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# Spinoza, Locke, and the Limits of Dutch Toleration

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# Spinoza, Locke, and the Limits of Dutch Toleration

Geoffrey Gorham

## I. Introduction

The Netherlands' reputation as a bastion of religious and political toleration has been tested in the last decade by the rise of indigenous anti-immigrant political movements. These movements are fueled not only by simple xenophobia and racism, amplified in the wake of September 11, but also by the seemingly sincere sentiment that the Netherlands, the most densely populated nation in Europe, cannot sustain historical immigration levels: "Holland is full." But another important component of anti-immigrant rhetoric is conceptual or ideological rather than practical, and trades on the tolerant self-image of the Dutch: toleration does not extend to the intolerant.<sup>1</sup> Muslim immigrants are the usual target of this argument, who are accused of harboring theocratic, patriarchal, homophobic, and anti-Christian or anti-Jewish convictions and designs. Such rhetoric raises important and complex questions about how social and political ideals like toleration, freedom, and equality—as much as idolatry, infidelity, and heresy—are conditioned by the structures of social and economic power in which they historically emerge. That is to say, does the ideal of "toleration" in practice merely reinforce the boundaries of what is "tolerable" within the dominant culture?

I will here be concerned with a somewhat simpler, though related and no less important question: how have the most influential supporters of toleration, especially Dutch toleration, attempted to identify its limits? More specifically, how have the philosophers of toleration approached the issue of tolerating attitudes or behaviors that seem in themselves inconsistent with the strictest ideals of toleration? These questions were at least as pressing in the Golden Age of the seventeenth century Low Countries, the birthplace of the modern philosophy of toleration,<sup>2</sup> as they are in contemporary Holland. I will emphasize the figures Baruch de Spinoza and John Locke, not only for their enormous influence, but also because each had first-hand experience, on the receiving end as it were, of Dutch toleration. Spinoza was born into an Amsterdam Jewish (Portuguese "Marrano") community of refugees from the Iberian persecutions and expulsions of the sixteenth century. He was eventually alienated from his own community and excommunicated from his Temple at the age of 23 for religious heresy.<sup>3</sup> Locke spent a long sojourn in Holland as a political refugee during the restoration of monarchical rule in England.<sup>4</sup>

## II. Locke on Toleration

Locke composed his famous *Letter Concerning Toleration* in 1685 while living in Amsterdam, where he was often in the company of Remonstrant theologians who were well-versed in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century Protestant defense of toleration originating especially with Arminius and Episcopius. Locke's letter is actually addressed to the Amsterdam theologian Van Limborch, with whom he regularly conversed and corresponded.<sup>5</sup> Although the *Letter* is concerned above all with the Christian sectarianism of seventeenth-century England and the vexed and heated question of the relationship between church and state, it also shows the influence of Dutch cosmopolitanism. The

Dutch provinces of the 1680s had active Catholic churches and Jewish synagogues, and diplomatic ties with Islamic kingdoms.<sup>6</sup> Locke himself had Jewish friends in Amsterdam and toured heterodox Protestant communities, such as the Labadists in rural Holland. At the same time, Protestant Huguenots (such as the influential skeptical philosopher Bayle) were flooding into the Low Countries after Louis XIV's 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Locke declares near the conclusion of his *Letter* that "neither Pagan, nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth, because of his religion" (*Letter* 35). But we will see that these civil rights are contingent upon the endorsement and profession of principles that are extrinsic to, and potentially in tension with, the religions themselves.

Locke's main argument for the toleration of religious heterodoxy is not based on moral principles but on rather practical and psychological considerations. Even if we assume, as Locke does, that the primary purpose of religion is the "saving of men's souls" and that Christianity is the only reliable means to this end, it does not follow that the state can compel its citizens to Christian observance and belief. However well intentioned, such coercive religious policies would be futile. The state is powerless to produce religious conviction because its power "consists only in outward force; but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind" (*Letter* 6). Fines, imprisonment, and torture are hopelessly ineffectual when it comes to faith since "such is the nature of the understanding that it cannot be compelled to the belief of any thing by outward force," only by "light and evidence" (*Ibid.*). Presumably, the state could compel someone by the threat of force, or by the promise of reward, to outwardly profess and practice a religion they do not inwardly believe; but Locke assures us that this would hinder rather than advance their chances for salvation. So the state should commit its resources to improving men's temporal lives, leaving to each man the care of his eternal soul.

