

4-1-2010

John Marshall, JOHN LOCKE, TOLERATION AND EARLY ENLIGHTENMENT CULTURE

Gary De Krey

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

De Krey, Gary (2010) "John Marshall, JOHN LOCKE, TOLERATION AND EARLY ENLIGHTENMENT CULTURE," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 27 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil201027225

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol27/iss2/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

consequentialists who seek to maximize these, just as primitive sufferings are presupposed by the effort to minimize these both in human society and among sentient beings in general. On Forrest's account, divine beauty seems to consist in both God's ability to bring our world into existence and to lovingly respond to creaturely joys and sufferings once it gets going. Divine beauty, it seems, becomes apparent to us when we try to view the cosmos as a valuable whole and in the long run. Consequentialism actually supports a theistic worldview.

Unfortunately, Forrest denigrates perfect being theology, whether found in classical theists like Katherin Rogers or in a neoclassical theist like (myself or) Hartshorne. The Anselmian effort to reach clarity regarding that than which no greater can be conceived is criticized by Forrest because, although God may become perfectly loving over time, such perfection is not there from the beginning. That is, what is really distinctive about the author's approach is not that he is a developmental theist, but that he denies that what we mean by "God" is a being that is by its very nature perfect.

I would be remiss if I did not mention in closing that there is not the slightest hint of dogmatism in the book. Throughout the book Forrest is genuinely interested in productive dialectical exchange with fellow theists. It would be a mistake, I think, for philosophical theists to put this book at the bottom of their reading lists.

John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture, by John Marshall. Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. viii + 767. \$123.00 (cloth)

GARY DE KREY, St. Olaf College

Little is more repugnant to the liberal mind than the employment of physical coercion to punish, interrogate, or re-educate those who hold stigmatized political or religious views. Yet nothing was more fundamental to medieval and early modern European culture, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, than the idea that the preservation of the faith and the security of the state required severe means to reclaim "heretics" and "schismatics." John Marshall's massive study investigates the transition from the general acceptance of rationales for the proscription and punishment of religious heterodoxy to the development of compelling arguments for universal religious toleration. He also inquires into the historical origins of the early Enlightenment. For Marshall, these questions are the same. Arguments for religious toleration became critical challenges to the dominant early modern intellectual and cultural paradigm and permitted more enlightened attitudes to emerge, at least among some Europeans.

Marshall places Locke and other early Enlightenment advocates of religious toleration in the broadest conceivable historical contexts. Almost

two-thirds of the book is taken up with the history of religious coercion before the breakthrough of more tolerant ideas in the 1680s and the 1690s. After surveying persecution in later seventeenth-century England, France, and the Netherlands, Marshall turns his attention to the justifications for such coercion that had developed over the centuries. He begins with the church fathers, the councils, and the early creeds that established Christian dogma and called for its defense, against those who actively dissented from it, with harsh corporal punishments. Working through late medieval thought and through the writings of the “magisterial” reformers, Marshall explains how understandings of heresy and schism became associated intellectually with such other anathematized categories or behaviors as blasphemy, sedition, witchcraft, sodomy, libertinism, and atheism. He also examines how Catholic and Protestant authorities repeatedly recycled these understandings. The language in which religious differences were condemned became richly multi-textured as “heresy” acquired negative, gendered connotations and was metaphorically assimilated to such other disasters as pestilence and the plague, pollution, and monstrous births.

In the course of Marshall’s analysis of the language of intolerance, many textbook assumptions fall by the wayside, and Christian thought before the Enlightenment is presented as fundamentally intolerant. Erasmus, it seems, was no more a supporter of leniency towards heretics than Luther, Calvin, or Counter-Reformation Catholic authorities. A more tolerant culture did develop in the Protestant Netherlands, but the limits to Dutch toleration were many. Leading Dutch Reformed clergy begrudged the practice of toleration and remained hostile to Catholicism, Anabaptism, Arminianism, and anti-Trinitarianism. Those outside the public church were generally permitted private worship only and suffered from numerous legal disabilities. Persecuted late-seventeenth-century French Reformed Protestant theologians like Pierre Jurieu had no more patience for intellectual diversity within their ranks: Arminianism remained as suspect to them as to most early seventeenth-century Calvinists. In England, advocacy of liberty for conscience by mid-seventeenth century Independents was limited by an insistence upon Trinitarian belief, by anti-Catholicism, and by fears that a general toleration would open the floodgates of Socinianism, atheism, antinomianism, and libertinism. Even the anti-Trinitarian John Milton was “markedly intolerant in his opposition to Catholicism,” (p. 331) while the more tolerant Levellers accomplished little. Attitudes towards Jews remained guarded everywhere; and positive perceptions of Muslims were largely restricted to anti-Trinitarians who viewed Islam through a Unitarian lens.

