All the World is not Mile End: Content and Context of Locke's Letters Concerning Toleration

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Abstract: "All the world," wrote John Locke in *A Letter concerning Toleration*, "is not Mile End." It was an inversion of a line from a comedy by Francis Beaumont in which a young Londoner asks naively "Is not all the world Mile End, Mother?" When the play was first performed in 1607 London was a small, enclosed, still defensible, urban space and Mile End was in the open countryside outside the walls. By the time Locke published the Third Letter for Toleration in 1692 London had spread beyond its walls to become a very different city operating as a node in a number of interlocking global trade networks. Locke could expect his riff on the Mile End line to be understood by a reading public whose horizons had widened beyond the confines of their city and parish. He was, by implication, sitting his opponent Proast among the staid citizens that the play had mocked. Yet Proast's argument is often accepted as far more compelling than the case Locke made for religious toleration which has largely been replaced by twentieth century versions of Social Contract Theory and theories of rights based on the concept of the Westphalian System. These theories have coloured the way in which Locke's letters on toleration are read and a significant element of their content and context elided. The key element missing from modern readings is Locke's reliance on travel literature and particularly the Spanish travel literature which formed the basis of his theory of Natural Law. Locke followed his Mile End remark with a discussion of America largely drawn from José de Acosta whose works were part of a much older and more philosophically sophisticated debate on toleration and coercion than that in Protestant Europe which is often seen as the dominant or even the sole tradition of toleration. A focus on the Mile End passage in Locke's third letter on toleration makes it possible to explore this wider context of Locke's case for toleration.

Keywords: Locke, travel literature, theatre, Acosta, Proast.

1. *Introduction*

"All the world," wrote John Locke in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, "is not Mile End." It was an inversion of a line from a comedy by Francis Beaumont in

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which a young Londoner asks naively "Is not all the world Mile End, Mother?"[1]. When the play was first performed in 1607 London was a small, enclosed, still defensible, urban space and Mile End was in the open countryside outside the walls. By the time Locke published the Third Letter for Toleration in 1692 London had spread beyond its walls to become a very different city operating as a node in a number of interlocking global trade networks. Locke could expect his riff on the Mile End line to be understood by a reading public whose horizons had widened beyond the confines of their city and parish. He was, by implication, sitting his opponent Proast among the staid citizens that the play had mocked. Yet Proast's argument is often accepted as far more compelling than the case Locke made for religious toleration which has largely been replaced by twentieth century versions of Social Contract Theory and theories of rights based on the concept of the Westphalian System. These later theories have coloured the way in which Locke's letters on toleration are read and a significant element of their content and context has been elided as a result. The key element missing from modern readings is Locke's reliance on travel literature and particularly the Spanish travel literature which formed the basis of his theory of Natural Law. Theatre played an important role in comprehending the reports published in the form of travel literature and Locke's, often neglected, interest in drama casts an interesting light on the intellectual environment in which he developed his philosophy. The combination of plays and travel literature is expressed in the passage which follows the Mile End remark and consists of a discussion of America largely drawn from José de Acosta whose works were part of a much older and more philosophically sophisticated debate on toleration and coercion than that in Protestant Europe which is often seen as the dominant or even the sole tradition of toleration.

2. *Natural Law*

Locke wrote four letters on toleration. The first was written in Latin and addressed to his friend Philip Limborch, a minister of the dissenting Remonstrant church in the Dutch Republic. It was translated into English by another friend, William Popple, a wine merchant and nephew of Andrew Marvell. Popple had narrowly escaped from France after the Revocation of the

[1] F. Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, London 1613.

Edict of Nantes and subsequently served with Locke on the Board of Trade[2]. Jonas Proast took issue with this English translation. He was a combative Anglican clergyman who had been ejected from the chaplaincy of All Souls College, Oxford in the disputes between Catholics and Anglicans during the reign of James II and was refused reinstatement by Locke's friend, the Archbishop of Canterbury John Tillotson, during the conflicts between Low and High Church Anglicans[3]. This article will consider one passage in the *Third Letter Concerning Toleration* published in 1692 and directed at Proast. It was in this letter that Locke remarks,

> you wonder at my news from the West-Indies; I suppose you found it not in your books of Europe and Asia. But, whatever you may think, I assure you all the world is not Mile-End[4].

He immediately launched into an account of natural law theory as evidenced by Native Americans. The modern reader might well wonder what Mile End has to do with America and, for that matter, what the connection is between Native Americans and religious toleration. The Mile End remark is often omitted from modern editions of the text as though it were an extraneous passage in a work that already offers an unsatisfactory defence of an unsatisfactory concept. Belief, it seems, can be, and is, coerced, making persecution perfectly rational[5]. Jonas Proast's case seems to have won the day[6]. The Mile End remark looks like one more irrelevance in an argument that is flawed in its basic premises and based on assumptions that are no longer a viable basis for political theory[7]. Among philosophers, the opinion of Louis Althusser that the state of nature was "a myth of idealist philosophers and empiricists" has become surprisingly representative of the general view[8].

2 C. Robbins, "Absolute Liberty: The Life and Thought of William Popple, 1638-1708," in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 24 (1967), 2, pp. 190-223.

3 R. Vernon, *The Career of Toleration: John Locke, Jonas Proast and After*, McGill Queen's University Press, Montreal 1997, p. 12.

4 J. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration and other Writings*, ed. by M. Goldie, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 2010, p. 76.

5 J. Waldron, "Locke: Toleration and the rationality of persecution", in S. Mendus, *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988, pp. 61-86.

6 J. Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994 p. 362.

7 J. Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: an Historical Account of the Argument of the Two Treatises of Government*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1969, p. xi.

8 L. Althusser and G. M. Goshgarian, "The Myth of the State of Nature: Extract From *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes",* in *Diacritics* 43 (2015), 2, pp. 16-22.

Locke scholars, philosophers and political theorist alike have come to see Locke's natural law theory as bad history, bad sociology and bad psychology. They have decided that "the free individual of the pre-political state seems to be a mythical creation of the political theorist"[9]. Jeremy Bentham struck the first blow with his "nonsense upon stilts" description of natural rights[10]. John Stuart Mill's argument for toleration superseded Locke's for a while although it fell into neglect along with the rest of Utilitarianism[11]. To a great extent Natural Law Theory has now been replaced by Social Contract Theories that have emerged out of the collapse of Utilitarianism[12]. Locke's theory of natural law and the state of nature struggled to survive even among contract theorists. John Rawls avoided the state of nature and instead based his contract theory on what he conceptualised as an original position which he insisted was not an actual historical reality, but rather "a hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a certain conception of justice"[13]. What is common to all of Social Contract theories is that to one degree or another they assume political society to emerge out of a series of logical decisions made by rational agents[14].

The same caveat can be made in relation to the Westphalian System which dominates the field of International Relations. It is the theory that the Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years War in 1648, created a system of sovereign states which granted rights, including religious toleration, to their citizens[15]. The Westphalian System makes rights dependent on the dispensation of the state in contrast to Locke's universalism which assumes rights to be independent of the state and recoverable by aggrieved citizens. Locke did not mention the treaty of Westphalia as a source of rights and it was not until the 1960s that the phrase "the Westphalian system" began to appear[16]. It is very much a neologism and one that has increasingly come under fire for being ignored or overridden in former colonial countries or Eastern Europe

9 R.I. Aaron, *John Locke*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1971, p. 273.

10 J. Bentham, "Anarchical Fallacies", in J. Bowring, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham,* vol. 2, William Tait, Edinburgh 1843.

