that Locke's experiences outside of Oxford were unimportant to his ideas on toleration, it does argue that new ideas on religion and human psychology were important to his new views on toleration.

---

[25] See Susan Mendus, "Introduction," in *Justifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-19; Richard Tuck, "Scepticism and toleration in the seventeenth century," in J*ustifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21-35; and Alan Ryan, "A more tolerant Hobbes?" in *Justifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37-59.

[26] See Alan Ryan, 37-59.

To become an advocate of toleration, Locke had to develop a new understanding of the causes of religious violence. Locke's early preoccupation with the destructiveness of human nature led him to conclude that humans need the restraint of a strong magistrate, particularly in matters that affect them as strongly as religion. Furthermore, Locke's preoccupation with protecting people from the violence of others did not change as his thought developed. Indeed, this fear is in part the basis for the creation of government, as discussed in both the *Second Treatise* and *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. That is, even while working to restrain civil power, he argued that it had to be sufficiently strong to protect the people from others, both those inside and outside their political society. Thus, we cannot claim that Locke came to support toleration because he no longer felt that violence was an important concern.

As his thought developed, Locke came to see other underlying causes for religious violence and better ways to control religious violence than enforced religious conformity. Ingrid Creppell argues that Locke came to see toleration as a psychological mechanism that could control human nature and end the problems of religious violence. She writes, "Locke now saw that toleration, as the establishment of boundaries, particularly that between public and private, constituted a way in which the individual freedoms and expression that he had always valued could be channeled, thereby making their chaotic tendencies less inevitable."[27] Toleration for Locke was not just a policy the state adopted, whereby it ceased persecuting those who belonged to non-establishment sects. Toleration was also part of a personal way of life; toleration made it possible for the state to grant freedom of worship because it created internal restraints and boundaries that impeded that liberty's degeneration into license and chaos.

---

[27] Ingrid Creppell, "Locke on Toleration: The Transformation of Constraint," *Political Theory* 24.2 (May 1996): 219.

As we will see, Locke argues for a boundary between civil and ecclesiastical authorities, each with its own origins, purposes, and limits. Simply legislating this boundary, however, is insufficient. As Rousseau argues, a constitution must be written in the hearts of men for it to have any effect.[28] This is especially true in matters of religion. Unless constitutional divisions between the civil and the ecclesiastical are internalized, they have no more worth than the paper upon which they are written. Those in power will continue to pass and enforce laws, regardless of the constitution's provisions. Toleration requires a constitution in the Aristotelian sense of a particular moral, social, and political disposition to maintain the distinction between the civil and ecclesiastical spheres. For toleration to become a fact and to avoid religious chaos, it needed to be supported and enforced by social attitudes," which Locke came to believe could be provided by religion.[29]

While Creppell's analysis is helpful in pointing the analysis of Locke's toleration toward an examination of the psychological causes and restraints of violence, she fails to credit religion for the role that it plays in maintaining toleration. Rather, her understanding of Locke is one that implicitly treats religion as inherently intolerant, such that toleration would be possible only by severely bracketing one's religious identity. Accordingly, she argues that Locke developed civil/ecclesiastical, body/mind, and public/private dualisms that fragment the identity, thus creating a "psychological plurality."[30] According to this conception, toleration is the creation and maintenance of boundaries between the different identity-fragments.[31] Each fragment would dominate when the individual found himself within the sphere of action to which that fragment corresponds. Thus, in the public sphere, the public self would dominate and the religious self would be incapable of using the state's coercive apparatus to secure its wishes. Armed with this conception of a "psychological plurality," Locke in her view was able to overcome his fears about toleration. Toleration, defined as internal boundaries, becomes the solution to the violence resulting from religious difference.

---

[28] Jean-Jacque Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, in *Basic Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Cress, with an introduction by Peter Gay (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 172.

[29] Creppell, 222.

While it is true that Locke's growing support for toleration in part resulted from changes in his understanding of human psychology, we will see that Locke's actual arguments for toleration undermine Creppell's claims. His views on prudence, religious knowledge, and the requirements for salvation demonstrate that Locke no longer saw the fact of religious violence and some will to power inherent to religion as the causes of religious violence. Rather, he came to see the causes of religious violence in the preferential treatment of certain religious groups and the persecution of others by rulers seeking to satiate their greed and ambition. Moreover, Locke justifies the dissidents whose reactions are the proximate cause of religious violence as legitimately responding to violations of their natural rights.

Furthermore, by contrasting Locke with Creppell's interpretation, we arrive at another of the theses of this work. It is not despite their beliefs that many religious people uphold toleration in the public sphere, it is because of their beliefs. Thus, while

---

[30] Creppell, 230.

[31] Creppell, 226.

Locke's theory of toleration depends on internal restraints, it does not depend on the identity's bifurcation into civil and religious selves and the subservience of the latter to the former in the public sphere.[32] While it might be a slight exaggeration to argue that "the explicit *distinction* between the . . . institutions of church and state was . . . as old as Christianity itself," it is nonetheless true that this distinction is a fundamental principle of some forms of Christian belief.[33] That is, for some Christians, support for the separation of church and state and for toleration comes from their Christian beliefs, and they sustain toleration in the public sphere not by bracketing and ignoring their religious selves but by obeying their religious selves, which they must always regard as their highest consideration.

---

[32] Creppell (226) admits that "Locke does not make this argument explicitly," but she believes that the civil/ecclesiastical distinction in identities "emerges from the thrust of his work in the *Letter*."

While beyond the scope of this paper, the mind/body and public/private distinctions upon which Creppell's fragmented identity stands are themselves problematic. If the mind/body distinction relies upon a soul or spirit that is separate and independent from the body, it is questionable how far the concept may be applied to Locke. In *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Locke questions whether there can be any mind or soul separate from the body (II.i.10-20). Indeed, Locke states that he sees no reason to believe "that the *Soul thinks before the Senses have furnish'd it with Ideas*" (II.i.20, emphasis in original). Later in the *Essay*, he tells us that we cannot know whether thought occurs in the matter of our bodies or in some "thinking immaterial Substance" (IV.iii.6). That we cannot prove the existence of a separate soul, or the soul's immateriality, is not a problem because "[all] the great Ends of Morality and Religion, are well enough secured, without philosophical Proofs of" it (IV.iii.6). Locke supports the idea that there is no soul separate from the body with his analysis of death in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Locke doubts the idea that someone will exist in a state of perpetual suffering for all eternity (3). He argues, rather, that when God declared that Adam would die for partaking of the fruit, he meant literally the cessation of existence. This mortality was subsequently passed on to Adam's children. Accordingly, Christ was sent to redeem humans from this death through a universal resurrection (8). Subsequent to the resurrection, each person would be judged, and then the righteous would pass on to eternal life and the wicked would return to a state of non-existence (10). Given Locke's ideas about the very idea of a mind or soul distinct from the body, one should be careful in discovering a mind/body distinction in his writings.

The problem with the public/private distinction when applied to Locke is that it does not appear in his work. Creppell admits that Locke "did not explicitly elaborate [the public/private distinction] as a central component of a specific argument" (225). She believes, however, that the distinction is implicit to Locke's argument, serving a "critical orienting role." The problem is that Locke's civil/ecclesiastical distinction is between civil and ecclesiastical, who both serve public functions. Ecclesiastical authorities regulate churches, which are voluntary societies people join "of their own accord in order to the *public* worshipping of God" (Letter, 396; emphasis added). Thus, Locke distinguishes two forms of public authorities, and the best way to express this is to employ Locke's vocabulary of civil and ecclesiastical differences.

[33] Creppell, 222.

The discussions of Locke's soteriology and his understanding of true Christianity will show that he proscribes the coercion of religious belief by combining Christ's commandments, scriptural examples, and grace, contingent upon one's sincere efforts to believe in Christ. Indeed, for Locke, these conditions require the formation of a new character, one who subjects himself to God, and essential to this character is toleration. If one were to fragment this identity, one would divide the public self from the identity that requires toleration, and remove many of the justifications for toleration that the person uses to restrain himself in the public sphere. Thus, Locke was able to overcome his early objections to toleration in part because he came to believe that religion could serve to restrain people from abusing the liberty given to them.[34] In what follows, we will see that Locke's changing views on the causes of and solutions to the problem of religious violence combined with his new understandings of Christian soteriology, the nature of the church, and the power of the government in religious matters to make him an advocate of toleration.[35] Locke thus came to see religion as a false cause for religious violence, toleration as a method to encourage non-establishment religious groups to protect the state, and freedom of conscience as a value as important as civil peace.[36]

---

[34] This is in part Sanford Kessler's argument in "John Locke's Legacy of Religious Freedom," *Polity* 17 (1984/1985): 484-503. Kessler argues that Locke created a new Christianity that would form tolerant individuals.

[35] While J.W. Gough's "The Development of Locke's Belief in Toleration" does not look at the changes in Locke's psychology of violence and deliberately eschews discussion of the theological controversies in Locke scholarship, it provides an excellent discussion of the changes in Locke's thought about the nature of the church and the power of the state in religious matters. Gough points out that Locke "gave a good deal of attention to questions about the nature of the church, and the power of the government in religious matters," such that Locke rejected his early position on toleration soon after formulating it in the *Two Tracts* (Gough, 65). Indeed, Gough argues that Locke's theory on toleration was largely complete by 1667, when Locke wrote *An Essay Concerning Tolertation*, and that the *Letter* largely reproduced the arguments about toleration in the fourth version of the *Essay* (Gough, 73; see also Cranston, 111). Furthermore, Gough claims that Locke's views on limited government and individual freedom developed with his views

3.2 Meaning of toleration

Locke's understanding of toleration in many respects reflects the traditional understanding of toleration as enduring something one dislikes. Toleration is not, however, a grant for license. We should always act in accordance with law, and we should not use our freedom to harm others. Thus, in writing the *Letter,* Locke attempts to navigate a path between the extremes of allowing destructive license by religious enthusiasts and allowing persecution by the state. In avoiding these extremes, he does not advocate opportunism; toleration was to be a natural right that every person holds as long as he or she does not harm anyone else.

Locke's toleration is also not indifference, either toward the other individual or toward the other's beliefs. Locke argues that we must always have concern for the other, which concern includes working to reclaim another from beliefs or actions one believes

---

on religious liberty, indeed that Locke's "belief in toleration" was "based on the same general principles as his political theory" and "was the fruit of long reading and reflection" (Gough, 57).

[36] Locke's later writings emphasize that liberty, religion, and public order are not incompatible. The obvious objection to this statement is that Locke made them compatible by stripping down liberty and religion to such an extent that they could not be incompatible with order, such that order always maintained its status as his primary value. In the *Second Treatise*, Locke emphasizes that liberty is not license; it is always circumscribed by the Law of Nature. Likewise, one may argue that Locke, by reducing true Christianity to sincere belief in Christ, so diminished the role and impact of religion in one's life that it also could do no harm to public order. Such a perspective, that Locke achieved toleration by creating a minimalist religion and fooled everyone into accepting it, ignores the true impact of what Lockean belief entailed, as will be shown in what follows. Further, this perspective ignores Locke's acknowledgement that sometimes a person's sincere conscience, particularly that of someone who belongs to a non-establishment group, will conflict with legitimate civil interests. If Locke's true value were public order, he would argue that in such a situation the conscientious objector has a responsibility to subordinate one's private interests to those of society. Locke, however, argues that, while the magistrate has the responsibility to pursue the public interest and punish infractions, the individual has the responsibility to follow his conscience despite the consequences. Thus, one's conscience has at least equal value as public order.

will harm him. Thus, Nathan Tarcov's statement that Locke's notion of toleration is not a "grudging endurance or gracious allowance of something one has the right not to tolerate" is only partially true.[37] Toleration remains the endurance of that which a person does not like or finds morally reprehensible, but it is not the gracious allowance of something that we have a right not to tolerate. Persecution is taking away another person's right to life, liberty, or estate for reasons unrelated to the preservation of those rights for others. Toleration, as opposed to persecution, means that one does not use the state's power to control actions and beliefs that one hates, but that do one no harm. As long as beliefs, actions, or attributes do no harm to others, one has a duty to respect them as rights. Toleration is thus a grudging endurance, but, as will be shown subsequently, it is also a right and a duty. One can try to reclaim others from error—that is part of one's duty—but one has no right or power to force another to renounce error.

Tied to Locke's justifications of toleration are considerations that do push it beyond a simple grudging endurance. One may endure the beliefs and actions of the person, but one should not merely endure him.[38] Inherent to Locke's justifications are a respect for the dignity of the individual, for the freedom and reason that God has given to each person. Further, a person should care about others' lives and salvation. In the *Two Treatises*, this means that one should do as much as possible to aid the self-preservation of others, as long as it does not impair one's own self-preservation. In the *Letter*, it requires us to have concern for the salvation of others, doing all we can to persuade them of their errors.

---

[37] Nathan Tarcov, "John Locke and the Foundations of Toleration," in *Early Modern Skepticism and the Origins of Toleration*, ed. Alan Levine (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 1999), 180.

[38] As a first step in understanding the true meaning of toleration, George Carey compares the deep moral disagreements underlying toleration in political life to the disagreements between him and his daughter over her taste in music. He writes, "I have a teenage daughter who loves pop music. You know she is at home when the house erupts with noise. The nearer you get to her room, the greater the danger to your ear drums and the lower your tolerance level of the music. But that doesn't mean I don't love my daughter." George Carey, "Tolerating Religion," in *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 46.

Further, Locke's idea of toleration may go beyond the subject of religious difference. Locke uses the absurdity of persecution over eye and hair color to demonstrate the incorrectness of religious persecution. Thus, toleration in religious matters is only a component of his larger political philosophy, in which the power of the state to harm us for any reason and in any aspect of our lives is to be limited.

Finally, Locke's notion of toleration goes beyond a matter of state policy. Locke's project would be useless if, after freeing our minds from the compulsion of state authority, we surrendered them freely to the authority of others.[39] Such freedom, as he makes clear in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, is necessary to the apprehension of truth. The personal search for religious truth, uncontrolled and motivated by one's own desires, is even more critical to one's salvation.

3.3 Justifications for toleration

Among those who study Locke's ideas on toleration, there is substantial disagreement concerning which arguments he advances and even how many of them there are. Some theorists have argued that there are as many as nine arguments, and others as few as one.[40] The only common argument recognized in the literature deals with Locke's position that salvific belief is not coercible. One finds, however, many interpretations of this argument and, more importantly, varying criticisms of it. Interpreting this argument in a way that is consistent with Locke's other writings and answering the criticisms of it is one of the chief goals of this chapter.

---

[39] Tarcov, 181.

[40] Respectively, Nathan Tarcov and Jeremy Waldron. See also Creppell, 220.

Locke divides the *Letter* into an introduction declaring the tolerant character of true Christianity, a section giving the reasons why toleration is necessary, a section describing the application of those principles, and a postscript delineating the differences between heretics, schismatics, apostates, and infidels. As Locke combines and recombines his arguments throughout the *Letter* to answer different challenges to it, no argument is completely distinct from the others. By intertwining the arguments, each one receives strength from the others. Thus, although one scholar describes five and another seven arguments, they do not necessarily disagree, although it is clearly difficult to reduce all of them to a single argument, as some try to do, for reasons we discuss below.

To demonstrate the importance of religious belief in Locke's defense of toleration, I will examine five principal arguments that he develops. These are prudence, the civil/ecclesiastical distinction, skepticism, the requirements for grace, and the true character of Christianity.

3.3.1 Prudential arguments for toleration

As we saw above, Locke did not always believe that toleration was prudential. Early on, he, like Hobbes, argued that the magistrate should control many matters of worship to preserve peace. He saw religious differences as a source of violence and civil war. In his later writings, Locke argues by contrast that the true cause of violence is not religious, and on this prudential basis argues that only a policy of toleration can secure civil peace.

Paradoxically, Locke first approaches prudential considerations for toleration in the *Letter* in his discussion of the duty of toleration. He writes, “neither single persons, nor Churches, nay, nor even commonwealths, have any just title to invade the civil rights and worldly goods of each other, upon pretence of religion.”[41] Such persecution is wrong, it is the essence of intolerance, because it violates another’s natural rights. To convince a potential persecutor that he should avoid intolerance, Locke emphasizes the deleterious effects it would have on everyone in society, including the persecutors. When people believe that they have the right to rule and control others in religious matters, “[no] peace and security, no, not so much as common friendship can ever be established or preserved amongst men.”[42] Rather, by introducing the use of force in religious matters, they should “consider . . . how pernicious a seed of discord and war, how powerful a provocation to endless hatreds, rapines, and slaughters they thereby furnish unto mankind.”[43]

Locke expands his claim that persecution engenders violence later, in the *Letter*’s postscript, while responding to the objection that religious meetings are dens of sedition and revolt. Locke notes that persecutors do not object to any other type of group or meeting; they argue only that religious meetings endanger the state and civil peace. Locke admits that religious assemblies sometimes become the focal points of rebellion, but argues that they are only because the magistrate causes them to be so. Any group, including one identified by unique religious beliefs, will revolt when oppressed. Were their natural rights not violated, religious groups would be as peaceable as any other would be.

---

[41] Letter, 403.

[42] Letter, 403.

[43] Letter, 403.

Locke anticipates that the previous arguments may fail to convince advocates of persecution of the natural harmlessness of religious diversity. He feels that the different interests of religious assemblies and of groups that meet in the market and in the courts contradict another possible contention against toleration, the belief that the former are more dangerous than the latter.[44] Those opposed to toleration believe that religious meetings are inherently dangerous while the latter, as civil meetings, are not. Building upon the distinction between civil and ecclesiastical interests, which we will later discuss, Locke responds that this view violates common sense. Civil assemblies and the state interest themselves about many of the same matters. Thus, according to Locke, we should expect these groups to generate conflict as they attempt to usurp the state's power to advance their civil interests. On the other hand, religious societies focus on one's eternal existence, which are largely unrelated to the objects within the state's power. Thus, according to Locke, these societies have less incentive to usurp political power or to use it tyrannically.[45]

Locke acknowledges that, notwithstanding the greater incentives of civil assemblies to lead to convulsions of the state, experience shows that religious societies have frequently disturbed civil peace. Those who advocate enforced uniformity ascribe this to the secretive, private nature of such societies. Such secrecy provides a medium in which conspiracy and disorder grow. To this charge, Locke first responds that religious meetings are not private by choice or by anything inherent to their worship. Religious groups hold their meetings in secret only because they are persecuted and forced to hold them in that way. Were they not persecuted, they would hold their meetings in the open and be less susceptible to private machinations. Moreover, secrecy alone according to Locke does not lead to sedition and revolt, as demonstrated by the many groups concerned with civil interests that nonetheless meet in private.

---

[44] Letter, 427.

[45] In the *Second Treatise*, Locke defines usurpation as the seizure of power by someone other than the person to whom the people have granted it. Tyranny is the taking of powers not surrendered to the magistrate by the people when they formed political society (2T, 197-8; 199-210).

Opponents of toleration also argue that permitting religious difference is dangerous because the members of religious groups are united in "minds and affections."[46] Locke finds this argument unconvincing. If unity in mind and affection are causes of civil unrest, then the magistrate according to Locke should fear the members of his own religious party as much as he does any other. Those urging a uniform establishment of religion would reply that it is silly for the magistrate to fear the members of his own party. This reveals to Locke, however, that disunity is not the source of conflict; the magistrate's partiality causes the violence they fear. He writes,

> [He] is kind and favourable to the one, but severe and cruel to the other. These he treats like children, and indulges them even to wantonness. Those he uses as slaves; and, how blamelessly soever they demean themselves, recompenses them no otherwise than by galleys, prisons, confiscations, and death. These he cherishes and defends. Those he continually scourges and oppresses.[47]

---

[46] Letter, 428.

[47] Letter, 428.

The seditions and factions of religious societies result from the unequal and sometimes repressive treatment by the magistrates. It is “not religion that inspires them to it . . . , but their sufferings and oppressions.”

Revolt against tyranny, however, is a response that religious groups have in common with other oppressed groups. It is “the common disposition of all mankind, who when they groan under any heavy burden, endeavour naturally to shake off the yoke that galls their necks.”[48] Thus, the frequent insurrections pointed to by those who oppose religious pluralism are only incidentally the result of religious differences; religious differences thus lead to violence only because those who believe differently are persecuted. To prove whether he is right or whether religious groups are truly peaceful, Locke challenges the magistrate to give the members of other religious parties the same freedoms and privileges as members of his own and monitor the results. Alternatively, if the magistrate fears making this test, he can choose some arbitrary characteristic, one equally frivolous to the true purposes of the state, and persecute those who differ from him in that characteristic. Those persecuted according to this arbitrary, and previously meaningless, distinction, will soon find themselves united in mind and affection. The magistrate will have forced this unity on them, and he can only blame himself when they unite in rebellion.[49] Any group, regardless of the distinctions that create it, will unite in heart and mind and revolt the violations of their natural rights finally become intolerable.

Some advocates of persecution might still worry about the disposition to unlawfulness seemingly demonstrated by those who unite and meet in opposition to the magistrate's will. In his response to this objection, Locke demonstrates that he has abandoned the distinction between necessary and indifferent aspects of worship that was critical to his defense of the magistrate's control of public worship in *The Two Tracts*.[50] The sincerity necessary to salvific worship demands that one do what one believes is pleasing to God. One "cannot alter, omit, or add any circumstance in that which [one thinks] the true way of worship," because that would be to voluntarily do something one knows to displease God.[51] Thus, the concern for one's eternal life, which supersedes all other concerns, would force one to disobey the magistrate when he proscribes or prescribes any matter of worship that one believes is false.[52] The magistrate, however, is at fault for causing one to break the law and develop the character of a lawbreaker. If an advocate of persecution is truly concerned about dispositions to unlawfulness, he should cease making matters of worship, so harmless to the ends of the state, unlawful.

---

[48] Letter, 428.

[49] Letter, 428-429.

Indeed, by repealing the laws against the worship of other groups, those groups will not only cease to be lawbreakers, they will become the state's strongest supporters. They will be so grateful for a magistrate who protects their rights and liberties that they will be intensely loyal to him. Moreover, Locke argues that a multiplicity of religious groups will act as a stabilizing force. The coalition of religious groups that would develop under a policy of toleration would jealously guard the rights and liberties of the nation. They, "like so many guardians of the public peace, will watch one another, that nothing may be innovated or changed in the form of the government."[53] Thus, religious pluralism would enhance, not inhibit, the peace and security of the state.

---

[50] In fact, as we saw, he abandoned this distinction years earlier in the fourth and final draft of *An Essay Concerning Toleration*. There he declares "that in religious worship nothing is indifferent" (Toleration, 190). See Gough, 71-73.

[51] Toleration, 190.

[52] Letter, 421. See also Letter, 423-424.

Locke admits, however, that some religious assemblies *are* occasionally the "nurseries of factions and seditions" that the proponents of intolerance fear. Those who pursue dominion over others and special privileges for themselves should not condemn all religious groups, however. The magistrate should treat violations against public order and security on an individual basis. "If anything pass in a religious meeting seditiously, and contrary to the public peace, it is to be punished in the same manner . . . as if it had happened in a fair or market."[54] Each person "is to be accountable for his own actions; and no man is to be laid under a suspicion, or odium, for the fault of another." No one, whether Presbyterian, Independent, Anabaptist, Arminian, Quaker, Jew, or Muslim, "ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion."[55] Religion should not be a factor in determining a person's rights or standing in a commonwealth. Only one's actions that directly relate to civil interests should affect one's rights and standing. All "those whose doctrine is peaceable, and whose manners are pure and blameless, ought to be upon equal terms with their fellow-subjects."[56] We should be clear that Locke does not advocate the toleration of *subversive* religious groups. The state may control these groups when they truly prove inimical to its security.

---

[53] Letter, 429. Locke's argument here seems very similar to Madison's enumeration of the benefits of a large republic in "Federalist 10."

[54] Letter, 430.

[55] Letter, 431.

[56] Letter, 430.

We will discuss this limitation on toleration, which depends on the distinction between civil and ecclesiastical authority, below.

Locke concludes the section and the main body of the letter with a warning and an entreaty. He warns that people, when "stripped of their goods," "delivered up for a prey to other men's violence and rapine," and otherwise persecuted for things that belong not to the magistrate but "entirely to the conscience of every particular man," will grow "weary of the evils under which they labour" and "think it lawful for them to resist force with force" in defending "their natural rights."[57] There will be no peace for the commonwealth unless it adopts a policy of tolerating religious differences. Locke's entreaty is that civil magistrates act "like fathers of their country."[58] To do so, they must resist "binding" others' consciences with their laws and direct "all their counsels and endeavours to promote universally the civil welfare of all their children."[59]

Locke thus uses his prudential argument to address the concerns of those who believe, as he did in his early years, that tolerating religious differences will only foment discord and disrupt the state. His argument is clever but convincing. He admits their claim that religious belief leads to violence, but explains that this violence is not only natural but also justified as a response to the violation of one's natural rights. Since persecution is the primary cause of religious violence, the key to avoiding religious violence is thus to shun the practice of persecution. Human nature is such that we will always rebel when punished for reasons not legitimately related to the ends of the state.

---

[57] Letter, 432.

[58] Letter, 433.

[59] Letter, 433.

Such rebellion is thus not intrinsic to religious groups but is the natural response of any group to the violence against them.

The development of a toleration-sustaining psychology required Locke to do more than justify most religious violence as a response to persecution, however. We must also see if his psychology can mitigate the persecution that initiates the violence. Some persecutors are motivated primarily by the belief that intolerance is the only means to peace. The prudential argument tells those who would persecute for peace that their efforts are counter-productive. If he can convince them that the prudential argument is accurate, their desire for peace would obligate them to be tolerant. Locke must also convince those who argue that their religion requires persecution that they are wrong. The argument to convince them, however, must go beyond prudence in matters of civil peace because, for them and Locke, eternal concerns outweigh those of this world. As we will see, this argument must really address two groups, those who are sincere believers and those for whom religion is a façade. Locke believes that true religion is not the original cause of most violence; ambition and avarice play that role. In the context of Christian Europe, Locke hopes to reveal this hidden motive by teaching the truly religious, those whom the ambitious and the greedy have deceived, that their religion forbids persecution. If Locke can convince them, as he believes, that their faith proscribes persecution, then he will have succeeded in generating within them internal constraints that forbid the persecution of others and, in the case of minority groups, a strong loyalty to the state that protects them with a policy of toleration. Their gratitude for the toleration extended to them will lead believers to aid the magistrate by jealously guarding against anyone who would usurp power and/or be tyrants.

We must remember, however, that Locke's early opposition to toleration derived not merely from his psychological understanding of the causes of religious violence. It depended as well on his religious beliefs, specifically on his minimalist understanding of religion. In his early writings, Locke agreed with Hobbes that most matters of worship were indifferent; as those matters were not specified by God, the magistrate was free to control them. Thus, not only was a transformation in his psychology necessary, his support of toleration demanded changes in his theology. Contrary to the arguments of some contemporary Locke scholars, it was not a minimalization of religious belief that sustained toleration in his later theory, but his rejection of the principle that belief and worship can be minimalized.[60] At least by the time he wrote the final version of *An Essay Concerning Toleration*, Locke no longer believed that there were any indifferent matters in worship. As we will see, the magistrate may only interfere in worship when the latter adversely affects what Locke defines as civil interests.

3.3.2 Separation of civil and ecclesiastical authority

Locke devotes more space in the *Letter* for the civil/ecclesiastical distinction of authority than any other argument. This argument draws on elements from the natural law tradition and from Locke's understanding of true religion. In analyzing the civil/ecclesiastical distinction, we will not only see why Locke believes this sustains toleration, but also the limits beyond which the state cannot tolerate certain forms of belief and worship. In our discussion, we will see that scholars have challenged the civil/ecclesiastical distinction, but will postpone analysis of these criticisms until later in the chapter. Our discussion of Locke's soteriology will clarify the answer Locke would make to their objections.

---

[60] Sam Black argues that Locke forms an ultra-minimal creed, which is composed of a few religious principles that can be known with certainty. The state may compel everyone to believe those principles, but all differences of opinion outside of the ultra-minimal creed should be tolerated. Sam Black, "Toleration and the Skeptical Inquirer in Locke," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 28.4 (December 1998): 473-504. Sandy Kessler (484-503) argues that Locke established religious freedom by restricting the scope of the Bible and drastically reducing the required beliefs. Richard Sherlock asserts that Locke creates a new form of Christianity, one that eliminates the central tenets of the faith, reducing religion to mere decorous behavior. Richard Sherlock, "The Theology of Toleration: A Reading of Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity*," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 9 (Winter 1998): 19-49.

Locke declares that toleration "is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind" that it is monstrous to refuse to recognize its advantages.[61] Some people, however, feign concern for the state or for another's soul as a pretense to persecute him, while others claim freedom of conscience to conceal licentiousness and unlawfulness. To prevent people from justifying their impositions with a false concern for the state or religion, it is "necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other."[62] To do so, Locke defines civil power and gives three considerations that he feels are sufficient to determine the propriety of toleration, followed by a definition of ecclesiastical power and considerations that determine when that power should be confined.

People establish both civil and religious societies by consent, although with different purposes, powers, and limits. A commonwealth is "a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing of their own civil interests."[63] To have any effect in limiting the power of the state, one must then define and circumscribe the civil interests over which the state has power. Locke defines civil interests as "life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like." These conditions define the duty and domain of action of the commonwealth's agent, the magistrate. The magistrate is to protect the "just possession of these things belonging to this life" and punish the violation of the "laws of public justice and equity," which are meant to protect the life, liberty, and property of those who are members of society.[64] The magistrate only has jurisdiction over such "civil concernments," and "all civil power, right, and dominion is bounded and confined to the only care of promoting these things."[65] This limitation, that "civil power, rights, and dominion" do not and should not extend "to the salvation of souls," is demonstrated by three considerations: the magistrate was never given this authority; the magistrate lacks the means to secure another's salvation; almost everyone would be consigned to eternal misery if the magistrate had the means and was given the authority.

---

[61] Letter, 393.

[62] Letter, 393.

[63] Letter, 393.

The magistrate has no power or dominion over the soul because such care was never given him. This does not mean that the magistrate may not work for the salvation of others. He may adopt the means available for any person to care for another's soul, exhorting and persuading them in those things he feels are necessary for eternal life. Every person has a "commission" to care for others in this manner.[66] Becoming magistrate, however, does not give someone *additional* authority over others' souls; particularly absent is the authority to use civil power in religious matters. In the *First*

---

[64] Letter, 394.

[65] Letter, 394.

[66] Letter, 395.

Treatise Locke tells us that if someone is to claim authority over others, there must be a way to clearly see that this authority belongs to him.[67] He argues that one who properly construes scripture cannot claim that God included among the powers given Adam that of dominion over other men. Further, anyone who claims succession to this authority must be able to demonstrate that God has granted it to him.[68] Similarly, in the *Letter* Locke argues that those who would claim a right from God to rule another in religious matters must be able to demonstrate that God has given them this authority. Locke says, however, that he cannot see where God has ever given the authority to compel others in matters of religion.[69] If God has not given it, the only other legitimate source of authority over a person for Locke is that person's consent. The right and authority to care for one's soul, however, is not a power delegated to the sovereign by the people's consent. They have not, would not, and could not give this power and authority to the magistrate.

The second consideration that Locke points to is the fact that the magistrate lacks the "power, right, and dominion" over souls because the means available to him cannot bring us to eternal life. The magistrate is "armed with the force and strength of all his subjects" to carry out the functions assigned to him at the state's creation, but this force and strength consists "in the deprivation or diminution of those civil interests, or goods" that one might have or enjoy.[70] Locke emphasizes that this power "consists only in outward force."[71] "[True] and saving religion," however, requires one's inward persuasion. Since the understanding "cannot be compelled to the belief of anything by outward force," the magistrate's power has no efficacy over anyone's salvation. Like all others, the magistrate is restricted to the same tools that all others can exercise in our common duty to care for one another's souls. "It is only light and evidence that can work a change in men's opinions," and all must rely upon these to "do what becomes any good man."

---

[67] 1T, 81.

[68] 1T, 95.

[69] Letter, 394.

[70] Letter, 394.

The third consideration that restricts the care of the magistrate over the soul results from the pluralism of religious belief. For the sake of argument, Locke grants the point that magistrates can alter belief. If that were true, the results would be so prejudicial to one's salvation that no one would ever give this authority to the magistrate. This harm results from three conditions, that there is only "one truth" and "one way to heaven," that there is a "variety and contradiction of opinions in religion," and that "the princes of the world are as much divided [in their religious opinions] as in their secular interests."[72] The world would be divided between a number of enforced religions, in which it would be likely that "one country alone would be in the right."[73] The people of all other nations would have to follow their princes to "destruction," resulting in the "absurdity" that one's place of birth determines one's "eternal happiness or misery." Such a notion is irreconcilable for Locke with "the notion of a deity." It shows why, in the first consideration, neither God nor man would give the authority over souls to the state. Each person must labor by "the light of [his] own reason" for his eternal happiness.

---

[71] Letter, 395.

[72] Letter, 396.

[73] Letter, 296.

As we will see below, many who study Locke have criticized these considerations, particularly that the magistrate lacks the power to save souls. For example, Jeremy Waldron used the second consideration to create a secularized argument for toleration, which he then used to demonstrate the feebleness of Locke's defense.[74] Generally, the scholars criticizing these considerations argue that Locke's argument fails because it is false that force has no effect over belief. These critiques, and the potential responses Locke could make to them using his other writings, will be more fully discussed in the section on the requirements for salvation.

Turning to ecclesiastical societies, one finds that their character and purpose, while making them responsible for aiding people in spiritual matters, preclude them from using the state's power to do so. Both civil and ecclesiastical societies are voluntary, in that they are formed and entered only by one's consent. This likeness between the two ends after one makes oneself a member of the societies. The ends of the state demand that it be voluntary only in one's entry; one cannot retract one's consent and leave that society unless it has become destructive to or helpless in securing the ends for which it was created. If people could leave whenever they dislike the magistrate's decisions, the magistrate could not effectively wield the combined executive power of society for their self-preservation.

---

[74] Jeremy Waldron, "Locke: toleration and the rationality of persecution," in *Justifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 61-86. Joshua Mitchell provides an important counter-perspective. He arges that religion is essential to the civil/ecclesiastical distinction. In "John Locke and the Theological Foundation of Liberal Toleration," Mitchell suggests that the dialectical interpretation of history began much earlier than in Hegel's writings. If one looks to Locke, one finds that toleration, the civil/ecclesiastical distinction in particular, depends upon Christ's fulfillment of biblical history. See Joshua Mitchell, "John Locke and the Theological Foundation of Liberal Toleration: A Christian Dialectic of History," *The Review of Politics* 52.1 (Winter 1990): 64-82.

In ecclesiastical societies, however, members retain the freedom of exit. People join these societies to learn and to take part in the public component of the worship necessary for salvation. These societies must be voluntary because, for worship to be "effectual to the salvation of their souls," they must sincerely believe that their worship is "acceptable to him [God]."[75] As with membership in political society, the requirement of consent precludes hereditary membership in religious societies by birth. The requirement of *sincere* worship demands that one have free entry in and exit from any given religious group, one's choice contingent upon the continuing belief that God accepts that society's form of worship.

