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The Metaphysical Foundations of the Idea of Tolerance in John Locke's Philosophy

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Abstract: In this paper we will try to identify the concrete ways in which John Locke describes the limits of toleration between different types of faith and its metaphysical foundations.
From the beginning of his text A Letter Concerning Toleration, John Locke specifies that toleration is, first and foremost, a practical ideal and, secondly, a moral one. As such, toleration must be the essential feature of the true Church because in the field of religious faith any claimed superiority is in fact only the expression of the struggle for power and domination. A theoretical perspective on the idea of religious toleration is also recalled from Locke's radical empiricism, which correlates man's identity with his appearance at birth, for the first time in the world, as a different form from others. Such a view is contrary to metempsychosis which could lead to innate ideas in the human soul about moral principles and especially about God, as Plato or Descartes believed.
Starting from the principles of toleration, John Locke's idea was to find those elements through which a fundamental separation between the Church and the State could be achieved. But toleration ceases when the Church and the State merge discreetly until they can no longer distinguish the boundaries between them.
We consider that the fundamental principle of religious toleration is based on the idea of reciprocity, i.e. toleration-to-toleration and intolerance-to-intolerance, as Locke stated. This principle is also an essential landmark for a moral law on religious toleration in the contemporary, global world.

Keywords: *toleration, separation of powers, Church and Commonwealth, philosophy, Christianity.*

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Introduction

In the second part of 17th century, the English Catholic aristocracy was traditionally linked to the continent, the English Puritans would have wanted a stronger connection of England to the vast Protestant movement in Northern Europe, and the Anglicans were seeking a balance between the two hostile parties. Finally, through the *Glorious Revolution* and the choice for a constitutional monarchy, which pleased everyone, Anglicanism prevailed, being considered to be the formula that could best serve England's neutrality in relation to disputes on the continent.

In this context, John Locke's political philosophy, perfected by his four letters on toleration [*Epistola de Tolerantia/A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), *A Second Letter Concerning Toleration* (1690), *A Third Letter Concerning Toleration* (1692) and *A Fourth Letter Concerning Toleration* (1704)], defined him as an adept of toleration, but also a critic of the excesses of Catholicism and atheism.

A meaningful text is the *Epistola de Tolerantia* (*A Letter Concerning Toleration*) (Locke, 1689), which was written in the context of the struggles that seemed endless between the religious parties in England, to which was added a misunderstanding of the relationship between the State and the Church, between reason and faith, between civil law and the salvation of the soul.

While hiding in Amsterdam, in the winter between 1685 and 1686, as he was suspected of complicity in the Monmouth Rebellion, Locke wrote the *Epistola de Tolerantia*, a clear and lucid summary of his arguments on the subject of religious toleration, representing the systematic discussion of the English philosopher on the differences between Church and State. It was published in 1689, shortly after the return of its author to England. Its first version was in Latin, but a translation into English entitled *A Letter Concerning Toleration* was published later that year.

A Letter Concerning Toleration remains a document of these attempts to achieve a climate of religious toleration that should allow the functioning of the young constitutional state. This seems to be a continuation of the *Two Treatises on Government*, especially the *Second Treatise*.

In this paper we will try to identify the concrete ways in which John Locke describes the limits of toleration between the State, which takes into consideration the body, and that of the Church, which deals with the soul.

Toleration Required the Separation of Powers

From the desire to cease the religious controversies, Locke affirms that: "none may impose either upon himself or others, by the pretences of loyalty and obedience to the prince, or of tenderness and sincerity in the worship of God; 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" (Locke, 1689, p. 6). He draws a clear line between the Church, which cares for the human soul, and the Commonwealth - defined as: "a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests. Civil interests I call *life, liberty, health, and indolency of body*; and *the possession of outward things,* such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like" (Locke, 1689, p. 6).

