

John Locke's Ideological Shift from 1660 to 1667: Absolutism to Toleration

British philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) is well-known for his support of religious toleration. In one of his most famous works, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, he defined true Christians as those who show charity and meekness to all others, regardless of their religious affiliation. He believed that the true ideal of religion was neither ecclesiastical dominion nor compulsive force but the regulation of “men’s Lives according to the Rules of Virtue and Piety.”¹ This letter demonstrates Locke’s view on those with different religious beliefs and constitutes a rebuke of those who forcefully coerced others into religious affiliation, while earning him a spot as one of the founders of modern liberalism.

However, his general reputation as an early libertarian was undermined by *Two Tracts on Government*, which remained unpublished until 1967, over two centuries after his death. In the *Two Tracts*, Locke referenced the traditionally absolutist Hobbesian concept of the state of nature and arguments.² The first tract sought to refute Edward Bagshaw's *The Great Question Concerning Things Indifferent in Religious Worship*, which advocated religious toleration.³ In the first tract, Locke argued that the liberty of conscience and religion “prove only a liberty for contention, censure and persecution and turn us loose to the tyranny of a religious rage,”⁴ ultimately agreeing that magistrates should have the right to impose arbitrary uniformity toward indifferent things for civil peace.⁵ Such an idea was in direct contrast to the liberal view that Locke was known to have championed.

Scholarship during the last three decades on Locke has also discussed this shift. For instance, political scientist Robert P. Kraynak categorizes scholars who attempted to explain Locke’s ideological shift as either denying Locke’s position as absolutist or denying that his

early absolutism was connected with his later views, as Locke underwent a radical change.⁶ Cambridge University historian Peter Laslett argues that Locke is a “constitutionalist” since he defended legal institutions, not arbitrary authorities,⁷ and claims that the *Two Tracts* have a flavor of Hobbes. Later, Laslett argues that he absorbed the infamous *Leviathan* of Hobbes while cautioning against the consideration of Locke alongside Hobbes.⁸ On the other hand, intellectual historian Maurice Cranston claims that the early view of Locke was “Hobbesian,” leading him to a radical shift to his later liberalism view.⁹ Kraynak supports a third position, arguing that Locke’s shift was not radical; instead, absolutism and liberalism possess more similarities than commonly assumed. He argues that both ways can be employed to mitigate religious conflicts.¹⁰ Therefore, Locke's transition from absolutism to toleration is seen as a pragmatic shift aimed at resolving religious controversies and achieving religious peace.

However, Peter Laslett and Mark Goldie have overly emphasized the significance of Locke’s association with Lord Ashley and neglected his experience in Oxford and his trip to Kleve.¹¹ Goldie claims that Locke “decisively” changed his mind in 1667, probably the “most important” reason was his “new association with Lord Ashley.”¹² Peter Laslett has similar arguments, claiming that Locke’s “association with Shaftesbury was to change him profoundly.”¹³ This article, however, will focus on Locke’s experience at Oxford and Kleve, seeking to delve deeper into these formative periods of his life and provide a more comprehensive understanding of their influence on his intellectual development. This investigation seeks to refocus the overall scholarly understanding of Locke’s ideas and also serve as a template for investigations into other philosophers’ intellectual transitions.

First, the paper will provide a comprehensive exploration of the historical context of the Cromwellian regime and the interregnum period. It will then delve into the key biographical events in Locke's life that may have played a pivotal role in shaping his worldview and philosophical outlook. These events will include his formative years at Oxford University and his sojourn in Kleve, Germany, a place known for its liberal atmosphere. The paper will critically examine how these experiences contributed to Locke's profound ideological transition. Finally, the research will scrutinize the impact of the friendship between Locke and Lord Ashley, who was an advocate of liberalism. This analysis will shed light on how Lord Ashley, with his liberal inclinations, influenced Locke's evolving ideas. Ultimately, the aim of this research is to address the gaps in existing scholarship, correct any misconceptions, and consolidate a more accurate understanding of the various facets of Locke's intellectual thinking.