Any society, even the most free and voluntary, must be regulated by laws and enforce some order. Otherwise, people could introduce new forms that would rend the society or that would subvert the ends for which it was created. The laws and powers that a society exerts over its members, though, must be commensurate to its origins and purposes. The laws and powers of religious societies are given shape by the requirements that worship be voluntary and sincere. Locke thus rejects the authority of the ecclesiastical tradition and insists that no one has a monopoly on the interpretation of scripture, such that no one could claim authority to dictate their beliefs, modes of worship, or conduct. He feels that a true church is one that fulfills the promise in Matthew 18:20, "wheresoever two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be in the midst of them."[76] To avoid misunderstanding Locke's idea of worship, however, one should read this statement in light of *On the Reasonableness of Christianity*.[77] Locke does not mean that one can take any idea and turn it into true worship by forming a group and declaring that it is in Christ's name. Scripture reveals beliefs and deeds necessary for salvation under the law of faith. Salvation requires more than sincerity in belief and worship; a person must be sincere in beliefs and acts that God has ordained. Gathering in Christ's name means that one has made an oath to accept Christ as one's sovereign, promising to fulfill the commandments he has expressly laid out in scripture. Thus, as long as the members of any group fulfill the conditions given by Christ for gathering in his name, theirs is true worship.

---

[75] Letter, 396.

Moreover, the origins and purposes of religious societies constrain the enforcement of the laws used to regulate themselves. As such societies exist for the "acquisition of eternal life," their laws, and the means to secure them, must directly relate to that end.[78] One's "worldly goods" have nothing to do with one's future state, so that transactions involving them are inappropriate to ecclesiastical societies. Nor may they exercise force in the pursuit of spiritual matters; force pertains to objects that fall within the dominion people have given to the civil magistrate, and it is only to the civil magistrate that they have given the power to use force. These restrictions do not mean, however, that religious societies lack the power to regulate their membership or their modes of worship. Were the members of a society denied the power to regulate their worship, they would be unable to fulfill the practices of worship that they feel are necessary for their salvation. They would be unable to accomplish the very purpose for which they created the society. To maintain this worship, to keep "members of [a religious] society . . . within their duty," leaders and other members may use "exhortations, admonitions, and advices."[79] If all their efforts to persuade another member, then they may expel that member from their society to maintain its integrity and, thereby, the worship they feel their salvation requires.

---

[76] Letter, 397.

[77] Sanford Kessler understands Locke as creating a new form of Christianity, one in which any belief is salvific as long as it is sincerely held. See Kessler, 484-503.

[78] Letter, 399.

The distinction between ecclesiastical and civil societies allows Locke to define three duties of toleration expected of the magistrate and three duties expected of ecclesiastical leaders and the members of society at large, as well as limits to these duties of toleration. First, as discussed above, no religious society can be required to retain a member who offends its laws. They must show toleration, however, by ensuring that their sentence of excommunication does not damage the body or estate of the expelled person through either word or action.[80] Excommunication may only affect the privileges given by the society to which no one has a civil right.

The second duty and limit of toleration requires that no person "prejudice another person in his civil enjoyments because he is of another Church or religion."[81] This duty requires each person to practice toleration in his daily life, not merely regarding it as a policy of the state. Each person should so act that he does not harm another.[82] This second duty also makes demands upon ecclesiastical societies. Churches stand in the same relation to one another as do private persons, such that churches must demonstrate the same toleration among themselves that private persons must exhibit. Thus, "peace, equity, and friendship are always mutually to be observed by particular Churches, in the same manner as by private persons, without any pretence of superiority or jurisdiction over one another."[83]

---

[79] Letter, 399.

[80] Letter, 400.

[81] Letter, 400.

[82] This principle is reiterated in the *Second Treatise*. There, Locke tells us that we have a responsibility to aid others in their self-preservation as long as such aid does not prejudice our own.

The third duty applies to those who have some ecclesiastical office, whether bishops, presbyters, ministers, or any other role. Those who claim ecclesiastical office, regardless of the veracity of their claims, should confine their authority "within the bounds of the Church" and never extend it "to civil affairs."[84] As we saw above, Locke believes that his discussion of the purposes and powers of civil and ecclesiastical societies shows them to be so distinct that no one with ecclesiastical office should ever assume civil power. Here, in declaring it a duty, Locke implies that this distinction is not merely imposed because it would be irrational to attempt to coerce belief. He implies that it is an immutable principle, restraining one's legitimate authority regardless of what one could do. He writes, "the Church itself is a thing absolutely separate and distinct from the commonwealth. The boundaries on both sides are fixed and immovable."[85] Locke next appeals to Protestant concerns about the corruption introduced in Christianity when it was originally wedded to the state. "He jumbles heaven and earth together, the things most remote and opposite, who mixes these two societies, which are in their original, end, business, and in everything perfectly distinct, and infinitely different from each other."[86] To avoid this corruption ecclesiastical leaders must shun the powers and duties of civil leaders.

---

[83] Letter, 401.

[84] Letter, 403.

[85] Letter, 403.

The duty of toleration requires ecclesiastical leaders to do more than avoid civil power and the violation of other's natural rights. The claim to ecclesiastical office is a claim to be a successor to the apostles.[87] Accordingly, they should follow the latter in doctrine and action. A person with such a calling should "admonish his hearers of the duties of peace and good-will towards all men . . . [and] exhort all men . . . to charity, meekness, and toleration." Leaders have a duty to teach their followers to be tolerant, particularly toward those against whom others preach persecution. They must "diligently endeavour to allay and temper all that heat, and unreasonable averseness of mind, which either any man's fiery zeal for his own sect, or the craft of others, has kindled against dissenters." Locke demonstrates this duty through Christ's teachings. For example, Christ commanded his disciples to love those who hate them and to turn the other cheek to those striking them. When asked by his disciples how many times they were to forgive the trespasses of others, he answered "seventy times seven." If Christ commands peaceable action in the most unlikely of circumstances, when one is most provoked, Locke reasons that true Christians should be tolerant toward those who do nothing more than differ from them in belief.[88] Those who aspire to succeed Christ's disciples should uphold the love and peace that were the bedrock of Christ's teachings and laws. Those ecclesiastical leaders who fail in this duty will "one day give account thereof unto the Prince of Peace."[89]

---

[86] Letter, 403.

[87] Letter, 404.

[88] Letter, 404.

Locke's argument for toleration based upon the civil/ecclesiastical distinction could be an entirely secular argument, based upon analytic distinctions and natural law. Indeed, some authors, hoping to create a universally accepted argument, have attempted to secularize it in this manner.[90] Locke, however, does not follow this path. He interweaves the argument with religious claims. The magistrate lacks spiritual authority partially because God's grant, which would be a revelation, cannot be found in scripture. The distinction between the two authorities also depends on Locke's soteriology and on a "common interpretive method that E. Brooks Holifield calls 'exemplary exegesis,' or the literal application of biblical examples."[91] Locke understands salvific belief to be non-coercible, lest it lose its saving character. Moreover, Christ and his disciples never coerced others, but instead attempted to persuade others of their beliefs and were themselves persecuted. In addition, the restrictions on ecclesiastical authority rely upon the definitions of a church and worship that Locke constructs from Christ's teachings in *Matthew*. Locke uses Christ's teachings on love and peace to argue that ecclesiastical leaders and everyday people have a duty to be tolerant. Thus, where Locke could easily have employed secular arguments with no fear of retribution and with greater rhetorical force, he chose instead to rely on religious materials and arguments. Moreover, he does not do this merely to make his argument more appealing in the religious atmosphere of the 17th century. As we will see in the discussion of the requirements for salvation, the strength of the civil/ecclesiastical distinction rests on Locke's soteriology, which was hardly orthodox.

---

[89] Letter, 404.

[90] See Waldron, Toleration.

[91] James P. Byrd, Jr., *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution, and the Bible* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 48, citing E. Brooks Holifield, *Era of Persuasion: American Thought and Culture 1521-1680*, ed. Lewis Perry, Twayne's American Thought and culture (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989): 46. Byrd uses Holifield's concept in his analysis of Roger Williams. This concept is equally applicable to Lockean scriptural exegesis.

3.3.3 Skepticism and religious knowledge

At least on the surface, two of Locke's arguments for toleration rely on a form of skepticism about our capacity to know absolutely. These arguments assume a situation in which religious knowledge is absent or uncertain. One of these approaches assumes that truth is possible and *will* ultimately win out but is *not* immediately obvious to us. Nathan Tarcov writes that this view "may remind us of the later view that truth will win out in the marketplace of ideas."[92] The second argument relies on Locke's observation that there is no earthly judge of religious truth. Each person must determine for himself what religious truth is, and, because of the differences in capacities and situations, no truth will be universally accepted.[93]

---

[92] Tarcov, 183. In his discussion of the magistrate's duties and limits regarding articles of faith, Locke writes, "[for] truth certainly would do well enough, if she were once left to shift for herself" (Letter, 420).

[93] Letter, 390; 401.

As Locke presents these arguments, they do not rest on real skepticism.[94] Indeed, in his analysis of the first of these forms, Tarcov states that it is "zetetic rather than skeptical."[95] The zetetic character of the argument requires only that one desire to know the truth and make efforts by inquiry and investigation to obtain it. Truth is still in principle attainable. The search for truth commences because, although one senses a lack of knowledge, one believes that truth is possible and desires to obtain it. The corresponding argument for toleration, that we must maintain an open public sphere in which truth is discovered through the clash of diverse viewpoints, inherently assumes that truth is lacking but possible. Thus, this form of toleration relies upon a limited skepticism, but one that will be overcome in time.

Moreover, this zeteticism not only rejects the skeptical position that ultimate truth is impossible, but also the position that all opinions are true or merely part of a larger truth. Rather, each position is largely composed of error with perhaps a small portion of the truth combined with it. One must sift through all available opinions to obtain all the pieces into which the truth has been shattered and recombine them.

Locke's zeteticism, although it posits that we can attain the truth, argues that the state has no authority to seek it, at least in the matters of faith. Indeed, the use of state power would impede the pursuit of truth at the core of Locke's zeteticism—the corruptions in human nature would lead magistrates to use power over opinion to obstruct the truth for their own benefit. Locke establishes these points in his discussion on the magistrate's duties toward matters of faith. The magistrate lacks authority because of the people's purposes in creating government and the powers given to it to achieve those ends. Since political society is created to preserve their lives, liberties, and estates, and one's religious beliefs neither endanger the magistrate's power—as long as the magistrate does not misuse it to control opinion—nor others' property, the veracity of a person's religious opinions is unimportant to the ends of government. There is no need for the magistrate to control it, such that no one would give the magistrate this authority, no matter how "false and absurd" an opinion may be.[96]

---

[94] Locke did not agree with the denial that anything could be known, as was typical of Academic skepticism; nor did he go so far in avoiding judgment or claims to knowledge that he would deny even the claim that nothing could known or the possibility that things can be known with a certain probability, as was typical of Pyrrhonism. Locke believed that many propositions could be known with certainty, and determining probability was a major component of his epistemology in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Even in religion, which was characterized by a greater uncertainty than other fields of knowledge, some things could be known. For a discussion of the religious propositions that could be known with certainty, see Black.

[95] Tarcov, 183.

After concluding that "the business of laws is not to provide for the truth of opinions, but for the safety and security of the commonwealth, and of every particular man's goods and person," Locke argues that this limitation of political power is also the normatively preferred state. Civil authorities should avoid exercising power in matters of opinion because the "truth certainly would do well enough, if she were once left to shift for herself."[97] Indeed, she would be better off. Those with the power to punish dissenters and control the dissemination of varying beliefs are, Locke feels, the least likely to befriend truth. He explains that truth has seldom "received, and . . . never will receive, much assistance" from such people, because they rarely know truth and even "more rarely welcome" it. Their opposition to the discovery of new truth results from their fear that it will destabilize their power. Indeed, their love of power may lead them to support error over truth to protect and even strengthen their power. Thus, Locke claims, "errors indeed prevail by the assistance of foreign and borrowed succours."[98]

---

[96] Letter, 420.

[97] Letter, 420.

Moreover, truth would be fine without the state's aid because she "is not taught by laws, nor has she any need of force to procure her entrance into the minds of men." Locke does not deny that force can effect our beliefs and opinions; indeed, his claim that power-holders abet error implies that they can use force to manipulate belief. Those with a sincere interest in truth, though, need not coerce others, because truth has no "need of force to procure her entrance" into our minds. Indeed, this use of force is more harmful than beneficial, at least at the individual level. Although one might persecute to eliminate all error in society, such persecution would diminish truth's power over the individual, as well as one's capacities. The strength of truth in our minds requires that we work through it on our own. "[If] truth makes not her way in to the understanding by her own light, she will be but the weaker for any borrowed force violence can add to her."[99] Thus, the persecution of even error diminishes the power of truth over individuals and, through them, society.

In *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, Locke demonstrates that he truly believes, and is not being sophistic in the *Letter*, when he argues that toleration is necessary for truth to have power over the individual. Locke writes *Of the Conduct* to teach a person how to take proper care of his understanding, such that he may properly govern himself.[100] Locke argues that there are three ways in which our knowledge may be deficient: we may be wholly ignorant, we may doubt something that we previously considered true, or we may regard all propositions as well-grounded without ever examining them.[101] The last of these three deficiencies is the "worst condition" in which a person can live. Locke fears that someone who can feel "fully assured of anything" without examining it might embrace even the most dangerous propositions as true. Furthermore, Locke feels that this person will prove himself resistant if not utterly resilient to reclamation from his error because he has already proved himself unaffected by examination—he would easily supplant whatever proofs given him with new errors based upon no evidence whatsoever. Thus, Locke fears the tendency to accept whatever proposition as true, regardless of the authority, without examining it for oneself. Moreover, a person is likely to fall into error even if he can trust an authority to have the truth, Locke argues, because receiving that truth from another requires one's own efforts to understand what that authority says. If a person were presented with a book containing the whole knowledge of any subject, he would likely misunderstand it if he did not exert himself to "study, read and consider" it.[102] Locke adds that a person must, in studying, reading, and considering a work, make one's own efforts to understand, and not depend upon the analyses that others make of it; their own opinions and even understandings of works will likely give the author's message a meaning other than the one he intends.

---

[98] Letter, 421.

[99] Letter, 421.

[100] CU, 167.

Thus, Locke's zeteticism falls short of relativism, universalism, or a true skepticism. He builds his argument on the premise that there is tremendous uncertainty in our knowledge but that, at least in important things, truth is possible. His zeteticism demands toleration because an open forum is necessary to sift through opinions to gather the fragments of truth and because truth cannot exercise its full power over the individual unless he is allowed to pursue it himself. Moreover, Locke's concern here is more than the philosopher's love of wisdom. Locke declares that those Christians who are ignorant of the principles of their religion "can hardly be thought really to be" Christians, and that men "cannot be excused from understanding the words, and framing the general notions, relating to religion right."[103] As we will see, each person has a duty to seek his salvation, and the principles necessary to salvation require one's desires and efforts. The respect and love that Christians should have for others entails then an obligation to secure the conditions necessary for others' salvation, including the freedom to seek out and accomplish the duties God has given them.

---

[101] CU, 213.

[102] CU, 213-214.

The second form of skepticism found in the *Letter* is a recognition of the pluralism of religious groups and the claims of each to alone be right. Locke argues that the religion of every church, person, or prince is orthodox to it- or himself.[104] Moreover, Locke declares that their pretensions to unique, certain knowledge are such that "[whatsoever] any Church believes, it believes to be true; and the contrary . . . to be error."[105] Furthermore, there is no earthly judge "by whose sentence [the controversy] can be determined." The contention itself precludes them from ordaining a common authority themselves, and it seems that God has also not given anyone the authority to determine another's beliefs.[106] Rather, Locke argues that God retains the right to judge and punish error after this life.[107]

---

[103] CU, 182.

[104] Letter, 390; 401; and 416.

[105] Letter, 401.

In *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke argues that Adam's Fall subjected humans to a mortality that corrupts their natures and ideas through the passions it introduces.[108] It is possible that this corruption could place truth beyond man's reach. On the other hand, it is possible that the grace introduced to compensate for man's disobedience could save everyone; all beliefs would be equally salvific. The former perspective is reflected in the interpretation of Locke's statements in the *Letter* that all truths are relative and that no one has the right to make himself judge of what is true per se. Accordingly, "no one can know which is the true religion and such ignorance requires toleration."[109] We have already seen some of the problems of interpreting Locke as a skeptic in this manner. On the other hand, some take the second, universalist perspective to transform Locke's writings into those of a radical Anabaptist.[110] Accordingly, Locke's statements in the *Letter* would mean that all beliefs and all religions are true when he writes that every person believes that his own doctrines are uniquely true and orthodox.[111] If Locke's writings reflect this universalist perspective, then he demands toleration because any persecution would be a fight against truth.

---

[106] Letter, 394.

[107] Letter, 401.

[108] Spellman, 221; 223. Spellman argues that, while Locke attenuated the concept of original sin, he still maintained that it corrupted man and created the continual need for grace.

[109] Tarcov, 185.

[110] Hans Denck, for example, took the concept of the divine light within each individual and argued that the authority of the individual's conscience was greater than that of the Church, state, or Bible. Will Durant, *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564*, vol. 6, *The Story of Civilization* (New York: MJF Books, 1957), 395. Durant cites Leopold Ranke, *History of the Reformation in Germany* (London: G. Routledge and sons, 1905).

Locke's statements in the *Letter*, however, reflect neither skepticism, universalism, nor relativism. Indeed, a closer reading reveals that Locke's statements reflect more his observation of the existing status of human knowledge than a belief that no knowledge is possible or that all opinions are true. As Tarcov writes, "[Locke's argument] may not be a denial of any objective religious truth or falsehood, but merely an invocation of the empirical facts of the existence of diverse churches with incompatible claims to religious truth *and* their failure to recognize any common judge of such truth."[112] Given Locke's belief that legitimate authority over a person requires that person's consent, he uses the "empirical fact" of pluralism to demonstrate why no one may claim the right to govern others in religious matters.[113] Indeed, given Locke's belief that legitimate authority is consensual, it should not surprise scholars that Locke would focus on any factor that would impede the common agreement necessary to establish authority. Moreover, the disagreement in religious affairs, particularly each party's belief that its own doctrines are true and others are false, would surprise neither Locke nor most students of history; very few religious groups in the history of western civilization have argued otherwise.[114] That each party would think that it alone is right is yet another recognition by Locke of the conditions of such disputes. As Richard Vernon writes, "We may assume, after all, that the parties to a serious dispute believe in the truth of their positions, since to believe something (as Locke himself insists) is to believe it to be true."[115]

---

[111] This is Sanford Kessler's interpretation of Locke. This interpretation would make Locke a Socinianian or a Unitarian universalist. Richard Sherlock agrees that Locke created a new form of Christianity to sustain toleration by adopting Socinian and Arminian beliefs. David Wootton provides another account of Locke as a Socinian. David Wootton, "John Locke: Socinian or natural law theorist?" in *Religion, secularization, and political thought: Thomas to J.S. Mill*, ed. James E. Crimmins (London: Routledge, 1990), 39-67. John Marshall provides a very considered account of Locke's Socinianism, pointing to elements where he sees Locke fitting and breaking out of a Socinian mold. John Marshall, "Locke, Socinianism, 'Socinianism', and Unitarianism," in *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, ed. M.A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 111-182. For a perspective arguing that Locke is a rational theologian but not a Socinian, see Victor Nuovo, "Introduction," in *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, ed. Victor Nuovo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), xv-lvii. W. M. Spellman agrees that Locke was not a Socinian based on Locke's affirmation of man's need of grace. W. M. Spellman, "Locke and the Latitudinarian Perspective on Original Sin," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 42 (1988): 215-228.

[112] Tarcov, 185. Emphasis added.

[113] Indeed, as we will see later, Locke believes that receiving the additional life offered by salvation requires one to believe in Christ. Believing in Christ, however, requires one to become a citizen of his kingdom, which one may do only by sustaining him as one's king.

Indeed, the debates between Jonas Proast and Locke, which led Locke to write three additional letters on toleration, focus on the policy implications of the recognition that everyone thinks he is right. Proast insists that, although others think they are right, those who are members of the Church of England really are right, which gives them a right to enforce their beliefs.[116] It does not matter to him that, if others claimed authority on the basis that they were right, it would lead to the imposition of error in other lands. Locke, however, insists that there is a distinction "between being right and having a right."[117] In *A Third Letter for Toleration*, Locke declares that Proast must add this distinction to the others he uses.[118] There is a "difference . . . between the ground of any one's supposing his religion is true, and the privileges he may pretend to by supposing it true." According to Locke, the grounds of truth are such that "men of all religions cannot be equally allowed to suppose their religions true." The distinction Locke insists upon, however, allows each person to equally believe that his or her beliefs are true. Moreover, a person's certainty that his beliefs are true does not endow him with any special privileges or rights; all people equally believe their opinions are correct, and they should all enjoy the same rights and privileges of belief and practice.

---

[114] The radical Anabaptists were an exception. See note 110.

[115] Richard Vernon, *The Career of Toleration : John Locke, Jonas Proast, and after* (Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 59. Vernon argues that one can develop an argument for toleration based upon the requirements of deliberation in Locke's work.

[116] Vernon, 52-3; 59.

[117] Vernon, 59.

[118] John Locke, *A Third Letter for Toleration*, vol. 6, *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, 12th ed. (London: Thomas Davison, 1823), 420.

Locke's argument that being right does not translate to having a right depends on the assumption that legitimate authority is consensual and that any claims to authority must be universalizable. If authority does not rest on consent, but merely on a person's assurance that he is right, then anyone can claim authority to govern another in religious matters. This is because, in matters that fall short of certain knowledge, like those of faith, one person's assurance that his religion is true is "no more an argument of its truth to another than *vice versâ*."[119] Person B, not accepting Person A's claim to be right but instead insisting on his own claim, would have as much claim to authority as Person A if believing one is right were the condition for authority. Authority, however, is not based upon a person's assumption that he is correct. It requires a person's consent, and in some cases even a person's consent is not adequate to grant authority. As we will see, the beliefs required for salvation are one of those matters in which even consent does not suffice as a grant of authority. Locke warns those like Proast that they should cease insisting to the contrary, that a right to such authority does exist, because of the consequences to them were they ever subjected to someone who holds different religious beliefs.[120]

---

[119] Third Letter, 420.

Although Locke insists on a distinction between being right and having a right to govern others, such that skepticism is not necessary to preclude the right of dominion over others in religious matters, that distinction alone does not prove that Locke believed that one religion could be right to the exclusion of all others' truthfulness. His very definition of "belief, assent, or opinion," combined with his insistence that one must develop certain beliefs for one's salvation, demonstrates that he does not enjoin a real skepticism in denying truth.[121] The tone and context of the examples he gives of other religions and his justifications for toleration also indicate that he rejects the universalist and relativist positions. Locke refers to the beliefs and forms of worship of other sects and religions throughout the essay, including those of Roman Catholics, Native Americans, Jews, and Muslims. Many times he uses other sects and religions simply to demonstrate how their system of ecclesiastical authority precludes toleration. At other times, he treats certain beliefs as absurd to demonstrate the lengths to which toleration should extend.[122] Indeed, Locke argues that most of the beliefs and forms of worship that distinguish the Christian sects, as they do not touch the "substantial and truly fundamental parts of religion," are frivolous things that could be observed or omitted with no impact on the salvation of souls.[123] Thus, Locke explicitly denies the universalist proposition that all beliefs are true as long as they sincerely reflect one's conscience. Indeed, as we will see, a more thorough rejection of this perspective is Locke's insistence that men are not universally saved, but are condemned to eternal death for their lack of obedience unless they develop the correct, sincere beliefs about Christ.

---

[120] Indeed, Locke tells Proast that if the latter does not give up his "reasonings" that being right allows one the right to persecute, he will "be forced to send [Proast] to [his] Mahometans or pagans," and adds that he would be more merciful to the people who would be subject to Proast if he sent him among them now (Third Letter, 420).

[121] Locke defines "*Belief*, *Assent*, or *Opinion*" as "admitting or receiving any Proposition for true, upon Arguments or Proofs that are found to perswade us to receive it as true" (Essay, IV.xv.3).

[122] For example, he refers to the Roman Catholic belief that the bread in the Sacrament is really the body of Christ, the belief of Jews that the New Testament is not scripture, and the rejection of both the Old and New Testaments by "heathens" (Letter, 420).

These objections to the universalist perspective also contradict the claim that Locke was a real skeptic. In Locke's objection to Christianity's sectarian strife, he argues that there are certain fundamental parts of belief. Indeed, as Sam Black discusses, Locke maintains that there are certain religious principles that can be known by reason, not just assented to with a certain probability.[124] Furthermore, as we will see, Locke's soteriology requires belief in propositions beyond those that reason can demonstrate. In the *Essay*, *Reasonableness*, and the *Letter*, Locke exhorts his readers to sincerely exert themselves in developing these beliefs, telling them that it is their highest duty. Remembering that belief is one's assent to the truth of a proposition, we find that Locke counsels his readers to take actions that preclude true skepticism or relativism.

Moreover, Locke created the *Essay* in part to help people avoid skepticism when confronted with a pluralist world. Locke fears that someone, viewing the contradictory opinions of mankind and the enthusiasm each person has for his own opinions, will believe "That either there is no such thing as Truth at all; or that Mankind hath no sufficient Means to attain a certain Knowledge of it."[125] Locke agrees that a comprehension of all things is beyond our faculties, but disagrees with the proposition that no truth is available to us. We err, and generate the distinctions that divide us, because we fail to recognize that there are many degrees of certainty and mistake the degree to which most propositions may be trusted as true. Locke feels that those who reject the possibility of knowledge when confronted with this confusion put themselves in a miserable position. He compares someone who denies the possibility of all knowledge because he cannot know everything to a person "who would not use his Legs, but sit still and perish, because he had no Wings to fly."[126] This statement for Locke is not mere hyperbole; Locke believes that eternal death awaits those who do not make the effort to develop the beliefs necessary for salvation.

---

[123] Letter, 407.

[124] Sam Black, "Toleration and the Skeptical Inquirer in Locke," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 28.4 (December 1998), 473-504.

[125] Essay, I.i.2.

Although men's understandings are limited, Locke feels that they have reason to be "well satisfied" with the "Portion and Degree of Knowledge" that God "has given them."[127] The capacities they have received are sufficient to "put within the reach of their Discovery the comfortable Provision for this Life and the Way that leads to a better." In the *Letter* Locke emphasizes that a person's eternal welfare should be his greatest concern, and he reiterates this judgment in the *Essay*. Despite the limitations of men's knowledge, "it yet secures their great Concernments, that they have Light enough to lead them to the Knowledge of their Maker, and the sight of their own Duties," which are necessary to follow the way that leads to a better life.[128] Thus, for Locke, it is not an exaggeration that those who fail to perfect their knowledge will perish. Locke believes that a fate of eternal death awaits those who neither obey the law of works nor believe in Christ, insofar as that knowledge is given to them. Although we will discuss in detail the individual's duty to develop salvific belief, a few statements from the *Essay*'s "Introduction," repeated here, underscore Locke's rejection of skepticism and universalism. He describes the failure to advance our knowledge because we cannot have all as "an unpardonable, as well as Childish Peevishness." Those who succumb to this "peevishness" will not be able to justify themselves before God when they are judged. "It will be no Excuse to an idle and untoward Servant, who would not attend his Business by Candle-light, to plead that he had not broad Sun-shine. The Candle, that is set up in us, shines bright enough for all our Purposes."

---

[126] Essay, I.i.5.

[127] Essay, I.i.5.

[128] Essay, I.i.5.

Indeed, the discussion of the business God has given to each person brings us back to the very quotations used to substantiate the claim that Locke is a skeptic or universalist. Locke did not state that there is no truth or no unique truth because there is no authority to adjudicate truth claims. He argues that there is no *earthly* judge, no one on earth with the authority to command us to believe one way or another.[129] There is, however, a unique truth, whose "decision . . . belongs only to the supreme judge of all men, to whom also alone belongs the punishment of the erroneous."[130] Thus, while he does argue that there is both truth and error, Locke asserts that no one may assume God's power to judge and punish it.[131] This is because each individual is God's servant, here to fulfill the tasks God has given him. Just as the belief that man is God's servant serves as the basis for man's freedom in the *Second Treatise*, it undergirds religious liberty in the *Letter*.[132] Locke believes that, as God's servants, we are accountable only to him in religious matters. Accordingly, persecutors add injustice to their pride and error when they "rashly and arrogantly" misuse the "servants of another master, who are not at all accountable to them."[133] As we will see, Locke believes that the business God has given each person is the preservation of his soul.

---

[129] Vernon provides an interesting distinction between epistemic and jurisdictional judges (59-60). The first refers to the ability to provide standards for belief. The second refers to "a legitimate power to hear causes, resolve disputes, and assign penalties." Vernon argues that, when Locke claims that there is no judge on earth, he is referring to the jurisdictional case. People are allowed to judge things to be true or false, but they cannot assign penalties to others when they do not agree.

[130] Letter, 401-2.

3.3.3.1 "Skepticism" as a means of recovering an authentic Christianity

Before discussing the beliefs Locke sees as necessary to salvation, we ought to question the origins of religious diversity. As we have seen, the idea that there is no judge on earth is "merely an invocation of the empirical facts of the existence of diverse churches with incompatible claims to religious truth."[134] Given Locke's arguments that some Christian sects espouse false beliefs although developing from the same teachings of Christ as those sects whose beliefs are true, one might wonder how this pluralism developed. While not openly discussing this point, Locke's writings present several possibilities. First, as Nathan Tarcov writes, Locke argues that the ambitious and the greedy will support and spread error to maintain their power.[135] Thus, their lust for power led some religious authorities to alter beliefs and forms of worship. Second, as Locke argues in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, the deficiencies in the human capacity for thought prevent reason alone from establishing certain moral truths and making them universally persuasive. Furthermore, the utmost care must be used to correctly understand and maintain those truths within reason's grasp. If this care were ever lacking in Christianity's history, then the truths it had would have been lost or mixed with error.

---

[131] It is important to note here that Locke doe not overrule all judgment. Indeed, as discussed above, all churches retain the right to judge and excommunicate those who believe and worship without the principles that the church defines. Churches retain this right to judge because, as will be discussed subsequently, one's salvation requires both public worship and that this worship be acceptable to God. If others corrupted one's worship with practices one considered deviant to God's will, it would no longer please God and would impede one's salvation.

[132] 2T, 6; Letter, 402.

[133] Letter, 402.

[134] Tarcov, 185.

One of Locke's associates, Isaac Newton, believed that the ambition and avarice of many political and ecclesiastical leaders played a critical role in obscuring the truth. In a manuscript that he repeatedly revised but never published, Newton argues that Christianity fell into a general "apostasy," which began in the days of Paul and was consummated during the reign of Constantine.[136] This apostasy was partly due to the loss of essential truths about the nature of God, and partly the result of ambition once power, wealth, and status were given to ecclesiastical positions by their association with the state. The general apostasy of Christianity, however, was not something to be feared; it was merely the fulfillment of New Testament prophecies, particularly those of Paul.[137]

---

[135] Tarcov, 187.

[136] Isaac Newton, untitled manuscript on Apocalyptic prophecy, Microfilm MS 664, Manuscripts Room, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge; original in MSS 1-5, Yahuda Collection, Jerusalem University, Jerusalem.

[137] Newton makes particular use the discussions of fallings away and apostasies in 2 Timothy 3-4 and 2 Thessalonians 2. He also argues that the Revelation of St. John describes the apostasy in its discussion of the anti-Christ's rule.

Newton argues that this apostasy prevailed from the days succeeding the primitive Christians, and that it was possible that the Reformation had only partially corrected it. Indeed, while he prefers the clergy of his time to those of the previous centuries, he feels that they are only slightly more righteous than those who led the Church into apostasy.

> for although the Reformation may be termed the Spirit of Christ's mouth being regulated according to his word and it be evident that [it] hath in part confounded the man of sin[,] yet he shall continue and hath of late considerably prevailed [against] the Reformation in many places and may yet further on until the brightness of the Lords coming by which he is to be destroyed.[138]

While the Reformation had eliminated much of the error of the apostasy, it had not eliminated all. The result was a proliferation of Christian sects, each affirming the absolute truth of its own doctrines while perhaps partaking in very little of it. Thus, in the introduction to this work, Newton argues that one must take great care in one's efforts for salvation.

> Thou seest therefore that this is no idle speculation, no matters of indifferency but a duty of the greatest moment. Wherefore it concerns thee to look about thee narrowly least thou shouldest in so degenerate an age be dangerously seduced & not know it. Antichrist was to seduce the whole Christian world and therefore he may easily seduce thee if thou beest not well prepared to discern him. But if he should not be yet come into the world yet amidst so many religions of which there can be but one true & perhaps none of those that thou art acquainted with it is great odds but thou mayst be deceived & therefore it concerns thee to be very circumspect.[139]

---

[138] Isaac Newton, untitled manuscript on Apocalyptic prophecy, Microfilm MS 823, Manuscripts Room, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge; original in MS Var. 1, Yahuda Collection, Jerusalem University, Jerusalem.

[139] Isaac Newton, untitled manuscript on Apocalyptic prophecy, Ms. 1.1., Yahuda Collection, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem; quoted in The Newton Project, Imperial College London, May-June 2004, available from http://www.newtonproject.ic.ac.uk/texts/yah1-1_n.html; Internet; accessed 3 June 2005.

Newton argues that there can be but one true religion, and that it would be very easy to miss or mistake the truths and practices necessary for one's salvation in the clamor of religious partisanship. Indeed, the central point of Newton's treatise is that the central truth whose loss occasioned the apostasy, the relationship between the Father and Son, was still almost entirely lost among Christians.

There is some evidence that Locke may have shared this view. Locke and Newton were both members of the Royal Society.[140] We know that Locke was influenced by Newton while writing *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* in the 1670s and 1680s.[141] They had also developed a friendship, by at least 1688.[142] Locke believed that Newton's religious views were worthy of great respect. Writing to his cousin, Peter King, Locke declares, "Mr. Newton is really a very valuable man, not only for his wonderful skill in mathematics, but in divinity too, and his great knowledge in the Scriptures, wherein I know few his equals."[143]

Even more than Locke's respect for Newton as an authority on scripture, the aid they gave one another in their religious writings indicates strong sympathy. Newton reviewed Locke's *Third Letter Concerning Toleration* and his work on the Epistles of Paul.[144] Locke's cooperation in reviewing and arranging the publication Newton's work on scriptural corruptions, however, provides the strongest evidence of his sympathy with Newton's views on an apostasy.[145] Newton argued that the loss of the knowledge of the true nature of the relationship between God and Christ was the central tenet of the general apostasy that had come to characterize Christianity. The work that Locke sent to Le Clerc for publication was a treatise on the changes that supporters of the consubstantial notion of the Trinity, that which emerged from the Nicene council, had made in the scriptures. These corruptions, as Newton saw them, went back at least to Jerome's Vulgate edition of the Bible. Locke's assistance in helping Newton publish the work indicates that he at least sympathized with the notion that the Nicene Creed was false and, concomitantly, that Christianity had been led astray in the earliest times.[146] As we will see, Locke's musings about God's purposes for grace highlight his sympathy with the view that Christ was not consubstantial with God. Moreover, one of the crucial points of Newton's argument is that Constantine's mixing of church and state was one of the greatest corruptions of Christianity, as well as a continuing source of corruption. He argues that competition for the emoluments that Constantine subsequently bestowed upon the holders of ecclesiastical office destroyed the purity of the leaders. Locke either shared this view or was deeply influenced by it. He considers avarice and greed as one of the principal sources of corruption within the church and of the persecution of the heterodox. The love of power and wealth led the Church's leaders to turn their backs on Christ's example and teachings.

