



## Res Publica - Journal of Undergraduate Research

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Volume 15 | Issue 1

Article 16

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2010

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#### Recommended Citation

Schmitz, Jillian (2010) "The Lockean Rut," *Res Publica - Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 15

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/respublica/vol15/iss1/16>

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## The Lockean Rut

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## THE LOCKEAN RUT

Jillian Schmitz

John Locke's approach to toleration is defensible today. I do concede that Locke's approach to toleration is limited, because he explicitly excludes both atheists and Catholics; however, the approach to toleration used today is still just as limited as Locke's approach.

Many do not believe John Locke's approach to toleration is defensible today because they do not see today's approach to toleration as being one that is limited. Locke states "those who are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of God. Promises, covenants and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist."<sup>1</sup> Locke also does not believe toleration should be granted to Catholics. He says "the church can have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate which is constituted upon such a bottom that all those who enter into it do thereby *ipso facto* deliver themselves up the protection and service of another prince."<sup>2</sup> The practice of toleration within today's society has changed in that toleration is now extended to both atheists and Catholics. Those who do not believe Locke's approach to toleration is defensible today view Anthony Marx's theory of liberal nationalism built on illiberalism to be an argument in defense of their claim. Marx states "it is striking that England retained its Catholic exclusions at the same time that it embraced an image of liberal inclusion and pretended that religion was no longer a political issue. But what appears to be contradictory was not. Simply put, anti-Catholicism continued to provide the glue for national cohesion, democracy, prosperity, and imperialism, which increasingly solidified on this basis could and did pretend to be other than it was."<sup>3</sup> Thus, Locke excluded Catholics because he was "ensuring continued national unity as the basis of discipline and order within a liberal democracy."<sup>4</sup>

However, those who do not believe Locke's approach to toleration is applicable today fail to realize the then excluded atheists and Catholics have now simply been replaced with other groups. Today Islam has replaced Catholicism and evolutionary biology has replaced atheism. Locke's limitations on toleration are still just as applicable. Anthony Marx says Locke set limitations on Catholicism because England's "revolution and liberal tradition wrapped itself in the banner of tolerance but was based on intolerance. Liberalism was founded on, indeed was made possible only, by illiberalism."<sup>5</sup> Marx's argument still rings true today. For example, after September 11, 2001, unity was established against a common enemy. Intolerance toward Islam has been justified by the government and the people. Today Islam is feared, just as Catholicism was feared, so complete toleration is not extended to this group of people, just as toleration was not

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<sup>1</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise on Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Mineola: Dover Publication, Inc., 2002): 145.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Marx, "Superimposing Democratic Inclusion on Forgotten Exclusion," in *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (New York:Oxford University Press, 2003): 183.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

extended to Catholics. Locke's approach to toleration is defensible today, even though it should not be. This toleration should have expanded with time, and yet we are still stuck in the Lockean rut.

John Locke's approach to toleration is defensible today because national unity is still made possible by illiberalism. Locke excluded Catholics because it helped unify England, today other groups, both religious and non-religious, are excluded from toleration.

Anthony Marx contrasts the French Revolution with England's Revolution. He states "the French Revolution was perhaps more true to liberalism and tolerance, though with some cost: that Revolution did not fully enact toleration, rejecting the glue of exclusionary religious passion."<sup>6</sup> Marx essentially illustrates why exclusion is necessary in order to attain some form of toleration. He says "England's projection of liberal inclusion was maintained amid contradictory exclusions, with anti-Catholicism remaining on the books and still unifying the nation selectively despite denials of its import. As a result, England enjoyed greater unity, at least among the Protestant majority, was able to more peacefully consolidate democratic governance, and avoided more explosive class conflict with a working class still divided by religion."<sup>7</sup> Today, certain groups are still excluded from toleration. In England, the magistrate acted in *de jure* religious intolerance, today intolerance exists, but mostly as *de facto*. Some specific examples of how intolerance is still in play today include the "don't ask, don't tell" policy and racial profiling at airports. During John Locke's time, "Liberalism paid off in its ultimate aim of preserving social order by restraining its hidden legacy of excluding some from the benefits of that order."<sup>8</sup> However, John Locke was simply a starting point. In order to claim our nation as being one based on liberal principles, John Locke's approach to toleration should be expanded. According to Marx, John Locke's intolerance was necessary. Today, intolerance is not necessary.

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<sup>6</sup> Marx, 188.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*