11 G. Finlay, "John Stuart Mill as a Theorist of Toleration", in D. Castiglione and C. McKinnon, *Toleration, Neutrality and Democracy*, Springer, Dordrecht 2003, pp. 125-139.

12 A. Weale, *Modern Social Contract Theory,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2020, pp. 23ff.

13 J. Rawls, *Theory of Justice,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1971, p. 11.

14 G. Tulloch and J.M. Buchanan, *The Calculus of Consent: the Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 1999, p. 23.

15 B. Mendelsohn, "God vs. Westphalia: Radical Islamist Movements and the Battle for Organising the World", in *Review of International Studies* 38 (2012), 3, pp. 589-613.

16 S. Schmidt, "To Order the Minds of Scholars: The Discourse of the Peace of Westphalia in International Relations Literature", in *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (2011), 3, pp. 601-23.

after the collapse of the USSR[17]. The concept of Westphalian sovereignty has, it is argued, always assumed that only European powers had a legitimate claim to authority[18]. Contract Theory and the Westphalian System have lost much of their persuasive power. Neither seems to provide an undisputed theoretical basis for the modern nation state, the global system of states or human rights. It might seem an appropriate moment to re-examine Locke's letters on toleration.

3. *Mile End and America*

So what about Mile End? This article will argue that, far from being redundant, Locke's Mile End remark is indicative of the universalistic ambitions of his philosophy and places the letters on toleration firmly within that philosophy rather than seeing them as something put together for an immediate polemical purpose. It will show that the play from which the line came was part of a cultural response to the experience of transoceanic voyages as writers and audience tried to make sense of what made no sense in the context of existing orthodoxies derived from biblical and classical texts. It will discuss the way in which Locke's fascination with plays and romances reflected his early attempts to comprehend an emerging new world. It will demonstrate that Locke's mature understanding of Natural Law Theory was derived from a body of Spanish travel literature based on neo-Thomist assumptions about the nature of the state and the universality of human rights. There are potential aspects of any discussion of toleration, at the time and since, that Locke did not deploy in his letters or only used to a minimal extent. The article will examine those absences. Locke's failure to discuss the economic questions that were already being linked to toleration and remain a major theme to this day will be explored. Neither economics nor religious background provide a sufficient explanation for the position Locke took on toleration as a comparison with his younger contemporary Daniel Defoe will demonstrate. The immediate context of the letters was the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the discussions on toleration in the Dutch Republic and between High Church and Low Church Anglicans. Locke was involved to one degree or another in all of them yet, as the article will show, he called on arguments that took him beyond this remit.

[17] S.D. Krasner, *Sovereignty*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ 1999, pp. 40ff.

[18] T. Kayaoglu, "Westphalian Eurocentrism in International Relations Theory", in *International Studies Review* 12 (2010), 2, pp. 193-217.

The Mile End remark is a case in point. It combines an implied reference to a play and to José Acosta's *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* reflecting the trajectory of Locke's own intellectual journey from someone who accepted the "absolute and arbitrary" authority of the state in religious matters not prescribed by scripture to a position in which he denied the state had any jurisdiction in religious matters. To the extent that Locke's early reading of plays was replaced by travel literature it was hardly more acceptable as a source of knowledge in learned circles. He could have presented a far more orthodox argument for toleration. This article will explore the way in which his references to America reflected a body of literature that went beyond a strictly national or even Christian European context.

4. *'The Knight of the Burning Pestle'*

Locke took the Mile End reference from a comedy by Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Locke had a copy of the play and a collected edition of all Beaumont's works[19]. At some point he had been bitten by the theatre bug to the extent that he even tried his hand at writing a play[20]. Locke may have drafted out this plot scenario sometime in or before 1661 while he was reading romantic novels and exchanging letters with a group of young women in Oxford. It is an aspect of his reading that is seldom integrated with what is usually considered his more serious studies. In that respect it resembles travel literature. Both these somewhat anomalous forms of literature are combined in the Mile End passage. Bawdy comedy and travel literature sit side by side in an argument which, to Locke scholars, is decidedly light on philosophy.

In an early modern context that was not strictly true. Commercial theatre, itself a relatively new phenomenon, was a medium in which new ideas and experiences could be explored in a consciously artificial space. Drama had the ability to mitigate the shock of the new but it was not entirely risk free. Even allowing for the emollient effects of comedy, playwrights walked a dangerous line. Imprisonment, nose slitting and ear clipping, riot, or simply commercial failure awaited those who misjudged their audience or the temper of the times. *The Knight with the Burning Pestle* is a case in point. It flopped when

[19] J. Harrison and P. Laslett, *The Library of John Locke,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 1971.

[20] D. McInnis, "'Orozes King of Albania': an Unpublished Plot for a Stage Romance by John Locke", in *The Review of English Studies* NS 65 (2014), 269, pp. 266-280; Bodleian MS Locke e. 6.

it was first performed by the Children of the Revels at the Blackfriars theatre in 1607[21]. The audience, the play's editor complained, when it was published did not appreciate "the privy mark of irony about it[22]". Beaumont might have anticipated a more appreciative audience with a better tuned sense of irony at the Blackfriars theatre which attracted a sophisticated clientele compared to some of the other theatres. It charged sixpence, even two shillings and sixpence for a box, rather than a penny at the Globe across the river[23]. Even so the play was perhaps better suited to an audience at the Inns of Court where the smart young men could laugh at the citizens of London and appreciate the play's experimental handling of the relationship between players and audience and its cross cutting between genres[24].

Blackfriars theatre goers may have been prosperous but the perspective of most Londoners at the beginning of the seventeenth century was still confined to their city and their parish. The East India Company had been founded only seven years before the play's first production. The Royal Africa Company would not be founded for another half century. To understand the meaning of the Mile End line we have to adjust our sense of geography and space. Mile End today is an integral part of London's urban environment. It is only about 15 minutes along the District Line from Blackfriars. In 1607 it was more than an hour's walk away and crucially a mile beyond the city wall in the Liberty of the Tower. Mile End was one of a group of extramural hamlets that occupied a distinct political, economic and social space that was beyond the control of the citizens and civic institutions of London. It was in a very real sense "foreign" when that term was used to denote anyone who came to London from outside the walls even if they were English. Mile End actually was the world.

The district was invested with an extra element of foreignness because it was to the open spaces of Mile End that the citizens of London periodically marched with the banners and ensigns of their train bands flying, fifes and drums playing, to stage mock battles in preparation for invasion. One of Beaumont's characters recalled the rout of the Spanish army at Mile End as

21 J. Dillon, "'Is Not All the World Mile End, Mother?': The Blackfriars Theater, the City of London, and 'The Knight of the Burning Pestle'", in *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 9 (1997), pp. 127-148.

22 Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, cit.

23 L. Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: a Jacobean Theatre Repertory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 61.

24 B.E. Whitred, "Why 'The Knight of the Burning Pestle' flopped at Blackfriars in 1607", in *Early Theatre*, 15 (2012), 2, pp. 111-130.

though it had been a real event rather than a drill. Mile End was only slightly less thrillingly remote and exotic than Waltham Forest, even further to the east of the city where the characters of Beaumont's play became lost in act two.