---

[140] Locke was elected a member in 1668, and Newton in 1671. Cranston, 116; Alfred Rupert Hall, "Isaac Newton," Isaac Newton Institute for Mathematical Sciences, available from http://www.newton.cam.ac.uk/newtlife.html; Internet; accessed 23 April 2005; taken from Alfred Rupert Hall, "Isaac Newton," Microsoft Encarta, 1998.

[141] Cranston, 264-5.

[142] Peter King, *The Life and Letters of John Locke* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972), 209.

[143] King, 263.

[144] Cranston, 360-1; 462.

---

[145] Locke arranged for it to be sent to Holland. Newton panicked, however, after it reached Holland and requested that Locke halt its publication. It was later rediscovered and published in 1754.

[146] The discussion in the section on the doctrines of salvation will show how Locke diverged from the Nicene Creed.

This belief in an apostasy, with its doubt about the legitimacy of any contemporary sect of Christianity, did not indicate skepticism about religious truth or doubt in the authority of scripture. If Locke shared Newton's views, as seems likely, then we might have to conclude that Locke's supposed skepticism was merely instrumental, a means to open up a forum so that Christians could study scripture in ways that might make it possible to recover a more authentic Christianity. Locke's support of toleration in this case seems not to be merely a prudential means of maintaining peace, but a vehicle for the recovery of true religious belief. Locke himself then appears to be less a skeptic than a heterodox believer interested in opening up space for his own version of Christianity, one that he feels will be more conducive to his own and others' salvation.

3.3.4 Toleration as a requirement for salvation

In the *Letter*, Locke defends religious assemblies from the assertion that they are "nurseries of factions and seditions." Moreover, he argues that toleration is founded upon an unwavering foundation of natural right.[147] Although Locke shows that prudential considerations, the desire for truth, and civil/ecclesiastical distinctions can be made to support toleration, they are not sufficient. Locke attempts to strengthen the prudential argument by showing that persecution cannot achieve peace; civil discord results from the persecution of some groups and the preferential treatment of others. Nonetheless, the prudential argument always maintains the possibility that a set of conditions might arise in which persecution is the only viable option. Similarly, the love of truth fails to sustain toleration under all conditions. Once society has the truth in a given matter, or at least believes that it has the truth, it no longer *needs* dissenting opinions from which to gather truth's fragments. Indeed, it might consider it necessary to eliminate dissent, as dissent could only detract from the complete truth it believes it now holds.[148]

---

[147] Letter, 427.

---

[148] Reinhold Neibuhr provides an interesting argument that would perpetually maintain truth's incentive for toleration, at least among some contemporary Christians. He argues that there is danger and error in viewing Christian eschatology or any historical process as one that has been or soon will be made actual. He sees the "history after Christ," the time between Christ's first and second comings, "as an interim between the disclosure of [history's] true meaning and the fulfillment of that meaning." Reinhold Neibuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: a Christian interpetation*, 2 vols. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Know Press, 1996), 49. One accepts, as part of this understanding of history, "a continued element of inner contradiction . . . as its perennial characteristic." Moreover, this "distinction becomes a basic category of interpreting history." Thus, Neibuhr argues that Christ's advent overcame sin, for example, "in principle but not in fact." Similarly, when grace justifies someone in this world, that person must understand "that the Christ in us is not a possession but a hope, that perfection is not a reality but an intention" (124-6). This conception of grace, Neibuhr hopes, will both avoid the Antinomian pretensions that a person can be saved despite his subsequent actions and the pretensions of "saints who have forgotten that they are sinners" (126). Indeed, for Neibuhr, one of the greatest causes of violence in the history of Christianity is the belief that the contradiction between man and God has been removed (122). When people believe that grace has removed the contradiction between them and God, that they are sanctified without qualification, "human pride and spiritual arrogance rise to new heights."

Furthermore, Neibuhr believes that Christianity shares a common source of danger with Renaissance thought and all those traditions descended from it, including liberalism. Neibuhr argues that "truth remains subject to the paradox of grace. We may have it; and yet we do not have it. And we will have it the more purely in fact if we know that we have it only in principle" (243). He feels that it is "provisionally true" that "fragmentary portions of the truth will finally be pieced together into the whole truth," but it is never possible for us to assemble all truth into a whole (237). That event must, like the resolution of the contradictions of sin and grace, await Christ's second coming. To believe otherwise is to make a religion of progress, and to forget that man, while he transcends history, is also part of it (240). Man's freedom from history also allows him to introduce error into it at any time. Moreover, Neibuhr believes that, even if man did not introduce error, as a creature that transcends history it is impossible for him "to complete his structure of meaning within" its limits (240). Historical truth is always an imperfect and corrupted truth. Accordingly, we can never find ultimate truth within history, and there always remains an "incentive for tolerance" (237).

To believe that one can obtain complete truth within history does not lead only to Christian fanaticism, according to Neibuhr, but also to fanaticisms in the form of the "religion of progress" and of "political religions." Neibuhr broadly defines a liberal culture as one that gives structure and meaning to the world by the faith in progress (240). Neibuhr asserts that proponents of liberal culture do not permit doubt about the historical fulfillment of truth and progress because that would undermine the structure and meaning of their world.

Neibuhr regards political religions as an even greater threat than liberal culture. Proponents of political religions also derive them from the modern premise that truth is fragmentary (240-1). They begin with a more skeptical or indifferent attitude than liberal culture, and seek a degree of meaning in the unity of the state rather than in the search for truth. To secure this unity, Neibuhr sees philosophers like Hobbes and Bodin as advocating an absolute state, one with "the power and the right to suppress all opinions and

Even arguments for toleration based on the civil/ecclesiastical distinction may fail. One of Locke's arguments, that which critics most frequently challenge, is based upon the means that are available to the state. It would be irrational for the state to assume ecclesiastical functions if it lacked the means to fulfill them. Locke argues that religion's purpose is to aid people in attaining eternal life, and that this goal is secured through belief in Christ. Scholars commonly assume that this belief, so critical to his accounts in the *Letter* and *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, has the same meaning as belief in the *Essay*, where he defines it as one's assent to the truthfulness of a proposition that one cannot deduce through reason. Given this latter meaning, Locke's argument for toleration fails. Although belief is not infinitely responsive to coercion, the totalitarian regimes of the Twentieth century demonstrated the power a state can have over belief by controlling access to information. If the state can control belief, then the state does have the power to affect one's salvation. Thus, if Locke bases his argument for toleration entirely on the irrationality of trying to do the impossible, then nothing prevents it from assuming ecclesiastical functions.

Furthermore, basing the civil/ecclesiastical distinction on divine positive law seems to make the distinction only slightly more secure. Locke implies that it is within God's power to give a magistrate dominion over souls, but he believes God has not given

---

vitalities which might imperil its unity" (241). Neibuhr claims that Bodin and Hobbes developed only an implicit religion through the demand for "unconditioned loyalty" to the state. Philosophies of state absolutism can develop into explicit religions, however, when they claim that "the whole meaning of life and existence" can be explained through "the individual's relation to the national community." In this final step, political religions mimic liberal culture in asserting a progress in history, one that is fulfilled when the state is made actual. The Nazis, in Neibuhr's opinion, represent the danger of "state absolutism" developed "to its final conclusion." The solution to all these types of fanaticism, for Neibuhr, is the realization that ultimate truth and meaning is never available in history.

this power to contemporary magistrates.[149] Although he qualifies and thus discounts the practice, civil and ecclesiastical power were united in ancient Israel.[150] Since the very God to whom Locke appeals for toleration can unite civil and ecclesiastical powers, allowing the magistrate to enforce religious beliefs and practices, it is difficult to see how toleration could be a natural right.

Locke's toleration is more than a tactic to achieve other social goals and more than the whim of God; it is a requirement for an individual's salvation and thus a right. Locke does not merely see toleration as a prudential tactic to secure safety and security, a tactic that one may abandon whenever another means appears more conducive to those ends. If that were the sum of Locke's argument, or if Locke argued for toleration only as a means for society to acquire the truth, then we could legitimately censure his argument for failing to respect the rights and suffering of the individual. Locke's concern for truth focuses more on the individual's acquisition of truth than that of society, and that distinction makes a great difference in sustaining toleration.

Moreover, toleration is not merely God's whim. Locke's God, while in many ways conceived of in a nominalist fashion as a God of will and power, also retains elements of a rationalist God, one who has a purpose for man and a method by which each person is to achieve it. Locke argues that man's highest duty is to gain his eternal life and that belief in Christ is essential to this goal. Such belief, however, is not to merely assent to the proposition that Christ exists. If it were, Locke's theory would indeed fail to secure toleration. Belief in Christ, as well as assent to true propositions, entails a covenant with God to become his subject and to reform one's way of life, i.e. conversion.

---

[149] Letter, 394.

[150] Locke attempts to portray this theocracy in as liberal a light as possible, arguing that only those who voluntarily made a covenant to that effect were subject to state power in religious matters. Those who did not covenant were not subject to the spiritual portions of the law.

Thus, through Locke's form of the belief argument, toleration becomes a natural right. Accordingly, he claims that all churches should "lay down toleration as the foundation of their own liberty, and teach that liberty of conscience is every man's natural right, equally belonging to dissenters as to themselves, and that nobody ought to be compelled in matters of religion either by law or force."[151] As a natural right, society may abridge these rights only under stringent circumstances, when doing so would endanger or violate others' rights to life, liberty—including liberty of conscience, and property.[152]

---

[151] Letter, 427. Emphasis added. William Popple produced an English translation of the *Epistola de Tolerantia* in 1689, the same year that Locke published it in Latin in Holland. In the codicil that Locke added to his will prior to his death, he wrote that this translation occurred without his "privity" (Cranston, 460n2). A second edition was later produced, but it is uncertain whether this translation was done under Locke's supervision. Certain stylistic changes indicate that it may have been, but some scholars dispute Locke's involvement. David Wootton, "A Note on the Texts," in *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. and with an introduction by David Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), 133. William Popple and Locke had contact through a club dedicated to the freedom of religious belief and worship, which Locke founded and of which Popple was the secretary (Cranston, 361-2). Indeed, the two were good friends (Cranston, 406). Through their contact with one another, Locke could easily have had Popple correct any deviations from his sentiments. Moreover, Locke could have published his own translation.

Even discounting the possibility that Locke was involved in the production of the second edition of the *Letter*, the codicil to his will indicates that he was not displeased with Popple's rendering, except, perhaps, that it had been done without his permission. In the codicil he finally acknowledged authorship of the works that he had published anonymously—the letters on toleration, the *Two Treatises on Government*, and the *Reasonableness of Christianity* and his published defenses of it. A year or two earlier, Locke had given copies of all the works he acknowledged to the Bodleian library. In the codicil, he granted copies of the other works, which he no longer feared to acknowledge as death approached. He also included comments explaining irregularities with the works. Locke complained that the editions of the *Two Treatises* were "very incorrect." Of the *Letter*, however, he only wrote that it had been translated without his knowledge.

There is even stronger evidence that Locke supported the idea that toleration is a natural right. Later in the *Letter*, Locke declares that persecution, which for him is the opposite of toleration, is a violation of one's natural rights (432). Moreover, in the *Third Letter*, Locke declares that men only quit their "natural liberty" to join a commonwealth to protect themselves from other men (212). He feels that, since another's beliefs and forms of worship do not harm others, those who create or enter into a commonwealth do not "intend" that the magistrate have the power to punish others for their religion. Moreover, he feels that the compulsion to leave the religion that one thinks is true is an "injury" that anyone would avoid while still in the state of nature. Thus, as protection from such injuries is one of the ends for which people create political societies, Locke argues that "every man has a right to toleration."

Locke believes that toleration is a requirement of divine will, as revealed through both reason and revelation.[153] As Jeremy Waldron explains, Locke uses revelation in the form of positive divine command to defend toleration.[154] Locke's defense, however, employs revelation in more subtle ways. In particular, Locke argues that grace requires a form of sincere belief that is not effective if coerced.

3.3.4.1 The law of works and the necessity of belief

In *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke argues that man's salvation was originally contingent on a primordial law of works. This law is binding upon people in all times and places, not just those between Moses and Christ. This is because the law of works comprehends both the law of nature, which men can learn from reason, and the positive divine law revealed to Moses.[155] The law of works obligates every person because everyone can learn its provisions, either by studying scripture or by exerting one's faculty of reason. Moreover, this law requires "perfect obedience, without any remission or abatement, so that, by that law a man cannot be just, or justified, without an exact performance of every tittle."[156] Inasmuch as no mortal has ever perfectly obeyed that law, according to Locke, all were condemned and subject to death.[157]

---

[152] For example, Locke feels that a magistrate should not tolerate a religion that teaches its members that they need not keep promises with those of other faiths, that they have a right to special privileges or powers because of their faith, or that they have dominion over the possessions and lives of those of another faith (425). Locke also argues that a religion forfeits its right to toleration when it teaches its members that they need not obey and may dethrone a magistrate not of their faith. This would include situations in which one's profession of faith causes him to swear allegiance to a foreign prince, as this would set up a "foreign jurisdiction" within the magistrate's own country (426). Finally, Locke argues that the magistrate should not toleration atheists, as they lack the belief in eternal rewards and punishments that he feels are necessary to make and obey the oaths necessary to political society.

That Locke thus restricts religious liberty does not diminish its status as a natural right. As he argues in the *Second Treatise,* the rights to life, liberty, and estate are not unqualified; they last only so long as the individual acts according to law and respects the rights of others. Similarly, a person can claim toleration as a natural right, but only so long as he or she respects it as a right for others.

[153] Letter, 393.

[154] Jeremy Waldron, *God Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations of John Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 211. Waldron quotes Locke in the *Second Letter*, where the latter writes, "It is not for the magistrate, or any body else, upon an imagination of its usefulness, to make use of any other means for the salvation of men's souls than what the author and finisher of our faith hath directed." John Locke, *A Second Letter Concerning Toleration*, vol. 6, *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, 12th ed. (London: Thomas Davison, 1823), 81.

Locke believes, however, that God wished to save men from the eternal death to which their disobedience condemns them. Accordingly, he sent Christ to the world and promised that belief in his son would compensate for disobedience to the law of works. Locke writes,

> God therefore, out of his mercy to mankind . . . proposed to the children of men, that as many of them as would believe Jesus his Son . . . to be the Messiah, the promised deliverer, and would receive him for their king and ruler, should have all their past sins, disobedience, and rebellion forgiven them.[158]

Furthermore, this forgiveness of their sins would extend also to their future actions if they would sincerely obey the law "to the utmost of their power."[159] Thus, although the law of works condemns all men to a second death, the law of faith justifies them, or makes them just and therefore capable of "eternal life," by "counting their faith for righteousness, i.e. for a complete performance of the law."[160] The law of works is then supplemented by a law of faith, which is "for everyone to believe what God requires him to believe as a condition of the covenant he makes with him, and not to doubt of the performance of his promises."[161]

---

[155] Reasonableness, 19. See also Reasonableness, 231.

[156] Reasonableness, 16.

[157] Reasonableness, 15; 178.

[158] Reasonableness, 178.

[159] Reasonableness, 178.

[160] Reasonableness, 178; 23.

Locke builds his defense of toleration on the requirement of sincere belief in Christ.[162] As we will see, these requirements play multiple roles, in restricting the magistrate from taking a role as magistrate in spiritual affairs and in restricting ecclesiastical authorities from assuming civil powers. We must remember that, for Locke, the magistrate lacks "power, right, and dominion" in spiritual matters. While they are related concepts, power, right, and dominion are not synonymous. Locke uses several arguments to demonstrate his belief that the magistrate lacks all three. Commonly, however, scholars reduce them to one, the belief argument. The failure to seek out what Locke understands as the belief underlying toleration, however, weakens the belief argument and, to those who believe that belief is the substance of Locke's theory, his entire defense of toleration.

---

[161] Reasonableness, 25.

[162] One could ask what was to become of those who never had the opportunity to hear Christ's name or teachings, such that they could believe on him for salvation. To this question, Locke replies that "Nobody was, or can be required to believe, what was never proposed to him to believe" (Reasonableness, 228). God would reward those according to their belief and adherence to the light and promises given them by reason and revelation. Those within the Biblical tradition received forgiveness by doing "all that was required of them: to be persuaded of and embrace the promises which they had" (Reasonableness, 229). The others, while not beneficiaries of the promises given by revelation, had yet been given the "light of reason," which would reveal that God was "good and merciful" (Reasonableness, 231). This same light, or "spark of the divine nature," gave him both the law and the "way of atoning" that the "merciful, kind, compassionate Author and Father of him" had prepared when he transgressed the law. Those who made use of this "candle" could find both the law and the way to receive forgiveness for it; those who "neglected this light . . .might, perhaps, see neither." Thus, the possibility of salvation is open to all through the light of reason, although, as the discussion of why Christ's coming was needed emphasizes, few, if any, were able to take advantage of it without the aid of Christ's teachings. Those born within reach of the Christ's teachings, however, have no excuse for not examining the propositions available to them.

According to the belief argument, "civil power, right, and dominion" consist in "procuring, preserving, and advancing" our civil interests, including life, liberty, and the "possession of outward things."[163] A magistrate exercises dominion over these matters by giving rewards and executing punishments in those objects that fall within the domain of civil interests. To punish a person who has violated or endangered others' civil interests, the magistrate may seize his property, restrict his liberty by throwing him in jail, or even take his life. A magistrate's powers thus consist of means that, Locke argues, do not affect one's salvation. Man's disobedience compels him to seek salvation in belief, and Locke argues that belief, particularly salvific belief, cannot be controlled by the instruments available to the magistrate. He writes, "And such is the nature of the understanding that it cannot be compelled the belief of anything by outward force. Confiscation of estate, imprisonment, torments, nothing of that nature can have any such efficacy as to make men change the inward judgment that they have framed of things."[164] Thus, the magistrate lacks the means to care for his subjects' souls because, in Locke's opinion, civil powers cannot alter belief. Since "true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind" and the magistrate's power "consists only in outward force," Locke concludes that "the care of souls cannot belong to" him.[165]

In contemporary literature, the belief argument has been restated as one of the irrational use of power. Since the control of belief is beyond civil power, it would be irrational for those holding that power to persecute a person over whom they have dominion with the object of changing his belief. It would be irrational to use means that cannot affect a given end. Since those are the only means within one's power, then it would be irrational to pursue those ends. Accordingly, those "ends cannot be one of the proper functions of government."[166] This formulation, however, does not really define the ends of government. It merely argues that the magistrate should not attempt to do that which he currently lacks the power to accomplish. The irrationality argument thus neither forbids the magistrate from seeking the power nor his use of it once he obtains it.

---

[163] Letter, 393-394.

[164] Letter, 395.

[165] Letter, 395.

Indeed, if one takes Locke's statement out of its place in his argument, it seems that he makes a very tenuous defense of toleration. Disregarding any arguments about the difficulty of establishing that the magistrate ought to do something as a result of the way the world currently is, we should feel some unease about the security of our rights to be free from coercion if this is the only basis for toleration.[167] There would be nothing to obligate the state to maintain a policy of toleration once it obtained the power to coerce belief. Indeed, contemporary theorists have criticized the failure of the Locke's argument, when reduced to the irrationality of coercing belief, to sustain toleration. As Waldron writes, "what one misses above all . . . is a sense that there is anything *morally* wrong with intolerance, or a sense of any deep concern for the *victims* of persecution or the moral insult that is involved in the attempt to manipulate their faith."[168] As we will see, a closer reading of Locke's arguments for the limitations of both civil and ecclesiastical authority and of the meaning of belief will reveal that Locke's defense of toleration and his respect for the rights of the persecuted are greater than these reductions of the belief argument would portray. This, however, requires a more thorough analysis of the problems facing the belief argument.

---

[166] Waldron, Toleration, 101.

[167] See David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, III.i.1.

[168] Waldron, Toleration, 120.

3.3.4.2 The problems of belief

Nathan Tarcov argues that the problem with the argument that force cannot control belief is not true.[169] "We have learned that systems of persecution can have effects on beliefs. Even where torture does not change the beliefs of the tortured, it may prevent those beliefs from even reaching other people."[170] While humans have an ability to resist persecution that prevents even totalitarianism from completely compelling belief, compulsion can affect it. Furthermore, Tarcov claims that Locke knew this, despite his claims in the *Letter*.

In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, Locke warned his readers of the error into which others might lead them through unwarranted conclusions and/or false and incomplete information. Such errors could result from simple mistakes or from lack of caution in a person's studies. Some people, though, deliberately lead others into error by withholding information or giving bad information to strengthen their power. Indeed, Locke's defense of toleration, in a way that seems paradoxical, relies on the influence persecutors have over knowledge. When he argues that truth's realization requires toleration, Locke explains that those with power generally fear and oppose new truths for the instability they may cause in the social order.

---

[169] Tarcov, 184.

[170] Tarcov, 184.

Indeed, those with power not only oppose new truths, they will support and create lies to sustain or improve their positions. Accordingly, errors and not truth "prevail by the assistance of foreign and borrowed succours."[171] This insight, Tarcov argues, sustains the belief argument to a certain extent. It is not so much that leaders cannot, but that they will not use civil power to lead people to correct beliefs.

Jeremy Waldron, focusing on the belief argument as the crux of Locke's defense of toleration, develops a much more damning critique of the *Letter* than Tarcov.[172] Waldron believes that one can bracket the religious content of the *Letter* to create a philosophical and practical political argument.[173] This argument, that persecution to coerce belief is irrational because belief cannot be coerced, would give the *Letter* contemporary relevance and make it convincing to non-believers as well as believers.[174]

The problem with a secularized and ahistoricized version of Locke's belief argument is that it loses its capability to restrain those in power from persecuting others. Waldron recognizes that this secularized and ahistoricized irrationality argument is "inadequate and unconvincing," but disregards that it is precisely the attempt to secularize Locke's argument that leads to the failure he discerns.[175] To set up his argument, Waldron distinguishes between functional and ends/means arguments for toleration. Functional arguments take as given the separation of Church and State and the fact that controlling belief is not one of the state's functions. It then follows that the state must be tolerant. The end/means argument begins by defining the means available to the state. If certain functions cannot be achieved by the means available to the state, then, Waldron suggests, it would be irrational for the state to assume those functions. Following Weber, Waldron argues the first type of argument is untenable, since states have historically adopted almost all functions.[176] Moreover, he asserts that toleration and a civil/ecclesiastical distinction are so similar that it is a circular argument to assert that the latter proves the need for the former. Waldron thus concludes that Locke did not follow the functionalist path but instead argued that the state must be tolerant because it lacks the means to instill belief.

---

[171] Letter, 421.

[172] Waldron, Toleration. Indeed, Locke's argument that belief cannot be coerced has long been a source of criticism for Locke's theory of toleration. It was one of the central disputes between he and one of his contemporaries, Jonas Proast. Richard Vernon documents this debate, and ultimately sides with Proast before resurrecting a deliberative argument for toleration out of the ashes of the old.

[173] Waldron, Toleration, 98.

[174] Waldron, Toleration, 99. Waldron acknowledges that there is another line of argument, one he considers "subordinate" to the rationality argument, that he "will largely overlook" in his discussion. The argument he sets aside rests on the belief that the true nature of Christianity is to be tolerant, and that persecution is repugnant to it. He avoids this argument because, "however effective and historically important [it] might have been, it is uninteresting from a philosophical point of view." It is "uninteresting" philosophically because it lacks the generality necessary to convince every single person who might hold the state's power that he ought not to use that power to persecute. Only a person, if such a person existed, who shared Locke's religious commitments would be convinced.

Waldron writes that a "careless reader" might believe that Locke simply defines the state as having no care over one's soul rather than proving that premise. Such a belief, Waldron argues, results from the reader's misinterpretation of one of Locke's statements. Locke writes, "The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing of their own civil interests. Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like."[177] A later statement, however, indicates to Waldron that Locke intends to prove the magistrate's lack of dominion in religious matters. Locke writes,

---

[175] Waldron does give some possible responses that one might make based upon religious belief, but quickly discredits them. See Toleration, 117-118.

[176] Waldron, Toleration, 100.

[177] Letter, 393.

> Now that the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate reaches only to these civil concernments, and that all civil power, right, and dominion is bounded and confined to the only care of promoting these things; and that it neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to the salvation of souls, these following considerations seem unto me abundantly to demonstrate.[178]

Waldron thus assumes that Locke regards the lack of the magistrate's responsibility over the soul as "the conclusion, not a premise, of his argument."[179]

Nevertheless, the mere attempt to demonstrate a principle's validity, for Locke, does not mean that the principle is only valid through demonstration. Locke's understanding of the complementarity between reason and revelation in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* demonstrates this. Our faculty of reason, without any other aid, cannot conceive certain moral principles, even some of those that are most important to the structure and preservation of society. Our faculties can conceive other important principles, but still fall short of demonstrating their truthfulness or importance. That is because "some parts of [moral truth] lie too deep for our natural powers easily to reach and make plain and visible to mankind without some light from above to direct them."[180] Thus, the ancient philosophers found it hard to establish morality with enough clarity and persuasiveness to establish morality among "the people."[181]

---

[178] Letter, 394.

[179] Waldron, Toleration, 102.

[180] Reasonableness, 243. See also Reasonableness, 241-3.

[181] Reasonableness, 241.

For Locke, part of Christianity's importance was the revelation of moral principles in plain and unequivocal terms as the will of God. No longer would extensive and complex arguments, beyond most men's abilities, be necessary to conceive or prove the importance of the moral truths necessary for social existence and individual salvation. Locke argues that those who would deny the Christian foundations of some of morality's most important principles have only succumbed to another failing of the human faculties. Humans, when they finally understand an idea, have a tendency to discount or forget the aid they received from others. They either regard the truth as so obvious that they would have obtained it had they tried, or they forget the help they had in first seeing a truth because, once they see it, they "see it with [their] own eyes."[182] Consequently, their pride leads them to "ascribe to [their] own understandings the discovery of what, in reality, [they] borrowed from others."[183] It is true that someone who comes after a truth's initial discovery must still work to understand it, but Locke feels that such a person should remember that the "pains" of those who first work to discover a truth are "of another sort than [his] own."[184]

Humans continually forget that they stand as tall as they do because they stand on the shoulders of giants. The debt for the most important truths, according to Locke in *Reasonableness*, is owed to revelation and the teachings of Christ.

> A great many things which we have been bred up in the belief of from our cradles (and are notions grown familiar, and, as it were, natural to us, under the gospel), we take for unquestionable obvious truths, and easily demonstrable; without considering how long we might have been in doubt

---

[182] Reasonableness, 243.

[183] Reasonableness, 243.

[184] Reasonableness, 243.

> or ignorance of them, had revelation been silent. And many are beholden to revelation, who do not acknowledge it.[185]

Toleration and the separation of ecclesiastical and civil governments are among these truths. The mere attempt to demonstrate these truths through reason, an enterprise that for many moral truths is fraught with difficulty, does not mean that these truths lose their importance or that their demands on us are eased if that demonstration fails.

That principles may retain their validity and exercise authority over us despite our failure to demonstrate them rationally is important. Waldron argues that Locke's argument for toleration relies upon the rational demonstration that belief cannot succumb to persecution; if this demonstration fails, so does Locke's defense of toleration. Locke's defense of toleration relies upon both reason and revelation. Waldron goes astray because he does not consider Locke's whole argument, disregarding those elements that rely on religious (vs. rational) explanation. What then does Locke actually argue here? We must notice that Locke gives three considerations, not just one, to demonstrate that a magistrate's power is limited with respect to the care of souls.

First, Locke maintains that the magistrate's "power, right, and dominion" is proscribed from promoting the "salvation of souls" because neither God nor the members of society have given him that authority. In the *Second Treatise*, Locke explains that we are God's creation, such that we are ultimately his property and subject to his will. It is clear to Locke that God gave us reason to govern ourselves, and that any other grant of authority over us must be clearly demonstrated. Locke writes, "there being nothing more evident, than that [humans] . . . should also be equal one amongst another without

---

[185] Reasonableness, 143.

Subordination or Subjection, unless the Lord and Master of them all, should by any manifest Declaration of his Will set one above another, and confer on him by an evident and clear appointment an undoubted Right to Dominion and Sovereignty."[186] It is an "evident" proposition that no one is subject to another, absent some declaration to the contrary. Rather, any right to make laws and execute them must be given to the magistrate by the consent of the people, always subject to the ends and the rights that they have ordained the magistrate to protect. Further, the people cannot concede certain powers to the magistrate, including the power to take their lives or enslave them. As the term of a person's life is subject to God's will, those powers belong only to God.

Just as Locke restricts our right to surrender certain powers over our bodies to the magistrate, he also restricts the right to surrender certain powers over our souls. In the *Second Treatise*, we learn that "Reason, which is that Law [of Nature], teaches all Mankind . . . that . . . no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty or Possessions."[187] It also teaches us that everyone "is *bound to preserve himself*," and gives each the ability to attain the knowledge necessary to secure that end. As *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* teaches, reason is also the means God has given to lead people to their salvation. "How short soever their Knowledge may come of . . . a perfect Comprehension of whatsoever is, it yet secures their great Concernments, that they have Light enough to lead them to the Knowledge of their Maker, and the sight of their own Duties. . . . The Candle, that is set up in us, shines bright enough for all our Purposes."[188]

---

[186] 2T, 4.

[187] 2T, 6.

We do not merely have the ability to use reason to discover the ideas necessary to regulate our conduct and secure our salvation, we also have the duty to do so. We cannot give to another our obligation to use our own reason to understand and evaluate the certainty of those principles we take on faith.

> *Faith* is nothing but a firm Assent of the Mind: which if it be regulated, as is our Duty, cannot be afforded to any thing, but upon good Reason; and so cannot be opposite to it. He that believes, without having any Reason for believing, may be in love with his own Fancies; but neither seeks Truth as he ought, nor pays the Obedience due to his Maker, who would have him use those discerning Faculties he has given him, to keep him out of Mistake and Errour.[189]

Rather than obstructing faith, reason makes it possible. Only when we have used our faculty of reason to support our belief can it be called faith, which is a firm assent based upon evidence. When we have not diligently sought evidence, not only do we fall short of true faith, but we also violate our duties to God. God gave humans the use of reason for our salvation, with the expectation that it would be used to that end. Locke explains that the observance of these things ["believing and doing those things" necessary to obtain God's favor] is the highest obligation that lies upon mankind."[190] Accordingly, "our utmost care, application, and diligence *ought* to be exercised in the *search* and performance of them."[191]

---

[188] Essay, I.i.5.

[189] Essay, IV.xvii.24.

[190] Letter, 421.

[191] Letter, 421. Emphasis added.

It is true that some people who fail to use their reason may somehow hold correct beliefs. Locke is unsure whether such belief can be salvific; it might be, but Locke has two reservations. First, the person who fails to use his reason will be fully accountable for any mistakes he makes in his belief. Inversely, "he that makes use of the Light and Faculties GOD has given him, and seeks sincerely to discover Truth . . . may have this satisfaction in doing his Duty as a rational Creature, that though he should miss Truth, he will not miss the Reward of it."[192] Second, even if one holds correct beliefs, one has still disobeyed God by not seeking with one's reason to support that belief. This person "transgresses against his own Light, and misuses those Faculties, which were given him to no other end, but to search and follow the clearer Evidence, and greater Probability."

These arguments from the *Second Treatise* and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* have important implications for the first consideration restricting the magistrate's authority, which argues that the care over others' was never granted to the magistrate. To prove this, one has to examine two sources of authority. As in the *Two Treatises*, one must first see if God, whose property we are, has given dominion over us to any person. In the absence of that grant, given a state of equality, any authority to give us rules and laws must be derived from our consent.[193] This liberal philosophy would seem to pertain to any form of authority, but some feel so strongly about controlling religious belief that it was necessary to write the *Letter* as a separate treatise specifically addressing religious authority. Locke first tells us that the magistrate lacks dominion and care over our souls because God never gave it to him. Locke writes, "it appears not that

---

[192] Essay, IV.xvii.24.

[193] 2T, 4; 6. See also Waldron, Equality.

God has ever given any such authority to one man over another as to compel anyone to his religion."[194] That it "appears not" seems to be a weak argument, but we must remember from the *Two Treatises* that any grant of authority must be easily identified.

If we cannot find this authority in a grant from God, we must seek it then in the consent of the people. Locke argues, however, that humans would not and could not give this power to a magistrate. He writes, "no man can so far abandon the care of his own salvation as blindly to leave it to the choice of any other, whether prince or subject, to prescribe to him what faith or worship he shall embrace."[195] The reason for this may appear to be connected to the second consideration demonstrating the magistrate's lack of authority over the soul.

Locke's second consideration is the most frequently analyzed in the scholarship on the *Letter*. According to the second consideration, the magistrate cannot have jurisdiction over souls because the means inherent to the state's power cannot affect the conditions necessary to save them, i.e. they cannot instill saving belief. Locke writes, "the care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because his power consists only in outward force; but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God. And such is the nature of the understanding that it cannot be compelled to the belief of anything by outward force."[196] According to Waldron, Locke's defense of toleration stands on two premises, that the point of coercion is to push another to change his will, and that such belief does not respond to the will.[197] Waldron believes, however, that both propositions that he culls out of the irrationality argument break down, undermining Locke's argument for toleration. The first premise fails because some people only desire revenge.

---

[194] Letter, 394.

[195] Letter, 394.

[196] Letter, 395.

The premise that some people only desire revenge, however, is one of the *Letter*'s principal arguments, i.e., that persecution has little to do with concern for the souls of others. Locke asserts that the true motives for persecution are ambition and the desire for dominion over others. As Nathan Tarcov maintains, once Locke can show these are the true aims of persecution, he can urge society to reject persecution and embrace toleration for the relative value of their motives, the desire to control others versus the desire to maintain their freedom. Inasmuch as the *Two Treatises* defend natural equality and freedom against ambition and avarice, removing the persecution's façade of piety only strengthens the *Letter*'s arguments with those of the *Two Treatises*.

Even if we allow persecutors to be motivated by mere revenge and not the lust for power, however, Locke has prepared other arguments in the *Letter* and the *Two Treatises* to challenge persecution. Retribution is not a legitimate justification for religious persecution because differences in religious belief do not harm others. Locke posits, "Every man has an immortal soul, capable of eternal happiness or misery; whose happiness depending upon his believing and doing those things in this life which are necessary to the obtaining of God's favour, and are prescribed by God to that end."[198] From the premise that we must do and believe certain things that are prescribed by God, Locke draws two conclusions. First, he concludes that "the observance of these things is the highest obligation that lies upon mankind, and that our utmost care, application, and diligence ought to be exercised in the search and performance of them." We have a duty to seek and then follow God's will. Second, since a person's salvation requires him to believe and do certain things, and since one person's religion—his "erroneous opinion," his "undue manner of worship," and even "his perdition"—does not violate another's rights nor harm another's affairs, "the care of each man's salvation belongs only to himself."