Locke's argument is vulnerable in a number of respects. He does not explain how he knows that God requires sincerity and "inward persuasion" for salvation. In addition, the psychological premise about the invulnerability of belief to coercion is doubtful, especially if "outward force" is construed broadly enough to include mandatory religious education and the banning of heterodox religious publications and preaching. As Locke himself notes in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, what we know is at least partly subject to the will insofar as it is up to us to "with-hold or employ" our faculties "from this or that sort of objects."<sup>7</sup> Parents are partly responsible through coercive practices for the sincere religious beliefs of their adult children. Similarly, through the regulation of religious information, the state could effectively direct our faculties to a preferred faith and stimulate inward persuasion without directly manipulating belief.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Locke's argument assumes that successful conversion to the true religion is the only plausible motive for religious intolerance. Yet in Locke's own day, imprisonment, expulsion, and genocide were commonly employed to enforce religious uniformity, not so much by enlarging the flock as by culling it. And although Locke himself is generally opposed to religious persecution—better to risk apostasy and schism than insist on doctrinal conformity to no religious end—he does acknowledge valid limits to toleration. Thus, no religion can be tolerated "which is constituted upon such a bottom, that all those who enter into it, do thereby ipso facto deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince" (*Letter* 31). With this limitation, Locke may have Catholics in mind, but he singles out Turkish Muslims for special mention: "it is

ridiculous for any one to profess himself to be a Mahometan only in religion, but in every thing else a faithful subject to a Christian magistrate, whilst at the same time he acknowledges himself bound to yield blind obedience to the mufti of Constantinople; who himself is entirely obedient to the Ottoman emperor” (Ibid.). The same principle might be employed today against Zionist Jews who maintain allegiance to the state of Israel while residing in another country.

He also exempts from the protection of toleration those religions which arrogate to their own members “any peculiar privilege or power above other mortals, in civil concerns,” e.g., contract only among its own (“faith is not kept with heretics”) or denial of genuine authority of magistrates outside its faith (“dominion is founded in grace”) (*Letter* 30-31). The social contract depends on equal treatment in social dealings and universal acknowledgement of the rule of law. Finally, whereas Catholics and Muslims are suspect for subordinating the authority of the sovereign to a pope or mufti, atheists, in Locke’s view, are not to be trusted because they cannot be subjected to any law at all: “promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist” (*Letter* 31).<sup>9</sup> Since such groups cannot be compelled to believe, then by Locke’s own psychological principles one presumes their dangerous “inward persuasion” must be suppressed as much as possible by “outward force.”

These three exceptions to the Lockean principle of toleration all undermine social stability by straightforwardly encouraging or permitting usurpation, derogation, or, in the case of atheism, simple disregard, of the legitimate civic authority. I will return shortly to question whether such exemptions are consistent and legitimate. But it is first worth considering one other ground for state censure and intolerance, which Locke mentions almost in passing but which raises particularly interesting and difficult issues. Along with those religions that flagrantly undermine or threaten sovereign authority, Locke adds to the list “those that will not own and teach the duty of tolerating all men in matters of mere religion” (*Letter* 31). It should be clear that this requirement to “own and teach” toleration, although it is rarely discussed independently, goes beyond the other three conditions.<sup>10</sup> For it seems possible that a religion should espouse articles of faith, ostensibly grounded on divine command, which impinge in no way on civic authority but which also make no provision for toleration in Locke’s sense. The question of toleration simply does not arise, for example, for a sect that advocates complete and mutual isolation of civic and religious affairs (any more than night and day should need to “tolerate” one another). Quakers, Congregationalists, and Anabaptists (such as the Mennonites) approached this model in Locke’s own context. Also, churches with a strongly prophetic orientation may provide no role for toleration, even though they pose no immediate threat to civic authority, because they await the establishment (or return) of God’s kingdom on earth. Various strains of Millenarianism represented such an attitude in Locke’s day.<sup>11</sup> All of these churches are potentially subject to intolerance from the Lockean state merely for failing to “own and teach” tolerance.