The eastern approaches to London regularly featured in early seventeenth century comedies as a strange, fantastical and dangerous place. Two years earlier in *Eastward Ho!*[25] the impecunious Sir Flash sailed in search of Virginian gold only to be shipwrecked on the Isle of Dogs in the Thames believing it to be France. His wife Gertrude, a city goldsmith's daughter, set out to find her husband's fictional castle and was reduced to camping in her coach selling off her possessions and hoping that a fairy would rescue her. In *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*[26] two sempstresses were robbed and threatened with rape as they delivered orders to a customer at Mile End[27]. All the outskirts of London were dangerous and remained so in Locke's day. Friends who visited him at Oates in Essex risked encounters with highwaymen as they passed through Epping Forest. But Elizabethan and Stuart theatre mixed these real dangers with the imagined gold of Virginia and enchanted castles in the air creating a Cervantes-like amalgam of travel literature and chivalric romances all located in the near-abroad of London's East End.

Locke may never have seen The *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, or any other play, as a boy or young man since the theatres were suppressed in 1642. Nevertheless he entered a theatrical atmosphere when he left Somerset for school in London in 1647. Plays were a recognised pedagogical technique and Westminster School was famous for its Christmas play. Theatrical performances were a means of imparting religious doctrine and confidence in spoken Latin. Before the civil war contemporary plays had been performed in educational settings. Locke's headmaster at Westminster, Richard Busby, distinguished himself playing the role of Cratander in William Cartwright's play *The Royal Slave* in front of Charles I when he was a student at Christ Church[28]. So great was his success he dreamed of becoming an actor[29]. Locke probably missed out on similar opportunities, or temptations, since professional players and even amateur dramatics were banned at the university while he was a student.

The Knight with the Burning Pestle survived in the repertoire of Beeston's

25 G. Chapman, B. Jonson and J. Marston, *Eastward Ho!,* London 1605.
26 T. Haywood, *Fair Maid of the Exchange*, London 1607.
27 J.E. Howard, *Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy 1598-1642*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 2009, p. 62.
28 F.G. Russell Barker, *Memoir of Richard Busby*, Lawrence and Bullen, London 1895.
29 M. Cranston, *John Locke: a Biography*, Longmans, London 1957, p. 18.

Boys at the Cockpit in Drury Lane until the suppression but it and the boy companies were out of fashion by the time Locke was back in London in 1667. Comedy themes had changed by then. The unfamiliarity of the city rather than the surrounding countryside was now the favoured device for comic effect. Wide eyed country wives found their adventures in the newly expanded west end of London. Locke does not seem to have plunged into the revived theatrical milieu. He broke off the relationship with the women he had known in Oxford and, with the prospect of a career ahead of him, turned his attention to more serious matters. Writing from London in 1668 he characterised plays, along with hunting, as "innocent diversions" which might be permitted as a means of mental refreshment "but if I spend all or the greatest part of my time in them, they hinder my improvement in knowledge and useful arts, they blast my credit, and give me up to the uneasy state of shame, ignorance and contempt, in which I cannot but be very unhappy."[30] His stern admonition to himself testifies to the attraction that theatre held for him. It is evidenced by the books in his library and his familiar recall, nearly thirty years later, of a line from an old play that must still have delighted him even if it was by a playwright often dismissed as a Catholic divine right royalist[31].

5. *Locke and Defoe*

By the final decade of the century when Locke wrote the *Third Letter Concerning Toleration* he could expect his riff on the Mile End line to be understood even if it had gone over the heads of the audience in 1607. London was expanded and rebuilt in a wave of speculation and renovation following the Great Fire of 1666. It was the same city as Beaumont's London, or even the London of Locke's youth, in name only. The aristocratic palaces that had once lined the Strand had almost all gone, replaced by multi-storied houses and commercial buildings. Exeter House, where Locke had lived as the Earl of Shaftesbury's secretary, had become a shopping mall[32]. By the turn of the century London was on its way to becoming one of the very few large cities in

[30] Bodleian MSS, Locke c. 28, ff. 143-4.

[31] R. Zaharias, "Rafe's Rebellion: Reconsidering 'The Knight of the Burning Pestle'", in *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 31 (2008), 3, pp. 103-126.

[32] E.B. Chancellor, *The Private Palaces of London*, Kegan Paul, London 1908, p. 49.

Europe with a population of between 400,000 and 575,000[33]. It still did not rank among the largest cities on a global scale. Istanbul dwarfed it, as did many Asian cities[34]. Nonetheless, the rapidity and scale of the change was difficult to comprehend. Contemporary observers believed that the population numbered in the millions[35]. London went from being a somewhat peripheral European city to being at the centre of several interlocking global networks. Londoners' perception of the world expanded with the city and its commercial connections.

London's economic growth might be thought to have encouraged greater religious toleration. Religious refugees and migrants helped to swell the population and establish new suburbs. Mile End road was the site of the first Jewish cemetery by 1657. Toleration was not, however, an inevitable outcome. If the rate of growth was spectacular so too it was disturbing because it threatened to erode the settled social relationships which had been the bedrock of the older, smaller city. One of those who was disturbed by the growth of London and the new social trends that accompanied it was Locke's younger contemporary Daniel Defoe. Defoe accepted the limited degree of toleration allowed by the 1689 Toleration Act, he was a dissenter himself, but did not believe in extending toleration to non-Trinitarians[36]. He saw in the possibilities for Sunday jaunts to bun houses, tea gardens and breakfast huts the danger of moral transgression and encroachments on privilege[37]. Servants forgot their place and apprentices imagined they were the equal of their masters in this new London. Expansion and greater diversity could produce a conservative reaction as well as greater tolerance of diversity and lessening of status distinctions.

For Defoe, family worship was the antidote to the social breakdown he perceived. Men had a duty to impose Bible readings, prayers and psalm singing on their households, he maintained, no matter what the cost. His *Family Instructor* offers a bleak picture of wives who resisted their husbands' self-

33 J. White, *"A Great and Monstrous Thing": London in the Eighteenth Century*, Bodley Head, London 2013, p. 33.

34 R. Birn, *Crisis, Absolutism, Revolution: Europe and the World 1648-1789*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2005, p. 11.

35 M. Pelling, "Skirting the city? Disease and social change and divided households in the seventeenth century", in P. Griffith and M.S.R. Jenner, *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural History of Early Modern London*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2000, pp. 154-175.

36 K. Clarke, *Daniel Defoe: the Whole Frame of Nature, Time and Providence*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2007, p. 35.

37 S. Pennell, "'Great quantities of gooseberry pie and baked clod of beef': victualling and eating out in early modern London", in P. Griffith and M.S.R. Jenner, *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural History of Early Modern London*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2000, pp. 228-249.

appointed Christian ministry driven to depression, mental breakdown and moral ruin.[38] His faith in patriarchal authority echoed the sentiments that Jonas Proast had expressed in his criticisms of Locke's letter when he demanded

> I pray, what is it that warrants and authorizes Schoolmasters, Tutours, or Masters, to use Force upon their Scholars, or Apprentices, to bring them to Learning, or to the Skill of their Arts and Trades,[39]

Proast could take it for granted that teachers, university tutors, masters of apprentices and the employers of servants all had the right to beat those in their charge, as parents did their children and husbands their wives. Patriarchal authority was essential to the entire process of socialisation, social control and education. Coercion by those who held such authority was basic to the general understanding of the way society worked and went largely unquestioned. Locke's writings on education were unusual in this respect but even he recommended that pauper children should be whipped[40]. Proast's argument was that since coercion was useful in teaching Latin or imparting a trade then it would be equally effective in instilling sound religious principles. Locke's challenge to patriarchy in government ran right through society and threatened institutions that were fundamental to social life.