---

[197] Waldron, Toleration, 115.

[198] Letter, 421.

The second premise speaks directly to the issue of revenge. Retribution in religious matters is never justified, because another's "erroneous opinions" or "undue" worship, or even his perdition, does not injure another's civil or eternal interests. In an earlier passage, Locke uses contemporary law to show that a person's religious beliefs and practices are innocuous to others. He advances from the more innocuous case of differences in inconsequential beliefs to differences in beliefs or worship that are sins. Even in this more serious case, however, Locke notes that the law is frequently silent.[199] Magistrates rarely punish the sins of their subjects because their sins neither violate others' rights nor "break the public peace of societies."[200] In their inaction, magistrates reveal that they have only been given power to punish those things, sin or not, that affect our civil interests. Sins are "nowhere punishable by laws; unless in certain cases, in which the real turpitude of the thing, and the offence against God, are not considered, but only the injury done unto men's neighbours, and to the commonwealth."

---

[199] Letter, 417. This means that toleration does not emanate from doubt and uncertainty. As we will see below, liberty of conscience in some matters is essential to one's salvation. It is only abridged when the consequences of such liberty infringe on other's civil interests.

[200] Letter, 417.

Furthermore, even when the magistrate punishes those things that God has also declared to be sins, the punishment should be commensurate only to the damage they have done to civil interests. The magistrate should not consider the offense to God's will; that judgment and sentence is left to God. That the magistrate should leave such punishment to God is consistent with Locke's understanding of the ends and limits of punishment. In the *Second Treatise*, Locke explains that there are only two purposes for punishment, deterrence and reparation.[201] Both ends must be governed by the dictates of "calm reason and conscience," and must be in proportion to the offense. These, and only these, rights to punishment exist by the law of nature as a part of our self-preservation. Deterrence preserves society and its members in allowing sufficient punishment to deter future offenses.[202] Reparation allows one to appropriate the goods and services of the offender in proportion to the damage done to one's own self-preservation. Thus, if one's ability to preserve oneself is not harmed, there is no reason for punitive reparations. Since another's religious beliefs, his manner of worship, and his perdition do us no harm, we have to right to seek reparations or any other form of vengeance. Indeed, this lack of cause partially explains the limits imposed on state power. The people create a state by compact to protect their life, liberty, and estate. In forming the state, people can only give it the powers they held in the state of nature, and not even all of those. Since another's religious differences do no harm to one's property, or even to one's soul, one has no executive power to punish those differences in the state of nature. Accordingly, in creating the social contract, one cannot give the state such power. Thus, the state cannot exercise retributive power for religious differences.

---

[201] 2T, 8.

[202] 2T, 12.

Waldron develops a more thorough critique of the proposition that belief is not responsive to the will, however, than he does of the proposition that persecution's only aim is to alter belief. Even in Locke's time, the argument that belief is not responsive to the will received more criticism than any other part of the *Letter*. In the *Letter*, Locke explains that penalties cannot change our beliefs because "only light and evidence . . . can work a change in men's opinions."[203] To understand how light can produce changes in belief, and how Locke's own writings undermine the belief argument, Waldron turns to *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In the *Essay*, Locke tells us that our knowledge is involuntary in two senses. First, once we open up our senses to perception, objects will inevitably cause us to form certain ideas. We cannot make something appear to us other than it is. Thus, we cannot will something yellow to look black or something that burns us to feel cold.[204] As Locke writes, "Men that have Senses, cannot chuse but receive some *Ideas* by them; and if they have Memory, they cannot but retain some of them."[205] Further, we cannot help but use our "distinguishing Faculty" to "perceive the Agreement, or Disagreement" between our ideas, generating knowledge. Once we have given names to those ideas, we can feel certain that the propositions that express in words the agreement or disagreement of ideas are as true as the agreements we perceive between the ideas.[206] Thus, if we have and use our faculties of perception and comparison, we will involuntarily receive ideas and create knowledge from them that we will know is true. Our use of the faculties, however, is voluntary.

---

[203] Letter, 395.

[204] Essay, IV.xiii.2.

[205] Essay, IV.xiii.1.

It is with the recognition that the use of our faculties is voluntary that Jonas Proast, a critic with whom Locke had an extended debate on toleration, objects that persecution is effective. It is also the point at which Waldron argues that Locke's argument falls apart. Proast agrees that force cannot directly change one's beliefs, but contends that it may do so indirectly. Since our faculties of perception and judgment will inevitable lead us to truth if we use them, Proast asks why we should not indirectly coerce belief. As Waldron writes, the state could force everyone to read materials conducive to the orthodox faith and bar all materials that would shake it, thus increasing "the number of people who eventually end up believing" it.[207] If salvific belief can be indirectly coerced, persecuting belief is rational and Locke's defense of toleration fails.

Tarcov explains this discrepancy by returning to the argument that truth would do better if she were left to herself. As described above, Locke argues as often that persecution will sustain error as he does that toleration will produce truth. Locke writes, "Errors indeed prevail by the assistance of foreign and borrowed succours."[208] Of this statement, Tarcov writes, "Indeed the thrust of this passage is partly that persecution will not succeed in propagating truth not so much because of the inefficacy of force as because of the unlikelihood that the wielders of force possess the truth."[209] Toward the

---

[206] Essay, IV.xiii.2.

[207] Waldron, Toleration, 116.

[208] Letter, 421.

[209] Tarcov, 184.

end of the essay, Locke also writes, "[truth] seldom has received, and I fear never will receive, much assistance from the power of great men, to whom she is but rarely known, and more rarely welcome."[210]

The argument with which we began this discussion upholds this interpretation. Locke states that three considerations demonstrate that the power of the magistrate does not extend to the salvation of souls. The second argument, the one that has presented such difficulty, is that the power of the magistrate, which consists "in outward force," is incommensurable with "saving religion," which consists in "inward persuasion."[211] Tarcov's response, although supported from subsequent passages in the *Letter*, is the third consideration that Locke presents to prove the limits of the magistrate's power. Locke tells us that even if he were to grant the above point, that the "rigour of laws and the force of penalties were capable to convince and change men's minds," it would not help "the salvation of their souls."[212] The problem results from the variety and contradictions of religious belief, in which, Locke notes, rulers are as divided as in their more secular interests. The coercion of all these different beliefs would not be a problem were it not that salvific belief for Locke also requires assent to correct propositions. He writes, "there being but one truth, one way to heaven, what hopes is there that more men would be led into it, . . . [if they had to blindly] resign up themselves to the will of their governors, and to the religion which either ignorance, ambition, or superstition had chanced to establish in the countries where they were born?"[213] Since there is only one way to heaven, but a plurality of religious belief among the world's princes, such a policy would save the citizens of one nation and condemn the rest to eternal destruction. This would result in the "absurdity" that a person's "eternal happiness or misery" depended upon his place of birth.[214]

---

[210] Letter, 420.

[211] Letter, 395.

[212] Letter, 396.

The third consideration demonstrating the limits of the magistrate's power thus begins to illuminate the first, which stipulates that neither God nor man grants the magistrate jurisdiction over souls. Locke's first consideration, as well as his arguments in the *Two Treatises*, argues that the authority to care for souls must come either from God or the members of society, and that no modern ruler could legitimately claim that Scripture supports any claim that God grants them such authority. God does not grant such authority because it would absurdly condemn men to eternal death for no fault of their own, which condemnation, as Locke writes in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, would violate God's justice and goodness.[215] Moreover, the magistrate cannot claim that the people have granted him such authority. Such a claim would be impossible because "no man can so far abandon the care of his own salvation as blindly to leave it to the choice of any other, whether prince or subject, to prescribe to him what faith or worship he shall embrace."[216] Not only *would* no one do this, no one *could* do it since faith always requires and in a sense *is* internal assent. The third consideration explains why no one would grant the magistrate this authority. One cannot trust a magistrate to care for anything other than his own power. Moreover, even if a magistrate could be trusted to care more for others than himself, one cannot trust that the magistrate can better judge religious truth than oneself. Indeed, in a matter so important, Locke argues that no individual would be so risk tolerant that they would trust its management to another. That the world's princes accept so many different religions demonstrates that they have no special claim to religious knowledge and that entrusting them with the care of souls would condemn most of the world to eternal death. Thus, fear for the eternal destruction of his soul would prevent a person from blindly surrendering the care of his salvation to another.

---

[213] Letter, 396.

[214] Letter, 396.

[215] Reasonableness, 1.

[216] Letter, 394.

In these considerations, we partially see how toleration comes to be a natural right. In the *Third Letter*, Locke asserts that men only quit the natural liberty of the state of nature by joining the commonwealth so that they may be protected from those who would injure them.[217] To compel a person to leave the religion he thinks is true, and consequently most conducive to his salvation, is an injury anyone would avoid in the state of nature. Accordingly, Locke concludes that toleration is a right and that persecution is one of those injuries from which the citizens of the commonwealth expect the magistrate to protect them.

3.3.4.3 Qualifications of sincere belief

Our discussion of the first and third considerations, however, has explained neither why salvific belief cannot be controlled, nor entirely why freedom of conscience would be an inalienable, natural right. Jeremy Waldron does offer a response "on Locke's behalf," that what "matters for the purposes of true religion is genuine belief."[218] Belief is categorized as genuine or non-genuine according to the history of the belief formation. Genuine belief is defined as the product of "the free and autonomous activity of the mind, choosing and selecting its own materials and its own evidence, uncoerced and undetermined by outside factors."[219] Coerced or manipulated beliefs might appear and feel like genuine belief, even to the person who holds them. As beliefs are judged by the process of their formation, however, they are non-genuine. Thus, by definition, the magistrate cannot coerce genuine belief.

---

[217] Third Letter, 212.

Waldron provides several objections to this defense of Locke's argument. He feels that this notion of genuine belief is so stringent that it disqualifies "the genuineness of everything we normally count as a belief in ordinary life."[220] Too many of our ideas result from familial, religious, and cultural socialization to be categorized as genuine by such strict standards of freedom and autonomy. Since so very few people would actually hold true beliefs, by the genuineness standard, Waldron believes that advocates of persecution could simply argue that their goal is not sincere belief, but a homogenized belief.[221] Waldron claims that "Locke has nothing to say" to those who would thus persecute without regard to sincere belief.

---

[218] Waldron, Toleration, 117.

[219] This is opposed to other notions of faith, such as that of Luther, in which God takes possession of the will, enslaving it.

[220] Waldron, Toleration, 118.

[221] Waldron, Toleration, 118.

It is hardly surprising that an argument addressed to a particular audience, those who would persecute for religious reasons, should lose much of its force when directed to another. That does not mean, however, that Locke has nothing to say to this new audience. To see what Locke would have to say, we would first have to know what motivates a particular persecutor. When looking at Waldron's division of the belief argument into two propositions, we saw that one possible motive for persecution, other than the desire to instill belief, is the desire for revenge. As shown in that discussion, Locke develops an argument to prove that the use of civil power for vengeance, or reparation, in religious matters is illegitimate.

We see another possible goal when we ask why anyone would want religious uniformity. As seen in the debates over the ratification of the United States' Constitution, there was a long-standing belief that the only solution to factionalism and its concomitant violence was enforced uniformity. Indeed, many people during and after the English Civil War believed that religious liberty inevitable led to civil war and death.[222] They believed that the only way to curb the violence resulting form religious differences was to give the magistrate absolute authority in religious matters. As we saw above, though, Locke argues that religious differences do not cause violence, but the preferential treatment of some sects by the magistrate. As the magistrate's control causes the violence advocates of persecution fear, persecution is irrational.

---

[222] Hobbes suggests that all that is needed is uniformity of practice and that belief can be private and uncontrolled by the state. Locke, in his early writings, agreed with Hobbes. In his later writings, however, Locke argues that the practice of worship is so tied to one's belief that controlling religious practice is controlling belief. True worship is that which one believes is acceptable to God; proscribing worship thus keeps one from doing something one feels God desires one to do, and prescribing worship may force one to do something one believes is detestable to God.

Locke suggests that other people might claim to persecute others out of concern for their salvation. Locke argues, however, that no one truly persecutes out of a love of God or concern for the soul of the persecuted. Persecution in his view is the result of the "avarice and insatiable desire of dominion" of ecclesiastical leaders, "who are more ministers of the government than ministers of the Gospel," and from the "immoderate ambition of magistrates."[223] In contrast, those who argue for toleration are motivated by a love of freedom. As Tarcov explains, we can judge between proponents of toleration and proponents of persecution based on their motives; "where the claims to truth of the intolerant are discredited by their motives in contrast to the superior motives of the tolerant."[224]

The *Two Treatises on Government* demonstrates Locke's belief that we may condemn persecution because of its inferior motives. Locke tells his readers that "all Men are naturally in . . . a *State of perfect Freedom* to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit."[225] Humans are free because God created them with the capacity to reason and made them free in and through that capacity.[226] The foundation of liberty is the ability to suspend desire, examining the consequences of a proposed action, until we have judged the best course and determined our will to do it.[227] This liberty to act according to the dictates of one's will is a gift from God, one that he has given to man so that he may be a moral being who govern himself by the laws God gives him through reason and revelation.[228] Thus, we are also free only through the capacity to reason, and only given the freedom to act on our own when we have sufficiently developed that capacity.[229] Locke thus develops a close connection between reason, freedom, and accountability. Moreover, we will see that humans should restrict their authority over one another out of respect for the freedom and purposes that God has given to each individual.

---

[223] Letter, 432.

[224] Tarcov, 188.

[225] 2T, 4.

[226] Waldron, Equality, 78-81.

[227] Essay, II.xxi.47.

The relationship between liberty, reason, and accountability applies to both the civil and the spiritual realms. Steven Dworetz, in his work on Locke and the American Founding, argues that Locke's philosophy appealed to American clergy because of its emphasis on individual accountability. Dworetz writes,

> Lockean individualism is actually derived from the theistic doctrine of individual responsibility. Duties to God are first; and they authorize all rights. Men must have liberty to do what God requires them to do, and only political arrangements that provide such liberty are deemed legitimate. Without a liberty to judge in matters of religion, as well as in politics, the individual is denied the status of a moral, responsible agent. Liberty is therefore 'indispensable to morality' and, as such, a requisite for salvation.[230]

We attach great moral value to freedom, and grant higher moral standing to one who upholds it than to one who undermines it. As Tarcov argues, we may reject arguments for persecution because the motives underlying them are inferior to the love of freedom underlying toleration.

---

[228] "For God having given Man an Understanding to direct his Actions, has allowed him a freedom of Will, and liberty of Acting, as properly belonging thereunto, within the bounds of that Law he is under" (2T, 58). Locke distinguishes the liberty he advocates from license. Liberty is "to dispose, and order, as he lists, his Person, Actions, Possessions, and his whole Property, within the Allowance of those Laws under which he is; and therein not to be subject to the arbitrary Will of another, but freely follow his own" (2T, 57). Even the divine laws revealed through revelation would be meaningless if one has not first developed the capacity of reason by which to understand the revelations.

[229] Hence children are subject to their parents until they have reached an age at which they have developed their reason enough to govern themselves.

[230] Steven Dworetz, *The Unvarnished Doctrine: Locke, Liberalism, and the American Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 157; quoting Sterling P. Lamprecht, *The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Locke* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 99.

Waldron also objects to the "genuineness" argument because it would classify most belief as non-genuine. While Locke does believe sincere belief is necessary to salvation, two considerations demonstrate that he would not classify most belief as non-genuine. First, Locke does not dichotomize belief into genuine and non-genuine; there are many gradations of belief. Second, Locke's emphasis on the necessity of sincere belief pertains to particular requirements for salvific belief. Locke posits the necessity of personal effort and minimal interference to learn truth in *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, but he does not divide that knowledge into sincere and insincere. Such a distinction applies only to those beliefs necessary for salvation. The discussion of these considerations will reveal that Locke's theory does not invalidate all belief. Moreover, we will see that the critique that the genuineness, or sincerity, criterion fails is itself problematic.

In *On the Conduct of the Understanding*, Locke defines three ways in which our knowledge may be deficient: one may be completely ignorant; one may maintain doubts about a proposition to which one assents; or one may fully embrace a proposition "without ever having examined and been convinced by well grounded arguments."[231] Locke compares the pursuit of knowledge to a trip; a person who does not know where to go and has not moved is nearer the truth than one who wanders down a path he believes is right without studying it, for his unexamined belief is likely to be wrong. Thus, the person who assents to a belief without any thought, study, or proof, is "in the worst condition."

---

[231] CU, 213.

Indeed, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke writes, "And yet these of all Men hold their Opinions with the greatest stiffness; those being generally the most fierce and firm in their Tenets, who have least examined them."[232] Two problems face this type of person in any quest for truth. First, the tendency to embrace a belief as truth without any evidence or examination will allow him to embrace almost anything, even the most profound error, as truth. Second, Locke argues that the ease with which such a person accepts error for truth indicates a diminished capacity to distinguish between the two. Given such a diminished capacity, it would be difficult to reclaim this person from error.

On the other hand, the person who is completely ignorant, who holds no partiality for any unproven doctrine, will find it easier to follow truth wherever it may lead him. Complete ignorance is thus the preferred state for someone who sincerely desires knowledge. This person should pursue truth "by enquiring directly into the nature of the thing itself, without minding the opinions of others, or troubling himself with their questions or disputes about it."[233] He should examine all of the possible sources of truth, all of the possible evidence, comparing it to find agreement and disagreement among ideas until he comes to the strongest conclusions possible. In this process, one should avoid the systems and opinions of others, for they will impose their own interpretations on the materials, possibly misleading anyone who heeds them while searching for the truth. To demonstrate his point, Locke takes as an example a fictional book, one that contains all of the information about a given subject. The best course would be to study and examine this book on one's own, rather than relying on another group's interpretation of it. Locke argues that, though the members of that group acknowledge the authority of the person who wrote the work, they

---

[232] Essay, IV.xvi.3.

[233] CU, 213.

> have already interpreted and wiredrawn [sic] all his text to their own sense; the tincture whereof when I have imbibed, I am more in danger to misunderstand his true meaning, than if I had come to him with a mind unprepossessed by doctors and commentators of my sect, whose reasonings, interpretation, and language, which I have been used to, will of course make all chime that way, and make another and perhaps the genuine meaning of the author seem harsh, strained, and uncouth to me.[234]

Thus, because of the danger that results from relying upon the knowledge or opinion of others and from a lack of study, "the surest and safest way is to have no opinion at all until he has examined, and that without any the least regard to the opinions or systems of other men about it."[235]

As this discussion of opinion and ignorance demonstrates, Locke dislikes unexamined beliefs. They prevent us from arriving at the truth. Locke does not argue, however, that everyone falls hopelessly short of genuine belief. There is no dichotomization of belief into genuine and non-genuine categories. There are many degrees of assent, ranging from "full *Assurance* and Confidence, quite down to *Conjecture*, *Doubt*, and *Distrust*."[236] Assent should be based upon the probability of agreement or disagreement between ideas; the greater the probability of agreement, the greater should be our assent.

---

[234] CU, 214.

[235] CU, 213.

[236] Essay, IV.xv.2.

If there were a dichotomization of genuine from non-genuine belief, and genuine belief were defined as belief based entirely on personal investigation and decisions made independently of all social influences, it is true that only a very small minority of humans, if any, could ever claim to have genuine belief. In rejecting such a dichotomy and creating many grades of assent, Locke undermines the claim that sincere belief is so hopelessly difficult that we need not pursue it. Although most people lack the resources to spend their lives in philosophy and theology, they are not destined to non-genuine belief and eternal destruction. They are commanded, as a duty attached to the gift of reason and as a requisite for salvation, merely to attain as great a degree of assurance as possible with the means given them. As will be discussed subsequently, Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity* teaches us that we are only responsible for the belief that would be available to us. Receiving forgiveness for our sins, however, does require that we exert ourselves to gain all of the knowledge possible. Anything less than our full exertion, as will be explained, falls short of sincere belief.

Moreover, the criticism that Locke's theory would characterize almost all belief as false fails because Locke believes that sincerity only applies to the beliefs required for salvation. In that context, as we will see, sincere belief acquires a special meaning. Partially out of his mercy, God created a substitute for the exact obedience necessary to salvation, sincere belief that Jesus is his son. There is no reason to apply the requirement of sincerity to all forms of belief, as Waldron does, because most beliefs are irrelevant to salvation.[237] Thus, Waldron's objection that Locke's argument would invalidate most beliefs lacks substance. Indeed, Locke's understanding of the sincerity inherent to salvific belief precludes its application to other beliefs. The *Letter's* discussion of the necessity of sincere worship for salvation demonstrates this. Moreover, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* amplifies our understanding of the special meaning of sincere belief. As we saw, Waldron argues that the sincerity criterion is meaningless, and hence fails to support toleration, since it would qualify all belief as non-sincere. Since Locke neither dichotomizes all belief as sincere and non-sincere nor makes the requirement of sincerity as stringent as Waldron would have it, his criticism of the sincerity criterion and of Locke's defense loses its strength.

Another of Waldron's powerful criticisms of Locke's defense of toleration is his argument that there is little functional difference between sincere and coerced belief. His criticism, however, depends upon a particular understanding of Locke's argument, which we will see does not correspond to Locke's idea of sincere belief. As we saw above, Waldron argues that belief could be so manipulated that even the coerced person could not distinguish any difference between his and a non-coerced belief. The person who looked at snow on his own would not see it as any more white than the person forced to look at it. Waldron then asks whether non-genuine beliefs "cannot perform some or all of the *functions* we expect beliefs to perform," or whether they are "functionally deficient in some way."[238] He concludes that it would be "hard to imagine what sort of epistemology or philosophy of mind could possibly connect the external conditions under which sensory input was acquired with the functional efficacy of the beliefs generated on the basis of that input."[239]

---

[237] Using Gilbert Ryle's terminology, one might say that applying the requirement of sincerity to all beliefs, invalidating them, is a category mistake.

[238] Waldron, Toleration, 117.

If it were true that no one could distinguish between coerced belief and that acquired freely and by one's own desire, if there were no differences between the actions and characters to which the two types of belief lead, then it would be hard to see how Locke could disagree with Waldron. Sincere belief would depend entirely upon the historical process that created it, even though everything else about sincere and coerced belief would be identical. Sincerity would describe merely a particular process of belief formation, and a person would be saved or damned because of another's actions. Moreover, a person could do nothing to remedy this situation. If, as in Waldron's example, the bayonet led a person to see and acknowledge that snow is white, there would be difficult to go back, to forget what one's eyes have seen, and learn snow's color in a different way. A soteriology that damns a person because of others' actions, especially if it left him with no remedy, opposes Locke's idea of a merciful, benevolent God and with his denial of the traditional understanding of original sin.[240] For example, while discussing the meaning of the death decreed on man after Adam's transgression, Locke writes, "some will have it to be a state of guilt, wherein not only he, but all his posterity was so involved that every one descended of him deserved endless torment in hellfire."[241] Such a notion of inherited guilt, he feels, defies "the justice and goodness of God."[242] Locke does not believe in a God who punishes us for the actions of others, but in an omnipotent God who is good and just.[243] Since Locke, by his own writings, could not agree with the consequences of Waldron's formulation of the sincerity argument, we must see if another formulation of the argument is possible, one that agrees with his soteriology and conception of God.

---

[239] Waldron, Toleration, 118.

[240] For an extensive discussion of original sin in Locke, see Spellman. Spellman argues that there were a number of perspectives of original sin in Locke's time among the Anglicans, ranging from the Puritan utter depravity of man to the Pelagian ideas of free will and perfectibility. Spellman believes that Locke agreed with the Latitudinarians, who freed man from much of the weight of original sin and argued for the importance of good behavior, while still maintaining the need for grace.

As discussed above, the law of faith was given to supplement man's inability to fully obey the law of works. Given that Locke rejects our responsibility for Adam's transgression and a "state of compulsory sinfulness," one must wonder why it is inevitable that man will fail to fulfill the requirements of the law of works.[244] W. M. Spellman writes, "Locke thought it just as incorrect to hold that mankind had experienced no infirmity in the wake of Adam's Fall, no moral catastrophe which has separated man from God."[245] While Locke is well-known for his rejection of innate ideas, Spellman feels that Locke in no way rejects the possibility of "innate dispositions."[246] Indeed, throughout Locke's writings we may see a reliance upon the innate capacity for thought. Spellman, however, focuses on the negative dispositions that resulted from Adam's fall. Mortality subjects us to "many errors and passions," and Adam's pride, which consists in his "rebellion against God," is "made an essential part of man's natural temperament."[247] Through their passions and pride, all humans inevitably fall short of complete obedience to God's will. God, however, prepared another way for them to achieve the justification necessary for salvation, the law of faith. "They were required to believe him to be the Messiah, which faith is of grace promised to be reckoned to them for the completing of their righteousness wherein it was defective."[248]

---

[241] Reasonableness, 3.

[242] Reasonableness, 3. See also Reasonableness, 1.

[243] For a good discussion of Locke and nominalism, a subject well beyond the scope of this paper, see Francis Oakley, "Locke, Natural Law and God—Again," *History of Political Thought* 18.4 (Winter 1997): 624-651. Oakley affirms that, regardless of Locke's views on a voluntarist God, "he is far from diffident about ascribing to God the attributes of wisdom and goodness" (650).

[244] Spellman, 220.

[245] Spellman, 220-1.

[246] Spellman, 228.

The eternal destruction that would overcome humans if not for the law of faith makes clear the importance of the belief necessary to it. One may ask, however, what the substance and requirements of that belief would be. "The faith required was: to believe Jesus to be the Messiah, the Anointed, who had been promised by God to the world."[249] Locke argues that belief in Jesus involves assent to a number of propositions. He devotes much of *The Reasonableness of Christianity* to demonstrate what it means to believe that Jesus was "the Christ." Locke emphasizes that "Christ" is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew "Messiah," which Locke argues was primarily understood by Jesus' contemporaries to mean the "son of God."[250] Thus, when Jesus and the Apostles taught that one must believe that he was the Christ to be saved, they meant that one must believe that he was the son of God. Moreover, belief in Jesus, as the son of God, included assent to the propositions that he had power over life and death and was resurrected.[251] Locke explains, "since the Messiah was to be a Savior and a king, and to give life and a kingdom to those who received him, . . . there could have been no pretense to have given him out for the Messiah, and to require men to believe him to be so, who thought him under the power of death."[252]

---

[247] Spellman, 221 & 225.

[248] Reasonableness, 212.

[249] Reasonableness, 183.

[250] Reasonableness, 30, 52, 97-8.

[251] Reasonableness, 32.

Assent to the proposition that Jesus is the Son of God is not the only component of sincere, or saving, belief.[253] "So that all that was to be believed for justification was no more but this single proposition: that 'Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, or the Messiah.' All, I say, that was to be *believed* for justification, for that it was not all that was required to be *done* for justification, we shall see hereafter."[254] Locke gives a clue to what this means when discussing the commission of the Apostles, that they were to preach only that the "Messiah and his kingdom was come."[255] Not only were the apostles and other disciples preaching that the prophesied Messiah had come, but that so had his kingdom. Locke continues, "When I say, this was all they were to preach, it must be understood, that this was the faith they preached; but with it they joined obedience to the Messiah, whom they received for their king."[256] Belief in Christ differs from other types of belief, insofar as it justifies a person, in that it does not merely signify assent to some proposition. If it were the same, Waldron would be correct that one's belief that snow is white is no different when one is "forced at the point of a bayonet to look at the colour of snow" than when one comes to it on one's own.[257] In the books of the New Testament, devils recognize Jesus as the Christ, but they do not receive salvation because of their recognition, even when James tells us that "The devils believe and tremble."[258] The difference between saving belief in Jesus and the simple assent to the proposition that he is the Christ lies in the statements above; the apostles and disciples taught that Christ's kingdom had come and that true believers were to accept him as their king.

---

[252] Reasonableness, 32.

[253] For another take on the sincerity argument, one which defends Locke's arguments by emphasizing that one must have correct intentions to acquire virtue, see Paul Bou-Habib, "Locke, Sincerity and the Rationality of Persecution," *Political Studies* 51 (2003): 611-626.

[254] Reasonableness, 50.

[255] Reasonableness, 99.

[256] Reasonableness, 100.

To explain why salvation required more than assent to the proposition that Jesus was the Messiah, Locke returns to the reason why Jesus was sent. All humans were condemned to eternal death because they failed to fulfill the law of works. "God therefore, out of his mercy to mankind . . . proposed to the children of men, that as many as would believe Jesus his Son . . . to be the Messiah, the promised deliverer, and would receive him for their king and ruler, should have all their past sins, disobedience, and rebellion forgiven them."[259] For God to accept belief in recompense for one's failure to obey the law of works, one had to accept Jesus as one's king. Baptism acted as the "initiating ceremony" by which one accepted Jesus as one's king; in this ceremony one committed to future obedience to all of his commandments and became a subject of his kingdom.[260] Becoming a subject of this new kingdom required that one abandon one's old life and become a new person; repentance was thus necessary. Repentance was "not only a sorrow for sins past, but (what is a natural consequence of such sorrow, if it be real) a turning from them into a new and contrary life."[261] It is only through repentance that one truly becomes a subject of Christ's kingdom, turning to a new life and obeying all of the laws that Christ gives. When one reforms one's life and accepts Jesus as one's king, one obtains forgiveness for the failure to perfectly obey the law of works. Furthermore, if people fulfill the terms of the covenant whereby they make themselves citizens of this new kingdom, "if for the future they lived in a sincere obedience to his law to the utmost of their power, the sins of human frailty for the time to come, as well as all those of their past lives, should, for his Son's sake, because they gave themselves up to him to be his subjects, be forgiven them."[262]

---

[257] Waldron, Toleration, 118.

[258] James 2:19. Locke discusses this in Reasonableness, 166-7.

[259] Reasonableness, 178.

[260] Reasonableness, 168.

In *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke makes explicit the importance of the sincerity that qualifies belief and worship in the *Letter*. If belief and works are not sincere, they do not represent a change in character, the conversion into a true subject of Christ. Those who truly believe and fail to obey would only be that much more rebellious and guilty. Thus, "faith without works, i.e., the works of *sincere* obedience to the law and will of Christ, is not sufficient for our justification."[263] Locke later reiterate the personal exertion required for true, saving belief. He declares that only "those who have believed Jesus to be the Messiah and have taken him to be their King with a *sincere* endeavor after righteousness, in obeying his law, shall have their past sins not imputed to them and shall have that faith taken instead of obedience."[264] According to Locke, God does not want someone to merely assent to the proposition that Jesus is the Messiah; to believe in Christ is to make oneself a new person, a subject of his kingdom who earnestly accepts all of the commandments Christ gives to his followers as their king.

---

[261] Reasonableness, 170.

[262] Reasonableness, 178.

[263] Reasonableness, 179. Emphasis added. Locke refers to James 2 to substantiate this claim.

[264] Reasonableness, 181. Emphasis added.

Thus, a functional distinction between coerced and sincere belief becomes apparent. Simply forcing a person to examine scripture and accept the proposition that Jesus was the Christ does not save him. Such belief did not save the devils, nor will it save even those who do miracles in Christ's name but fall short of sincere obedience.[265] Their belief only compounds the guilt of their disobedience.

Qualifying belief to include the fulfillment of certain tasks, however, does not guarantee toleration. Persecutors could just add another goal to their persecution. The additional requirements of sincere obedience and allegiance to Christ as a king, however, do compel toleration. To believe in Christ is to covenant with him that he will be your king and that you will be his subject. In Locke's philosophy, however, a ruler cannot claim legitimate authority over another except by that person's consent. Locke explains this in the context of someone who holds resources necessary for another to live and of a conqueror who subjects a land by the sword.[266] Neither can claim authority, neither can be a rightful king, over those threatened with death, although they may compel their obedience. Their authority exists only by the consent of those they rule, and extends only to the limits to which those ruled have consented in the compact defining their authority. Moreover, the consent necessary to make authority legitimate cannot be coerced. When Locke questions whether "*Promises*, *extorted by Force*, without Right, can be thought

---

[265] Reasonableness, 213. See Matthew 17:21-23.

[266] 1T, 43; 2T, 186.

Consent" and whether they are binding, he declares that "they *bind not at all*."[267] If someone takes something from another by force, that person retains the right to that which was taken and the first has an obligation under the law of nature to restore it. If the first person forces from another a promise, then he has an obligation "to restore it, *i.e.* quit [that person] of the Obligation." Alternatively, the other person may choose whether to perform the promise made under coercion. The law of nature, the foundation of all promises and contracts, only requires a person to perform obligations made in accordance to her rules; she cannot oblige a person to perform those promises made in contradiction to them. Extorting anything by force is one of those conditions that violate the rules of the law of nature. Thus, "*Government of a Conqueror*, imposed, by force, on the Subdued, . . . *has no Obligation* upon [the conquered]."[268]

A person might object that the asymmetry of the power relationship and the constant threat of eternal death would make consent to Christ as one's king illegitimate. In claiming that this situation would be unjust, we would fail to see Locke's doctrine of eternal rewards and punishments in its proper context. For Locke, human life is a gift from God, and our lives always belong to him. Locke denies the immortality of the soul, asserting that humans have no existence prior to that which God gives them when they come to the Earth. Between the time of their death and the final judgment, humans return to this state of non-existence. At the time of the final judgment, God returns each person to life to be judged. That person is then given the gift of eternal life or is returned to the state of non-existence in which he would always have existed had it not been for the will of God.

---

[267] 2T, 186.

[268] 2T, 187.

Before stating whether such a system is just or unjust, let us look at a hypothetical example. Suppose that science had progressed to the point that it could pinpoint to the exact day, hour, minute, and second in which a person was to naturally die, having spent all of the life that his body was capable of giving him. Suppose then that a scientist came to that person, offering him additional life, beyond that to which he had any hope or claim, in exchange for obedience and authority during the additional span of that person's life. Would that authority be illegitimate? If that scientist were a human, whose wish would likely be to turn that person into a slave, Locke would likely agree that such authority would be illegitimate and the deal unethical.

In the case of God, however, Locke does not seem to think that the gift of life in exchange for obedience would be unethical or illegitimate, despite what our objections might be. He consistently treats each person's mortal life as God's possession, something that God can legitimately extend or end according to his will. Indeed, political freedom according to Locke depends upon the fact that our lives belong to God, such that no other person can legitimately claim authority over them.[269] For Locke, the case of eternal rewards and punishments is not the case of a person letting another starve if he will not serve him, but the case of God giving someone an unimaginable reward, one to which he had no expectation, if he will obey God's commandments.

Indeed, the character of Locke's God is far different from that of the scientist described above. His God is not an arbitrary ruler, intent on subjecting every person around him. Rather, he is a merciful and loving God, one whose every action has been to give men freedom, even in the laws he has given to man. Natural liberty for Locke is to live under no rule but the law of nature, which is merely part of divine law.[270] Locke claims that a person is naturally free when he governs himself according to the dictates of God's will. If this is the case during the mortal life that God has given each person, it would be inconsistent to call it slavery for that person to govern himself according to the same dictates when God gives him an additional, eternal life. Further, Locke's God is not an unmerciful, arbitrary, and cruel tyrant. His God is omnipotent, but is also a loving, merciful God who binds himself by the promises and oaths that he makes.[271] Moreover, Locke does not believe in Filmer's God; under Filmer's God all men are naturally born slaves, and all authority is absolute and divine since slaves have to right to "*Compact or Consent*."[272] Rather, Locke believes that God is such that he created all men to be "free, equal and independent" by nature, such that no one may be "subjected to the Political Power of another, without his own *Consent*." It would seem that, ultimately, God would not even subject men to the political power of his son without their consent.