It is possible that this requirement was merely an *ad hoc* device of Locke to constrain the more radical, separationist strains of English religious dissent. But I am mainly concerned with the theoretical justification of the “own and teach” requirement. Since Locke offers none, we will need to speculate. One might hold, on contractarian grounds, that enjoying the benefits of toleration obligates one to promulgate toleration of other’s beliefs, just as enjoying security from foreign or domestic invasion obliges one to support

the military or police through taxes or service. Such a rationale is suggested by Locke's observation that we should tolerate religious minorities because we would want to be tolerated if we were in their place: "what if in another country, to a Mahometan or a Pagan prince, the Christian religion seemed false and offensive to God; may not the Christians for the same reason, and after the same manner, be extirpated there?" (*Letter* 24). Yet this ignores a crucial asymmetry in the religious case. We all have an equal interest in peace and security; but with respect to religion our interest is above all salvation for our eternal souls rather than merely our peculiar form of worship. And so, "there being but one truth, one way to heaven" (*Letter* 7), charity requires us to share this truth with those who have tolerated us, rather than merely to acquiesce in their error by tolerating them in turn. The point is not, of course, that among the great variety of religions and sects, one is likely to stand out as more certain than all the others,<sup>12</sup> nor that intolerance of the churches we regard as errant is likely to bring about their conversion. The point is rather that, from the perspective of the faithful of a given sect, the benefit they receive from a tolerant state is not simply freedom of conscience but a chance for eternal life.<sup>13</sup>

So it is not clear that religions acquire from being tolerated an obligation to express and teach toleration that overrides the saving of souls. There is, I think, a stronger philosophical basis for Locke's requirement that tolerated religions themselves "own and teach" toleration. Since the state is unable to direct citizens to the truth by coercive means—"nor are fire and sword any proper instruments wherewith to convince men's minds of error" (*Letter* 12)—inward religious errancy must be tolerated so long as it does not undermine civic authority. But since there is no question that for Locke religious errancy jeopardizes souls, one might have expected him to impose limitations on heretical religious speech and display, which would certainly fall within the state's power and purview. In fact, Locke believes that toleration of "inward persuasion" entails quite liberal toleration of "outward worship": "the magistrate has no power to enforce by law either in his own church, or much less in another, the use of any rites or ceremonies whatsoever in the worship of God" (*Letter* 19). For Locke, free worship is not merely an incidental component of religious practice but essential to religion itself. Because the aim of religious belief is salvation, therefore a church is by definition "a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshipping of God, in such a manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls" (*Letter* 7). And, as mentioned above, Locke takes it as obvious that such worship will be "effectual" only if it is sincere: "whatsoever is practised in the worship of God, is only so far justifiable as it is believed by those that practise it to be acceptable unto him" (*Letter* 19). Since religious belief is the sincere hope that I will be saved by worship and doctrine "acceptable" to God, my faith cannot be severed from a set of practices.

This explains, I believe, why Locke thinks that among the practices of tolerable religions must be to "own and teach" toleration. For it will not be possible to isolate intolerant religious doctrines from open espousal and implementation, such doctrines necessarily seeming to their faithful as acceptable to God and required for salvation. But in many cases, this implementation will be inconsistent with strict toleration. For example, if a Millenarian church believes the "end is nigh," and that only those firmly convinced of this will be saved, these beliefs will inevitably be expressed in practices that

are contrary to social stability. Provisions will be hoarded within the religious community, education and labor will be abandoned, and since time is short, allegiance will be transferred from the civil authorities, who are concerned with trivial, mundane affairs, to the ecclesiastical authorities, who are focused on the world about to arrive. Moreover, with the clock ticking and so many souls at stake, forced conversion could seem a quite reasonable last resort. But if this same church requires toleration itself as a condition of salvation, Locke may suppose, their Millenarian prophecies will not gain a foothold in anti-social practice.

Indeed, Locke makes it plain that the primary source of social strife is intolerance by and among *Christian* churches (that most “modest and peaceable religion”):

It is not the diversity of opinions (which cannot be avoided), but the refusal of toleration to those that are of different opinions (which might have been granted), that has produced all the bustles and wars that have been in the Christian world, upon account of religion. The heads and leaders of the church, moved by avarice and insatiable desire of dominion, making use of the immoderate ambition of magistrates, and the credulous superstition of the giddy multitude, have incensed and animated them against those that dissent from themselves (*Letter 36*).

Unchecked by civil authority, power-hungry church leaders are able to enflame their congregations and enlist corrupt government officials and princes in support of their religious persecution, which triggers an understandable backlash on the part of the unfavored sects, and eventually all-out civil war. This historical pattern will continue, Locke predicts, just so long as “magistrates should thus suffer these incendiaries, and disturbers of the public peace” (*Ibid.*). So a policy of “enforced toleration” is for Locke not a moral ideal but a practical necessity for the short- and long-term stability of the commonwealth.