Pre-1660: the Cromwellian England and Religious Toleration Policy

Locke lived through the Cromwellian period and the Interregnum, in which toleration policies saw significant hurdles. After the execution of Charles I (1600-1649), the second Stuart king of Great Britain, who went into continuous war with the Parliament and was ultimately defeated by Oliver Cromwell, England declared itself a republic, with Cromwell as the leader of the Commonwealth. Then, the House of Lords was abolished. Through an act of the parliament, the House of Commons claimed that the House of Lords was “useless and dangerous to the people of England.”¹⁴ Cromwell was long-claimed as a friend of toleration, as he permitted all Christians to have their religious practice as long as they did not create societal unrest. In 1650, he stated his position in a letter to Edward Dunbas (date unknown), a

Scottish Presbyterian, that it would be “unjust” to “deny a man the liberty he hath by nature upon a supposition he may abuse it.”¹⁵ And when the men “abuse it, judge.” According to George Drake, this means that the policy of Cromwell was based on the principle of recognizing and accepting the rights of different religious groups.¹⁶ However, Cromwell's religious policies were largely unsuccessful. Cromwell's approach to Roman Catholics during his rule was defined by a complex blend of tolerance and persecution. At times, he extended leniency by granting pardons that relieved them from the harsh consequences of sequestrations and property confiscations. However, it's important to note that Cromwell had personal reservations and even animosity toward Catholicism, considering it a heretical faith.¹⁷ An instance that exemplified the hatred of Cromwell to Catholics is the suppression of the Irish revolts in 1649; a debate soon ensued on whether Irish Catholics had been massacred. To be specific, the debate essentially revolved around the problem of whether there were massacres of civilians in the siege of Drogheda. However, there was no doubt that five priests—noncombatants—were executed at Drogheda and later more in Wexford.¹⁸ Cromwell's hatred toward priests is publicly acknowledged. Additionally, James Burke argued that many noncombatants were killed, though there may not be a general massacre of the civilians. He provided evidence that:

The desperate screaming of one victim as recorded by Cromwell, 'God damn me, God confound me; I burn, I burn', has definite echoes of hellfire. Cromwell also suggests that the general slaughter in the vicinity of the church was fitting retribution for the 'insolent' who had dared celebrate a mass there on the previous Sunday.¹⁹

The report of an anonymous Jesuit father to the Irish College in Rome also demonstrates the slaughter of noncombatants and civilians: “When the city was captured by the English, the blood of the Catholics was mercilessly shed in the streets, in the dwelling houses, and in

the open fields; to non was mercy shown; not to the women, not to the aged, not to the young...”²⁰

Such massacre is highly significant due to its demonstration of Cromwell’s intolerance toward Catholicism. Additionally, there was great opposition to Cromwell’s conquest of Ireland in England. An example can be seen through the argument in *The English Soldiers’ Standard*, which was probably written by William Walwyn (1600-1681), a Leveller:

Will you go on still to kill, slay and murder men, to make them [the army leaders] as absolute lords and masters over Ireland as you have made them over England; or is it your ambition to reduce the Irish to the happiness of tithes upon treble damages, to Excise, Customs and Monopolies in trade; or to fill their prisons with poor disabled prisoners; to fill their land with swarms of beggars; to enrich their Parliament men and impoverish their people; to take down monarchical government and set up an aristocratical tyranny.²¹

Nevertheless, no specific evidence has proven the effect of the massacre on Locke; neither has any evidence mentioned the influence of public opinion on Locke. Therefore, while the conquest of Ireland might not have influenced Locke, there was at least public opposition and controversy surrounding the violence during this period.

According to historian John Ericson, the reformation for tolerance led to the development of even more radical religious groups that Cromwell had never faced before. The radical sects already present in England wanted even more religious freedom than the parliament had granted them.²² That decade and the previous civil war period formed what Oxford English historian Christopher Hill described as “the greatest upheaval in English history.”²³ James Walvin explains the reason for it to be such upheaval:

The entire nation was racked by personal and social agitations that had been whipped up by a bloody and vengeful civil war[...]Old assumptions and beliefs -- old certainties -- were shattered by the convulsion of religious and political freedoms which had scarred most people in some way or other. The traditional acceptance that

all English people belonged to the national Church and must worship as a matter of obligation was destroyed for ever.²⁴

The Quakers were one of the radical religious groups that existed during the Cromwellian period, established by a well-known English dissenter, George Fox (1624–1691). The Quakers, known for their nonconformist religious practices, frequently disrupted the Sunday services of the Puritans, causing significant tensions. In response to these interruptions, Oliver Cromwell enacted a law aimed at persecuting those engaged in disruptive and intolerant actions. However, the implementation of this law by magistrates did not succeed in stemming the rapid growth in popularity of the Quakers. George Fox pleaded with Cromwell to repeal this law, hoping to find some tolerance for his religious group. But Cromwell refused to do so, and religious tensions persisted during this period. This illustrates the challenges and conflicts that arose due to differing religious beliefs and practices in Cromwell's England. On the other hand, many radical religious sects that include the Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Muggletonians, Fifth Monarchists, and Millenarians, thrived in response to the discontent with the established social order. As the traditional hierarchy of kings, lords, and bishops faced ridicule and degradation, these previously inconspicuous groups gained prominence and influence.²⁵