---

[269] 2T, 6.

Locke explains repeatedly that God is the author of the law of nature. It was God who created the "Law of Nature" such that she obligates a person to perform a promise or contract "only by the Rules she prescribes," and such that she cannot obligate a person when a promise or contract is created in "violation of her Rules," i.e. by coercion. As we will see, regarding earthly authorities, the law of nature is created in this way so that humans may fulfill the business of their creator, if they so wish. Regarding Christ's authority, Locke seems to think that God appoints the law of nature in this way because of the type of subjects he would create for his son. The law of faith requires that a person turn his life around, that he become a new person as one of Christ's subjects. This is the meaning of conversion and repentance. This new person is to be full of a "faith that works, not by force, but by love."[273] The law of faith requires a change caused by a person's desires and concomitant efforts. Locke declares that "God himself will not save men against their wills."[274] Humans have been given the ability to choose for themselves, and God desires their hearts and actions as a free gift. Thus, "Faith only, and inward sincerity, are the things that procure acceptance with God."[275]

---

[270] 2T, 22.

[271] 1T, 6.

[272] 1T, 5.

Locke argues that only worship that is sincere can please God. It does not seem that persecution, which Locke describes as a source of animosity and hatred, could lead humans to an obedience that pleases God, that God would be pleased when someone follows him only because he is forced to do so. Since it is only worship and belief that pleases God that can save a person, and worship that the magistrate coerces hardly seems capable of pleasing him, it seems that the magistrate truly cannot coerce salvific belief—the fundamental premise of such belief is that it cannot and should not be coerced. Anyone who attempts to do so violates the will of God.

---

[273] Letter, 390.

[274] Letter, 406.

[275] Letter, 410.

Jeremy Waldron's recent work emphasizes the point that has been made here about God's will in reference to religious freedom.[276] Waldron argues that religion provides the foundation for equality, natural rights, and freedom in the *Two Treatises*. Humans, to whom God has given the gift of reason, have the ability to develop the abstract idea of God and on that basis enter into a special relation with him. The existence of the rational faculty indicates that a person "has been sent into the world by God, 'by his order and about his business.'"[277] That such a person acts as God's servant, about his business, requires special consideration on the part of the person who believes in this God. "Because creatures capable of abstraction can be conceived as 'all the servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the World by his order, and about his business,' we must treat them as 'his Property, whose Workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one anothers Pleasure' and refrain from destroying or harming or exploiting them."[278] Waldron argues that this consideration undergirds Locke's understanding of what man is and why he is equal.

The special relationship between man and God, by which the former deserves respect and special consideration as the servant of the latter, provides an even stronger foundation for religious liberty than the political liberty to which many scholars restrict the *Two Treatises*. Locke argues that the observance of those things that will lead one to salvation is each person's "highest *obligation*."[279] Why is this one's highest obligation, greater even than the preservation of our life? It is not merely because "there is nothing in this world that is on any consideration in comparison with eternity."[280] It is also because each person's salvation is the business that he is here to accomplish.

---

[276] Waldron, Equality.

[277] Waldron, Equality, 80. For the Locke quotation, see 2T, 6.

[278] Waldron, Equality, 80-1.

[279] Letter, 421. Emphasis added.

Passages from *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, hinting of doctrines shared with proponents of Arianism, reveal why Locke believes God sent each person to work out his own salvation. Locke tells us that we know very little of the visible world, and even less of the intellectual world, "wherein are infinite numbers and degrees of spirits out of reach of our ken or guess."[281] We cannot understand completely why we needed the advent of a Savior to receive forgiveness, and we cannot understand entirely why Christ did it. We do not know "what transactions there were between God and our Savior in reference to his kingdom."[282] Locke argues that we do know, however, that prior to the law of faith and Christ's coming, all men were condemned to eternal death. Consequently, Christ's kingdom would have had no subjects.

> God therefore, out of mercy to mankind and for the erecting of the kingdom of his Son and furnishing it with subjects out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, proposed to the children of men, that as many of them as would believe Jesus his Son . . . to be the Messiah, the promised deliverer, and would receive him for their king and ruler, should have all their past sins, disobedience, and rebellion forgiven them.[283]

It was the desire to give his son a kingdom, as well as mercy for mankind, that led God to give the law of faith. Thus, "their faith . . . should be accounted to them for righteousness," which means that their faith would compensate for their disobedience and

---

[280] Letter, 421.

[281] Reasonableness, 235.

[282] Reasonableness, 234-235.

[283] Reasonableness, 178.

"justify, or make them just, and thereby capable of eternal life."[284] Thus, God gave them the possibility of eternal life and, through that life, gave a kingdom to his son. This kingdom, though, would only exist if humans accomplish the tasks required of them. They must develop sincere belief in Christ, which means that they must consent to become members of his kingdom and become a new person by developing the character of a citizen of his kingdom. That is their business. As in the argument for equality, humans should respect others as the servants of God, leaving them free to accomplish his business as he has commanded them. Equally in spiritual as in the civil interests, , one should "refrain from destroying or harming or exploiting them."[285] One should be tolerant.

3.3.4.4 Strauss and the conflict between reason and revelation

We have assumed throughout our discussion that Locke is Christian, although not entirely orthodox. This is not a universally held view. A number of scholars, most prominently Leo Strauss, have suggested that Locke was not truly religious. I have argued that reason and revelation are limited and complementary. Strauss by contrast argues in his discussion of Locke and natural law that there is a contradiction between reason and revelation.[286] To demonstrate that Locke really develops only a partial natural law, one roughly equivalent to what he sees as the more hedonistic theory of Hobbes, Strauss works to show that reason and revelation are incommensurable in

---

[284] Reasonableness, 178.

[285] Waldron, Equality, 80-1.

[286] Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

Locke's thought.[287] Strauss claims that, for Locke, a rule cannot be a law unless there is a lawgiver who maintains clear and certain punishments when it is violated. Moreover, he distinguishes natural law from divine law, defining the former as those precepts developed entirely from reason and the latter as those given by revelation.[288] For a law to be natural, unaided reason should be able to completely define its rules and obligations. As reason is available to all and all are thus capable of knowing its demands, natural law "obliges man as man."[289] The "law revealed in the gospel," however, obliges only Christians. If one should be able to derive all aspects of natural law from reason, including its obligations, then, Strauss argues, Locke's natural law fails.[290] Locke denies that reason can demonstrate the soul's future existence, and, as a result, natural law is not a law "in the strict sense."[291]

Strauss raises the contradiction between reason and revelation in refuting the argument that revelation sustains natural law by providing the answers that reason cannot. Locke argues that a person may rely on the truthfulness of whatever God says. Therefore, if you can demonstrate that a proposition is a revelation from God, you can be certain that the message is true. Consequently, if reason can demonstrate that scripture, specifically the New Testament, is the word of God, then natural law will be effectively established using the rewards and punishments of an afterlife. As Steven Dworetz notes, however, Strauss builds an interpretation of political thought on the incompatibility of reason and faith; the obedience demanded by faith contradicts the free inquiry required by reason.[292] As proof of the conflict between reason and revelation, Strauss discusses Spinoza, Hobbes, and the deists whom Locke almost certainly read. Strauss argues that "they deny the reality, or at least the certainty," of miracles.[293] Accordingly, one cannot rely on universal assent to the veracity of the New Testament, and it thus cannot establish the sanctions necessary for the precepts of the law of nature to be law.[294]

---

[287] Strauss and his critics in the following argument generally share a common assumption, that Thomas Hobbes was an atheist or, at most, a deist. Moreover, they interpret his writings as advocating a hedonistic system in which a powerful state manipulates and controls our pursuit of pleasure. This is not necessarily a universal understanding of Hobbes. An analysis of this point, though, is beyond the scope of this project.

[288] Strauss, 202.

[289] Strauss, 203.

[290] Strauss here unnecessarily restricts Locke to choosing between two extremes. Many nominalists and scholastics, Thomas Aquinas most notably among the latter, knew that reason could not explain everything.

[291] Strauss, 204.

Moreover, the form in which Strauss understands Locke to have written the *Second Treatise* indicates to him that Locke shared their doubts about the certainty provided by miracles and the compatibility of reason and revelation.[295] Strauss contends that a proper religious argument is one in which the author merely compiles a list of scriptures that sustains his point.[296] That Locke wrote the *Second Treatise* as a document based on natural law and reason rather than quotations from the New Testament means, for Strauss, that Locke believed that a "strictly scriptural natural law teaching" was too difficult.[297] Locke failed to rely on scripture because he knew that one could not demonstrate "the revealed character of scripture" and/or that the law revealed in the New Testament was equivalent to the law of nature.

---

[292] Dworetz, 125-6. This is Strauss's famous split between Athens and Jerusalem.

[293] Strauss, 211.

[294] Strauss, 211-2.

[295] Strauss does tell the reader, though, that his thesis does not depend on Locke sharing those doubts; it only requires Locke's acknowledgement that miracles and revelation are not convincing to others (209). Accordingly, revelation could not uphold natural law.

[296] Strauss, 205.

[297] Strauss, 206.

Strauss contends that the problems with the law of nature led Locke to conceal within it a "partial law of nature."[298] Rather than relying on the New Testament and its doctrine of an afterlife, the laws necessary for a peaceful and prosperous existence could be erected by appealing to convenience, honor, and the rewards and punishments of a powerful state.[299] The gospel's prescriptions to love one another and help one's neighbor are replaced by commands to preserve oneself and merely refrain from harming others.[300] Thus, it is only on the first glance, at the surface of Locke's teaching, that he "seems to reject . . . Hobbes's notion of natural law and to follow the traditional teaching."[301] Rather, Strauss interprets Locke as creating a natural law doctrine that "prescribes an uninhibited Hobbesian hedonism" and fundamentally opposes "the teaching of the Gospel."[302] The natural law teachings, with their trappings of Christian belief, remain only to conceal this more rational, but also more dangerous, doctrine.

The reduction of Locke to an atheist and his thought to a "Hobbesian hedonism" is predicated on reason's inability to sustain natural law. As Ruth Grant explains, however, scholars who criticize or build their theories on contradictions in Locke's thought have largely created those very contradictions by imposing their own understandings on what he says.[303] Primarily, these contradictions develop when scholars force Locke to take a strictly rationalist or strictly voluntarist position. The voluntarist interpretation sees natural law as merely an expression of God's will, which can be known only through revelation or innate ideas.[304] Critics argue that Locke cannot sustain natural law through the strictly voluntarist position, however. The voluntarist position excludes the rationality of nature, such that one cannot understand nature through reason.[305] Locke's rejection of innate ideas, however, leaves only the inadequate means of "sense and reflection," and as a result he cannot uphold natural law.[306] The rationalist position, on the other hand, argues that natural law is "the embodiment of rules of reason that can be known through unaided human reason."[307] Critics who subscribe to the strictly rationalist position argue that Locke fails to uphold natural law because, while reason can establish the rules one should follow, it fails to establish the obligation necessary to make them laws.[308] That a theory is consistent or logical does not mean that one has to obey it.

---

[298] Strauss, 213-4; 219-220.

[299] See Strauss 229 and 231. This again builds upon Strauss's view that reason and revelation are incommensurable. He assumes here that laws and their obligations must be understood entirely by reason or entirely by revelation, and that Locke must have agreed. Although this may not be a controversial assumption in contemporary philosophy, many philosophers would have disagreed during the Middle Ages and the early thought of the Modern Period. See footnote 290.

[300] Strauss, 221n82.

[301] Strauss, 202.

[302] Dworetz, 125.

---

[303] Grant, 24.

[304] Grant, 24.

[305] That voluntarism excludes reason, however, is not a necessary conclusion. Such a conclusion relies upon the more ancient view of reason, in which the universe is rationally ordered and even the divine is controlled by its dictates. Those who ascribed to voluntarist perspectives, however, did not necessarily understand the universe as controlled either by a God of arbitrary will or a God of absolute reason. God could freely choose to act rationally. This is an empirical question that people such as Newton thought they could answer affirmatively.

[306] Grant, 24.

[307] Grant, 24.

[308] As Grant explains, Locke constructs natural law as a demonstrative moral science. One encounters difficulty in creating an obligation from such a science, however, because "logical validity" does not equate with "moral obligation" (Grant, 24).

The realization that Locke was neither strictly rationalist nor strictly voluntarist, but instead combined elements of both positions, resolves the contradictions that critics perceive between Locke's epistemology and his theory of natural law. By combining both rationalist and voluntarist positions, Locke was able to use reason to understand natural law and God's will to establish man's obligation to obey it.[309] Moreover, as we will later see, Locke not only distinguishes "the rationalist criterion of right" from the "theological ground of obligation" to create his moral theory, he also distinguishes both "from the hedonistic psychology of motivation."[310] Grant writes, "Reason can tell a man what is right; his relationship to God is the source of his obligation to do what is right; and he will be motivated to do what is right by his expectations of painful or pleasant consequences of his actions."[311] Thus, there need not be a contradiction between reason and revelation and the laws derived from each.[312] Any such inconsistency results only when the interpreter imposes his own understanding of natural law and divine will on

---

[309] Grant, 25.

[310] Grant, 44. The additional distinction is made necessary by Locke's epistemology, which divides ideas into those that represent things that actually exist and those that are "Dependences on, or Affections of Substances" (Essay II.xii.4). Locke's nominalism leads him to reject the possibility of certain knowledge of the former. We may have knowledge of the latter, however, as they are creations of our minds and not really existent things of which our finite minds can have only partial knowledge. Locke says that one can build a demonstrative moral science, such as the law of nature, out of the latter. One must, however, discover how those ideas can be applied to reality and not just be an arbitrary creation of the human mind. As Grant explains, the additional distinction between the ideas of obligation and right and the means necessary to motivate humans is necessary to explaining how a demonstrative moral science may represent reality and become a standard for human existence (Grant, 12-51).

[311] Grant, 44.

[312] Indeed, Locke claims that natural law is divine law. John Locke, Letter to Tyrell, 4 August 1690, in Lord Peter King, *The Life of John Locke with Extracts from His Correspondence, Journals and Common-Place Books*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), 1:366-73; quoted in Grant, 26.

Locke's thought. A closer reading of the text, one sensitive to word usage and context, eliminates most of the contradictions one encounters.[313]

That the resolution of the conflict between reason and revelation relies partially on the expectation of pleasure and pain, however, still leaves open the charge that Locke employs a hedonism that opposes Christian teachings. The impulse to obey merely out of concern for one's personal comfort might betray a self-centeredness in conflict with Christian prescriptions to love God and care for one's neighbor. Dworetz, reminding the reader of Mill's critique of Christian ethics and morality, contends that Locke's hedonism does not set Locke's theory apart from Christianity, but does separate it from that of Hobbes.[314] Mill asserts that Christian morality was not the product of Christ and his apostles, but resulted from the additions of later Christians, often in opposition to the religions and systems of morality they encountered. Mill feels that the morality they created, reliant upon the "hope of heaven and the threat of hell," fell short of the morality of the "best of the ancients."[315] Rather than lead virtuous lives because they felt they had a duty to their "fellow-creatures," men led moral lives to receive a reward. Human morality became mercenary. Dworetz notes, however, that this was not a "Hobbesian hedonism."[316] He argues that, for Hobbes, men only lived moral lives out of fear of the overwhelming power of the state. Locke, however, felt that eternal rewards and punishments create an uneasiness in man that eclipses that produced by mundane rewards and punishments. This uneasiness is the rational anticipation of the pleasures and pains that a person expects as the consequences of his actions. Once a person comes to understand the eternal consequences of obedience and disobedience, the anticipation of divine rewards and punishments should overcome the pull of present pleasures and pains. Accordingly, as the threat of a future life has such power to control the individual, Locke believed that public order and prosperity was possible despite a less powerful, more restrained state. This distinction between what he sees as the hedonisms of Hobbes and Locke is critical, Dworetz contends, because it explains the difference between Hobbes's despotic Leviathan and Locke's constitutional government.

---

[313] Grant, 9. See also Francis Oakley, "Locke, Natural Law and God—Again," *History of Political Thought* XVIII, No. 4 (Winter 1997): 624-651.

[314] Dworetz, 119.

[315] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. with an introduction and notes by John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; 1998), 56.

[316] Dworetz, 119.

Grant also distinguishes Locke's thought from a simple (Hobbesian) hedonism. Locke explains that, while eternal rewards and punishments can lead men to obedience, their appetites frequently lead them in directions that, if unrestrained, would overturn all morality.[317] Moreover, there is nothing innate in a person's appetites that explicitly delineates what will lead that person to the greatest pleasure or pain—that determination requires the individual to exercise his judgment. Thus, not only can men's appetites destroy morality, but, if good and evil were merely associated with those things that bring us pleasure and pain, their divergent appetites would create contradictory moral standards.

Thus, for morality to be a part of natural law, it must involve more than the simple idea of pleasure and pain. Grant explains that Locke's very idea of knowledge requires moral truths to be more than "calculations of convenience and social utility."[318]

---

[317] Essay I.iii.3; I.iii.13.

[318] Grant, 42.

"Moral knowledge and moral action are possible only through the operations of reason in conjunction with the 'inclinations of the Appetite to good.'"[319] Moral knowledge requires that men pursue pleasure and avoid pain in the correct things, in those things that reason has determined are right and wrong. Humans were given the ability to suspend judgment. Thus, they can refrain from willing the action called for by immediate pleasures or pains and analyze how that action will affect their future lives. They can then act according to what brings them the most pleasure and pain in light of the present and future consequences.[320] This ability to suspend judgment makes men accountable for their actions, and it allows them to be moral beings. They can pursue not just what feels good, but what is morally good. This requires the schooling of their appetites according to what they have determined to be right and wrong.

The education of one's appetites corresponds with the development of the new person required by repentance. As we saw above, Locke feels that a person who believes in Christ must, when he receives Christ as a "king and ruler," live in "sincere obedience."[321] In the *Letter*, one of Locke's worries about coerced belief and worship was the "hypocrisy" and "contempt" of God to which it would lead.[322] Obeying God's commandments merely out of the mercenary desire to use him for rewards and punishments, grudgingly obeying while wishing to do anything but those actions required by divine law, would seem to do demonstrate an even greater “contempt of . . . divine majesty.” Locke probably does not accept Luther and Augustine’s notion that the turning around of conversion requires the Spirit to completely dominate the person, controlling the individual’s will and completely reforming a sinner into a saint. He does, however, argue that the repentance involved in becoming a sincere believer involves becoming a new person, one who develops new desires and a attitude of love toward others. Thus, the sincere belief of Christianity requires “holiness of life, purity of manners,” “benignity,” “meekness of spirit,” “charity,” and faith that works by love. Otherwise, a person merely “[usurps] the name of Christian.”[323] In these characteristics, sincere belief requires much more than a “hedonistic Christianity.” Furthermore, inasmuch as one’s obedience is truly tied to Christ’s commandments to love one another, it seems that it should require more than Mill’s self-interested concern for others.[324] In light of the commandments to love one another, Locke declares that “no man can be a Christian without charity, and without that faith which works . . . by love.”[325] Inasmuch as a Christian truly follows what Locke understands to be Christianity, he cares for others not out of self-interest properly understood, or even out of duty, but out of genuine love and concern.[326]

---

[319] Grant, 43; quoting Essay, I.iii.3.

[320] Locke argues that this ability to suspend action in order to analyze the consequences is mistook as free-will. Also, we should note here that through similar ideas of calculating pleasures and pains, whereby one experiences present pains and foregoes present pleasures in anticipation of future rewards and punishments, that philosophies like that of the Epicureans escape hedonism.

[321] Reasonableness, 178.

[322] Letter, 394-395.

As we have seen, Locke neither introduces contradictions that invalidate the law of nature, nor produces a natural law that opposes Christian doctrine. The question of the incompatibility of reason and revelation nonetheless remains. Strauss treats the teachings of reason and revelation as distinct entities that divide and make claims on different parts of one's identity. He argues that Locke preserves "the distinction between the law of reason, which obliges man as man, and the law revealed in the gospel, which obliges Christians."[327] To sustain this claim, he quotes from one of Locke's defenses of *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, wherein Locke writes, "As men, we have God for our King, and are under the law of reason: as Christians, we have Jesus the Messiah for our King, and are under the law revealed by him in the Gospel. And though every Christian, both as a Deist and a Christian, be obliged to study both the law of nature and the revealed law. . . ."[328] Strauss takes this passage as proof that, for Locke, reason and revelation are incommensurable. That is, to know the laws revealed by reason and revelation, one must study them separately.

---

[323] Letter, 390.

[324] Mill, 66.

[325] Letter, 390.

[326] Indeed, as we will discuss in the final section of the chapter, the law of nature seems to teach somewhat the same lesson. Reason teaches each person that they have a duty to aid others in their self-preservation, subject to the limitation that a person does not have to endanger his own life to save that of others.

For Strauss, though, Locke does not merely find reason and revelation incommensurable, Locke rejects revelation. This conclusion derives from his understanding of the *Second Treatise* as a strictly rational work, the contradictions he sees within Locke's work, and his understanding of the role of philosophers within the tradition of political philosophy. A true philosopher cannot follow biblical religion because the lives required by philosophy and faith oppose one another.[329] The conflict between faith and philosophy is that of "a life of obedient love versus a life of free insight."[330] Thus, as someone whom Strauss considered devoted to the life of philosophy and was familiar with the arguments and problems raised by rationalists and deists, Locke must have been one of them.[331]

---

[327] Strauss, 203.

[328] John Locke, *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*, vol. 7, *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, 12th ed. (London: Thomas Davison, 1823), 229.

[329] Dworetz, 126.

The opposition between reason and revelation depends on a caricature of religious argumentation. Strauss claims that a scriptural teaching on natural law would not be a complex argument; it would be nothing more than a list of properly arranged scriptures.[332] That Locke failed to write the *Second Treatise* as a list of scriptures, but wrote it instead in what Strauss sees as a very secular and rationalist form, indicates to him that Locke was a deist who doubted the certainty of scripture, the equivalency of the natural law and divine law, or both. Strauss's view, however, merely represents many theorists' condescension toward religious argumentation. As Jeremy Waldron writes, "Secular theorists often assume" that a religious argument must be "a crude prescription from God, backed up with threat of hellfire, derived from general or particular revelation," which "they contrast . . . with the elegant complexity of a philosophical argument by Rawls (say) or Dworkin."[333]

Strauss here ignores that the *First* and *Second Treatises* are both part of the same work and that the *First Treatise* is in many ways a scriptural refutation of the divine right of kings, although its argument is much more complex than a mere list of scriptures.

---

[330] Strauss, 74-75; quoted in Dworetz, 126.

[331] Dworetz, 123.

[332] Strauss, 205.

[333] Waldron, Equality, 20. Waldron believes that one of the outcomes of his analysis of the theological foundations for equality in Locke's thought is to demonstrate that religious arguments need not be so simplistic. The realization that religious arguments can be as sophisticated as other philosophical argumentation will, he argues, enrich political and philosophical debate, as the former challenges many of our easy assumptions and answers and expands our notions of what may be considered an argument.

Given that Strauss seems to ignore the religious elements of the *First Treatise* and his view of proper, compelling religious arguments as coarse and unsophisticated, it would not be surprising if he were to miss a complex and subtle religious argument in the *Second Treatise*.[334] The presence of such an argument, however, would undermine the view that the *Second Treatise*, as a secular work, is evidence of Locke's rationalism and of the contradiction between reason and revelation. Indeed, other scholars have found religious belief permeating Locke's thought, including the *Second Treatise*. John Dunn argues that the *Two Treatises on Government* is "saturated with Christian assumptions—and those of a Christianity in which the New Testament counted very much more than the Old."[335] Dunn notes that, although they are not specifically cited, the teachings of Christ and Paul are critical to Locke's foundation for equality in that work. As we saw above, Waldron agrees, arguing that Locke's "argument for creaturely equality will not work" without the relationship between God and man given in Locke's understanding of Christianity.[336]

Moreover, one must look more closely at the passage Strauss cites: "As men, we have God for our King, and are under the law of reason: as Christians, we have Jesus the Messiah for our King, and are under the law revealed by him in the Gospel. And though every Christian, both as a Deist and a Christian, be obliged to study both the law of nature and the revealed law . . ." In this passage, Locke does not in fact support the position that the law of reason and the law of revelation are incommensurable and must be studied individually for each to be understood.[337] Concealed in Strauss's ellipsis is Locke's belief that a person studies both laws "that in them he may know the will of God, and of Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent." In them one learns the will of God regardless of the medium—reason or Christ. To emphasize this point, Locke adds, "in neither of these laws is there to be found a select set of fundamentals, distinct from the rest, which are to make him a Deist, or a Christian."

---

[334] Strauss argues that, if revelation truly supported natural law, then the proper way to write a tract on government would "consist of properly arranged quotations from Scripture and especially from the New Testament. Accordingly, one would expect that Locke would have written a 'Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture Sainte.' But, in fact, he wrote his *Two Treatises of Government.*"

[335] John Dunn, *Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 99; quoted in Waldron, Equality, 12.

[336] Waldron, Equality, 215. Waldron adds that it is still a puzzle why Locke does not explicitly reference Christ in the *Second Treatise*, but offers some conjectures.

Furthermore, it is not just in Locke's defense of *The Reasonableness of Christianity* that he equates the teachings of reason with those of revelation. Dworetz notes at least two other works in which Locke equates reason and revelation as expressions of the same, divine will.[338] In *Essays on the Law of Nature*, Locke declares that the laws revealed by reason and revelation "differ only in method of promulgation and in the way in which we know them."[339] In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke explains that by divine law he means "that Law which God has set to the actions of Men, whether promulgated to them by the light of Nature, or the voice of revelation."[340] Later in the same work, Locke adds, "*Reason* is natural *Revelation*, whereby [God] . . . communicates to Mankind that portion of Truth, which he has laid within the reach of their natural Faculties."[341] Moreover, "*Revelation* is natural *Reason* enlarged by a new set of Discoveries communicated by GOD immediately." In addition, Dworetz notes instances in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, the *First Treatise*, the *Second Treatise*, and the *Letter*, where Locke argues that reason and revelation together sustain a given point.[342] Locke would have found it difficult to use reason and revelation simultaneously to support his argument if they conveyed "mutually exclusive laws."[343]

---

[337] Locke, Second Vindication, 229.

[338] Dworetz, 126-128.

[339] John Locke, "Essay 6," in *Essays on the Law of Nature*, trans. and ed. with an introduction and notes by W. Von Leyden, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 189.

[340] Essay, II.xxviii.8.

Locke's declaration that reason is natural revelation leads us to examine how they are related in his works. As Grant declares, Locke believes in a purposive creation. If reason and revelation declare the same things, it seems that neither could be superfluous without frustrating creation's purposiveness. Indeed, it is in this parsimony that Strauss criticizes Locke's natural law theory, for reason's reliance on revelation to demonstrate a future existence and thus sustain natural law. Strauss's discussion of the point seems to imply, at least regarding natural law, that Locke initially declares that reason is inferior to revelation. He substantiates his claim that natural law fails by referring the reader to Locke's declarations that reason cannot prove the immortality of the soul. The passages to which Strauss refers the reader, though, reveal that Locke believes in the inferiority of neither reason nor revelation. They are complementary methods of attaining the knowledge necessary for salvation, and neither would be sufficient without the other. Locke's replies to the Bishop of Worcester, who accuses Locke of undermining Christianity by limiting the powers of reason, are especially interesting. In his second response, Locke does not subordinate reason, but sustains the ability to trust in the certainty of religious propositions despite reason's inability to substantiate them. Locke declares that the Bishop's position is unbecoming of a true Christian.[344] It demonstrates a "bare skepticism" that one would distrust God's word unless reason can confirm it. Such a view implies that "God is not to be believed on his own word, unless what he reveals be in itself credible, and might be believed without him." With less hyperbole, Locke explains that requiring reason to substantiate every doctrine given by revelation would be "to resolve all revelation perfectly and purely into natural reason, to bound its credibility by that, and leave no room for faith in other things, than what can be accounted for by natural reason without revelation."[345] As this doctrine would "subvert the very foundations of the Christian faith," Locke declares that it is not "to be found in any of [his] writings."[346]

---

[341] Essay, IV.xix.4.

[342] Dworetz, 127-128. Reason and revelation "both together witness" that the New Testament provides God's standard of morality (Reasonableness, 242); neither scripture nor reason sustain the doctrine of divine right (1T, 4); that God gave an abundance to mankind is "the Voice of Reason confirmed by Inspiration" (2T, 31); "The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind, as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it . . ." (Letter, 393). Other places where they mutually sustain principles in the *Second Treatise*, not cited by Dworetz, include 2T, 25; 52. Locke also discusses God giving man reason: 2T, 26; 56; 172.

[343] Dworetz, 127.

More important in these passages than Locke's insistence that reason cannot prove a future life is his belief that a person can rely on the truths imparted by revelation when reason falls silent. The opposite is also true. When reason or revelation reaches its limits and falls silent, one may safely rely on whatever truth the other gives.[347] The truth of the silent medium is “assisted and improved, not “injured” or “disturbed,” by the other’s aid. This is necessarily so because the truths revealed by both come from God, “the Eternal Fountain of all Knowledge.”[348]

---

[344] John Locke, "Mr. Locke's Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Second Letter," vol. 4, *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, 12th ed. (London: Thomas Davison, 1823), 474. This work will hereafter be cited as Second Reply.

[345] Second Reply, 482.

[346] Second Reply, 475.

When he argues that reason cannot substantiate natural law, Strauss is framing his larger contention that revelation is opposed to and inferior to reason, and that Locke’s natural law theory fails because of its reliance on the former. Sweeping away the crumbling exterior of the natural law theory, Strauss believes that one discovers a residual natural law argument in opposition to the New Testament and its teachings. Strauss’s intentions for these passages, though, are in direct contradiction to what Locke says in them. Locke indeed declares that reason cannot demonstrate the existence of a future life, but it is hardly surprising that he would regard reason as limited. He opens the *Essay*, his treatise on human knowledge, by comparing man to a sailor on an “Ocean of *Being*” of a “boundless Extent.”[349] Later, in his discussion of the relation between faith and reason, he reminds the reader that there are many things about which “we have very imperfect Notions, or none at all.”[350] In those instances, we lack knowledge from any source, whether reason or revelation. There are some matters, however, about which we can have no knowledge by reason, but in which faith can still guide us. Indeed, when reason relies on uncertain evidence and can accordingly support a proposition only upon probable grounds, revelation may determine our assent although it contradicts reason. "For where the Principles of Reason have not evidenced a Proposition to be certainly true or false, there clear *Revelation*, as another Principle of Truth, and Ground of Assent, may determine; and so it may be Matter of *Faith*, and be also above *Reason*."[351] The existence of an afterlife, "that the dead shall rise and live again," is one of those instances when revelation can determine our assent.[352]

---

[347] Essay, IV.xviii.9-10.

[348] Essay, IV.xviii.10.

[349] Essay, I.i.6-7.

[350] Essay, IV.xviii.7.

More important than the ultimate status of our knowledge about a future life, however, is Locke's insistence on modesty in our claims to knowledge. Just as the sailor does not need to know the ultimate depth of the ocean, but only the length of his sounding-line, so humans only need to know enough to correctly regulate their conduct in this world. Reason and revelation, Locke feels, can give humans enough light to fulfill their duties in this life and have certainty of attaining a better one.[353]

Strauss, however, argues that the uncertainty of revelation prevents it from upholding Locke's natural law theory. He believes that this uncertainty is sufficiently demonstrated by Locke's failure to use religion to sustain the *Second Treatise* and the failure of deists and some prominent philosophers, whom Locke should have respected, to assent to the evidence provided by miracles. We have already seen that other scholars have seen substantial religious content in the *Second Treatise*, in fact that its arguments depend upon its religious assumptions. An important issue remains, however; how does

---

[351] Essay, IV.xviii.9.

[352] Essay, IV.xviii.7. Locke emphasizes that putting revelation above reason's conclusions in these matters does not undermine reason or the foundations of knowledge. Although our evidence leads us to assent to one proposition, another could easily be true due to our limited and uncertain evidence in that matter. Thus, one can rely upon revelation "as another Principle of Assent."

[353] Essay, I.i.5.

Locke reconcile the certainty that revelation is supposed to confer with its rejection by so many? Recalling the introduction to the *Essay*, one can see how Locke would explain skepticism of what he would consider to be religious truths. Locke hoped that the *Essay* would help us discover the limits of human knowledge and the concomitant boundaries between those things that our understandings can illuminate and those things that must remain in darkness.[354] Those who founder in skepticism are those who have wandered into the depths of the "Ocean of *Being*," places where they could find no footing. Lacking any foundation through their wanderings, they declare that all certainty is impossible. Thus, failing to properly comprehend their own powers of understanding, they deny that which would give them "Light enough to lead them to the Knowledge of their Maker, and the sight of their own Duties."[355] Their own misunderstandings lead them to reject revelation, which would put within their reach the discovery of "the comfortable Provision for this Life and the Way that leads to a better."

Despite Locke's rejection of skepticism, he also recognizes dangers surrounding the medium of revelation. It involves uncertainties that subordinate its epistemic value to that of pure reason. Although he argues that anything God says is undoubtedly true, one's recognition that God actually said something is a matter of judgment. The danger in relying upon inner light is that it is difficult to distinguish this light from the strength of one's own persuasion, which Locke defines as enthusiasm, or even from the delusions of Satan.[356] Locke, however, doubts that God would leave one in such a state of uncertainty, and asserts that, when God gives revelation, he leaves those to whom it is directed with the rational capacity to ascertain with a high degree of certainty that it is from God.[357] Reason confirms that a message is revelation by verifying that it is consistent with the word of God, whether the latter comes through reason or already confirmed revelation.[358] In those instances in which revelation concerns propositions with which there is nothing to compare, Locke claims that God gives signs to confirm that the message comes from him. Reason, however, must confirm that those signs are miracles. Thus, reason for Locke works to sustain and not undermine revelation.

---

[354] Essay, I.i.7.

[355] Essay, I.i.5.

[356] Essay, IV.xix.11-13. For more on enthusiasm, see Essay, IV.xix.

This does not mean that one can claim to know revelation is true, only that one can assent to its truthfulness with a high degree of certainty. The passage Strauss quotes shows that, for Locke, the knowledge gained by revelation is less certain than the knowledge gained by reason. "For whatsoever Truth we come to the clear discover of, from the Knowledge and Contemplation of our own *Ideas*, will always be certainer to us, than those which are conveyed to us by *Traditional Revelation*."[359] A person will always be more certain of knowledge produced by measuring ideas in one's own mind than of truths one hears from another. This condemns, however, not just revelation, but also history and any other field of knowledge in which one relies on the written or oral testimony of others. Someone who witnesses an event will always be more certain of it than those who learn of it through their testimony. Indeed, Locke discusses history among the truths about which one cannot claim certain knowledge. After analyzing the many factors governing the confidence that one can have in it, he assures the reader that one should not understand him to "lessen the Credit and use of *History*."[360] He adds that "we receive from it a great part of the useful Truths we have, with a *convincing* evidence."[361]

---

[357] Indeed, reason must be used to interpret the revelation and even to have the ideas necessary to receive it from others (Essay, IV.xviii.3).

