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A Letter Concerning Toleration

By John Locke

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John Lockes Letter Concerning Toleration is one of the most under-appreciated texts in the liberal tradition of political philosophy. The subject of the Letter is specifically religious toleration, but Lockes general argument for toleration is also applicable to issues of more modern concern. This is not a state of license, in that the civil government does not actively promote a variety of (or for that matter, any) religious practices, but it is a state of negative liberty, in which the state remains neutral to the religious content of religious worship. Specific sects or acts of worship can be banned if they are prejudicial to other mens rights or they break the public peace of societies, but they cannot be banned on religious grounds. Some critics have argued that Lockes Letter is no longer very relevant: he deals only with religious toleration, and religious toleration is widely accepted and practiced in the modern Western world. However, the historical context of the Letter suggests it retains its relevance. In Lockes day, religion was not the dormant issue it is today;...



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