Therefore, Locke lived during a turbulent period when policies of toleration were promoted but failed due to the active religious behavior of radical religious groups. These groups defended themselves as champions of freedom of conscience, but Locke viewed them as radical factions hiding behind the banner of religious freedom.²⁶ At the time of Cromwell's reign, toleration policies seemed unable to provide stability and peace between religious factions and, instead, led to further disputes. It is likely that because of the failures in this

period, Locke found that absolutism and the suppression of the personal right of worship would reduce religious conflicts. On the contrary, after the restoration of Charles II and his policies aimed at religious uniformity, which only led to further disputes, Locke reevaluated the policies of the Cromwellian regime and the policy of toleration, comparing it to the failing absolutism. Such a comparison between absolutism and Cromwell's policy of toleration would possibly lead to the transformation of Locke. The conflicts and disputes after the restoration of Charles II will be unpacked in greater depth in the following section.

Restoration of Charles II and Religious Persecution

Oxford, being an Anglican university, supported King Charles I during the Civil War, a stance that eventually led to the expulsion of many of its administrators. The restoration of Charles II (1660) and re-establishment of the Stuart monarchy in England and Scotland was critical for Oxford, where Locke pursued his studies from 1652 to 1667. The restoration allowed for the reemployment of administrators who had been expelled or ousted during the English Civil War (1642–1651) and the subsequent interregnum period (1652–1660).

After the Commonwealth experiment in England had failed to bring about the desired political and religious peace, it gave rise to radical religious factions and political turmoil. Consequently, many people rallied behind the restoration of Charles II, believing it would provide a solution and usher in a new era of peace and stability. Both Locke, a then-proponent of absolutism, and Edward Bagshaw, who wrote fervently against it, supported the restoration of Charles II.²⁷ Locke believed that the monarchy would have brought peace to England, as he had lived through the tumultuous English Civil War and English Republic eras, thus witnessing their instability. This is evident from four tailor-made poems. The

restoration poem is the most explicit among the four, as it strongly conveys the idea that the return of Charles signifies the end of anarchy and the restoration of peace, thus reinstating order:

As in the world's Creation, when this frame
Had neither parts, distinction, nor a name
But all confus'd did in the Chaos jarre
Th' embleme and product of intestine warre,
Light first appears...
Beauty and Order follow, and display
This stately fabrick guided by that ray.
So now in this our new creation when
This isle begins to be a world again,
You first dawn on our Chaos, with designe
To give us Order...
Till you upon us rose and made it day
We in disorder all and darkness lay.²⁸

The poem draws an analogy between peace, order, Restoration, and light on one side, and chaos, anarchy, darkness, and disorder on the other. This strongly suggests that Locke viewed the Restoration as a means to establish peace and order, providing significant evidence of his early defense of absolutism and his inclination towards it.²⁹ Such an idea also reveals Locke's philosophy as weighing peace and stability over idealism and liberalism upheld in the prior Cromwell period. A similar concept can also be found in Kraynak's work. He believes that Locke's philosophy centered religious peace, and the two policies were "the same in purpose and principle."³⁰

However, the restoration of Charles II did not solve religious conflicts as Locke had imagined but brought a period of "Great Persecution."³¹ During this period, the restored Anglican Church emerged as a central religious persecutor, propelling society into turmoil. In 1660, Charles II signed the Declaration of Breda, which offered "liberty to tender consciences" and the right of not being "disquieted or called in question for differences of

opinion in the matter of religion” that does not “disturb the peace of the kingdom...”³² With the restoration of Charles II, the bishops who went into exile during the Commonwealth period because they supported monarchy and the Anglican church also came back to England and restored their positions in Oxford. The Church of England was also restored. However, with the failures in the Savoy Conference (1661), one year after the Declaration of Breda, which attempted to negotiate and compromise between Presbyterians and the Anglicans, the delegates reported that they “could not come to any harmony.”³³ Charles II attempted to persuade Parliament to pass a declaration of indulgence that would have favored the Presbyterians. However, the Presbyterians thought that comprehension was at hand and opposed the toleration of other nonconformists. Such an act antagonized Charles II and the sectaries, leaving the Presbyterians without allies when the Episcopalians secured the Uniformity Act. Locke seemed to be unperturbed by the Savoy Conference as he continued to write the *Second Tract* that elaborated on the content of the previous tract. While the Savoy Conference was a step forward in religious uniformity and harmony, the consequences of religious uniformity were evident in the immediate future, when in 1665 the acts aiming for uniformity would lead the nonconformists to reach their nadir of religious stability.