That Locke conceives doctrinal toleration primarily as a practical safeguard against the outbreak of enthusiastic intolerance harmful to civil peace explains, I think, his treatment of the biblical Mosaic law requiring the faithful to “root out” idolatry. He does not condemn the injunction as intolerant, which it certainly is, nor excuse it as ineffectual or extraneous. Moses is not admonished for failing to “own and teach” toleration since in his special context, intolerance, even to the point of expulsion and forced conversion, is not a threat to civil authority. The reason is that in the “commonwealth of the Jews,” there can be no conflict between civil and religious authority because “God himself was the legislator” (*Letter 24*). The persecution of idolatry was therefore justified, and imperative, since idolatry was tantamount to treason. But Locke insists that there are no longer any such commonwealths, certainly not Christian ones. There is now a gap between the aims of the sovereign (securing peace) and the aims of the various religious sects (saving souls) and so idolatry cannot be prohibited by civil law. On the contrary, in order to ensure that the aims of religion and state do not come into conflict, religious pluralism must be tolerated by the state and embraced by even the most evangelical of churches. To this end, “one may employ as many exhortations and arguments as he pleases, towards the promoting of another man’s salvation. But all force and compulsion are to be forborn” (*Letter 27*).

Conceived in this way, Locke's "own and teach" condition imposes rather strict limits on religious toleration by the state, i.e., a rather low bar for religious persecution. To qualify as a legitimate target of persecution, a church need not pose any immediate threat to social peace and stability. It is enough that it does not explicitly condemn intolerance as a greater sin than heresy, infidelity, and idolatry. Applied today, this would exclude nearly all theistic religious orientations outside of liberal Protestantism (Locke's own orientation), including Christian, Jewish, and Muslim fundamentalism. And of course, all forms of atheism and non-theistic religions are exempted from toleration, regardless of their explicit moral codes, since no one who denies God can be trusted. Consequently, it is worth considering the slightly earlier defense of toleration presented by Spinoza, since it seems to offer a more expansive case for religious freedom.

### III. Spinoza on Toleration

Spinoza's major political treatise, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*),<sup>14</sup> was published anonymously in 1670, fifteen years before Locke wrote his *Letter* on toleration. Like the *Letter*, the *TTP* is concerned above all with the relation, and potential conflict, between civil and religious authority. Although their personal religious convictions were very different—Locke a devout theist and Spinoza a naturalistic pantheist (i.e., atheist)—they shared considerable ground on the question of religious toleration. They agreed, following Hobbes, that the state originates with an exchange of absolute individual liberty or "natural rights" for peace and security. Since "everyone wishes to live as far as possible securely beyond the reach of fear, and this would be quite impossible so long as everyone did everything he liked" (*TTP* 16, p. 202), we voluntarily transfer our rights to a sovereign who "will have sole and unquestioned dominion, and whom everyone will be bound to obey, under pain of the severest punishment" (*TTP* 16, p. 205). This authority extends to all important aspects of social life, including the practice of religion: "the sovereign power, which alone is bound both by Divine and natural right to preserve and guard the laws of the state, should have supreme authority for making any laws about religion which it thinks fit" (*TTP* 16, p. 212).

And yet Spinoza insists that, "the best government will allow freedom of philosophical speculation no less than of religious belief" (*TTP* 20, p. 261). As with Locke, toleration of religious belief, even when it is grossly erroneous, is warranted on practical rather than moral grounds: "He who seeks to regulate everything by law, is more likely to arouse vices than to reform them. It is best to grant what cannot be abolished, even though it be in itself harmful" (*TTP* 20, p. 261). Like Locke, he maintains that genuine religious belief, and indeed genuine conviction of any sort, cannot be imposed by external fiat or coercion: "However unlimited, therefore, the power of a sovereign may be, however implicitly it is trusted as the exponent of law and religion, it can never prevent men from forming judgments according to their intellect" (*TTP* 20, p. 258).<sup>15</sup> For this reason, as he puts it in his later, unpublished *Tractatus Politicus* (*TP*), "the mind, so far as it makes use of reason, is dependent, not on the supreme authorities, but on itself. And so the true knowledge and the love of God cannot be subject to the dominion of any" (*TP* III, 10, p. 305). Thus, it is an "abuse of sovereignty and a usurpation of the rights of subjects, to seek to prescribe what shall be accepted as true, or rejected as false, or what opinions should actuate men in their worship of God" (*TTP* 20, p. 257).

