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Locke: Political Writings (Hackett Classics)



Synopsis

John Locke's Second Treatise of Government (c. 1681) is perhaps the key founding liberal text. A Letter Concerning Toleration, written in 1685 (a year when a Catholic monarch came to the throne of England and Louis XVI unleashed a reign of terror against Protestants in France), is a classic defense of religious freedom. Yet many of Locke's other writings--not least the Constitutions of Carolina, which he helped draft--are almost defiantly anti-liberal in outlook. This comprehensive collection brings together the main published works (excluding polemical attacks on other people's views) with the most important surviving evidence from among Locke's papers relating to his political philosophy. David Wootton's wide-ranging and scholarly Introduction sets the writings in the context of their time, examines Locke's developing ideas and unorthodox Christianity, and analyzes his main arguments. The result is the first fully rounded picture of Locke's political thought in his own words.

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Customer Reviews

Once I became used to the very long sentences I found this book a delight. In 21st century England we have long been used to religion being confined to the personal sphere, notwithstanding the Lords Spiritual, the Queen as Head of the Church and a tiny, disaffected minority that would see our country take its place in a Global Caliphate. In both his Treatises on Government, as well as in his Essay on Toleration, Locke seeks to demolish many barriers, then still standing, against freedom of custom in forms of worship and freedom of conscience in belief. Such was the atmosphere in the

late 17th century. The place of God in our Constitution had been a crucial issue in the blood soaked Civil War which had been the backdrop to Locke's childhood. He was sixteen years old when the Prot./Cat. Thirty Years War drew to a close. Locke's burial of the notion of the divine right of kings, and his acknowledgement that rulers can only rule legitimately with their people's consent may make him sound like a pioneer of liberalism, or even a visionary of our modern age. He is, however, very much a man of his time. Indeed that is the attraction of this book. The comments of a 17th century man from a 17th century perspective bring the period to life in a way that would tax the skills of a 21st century historian. Consciously or no, historians will have their own agenda. 'Liberal' is a relative term. Locke would outlaw atheists; he was convinced that morality was impossible without a belief on God. 'Mahomedans', whose loyalty would, with their essentially political faith, be to the Ottoman Sultan and Caliph, could not possibly be subjects of the English crown.

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