University of St. Andrews’ Jacqueline Rose claims that the Anglican church is a “self-assured and belligerent organization” that persecuted “dissenters” who stood on their paths and proclaimed their righteousness to do so with sermons and treatises.³⁴ This is evident from the Uniformity Act of 1662 and events later on, despite the promises agreed to when Charles II had signed the Declaration of Breda. The Parliament passed the Uniformity Act in 1662 promoted by the Episcopalians, which ordered all clergies to follow the Book of Common

Prayers. This act was deliberately crafted to cripple the power of the dissenters or nonconformists. It was passed due to the pressure of the Anglicans in the Parliament, who, like the Puritans, wanted to suppress other groups.³⁵ For those who refused to comply with the act, severe punishments, like fines, imprisonment, and even executions, were given. The enforcement of the act unleashed a period of violent religious disturbance and hatred across England, Scotland, and Wales.

Similar circumstances of religious intolerance and the effect of the Uniformity Act also occurred at Oxford. Though there was little primary evidence that directly pointed to the effect of it, one case regarding Henry Wilkinson (1616-1690, head of Exeter College and New Inn Hall, ejected from Oxford in 1662) is of special interest. Wilkinson's religion was intolerable to Clarendon (1609-1674). Wilkinson was scolded one day, according to Hardacre, "for his failure to maintain the Book of Common Prayer, and for tolerating immorality among his students."³⁶ Wilkinson later declined to observe the Uniformity Act of 1662, leading him and several other heads of the Exeter College and New Inn Hall to be ejected from Oxford. Most Presbyterians and Independents were also ousted from Oxford in 1662, widely concluded as the effect of the Uniformity Act.

Locke, then, found himself in an environment not only characterized by religious persecution and fervor but also right in the epicenter of religious enthusiasts. The severe persecution of Quakers provides another example of persecution directed toward nonconformists, documented through the correspondence between Clarendon and Bayle. Clarendon persistently pursued measures to suppress the Quakers, encouraging the vice-chancellor to adopt stringent measures, asserting that "tenderness and lenity" should not

apply to this group. He urged strict enforcement of the law “since it would be of very ill example that we should not be able to root them out of an (sic) university.”³⁷ Hardacre explained Clarendon’s positions: “ [the] University was a corporation, possessing countless chartered freedoms and privileges. It was his duty to defend these from all threats.” The Quakers, therefore, would be considered a threat to Oxford from Clarendon’s perspective; the Anglicans generally viewed those other religious sects as threats, not to mention the Puritans, who rebelled against the Anglican church and exiled many of the Anglican leaders at Oxford. Collins mentioned that the "experience of exile widened the theological breach with Puritanism," and "the old hostility [of high Anglicans for Puritans] deepened into a hatred that was almost an obsession.”³⁸ This partly explains why he identified as an “Anglican” despite his family's Puritan background.³⁹ In order to protect himself in a time of religious persecutions and hostility toward the nonconformists, he had no choice but to proclaim himself an Anglican.

England, however, was not entirely composed of religious fanatics, and certain lords endeavored to alleviate ecclesiastical tensions. The commons, however, vehemently opposed religious tolerance and shattered the aspirations of nonconformists.⁴⁰ Philosophically, Locke would have felt similar to those nonconformists, as the effect of the Uniformity Act had already appeared in Oxford, where many other nonconformists had been ousted. In addition, the religious circumstances would already be tense and unsettled at this time, which would lead him to rethink the outcome of religious uniformity gradually.

The perceptions and voices of those advocating for universal freedom of conscience and those who condemned the insolence of nonconformists compelled parliament to foster the

enactment of the Conventicle Act of 1664. This punitive legislation imposed severe penalties on individuals aged sixteen and above who attended religious gatherings not conducted in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer.⁴¹ Many argued that the act was too severe for the nonconformists, especially the Quakers.⁴² During the enforcement of the Conventicle Act, families seeking liberty of conscience endured the anxiety of safeguarding the secrecy of their illegal conventicles' locations. As described by Baptist historian E. A. Payne, these gatherings took place in "lonely houses ... cellars [and] haylofts." In some cases, individuals were designated as lookouts, responsible for providing advance notice of the potential risks of arrest.⁴³ One Presbyterian still remembered how his father was "forced to disguise himself and skulk in private holes and corners."⁴⁴ The Conventicle Act, as indicated by Locke's words in the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, served as a testament to the limited impact of physical coercion on an individual's inner beliefs. Locke's argument emphasized that civil authority should not be employed to dictate a person's internal convictions. He contended that authentic and redemptive religious faith is rooted in the inward persuasion of the mind, a fact that cannot be compelled through external means.⁴⁵ In this case, the expectations of people who had supported the restoration of monarchy were unmet as the religious intolerance movement continued. Locke, among others, shared this disillusionment. He was not a religious zealot but rather a thinker who actively sought solutions to the religious and political conflicts that plagued the era—while others sought religious reckoning and chaos, he pursued a quest for stability. According to Mark Goldie, the *Two Tracts on Government* "revealed a Locke deeply fearful of civil anarchy driven by religious fanaticism."⁴⁶ This assertion can be supported in the *Essay Concerning Toleration*, as Abrams wrote:

And he [Locke] denies toleration to those activities and opinions that he considers overtly or intrinsically 'destructive' to government—including Roman Catholicism and atheism. He declares against any attempt to put down or impose opinions as such (since the end cannot be achieved); but he approves the suppression of efforts to propagate opinions dangerous to society.⁴⁷

Locke believed that the Civil War opened a Pandora's box of religious fanaticism and "antinomian zealotry masquerading under the banner of conscience."⁴⁸ Locke's advocacy for absolutism in this period was not in allegiance to the monarchy but rooted in his conviction that religious tranquility would be achieved through uniformity, a belief he upheld after witnessing the consequences of toleration in the Cromwellian period discussed in the previous section.⁴⁹ Moreover, the *Tracts* revealed Locke as a man deeply impacted by the political and religious upheavals of his youth: "I no sooner perceived myself in the world," he wrote, "but I found myself in a storm, which hath lasted almost hitherto."⁵⁰ He assimilated Hobbes in this condition, where he blamed the religious leaders of different sects for manipulating people, which undermined the public good by heightening religious enthusiasm and creating sectarian animosities. Mutual hatred, followed by civil war due to religious diversity and differences, would then inevitably appear.⁵¹ The imposition of religious uniformity, therefore, which led to decreasing religious diversity, may prevent mutual hatred and civil war because the religious differences have been suppressed.

Nonetheless, the circumstances in 1665 shattered his confidence in absolutism and religious uniformity. The enactment of the Five Mile Act in 1665 further imposed restrictions on ministers of the nonconformists. This act specifically targeted ministers who had taken responsibility for the pulpits of conformist ministers who fled to the countryside during the plague while prohibiting the dispossessed ministers from returning to their former congregations. During this period, the condition of the nonconformists was at its lowest

point.⁵² In 1665, during the same year that witnessed the peak of religious persecution, Locke departed from Oxford to the small town of Kleve in Germany for a diplomatic mission. This town was known for its religious toleration policy and its residents' harmonious coexistence. Through his observations and conversations with people of different religious sects, he would come to appreciate the positive aspects of the policy of toleration. Locke's experience in Kleve will be elaborated in the following section.

The Significance of John Locke's Association with Lord Ashley

In 1663, Locke attended medical and chemical lectures and became less interested in politics after writing *Two Tracts on Government*. He studied medicine informally with Dr. David Thomas (dates unknown) as a friend and collaborator. According to Uzlagis, they also had a laboratory in Oxford, which was used as a pharmacy.⁵³ Though the influence of this break from philosophical thinking on Locke's philosophy was uncertain, the experience led him to a coincidental meeting with a man who profoundly influenced Locke in various aspects—Anthony Ashley Cooper (1621-1683). Anthony Ashley Cooper, later known as Lord Ashley and the first Earl of Shaftesbury, was a prominent figure in Locke's era—a wealthy, intelligent, and adept leader.⁵⁴ Struggling with a liver ailment, Lord Ashley sought a cure at Oxford,⁵⁵ where he encountered Locke in 1666, marking the start of their relationship. This initial meeting, awkward in nature, laid the foundation for their future interactions.⁵⁶ In this meeting, Lord Ashley was attracted by the courteousness, modesty, and insights of Locke. At the same time, Locke was impressed by how Lord Ashley treated him respectfully and patiently despite the embarrassment. Later, Lord Ashley invited Locke to come to his house, lodge there, and become his personal physician.

In 1667, Locke took up residence with Lord Ashley's family in his apartment at Exeter's house, to which Locke was also invited to advise, have conversations, and treat him. An article from the *Shaftesbury Paper* reveals the friendship between them and the influence of Lord Ashley on Locke, as Lord Ashley "imparted to him from time to time all the secretes affairs then in agitation," and we know that their conversations related to "state affairs, religion, toleration, and trade," these conversations and the financial favor of Lord Ashley influenced much of Locke's thought and "[he] writ his book concerning Human Understanding whilst he lived with my Lord."⁵⁷ This essay is, therefore, critical to understanding Locke's origin of views on many different topics, as we can see the direct significance of Lord Ashley's influence on Locke.