For Spinoza, once again as for Locke, toleration is justifiably limited if it threatens the core function of the state: “to free every man from fear, that he may live in all possible security” (*TTP* 20, p. 259). Acts are intolerable simply insofar as they contravene the laws that are established to this end. Moreover, certain mere opinions are “seditious” and intolerable in themselves. For example, there can be no toleration of men who, like Locke’s atheists, “hold that promises ought not to be kept or that everyone should live as he pleases” since such opinions “abrogate the contract which tacitly or openly he made with his rulers” (*TTP* 20, p. 260).<sup>16</sup> But in general, in ceding his right of free action, the citizen nevertheless retains the right of “free reason and judgment” (*TTP* 20, p. 257), even when this judgment is directly contrary to particular laws. Consequently, a citizen may be justly compelled “to act in contradiction to what he believes, and openly feels, to be the best” and to obey the sovereign commands “though he believes them to be most absurd” (*TP* VI, 39, p. 326). We may be compelled, for example, to participate in state-sponsored religious observances and ceremonies; but we cannot be compelled to believe the creeds we recite there.

Evidently, Spinoza draws a more radical distinction even than Locke between a citizen’s “inward” judgment and his “outward” actions. I argued that Locke must require religions to “own and teach” tolerance because inward opinions to the contrary will inevitably gain purchase in outward practice and thereby undermine civic authority. And (although Locke does not appreciate this point sufficiently) outward practice, especially religious education and ritual, cannot fail to influence inward belief. But Spinoza sees no theoretical problem, and only minor practical difficulties, in a state wherein “everybody submits to the control of authority over his actions but not over his judgment and reason” (*TTP* 20, p. 263). It is true that the heterodox may need to submit to “external rites” at odds with their internal convictions—as Spinoza’s ancestors were forced to convert to Christianity—but such rites “ought not to be held of such importance that they should be thought worthwhile on their account to disturb public peace and quiet” (*TP* III, 10, p. 305). Although he is no less concerned than Locke to safeguard civic authority, this radical divorce between reason and practice is precisely what enables Spinoza to grant near universal latitude in matters of individual opinion, religious and otherwise, while insisting on absolute obedience and conformity in religious practice: “a man’s loyalty to the state should be judged, like his loyalty to God, from his actions only” (*TTP* 20, p. 261).<sup>17</sup>

That Spinoza conceives the gap between individual judgment and social practice as absolutely unbridgeable is shown in his analysis of the biblical rule of Moses. Like Locke, he perceives in this rule a historically unique convergence of state and church: “in the Hebrew state the civil and religious authority, each consisting solely of obedience to God, were one and the same.” Locke emphasized that in such special circumstances the question of tolerating private religious heterodoxy (e.g., idolatry) simply does not arise: “the subjects of that government both may, and ought to be kept in strict conformity with that church, by the civil power” (*Letter* 25). But Spinoza maintains that even in such a pure theocracy, the adage “every man’s understanding is his own” will be confirmed: “Moses, not by fraud, but by Divine virtue, gained such a hold over the popular judgment that he was accounted superhuman, and believed to speak and act through the inspiration of the Deity; nevertheless, even he could not escape murmurs and evil interpretations” (*TTP* 20, p. 257).



Since “divine law does not demand the performance of ceremonies” (*TTP* 4, p. 61), it follows that rites and rituals in themselves “have nothing to do with a state of blessedness” (*TTP* 5, p. 76). As evidence of the latter, Spinoza cites the Dutch in Japan, who remain faithful Christians even though they “are enjoined by their East India Company not to practise any outward rites of religion” (*TTP* 5, p. 76). Outward religious worship in Spinoza’s ideal state will be simple and unadorned. Apart from inward love and obedience of God, the “worship of God consists only in justice and charity, or love towards one’s neighbor” (*TTP* 14, p. 187). This enjoinder, along with a few other minimal tenets of this “universal religion” (such as that God exists and is one), constitute the doctrinal foundation of the state church. In the *Tractatus Politicus* he stipulates that this church will be large, publicly funded, and governed by the patricians of the city. Smaller, private religion will be tolerated but kept within strict limits: “those that are attached to another religion are, indeed, to be allowed to build as many temples as they please; yet these are to be small, and limited to a certain standard of size, and on sites at some little distance one from another” (*TP* VIII, 46, p. 368).

