

Religious Inclusion and Exclusion

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Many choose to participate in religion. Participation means being a part of something and willingly engaging in some process or a group structure. Religious inclusion and exclusion, at first glance, seem to have a built-in construction of power and control, or authority; in other words, the authority to bring someone in or shut them out. Willingly joining and participating in society and religious life versus being permitted to or denied from enjoying that right is the theme you will examine in this lesson. You'll also look at some of the justifications and rationale behind an influential argument for both inclusion and exclusion. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. John Locke
2. Toleration
3. Religious Pluralism
4. Separation of Church and State
5. Sensus Communis

1. John Locke

To get started, you must look back to the 17th century. An Englishman called John Locke was an influential Enlightenment philosopher and a member of the Anglican Church. He wrote on a range of subjects, including mathematics, philosophy, political philosophy, and religion, one of the subjects about which he was most passionate. One of his most important essays has been “A Letter Concerning **Toleration**,” written in 1689. For Locke and others, the question of religious tolerance is a tricky endeavor because of the nature of belief itself.

IN CONTEXT

To get an idea of why this is so tricky, let's examine an idea of Locke's. In his view, there should be no tolerance for atheism. Ask yourself this: if religion is based on belief and tolerance is based on the value of recognizing different beliefs, how can atheism, which is also a belief, be legitimately excluded? You can see how this becomes hard to navigate.

Locke's "A Letter Concerning Toleration" is a foundational text for religious liberty. Toleration for John Locke pretty much only extended to monotheists, but nonetheless, this is an important text for the diverse societies of today.

Locke was a very religious person, and his ideas served to transform the way society and religion function concerning the other. The idea of reciprocity, or reciprocal exchange, was a central theme in his writings while it relates to participation.

Locke believed that for someone to participate in the processes of society, they had to inhabit or understand some form of religious ground. Now the ground that religion offers is the freedom to pursue the truth, the equal right of all individuals to seek and search. The collective search then, which includes all genuine religious inquiry, provides the moral structure for society.



TERM TO KNOW

Toleration

Recognition of the right of others to believe as they choose.

2. Toleration

The reciprocal relationship between the individual and society, between an individual's decision to participate of his or her own free will and society's reception of that individual, is based on equality. Toleration, from Locke's point of view, means a free and equal society bound by the moral structures that religion provides. That, in turn, equals the free individual.

The reciprocity goes both ways. The free individual willingly participates in society because he or she expects this fundamental truth of equality to be recognized when he or she willingly joins society. This is the motivation for becoming involved and participating in society. At the same time, society accepts the individual who willingly chooses to join, and the condition is religion.

Toleration	=	Free equal society bound by the moral structures that religion provides	=	Free individual (logical equivalence)
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For Locke, if some part of the equation is missing, namely the principle of ascribing individually to the free search for understanding that religion and moral education provide, then this bars or excludes one or many from certain aspects and functions of society. However, it doesn't deny his or her fundamental, innate, God-given equality.

It has more to do with human understanding, and Locke goes into this in his "Essay Concerning Human Understanding." Religion and God are the principal binding forces for society. The bond is reinforced by commitments, oaths, and moral standards upheld by each individual. An atheist, according to Locke, is not bound to these commitments and oaths. Given his or her outlook on a godless world and society, the reciprocity is not there for the atheist. So for Locke, that's how atheism forms the main exception to religious tolerance.

3. Religious Pluralism

As for Locke's level of tolerance for other non-Christian religions, there are many different interpretations of that. What is clearer and agreed upon, however, is that he had no tolerance for religious zealots who tirelessly pushed religious conversion on other people.

This brings up the idea of a more comprehensive religious pluralism. This term is sometimes applied as a synonym for **religious ecumenism**, an attitude toward religion that emphasizes commonalities over differences. Religious pluralism is a description of the attitude and behavior of the society; valuing the diversity and the practice of different paths toward truth, toward God, and toward understanding. In this sense, pluralism acts as a societal norm.

Religious pluralism might seek to find the balance between the harsh exclusion of bigotry and ecumenism or ecumenicalism, which might tend to favor unity commonality and forming unity to the point of disregarding the value of potential differences.



TERM TO KNOW

Religious Ecumenism

An attitude toward religion that emphasizes commonalities over differences.

4. Separation of Church and State

In Locke's "A Letter Concerning Toleration," he also introduces the tenets of a modern relationship between religion and political structures. He believes these are meant to uphold and protect the values of freedom, tolerance, and the right of an individual to search for understanding. He says, "I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other."

From this, we see the modern application of the separation of church and state. In a modern global society, the challenges of toleration are perhaps more tangible than during Locke's time. Take a look at England. Locke's Church of England functions as the national church, yet despite this fact, there are fewer regular churchgoers than there are those who attend mosque.

5. Sensus Communis

The ongoing question for all times is, if religion often provides the basis for many social conventions and many different religions are instructing these conventions, what is the real common ground?

Well, Locke referred to the Latin term, **sensus communis**, which originated with Aristotle and was also used a lot during the Middle Ages. It carries with it a strong sense of morality and community relations. It has to do with how we perceive, form, and integrate sensory input, and eventually represent it to ourselves and the world.

Locke held that religious structures offer this unifying common sense. Without this unifying sensibility, countries might and do crumble. This is also another justification for tolerance.



TERM TO KNOW

Sensus Communis

A shared moral sense that tends to unite a community.



SUMMARY

You explored the ideas of **John Locke** to examine the idea of religious inclusion and exclusion. His influential essay from 1689, “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” is good ground for understanding modern-day **toleration** and modern-day **religious pluralism**. This also outlined tenets that lead to the idea of **separation of church and state**. The **sensus communis** is the moral sense that unites communities. Locke believed this could only be found in the structure that religion provides.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Religious Ecumenicalism

An attitude toward religion that emphasize commonalities over differences.

Sensus Communis

A shared moral sense that tends to unite a community.

Toleration

Recognition of the right of others to believe as they choose.