To understand the influence of Lord Ashley on Locke, it is essential for us to analyze his belief in liberalism and toleration. During the period from 1643 to 1660, Lord Ashley displayed a solid aversion to arbitrary executive behavior, the manipulation of religion to support political tyranny, and the potential threat of the army to free government, which could lead to a form of "mechanic tyranny."⁵⁸ According to Mansfield, the aristocratic constitutionalism promoted by Lord Ashley would have a profound impact on the subsequent shaping of England after the Glorious Revolution (1688-1689).⁵⁹ Many have asserted that Lord Ashley was an opponent of tyranny, particularly in the guise of arbitrary monarchy and Catholicism, which led him to be deeply suspicious of King Charles II's political maneuvers and the willingness of the court and the Commons to go along with them. At the same time, Lord Ashley proposed a solution that involved reforming a free mixed government based on aristocratic principles, with the aim of ensuring liberty and religious toleration, primarily for

Protestants.⁶⁰ Mark Goldie claimed that the “most important” reason for Locke’s ideological transition was his closeness to Lord Ashley. He also mentioned that another significant factor was Locke’s move from Oxford, the home of Anglicans, to the more cosmopolitan London.⁶¹

He claimed that:

Probably most important was his new association with Lord Ashley, the future Whig leader and Earl of Shaftesbury, and his consequent move from Oxford, the ideological home of Anglican churchmanship. Locke settled in the more cosmopolitan London, close to the court of Charles II, which had its own reasons for seeking toleration, as the king was either religiously indifferent or crypto-Catholic. Locke’s visit to Cleves in Germany in 1666 was also an eye-opener...⁶²

This argument does not appear to be logically sound. On one hand, Mark Goldie’s claim lacks any evidence from the most immediate sources at the time. On the other hand, Goldie claims that the other factor was his move to the more cosmopolitan London, which sought tolerance. Yet quite to the contrary, a great deal of evidence indicates that London was neither religiously tolerant nor in harmony. In The Diary of Samuel Pepys, the dissenters in London and many other places, hoping for relief from the first act of the Conventicle Act, were described as “mighty high and...expect[ing] to have their day now soon.” When Locke came to London and saw the effect of the Conventicle Act and how the nonconformists were living in such a brutal environment due to acts for religious uniformity, he was likely to ponder whether religious uniformity would bring forth harmony, as the religious environment was starkly contrasted with the tolerant and peaceful environment of Kleve. The Great Fire of London likewise showcases the ineffectiveness of the monarchy and the secret hatred between different religious groups rampant in contemporary London.

The Great Fire was considered a significant embarrassment for the city. Historian Christopher Heyl suggested that King Charles II must have felt embarrassed by his inability

to take decisive action when the fire broke out.⁶³ This catastrophic event also exposed underlying tensions among different religious sects of the time. For instance, an anonymous work titled *Pyrotechnica Loyolana* claimed that Catholic arsonists deliberately started the fire as an attack on the Protestant Church.⁶⁴ Many anti-Catholic individuals supported this view, highlighting the religious animosity and tension between various religious groups in London. This contrasted with the situation in Kieve, where the citizens lived in tolerance and did not hold secret hatred toward each other. The limited power of Charles II was insufficient to prevent the presence of hatred and religious conflict among the different religious sects in London, which suggests that Goldie's claim that London had a better environment of tolerance is incorrect, and the idea that Locke's transition was fostered in London because it was more cosmopolitan is logically flawed. This paper contends it is more likely due to the ineffectiveness of the monarchy and the idea that religious uniformity and suppression would never be able to completely end secret hatred between different religious groups.⁶⁵

The other scholar who attributed Locke's shift solely to Lord Ashley was Peter Laslett, pointed out by Kraynak. Laslett faced Kraynak's criticism for diluting the "absolutism" elements in the *Two Tracts* and defending Locke as an early "constitutionalist" who upheld "legal" rather than "arbitrary" institutions, which contradicted his later point that Locke had a "flavour of Hobbes."⁶⁶ Laslett later attributed Locke's shift almost exclusively to the influence of Lord Ashley by claiming that "[h]is association with Shaftesbury was to change him profoundly."⁶⁷ Though he mentioned Locke's diplomatic trip to Kieve and how it was successful, he neglected the observations and conversations of Locke with residents of Kieve, which will be discussed in detail later in this paper.