Tolerationist arguments did circulate before the Enlightenment; but they largely developed within the ranks of the persecuted themselves—the Anabaptists, anti-Trinitarians, and other sectarians. Intellectual leaders of the dwindling Arminian or Remonstrant community in the Netherlands also embraced and improved upon the limited tolerationist arguments of Hugo Grotius. The work of the tolerant Arminian writer Simon Epis-

copious, for instance, was republished and promoted by the Remonstrant professor Philipp van Limborch, John Locke's Dutch friend and host in the 1680s. However, neither the anti-predestinarian nor the semi-Socinian elements of Arminian thought did much to advance the acceptability of toleration. Dutch Arminianism nevertheless influenced Locke and many other figures in the conversational circles that Locke encountered in the Netherlands.

Marshall's lengthy treatment of the politics and culture of European religious coercion, which reached a climax in the 1680s, permits him to emphasize the significance of the coincident intellectual breakthrough made by Locke, Pierre Bayle, Gilbert Burnet, and their Dutch and French friends. As Marshall moves—in the final third of the book—to examining the relationships, publications, shared ideas, and differences of these men, he also addresses the origins and nature of the early Enlightenment. He does this through extensive juxtapositions of the tolerationist arguments of Locke, Limborch, Burnet, Bayle, Jean Le Clerc, Adriaan van Paets, Charles le Cène, Isaac Papin, and others. Through their intentional collaboration, these advocates of a new approach to religious disagreement formed the center of the “republic of letters,” an informal association of like-minded thinkers who drew upon and promoted each other's writings. Recent Enlightenment historians have seen them as central in the deliberate launching of a more tolerant, civil, and polite culture. Marshall finds in them not only many of the ideas of the mature Enlightenment but also a self-conscious attempt to recover “primitive Christianity” from what they saw as its millennium-long bondage to the corruptions of Constantine, the Bishops of Rome, and the magisterial Protestant reformers. Although Marshall is principally interested in situating Locke within this early Enlightenment ethos, he also provides great insight into Pierre Bayle. Bayle's *Philosophical Commentary* (1686–1688), his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697), and his journal, *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, helped define the values and arguments of the emerging “tolerationist associations.”

Sweeping through centuries and digesting the work of scores of major thinkers, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* will provoke discussion for years. All consideration of the early Enlightenment and of the intellectual breakthrough of arguments for toleration must now start with Marshall's book. Yet both its overly ambitious scope and its prolix style will discourage many readers. The critical final third of the study can profitably be considered independently of the rest by those chiefly interested in the early Enlightenment and in Locke's religious thought. As tedious as Marshall's method of compiling comparable quotations can become, each author under consideration—and especially Locke—can be understood here as part of an innovative ensemble of critics of Christian “orthodoxy” whose publications marked a decisive departure in European thought. Few Locke scholars have ever read as deeply and as insightfully into the work of Locke's continental friends as Marshall. His evaluation of Locke's writings as part of the republic of letters is fresh and compelling,

and his analysis of the early Enlightenment challenges Jonathan Israel's more Spinoza-centered interpretation.¹

A book of such scope, which touches upon the work of multi-disciplinary cadres of scholars, will arouse criticism from diverse academic quarters, especially since Marshall steps on many toes. Students of early modern Christian thought, for instance, will find little nuance and much selectivity in his attachment of almost all Trinitarian defenders of church establishments to an intellectual template associating "heresy" with all manner of moral turpitude. Marshall does not always carefully distinguish between formulaic and more intentional rhetorical usages of such pejorative categories as libertinism and atheism; and his discussion of these pejorative categories often overshadows the core theological differences that provoked their employment in the first place. He also treats European culture from the late middle ages through the era of Louis XIV in rather static terms. Oddly, for a scholar who has contributed much to the study of late seventeenth-century English political thought, Marshall is more adroit in placing Locke in the continental intellectual context than in the context of English ideas about religious coercion and liberty of conscience. Because he judges all early modern arguments against religious coercion by the Enlightenment standard of *universal* religious toleration, he minimizes the contributions of previous English advocates of conscience to the eventual breakthrough of tolerationist ideas. He notes the importance of sectarian, Quaker, and Leveller authors, for instance; but he does not explore them in the depth he accords to the Dutch Arminian tradition. He has previously examined the influence upon Locke of the irenic Latitudinarian Anglicans and Cambridge Platonists, but he does not here revisit the place of either group in the development of English tolerationist thought.²

Marshall also regards Restoration Presbyterian and Independent authors as offering only limited and self-interested pleas for conscience or for comprehension within the established church. Yet the early Enlightenment insistence that religious oppression—rather than toleration of religious diversity—was more likely to cause civil dissension was commonplace among Locke's Restoration dissenting contemporaries by the 1680s. Slingsby Bethel, Sir Charles Wolseley, and other nonconformist spokesmen popularized the arguments that conscience is directly responsible to God rather than to the civil magistrate and that persuasion of the mind, rather than coercion of the body, is the Christian means for overcoming religious differences.³ Similarly, the anti-clericalism of the republic of letters was anticipated not only by English civil war sectarians but also by such Restoration dissenting figures as Andrew Marvell and the

¹J. I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²J. Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. chap. 3.

³For further analysis, see G. S. De Krey, "Rethinking the Restoration: Dissenting Cases for Conscience, 1667–1672," *The Historical Journal* 38 (1995), pp. 53–83.