[358] Essay, IV.xix.15-16.

[359] Essay, IV.xviii.4.

Locke concludes the section on assent with a category of propositions whose certainty rivals that of knowledge. He writes, "there is one sort of Propositions that challenge the highest Degree of our Assent, upon bare Testimony," whether it agrees with our experience or our understanding of natural laws.[362] Such testimony is incontrovertible for Locke because it comes from God, one who cannot deceive.[363] This testimony, which Locke defines as revelation, "carries with it Assurance beyond Doubt" and "Evidence beyond Exception." Faith, which Locke defines as assent to the truthfulness of revelation, "absolutely determines our Minds, and as perfectly excludes all wavering as our Knowledge it self; and we may as well doubt of our own Being, as we can, whether any Revelation from GOD be true." Thus, we can be certain of God's truthfulness.

Furthermore, according to Locke, we can be reasonably certain that a given revelation is from God, and thus true. "So that Faith is a setled [sic] and sure Principle of Assent and Assurance, and leaves no manner of room for Doubt or Hesitation." One's faith, one's assent that the message comes from God, may be certain beyond all "Doubt or Hesitation."[364] Locke did not believe that enthusiasm or other forms of delusion undermine the certainty one can have in revelation, or that truth was wasted in propositions about which one could have no assurance. Locke believed that we may safely receive revelation as true so long as it is confirmed by internal or external evidences.[365]

---

[360] Essay, IV.xvi.11.

[361] Essay, IV.xvi.11. Emphasis added.

[362] Essay, IV.xvi.14.

[363] Essay, IV.xvi.14. See also Essay, IV.xviii.8.

The "internal" evidences that a given revelation comes from God include that revelation's conformity to the light of reason or its conformity to existing, "attested Revelation." Locke asserts that God gives external evidences when such internal evidences are lacking. Such external evidence includes power "to justify the Truth" of a prophet's commission and "visible Signs," or miracles, to demonstrate the "divine Authority of the Message" he is sent with.[366]

As Peter Harrison discusses, the belief in miracles by the leading scientists and philosophers of the seventeenth century, those responsible for establishing the view of a mechanistic universe, has puzzled the best of scholars.[367] They find it difficult to reconcile the mechanistic, law-bound universe that these scientists and philosophers advocated with their belief in a God of miracles, which were violations of those laws. Nevertheless, "those figures who were at the forefront of an advancing mechanical science were also the most staunch defenders of miracles. The Christian virtuosi of the Royal Society . . . insisted not only that miracles could take place but that they played a vital role in establishing the truth of Christian religion." Harrison notes that many scholars assert either that these scientists and philosophers led "strange dichotomous mental lives" or that they reconciled their views with assumptions that the progress of human thought revealed to be conflicting.[368] Harrison, however, argues that we create these inconsistencies by forcing the Scholastic understanding of miracles on these scientists. Newton and his contemporaries, according to Harrison, resorted instead to an alternate view of miracles, one closer to that of Augustine, which avoided many of the conceptual inconsistencies that we see between a mechanistic universe and miracle, and thus between reason and revelation.

---

[364] Essay, IV.xvi.14.

[365] Essay, IV.xix.15.

[366] Essay, IV.xix.15.

[367] Peter Harrison, "Newtonian Science, Miracles, and the Law of Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56.4 (Oct., 1995): 531.

Harrison thus demonstrates that some of the greatest scientists and philosophers of Locke's age were not rocked by the criticisms of deists and rationalists. Rather, they developed ways to reconcile faith and the new science, both of which they advocated with fervor. Thus, judging Locke by his contemporaries rather than our own views of faith and science, we can reasonably take Locke at his word about the compatibility, indeed symbiosis, of reason and revelation. This view is made even more probable by Newton and Locke's friendship, and by Newton's paranoia about protecting his religious views from those who did not share them.[369]

---

[368] Harrison, 532.

[369] Of course, Strauss and others might claim that this interpretation fails to take into account the esoteric messages of Locke's writings, that it has become lost in the exoteric message meant to fool the censors who would suppress his message and the masses who would be harmed by it. Ruth Grant writes that one must show caution in imposing an exoteric/esoteric distinction on Locke's writings, especially when the esoteric doctrine would contradict the exoteric teaching (Grant, 8-9). She notes that Locke emphasizes that "proper writing should clearly and consistently state the author's meaning," and that the reader should approach a text "looking for the plain sense of the language and for its chain of logical argument." Indeed, as we saw above, one of Locke's concerns in establishing a free mind is that people will approach a text with a preexisting interpretation, rather than analyzing it to understand what it means without the accretions of a given party's doctrines (CU, 213-4). The latter is, however, what Dworetz claims that Strauss does in his interpretation of Locke (125-6). Dworetz criticizes Strauss's method for dismissing all evidence in a text

Locke neither believed in a conflict between natural law and the New Testament nor between reason and revelation. Indeed, as the arguments on the necessity of sincere belief for salvation have shown, belief is neither blind nor passive. Reason is integral to belief, and it is partially upon the command that we exercise our powers of reason to develop salvific belief that Locke develops his theory of toleration. Nevertheless, although this work argues that Locke believed himself to be a true Christian, whether he believed his interpretation of Christianity is not ultimately critical to this work's thesis. That is, the most important point we can take from this work is that Locke was able to either recover or create an interpretation of Christianity that sustained toleration. As the final chapter's discussion of the development of toleration in the early American republic will reveal, Locke's interpretation and those like it were important in the development of religious liberty.

3.3.5 Nature of true Christianity

Locke closes *A Letter Concerning Toleration* by admonishing civil and ecclesiastical leaders that true Christianity is pacific and loving. Moreover, he prays that "God Almighty" may grant "that the Gospel of Peace may at length be preached."[370] If his prayer were granted, he believes that civil magistrates would act like good fathers to their countries, in part by confining themselves to the civil welfare of "their children." Ecclesiastical leaders, for their part, would walk "peaceably and modestly in the apostles' steps, without intermeddling with state affairs, [and] apply themselves wholly to promote

---

that contradicts one's desired interpretation and for shielding itself from substantive criticism by dismissing all other interpretations as failing to understand how to read texts (128-9).

[370] Letter, 433.

the salvation of souls." Locke argues that civil and ecclesiastical leaders who act otherwise do not truly care for the civil and spiritual welfare of those over whom they are stewards. Furthermore, he declares that they do not care about the true character of Christianity. In the latter argument, he relies on his description of true Christianity in the *Letter*'s introduction. Given the pacific and loving nature that Locke ascribes to Christianity, one might wonder how so many Christians could be so oppressive. Locke works in the bulk of the *Letter* to discredit every possible motive for persecution. He argues that oppression leads to violence rather than peace, that coercion cannot instill saving belief, that persecution leads to error instead of truth, and, indeed, that persecution defies the nature of civil and ecclesiastical government. Given these considerations, Locke concludes that ambition, avarice, and the desire for dominion are the true motives for persecution. After stripping persecution of its religious and social justifications, Locke enjoins leaders to adopt the true attributes of the Christian character they profess.

Locke introduces the *Letter* with the declaration "that toleration [is] the chief characteristical mark of the true Church."[371] He argues that the proper practice of true Christianity necessarily leads to toleration. This is because Christianity "carries the greatest opposition to covetousness, ambition, discord, contention, and all manner of inordinate desires; and is the most modest and peaceable religion that ever was."[372] Someone who aspires to be a Christian must "make war upon his own lusts and vices," striving to regulate his life according to "rules of virtue and piety."[373] One thus develops

---

[371] Letter, 390.

[372] Letter, 431.

[373] Letter, 390.

"holiness of life, purity of manners, and benignity and meekness of spirit."[374] The attributes of this Christian character are incompatible with persecution because the latter aims for "power and empire," for the "erection of an external pomp," and the exercise of "compulsive force" to dominate another. The desire for power and glory, to dominate and control others, contradicts the introspective self-regulation and meekness that Locke sees in Christianity.

Moreover, Locke asserts that no one can be a Christian without charity and faith that works by love. This charity and love, for Locke, requires a person to care for the lives and salvation of others.[375] This concern for others, though, requires one's own conversion. Others will treat a person's concern as disingenuous and ignore his efforts on their behalf if they see that he does not care for his own soul. Thus, someone who sincerely desires to help others must secure his own conversion first. The turning around of conversion requires that person to adopt the purity of morals Locke sees as necessary to Christianity. Consequently, a person who sincerely desires to help others' souls cannot persecute, because the character necessary to aid others in their conversion prohibits it.

The precepts of love and charity also prohibit persecution in a way much more direct and obvious than the requirement that a person must be converted before converting others. Persecutors, pretending that they love God and those they persecute,

---

[374] To sustain this characterization, Locke quotes Christ's admonitions to his disciples in Luke 22, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise Lordship over them . . . but ye shall not be so." Letter, 390. See Luke 22:25-26.

[375] While discussing the magistrate's duties of toleration, Locke stipulates that toleration does not mean that one ceases striving to help others achieve salvation. Toleration only means that one abandons the use of civil power and adopts the means legitimately available to every person. Locke writes, "But a charitable care, which consists in teaching, admonishing, and persuading, cannot be denied unto any man" (Letter, 405).

"deprive [the persecuted] of their estates, maim them with corporal punishments, starve and torment them, . . .and in the end even take away their lives."[376] When he talks of the persecutor's burning zeal, he reminds us that the persecutor literally burns others "with fire and faggot." That such persecution develops from love and a desire to help another seems preposterous to Locke. He cannot see how persecutors love and befriend those they "persecute, torment, destroy, and kill . . . upon pretence of religion."[377] Locke's tone and word choice demonstrate his disbelief that the persecutor loves those whom he persecutes. He writes, "That any man should think fit to cause another man whose salvation he heartily desires to expire in torments, and that even in an unconverted state, would . . .seem very strange to me."[378] Someone who truly loves another would not torture and kill that person in an unconverted state, sending him to eternal death. Persecution and the attributes of true Christianity are, for Locke, incongruous.

Several considerations also demonstrate that persecutors fall short of a sincere love of God and his commandments. In their supposed zeal to uphold the latter, persecutors fail to see the far greater sins of their friends. Locke writes,

> For if it be out of a principle of charity, as they pretend, and love to men's souls, that they deprive them of their estates, maim them with corporal punishments, starve and torment them in noisome prisons, and in the end even take away their lives; I say if all this be done merely to make men Christians, and procure their salvation, why then do they suffer 'whoredom, fraud, malice, and such like enormities' (Rom. I), which . . . manifestly relish of heathenish corruption, to predominate so much and about amongst their flocks and people?[379]

---

[376] Letter, 391.

[377] Letter, 391.

[378] Letter, 392.

[379] Letter, 391.

That persecutors blind themselves to the major sins of their friends and associates, while violently punishing the minor sins or doctrinal differences of others, demonstrates to Locke that persecutors care little about God's commandments.

Locke argues that the importance persecutors place in ceremonies and elaborate theologies, which have little to do with the requirements Christ declared necessary for salvation, provide even stronger evidence that persecutors do not care about God, his commandments, or others' souls. In their "burning zeal" for the "nice and intricate matters" of their own creation, they "pass by those moral vices and wickednesses without any chastisement, which are acknowledged by all men to be diametrically opposite to the profession of Christianity."[380] This zeal to burn "with fire and faggot" demonstrates a desire to build one's own kingdom and power, not that of God. As we have seen, Locke declares that persecutors demonstrate that they do not love or care for others by causing them "to expire in torments, and that even in an unconverted state."[381] How can persecutors pretend that their goal is to save a person's soul when they kill him before he has done those things necessary for his salvation? If we admit, however, that persecutors care more for their own dominion than for Christ's kingdom or another's soul, Locke feels that we should feel little surprise that persecutors use "arms that do not belong to the Christian warfare."[382]

The "arms" of "Christian warfare," although expressed by Locke in militaristic tones, are altogether different from those used by the power-hungry and the ambitious.

---

[380] Letter, 391.

[381] Letter, 392.

[382] Letter, 392.

As we have seen, God established the conditions whereby the law of faith was to compensate for man's inability to fulfill the law of works. *The Reasonableness of Christianity* explains that the law of faith requires us to believe that Christ was the son of God. To be effectual, this belief has to be earnestly sought using the reason God has given man, and must be attended with a reformation of character and other signs that one accepts Christ as one's king. In his ministry, Christ, whom Locke calls the "captain of our salvation" and the "prince of peace," established a method whereby we are to learn the conditions that make justification possible.[383] Rather than seeing Christianity as a source of persecution and violence, some have blamed it for propagating a doctrine that weakened the passions and undermined ancient civilization. Locke also draws our attention to the effect that Christianity had on the spirit of the ancient world. He tells us that Christ "sent out his soldiers [as missionaries] to the subduing of nations and gathering them in to his Church."[384] This "subduing of nations" is the cumulative effect of proselytizing and gathering into Christ's church, not violence. It results from the efforts of Christ's true followers to convince others to accept him as their king. Christ charged his "soldiers" to accomplish these tasks, "not armed with the sword, or other instruments of force, but prepared with the gospel of peace, and with the exemplary holiness of their conversions."[385] They were to spread the "gospel of peace" by their testimonies and their examples of righteousness. Finally, to those who would still persist in wringing the necessity of persecution out of scripture, Locke attempts an appeal to common sense. If they truly believe that Christ is the son of God, endowed with all of the powers of an omnipotent God, why would he need our insignificant powers to coerce others' conversions? If Christ really desired to compel belief, he has far more powerful weapons. Locke writes, "It was much more easy for him to do it with armies of heavenly legions, than for any son of the Church, how potent soever, with all his dragoons."[386]

---

[383] See Reasonableness, 179.

[384] Letter, 393.

[385] Letter, 393.

Locke concludes the introduction to the *Letter* with the assertion that, "The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind, as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it in so clear a light."[387] The gospel requires purity of character and a love-inspired concern for others' salvation. Thus, Locke argues that Christ's teachings clearly obligate all who would be true Christians to adopt those principles and attributes that result in toleration.

3.3.5.1 Moving beyond mere toleration

For Locke, a Christian is not merely obligated to be tolerant, he must care for those who are different from him. Locke argues that we have a duty to care and respect for others, but he tempers this duty and its obligations with respect for every person's conscience and rights. To understand this love and care for others, it is helpful to notice that both reason and revelation demand toleration. As we saw above, Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity* describes a relationship between reason and revelation in which the two sustain one another and satisfy one another's defects. Similarly, the

---

[386] Letter, 393.

[387] Letter, 393.

Second Treatise tells us that reason and revelation equally sustain many important principles, and that reason itself is a gift from God for preserving and regulating our lives.[388] Among these principles is the right to self-preservation, which is sustained by a fundamental equality between human beings. The *First Treatise* attacks the foundations on which people attempted to justify the inherent power of some to rule, and the inherent subjection of others. The *Second Treatise* establishes the equality of human beings in the obligation of stewardship that each person has over his or her own life. Humans, by their creation, are God's property and are obligated to live according to God's "pleasure."[389] No one else has the right to decide whether we will live or die, nor to impede us from those things necessary to our self-preservation. The law of nature is revealed to us through our God-given reason, and each person is obligated to preserve his life. Indeed, to avoid breaking the law of nature and consequently violating God's will, we must never take another person's life or impair his ability to gain those things necessary to it.[390] The law of nature, though, does not just command us to do no harm to others. It requires each person to do "as much as he can, *to preserve the rest of Mankind*."[391]

Thus, to guarantee our own self-preservation, we have rights to those things necessary to it—life, liberty, and estate. Moreover, the law of nature's universal dictate for self-preservation also limits our rights and attaches to them a duty. Our rights can never extend so far that they impede another person in obtaining those things to which he has a right for his own preservation.[392] Moreover, the law of nature attaches to our rights the duty to care for others.

---

[388] See 2T, 25 and 11.

[389] 2T, 6.

[390] 2T, 6. The proscription from taking another's life does not apply for Locke, though, when justice demands his death for violating the law of nature.

[391] 2T, 6.

Locke reiterates throughout the *Second Treatise* that we have a duty to care for others, doing all we can to preserve their lives as well as our own. He states that "the *Fundamental Law of Nature*" is that "*Man* [is] *to be preserved*."[393] That "man" here refers to all humans is revealed by Locke's qualification of the statement. He admits that sometimes all beings cannot be preserved, but that is only because those who make war upon others must be destroyed to protect "the safety of the Innocent."[394] Later in the *Second Treatise*, however, Locke explicitly states that the "Law of Nature" is just a declaration of the "Will of God," and that the "*fundamental Law of Nature* [is] *the preservation of Mankind*."[395]

To fulfill God and nature's will that all mankind be preserved, each person has the right and concomitant power to punish those who would violate that law.[396] Indeed, the two powers a person holds in the state of nature are "to do whatsoever he thinks fit for the preservation of himself and others" and "*to punish the Crimes* committed against that Law." Each person has the right to preserve any other and to punish a crime against any other because all humans are members of the same community under the law of nature.[397] When people join a political society, their powers change. Each member completely surrenders the authority to punish crimes, instead pledging all his force to the magistrate so that he may use it to preserve everyone.[398] In joining a political society, though, a person does not give up the power to preserve himself and others. Rather, he gives up the power to do "*whatsoever he* [thinks] *fit*" to guarantee that preservation.[399] The commonwealth regulates this power, but only so far as is necessary for everyone's preservation.

---

[392] 2T, 27; 31. Hence Locke's prescription that, in the state of nature, whatever we appropriate for our survival must leave "enough, and as good" for others, and that we must never take so much that it spoils and cannot be used by another. Moreover, the inequality within political society is legitimate only insofar as it consists in those things that have no intrinsic value, i.e. in things not necessary for survival. See 2T, 46 and 50.

[393] 2T, 16.

[394] 2T, 16. See also 2T, 159. In Locke's discussion of the prerogative power of the executive, he declares that the magistrate has a duty even to preserve the life of the guilty, as long as that does no prejudice to the innocent.

[395] 2T, 135.

[396] 2T, 11.

Indeed, the law of nature even more fundamentally restricts the loss of these powers. The members of society give up their liberty and powers only with the intention that the commonwealth will better protect their lives, liberty, and property.[400] This is in accordance with the law of nature, whose fundamental law is that all humankind is to be preserved. Whenever the powers conceded to civil leaders are used in a way that inhibits the preservation of the other members of society, the members of that society have a right "to *appeal to Heaven*," i.e. put new leaders into power, even by war. The rights a person has under the law of nature exist so that he may fulfill the fundamental dictate of that law, to preserve himself and others. All other considerations are subsidiary to this purpose, such that "God and Nature never" allow "a Man so to abandon himself as to neglect his own preservation."[401] This statement, similar to Locke's sentiments in the *Letter* that no person can abandon the care of his soul to another, teaches us that the law of nature's dictate that mankind must be preserved not only gives each person the right to preserve himself and others, but also the obligation that he must do so. Consequently, the law of nature does not command that we must merely do no harm to others, but that we must care for them.

---

[397] 2T, 128.

[398] 2T, 130.

[399] 2T, 129.

[400] 2T, 131.

In dictating that we must care for others, the law of nature at least approaches one of Christianity's fundamental principles, as encapsulated in the commandment that we love one another. As expressed in the *Second Treatise*, this love requires a person to respect the rights necessary for others' self-preservation, as well as exert himself to help them in that goal. In the *Letter*, however, this love is expressed in sustaining the liberty of conscience necessary for everyone's eternal life, while also commanding each individual's exertions to care for others' souls.

The commandment to love God, which includes respect for him and his designs, also prescribes toleration. As Jeremy Waldron has recently argued, the equality underlying Locke's foundation for liberty relies upon religious belief to define what it means to be human.[402] Some scholars claim that Locke required a "cosmological apparatus" that defined all of the species and their relation to one another to distinguish the human race, thus establishing who is entitled to equality as a member of the human species.[403] Waldron argues, however, that such a cosmological apparatus would appear

---

[401] 2T, 168.

[402] Waldron, Equality.

[403] Waldron, Equality, 54. Waldron refers us to For more information, see Kristy McClure, *Judging Rights: Lockean Politics and the Limits of Consent* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 28ff.

"shaky" to Locke "in a way that is not at all strange or unfamiliar to us in our *post*-modern hesitations and uncertainties."[404] Locke attacks the idea of essences, arguing that "the *supposition of Essences . . . cannot be known*."[405] Thus, using the idea of essences to distinguish "the Species of Things, *is* so *wholly useless*, and unserviceable to any part of our Knowledge, that that alone were sufficient, to make us lay it by."[406] Essences are merely words we create to compensate for our cognitive limitations, and do not represent anything that actually exists.[407] According to Locke, the concept of species is particularly specious when applied to human beings. As Waldron notes, Locke uses the concept of man as one of the most frequent examples of the problems with species and essences.[408]

Waldron shows, however, that Locke's denial of species and essences complicates the recognition of human equality. Locke's theory rejects all distinctions between human beings as artificial constructions. Accordingly, a person can draw the boundaries of what it is to be human, with the rights tied to that title, wherever he likes.[409] While this anti-essentialism is initially appealing, inasmuch as it alone seems to establish equality between human beings, Waldron argues that it conceals a danger that many contemporary theorists do not see. He fears that they assume too readily that this anti-essentialism does not touch the boundaries between the human and the non-human and that the boundaries defining the human are wide.

---

[404] Waldron, Equality, 54.

[405] Essay, III.iii.17.

[406] Essay, III.iii.17.

[407] For a fully developed account of the anti-essentialism and anti-realism in Locke, see Waldron, Equality, 44-82.

[408] Waldron, Equality, 60.

[409] Waldron, Equality, 63.

As Waldron points out, however, skepticism of the type Locke presents creates difficulties in protecting anything as human. "It leaves [such a theorist] with no naturalistic basis whatsoever for distinguishing those creatures one is allowed to hunt, exploit, enslave, or eat from those that must not be treated in any of these ways. . . . it is hardly calculated to cheer those who think there is something special about humans and human equality."[410] Further, even when we rely on God's pronouncement that "all humans are created equal" and that we are to treat them accordingly, "we still face the problem of defining . . . the species-members" to whom that pronouncement applies.[411]

According to Locke, when people perceive similarities in the qualities of different creatures, they suppose that those qualities represent essences that define those creatures as a species-group. The difficulty is that we can never truly see all the essences that distinguish a species or that would place a given creature in one species-category or another. Thus, we can never truly define a species, or conclusively declare that an individual creature is a member of a given species. This creates a problem, then, in judging whether a given creature is a human with human rights.

Locke sees one solution to this dilemma in the capacities that God has given to man.[412] In the *Essay* Locke writes, "when we say that *Man is subject to Law*: We mean nothing by *Man*, but a corporeal rational Creature: What the real Essence or other

---

[410] Waldron, Equality, 63.

[411] Waldron, Equality, 64.

[412] As Waldron notes, Ruth Grant addresses the problems of species in Locke and focuses on other ways in which Locke addresses the problems. Waldron, Equality, 50n16.

Qualities of that Creature are in this Case, is no way considered."[413] Locke distinguishes between "*Man* in a physical Sense" and "*moral Man*." What constitutes the former is disputable; Locke refers to the differences between a child and an adult, and to the deformities with which some people are sometimes born to demonstrate this difficulty. Moral man, though, is an "immoveable unchangeable *Idea*" of "*a corporeal rational Being*."[414] We should consider as human anything that can "understand general Signs" and "deduce Consequences about general *Ideas*," because it could then understand and obey natural law.

After defining moral man as a rational being, Locke must still identify the type of rationality that defines man and confront the great differences in rational capacities before he can declare all men equal. Waldron argues that Locke resolves these difficulties theologically. Locke relies on the creation of human beings in the image of God, as rational beings.[415] To solve the problem of the great variations in human reason, Locke creates a threshold above which all humans are considered human and entitled to equal consideration. In *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke tells us that the Christ's gospel was sent to aid the greater part of mankind, those who lacked the time or capacity to spend their life in philosophical examination. Waldron sees something similar in his examination of the *Essay* and the *Two Treatises*. The relevant capacity to determine the threshold of human rationality is the ability to come to the idea of God. God's "strategy" is to confer "on those whom He intends to serve Him the rational power that is required for easy recognition of His existence."[416] For Locke, human beings can be identified as a class by the ability to recognize God's existence.

---

[413] Essay, III.xi.16.

[414] Essay, III.xi.16.

[415] Waldron, Equality, 71.

The rational power to know God and to discover and obey his commandments gives "special significance" to each human being.[417] God has sent each person into the world with specific purposes. Each person accordingly has an obligation to discover his own duties.[418] Moreover, each person is obligated to respect and not impede others in the fulfillment of their obligations. Thus, according to Locke, we may establish equality and freedom, including liberty of conscience, on the foundation of respect due to each person as one of God's agents.

Thus, we can see that respect, love, and concern are critical to Locke's thought. Locke does not believe, however, that we must respect every aspect of a person's identity. Indeed, if the state attempted to enforce such respect it would violate the individual's freedom of conscience for Locke. In order to bring this about one would have to coerce beliefs and thus act in the intolerant manner Locke opposes. The love and concern one should have for another, as well as a regard for the purposes for which each person is sent forth by God, require a profound respect for each person—not for the various attributes which distinguish us, but for something far more important and valuable, the image of God that is reflected in each person. Thus, Locke argues that it is crucial not merely to tolerate but also to respect and even love human beings, especially those we morally dislike, because each of them is created in the *imago dei*, or image of

---

[416] Waldron, Equality, 79.

[417] Waldron, Equality, 80.

[418] See Waldron, Equality, 80-1.

God.[419] Thus, at this most fundamental level, toleration and respect are for Locke religious principles. Locke's ideas of toleration and respect thus are at their core not rational and secular, but Christian.

3.4 Conclusion

In 1545, soon before his death, Martin Luther wrote, "Therefore ought he, the pope, his cardinals, and all the rabble of his idolatry and papal holiness, to be taken and, as blasphemers, have their tongues torn out by the backs of their necks, and nailed in rows on the gallows."[420] Luther's rhetoric never inflicted any harm on the Pope, but such sentiments led to the slaughter of hundreds of thousands in the Sixteenth Century. During the Peasants' Rebellion in the 1520s, at least one hundred thousand peasants died. On May 27, 1525, twenty thousand peasants in Alsace alone were killed, many after their surrender.[421] Forty-seven years later, "seventy thousand French Huguenots were slaughtered in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre."[422] Such killing was not restricted to the Sixteenth Century, however. Religion was an important factor in the English Civil war, although more mundane struggles for power played a part as in all of the religious wars. The Quakers, who swelled the ranks of the Protectorate's armies before its end, encouraged Cromwell to rid all Europe of Popery.[423] How could Locke have ignored this and argued for religious liberty? We must note that Locke never argued for absolute liberty in religious matters. He still maintained in his later thought on toleration that those who violate others' rights to life, liberty, including that of conscience, and property should never be tolerated. In his earlier thought, however, he went farther and argued that the magistrate should regulate most matters of religion in the interest of everyone's preservation. Despite his sorrow for those who would be persecuted in their innocent dissent, he felt that religious liberty would only give license to religious enthusiasts who would rend the state.

---

[419] 1T, 30; 40. Locke further discusses the concept of *imago dei* in Reasonableness, 173-176. There he focuses on another aspect in which humans were supposed to have been created in the image of God—immortality.

[420] Martin Luther, *Werke*, vol. XXV, Weimar ed. (1883), 124-55; quoted in Will Durant, *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564*, vol. 6, *The Story of Civilization* (New York: MJF Books, 1957), 450.

[421] Durant, 392. Durant lists the total dead among the peasants alone as 130,000.

[422] Michael A. Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, forthcoming (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

To become one of the foremost defenders of toleration, several changes occurred in Locke's understanding of the causes of violence and of the religious belief necessary for salvation. Locke came to believe that the violence that he had previously seen as religious was in fact not. It resulted from the greed and ambition of the powerful, who sometimes deceived believers that the religion of the latter demanded the warfare that benefited the interests of the former. More frequently, however, "religious" warfare arose as the natural and just response to the preferential treatment of establishment groups and the persecution of non-establishment groups, persecution Locke equates to violations of their rights to life, liberty, and property.

The solution to religious violence, as Locke came to see it, was not persecution. It was to restrict the ambitions of the powerful and to tolerate religious dissenters by protecting their natural rights. Not only would such toleration remove the causes that led non-establishment groups to rend the state, it would make them loyal guardians of the state as well. The different sects would jealously watch one another for signs of ambition.

---

[423] See Christopher Hill, "Toleration in seventeenth-century England: theory and practice," in *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 27-43.

Moreover, Locke's investigations into his beliefs led him to the conclusion that Christianity, in its true form, required its adherents to develop a loving character. They did not have to accept and respect everything that person believed or did—such a requirement would violate their own right to believe that theirs was the correct understanding of God's will. They were not, however, allowed to persecute others for those differences. Such persecution would violate the precept that they were to go beyond toleration in their attitudes toward the persons who differed from them. They were required to have love and genuine concern for all others.

Indeed, Locke finds rich support for toleration in his Christian belief. Toleration is necessary to make available and properly understand the truths that are necessary to order one's life in the ways necessary for salvation. Moreover, coercing belief in those truths cannot save a person. The sincere belief necessary for salvation requires a person to covenant with God to make Christ his king, and such a covenant is null if forced. Furthermore, personal effort is necessary to demonstrate respect for God and to develop the new character necessary to be a member of his kingdom. Indeed, according to Locke's view that each person is a servant of God and his notion that only a servant's master has the right to punish him for disobedience, it would be hubris to assume God's power in punishing another for disobeying God's commandments. Rather, we are required to respect the divine element in each individual: the rational capacity each person has to know and follow God.

Thus, through divine commandments, the example of Christ and his disciples, and a soteriology that demands sincere, personal choice, Locke's Christian belief inscribes toleration in its adherents' hearts. These mores become a much more formidable bulwark of toleration than any written constitution or bill of rights. As Locke developed a new understanding of Christian soteriology through his studies, he came to believe that Christianity not only needs toleration, it sustains it. Thus, in his appropriation of what he saw as a more authentic Christianity, he disassociated belief from violence.

4 Conclusion

4.1 John Locke and Roger Williams

In histories of toleration, Locke frequently eclipses most of toleration's other proponents. Ironically, this preeminent defender of toleration initially opposed it, defending state control over religion to avoid a renewal of the chaos of the Interregnum, which he first attributed to the supposedly inevitable conflict that arises from religious pluralism. Moreover, this Erastianism did not trouble him theologically because he thought that any matter that the state could control was irrelevant to a person's salvation.

Fortunately, Locke's views on toleration continued to develop throughout his lifetime as a result of his continuing studies of religion and human behavior, which led him to form new ideas about the conditions necessary for salvation and the causes of religious conflict. These new ideas led him to reconsider his opposition to toleration. He came to agree with those who argued that religious differences per se do not cause religious violence. Religious conflict in his view arose when avaricious and ambitious civil and ecclesiastical authorities persecute religious groups, violating their natural rights. Thus, he turned his earlier arguments back on themselves. Controlling religious belief to secure peace was futile and counter-productive; the persecution involved would only kindle greater conflict. Prudence and a desire for peace demanded toleration and the protection of dissenting religious belief, according to Locke.

Moreover, as Locke continued his religious studies, he concluded that true Christianity requires toleration as a precondition for salvation and was thus a necessary attribute for all Christians. In his early writings, he had adopted a perspective similar to that of Hobbes, holding that belief was the principal requirement for salvation and that the elements of religious practice and worship beyond this basic, internal belief were irrelevant. Accordingly, a magistrate could control the latter without prejudice to anyone's salvation. After further study, however, Locke circumscribed the domain of *adiaphora,* or of things indifferent to one's salvation, particularly in the domain of outward worship. He does not abandon the Reformation principle that belief was most critical for salvation, i.e., that salvation comes only through belief in Christ. Rather, Locke came to believe that faith in Christ required ancillary beliefs and practices, including public worship.

In making worship a part of belief, worship receives the same requirements and protections as belief. For even true forms of worship and religious practice to be salvific, a person has to believe that they please God. According to Locke, the outward manifestations of belief should result from a desire to please God by doing as he commands. Engaging in worship contrary to what you believe God has commanded, or not engaging in worship you believe God has commanded, would be to displease God and thus to sin. Consequently, because the outward manifestations of faith are so closely tied to a person's belief and consequent standing before God, Locke concludes that they are not indifferent.

Furthermore, Locke concludes that toleration is one of the primary characteristics of true Christianity. Christ commands human beings to love others, and concern for others should accompany this love. A desire to labor for another's salvation is part of this love and concern, but the latter precludes persecution as a legitimate means to contribute to another's salvation. This is in part because Locke cannot see how love could lead anyone to cause pain to another. This is particularly true if the pain we cause another to feel serves no purpose, as is true with coerced belief.

True concern for others' salvation, a concern guided by the real requirements for salvation, demands toleration. According to Locke, saving belief requires a person to make a covenant with Christ, and coerced covenants are invalid. In addition, Locke doubts that coerced belief can save someone because it demonstrates no effort to understand God and his commandments, and would thus displease God. Furthermore, Locke believes that each person is on earth as God's servant, and thus has a duty to personally seek out and follow God's will. Inasmuch as no one has the authority to punish another person's servants, it is ultimately hubristic to assume the authority to punish God's servants. Finally, Locke denies that anyone can legitimately claim to spread Christ's teachings in a manner other than the method by which Christ's apostles were commissioned to do so, i.e. "peaceably and modestly" through persuasion.[1] Furthermore, Locke argues that Christ set an example of peace and love for all Christians to follow.

Williams similarly looks at early Christianity as a guide in determining the correct relationship between church and state. Williams and Locke are not unique in this—the Reformation was in large part an attempt to purge Christianity of false beliefs and practices that had purportedly accumulated over the centuries, and thus to return to a more pure form of belief and worship. The Protestant assertion that the beliefs and practices of the early Christian church had been corrupted over time is central to

---

[1] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, trans. William Popple, in *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), 433.

Williams's arguments for toleration. Williams uses the term Christendom to refer to the integration of Christianity with the state that began with Constantine, and this Christendom is for Williams one of the primary corruptions of Christianity.

Like Locke, Williams looks to the examples of Christ and the apostles, whom he defines as the servants Christ ordained with power and authority to preach his gospel. In their teachings and examples, Williams sees an absolute separation between church and state. Indeed, had Christ given civil authorities power in religious matters, he feels that we would be able to find this authority in the descriptions of the early church. Instead, according to Williams, the scriptures show the apostles retaining ultimate authority in spiritual matters, in which they ruled over even kings and magistrates. Thus, civil authorities lack the authority to act in spiritual matters.

In addition, Williams argues that Christ instructed his apostles that they were to convert others through persuasion. Like many of his contemporaries, Williams believes that we need scriptural sanction for our actions, including the means to convert others. Since he cannot determine that Christ ever granted civil or ecclesiastical authorities the authority to use coercion in spiritual matters, he argues that no contemporary authority can claim such authority. Furthermore, according to Williams, the scriptures show Christ ordaining two types of servants: those with the authority to bring new members into his church and those with the authority to watch over the existing members. Since the early days of the church, however, Williams can identify no one who could claim or pass on the authority to spread Christ's gospel. Consequently, Williams denies that anyone now has the authority to spread Christ's teachings through the methods he prescribed, much less by coercion.