Because outward religious practice breeds superstition and schism, which threaten social peace, and because it has no particular connection to inward religious judgment or blessedness, Spinoza’s toleration is very circumspect. However, there is one sort of action that he thinks must be granted considerable latitude, namely speech.<sup>18</sup> Human beings, he finds, are simply incapable of keeping their opinions to themselves: “men’s common failing is to confide their plans to others” (*TTP* 20, p. 258). Far from promoting civil peace, if “men be so bound down, that they do not dare to utter a whisper, save at the bidding of their rulers,” the social consequences would be disastrous. For men, at least virtuous ones, “resent the branding as criminal of opinions which they believe to be true” to such an extent that they would perpetuate rebellion and risk exile or death in defense of free expression (*TTP* 20, p. 262). Furthermore, even among ordinary citizens, if oppressive laws were enacted to the point that “men would be daily thinking one thing and doing another,” we would become in effect habitual liars. The social upshot of this would be “the corruption of good faith, that mainstay of government” (*TTP* 20, p. 261). For these reasons, Spinoza therefore grants considerable freedom of speech, even if “propounded and published with unworthy motives” (*Ibid.*).<sup>19</sup> Still, restrictions on certain kinds of speech, such as openly seditious pamphlets and “conventicles,” will not be tolerated: “authority may be as much injured by words as by actions” (*TTP* 20, p. 258).

#### **IV. Locke and Spinoza: Moderate vs. Radical?**

The eminent historian of the Dutch Golden Age and Enlightenment, Jonathan Israel, has emphasized the deep differences between the Lockean and Spinozist theories of toleration. Locke’s conception, he maintains, is at bottom “theological” since it is rooted in the assumption that each person is responsible for securing his or her own salvation by the means of worship acceptable to God. Spinoza’s notion is in essence “republican” since it is concerned primarily with securing freedom of thought and speech, rather than belief or worship, and with minimizing the divisive authority of ecclesiastical offices and teaching. This explains why Locke exempts atheists from toleration, while Spinoza considers it irrelevant, in religious matters, whose beliefs are true or false: “faith does not demand that dogmas should be true as that they should be pious” (*TTP* 14, p. 185). In

Israel's terms, Spinoza's brand of toleration represents the "radical" Enlightenment, Locke's the "moderate."<sup>20</sup>

Although there is much to be said for Israel's concept of the Radical Enlightenment, it seems to me that he underestimates the radical import of Lockean toleration and exaggerates the breadth and depth of Spinozistic toleration. It is true that for Locke the magistrate must tolerate religious self-determination among his subjects because he is powerless to secure salvation on their behalf. This does not mean the social structure of religion would be left unaffected by the implementation of Lockean toleration. As we have seen, Locke agrees with Spinoza that intolerant doctrines and preaching from within churches, aided by superstitious congregations and corrupt politicians, constitutes the major threat to civil peace. Consequently, the Lockean state is empowered not only to ban religions that explicitly usurp or derogate civic authority, but also to require any religion to "internalize" (own and teach) toleration with respect to any other religion. For Locke, this means any church would be required to preach, as a matter of dogma, that the members of all other churches must be given equal, unprejudiced treatment in all "temporal" affairs, presumably including education, business, and politics. In addition, other church doctrines may need to be conceived in light of the toleration imperative, most obviously, those relating to idolatry, heresy, and infidelity, but also concepts of the Sabbath, diet, oaths, inter-marriage, usury, etc. Certain historical and eschatological doctrines might also require modification to be made consistent with toleration, insofar as these record or anticipate differential treatment of the unfaithful. Even if rigorously applied, Locke's tolerationist policy would not reduce all sects to Spinoza's "universal religion"; but over time it would drastically reduce the sectarian and segregationist tendencies of most intolerant factions.

As for Spinoza's more "radical" conception of the tolerant state, we should keep well in mind that the sovereign retains "the right to treat as enemies all men whose opinions do not, on all subjects, entirely coincide with its own" (*TTP* 20, p. 258), even though it would be unwise and in fact impossible for it to compel the judgment of its subjects. Nevertheless, in order to prevent the usurpation of civil authority, "the right of control over spiritual matters depends absolutely on the decree of the sovereign" (*TTP* 19, p. 254). All rites of outward worship, in both the large state religion and the smaller permitted churches, are determined by the sovereign alone in accordance with public peace and well-being. As for the toleration of atheism, although Spinoza states clearly that "the supreme right of free thinking, even on religion, is in every man's power" (*TTP* 7, pp. 118–19), he also argues at great length that the knowledge and belief in the Scriptures (as moral narratives rather than doctrine) are necessary to the masses and someone who denies them owing to disbelief in God is rightly judged impious (*TTP* 5, p. 78). And the first dogma of the "universal religion" that is promulgated as the state church is that "God or a Supreme Being exists." Under these conditions, actual disbelief will seem to be a rare privilege of the intellectual elite (like Spinoza himself), divorced from lifestyle and typically unspoken. But it is for the best of all that the multitudes receive their religion from the sovereign rather than from free and independent thought:

Men are very prone to error on religious subjects, and, according to the diversity of their dispositions, are wont with considerable stir to put forward their own inventions, as experience more than sufficiently attests,

so that if no one were bound to obey the state in matters which, in his own opinion concern religion, the rights of the state would be dependent on every man's judgment and passions. No one would consider himself bound to obey laws framed against his faith or superstition; and on this pretext he might assume unbounded license (*TTP* 16, pp. 211–12).

## V. Conclusion

In the Netherlands, toleration is celebrated as a national virtue in much the way liberty is celebrated in the United States. During our meetings in The Hague (only a few blocks from Spinoza's grave and across the street from the Dutch Parliament), we heard endorsements of Dutch toleration (sometimes tinged with academic cynicism) from remarkably different perspectives: Somali immigrants, gay activists, Calvinist Christians, and conservative politicians. At the conclusion of the *TTP*, Spinoza himself exploits, or simply displays, this aspect of the Dutch self-image:

The city of Amsterdam reaps the fruit of this freedom in its own great prosperity and in the admiration of all other people. For in this most flourishing state, and most splendid city, men of every nation and religion live together in the greatest harmony, and ask no questions before trusting their goods to a fellow-citizen, save whether he be rich or poor, and whether he generally acts honestly, or the reverse. His religion and sect is considered of no importance: for it has no effect before the judges in gaining or losing a cause, and there is no sect so despised that its followers, provided that they harm no one, pay every man his due, and live uprightly, are deprived of the protection of the magisterial authority (*TTP* 20, p. 264).

It is difficult to know how sincerely this is intended, appearing as it does in a book published anonymously, by an author who was unable to publish his magnum opus in Holland during his lifetime. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that Spinoza's homage to the city of his birth would still ring true, at least as an ideal, to a broad spectrum of Dutch residents.<sup>21</sup> It is less clear whether his actual theory of toleration, however far-thinking and "modern" it is esteemed by liberal scholars, provides a useful model for contemporary Dutch society. His "freedom to philosophize" favors a highly rationalistic "inward" conception of "blessedness" that radically detaches religious expression from its cultural context. As the child of religious refugees as well as someone expelled from his own religious community, Spinoza naturally derived immense value from such inner devotion (which in the *Ethics* he terms the "Intellectual Love of God"). Outward religious conformity (or at least invisibility) on the part of the diverse immigrant communities, in terms of dress, prayer and worship, would amount to a partial surrender of cultural identity. Diversity, which is also celebrated by most Dutch, would be sacrificed for an officious and begrudging tolerance. But is it really necessary to trade cultural pluralism for the freedom to philosophize? Spinoza's fear that "no one would consider himself bound to obey laws framed against his faith" (*TTP* 16, p. 212) if the state did not regulate religion perhaps finds some recent, if isolated, support from incidents of religiously

motivated violence in Europe, including the murder of Theo Van Gogh. Yet given the long history of relatively peaceable settlement of religious minorities in Holland and other EU countries, not to mention the evident power and stability of the Dutch state itself, it is hard to perceive a risk of religious wars or theocratic sedition anywhere near seventeenth-century levels.

What of the compelling idea that intolerance must not be tolerated? As mentioned in the introduction this notion has played a central role in the rhetoric of recent Dutch anti-immigrant movements. Thus, Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated in 2002, frequently asserted that Muslim culture was inconsistent with the tolerant Dutch values that enabled an openly homosexual man (such as he was) to become leader of a major political party.<sup>22</sup> We have seen that John Locke, while living in Amsterdam, came to the same conclusion that churches must “own and teach” toleration in order warrant toleration. Although Locke did not fully articulate the motivations for this view, and for this reason he has earned the reputation of a “moderate,” I think they are clear enough. Like Spinoza, Locke feared that heterodox religious movements, unless they were kept in check, would co-opt and usurp the authority of the state at the cost of peace. Despite his own, Spinozistic distinction between inward belief and outward practice, Locke understood much better than Spinoza that intolerant doctrines cannot be absolutely divorced from intolerant actions. Requiring doctrinal toleration in exchange for the privilege of being tolerated (i.e., of existing) would help to remove the threat of insurrection.