Presbyterian doyen Richard Baxter, whose assaults upon “the carnal and aspiring part of the clergy” matched the rhetorical intensity of subsequent savants.⁴ Neither would the early Enlightenment division between a tolerant “primitive Christianity” and an intolerant Constantinian Christianity have been news to Baxter or to Marvell, who saw the Council of Nicaea as imposing ideas unknown to earlier Christians.⁵ Even Locke’s definition of a church as a “voluntary society” was comparable to that of Baxter, who maintained that nobody becomes a member of a church except through “his own consent.”⁶

The point to be made about dissenting arguments for conscience is not that they directly influenced Locke, a suggestion Marshall has ably refuted, but rather that these authors and their Anglican opponents together infused the English public sphere with arguments about conscience and toleration. A variety of pre-Enlightenment writers against coercion—dissenters, Latitudinarians, and Cambridge Platonists among them—made liberty of conscience for Protestants a central issue in English political and intellectual life before the 1680s. The point is important because these authors and schools of authors were generally more conventional in their Christianity than Locke. Marshall is so insistent that “orthodox” Christianity and “tolerance” were mutually exclusive from the late Roman Empire through the 1680s that he cannot see the proliferation within British Protestant thought of many of the motifs from which Locke and others would fashion cases for virtually unlimited religious toleration. Moreover, the acceptance of tolerationist arguments by Whig, Latitudinarian, low-church, and dissenting political elements—all critical in the social grounding of early Enlightenment attitudes in England—cannot be explained solely by analyzing Locke and the republic of letters. Marshall’s neglect of English dissenting thought reflects his too ready agreement with those historians who have artificially narrowed the ranks of the dissenting and partially conforming population. It also reflects the absolute dichotomy he establishes between tolerance and intolerance, although his own evidence suggests that these stances are best understood not only as ideal opposites but also as terminal points on a broad spectrum of nuanced positions that often show varying shades of each.

All criticism aside, Marshall’s treatment of Locke’s mature religious thought demands respect. Locke’s emphasis upon a few fundamental beliefs as the core of Christianity was part of a broader, collaborative effort to overcome persecution and polarization about religious differences. Locke’s non-dogmatic reformulation of Christianity appears here as an effort to defend the heart of Christianity—indeed, to revive non-dogmatic “primitive Christianity”—rather than only as an attempt to reduce the

⁴[Andrew Marvell], *Mr. Smirke; or, the Divine in Mode* (1676); Richard Baxter, *Church-History of the Government of Bishops and their Councils Abbreviated* (1680), p. 25.

⁵[Andrew Marvell], *A Short Historical Essay, touching General Councils, Creeds, and Imposition in Religion* in *Mr. Smirke*, p. 60.

⁶Richard Baxter, *The Nonconformists Plea for Peace* (1679), p. 31.

faith according to the dictates of reason. In promoting agreement about Christian fundamentals, and in emphasizing the voluntary nature of religious association, Locke was acting in the spirit and reflecting the ethos of the amicable and humane republic of letters. Like his fellow writers, Locke was aware of how previous arguments for toleration had been damaged by charges of Socinianism; and this awareness ensured his own discretion on the subject of the Trinity. And Locke's toleration was generally extended to Jews, to Roman Catholics, and to Muslims, although his approaches to each of these traditions were, according to Marshall, couched in characteristically careful language. Marshall supports the argument that, while Locke denied toleration to Catholics who honored papal political authority, he nevertheless accepted the private worship of Catholics in Protestant states who rejected such authority. And he similarly argues that, although Locke denied toleration, on the same grounds, to the Islamic followers of the Mufti of Constantinople, he otherwise favored the toleration of Islam. For these and other approaches to Locke's religion, Marshall's study will long be essential reading.

God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell, by Erik J. Wielenberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. vii + 243. \$75.00 (hardback), \$21.99 (paper).

GREGORY BASSHAM, King's College (Pa.)

C. S. Lewis wrote extensively on philosophical issues. In books such as *The Problem of Pain* (1940), *The Abolition of Man* (1943), *Miracles* (1947), and *Mere Christianity* (1952), Lewis wrote at length about the problem of evil, the existence of God, the objectivity of moral judgments, the credibility of miracles, naturalism vs. supernaturalism, and other classic philosophical problems. Lewis, of course, was not a professional philosopher, and his apologetical books were directed at a general audience rather than at regular readers of *Mind* or *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. Nevertheless, it can be asked whether Lewis's philosophical writings are worthy of serious attention by professional philosophers.

Until very recently, the prevailing view has been that they are not. Lewis's writings were mostly ignored by professional philosophers until the late 1970s, when Christian philosophers such as Richard Purtill, Peter Kreeft, and Gilbert Meilaender began urging that they be taken seriously. In the mid-80s, John Beversluis's sharply critical book, *C. S. Lewis and the Rational Search for Religion* (Eerdmans, 1985; rev. edition, 2007), seemed to many to clinch the case for seeing Lewis as a philosophical lightweight.

Today, the tide has turned, and there are a slew of books that make the case for Lewis's merits as a philosopher. Among the most notable are: David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls, eds., *C. S. Lewis as*