Williams's contemporaries claim scriptural sanction from what Christians know as the Old Testament to form a national church and to punish people in spiritual matters. A focus on Christ and early Christianity is central in Williams's responses to this claim. While both the Puritans and Williams employ typological exegesis as a form of scriptural interpretation, the objects or antitypes they identify lead to very different conclusions about persecution. The New England Puritans see themselves as the antitypes to Israel and Israel's kings in the Old Testament, such that they claim the right to form a national church and punish people who sin. Williams emphasizes incarnation theology, however, such that Christ and his church are the antitypes to Israel's kings and their nation. Since Christ is the antitype, we can only understand Old Testament types through him. Indeed, we can only use Old Testament types properly when we understand how they are mediated by Christ's teachings and actions. Since Christ's actions are peaceful, according to Williams, the Old Testament cannot then be used to justify persecution.

Williams also combines discussions of non-Israelite kings in the Old Testament with his knowledge of world history and cultures to defend non-Christians. Some of his contemporaries believed not only that a state needed a common religion to ensure civil peace, but also that the citizens required Christianity to instill the virtues necessary for peace and civilization. Williams believes that the Bible and world history demonstrate the existence of great non-Christian civilizations. Indeed, while the Christian Europeans scorned the Native Americans as wild and savage, Williams argues that the Native American "heathens" were frequently more humane than the Christian Europeans. Christians and non-Christians alike were capable of peace and civil life because, according to Williams, the Fall of Adam did not completely debilitate the human conscience.

Williams articulates a notion of a voluntary church and liberty of conscience based on predestination and God's ultimate control over the conscience. Like Locke, he argues that we cannot coerce belief in Christ. He does so based on a more orthodox Calvinism, though, arguing that it is impossible to coerce belief in Christ because such belief is a gift of grace accompanying the justification of the elect, and God alone decides if and when he will call a person to election. Thus, according to the doctrine of election that Williams and his interlocutors had in common, attempting to coerce belief in Christ would be irrational.

Furthermore, according to Williams's doctrine of election, true Christians do not persecute others. The transformation of the elect when they are justified leads them to love and be concerned for others. The elect would thus avoid causing others harm and pain, and they would particularly avoid the futile and consequently even more tortuous pain inflicted by attempting to control belief. Thus, Williams implicitly challenges the election and Christianity of his interlocutors.

Finally, Williams elaborates a theological foundation for something similar to later, liberal understandings of government. Drawing from the same scriptural sources as Calvin, Williams agues that all authority comes from God, but he denies that this implies the absolute authority of civil magistrates. While God retains sovereign authority in spiritual matters, including the authority to appoint his messengers or apostles, he gives the sovereign authority in civil matters to the people. They consequently have the right to appoint the form of government they wish, and this government is accountable to the people and limited to the powers they give it. The people can give authority to their government only in civil matters, however, since God retains the authority to appoint his messengers and bring the elect into his church. Thus, Williams builds on Luther and Calvin's separation of civil and ecclesiastical authority, but does so in a way that forbids persecution.

4.2 Toleration and religious liberty in early America

While Williams and Locke present doctrines that enjoin toleration, we must go beyond doctrines to see anything but a theoretical link between some forms of religious belief and toleration. In his efforts to establish a colony based on the principle of liberty of conscience, however, Williams provides one example of belief coalescing with action. Furthermore, religious belief has been a powerful motivating factor in almost every major issue in American history, and the development of toleration was no different. In what follows, we will see that religious belief, including the formulations espoused by Locke and Williams, played a role in the development of toleration in the early American republic.

The extent of Williams's influence on American politics is a matter of scholarly dispute. Even some scholars who praise his works nonetheless discount his influence. Responding to the Progressive scholars of the previous generation, who had turned Williams into a secular Enlightenment democrat, Perry Miller argued that Williams was not a prototype of Jefferson. He denied the Progressive historians' claims that Williams was a democrat who was more interested in politics than religion. Miller altered the direction of the scholarship on Williams, asserting that Williams was equally or more theologically-minded than the Puritans, who had banished him for, among other things, threatening their order through his biblical interpretations.[2] A later scholar, however, sees Miller going too far in response to the Progressive historians, so far that Miller almost makes the mistake of denying that Williams made any contribution to America's democratic tradition.[3]

Like Perry Miller, Michael McConnell argues that Williams had no real influence on the American tradition of religious liberty until after that tradition had developed and made toleration a primary American value.[4] He argues not only that Williams's writings were largely forgotten until the eve of the American Revolution, but also that Williams's Rhode Island had a such a reputation for disorder and instability that many saw it as demonstrating the disadvantages of religious liberty.[5] Thus, McConnell concludes that it "is unlikely that the Rhode Island provisions had much direct influence on subsequent developments of the free exercise principle."[6]

---

[2] See William Lee Miller, *The First Liberty: American's Foundation in Religious Freedom: Expanded and Updated* (New York: Knopf, 1986; Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 143-145; James P. Byrd, Jr., *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution, and the Bible* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 21-41; and Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 215-7. The Progressive historians most involved in this interpretation of Williams are Vernon L. Parrington and James Ernst. Ernst argued that Williams, unlike the Puritans, was motivated more by natural right theory than by the Bible, such that he developed an interest in religious liberty and the separation of church and state (Byrd, 30). Indeed, Byrd quotes Ernst as "arguing that 'Christianity, as such, made no contribution to [William's] political theory.'" Byrd, 30; and James Ernst, *Roger Williams: New England Firebrand* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), 422; 436.

[3] Miller, First Liberty, 144. William Lee Miller writes that Parrington presented Williams as "so attractive and so well pruned to fit a twentieth-century democratic mind" that, when he read Parrington as a young man, Miller "enthusiastically [attributed] to Roger Williams all [his] own opinions" (143). He later adds, however, that one has to read very little of Williams before realizing the error in this interpretation (144). He quotes an anonymous teacher as saying that "students have been known to open one of Roger Williams's pamphlets under the impression that they are going to meet a familiar figure, only to shut it hastily again with the feeling that there has been some mistake." It is in this reaction that one tends to the extreme attributed to Perry Miller. As William Lee Miller points out, it is a mistake to believe that Williams thought only of theology and eschewed political thought, or vice versa, because religion and politics were so intertwined in that era that interest in one necessarily involved concern for the other. He argues that Williams was most interested in the "social-political-moral issue" of persecution and religious freedom (145).

[4] William Lee Miller also attributes this perspective to Father John Courtney Murray, one of the principle architects of Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom. Murray argued that the First Amendment to the United States *Constitution* resulted more from Enlightenment thought and from prudence and social necessity in the face of pluralism than from religious principle. Recourse was only made to Williams after the fact, to give some foundation in religious principle for religious liberty (Miller, First Liberty, 184).

In his work on the roots of religious liberty, William Lee Miller argues that the religious liberty in America developed through the interactions between religious and secular forces. The establishment of religious liberty resulted from the interactions between more secular defenders of religious liberty, like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, and groups of believers who stood for religious liberty, particularly the Baptists.[7] Moreover, as we will see in the following, both Locke and Williams were sources for believers as they developed their thought on religious liberty.[8]

Virginia was one of the most important battlegrounds in the development of religious liberty in the emerging American republic. Although Rhode Island and Pennsylvania established religious liberty many years earlier, under the influence of Williams and William Penn, respectively, Virginia was among the first states to establish it in the new nation, setting a trend for others to follow.

From 1783 to 1785, Virginia was embroiled in controversy over a general assessment. Many Virginians felt that the people's virtue had declined during the

---

[5] Michael W. McConnell, "The Origins and Historical Understanding of Free Exercise of Religion," *Harvard Law Review* 103.7 (May 1990): 1426.

[6] McConnell, 1427.

[7] For more on the history of this topic, see Miller, First Liberty.

[8] Miller believes that Williams has been made a hero in retrospect. He argues that religious people desire a religious figure to praise, someone who fought for religious liberty "on grounds of affirmative religious belief" rather than "rationalism, indifference, or expediency," and subsequently "discovered" Williams as a figure who could "fulfill that symbolic role" (Miller, First Liberty, 130). Nevertheless, Miller later asserts ways in which Williams influenced the American tradition. See 178-186.

Revolutionary War, and they felt that a general assessment was necessary to rejuvenate religion and through it virtue. The assessment was a property tax that would generate funds to support the clergy and maintain the buildings of whichever denomination a taxpayer selected on his assessment. In those cases in which a taxpayer selected no denomination, or when a denomination had no paid clergy, the funds would be used to support schools or to promote that particular denomination in another way.[9]

James Madison, after a long legislative session debating the general assessment, persuaded the legislature to postpone voting on the assessment until the next session so that they could seek to better understand the mind of the people on the matter. While the legislature was still in session, however, it passed a bill (with Madison's support) to incorporate the former Church of England as the Episcopalian Church. Fearing that the general assessment would give disproportionate power to the Episcopalian Church, and that it would renew its persecution of other sects, even denominations that had previously supported the assessment turned against it. The legislature was inundated with letters, editorials, and other forms of protest, including Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance*.

When the next session began, the bill for the general assessment never resurfaced. There was, however, a single, tabled alternative. After the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, Virginia's legislators had felt that a revision of the state's laws was necessary to make them conform to Virginia's status as an independent republic. They appointed a Committee of Revisors, of which Jefferson was the principal member. When the committee submitted its new plan for the government in 1779, the legislature adopted some provisions and tabled many others. Jefferson's provisions for complete religious liberty and disestablishment of religion were among those tabled. When the legislature dropped the bill for the general assessment, however, Jefferson's tabled revisal was the only other alternative before them for governing the relation between church and state.[10] Thus, when the proposal for the general assessment had been dropped, Madison shepherded Jefferson's revisal through the legislature.

---

[9] Miller, First Liberty, 24-26.

While Jefferson and Madison unmistakably influenced the development of religious liberty in Virginia, we would err in forgetting the religious groups who were involved. Some of these religious groups did not oppose establishment in principle, and thus did not initially oppose the general assessment bill. Indeed, these groups began to push for the disestablishment of religion only because they feared that a general assessment would give too much power to the Episcopalian Church, allowing it to resume its prewar persecution of other groups. This in part explains us the opposition of the Methodists, who had only recently separated from the Anglican Church and were disliked by many Episcopalians.[11]

The Presbyterians were the second largest groups after the Episcopalians, and they also began to oppose the assessment after the incorporation of the Episcopalian church.[12] In the year between the incorporation of the Episcopalian church and the vote on the assessment, however, other changes among the Presbyterians contributed to their changing views about the assessment. In particular, changing demographics in church membership led to new attitudes and changes in church leadership. Scotch-Irish

---

[10] Miller, First Liberty, 40.

[11] Edwin S. Gaustad, *Faith of the Founders: Religion and the New Nation 1776-1826* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987; revised edition, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 52.

[12] Miller, First Liberty, 39.

Presbyterians placed a high value on religious liberty, and their increasing numbers in the western mountains increased their power in the Presbyterian leadership and contributed to the church's new position. Moreover, they opposed the bill for general assessment because it made the clergy independent of the laity, which was contrary to their understanding of proper church government.

These groups joined with the Quakers and Baptists in opposing the assessment. Like the Quakers, the Baptists had long maintained opposition to any mixing of church and state, including a general assessment.[13] Furthermore, the support for religious liberty was widespread among the Baptists, so much so that the number of signatures on their petitions against the assessment surpassed even those for Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance*. As Edwin Gaustad writes, "Baptists joined with Jeffersonians in urging government to do the best thing it can for religion: simply leave it alone."[14]

Moreover, by the time of the ratification debates for the United States Constitution, their support was critical for Virginia's ratification. Like other groups, Baptists in Virginia opposed the Constitution because it failed to give explicit protections for religious liberty. Indeed, it was in part due to John Leland, a Baptist "preacher of great force and great conviction with respect to the separation of church and state," and an ally in the Virginia battles for religious liberty, that Madison came to support a bill of rights.[15] Leland felt that all persecution and inquisition derived from the intrusion of "the laws of men into the Kingdom of Christ," and that the "state establishment of religion, like a bear, hugs the saints but corrupts Christianity."[16] Thus, although Madison is rightly credited as one of the most greatest defenders of religious liberty, he soon learned that he needed to go even further in defending it to get the support he needed to ratify his constitution. Through his conversation with John Leland, among others, Madison learned that "Virginians in large numbers would vote against the Constitution unless it had a bill of rights."[17]

---

[13] Indeed, they opposed both the assessment and the incorporation. They feared any semblance of an establishment, having suffered a long history of persecution in England and America. Miller quotes them as saying that the assessment would open "the door to religious tyranny" and that the incorporation was "inconsistent with American freedom" (38).

[14] Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today, Revised Edition* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 2002; 2004), 46.

Although Jefferson's Statute for Religious Freedom, and thus religious liberty in Virginia, demonstrates the inspiration that Jefferson found in John Locke, we can also see traces of Williams's impact on the development of religious liberty in Virginia.[18] Williams not only established the first Baptist church in America, he also preached doctrines that were dear to Baptists, including the doctrine of believer's baptism and the importance of religious liberty. As William Lee Miller notes, "Williams was centrally important to the Baptist leaders who were essential to the politics of the passage of the Virginia Statute . . . as well as to the achievement of religious liberty in the constitutions and bills of rights in other of the new American states as well."[19] The support of Leland and other Baptists was important to the establishment of religious liberty in Virginia, as well as to the ratification of the Constitution and the promise of a bill of rights. Furthermore, the influence of the Baptists was not restricted to Virginia.

---

[15] Gaustad, Liberty, 206.

[16] Gaustad, Liberty, 206.

[17] Gaustad, Liberty, 206.

[18] McConnell, 1430-1431. Locke took several pages of notes from Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration,* and passages of his Statute seem to draw on the latter.

[19] Miller, First Liberty, 177.

People in New England both criticized and praised Roger Williams. New England Congregationalists and Unitarians criticized Williams well into the 19th century. Cotton Mather and John Quincy Adams, for example, painted Williams as a troublemaker, as someone who inflamed conflict over seemingly minor points of doctrine.[20] Nevertheless, other New Englanders held Williams in higher esteem. John Callendar, a Harvard trained Baptist minister who had been ordained by Cotton Mather, wrote a religious history of Rhode Island that praised Williams and his defense of religious liberty. In the 1760s, Stephen Hopkins, a Quaker who had been governor of Rhode Island and signed the Declaration of Independence, published a history of Rhode Island in which he praised Williams for being "the first legislator in the world . . . that fully and effectively provided for and established a free, full, and absolute liberty of conscience."[21] Not only did Williams legally establish liberty of conscience, but in inviting all who desired liberty of conscience to live in his new colony, he also helped create a colony with a fierce love of liberty.[22]

---

[20] Cotton Mater in his *Ecclesiastical History of new England* (1702) and John Quincy Adams in an address to the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1843. See Gaustad, Liberty, 199-200 and 211-212.

[21] Gaustad, Liberty, 201. Indeed, while Williams spoke very strongly against what he considered to be the heresies of Quaker doctrines, he refused to assist Massachusetts in eliminating Quaker beliefs in New England, declaring that they had the same right to freedom of conscience by the laws in Rhode Island as anyone. See Gaustad, Liberty, 201-202.

[22] Their love of liberty often made them difficult to govern, as Williams, Hopkins, and outside observers noted, the latter with some disdain. They also preceded all of the colonies in declaring independence from Great Britain, on May 4, 1776, and were the last of the original colonies to accept the Constitution and its strengthened national government.

Other New Englanders, particularly Isaac Backus, also found inspiration in Williams. Backus, a Connecticut Congregationalist who became a historian, politician, and Baptist pastor in Massachusetts, was, according to one biographer, "central to the whole movement for separation of church and State in America."[23] Backus was a strong supporter of the Revolutionary War, but he saw the war as much more than a fight for political liberty. He felt that religious and political liberty were intertwined, and saw the Revolution as a war for religious as much as political liberty.[24] Thus, in 1774, he led a delegation to urge the Massachusetts delegates to the First Continental Congress to tell them that they should support religious liberty and fight against even minor taxes to support churches. Appealing to the same language they used to sustain the Revolution, he declared that it was "a matter of conscience and of natural, God-given human right."[25]

As a historian, Baptist pastor, and proponent of religious liberty, Backus was deeply interested in Williams. As William Lee Miller writes, "Backus read, borrowed from, and praised Roger Williams, took arguments against religious persecution from him, and devoted the first volume of his four-volume history of the American Baptists to him."[26] Backus praised Williams, calling him "The first founder and supporter of any truly civil government upon earth," and declaring that he knew of no one from that period in New England “who acted so consistently and steadily upon right principles about government and liberty as Mr. Williams did.”[27]

---

[23] William G. McLoughlin, quoted in Miller, First Liberty, 180.

[24] Backus and his fellow Separate Baptists called the Revolution the "New Reformation." Miller, First Liberty, 178.

[25] Miller, First Liberty, 177-178.

[26] Miller, First Liberty, 180.

Backus felt that religious liberty was a central concern in Massachusetts and in the united efforts of the colonies to achieve freedom. Thus, he devoted the first volume of his history, published in 1777, to Williams because he felt that the latter’s theme of religious liberty was so important to the Revolution.[28] Moreover, Backus was influential in the Massachusetts ratification debates, urging the Baptists and others who sustained religious liberty to support the U.S. Constitution because is prohibited religious tests for federal office.[29] On the other hand, Backus believed that the new Massachusetts constitution (1780) did not do enough to protect liberty of conscience. Although it included many new protections for religious liberty and took steps toward disestablishment, it nonetheless required a nominal establishment in that it required each town to support the church of its choice. Backus thus decried Massachusetts constitution for “the unscriptural evil of taxation (hence compulsion) for the support of things of the spirit,” and continued to fight for what he considered to be full religious liberty.[30] When religious establishment was finally defeated in Massachusetts in 1818, according to William Lee Miller, it was due to the combined efforts of both “Jeffersonians and [the] pietist heirs of Backus.”[31]

---

[27] Gaustad, Liberty, 203.

[28] Gaustad, Liberty, 203.

[29] Miller, First Liberty, 99. Gaustad notes that the Baptists had grown in influence because of the explosion of their numbers after the Great Awakening in the mid-1700s. Gaustad, Liberty, 204.

[30] Miller, First Liberty, 179.

[31] Miller, First Liberty, 180.

Thus, in both Virginia and Massachusetts, believers committed to religious liberty were critical to the cause of religious liberty. Indeed, looking at the influence in early America of the pietists in general, Edwin Gaustad declares, “The pietists, who came much closer to representing the broad public [than the deists], made religious liberty real not so much by talking about it as by living it.”[32] Furthermore, we should note that the Baptists, one of the principal groups fighting for religious liberty, saw Roger Williams as one of the fathers of their religion, and that some of their principal members used his writings in defending religious liberty.

Furthermore, Williams had an indirect effect on subsequent efforts to establish religious liberty through his colony and its charters. In 1644, Williams traveled to England to obtain a royal charter for his colony, which he hoped would help preserve the colony and the religious liberty he founded it to protect. Land disputes between members of the colony and the machinations of neighboring colonies soon threatened this charter and thus their religious liberty, so Williams and John Clarke returned to England in 1651. Parliament subsequently agreed to resolve the issue, and ordered the colony to continue operating under its old charter in the interim. Although Williams had to return home, Clarke finally obtained a new charter from the restored monarchy in 1663. The royal charter granted by Charles II protected the interests and spirit of the colony, guaranteeing the freedom of conscience desired by Williams and his fellow colonists.

Rhode Island’s 1663 charter is important because it influenced those that followed. The charter declared,

---

[32] Gaustad, Liberty, 210.

> That our royal will and pleasure is, that no person with the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any differences in opinion in matters of religion, and do not actually disturb the civil peace of our said colony; but that all and every person and persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concernments . . .[33]

The proprietors of New Jersey gave the same protections for religious liberty in their charter, adding only that there should be no persecution for practice as well as opinion, and Charles II subsequently included the amended protections in his charter to the proprietors of the Carolinas.[34] The latter included Lord Ashley, Locke's later employer and an advocate of toleration. In the subsequent charter of rights for their colony, they affirmed the rights that the king granted to them.[35]

In discussing the relevance of Roger Williams to the issue of religious liberty, we should not so glorify him as to neglect the even greater influence of others, especially

---

[33] *Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, July 15, 1663, The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, available from www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/ri04.htm; Internet; accessed 2 September 2005. The text has not been changed, except to make the spelling more consistent with contemporary usage.

[34] "That no person qualified as aforesaid within the said Province, at any time shall be any ways molested, punished, disquieted or called in question for any difference in opinion or practice in matters of religious concernments, who do not actually disturb the civil peace of the said Province; but that all and every such person and persons may from time to time, and at all times, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their judgments and consciences in matters of religion throughout the said Province . . ." *The Concession and Agreement of the Lords Proprietors of the Province of New Caesarea, or New Jersey, to and With All and Every the Adventurers and All Such as Shall Settle or Plant There*, 1664, The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, available from www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/nj02.htm; Internet; accessed 3 September 2005.

See *Charter of Carolina*, June 30, 1665, The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, available from http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/nc04.htm; Internet; accessed 3 September 2005.

[35] "That no person or persons qualified as aforesaid within the Province or all or any of the Counties before expressed at any time shall be molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question for any differences in opinion or practice in matters of religious concernment who do not actually disturb the civil peace of the said Province or Counties but that all and every such person and persons from to time and at all times freely and fully have and enjoy his and their judgments and conciences in matters of religion . . ." *Concessions and Agreements of the Lords Proprietors of the Province of Carolina*, 1665, The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, available from www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/nc03.htm; Internet; accessed 4 September 2005.

John Locke. While Williams was important to the accounts of many later arguments for religious liberty, particularly among the Baptists, Locke's arguments had an even greater impact. Indeed, while Williams's arguments generally appealed only to those who are religious, Locke's arguments found adherents among both the devout and the secular.

William Lee Miller sees Jefferson as representative of the Enlightenment secularists who supported religious liberty.[36] Nevertheless, Miller argues that one can see much of Locke in the language Jefferson used to defend religious freedom.[37] Jefferson consistently spoke highly of Locke and his philosophy, joining Locke with Bacon and Newton as the three greatest men ever to have lived.[38] Jefferson included Locke's writings among the essential teachings on government, in part because they explicated "the general principles of liberty and the rights of man, in nature and in society."[39] Moreover, in explaining the purposes of the *Declaration of Independence*, Jefferson declares that the *Declaration* was meant to reflect the common sentiments of the American people, which one could find in the union of many sources, including

---

[36] That Jefferson was an Enlightenment secularist is not uncontested. For a short analysis of the influence of religion in Jefferson's thought, see Garrett Ward Sheldon, *Eclectic Synthesis: Jesus, Aristotle, and Locke*, in *Thomas Jefferson and the Politics of Nature*, ed. Thomas Engeman, 81-98 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

[37] Miller, First Liberty, 58-9. Miller states that many phrases from the Popple translation of *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, particularly the passage on truth's power to survive and flourish on her own, seem to echo in Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom.

[38] Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to John Trumbull," Feb. 15, 1789, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings,* ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 939-40.

[39] Thomas Jefferson, "From the Minutes of the Board of Visitors, University of Virginia, 1822-1825," March 4, 1825, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings,* ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 479. Thus, Jefferson and the other members of the University of Virginia's governing board required its students to read Locke. See also Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to John Norvell," June 14, 1804, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings,* ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1176.

Locke.[40] Thus, while many philosophers undoubtedly influenced Jefferson, the form and content of his thought owed a great deal to Locke.[41]

Jefferson was not the only medium through which Locke influenced American politics, including the issue of religious liberty. Garrett Ward Sheldon writes, "Like most educated British colonials in the eighteenth century, Jefferson became acquainted with John Locke's political theory while studying law in college."[42] While the educated members of the colonial society generally became acquainted with Locke during the course of their education, that would hardly explain Jefferson's assertion that the principles in the *Declaration of Independence*, which seem to draw so heavily from Lockean thought, represent the American mind. In his analysis of Locke's influence on American thought during the revolutionary period, Steven Dworetz finds "a great many more citations of 'Locke on Government' in the Revolutionary writings, clerical and secular, than of any other nonbiblical source."[43] Dworetz's analysis indicates that Locke's influence spread much farther than the circles of those who received a college education, inasmuch as Locke was quoted and paraphrased, with and without attribution, in personal correspondence, newspaper editorials, pamphlets, and sermons.[44]

---

[40] Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Henry Lee," May 8, 1825, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1501.

[41] Scholars debate whether Jefferson was more influenced by the individualism ascribed to Locke or by writers in the classical republican tradition. For a fascinating discussion of the influence of Locke and this debate, see the articles in Thomas Engeman's *Thomas Jefferson and the Politics of Nature*. Of particular interest are Jean Yarbrough, "Thomas Jefferson and Republicanism," 59-79; Garrett Ward Sheldon, "Eclectic Synthesis: Jesus, Aristotle, and Locke," 81-98; Robert Booth Fowler, "Mythologies of a Founder," 123-141; Michael P. Zuckert, "Response," 191-210. They all ascribe at least some influence to Locke, varying only in the degree ascribed.

[42] Sheldon, 87.

[43] Steven M. Dworetz, *The Unvarnished Doctrine: Locke, Liberalism, and the American Revolution* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1990), 43.

The use of Locke in colonial sermons is important in illustrating the compatibility and the practical connection between toleration and certain forms of religious belief in colonial America. The genius of Locke's writings, including his *Letter Concerning Toleration,* was their wide appeal. As Dworetz writes, "[The] external evidence clearly shows that the "secular" authors also called upon Locke to support their views on a variety of issues (and in many ways their arguments echoed the clerical teaching)."[45]

Moreover, the genius of the *Letter* was its ability to appeal across dogmatic boundaries. This is important because, as we noted above, pietists outnumbered the more rational, secular deists in early America, and they were especially active in the battles to establish religious liberty. While Locke's *Letter* can withstand criticism about coercibleness of belief, in order to fully understand his position it is necessary to examine his particular understandings of salvation, as given in his other works. Had Locke included his more libertarian notions of the will in the *Letter,* orthodox Calvinists would have rejected it and it would have had less influence in defending religious liberty.

---

[44] Dworetz describes Locke's influence on American revolutionary thought as the "Lockean connection," eschewing the term "influence." Dworetz argues that "influence" is an academic term that is impossible to measure (67-68). Moreover, he argues Locke's philosophy did not cause the revolution; it resulted from the actions and policies of people and governments in the colonies and England (68-70). Dworetz does argue, however, that the philosophy of the colonists was "Lockean-liberal," that Lockean theory supplied "the concepts and categories in which the Revolutionists articulated their deepest concerns about liberty and property" (68; 70). Dworetz, however, seems to underestimate the very power of these concepts and categories; when we articulate our concerns within a given category, we not only fashion the way we explain them to others, but also the way we think about them and, consequently, the way we act. While proving influence may be impossible, we should not discount the influence Locke's categories, as they were preached from the colonial pulpits as part of God's word, had in fashioning a people who would rebel under a given set of circumstances.

[45] Dworetz, 95. Dworetz provides a list of issues and concepts about which Revolutionary authors cited Locke and/or made us of his terminology and ideas. Dworetz, 95-96.

Williams came to similar conclusions about religious freedom, however, using orthodox Calvinist notions of election. By maintaining a religious framework for his defense of toleration but abstracting from more the controversial foundations, Locke created a template that believers from different Christian backgrounds could embrace.

Thus, it was through the clerics that Locke and his ideas were able to diffuse so widely among the colonists. Building on Carl Becker's statement that "most Americans had absorbed Locke's works as a kind of political gospel," Dworetz states that "most Americans before and after 1763, and especially in New England, 'absorbed' Lockean political ideas *with* the Gospel."[46] While the educated members of colonial society read Locke as part of their college educations, others became familiar with Locke's writings from the pulpits. Their ministers "read, understood, and sympathized with Locke, and had been preaching the fundamentals of Lockean political theory" to them.[47]

These ministers, according to Dworetz, drew upon Locke because of "shared 'religious preoccupations' and 'theological commitments,' from which Locke and the ministers derived essentially similar ideas about civil government, with the ministers often citing Locke to make their political points."[48] According to Dworetz, American clergy sympathized with Locke and drew from his works in four principal areas: the relationship between reason and revelation, the nature of God, the obedience owed to the state as interpreted from scripture—particularly Romans 13, and the necessity of individual judgment in the pursuit of salvation. While Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was a common text in college curricula, the clergy were also familiar with and approved of his scriptural commentary.[49] In particular, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke's commentaries on Paul, and the *Two Treatises* were popular among the clergy.[50]

---

[46] Dworetz, 135; Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 27.

[47] Dworetz, 135. Quoting Clinton Rossiter, Dworetz writes, "the New England ministers, who 'gave the first and most cordial reception' to Locke's arguments, regularly fed their congregations 'doses' of Locke's political theory in a 'scriptural spoon.' As a result, 'Locke rode into New England on the backs of Moses and the Prophets.'" Clinton Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic* (Random House, 1953), 400, 53, 237.

[48] Dworetz, 136. Dworetz provides a fascinating discussion on the character of these theological commitments and the conclusions that Locke and the clergy drew from them. In particular, see "Chapter 5: Theistic Liberalism in the Teaching of the New England Clergy," 135-183.

In 1766, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act, which asserted Parliament's supremacy in lawmaking and, indeed, in "all cases whatsoever." The colonists opposed this act in part because they feared that it would be used to establish the Church of England and control belief in the colonies.[51] As Dworetz writes, "*nothing* served to mobilize Revolutionary political thinking more than the dreaded prospect of an army of Anglican bishops landing in American to reimpose the religious tyranny from which the colonists' ancestors had fled in the first place."[52] In responding to the act, the colonists were able to draw on two aspects of Locke's writings, his defense of limited government in the *Two Treatises* and his defense of liberty of conscience in the *Letter*.[53] As Dworetz's survey of colonial literature shows, the colonists cited Locke and made "distinctively Lockean arguments" in challenging the "fatal edict," as some colonists referred to it.[54] The clergy, moreover, were citing Locke and elaborating on his doctrines in their sermons. Indeed, long before the Declaratory Act they began to argue that the people had the duty to exercise judgment in political as well as religious matters to protect their religious freedom and their salvation.[55] The clergy taught the members of their denominations that they had the "right, duty, and competence to judge how well they are governed, and to obey or to resist their rulers accordingly."

---

[49] Dworetz, 137.

[50] Dworetz, 93.

[51] Dworetz, 90.

[52] Dworetz, 91.

[53] Dworetz, 92-93.

[54] Dworetz, 94; 92.

Through their teachings, the clergy contributed to the development of the American mind that Jefferson claimed to summarize in the *Declaration of Independence*. The freedom to worship as guided by one's own conscience was frequently their primary concern, but, as the example of Backus demonstrates, their concerns frequently spilled over in the defense of freedom in general. Moreover, although some clergy and believers held to what we might call mere toleration, allowing at least a minimal establishment of religion, they nonetheless advocated that no conscience be molested or harmed for its beliefs. Many others, however, drawing on sources such as Williams and Locke, advocated a toleration or religious liberty that demanded complete separation between civil and ecclesiastical authority.[56]

This is not to deny the vital contributions of deists and Enlightenment rationalists, particularly Jefferson and Madison, to the development of religious liberty in America.[57]

---

[55] Dworetz, 179.

[56] We must remember that to Locke, as to others, liberty did not mean license. To be free was to live within the bounds of the law, and consequently the liberty for which they fought always required that one respect the life, liberty, and property of others.

[57] Ironically, especially given the myth that toleration developed through the spread of Enlightenment skepticism and modernism, it was the rationalist "Unitarian wing of the Standing Order, Jefferson's favored theological position," that "led the fight against disestablishment" in Massachusetts (McConnell, 1440). On the other hand, the dissenting evangelical and pietist groups, whom the Congregationalists derided as fanatical and radical for their behaviors and beliefs, were the principle proponents of disestablishment. Both proponents and opponents of establishment agreed that religion was necessary for the virtue required to sustain civil society. The former believed that the state's support was necessary for religion to survive,

Madison and Jefferson prepared the legislative enactments at the foundation of religious liberty for both Virginia and the United States, and Madison was responsible for much of the legislative maneuvering that brought about the passage of both. They also defended religious liberty with persuasive secular arguments. Nevertheless, it is important to remember, despite the increasing secularization of America, that the "deists did not speak for all the American people." In fact, as Edwin Gaustad writes, the deists "spoke for very few."[58] Rather, he argues that the "pietists, who came much closer to representing the broad public, made religious liberty real not so much by talking about it as by living it."[59] Thus, as Michael McConnell writes, "To determine the meaning of the religion clauses [of the First Amendment], it is necessary to see them through the eyes of their proponents, most of whom were members of the most fervent and evangelical denominations in the nation." As we have already seen, the Baptists played a particularly strong role in the fight for religious liberty, as did the Quakers. These groups, which long maintained the struggle for religious freedom, were joined by other denominations at

---

while the latter belonged to voluntary religions that already knew how to survive without state support. Indeed, they believed that state support only polluted religion. Thus, as McConnell writes, the paradox of the Massachusetts debates is that the proponents of establishment "employed essentially secular arguments based on the needs of civil society for the support of religion," while the proponents of disestablishment "employed essentially religious arguments based on the primacy of duties to God over duties to the state."

There is a difference between treating persecution as the opposite of toleration and treating even a minimal establishment of religion as the opposite of toleration, especially from the perspective of contemporary observers. While early proponents of toleration frequently tended to the first perspective, we nonetheless find traces of the second in their writings. Thus, while Locke defines the opposite of toleration as persecution, persecution signified a violation of a person's right to life, liberty, and property, and someone could interpret this as requiring an absolute separation between church and state. Thus, following Locke, Backus argued that their natural rights—both of property and of conscience—were violated when they were forced to support even a minister of their choosing. See Gaustad, Liberty, 203-4; Miller, First Liberty, 177-9.

[58] Gaustad, Liberty, 210.

[59] Gaustad, Liberty, 210.

decisive moments.[60] Accordingly McConnell claims that the "greatest support for disestablishment and free exercise . . . came from evangelical Protestant denominations, especially Baptists and Quakers, but also Presbyterians, Lutherans, and others."[61]

The establishment of religious liberty in America coincided with an explosive growth in religious activity. Even the members of previously established churches were surprised at the flourishing religious activity, but the churches that had advocated and were already accustomed to this voluntary religion grew the fastest.[62] Moreover, as Edwin Gaustad writes, they "made religious liberty real not so much by talking about it as by living it."[63] Although they felt compelled to spread their beliefs to save souls and help the nation, they did so without the aid of the state. Supplementing the revivalism and evangelistic fervor of the Second Great Awakening, they formed societies to flood the frontier with inexpensive bibles and religious tracts, formed the American Sunday School Union to establish the only grammar schools in many places along the frontier, and established some of the Midwest's leading universities.[64] Thus, with some

---

[60] Some of these groups, such as the Presbyterians in the struggle against the General Assessment in Virginia, played their critical role not necessarily because of any specific conviction in religious liberty, but because the measures against which they fought opposed other aspects of their religion. Thus the members of the Presbyterian Church, the state church of Scotland, fought against the general assessment in Virginia because its particular structure would have removed the clergy from the control of the laity, not because they opposed government aid to religion. Antagonism to the Episcopalian church, which would have the most to gain from the assessment, was also a large factor in the opposition of some religious groups. See Miller, First Liberty, 29-30 and 39-40; McConnell, 1439-1440.

