
WILLIAM PENN
Political Writings

William Penn (1644–1718) – Quaker activist, theorist of liberty of conscience, and colonial founder and proprietor – played a central role in the movement for religious liberty on both sides of the Atlantic for more than four decades. This volume presents, for the first time, a fully annotated scholarly edition of Penn’s political writings over the course of his long public career, tracing his thinking from his early theorisation of religious toleration and liberty of conscience in England, as a leading member of the Society of Friends during the 1670s, to his colonial undertaking in Pennsylvania a decade later, his controversial role in the years leading up to the 1688 Revolution, and the ongoing consequences of that Revolution for his future prospects. Penn’s political writings provide an illuminating window into the increasingly sophisticated and influential movement for liberty of conscience in the early modern world.

Andrew R. Murphy is Professor of Political Science at Virginia Commonwealth University. His work on Penn has spanned several decades, including a biography, *William Penn: A Life* (2019); a collection of essays (co-edited with John Smolenski), *The Worlds of William Penn* (2019); and the first study of Penn’s political thought in fifty years, *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration* (2016).

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WILLIAM PENN

Political Writings

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Acknowledgments

This volume represents the culmination – and, for the time being, the completion – of more than two decades in which the life, career, and thought of William Penn has played a major role in my scholarship. From my doctoral dissertation (a revised version of which was published as *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America*)¹ to my most recent work on Penn (*Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration: The Political Thought of William Penn; William Penn: A Life*, and the co-edited volume *The Worlds of William Penn*),² I have devoted a great deal of energy to arguing for Penn's inclusion in the canon of political thinkers worthy of sustained scholarly treatment.

To be sure, Penn produced neither an architectonic masterwork of *Leviathan*-esque proportions nor a touchstone for later generations like Locke's *Second Treatise*. Moreover, he was viewed with suspicion by many (including Locke) in his own day, and by others ever since (most famously, Macaulay in his *History of England*),³ for his close and supportive relationship with James II. However, as I have argued in my prior work on Penn, between the late 1660s and the early 1710s, William Penn

¹ Andrew R. Murphy, *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2001).

² Andrew R. Murphy, *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration: The Political Thought of William Penn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Andrew R. Murphy, *William Penn: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Andrew R. Murphy and John Smolenski (eds.), *The Worlds of William Penn* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019).

³ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, 5 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849–1861), vol. I, ch. 4.

Acknowledgments

played an enormously influential role in the movement for toleration in both England and America. Not only did he articulate principles of liberty of conscience in his native country, most particularly during the 1670s, but he seized the opportunity to attempt to instantiate those principles in Pennsylvania. (That he found practice far more challenging than theory ought neither to surprise us nor lessen the importance of his career to the history of toleration.)

This volume's publication in the Cambridge Texts series originated in an offhand comment made more than a decade ago, over coffee, by Quentin Skinner, a comment that I had either the temerity or the foolhardiness to remember years down the road. I am grateful to the editors of this august series for deeming Penn worthy of inclusion, and hope that this volume's appearance sparks renewed interest not only in Penn himself, but in the broader seventeenth- and eighteenth-century contexts that shaped him, and that he did so much to shape.

Over the years countless colleagues and friends have offered helpful observations, encouragement, and conversation about Penn and the broader tolerationist movement. It is impossible to remember, much less to mention, them all individually. With regard to this volume in particular, I thank Steve Angell, Teresa Bejan, Alastair Bellany, Jane Calvert, John Coffey, Ben Pink Dandelion, Mark Goldie, Evan Haefeli, Christie Maloyed, John Smolenski, and Scott Sowerby for their intellectual camaraderie as well as, at times, their assistance in tracking down some of Penn's more obscure references. In addition, as it depended on access to the many different printings of Penn's original texts, this volume also would not have been possible without the helpful assistance of reference librarians at the British Library, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Library of the Religious Society of Friends at Friends House, London. At Cambridge University Press, Elizabeth Friend-Smith, Atifa Jiwa, and Ruth Boyes guided the project from proposal to publication; along the way, Christopher Jackson and Heather Dubnick provided outstanding copyediting and indexing services.

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