Defoe's defence of religious coercion in the home points to a more complex picture both of toleration and of coercion. Defoe took different positions at different times and in different political contexts, as did Locke[41]. Their positions on the subject evolved over time in response to changing political circumstances and the direction of the debate. Defoe's insistence on the importance of family worship was, at least in part, an indirect response to Locke's insistence that belief could not be coerced which opened the way to alarming levels of individualism in religion. Locke left the door open for free-thinkers, Deists and atheists. Defoe shut it firmly giving distinctly Deist arguments to the errant wives who featured in his dialogues on family worship.

Locke and Defoe were both Christians and both came from a Calvinist

[38] D. Defoe, "The Family Instructor II", (orig. 1718) in P.N. Furbank, *Religious and Didactic Writings*, vol. 2, Pickering and Chatto, London 2006.

[39] J. Proast, *A third letter concerning toleration in defense of The argument of the letter concerning toleration, briefly consider'd and answer'd*, Oxford 1691, p. 18.

[40] P. Gay, "Locke on the Education of Paupers", in A.O. Rorty, *Philosophers on Education: Historical Perspectives*, Routledge, London 1998, p. 189.

[41] Y. Deschamps, "Daniel Defoe's Contribution to the Dispute over Occasional Conformity: An Insight into Dissent and 'Moderation' in the Early Eighteenth Century", in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46 (2013), 3, pp. 349-361.

background but they arrived at different conclusions about toleration. It is still sometimes argued that Defoe was trying to bring Locke's philosophy to life in his novel Robinson Crusoe[42]. The connection between them owes more to Defoe's enemies than Defoe himself. He always denied that he was indebted to Locke and Locke's association with reputed Deists would have made any conscious use of Locke's philosophy of questionable value for Defoe[43]. Locke remained a committed Christian and his argument in favour of toleration has been characterised as evangelical[44]. Defining Locke's attitude to toleration by his religious outlook alone is not sufficient in itself since Defoe's insistence on coercion of belief in the household demonstrates that not all evangelical Calvinists ended up singing from the same hymn sheet.

6. *The Economics of Persecution*

The complexity surrounding toleration and Locke's attitude to it extends to economics. Persecution and coercion are assumed to be bad economic policy and this tends to colour the way that modern readers understand Locke's approach to toleration. Interestingly, Proast seemed to implicitly accept that toleration would benefit trade or at least recognised that this was already a common argument in favour of toleration. Under criticism, he grudgingly conceded that the author of the letter had not advocated favouring trade at the expense of religion.

> Where I say that some seem to place the advancement of Trade and Commerce above all other Considerations, you tell me that if I do not know that the Author places the advancement of Trade above Religion, my Insinuation is very uncharitable. But I thought I had sufficiently prevented such an interpretation of my words, by acquitting the Author but just before, of any ill design towards Religion. That there are some Men in the World, who are justly suspected of the Crime I mention, I believe you will not deny. And I assure you I did not intend, by those words, to bring any Man under the suspicion of it, who has not given just cause for it[45].

[42] B.C. Cooney, "Considering Robinson Crusoe's 'Liberty of Conscience' in an Age of Terror", in *College English* 69 (2007), 3, pp. 197-215.
[43] Clarke, *Daniel Defoe*, p. 51.
[44] M. Goldie, "Introduction", in Goldie, *A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 2010, p. xii.
[45] Proast, *A third letter*, p. 4.

The Third Letter of Toleration, like its predecessors was anonymous, and Locke never admitted to having written any of them but it seems to have become common knowledge and it is likely that Proast knew he was the author. It must have made sense to him that Locke would favour trade. What is interesting in retrospect is that Locke did not mention trade in relation to religious toleration. Modern economic historians still assume that there is a positive correlation between toleration and economic development either because the inward migration of religious exiles stimulates the economy or because toleration promotes the development of human capital which in turn leads to greater economic growth.

States that were open to religious refugees such as the Huguenots, it has been argued, enjoyed greater prosperity[46]. Economic individualism was the essential counterpart of religious toleration it seemed and a free market economy produced a free market in religion[47]. The argument has always been ill-defined. Protestantism itself is sometimes identified with a lack of persecution and Roman Catholicism regarded as inherently intolerant and prone to persecution. Max Weber's argument that Protestantism was the promoter of economic success in Protestant Prussia as opposed to Catholic South Germany still has some currency in the twenty-first century[48]. The equation is made between Protestantism, literacy and the human capital necessary for economic development. The same argument has been extended to non-religious persecution in China. The literary inquisitions that saw scholar-officials condemned by the Qing emperors of China, it has been suggested, led to a fall in literacy and less economic development in the home regions of the persecuted scholars[49]. The archetypal form of systematic ideological persecution is, of course, the Inquisition and it has been suggested that the activities of the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition had an effect on the economic development of Spain that can be measured down to the present day[50].

The Inquisition was something Locke was acutely aware of and studied in some detail but his interest did not relate to its potential impact on economic

[46] C. Weiss, *History of the French Protestant Refugees from the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes to the Present*, trans. by F. Hardman, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh 1854.

[47] R.H. Dees, "Establishing Toleration", in *Political Theory* 27 (1999), 5, pp. 667-693.

[48] S.O. Becker and L. Woessmann, "Was Weber Wrong? A Human Capital Theory of Protestant Economic History", in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 124 (2009), 2, pp. 531-596.

[49] M. Koyama and M.M. Xue, "The Literary Inquisition: The Persecution of Intellectuals and Human Capital Accumulation in China", in MPRA Paper 62103, (2015) University Library of Munich, Germany. https://ideas.repec.org/p/pra/mprapa/62103.html

[50] M.J. Vidal Drelichman and H-J. Voth, "The long run effects of religious persecution: Evidence from the Spanish Inquisition", in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118 (2021), 33.

development. While he was in Montpellier, he copied sections of the report of the inquisition that had been held in Toulouse in the fourteenth century following the Albigensian crusade. Locke went to considerable lengths to secure ownership of the manuscript for his friend the Quaker and bibliophile Benjamin Furly[51]. Philip Limborch borrowed the manuscript from Furly for his *History of the Inquisition*[52]. Locke, Limborch and Furly feared that the manuscript would fall into Roman Catholic hands and be destroyed[53]. The original Latin letter on toleration was addressed to Limborch[54]. Locke's mature views on toleration arose in part at least out of discussions within this group of friends while he was taking refuge in the Dutch Republic. Although they did not share a common position on how far toleration should extend there was a common purpose between them.