[61] McConnell, 1439.

[62] Gaustad, Liberty, 210-211.

[63] Gaustad, Liberty, 210.

[64] Gaustad and Schmidt, 141-145. Such schools included Western Reserve, Knox, Grinnell, Ripon, McKendree, DePauw, Ohio Wesleyan, Denison, Shurtleff, Baylor, St. Louis University, St. Xavier, Notre Dame, and Kenyon.

Like the Puritans, they felt that education was necessary to fight ignorance and help people be righteous. Moreover, they were also reacting to the radical deists, such as Elihu Palmer, who characterized exceptions, the "future . . . belonged to those who reveled in the freedom . . . In a sense, the nation had decided between Roger Williams and John Cotton, and Cotton had lost."[65]

Thus, we can see that deeply ingrained religious belief had a powerful positive impact on the development of toleration. While religious liberty in America developed through the efforts of many people, who advocated toleration for different reasons, many of toleration's advocates were motivated by beliefs similar to and sometimes even derived from those of Locke and Williams. Mark Twain sardonically wrote, "It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either."[66] Twain was correct in declaring that providence had little to do with freedom of conscience for some believers. Some advocated toleration merely out of strategic or *modus vivendi* considerations, which had little or nothing to do with toleration as a right according to God's will. There were others, however, whose beliefs and actions give meaning to the position Twain mocks, people who embraced religious liberty as God's will and thus as a vital element of their beliefs and practices. These people illustrate the link between belief and action in sustaining religious liberty. Furthermore, inasmuch as many of these drew on Locke and Williams in justifying toleration because they shared some of their religious commitments, they demonstrate the practical as well as theoretical links between toleration and the arguments outlined in the previous chapters.

"traditional religion as 'an empire of superstition.'" Gaustad and Schmidt, 140. Confronted by the fervor of this new voluntary religion, the "radical deists were routed," according to Gaustad and Schmidt, "and the larger rationalism of the Enlightenment was tamed for Christian purposes of progress and civilization."

[65] Gaustad, Liberty, 211.

[66] Mark Twain, *Following the Equator* (1897); Internet, http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mark_Twain, accessed 1/8/07.

4.3 Religion and contemporary liberalism

A preoccupation with the dangers of violence and oppression are inherent to the liberal tradition. Indeed, as we see in the works of Hobbes and Locke government's primary purpose is to protect us from harm to our lives, liberties, and possessions. Thus, although toleration is a right according to liberals like Locke, a right that the state is required to respect and protect, it is not an unlimited right. The theories underlying the right require that it be limited when respecting it would undermine other's rights.

Liberalism thus can sanction intolerance, but only as a response to intolerance. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to use this exception to sanction the persecution of tolerant, beneficial members of our communities. As we noted above, some contemporary liberals unreasonably lump all religious groups together as irrational and then overestimate the dangers that religious belief as such poses to liberal politics. This overestimation then leads them to imagine that it is permissible on liberal grounds to suppress the religious as if they were themselves intolerant.

Some elements of progressive liberalism accept the Enlightenment myth that toleration resulted entirely from the increasing secularization and what Weber called the disenchantment of the world that characterized the modern era. Religion from this perspective is superstition and contributes to the "forces of darkness" that uniquely lead "good people to do evil things" and threaten us with a new "dark age."[67] Moreover, even when progressive liberals distinguish between truly dangerous religious groups and others that are more moderate and mainstream, they tend to denigrate these religious liberals for “giving shelter to the extremists of all faiths.”[68]

---

[67] Maureen Dowd, "Rove's Revenge," *New York Times,* November 7, 2004, available from LexisNexus; Internet; accessed 29 December 2006; Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 249.

While there are many liberal views about religion, as well as many religious liberals, these progressive liberals are merely an extreme manifestation of a deeper, more widespread distrust among many liberals about the potential dangers of religious belief, particularly the rigid, sometimes uncompromising religious belief that is based on revelation rather than reason. Thus, John Rawls would require that all political deliberation and decision-making be conducted in the language of public reasons. As Rawls recognizes, but never fully reconciles, this requirement would have disqualified many of the religious movements that he admires, including the abolitionist and civil rights movements.[69]

Indeed, many of the religious arguments even for toleration are inflexible, inasmuch as they are based on a narrow reading of revelation. This is particularly the case with Roger Williams, who approached the beliefs he held in common with the New England Puritans with such “theological stringency” that he made the latter look like “capitulating religious liberals.”[70] While this rigid adherence to fundamental beliefs is frequently associated with intolerance, for Williams it was this rigid adherence to fundamental Calvinist ideals, particularly predestination, that sustained his belief in toleration. The existence of believers like Williams thus calls into question the idea that rigid religious belief is necessarily intolerant. Rather, Williams, Locke, and other believers show that various forms of religious belief that combine reason and revelation in different degrees have sustained believers in fighting for toleration.

---

[68] Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), ix.

[69] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 247; 249-250.

[70] James Calvin Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams: Christian Conviction and Public Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), xi.

Indeed, it would perhaps not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that the liberal suspicion of religion as anti-rational, anti-liberal, and anti-democratic is radically misplaced. Religion has played an important role in almost every act in the social and political history of America beginning with the European colonization and down to the civil rights and anti-war movements of the later twentieth century. The desire to sincerely live according to the dictates of one's conscience was one of the primary reasons for colonization, particularly in the northern colonies. The Revolutionary War for many others was as much about religious tyranny as political tyranny.[71] The pietists and religious enthusiasts were critical members of the coalitions fighting for religious liberty in the new nation. Religion also played an early and vital force in abolitionism. Later in the century, the proponents of the social gospel worked to fight the poverty and other social problems stemming from the Industrial Revolution.[72] Religion was also a factor in the roles women played in the reform movements after the Civil War.[73] Furthermore, the efforts of religious leaders, most notably Martin Luther King, Jr., were central to the Civil Rights movement.

---

[71] Gaustad and Schmidt, 121.

[72] Gaustad and Schmidt, 231-237; 241-245.

[73] As Gaustad and Schmidt write, "Much of their efforts were understandably aimed at increasing voting privileges for women, but often joined to the suffrage movement . . . were such reformist matters as temperance, world peace, and civil liberties" (Gaustad and Schmidt, 245-6). Furthermore, they formed organizations such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Salvation Army, and through the latter formed slum brigades to fight "filth and disease," created rescue homes to help prostitutes, and provided "legal advice, first aid, life insurance," food, and clothing (Gaustad and Schmidt, 246-8).

One of the chief motives in the story of the development of American liberty and American democracy has thus been Biblical religion, although often combined with a more practical secular reasoning. The liberal suspicion of religious thought is thus difficult to justify on the basis of the activity of religious groups throughout the history of the country. The inability of contemporary liberalism to find a place for religious thought is in this sense more an indictment of liberal theory than of religion and religiously inspired political activity.

Liberals such as Rawls and people like Amy Gutmann develop theories that would disqualify religiously inspired political activity because the arguments used derive from comprehensive doctrines or personal religious beliefs, particularly religious beliefs established in revelation, which ought not to influence public decisions or actions.[74] Nevertheless, as William Galston suggests, theories of public reason and deliberation like those of Rawls and Gutmann are nonetheless too exclusive toward religious belief.[75] We mistake others as intolerant for a variety of reasons, including prejudice, misinterpretations of the meaning of toleration, confusion about the necessary preconditions for toleration, or mistaken understandings about the beliefs and practices of some religious groups. Many of the contemporary theories about public reason succumb to the third of these errors, demanding greater adherence to contemporary liberal principles that is necessary for toleration. They rely on "theoretical abstractions" to demand everyone's adherence to liberal democratic principles, such as the ideals of public reason.[76] In so doing, they fail to see that these religious groups often facilitate liberal democracy in many other ways.[77] Indeed, they fail to see that religious groups involved in the development of early liberal principles like toleration did so based on religious doctrines that their standards would disallow as legitimate arguments in public debate.

---

[74] Under criticism from Amy Gutmann, among others, Rawls begins to confront in *Political Liberalism* what he admits to have been his "exclusive view" about the role of religion in the public sphere (Rawls, Political Liberalism, 247n36). Nonetheless, Rawls and Gutmann still elaborate theories that would disqualify religious belief.

[75] William Galston, *Liberal Pluralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 115-116.

It is beyond the scope of this work to address the legitimate role of religion in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the examples of Locke, Williams, and the many other believers who have fought for toleration, and many other important liberal and democratic ideals, suggests that liberalism needs not to exclude religion from the public sphere but to rethink the nature of the political sphere itself. That is, although theorists like Rawls and Gutmann employ the notion of reciprocity in their theories of public reason to make the latter more inclusive, their notion of reciprocity is frequently too restricted to ameliorate the exclusiveness of their own theories. In expressing the legitimate ideal that individuals should strive to give reasons to one another, these theories require that the reasons be constructed according to particular languages that privilege one group or one set of groups.

---

[76] Galston, 16. William Galston builds on the work of Nancy Rosenblum in elaborating this argument.

[77] Galston notes that religious groups are "arenas of political mobilization and education" and "training grounds for political skills." Churches provide "arenas for the accommodation of deep differences; temper individual self-interest; help integrate otherwise disconnected individuals into society; nurture trust; serve as seedbeds of citizenship; and resist the totalizing tendencies of both closed communities and state power" (16). Later, Galston argues that deliberation is merely one element of good citizenship. Others include "law-abidingness, personal responsibility, and the willingness to do one's share (through taxes, jury duty, military service, etc.) to sustain a system of social cooperation" (118). Even when certain forms of religious belief and their institutions do not encourage deliberation, they inculcate these other values, and the claims for the value of deliberation must be balanced against them.

Galston, on the other hand, imagines a more inclusive public forum based not on public reason alone but also on imagination and shared understanding.[78] For example, if a fundamentalist Christian were to request an accommodation, citing a conflict between a public policy such as a school curriculum and his or her beliefs, that person in Galston's view is giving a public reason in the form of the "fact of that belief and of the resulting clash with secular public policies." While such a public reason does not require others to accept that person's beliefs, it does require them to imagine what it would be like to be that person. They thus might learn to be more tolerant.

Galston thus points to a more inclusive understanding of reciprocity, an understanding that is perhaps more true to the fundamental meaning of the term. If we value both deliberation and an inclusive public sphere, one that belongs to everyone, we should strive to give reasons that others can accept. The vast differences in comprehensive doctrines and ways of understanding the world, however, make finding mutually acceptable reasons difficult. At the very least, we should seek to communicate, but we have to recognize that the goal of communication may and perhaps even should make demands of all the parties involved. Too often, theories of public reason make demands, or at least place the greatest burden, on only one party. True reciprocity may require more than a single language of justification, and would particularly require more than a language of public reasons that privileges a single party. Moreover, such a doctrine places a burden on both the person giving public reasons, in the sense of reasons that he gives publicly, and on those hearing them. That is, the persons giving public reasons must *strive* to explain themselves in terms others can understand while still being true to their own beliefs, and those listening must strive to understand what the others are saying and why it is important to them. Both parties are required to stretch themselves, to leave their comfort zones and understand, but not necessarily accept, what others think. Such a striving to understand one another, whereby each person is required to make efforts to give and receive, comprises a more full and comprehensive notion of reciprocity, and, I might add, true toleration.

---

[78] Galston, 117. Also of interest in creating a more inclusive public sphere are John Tomasi's concerns about ethical diversity. See John Tomasi, *Liberalism beyond Justice*. For a succinct discussion of the latter, see Stephen L. Newman, "Review of *Liberalism Beyond Justice: Citizens, Society, and the boundaries of Political Theory*," *American Political Science Review* 96.3 (Sept. 2002): 626-627.

Such a form of reciprocity is more reflective of a liberal democratic society that values civic friendship and the dignity of each individual.[79] Indeed, while such reciprocity relies upon ideals of respect and friendship as motivations to give and receive reasons, it is also necessary to peace and friendship. As Locke reminds us, privileging one group over another is one of the surest ways to incite civil strife and to destroy the bonds between members of a community. On the other hand, working to accommodate other groups is one of the best means to encourage their loyalty to and participation in the community.

This brings us back to the work of George Kateb, who sees in religious thought the seeds of totalitarianism. According to Kateb, individuals and their freedom are threatened by the totalitarian tendencies inherent to the search for meaning. Kateb lumps religion with ideologies, "fictional stories, myths, legends, . . . and metaphysical systems," declaring that they are all the same, regardless of the different contents of their stories, inasmuch as they all attempt to confer meaning on reality.[80] The differences in content do not matter, he concludes, because practically “any specimen” of these meaning-conferring modes “has induced and can induce fanaticism, the ruthless will to realize the ambition to make the world over in accordance with the aesthetic imperatives of the murderous fiction or story about the world or picture of it.” Thus, Kateb concludes that our “greatest teachers . . . should encourage us to endure meaninglessness.”[81]

---

[79] On civic friendship, see Thomas A. Spragens, Jr., *Civic Liberalism: Reflections on our Democratic Ideals* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 175-211; Thomas A. Spragens, Jr., *Reason and Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 123-126.

We all tell stories to make sense out of our lives and to guide us in reacting to the world. Viewing the world as meaningless is a world-picture, albeit a minimal one, and the call to see and react to the world as meaningless is a call for everyone to conform to that world-picture. That is not to argue that Kateb’s meaninglessness is as dangerous as Nazism or Bolshevism. Such a conclusion would be absurd, because the content of a story is important in determining whether it is likely to lead to an enriched liberal existence or to totalitarianism. To treat the content of a story as unimportant, to treat all stories (save that of meaninglessness) as equal, foments a dangerous prejudice. It links religious belief, and many pacific, indeed liberal, believers, with some of the murderous ideologies that ironically were perhaps most staunchly opposed by those same religious groups Kateb attacks. The danger in this is that if we treat all religion as if it were essentially totalitarian and thus a public danger, we are likely to drive it underground and make it precisely the subversive and dangerous force Kateb fears, as Locke himself argued in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Consequently, rather than ignoring the differences between the stories that people inevitably use to give meaning to their lives, we must draw on those with differences that lead to toleration.

---

[80] George Kateb, “Ideology and Storytelling” *Social Research* 69.2 (Summer 2002): 355.

[81] Kateb, 355.

While all the stories that we use to give life meaning carry with them an impulse to remake the world according to the beauty we see in them, some of those stories carry within them the power to overcome their potential intolerance. Kateb acknowledges the power of religion to change and govern our lives. Indeed, he reveals religion as his standard of comparison for ideology and other meaning-conferring modes when he writes, "The story changes the hearts of those who succumb to it. Falling under the spell of an ideology is just like undergoing a religious conversion and remaining devout."[82] Stephen Jay Gould recognizes that religion's immense power can be either beneficent or maleficent when he writes, ". . . I have enormous respect for religion, and the subject has always fascinated me, beyond almost all others . . . Much of this fascination lies in the historical paradox that throughout Western history organized religion has fostered both the most unspeakable horrors and the most heartrending examples of human goodness in the face of personal danger."[83] Thus, while religious belief has inspired or contributed to some of history's darker moments, it has also inspired great sacrifice on behalf of one another.

William Galston writes, "In most times and places, the avoidance of repression and bloody conflict is in itself a morally significant achievement—all the more so if it is based on internalized norms of restraint, rather than on a modus vivendi reflecting a balance of power."[84] As we have seen here, through the examples of Williams, Locke, and the proponents of religious liberty in the early American republic, certain forms of religious belief inspire such internalized norms of restraint. Indeed, as we saw in our discussion of Locke's change from opponent to advocate of toleration, religion can help restrain the predisposition to persecution inherent to our desire for meaning.

---

[82] Kateb, 351.

[83] Stephen Jay Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria," *Natural History* 106.2 (March 1997); available from http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=11168473&sid=3&Fmt=3&clientId=15023&RQT=309&VName=PQD; Internet; accessed 8 January 2007.

Of course, the forms of Christianity discussed in this work are not the only forms of Christianity to inspire toleration. Indeed, they are not necessarily the only forms of belief in the Abrahamic tradition to do so, much less in the pantheon of world religions. Religion is not unique among the meaning-conferring modes in its ability to inspire and help individuals internalize norms of restraint. There are clearly secular philosophic sources of such moral constraint as well. Toleration in the Western world came into being as the result of the efforts of both believers and non-believers.

Amidst the current political struggles that often pit believers against non-believers—struggles in which the partisans see one another as aliens intent on destroying their way of life and as leading a form of existence that imperils all that they hold dear, it is easy to forget that we can and need to cooperate with others. Our difficulties in speaking across this divide produces a suspicion that is inimical to toleration and thus to cooperation. In this context it is then very useful to remember the long history of cooperation that produced the ideal of toleration as we know it. There is value in examining the teachings of those like Roger Williams and John Locke. Williams in particular urges us to see the good in others. The recognition of our common humanity is important in creating foundations for cooperation, for it can sustain our relationship with others when their views and the reasons for their views seem alien, misbegotten, or absurd. It can help us under difficult circumstances to remain tolerant. As Stephen Gould points out, we should seek and praise the good that we find in the other, rather than underestimate it. "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country."[85]

---

[84] Galston, 119. Similarly, Maurice Cranston states that "toleration is a second-best, but a second-best to be cherished in an imperfect world." Maurice Cranston, "John Locke and the Case for Toleration," in *On Toleration*, eds. Susan Mendus and David Edwards (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 102.

---

[85] Prov. 25:25 KJV (King James Version). I am indebted to Gould's "Nonoverlapping Magisteria" for directing my attention to this passage.

Bibliography

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae,* trans. English Dominicans. London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1912-36; New York: Christian Classics, 1981.

Ayer, A.J. “Sources of Intolerance.” In *On Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus and David Edwards, 83-100. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

Beach, Waldo. “The Basis of Tolerance in a Democratic Society.” *Ethics*, 57.3 (April, 1947): 157-169.

Black, Sam. “Toleration and the Skeptical Inquirer in Locke.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 28.4 (December 1998): 473-504.

Bou-Habib, Paul. “Locke, Sincerity and the Rationality of Persecution.” *Political Studies* 51 (2003): 611-626.

Brook, Arthur C. “Religious Faith and Charitable Giving.” *Policy Review* 121 (Oct-Dec 2003): 39-50.

Brown, Dan. *Angels and Demons*. New York: Atria Books, 2000.

Butler, Charles James. “Religious Liberty and Covenant Theology.” Dissertation. Temple University, 1979.

Byrd, James P., Jr. *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution, and the Bible*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002.

Calvin, John. “Reply to Sadoleto.” In *A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto’s Letter to the Genevans and Calvin’s Reply, with an Appendix on the Justification Controversy*, ed. John C. Olin, 49-94. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1966.

________. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated and Indexed by Ford Lewis Battles. 2 volumes. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960. Available at http://pastmasters2000.nlx.com/. Accessed 21 June 2006.

Canovan, Margaret. “Friendship, truth, and politics: Hannah Arendt and toleration.” In *Justifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus, 177-198. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Carey, George. “Tolerating Religion.” In *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus, 45-63. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

Charter of Carolina. June 30, 1665. The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, available from http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/nc04.htm; Internet; accessed 3 September 2005.

Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. July 15, 1663. The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, available from www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/ri04.htm; Internet; accessed 2 September 2005.

Concession and Agreement of the Lords Proprietors of the Province of New Caesarea, or New Jersey, to and With All and Every the Adventurers and All Such as Shall Settle or Plant There. 1664. The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, available from www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/nj02.htm; Internet; accessed 3 September 2005.

Concessions and Agreements of the Lords Proprietors of the Province of Carolina. 1665. The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, available from www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/nc03.htm; Internet; accessed 4 September 2005.

Cranston, Maurice. "John Locke and the Case for Toleration." In *On Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus and David Edwards, 101-121. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

________. *John Locke: a biography*. London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1968.

Creppell, Ingrid. "Locke on Toleration: The Transformation of Constraint." *Political Theory* 24.2 (May 1996): 200-240.

Davis, James Calvin. *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams: Christian Conviction and Public Ethics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Dawkins, Richard and Steven Pinker. "Is Science Killing the Soul." The Guardian-Dillons Debate at Westminster Central Hall, London (10 February 1999). Available at http://www.edge.org/documents/archive/edge53.html. Accessed 3 February 2006.

________. "Is Science a Religion?" *The Humanist* (January/February 1997), available from www.thehumanist.org/humanist/articles/dawkins.html; Internet; accessed 3 February 2006.

________. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006.

Dowd, Maureen. "Rove's Revenge." *New York Times* (New York), 7 November 2004, available from LexisNexus; Internet; accessed 29 December 2006.

Dunn, John. *Locke*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

________. *Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the Two Treatises of Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, 99. Quoted in Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations of John Locke's Political Thought*, 12. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Durant, Will. *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564*. Vol. 6, *The Story of Civilization*. New York: MJF Books, 1957.

Dworetz, Steven M. *The Unvarnished Doctrine: Locke, Liberalism, and the American Revolution*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990.

Engeman, Thomas, ed. *Thomas Jefferson and the Politics of Nature*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.

Ernst, James. *Roger Williams: New England Firebrand*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932.

Fiorina, Morris P., with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America.* New York: Pearson Longman, 2006.

Fowler, Robert Booth, Allen D. Hertzke, Laura R. Olson, and Kevin R. Den Dulk. *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, culture, and Strategic Choices*, 3^{d} ed. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2004.

Galeotti, Anna. "Citizenship and Equality: The Place for Toleration." *Political Theory* 21 (Nov. 1993): 585-605.

Galston, William. *Liberal Pluralism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Gaustad, Edwin and Leigh Schmidt. *The Religious History of America: The heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today, Revised Edition*. San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 2002; 2004.

Gaustad, Edwin S. *Faith of the Founders: Religion and the New Nation 1776-1826*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987; Revised edition, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004.

________. *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.

Gill, Anthony. "The Political Origins of Religious Liberty: A Theoretical Outline." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 1.1 (2005): 1-33.

Gillespie, Michael A. *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, forthcoming. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gough, J. W. "The Development of Locke's Belief in Toleration." In *John Locke, A letter concerning toleration in focus*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus, 57-77. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Gould, Stephen Jay. "Nonoverlapping Magisteria." *Natural History* 106.2 (March 1997); available from http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=11168473&sid=3&Fmt=3&clientId=15023&RQT=309&VName=PQD; Internet; accessed 8 January 2007.

Grant, Ruth W. *John Locke's Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987; 1991.

Gutmann, Amy and Dennis Thompson. "Moral Conflict and Political Consensus." *Ethics* 101.1 (Oct. 1990): 64-68.

Hall, Alfred Rupert. "Isaac Newton." Isaac Newton Institute for Mathematical Sciences, available from http://www.newton.cam.ac.uk/newtlife.html; Internet; accessed 23 April 2005; taken from Alfred Rupert Hall, "Isaac Newton," Microsoft Encarta, 1998.

Hancock, Ralph. *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Harris, Sam. "Do We Really Need Bad Reasons to Do Good?" *Boston Globe* (Boston)*,* October 22, 2006, available from http://richarddawkins.net/article,226,Do-We-Really-Need-Bad-Reasons-To-Be-Good,Sam-Harris--Boston-Globe; Internet; accessed 29 December 2006.

________. *Letter to a Christian Nation.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

Harrison, Peter. "'Science' and 'Religion': Constructing the Boundaries." *The Journal of Religion* 86.1 (Jan. 2006): 83-87

________. "Newtonian Science, Miracles, and the Laws of Nature." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56.4 (Oct. 1995): 531-553.

Hill, Christopher. "Toleration in seventeenth-century England: theory and practice." In *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus, 27-43. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

Holifield, E. Brooks. *Era of Persuasion: American Thought and Culture 1521-1680*. Edited by Lewis Perry, Twayne's American Thought and culture. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989, 46. Quoted in James P. Byrd, Jr., *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution, and the Bible*, 48. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002.

Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979.

Houston, Alan Craig. "Monopolizing Faith: The Levellers, Rights, and Religious Toleration." In *Early Modern Skepticism and the Origins of Toleration*, ed. Alan Levine, 147-164. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999.

Hunter, James Davison. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America.* New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Hutchinson, Ian. "Science: Christian and Natural." ASA Conference (4 August 2002). Available at http://silas.psfc.mit.edu/hutchinson/asa2002/. Accessed 1 February 2006.

Jefferson, Thomas. *Thomas Jefferson: Writings.* Edited by Merrill D. Peterson. New York: The Library of America, 1984.

Kateb, George. "Ideology and Storytelling." *Social Research*, 69.2 (Summer 2002): 321-357.

Kessler, Sanford. "John Locke's Legacy of Religious Freedom." *Polity* 17 (1984/1985): 484-503.

King, Peter. *The Life and Letters of John Locke*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1972.

Kraynak, Robert P. "John Locke: From Absolutism to Toleration," *American Political Science Review* 72.1 (Mar., 1980): 53-69.

Lamprecht, Sterling P. *The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Locke*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1962, 99. Quoted in Steven Dworetz, *The Unvarnished Doctrine: Locke, Liberalism, and the American Revolution*, 157. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990.

Larue, Gerald A. "Another Chapter in the History of Bible Translation." *Journal of Bible and Religion* 31.4 (Oct, 1963): 301-310.

Levine, Alan, ed. *Early Modern Skepticism and the Origins of Toleration.* Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999.

Lewis, Bernard. "I'm Right, You're Wrong, Go to Hell." *The Atlantic Monthly* 291.4 (2003): 36-42.

Linker, Damon. "The Big Test: Taking Mormonism Seriously." *The New Republic* (1 Jan 2007): 18-21.

Locke, John. "'Preface to the Reader' from the *First Tract on Government*." In *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton. New York: Mentor, 1993.

________. "'Question: Can the civil magistrate specify indifferent things to be included within the order of divine worship, and impose them upon the people? Answer: Yes' (*Second Tract on Government*)." Translated by David Wootton. In *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton. New York: Mentor, 1993.

________. "Essay 6." In *Essays on the Law of Nature*. Translated and edited with an introduction and notes by W. Von Leyden. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954.

________. "From: 'Question: Whether the civil magistrate may lawfully impose and determine the use of indifferent things in reference to religious worship. Answer: Yes' (*First Tract on Government*)." In *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton. New York: Mentor, 1993.

________. "Letter to Robert Boyle, 12/22 December 1665." Vol. V, *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*. London: A. Miller, 1744, 565-6. Quoted in Maurice Cranston, *John Locke: a biography*, 82. London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1968.

________. "Mr. Locke's Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Second Letter." Vol. 4, *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, 12th ed. London: Thomas Davison, 1823.

________. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Translated by William Popple. In *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton. New York: Mentor, 1993.

________. *A Second Letter Concerning Toleration*. Vol. 6, *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, 12th ed. London: Thomas Davison, 1823.

________. *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*. Vol. 7, *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, 12th ed. London: Thomas Davison, 1823.

________. *A Third Letter for Toleration*. Vol. 6, *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, 12th ed. London: Thomas Davison, 1823.

________. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited with a forward by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975; Oxford University Press, 1979.

________. *An Essay Concerning Toleration*. In *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton. New York: Mentor, 1993.

________. *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*. Edited with an introduction by Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996.

________. *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures*. Edited by George W. Ewing, with a new foreword by Harold O.J. Brown. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1997.

________. *Two Treatises of Government*, student ed. With an introduction and notes by Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Luther, Martin. *Werke*. Vol. XXV, Weimar ed. (1883), 124-55. Quoted in Will Durant, *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564*, vol. 6, *The Story of Civilization* (New York: MJF Books, 1957), 450.

Marshall, John. "Locke, Socinianism, 'Socinianism', and Unitarianism." In *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, ed. M.A. Stewart, 111-182. OOxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.

Massanari, Ronald. "The Pluralism of American 'religious pluralism.'" *Journal of Church and State* 40.3 (Summer 1998): 589-601.

McConnell, Michael W. "The Origins and Historical Understanding of Free Exercise of Religion." *Harvard Law Review* 103.7 (May 1990): 1409-1517.

Mendus, Susan. "Introduction." In *Justifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus, 1-19. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

________. "Introduction." In *On Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus and David Edwards, 1-16. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

Mill, J. S. *On Liberty*. In *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. with an introduction and notes by John Gray. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; 1998.

Miller, William Lee. *The First Liberty: American's Foundation in Religious Freedom: Expanded and Updated*. New York: Knopf, 1986; Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003.

Milton, John. *Areopagitica*. In *Areopagitica and Other Poltiical Writings of John Milton*, ed. John Alvis, 1-51. Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1999.

Mitchell, Joshua. "John Locke and the Theological Foundation of Liberal Toleration: A Christian Dialectic of History." *The Review of Politics* 52.1 (Winter 1990): 64-82.

Moreno-Riano, Gerson. "The roots of tolerance." In *The Review of Politics* 65.1 (Winter 2003): 111-129, available from proquest.umi.com; Internet; accessed 7 July 2003.

Murphy, Andrew. *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America*. University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2001.

Nederman, Cary and John Laursen, ed. *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996.

Neibuhr, Reinhold. *The Nature and Destiny of Man: a Christian interpetation*. 2 Vol. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

Newton, Isaac. Untitled manuscript on Apocalyptic prophecy. Ms. 1.1. Yahuda Collection, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem; quoted in The Newton Project, Imperial College London, May-June 2004, available from http://www.newtonproject.ic.ac.uk/texts/yah1-1_n.html; Internet: accessed 3 June 2005.

________. Untitled manuscript on Apocalyptic prophesy. Microfilm MS 664. Manuscripts Room, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge; Original in MSS 1-5. Yahuda Collection, Jerusalem University, Jerusalem.

________. Untitled manuscript on Apocalyptic prophesy. Microfilm MS 823. Manuscripts Room, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge; Original in MS Var. 1. Yahuda Collection, Jerusalem University, Jerusalem.

Nuovo, Victor. "Introduction." In *John Locke and Christianity: Contemporary Responses to "The Reasonableness of Christianity,"* ed. Victor Nuovo, ix-xli. Briston, England: Thoemmes Press, 1997.

________. "Introduction." In *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, ed. Victor Nuovo, xv-lvii. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.

Oakley, Francis. "Locke, Natural Law and God—Again." *History of Political Thought* 18.4 (Winter 1997): 624-651.

Olin, John C. "Introduction." In *A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply, with an Appendix on the Justification Controversy*, ed. John C. Olin, 7-27. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1966.

Philbrick, Nathaniel. *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*. New York: Viking, 2006.

Popper, Karl. "Toleration and Intellectual Responsibility." In *On Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus and David Edwards, 17-34. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacque. *On the Social Contract*. In *Basic Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Cress, with an introduction by Peter Gay. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.

Ryan, Alan. "A more tolerant Hobbes?" In *Justifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus, 37-59. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Sherlock, Richard. "The Theology of Toleration: A Reading of Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity.*" *Jewish Political Studies Review* 9 (Winter 1998): 19-49.

Smiley, Jane. "Why Americans Hate Democrats—A Dialogue: The Unteachable Ignorance of the Red States." 4 November 2004, available from http://www.slate.com/id/2109218/; Internet; accessed 29 December 2006.

Smith, Christian, ed. *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Spellman, W. M. "Locke and the Latitudinarian Perspective on Original Sin." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 42 (1988): 215-228.

Spragens, Thomas A., Jr. *Civic Liberalism: Reflections on our Democratic Ideals*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999.

________. *Reason and Democracy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990.

Stossel, John. "Cheap in America: Who Gives? Who Doesn't?" *20/20* 29 November 2007, available from LexisNexis; Internet transcript; accessed 8 January 2007.

Strauss, Leo. *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

Sullivan, J. L., George E. Marcus, Stanley Feldman, and James E. Piereson. "The Sources of Political Tolerance: A Multivariate Analysis." *American Political Science Review* 75 (Mar. 1981): 92-106.

Sullivan, J. L., J. Piereson, and G. E. Marcus. "An Alternative Conceptualization of Political Tolerance: Illusory Increases, 1950s-1970s." *American Political Science Review* 73 (1979): 781-794.

Tarcov, Nathan. "John Locke and the Foundations of Toleration." In *Early Modern Skepticism and the Origins of Toleration*, ed. Alan Levine, 179-195. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999.

Tuck, Richard. "Scepticism and toleration in the seventeenth century," in *Justifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus, 21-35. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Twain, Mark. *Following the Equator* (1897); available from http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mark_Twain; Internet; accessed 8 January 2007.

Verlet, Loup. "'*F = MA*' and the Newtonian Revolution: An Exit from Religion Through Religion." *History of Science* 34 (1996): 303-346.

Vernon, Richard. *The Career of Toleration : John Locke, Jonas Proast, and after*. Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997.

Walch, Tad. "Pilgrims and Savages? No!" *Deseret Morning News*, 24 November 2005; review of Jenny Hale Pulsipher, *Subjects Unto the Same King: Indians, English, and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

Waldron, Jeremy. "Locke: toleration and the rationality of persecution." In *Justifying Toleration*, ed. Susan Mendus, 61-86. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

________. *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations of John Locke's Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Williams, Roger. *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*. Edited by Samuel L. Caldwell. Vol. 3. *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963.

________. *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*. Edited by Samuel L. Caldwell. Vol. 4. *The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963.

________. *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*. Edited by Samuel L. Caldwell. Vol. 5. *George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrowes*. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963.

________. *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*. Edited by Samuel L. Caldwell. Vol. 7. *Christenings make Not Christians*. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963.

________. *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*. Edited by Samuel L. Caldwell. Vol. 7. *The Examiner—Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer*. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963.

________. *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*. Edited by Samuel L. Caldwell. Vol. 7. *The Hireling Ministry None of Christs*. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963.

Wills, Gary. "The Day the Enlightenment Went Out." *New York Times* (New York), 4 November 2004.

Winthrop, John. “A Little Speech on Liberty.” In *Political Thought in America: An Anthology*, ed. Michael B. Levy, 13-14. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1988.

Wootton, David. “A Note on the Texts.” In *John Locke: Political Writings*. Edited and with an introduction by David Wootton. New York: Mentor, 1993.

________. “John Locke: Socinian or natural law theorist?” In *Religion, secularization, and political thought: Thomas to J.S. Mill*, ed. James E. Crimmins, 39-67. London: Routledge, 1990.

Biography

Owen Dennis Yeates was born in Logan, Utah, on April 2, 1976. He attended Brigham Young University from 1994 to 2000, deferring enrollment between 1995 and 1997 to serve as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Colombia, South America. Yeates graduated *summa cum laude* from Brigham Young University in 2000, earning University Honors and the degree of Bachelor of Science in physics. His honors thesis analyzed the thought of Isaac Newton. From 2000 to 2007, he attended Duke University, earning the degree of Master of Arts in political science in 2003 and the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in political science in 2007.

While at Duke, Yeates has earned a graduate fellowship from the Earhardt Foundation (2002-2003), summer research fellowships from the Graduate School of Duke University (2003, 2005), and a Humane Studies Fellowship from the Institute for Humane Studies (2006-2007). He also participated as a fellow in the Kenan Graduate Colloquium in Ethics (2005-2006). Yeates is currently a visiting instructor in the Department of Political Science at Wake Forest University.

He and his wife Celeste have two children, Hyrum, four years old, and Claire, one year old.