Laslett first introduced the nature of Locke's relationship with Lord Ashley, from how they met to Locke's move to doctor Lord Ashley. However, Locke commenced writing the *Essay Concerning Toleration* closely after arriving at Lord Ashley's residence, as Laslett claimed that Locke "composed an Essay Concerning Toleration...in the first months of his residence at Exeter House," which "turned his earlier arguments into a vigorous defense of the right of dissent."⁶⁸ In Locke's view, the conversion of complex and intricate ideas is a gradual process, much like how "[f]ire has a power to melt gold, i.e., to destroy the consistency of its insensible parts, and consequently its hardness, and make it fluid; and gold has a power to be melted."⁶⁹

In addition, the nature of Lord Ashley and Locke's relationship should be analyzed. As previously mentioned, Lord Ashley aimed to seek a remedy for his illness and accidentally met Locke as a doctor. The later invitation of Locke to take up residence, though no evidence specifically proved Lord Ashley's intention, was more of an intention to treat Lord Ashley than invited to consult him on all affairs. Such speculation can be explained through the record of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), which indicates that it was after the surgery that Lord Ashley "began to use him [Locke] as a friend, and consult with him on all affairs of state."⁷⁰ So, it is logically reasonable to infer that Lord Ashley did not use Locke as a real friend and consult with him on all of the affairs before he did the surgery; instead, Locke used more time communicating with Lord Ashley about medicine. Though the possibility of Lord Ashley's influence on Locke still existed based on his later influence on the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, there is no primary evidence that supports that, as Goldie explained, the reasons still remain unclear.

Hence, it would be inconceivable for Lord Ashley to be the main factor for this transformation as it is in less than a month, especially when he observed the religious fanaticism at Oxford University in the previous five years.

However, according to historian J.R. Milton, as Locke wrote "Sic cogitavit Atticus 1667" at the end of the manuscript, this means that the timeframe for the first draft goes from January 1, 1667 to March 25, 1668, but was likely initiated in the autumn of 1667.⁷¹ Locke moved to Lord Ashley's residence the same year, but the exact date or month of his arrival remains unclear. Only a letter from Dr. Thomas, dated June 22, 1667, addressed to Locke at Exeter House, hints at a potential date for his arrival at Lord Ashley's residence.⁷² Therefore, if J.R. Milton is correct, Lord Ashley's influence may be more significant than previously perceived.

Additionally, there is a lack of direct evidence within *An Essay Concerning Toleration* where Locke explicitly acknowledges the influence of Lord Ashley on his work. Instead, the historical record suggests that Lord Ashley significantly influenced not *Essay Concerning Toleration* but his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1689.

However, Lord Ashley likely played a persuasive role in guiding Locke, whose ideologies had already been significantly influenced by prior observations that opposed his absolutism belief. Therefore, it can be argued that Lord Ashley acted as a catalyst for the evolution of Locke's ideas rather than being the primary impetus behind his ideological shift.

To conclude, while Lord Ashley undeniably exerted a significant influence on Locke's intellectual journey, it's highly improbable that he single-handedly ushered Locke's shift towards toleration since *Essay Concerning Toleration* was finished as a draft not long after he

came to Lord Ashley's house, but according to Locke himself a shift in idea was the result of a long period of observations. For example, his experiences at Oxford, where he witnessed religious controversies under absolutism; his journey to Kleve, where he observed religious peace under toleration; and his time in London, where he recognized the ineffectiveness of monarchy and the presence of secret animosities among different religious groups. These experiences collectively indicate that Locke's ideological shift can be primarily attributed to the diverse array of experiences he encountered.

John Locke at Kleve

Locke's sojourn in Kleve, a town in West Germany near the Dutch border, is a critical event that contributed to his ideological shift that has often been neglected by many scholars. I contend that Locke's ideology and beliefs underwent a profound shift due to his visit to this tolerant and harmonious city in Germany. This visit challenged and undermined his previous convictions, prompting him to reconsider whether absolutism or toleration offered a more viable solution to religious conflicts. Before his experience in Kleve, Locke had used Germany in the Two Tracts as an example of notorious religious calamities, where he wrote:

All things sacred as well as profane are held as nothing, and so long as they march under the banners of liberty and conscience, they assert that each may do what he will. And certainly, the overheated zeal of those who know how to arm the rash folly of the ignorant and passionate multitude with the authority of conscience often kindles a blaze among the populace capable of consuming everything... Germany, which is notorious for civil disasters, provides evidence of this. And I only wish that this age and country of ours, so happy in other respects, had been content with foreign examples and had not provided such wretched evidence of this truth in its domestic misfortunes or wished to learn by experiment on its own body how many calamities a predatory lust under the guise of Christian liberty and religion brings in its wake — calamities of which the very memory would in truth be thoroughly distressing did not our present good fortune, the new posture of affairs and the well-composed order of society reassure us.⁷³

In this text, Locke used Germany as a foreign example of “calamities” that had also affected England. He expressed a deep dislike of the German environment and was happy that England was opposite to Germany. Religious fanaticism under the cover of religious freedom and liberty of conscience had, according to him, only brought destruction. However, Locke changed his mind when he visited Kleve for the first time in 1665.