Locke lived in an atmosphere of plots, counter-plots and conspiracies. Arcane and antiquarian though a mediaeval manuscript may seem in terms of modern theories of toleration and freedom of conscience, for Locke and his contemporaries it had an immediate and pressing relevance. They saw the Inquisition as a real political and religious threat that could be used as an instrument of absolutism. Locke's attitude to the Inquisition was, therefore, a response to those real and imagined political imperatives not a subdivision of economic policy. He could have made the case for the economic importance of toleration. It was not an unreasonable argument for a man who had worked at the Board of Trade and had investments in major trading companies to make and it was, to judge from Proast's comment, an idea that was already in circulation. Some of Locke's followers were later to make a case for toleration on economic grounds[55]. Locke signally failed to do so.

7. *News from the West-Indies*

Just as Locke's interest in the Inquisition cannot be related to economic considerations so his interest in travel literature should not be interpreted as entirely related to his role on the Council of Trade and Plantations or as secretary

[51] Liber Sententiarum inquisitionis Tholosanae, British Library Add MS 4697.

[52] P. Limborch, *Historia Inquisitionis*, Amsterdam 1692.

[53] M.A.E. Nickson, "Locke and the Inquisition of Toulouse", in *The British Museum Quarterly* 36 (1972), 3/4, pp. 83-92.

[54] J. Locke, *Epistola de tolerantia*, Gouda 1689.

[55] T. Gordon, *An Essay on the Practice of Stock-jobbing, and some Remarks on the right Use, and regular Improvement of Money. In a Letter to a Gentleman, and a Proprietor of South-Sea Stock*, London 1724.

to the Lords Proprietor of Carolina[56]. He certainly sought information from the captains of merchant ships and they presented Locke, as a distinguished public official with elevated connections, gifts of curiosities collected on their travels but his vast library of travel literature was not purely utilitarian in character. Rather than providing him with a shopping list for colonial ventures Locke's travel books, particularly those on the Americas, reflect his developing views on natural law theory and the origins of the state.

Proast expressed his surprise at Locke's "News...from the West-Indies" by which he meant Locke's comments on the political organisation of Native American societies.

> The News you tell us here from the West-Indies, of Commonwealths there, wherein, in time of Peace, no body has any Authority over any of the Members of them, is indeed very wonderful and surprizing. For I confess I thought before, that there could be no Commonwealth, without Government; nor Government, without Authority in some body, over those who are to be govern'd.[57]

His surprise came in response to Locke's comment in his previous letter.

> There are nations in the West Indies which have no other end of their society, but their mutual defence against their common enemies. In these, their captain or prince is sovereign commander in time of war; but in time of peace, neither he nor anybody else has any authority over over any of the society.[58]

The argument had continued between the two men from their first exchange of letters. Locke had argued that a ruler or magistrate only had authority in civil matters and that this power did not extend to religion. It was the duty of a civil ruler to protect,

> Life, liberty, physical integrity, and freedom from pain, as well as external possessions, such as, land, money, and the necessities of everyday life, and so on.

The civil ruler, Locke insisted "has no mandate from God" and could not impose religion on their subjects because "no one can believe at another's behest". The test of belief, for Locke, was an inward one rather than external conformity.

56 B. Arneil, "Trade, Plantations, and Property: John Locke and the Economic Defense of Colonialism", in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55 (1994), 4, pp. 591-609.

57 Proast, *A third letter*, p. 62.

58 J. Locke, "A Second Letter on Toleration", in R. Vernon, *Locke on Toleration*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 106.

> No matter what you profess with your lips or what external worship you offer, if you are not inwardly and profoundly convinced in your own heart that it is both true and pleasing to God, it not only does not assist your salvation, it positively hinders it.[59]

Proast had countered that the purpose of a commonwealth or civil society was to safeguard "the spiritual and eternal interests of men" as well as their material well being[60]. Locke developed his case in his next letter by referring to the case of the West Indies or the Americas where he claimed there were societies that appointed war leaders who had no authority in peacetime. Proast doubted that any society could exist without some form of permanent political authority and Locke hit back with the Mile End remark. Proast had failed to find descriptions of such societies in "your books of Europe and Asia" so he thought it was untrue[61]. Ultimately, Locke's case in favour of the purely secular nature of civil society hung on the evidence of travel literature, as did his refutation of royal absolutism in *The Two Treatises of Government* and the thesis that ideas were not innate to the human mind in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

8. *Religious toleration in England*

Locke could have made a case for the purely civil nature of political authority and in favour of religious toleration without reference to the Americas. He cited Richard Hooker, the sixteenth century Anglican theologian, and the epistles of St Peter to the effect that political society was a human creation and was not ordained by God. He could have made use of an existing tolerationist discourse which went back to the mid-seventeenth century. John Milton had insisted that neither the state nor church could claim infallibility where religion was concerned. Roger Williams, who was driven out of the Massachusetts Bay colony by the intolerance of the Puritans, denied that the Old Testament provided a blueprint for the foundation of a godly, Christian commonwealth and advocated comprehensive toleration[62]. The Cambridge Platonists shared with Locke what

[59] J. Locke, "A Letter on Toleration", in R. Vernon, *Locke on Toleration*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 7.

[60] J. Proast, "The Argument of the Letter Concerning Toleration", in R. Vernon, *Locke on Toleration*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 62.

[61] *Letter Concerning Toleration* ed. by M. Goldie, p. 7.

[62] T.N. Corns, "John Williams, John Milton and the Limits of Toleration", in S. Achinstein and E. Sauer, *Milton and Toleration,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, pp. 72-85.

has been called "the argument from ignorance". Since no one could claim to know the exact nature of religious truth with certainty toleration of divergent views was necessary. Locke used the argument repeatedly in the letters on toleration and often cited the Cambridge Platonists whose books he recommended as a sound guide to religion. Like Locke they insisted that conscience could not be an infallible guide to truth[63]. From 1691 Locke lived at the house of Damaris Masham, the daughter of the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, and some scholars have traced an influence through her of Cudworth's ideas on Locke[64].

The emergence of a group of churchmen, often identified collectively as Latitudinarians, in the later seventeenth century, who advocated a broadly based and inclusive form of Anglicanism, gave a new impetus to what was by then a long standing case for toleration. Gilbert Burnet, who was made Bishop of Salisbury after the "Glorious Revolution", had argued that freedom of religion was protected by the laws of England even before Locke published *The Two Treatises of Government*[65]. Archbishop of Canterbury John Tillotson was a popular preacher whose sermons were read long after his death in 1694. Like Locke, he emphasised rationality and morality over doctrine[66]. Locke was particularly close to Tillotson with whom he felt free to discuss difficult theological problems and greatly regretted his death. Some have argued that it would be a mistake to group Locke with the Latitudinarians[67]. There was always the suspicion that some at least of them were time-serving opportunists who had adapted to the new regime. King William came increasingly to regard Burnet as a pious fraud[68]. Burnet's views were not entirely in accord with Locke's since, while he abhorred persecution, he seems to have believed that there was a religious basis for the state[69]. Locke had a far more sceptical attitude towards the state and, in his mature works at least, did not wish to

63 G.A.J. Rogers, "Locke and the latitude-men: ignorance as a ground for toleration", in R. Kroll and P. Zagorin, *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England 1640-1700*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992, pp. 230-252.

64 J. Broad, "A Woman's Influence? John Locke and Damaris Masham on Moral Accountability", in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, (2006), 3, pp. 489-510.