However reasonable Locke’s own fears, it is difficult to extend them to the Holland of today. Whatever can be said for or against their moral value, the allegedly intolerant doctrines of immigrant religions seem not to have reduced the celebrated social freedoms of Dutch society nor posed any serious threat to the Dutch state.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, religious orthodoxy seems as reserved in Holland under immigrant guise as it was for hundreds of years under Calvinist guise. (I am reminded of the various religious missions, including the Oude Kerk, interspersed among the prostitution windows, coffee shops, and sex shops of the red-light district.) At least for the time being, those looking for philosophical arguments to limit religious toleration in the Netherlands will need to look beyond the patron saints Spinoza and Locke.

## Notes

1. See Buruma 2006 for an accessible account of recent anti-immigrant movements in the Netherlands. See also Peninx 2006 and Buijs 2009.
2. See Nobbs 1938; Israel 1995; Berkvens-Stevelinck et al. 1997; Grell and Porter 2000; Po-Chia Hsia and Van Nierop 2002; Zagorin 2003; and the contribution of Joop de Jong in this volume.
3. See Nadler 2001.
4. See Ashcraft 1986, chap. 9; and Woolhouse 2007, chap. 6.
5. See Marshall 2006 and Woolhouse 2007.
6. See Israel 1995, p. 658; Marshall 2006, chap. 12; and Van Rooden 2002.

7. *Essay* 4, 13, p. 2.
8. See Waldron 1988.
9. For detailed discussion of Locke on the toleration of atheists, see Waldron 2002, chap. 8. Another important philosopher of toleration, also a Dutch resident, Pierre Bayle, took the opposite stance on atheism and morality: “atheism does not necessarily lead to the corruption of morals” (2000, p. 133). For more on Bayle and toleration, see Israel 2006, chap. 6; Marshall 2006; and Zagorin 2003, chap. 7.
10. In his recent, 750+ page book on toleration in the seventeenth century, John Marshall devotes only one page to toleration of the intolerant (2006, pp. 681–712).
11. On Early Modern millenarianism, see Force and Popkin 2001.
12. This is why, for Locke, we cannot justify intolerance on the grounds that the magistrate has special access to the truth in religious matters: “neither the right, nor the art of ruling, does necessarily carry along with it the certain knowledge of other things; and least of all of the true religion” (*Letter* 16). For discussion, see Harris 1994, chap. 6.
13. Nor is this not to deny that the untenability of universalized intolerance constitutes a powerful argument for tolerance, although contrary to Tuckness 2008, I do not think this is Locke’s main argument for toleration. For criticism of Tuckness’ approach, see De Roover and Balagangadhara 2008. The question that concerns me here is specifically the philosophical basis for Locke’s “own and teach” condition.
14. Essentially the same doctrine is asserted by Hobbes, who may have exerted an influence on both Spinoza and Locke on this point. See, for example, *Leviathan*, chap. 45, sec. 37 (Hobbes 1994, p. 266). How our inalienable power of forming religious judgments relates to Spinoza’s metaphysical conceptions of freedom and “conatus” in his *Ethics* is not altogether clear. For a good recent discussion, see Rosenthal 2003.
15. See further, Laursen 1996, pp. 189–90.
16. For critical discussion, see Balibar 1998, chap. 2.
17. See Smith 1998, pp. 156–158.
18. On Spinoza’s difficulties securing publication, see Israel 2001, chap. 16.
19. Israel 2000, p. 103. See also, Israel 1999 and 2006, chap. 6. Laursen 1996 provides a similar comparison between Locke and Spinoza on toleration.
20. As might another reference by Spinoza to Dutch culture: “What nation ever had to pay so many and so heavy taxes as the Dutch? Yet it not only has not been exhausted,

but, on the contrary, has been so mighty by its wealth, that all envied its good fortune” (*TP VIII*, 31; 360).

21. Fortuyn compared the strict moral principles of Islam to those of the Calvinist Reform Church: “You see the same thing in Muslim culture. Now look at the Netherlands. Where could a candidate for a huge political movement such as my own be openly gay? I take huge pride in that. And I’d like to keep it that way” quoted in Buruma 2006, p. 57. See also Spruyt 2009. For further discussion, see Eisenberg 2009.

22. John Rawls summarizes a more pluralistic and moderate attitude to an “intolerant sect” within a tolerant society: “its freedom should be restricted only when the tolerant sincerely and with reason believe that their security and the institutions of liberty are in danger” (1971, p. 220).

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