From November of 1665 to February of 1666, Locke went to Kleve as a secretary of Sir Walter Vane (1619–1676) for a diplomatic mission for Elector Frederick William of Brandenburg.⁷⁴ The Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–1667) had ensued by then, and diplomatic missions such as this hoped to secure alliances, or at least neutrality, of areas that shared borders with the Netherlands, such as Kleve. Though Locke was there on a different mission, he had the opportunity to witness significant examples of religious tolerance and harmony in Kleve, his experience was reflected in the letter he wrote to Robert Boyle (1627–1691) on the 12th of December:

... there a greater uniformity in their religion, three professions being publicly allowed. The Calvinists are more than the Lutherans, and the Catholics more than both—but no papist bears any office—besides some anabaptists, who are not publicly tolerated. But yet this distance in their churches gets not into their houses. They quietly permit one another to choose their way to heaven; for I cannot observe any quarrels or animosities amongst them upon the account of religion.⁷⁵

Rather than the radical religious groups or ongoing religious conflicts he had anticipated, the reality before him painted a different picture. He could not observe any quarrels or animosities due to differences in religious belief. Before being assigned to this mission as a secretary, it was the peak of religious fanaticism of the Anglican church in England, accompanied by severe religious persecutions due to stringent laws against nonconformists.⁷⁶ However, when he was sent to Kleve, an environment of religious toleration—a concept he

had previously dismissed—the experience upended his long-held beliefs. In this place, people coexisted in harmony and peace, in stark contrast to the religious instability maintained under absolutist rule. Additionally, he claimed that the stability of this place was partly due to the magistrates, who largely maintained religious stability at that time, and partly because of the “good nature of people.” This is a significant contrast to his Hobbesian views expressed in the *Two Tracts on Government*, where he stated that without a common authority, there will be “no peace, no security, no enjoyments, enmity with all men and safe possession of nothing, and those stinging swarms of miseries that attend anarchy and rebellion.”⁷⁷ The above-noted letter to Boyle is, therefore, direct evidence of him contradicting his previous Hobbesian views and a mark of his shift.

Conclusion

Through a close reading of Locke's early work defending the restoration of Charles II and absolutism, *Two Tracts on Government*, his 1667 work written in Lord Ashley's House supporting the freedom of religious practice and toleration, *Essay Concerning Toleration*, in addition to a slew of other sources, we gain a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the reasons behind Locke's shift from religious uniformity to toleration.

To understand the reason for Locke's shift in idea, this paper closely examined the lack of success surrounding policies of religious toleration in Cromwellian England, in which the toleration policy led to the growth of many extreme religious groups that desired more power than the policy designed to grant. It also created continuous religious conflicts and instability because of the development of those groups. Since Locke mainly lived in this period before he wrote the *Two Tracts*, he likely formed his idea that absolutism would lead to religious

peace and stability, because the previous Cromwellian period indirectly proved that toleration led to further disputes. Therefore, Locke got ideas through observation; he saw the fanaticism in the Cromwellian England period and believed toleration would be wrong. Things altered after the restoration of Charles II, which many believe was the solution to problems of religious conflicts and political instability. Yet the restored Anglican church accompanied the restoration, and the reemployment of Anglican administrators expelled during the Cromwell period made things worse. As they passed new laws and acts that would suppress the rights of the nonconformists, leading to further religious disputes, Locke began to transition during this time. After that, Locke moved to Kieve, where he saw the effectiveness of using toleration to solve religious conflicts and controversies; he was very impressed by the town at that time. It would significantly contribute to his transition. Nearly simultaneously, he met Lord Ashley, and was attracted by the idea of toleration, then became a supporter of the toleration side. Each of his experiences shaped his understanding of religious harmony and what he sought in religious institutions at the time.

The contribution of this paper lies in retracing the significance of biography in the History of Philosophy. The evidence demonstrates that before his visit to Kieve, England was marked by religious persecution and unrest. Then the tolerance and harmony in Kieve left a profound impression on him, as indicated by his letter to Boyle, suggesting that this trip played a crucial role in his ideological transition. I hope this paper will make clear to future researchers of the importance of historical context and biographical information associated with the transition in the idea of certain historical figures.

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