65 M.I.J. Griffin jr., *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England,* Brill, Leiden 1992, p. 30.

66 J.M. Blosser, "John Tillotson's Latitudinarian Legacy: Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, and the Pursuit of Happiness", in *Anglican and Episcopal History* 80 (2011) 2, pp. 142-173.

67 J.Tully, "Locke", in J.H. Burns and M. Goldie, *Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, p. 645.

68 Cranston, *John Locke,* p. 317.

69 T. Claydon, "Latitudinarianism and Apocalyptic History in the Worldview of Gilbert Burnet, 1643-1715", in *The Historical Journal* 51 (2008), 3, pp. 577-597.

allow it the capacity to determine matters of faith[70].

Locke's relationship with the Latitudinarians was complex. While he may have harboured doubts about Burnet, he was on good terms with Burnet's wife and took her advice seriously[71]. Edward Stillingfleet can be numbered among the Latitudinarians. He had attempted to include dissenters in his congregation when he was rector of St Andrews, Holborn[72]. Influenced by the Cambridge Platonists, he accepted that conscience was not a guide to truth and allowed for diversity in matters not prescribed by scripture[73]. Yet, despite his broad church principles, he was one of Locke's sternest critics and engaged in a long running and often intemperate dispute with Locke about the *Essay*. If we take the Latitudinarians to be a group it was not an homogeneous one.

Whatever differences may have existed did not prevent Locke from working with both Burnet and Tillotson on Philip Limborch's *History of the Inquisition* which included the text of the manuscript Locke had gone to such lengths to preserve. The book was dedicated to Tillotson and laid out the horrors of persecution over the centuries which linked it to absolutism in all its forms. The Third Letter of Toleration can be seen as part of an increasingly acrimonious dispute between High Church Tories and Low Church Latitudinarians in which Proast wrote on behalf of the Oxford-based High Church Tories and Locke on behalf of Tillotson and a more comprehensive form of Anglicanism[74]. However, it could equally be argued that Limborch's *History of the Inquisition*, which became very much a joint tolerationist project, fits into this categorisation rather better than the letter since it was aimed firmly at the Roman Catholic Church and those who were suspected of wanting to return to its ceremonies, without any material about America.

[70] D. Lucci, John Locke's Christianity, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020, p. 179.

[71] R. Woolhouse, *Locke: a Biography,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 431.

[72] S. Mandelbrote, "Religious Belief and the Politics of Toleration in the Late Seventeenth Century", in *Nederlands Archief Voor Kerkgeschiedenis / Dutch Review of Church History* 81 (2001), 2, pp. 93-114.

[73] W.M. Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England 1660-1700*, University of Georgia Press, Athens 1993, p. 29.

[74] M. Goldie, "John Locke, Jonas Proast and Religious Toleration 1688-1692", in J. Walsh, C. Taylor and S. Taylor, *The Church of England 1689-1833,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993, pp. 143-171.

9. *Travel Literature*

Locke could have settled in his letters on toleration for a reiteration of well rehearsed arguments sustained by the bonds of friendship and sanctioned by ecclesiastical authority that were intended to define the nature of the national church and provide a foundation for political harmony in a state that was still open to challenge from within and threats from abroad. With his reference to the West Indies he chose to go further and make a universal case for toleration rather than base himself on strictly English or even purely Protestant precedents. The letters can be compared to *The Two Treatises of Government* in which he went beyond penning a straightforward exclusionist tract designed to demonstrate why James should not be king[75]. In the immediate polemical sense citing travel literature might not have helped his case very much since there was still no settled and established view of the nature of indigenous societies in the Americas and their implications for what would be called history, political science, sociology, theology and anthropology today, which were still being framed in essentially biblical and classical terms of reference. Land masses of unknown but evidently vast scale, inhabited by a bewilderingly diverse range of peoples, speaking languages unrelated to any that were known to Europeans could not be absorbed into the existing framework of knowledge. Two hundred years after Columbus sailed across the Atlantic the Americas were still sending shock waves through the intellectual life of Europe as Proast's comments demonstrate.

Reliable information was scarce initially and the Americas were absorbed into the fantasy landscapes of chivalric romances. The Spanish monarchy kept a tight control over reports and maps making it difficult for English writers to get hold of even the limited amount of information that was known about the new continents and the societies that inhabited them. Richard Hakluyt who published one of the first English accounts of the Americas had to gather information from Portuguese exiles in France and from French sailors who knew the coast of North America despite his claims of English precedence[76]. Not only was it difficult to acquire accurate information but the state of knowledge was fluid. Old certainties were challenged but little definite could be put in their place. Spanish cosmographers were the first to deal with the problem and they had to develop novel epistemic methods to cope with each

[75] P. Laslett, "The English Revolution and Locke's 'Two treatises of government'", in *Cambridge Historical Journal* xii (1956), 1, pp. 40-55.

[76] R. Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation,* London 1589.

piece of new material[77]. Even treating an eye-witness account as a reliable source of information when it challenged established knowledge required a different epistemological approach. Principles established in courts of law could be applied to reports from the Americas so that two independent eye-witnesses were generally better than one. It was an approach that had its own problems since more than one eye-witness claimed to have seen mermaids[78]. Travel literature did not provide a ready made store of empirical data.

Edward Stillingfleet, who acquired a collection of travel literature comparable to Locke's own, challenged Locke's use of travel writers who were "mere strangers and persons looked on as enemies"[79]. Spanish writers were unreliable, as far as Stillingfleet was concerned, because they wanted to justify the enslavement of Native Americans by claiming they had no religion[80]. Travel literature did not shed its air of unreliability easily. It was in the context of this disintegration of old certainties and a lack of any authoritative systematisation of new knowledge about the Americas that the city comedies fabricated their own fabulous cosmography beyond the walls of London. The problem was never satisfactorily resolved so that even in the late seventeenth century travel literature remained a highly suspect and unreliable form of evidence. From a purely polemical point of view, Locke might have done better to avoid it.

10. *José de Acosta*

Locke did not cite any specific travel books in his replies to Proast but in the *Two Treatises of Government* and the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he cited, quoted and paraphrased a number of travel writers on the Americas. He used the Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta in *The Two Treatise of Government* on the question of the social organisation of Native American societies,

> And if Josephus Acosta's word may be taken, he tells us, that in many parts of America there was no government at all. There are great and apparent conjec-

[77] M. Portuondo, *The Secret Science: Spanish Cosmography and the New World*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2009, p. 299.

[78] A. Gerbi, *Nature in the New World from Christopher Columbus to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo*, trans. by J. Moyle, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 1985.

[79] E. Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae: the Philosophy of Edward Stillingfleet including his replies to John Locke*, vol. 3, ed. by G.A.J. Rogers, Thoemmes Press, Bristol 2000, p. 279.

[80] A. Talbot, "*The Great Ocean of Knowledge": the Influence of Travel Literature on the Work of John Locke*, Brill, Leiden 2010, p. 176.

