

Cambridge University Press

0521810019 - God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations of John Locke's Political Thought

Jeremy Waldron

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## GOD, LOCKE, AND EQUALITY

Are we humans all one another's equals? And if we are, what is this equality based on and what are its implications?

In this concise and engaging book, Jeremy Waldron explores these questions in the company of the seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke. Waldron believes that Locke provides us with "as well-worked-out a theory of basic equality as we have in the canon of political philosophy." But for us it is a challenging theory because its foundations are unabashedly religious. God has created us equal, says Locke, and a proper grasp of the implications of this equality is inseparable from an understanding of ordinary men and women as creatures of God, created in his image and "made to last during his, not one another's Pleasure."

The religious foundations of Locke's political thought have been noted before, but they have never been explored more sympathetically, or with greater attention to their implications for modern debates about equality. Jeremy Waldron is one of the world's leading legal and political philosophers, and this book is based on the Carlyle Lectures that he presented in Oxford in 1999. It provides new perspectives on Locke's egalitarianism and the tribute he paid to the status and dignity of the ordinary person; it examines the problems Locke faced in defining the human species for the purposes of his commitment to basic equality; it explores the relation between his egalitarianism and his Christian beliefs; and most important, it offers new interpretations of Locke's views on toleration, slavery, property, aboriginal rights, the Poor Law, the distribution of the franchise, and relations between the sexes.

But this is not just a book about Locke. *God, Locke, and Equality* discusses contemporary approaches to equality as well as rival interpretations of Locke, and this dual agenda gives the whole book an unusual degree of accessibility and intellectual excitement. Indispensable for Locke scholars and for those who study the foundations of equality and the relation between politics and religion, it will be of interest also to philosophers, political theorists, lawyers, and theologians around the world.

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
 Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* Baskerville Monotype 11 / 12.5 pt    *System* L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X 2 $\epsilon$  [TB]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Waldron, Jeremy.  
 God, Locke, and equality: Christian foundations of John Locke's political  
 thought / Jeremy Waldron.  
 p.      cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 81001 9      ISBN 0 521 89057 8 (pbk.)

1. Locke, John, 1632-1704 - Contributions in political science.    2. Locke, John,  
 1632-1704 - Contributions in the concept of equality.    3. Equality - Religious  
 aspects - Christianity.    I. Title.

JC153.L87 W34 2002  
 320.51'2'092 - dc21    2002-022288

ISBN 0 521 81001 9 hardback  
 ISBN 0 521 89057 8 paperback

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*To Gwen Taylor,  
teacher, friend, and muse  
with thanks*

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## *Preface*

This book is a revised version of the Carlyle Lectures which I delivered at the University of Oxford in Michaelmas Term 1999, under the title “Christian Equality in the Political Theory of John Locke.”

The opportunity to develop and deliver these lectures was most welcome and I am particularly obliged to Larry Siedentop and Mark Philp for the invitation and the arrangements. I am grateful also to the Warden and Fellows of Nuffield College and the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College for office accommodation and living accommodation during my eight weeks in Oxford, and to Suzanne Byrch for administrative arrangements. Thanks also to Gerry Cohen, Cecile Fabre, John Gardner, James Griffin, Bob Hargrave, Tony Honore, Brian Loughman, Dan McDermott, David Miller, Karma Nabulsi, Joseph Raz, Mike Rosen, Alan Ryan, and Andrew Williams for their interest and their comments.

A substantial extract from Chapters 3 and 8 of this book was delivered as the Spring 2000 University Lecture at Columbia University. I want to say “thank you” to President George Rupp and Provost Jonathan Cole for this invitation. It was an honor to be able to present some of these arguments under the great cupola of Columbia’s Low Library. The same material was also presented at Political Theory workshops at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago. Participants everywhere have been generous with their comments on this and other work that I have presented on basic equality: I am particularly grateful to Jean Cohen, Jules Coleman, Bill Connolly, Chad Cyrenne, Michael Dorf, Ronald Dworkin, David Estlund, George Fletcher, Robert Gooding-Williams, Kent Greenawalt, David Johnston, Frances Kamm, George Kateb, Ira Katznelson, Philip Kitcher, John Marshall, Alan Musgrave, Thomas Nagel, Graham Oddie, Susan Okin, Thomas Pogge, Gwen Taylor, Susan Wolf, Nicholas Woltersdorff, and Iris Young.

In respect of the revision phase, my greatest debt is to Richard Fisher of Cambridge University Press for his patience and encouragement.

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*Preface*

(Thanks, too, to the Press's reviewers, who provided extensive and valuable suggestions.) Ekow Yankah provided research assistance and Chevor Pompey provided secretarial help. I am grateful to Columbia Law School for a summer stipend in 2001 supporting the completion of this work (as well as for the time to present the lectures at Oxford in 1999).

Thanks, finally, to Carol Sanger for her companionship throughout this process, and for her contributions and comments on the text. Those who know her know how lucky I am.

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[More information](#)*Citations and abbreviations*

The major writings of John Locke are frequently cited in the text that follows. Full details are in the bibliography, but the following abbreviations will be used in the text.

- 1st T Book I of John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 137–263. My citations to the *First Treatise* are by numbered paragraph.
- 2nd T Book II of John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 265–428. My citations to the *Second Treatise* are by numbered paragraph.
- E John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). My citations to the *Essay* are by book, chapter, and section.
- LCT John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. James Tully (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983). Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* is cited by page number.
- RC John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997). This is a facsimile of *Reasonableness* from the 1794 edition of Locke's works, reprinted in the series "Key Texts: Classic Studies in the History of Ideas." It is cited by page number.
- P&N John Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 2 vols., ed. Arthur W. Wainwright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). This posthumous work of Locke's is cited by volume and page number.

Locke scholars will note that my citations refer to recently published and widely available editions in preference to scholarly editions of



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Locke's complete works, most of which are found only in libraries. I have done so because I think it is easier on readers, who are more likely to have these recent editions in front of them. The "Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought" series has done much to standardize political theory citations: it is unfortunate, however, that the Locke volumes in this series do not include Locke's 1689 *Letter Concerning Toleration*, and it is a pity too that there is no standard or widely recognized version of *The Reasonableness of Christianity* available for citation. I have done the best I can with these.

Apart from the six works listed above, all other works by Locke and all works by other authors are cited in the footnotes by author and short title. (For some of these, I am afraid, there is no choice but to use ancient library-bound editions.) Readers are referred to the bibliography at the end of the book for full details.