> tures, says he, that these men, speaking of those of Peru, for a long time had neither kings nor commonwealths, but lived in troops, as they do this day in Florida, the Cheriquanas, those of Bresil, and many other nations, which have no certain kings, but as occasion is offered in peace or war, they choose their captains as they please.[81]

This captains and kings passage from Acosta sounds close to the point that Locke made to Proast. Locke had Acosta's *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* in both English and the original Latin[82]. His book contained information that was otherwise kept under lock and key in the Council of the Indies archive and may have taken some years to come to press[83]. It was an attempt to provide an encyclopaedic description of the Americas that would act as a manual for future missionaries. Later travellers such as Alexander von Humboldt were impressed by the material in Acosta's book even though his purpose was religious rather than scientific. Humboldt recognised that the book must have had an impact on European intellectual life at a time when reliable reports from America were scarce[84]. What that impact was on Locke only began to be seriously studied in the second half of the twentieth century. Travel literature has been seen as providing a confirmation and illustration of the conditions that existed in the biblical Garden Eden[85]. It has been put into the context of European colonial expansion[86], and the development of political anthropology[87]. The great stumbling block has always been that the Early Modern travellers whose books Locke used were not informed observers in the sense that anthropologists defined their own discipline in the course of the twentieth century. They represented the antithesis of scientific anthropology as it was developed by Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski and their students[88].

Acosta was not an obvious reference, and certainly not a source that could

[81] J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. by Peter Laslett, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1960, p. 102.

[82] J. a Costa, *De Natura Novi Orbis libri duo*, Cologne 1596; J. de Acosta, *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies,* London 1604.

[83] Portuondo, *Secret Science*, p. 264.

[84] T.R. Ford, "Stranger in a Foreign Land: Jose de Acosta's Scientific Realizations in Sixteenth-Century Peru", in *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998), 1, pp. 19-33.

[85] W.G. Batz, "The Historical Anthropology of John Locke", in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (1974), 4, pp. 663-670.

[86] D. Carey, "Locke, Travel Literature, and the Natural History of Man", in *The Seventeenth Century* 11 (1996), 2, pp. 259-280.

[87] D. Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 92.

[88] Talbot, *Great Ocean*, p. 251.

be expected to occupy such a central place for Locke, since he was part of intellectual tradition that was very different from the Baconian natural history that characterised much of Locke's work[89]. The gap may not have been as wide as it seems at first glance. Locke's mentor Robert Boyle respected Acosta's knowledge of the Americas and cited him on the refining of gold and silver[90]. Acosta was a valid source for Boyle because he had first-hand experience after living in America for many years which was coupled with an extensive knowledge of the classical sources such as Pliny. Bacon's anti-Aristotelianism should not be exaggerated. He may not have repudiated Aristotle completely but rather rejected Renaissance Aristotelianism when he attempted to strike out in a new direction[91]. Nonetheless there was a turn away from scholasticism which was made explicit by Thomas Spratt when he said that the Royal Society "intends a philosophy for the use of cities, and not for the retirements of schools"[92]. Despite a certain nuance in the attitude of Royal Society natural philosophers toward Aristotle, the situation in Spain was entirely different. In Spain there was no turn away from Aristotle, quite the reverse, Spain saw a vigorous revival of Aristotelianism and an attempt to frame the new information coming from the Americas and elsewhere in Aristotelian terms. Acosta's *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* was a thoroughly Aristotelian work[93]. Faced with a flood of new material the response in Spain was to revive Aristotle not consign him to the past.

11. *Spanish Revival of Aristotelianism*

Acosta belonged to a Spanish neo-Thomist school that can be traced back to the Dominican Francisco de Vitoria, who was trained at the Sorbonne, where he came under the influence of the Flemish Thomist Peter Crockaert. Returning to Spain he eventually became professor of theology at the university of Salamanca. His lectures were never published but they were widely circulated in the form of students' notes giving him an extensive influence not only over

89 P.J. Connolly, "Travel Literature, the New World, and Locke on Species", in *Society and Politics* 1 (2013), 7, pp. 103-116.
90 R. Boyle, *The Sceptical Chymist,* Sixth Part, London 1661, p. 371.
91 B. Vickers, "Francis Bacon and the Progress of Knowledge", in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992), 3, pp. 495-518.
92 T. Spratt, *The History of the Royal Society,* London 1667, p. 76.
93 Portuondo, *Secret Science,* p. 262.

his own students but over the students of his students in faculties of theology throughout Spain and among missionaries in every part of the Spanish empire. Salamanca was globally connected and became the intellectual centre at which the novel experiences of Europeans were turned into new knowledge[94]. The framework within which that process of knowledge formation took place was Aristotelian.

It has been argued that Locke only cited Hooker, as he did in *The Two Treatises of Government* and the Letters of Toleration, because Hooker was an acceptably conservative source behind whom he could hide his own more challenging ideas when there was, in reality, very little in the way of substantial agreement between them[95]. Not everyone has accepted that Locke's use of Hooker was purely tactical[96]. The connection Locke made between Hooker's views on natural law and what amounts to a summary of a passage from Acosta tends to support the idea that Locke owed a genuine intellectual debt to Hooker. Hooker's ideas had been highly controversial when they were first published because they reflected the influence of Aristotle and Aquinas. He was accused of importing "Romische doctrine" and the "darknesse of school learning" into English Protestantism[97]. What Locke found in Acosta was the same neo-Thomistic natural law theory that Hooker used but in Acosta's case developed in relation to America.

In England the theory of Natural Law is most often associated with Thomas Hobbes who took the view that life in the state of nature was "solitary, poore, nasty, bruitish and short"[98]. Locke expressed a similar opinion in his early writings. He described the state of nature as having

> no peace, no security, no enjoyments, enmity with all men and safe possession of nothing, and those stinging swarms of miseries that attend anarchy and rebellion.[99]

[94] T. Duve, "The School of Salamanca: A Case of Global Knowledge Production", in T. Duve, J.L. Egío and C. Birr, *The School of Salamanca: A Case of Global Knowledge Production*, Brill, Leiden 2021, pp. 1-42.

[95] L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History,* Chicago University Press, Chicago 1953, pp. 179-180.

[96] E. De Jonghe, "Locke and Hooker on the Finding of the Law", in *The Review of Metaphysics* 42 (1988), 2, pp. 301-325.

[97] W.J. Torrance Kirby, "Richard Hooker's Theory of Natural Law in the Context of Reformation Theology", in *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 30 (1999), 3, pp. 681-703.

[98] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by R. Tuck, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1966, p. 90.

[99] J. Locke, *Two Tracts on Government*, ed. by P. Abrams, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1967, p. 156.

He was probably influenced by Hobbes, although he never admitted as much, but he could have found the state of nature framed in similar terms by Samuel Pufendorf for whom it was a condition of "war, fear, poverty, nastiness, solitude, barbarity, ignorance, savagery"[100]. In the wake of the Thirty Years War the state of nature was seen principally in terms of the breakdown of social order in a European context rather than the social condition of non-European peoples. Having grown up during the English Civil War, Locke's early thinking was shaped by the turmoil of the period. Even without that experience there was a classical precedent for viewing the state of nature in these grim terms. For the Stoics the state of nature was an a-social or pre-social condition in which human beings lived as isolated individuals leading an animal-like existence without culture. By the time Locke came to write *The Two Treatises* his conception of the state of nature had changed. He now saw it as a social condition. Those living in a state of nature could own property and make agreements without giving up their fundamental equality and freedom under the law of nature. Locke's new approach to the state of nature reflected his extensive reading of travel literature.

12. *Natural Rights and Toleration*

Acosta's work was central to Locke's changed understanding of the state of nature. It grew out of a Spanish debate about coercion and the nature of belief that dated back to the forced conversion of Muslims and Jews. Some argued that the New Christians should be accepted as imperfect Christians and that social inclusion would encourage them to become better Christians others that coercion was appropriate because they had been given long enough to convert and should be expelled from the country[101]. The conversion of Native Americans raised similar issues and Vitoria applied the same principles he had expounded in relation to converts in the Iberian peninsula to the Americas in his *De Indiis* lecture. Forced conversion would not produce Christian believers but would produce hostility, he maintained[102]. Bartolomé de las Casas took

[100] S. Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen according to the Natural Law*, ed. by J. Tully, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991, p. 118.
[101] S. Kimmel, *Parables of Coercion: Conversion and Knowledge at the End of Islamic Spain,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2015, p. 2.
[102] Ibid., p. 45.

up Vitoria's arguments in a debate held at Valladolid to decide whether it was lawful for the Spanish king to wage war on Native Americans[103]. His opponent, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, argued that war was not only legitimate but was the necessary precursor to conversion. It was this debate which provided the basis for subsequent discussions of coercion and toleration throughout the Spanish Empire and provided the context for many of Locke's collection of books on America. Locke had Las Casas' *History of the Indies* although he did not cite it directly in any of his works[104]. Acosta differed from Las Casas in some respects but had been educated in the same neo-Thomist tradition. He rejected the idea that genuine conversion could come out of the violence of the Spanish conquest[105]. Like Locke he stressed the importance of personal belief and insisted that faith was necessary for salvation.

We are perhaps accustomed to seeing the rise of religious toleration in a Protestant or northern European and, by extension, North American context. Acknowledging Locke's debt to Acosta and Spanish neo-Thomism shifts that perspective. Locke's view of who should be tolerated remains narrow and no less determined by the perceived political imperatives of the day among the Whig elite, but the theory itself becomes much richer and less specific to a particular national environment. Instead of defining toleration in terms of English law and English history or Protestant practice and doctrine, Locke was attempting to base his case for toleration on a theory of natural rights that had a claim to universal application. The claim was not entirely unfounded since Thomism had originally developed in response to the influx of Arabic texts, particularly those of Ibn Rushd or Averroes, which made it possible to develop a coherent curriculum of Aristotelian philosophy in Christian Europe for the first time[106]. Vitoria's revival of Thomism was another later response to the persistence of Islamic and Jewish culture in Spain. His extension of the Thomist conception of natural rights to America represented a further widening of the theory which was not entirely one sided but involved the recognition that Native Americans were rational beings who needed to be convinced and persuaded

[103] M. Zamora, *Language, Authority and Indigenous History in 'The Comentarios reale de los Incas',* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988, p. 92.

[104] B. de Las Casas, *Histoire des Indes,* Lyons 1642.

[105] I.W. del Valle, "José de Acosta, Violence and Rhetoric: The Emergence of Colonial Baroque", in *Calíope* 18 (2013), 2, pp. 46-72.

[106] C. Burnett, "Arabic into Latin: the Reception of Arabic Philosophy into Western Europe", in P. Adamson, R.C. Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, pp. 370-404.

rather than physically coerced into accepting Christianity. Acosta based his history on interviews with Native Americans as well as conventional classical texts. Garcilaso de la Vega, another of the authors Locke cited, wrote about Inca culture and beliefs from the inside, as the son of an Inca princess and a Spanish conquistador. His aim was to explain the culture of his mother's people to the Spanish. Having built up a library of this character Locke could justifiably feel that he was getting "beyond the smoke of his own chimney"[107] and escaping from the little "goshen in the intellectual world"[108] that he thought trapped other scholars.

13. *Conclusion*

Locke's early interest in plays and romances reflected a desire to comprehend the new world that Europeans became aware of as a result of the transoceanic voyages of the fifteenth century. If over time he collected more serious sources of information he nonetheless remembered the line that he threw back at Jonas Proast showing a strong element of continuity in his thought. Digesting the new information was a protracted affair and Proast's surprise at Locke's news from the West Indies was probably genuine even though Acosta's *History of the Indies* was by then nearly a century old. Few people knew as much about travel literature as Locke and even fewer could integrate it into the existing framework of knowledge derived from Biblical and classical sources.

The *First Letter Concerning Toleration* can be seen in terms of a discussion taking place among Dutch dissenters, English and French exiles in the Netherlands. Subsequent letters were written in the context of the dispute between High and Low Church Anglicans for control of the national church. If that was the sum total of what the letters were about they could have been much simpler. Locke did not have to bring America into the discussion. By doing so he was taking the debate into intellectual territory that was highly controversial and did not, in his opponents' eyes, and probably his supporters' eyes too, appreciably strengthen the case for toleration. The limits Locke placed on toleration were politically expedient but the general scope of the case he made for toleration was not. It was universal and challenged institutions that

[107] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975, p. 66.
[108] J. Locke, *The Conduct of the Understanding,* London 1801, p. 12.

were essential for socialisation and education.

The growth of London as a global trading centre could conceivably have given Locke the opportunity to discuss toleration in terms of its potential in relation to trade and industry. He could have presented it either as a cause or a consequence of economic growth. London was a far more diverse city as well as a larger one by the end of the seventeenth century. Reactions to that growth were by no means uniform. Defoe's call for family worship to be maintained reflects a more conservative response to economic growth and indicates that there was more than one possible attitude to religious toleration even among Calvinists. Proast clearly expected Locke to argue that toleration would benefit trade and some of Locke's followers were later to do so. Locke's failure to argue in favour of toleration on economic grounds is worth emphasising because the belief that the economic case for religious toleration is strong is still prevalent and has tended to distort the understanding of Locke's letters and the history of religious toleration generally. Toleration has come to be seen as a part of an ideological current restricted to liberal, Protestant, capitalist countries and alien to the rest of the world. Locke's use of Spanish travel literature suggests that this was not the case.

Locke's letters drew on a body of literature which had emerged from Spanish neo-Thomism and was a product of a prolonged interaction between Islam, Judaism and Christianity to which was added the intellectually destabilising impact of America. The debate on coercion and toleration went back much further in Spain than in England. It was intellectually richer and based on more sophisticated philosophical foundations than even the most closely argued Biblical, legalistic or economic argument for toleration. Locke's reliance on Spanish travel literature indicates that his case for toleration was not restricted to immediate political or confessional concerns. Although such contingent issues were certainly present in the letters and account for a large element of the context, they do not provide a comprehensive account of the content which was not a direct response to the particular historical situation that existed in England when Locke wrote them.

Locke's letters developed a universal case for toleration which presents problems for modern readers who do not accept Natural Law Theory as a valid basis for assumptions about rights. His letters on toleration have been largely ignored as a result. A much narrower conception of toleration has been developed on the basis of Social Contract Theory or the Westphalian System. While these theories themselves are increasingly regarded as mythical, Natural Rights Theory has not made a successful comeback to intellectual respectability.

It would seem to be the equivalent of accepting that the existence of mermaids was necessary for an adequate theory of marine ecology. Locke's intellectual journey from Mile End to America is no longer open for us to make. What can be said, however, is that in recovering that wider context of the letters on toleration they regain a relevance that is otherwise lost. Far from being redundant, when the letters on toleration are read in the context of Spanish travel literature they point to the absence of a well founded theory of universal rights in modern political theory and philosophy.

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