Locke firmly establishes the distinction between State and Church in a liberal perspective of the natural rights of individuals. It is the duty of the state to ensure the "civil interests" of its citizens, but the "care of the soul" cannot be "a business", as it is a matter between the individual and God, who alone is responsible in this regard. Therefore, there is an inalienable right of the free exercise of religion, granted by God. Churches are only voluntary associations, without any right to use force in a legitimate political order, based on the consent of the leader. The English philosopher sets limits to toleration in case a religion does not accept its proper place in civil society. Locke refers to those cases when, through religious excesses, an attempt is made to limit the freedoms offered by civil society, thus seriously affecting the rational legislation it guarantees. Atheism, which ignores any higher moral authority and, consequently, destroys the basis of any social order, is at the opposite pole of religion.

The Influence of Modern Dutch Political Philosophy on the Elaboration of *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

The sources of inspiration for Locke's ideas of toleration can be found in Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, as well in his *Ethics* (Dumitrescu, 2018a; Dumitrescu, 2020).

Baruch Spinoza was a thinker who anticipated the political reality of Europe that would evolve into other patterns after 1688, primarily due to the practical success of the ideas imposed by the Glorious Revolution in England.

Recently, Louisa Simonutti, from the University of Naples, Italy, co-ordinated a large volume dedicated to Locke and the biblical hermeneutics

he developed, stated that the British thinker defended Christian values using the tools of philosophy not only in the text of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, but also in *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians, Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians*, a manuscript published posthumously in 1707. The Italian researcher identifies a certain similarity between the hermeneutic method applied to sacred texts by Spinoza in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the method applied by John Locke in *Paraphrases and notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*. At the same time, she points out that the Dutch philosopher does not recognize the revealed character of sacred texts, as he "radically denies the prophetic inspiration and the existence of the miracle", but, in return, tries to bring philosophical arguments in support of Christian teaching, "whom he considers inspired and providential, thus approaching the voluntarism of the Dutch Arminians and his friend Le Clerc" (Simonuti, 2019, p. 63), with whom he had come into contact during his exile from 1683-1689 in the Netherlands.

Spinoza dreamed of a political and especially religious context that would allow the initiative and the freedom of expression for the people cultivated through education (Dumitrescu, 2018a). For the Dutch philosopher, Christ promises a spiritual reward and not, like Moses, a bodily one. Christ came to the world to treat a possible neurosis of the ancient Jews, which had risen from the excess of zeal imposed by the respect of the Law that had to regulate their external, material life, but often creating situations incompatible with their authentic, soul experiences that built their inner, spiritual world (de Spinoza, 1862). Between the Law of Moses and that of Christ there is a difference of essence. Moses' Law has the role of constrain, but the new Law, instituted by Christ, is meant to come to the aid of man, who accepts, with obedience and humility, the authority imposed upon him by the force and command of the supreme God, who gives hope to the believer. Thus, faith founded on the Sacred Text is more a matter of living, an interpretation of religious content (Dumitrescu, 2018a).

Based on this background of Spinoza's ideas concerning the relationship between faith and state authority, John Locke explicitly outlined the areas in which the State and the Church were to limit each other's interests and influences.

Toleration is not primarily a moral ideal in John Locke's philosophy, but a practical one, which takes into account the proper functioning of society, both in the short and long term (Gorham, 2011). Right from the beginning of *A Letter Concerning Toleration* it is specified that: „toleration [is] the chief characteristic mark of the true Church" (Locke, 1689, p. 3). Any act

by which one church claims the reason of superiority over another is actually a manifestation of "power and empire over one another" (Locke, 1689, p. 3). Locke's fundamental idea was to find those elements through which a fundamental separation between Church and State could be done. Toleration ceases when the Church mixes with the State and extreme situations such as religious wars or massacres can occur. Toleration ceases when the Church and the State merge or mix discreetly until no boundary can be distinguish between them (Locke, 1689, p. 6).

The Commonwealth and the Church Are Concerning Two Different Aspects, Namely the Body and the Soul

Separation of the State from the Church is not sufficient if there is no balance between these two authorities. The State reflects the protection of the needs of the body and the Church - those of the soul; between these two types of needs there must be a harmony in which neither harms the other. In order to designate the authority of the state that refers to everything related to the material dimension of human existence, John Locke appealed to the term *Commonwealth,* which is a thing absolutely separate and distinct from the Church.

The mission of the Commonwealth is to protect a society of people for the purposes of protecting their lives, freedom, health, and everything related to the possession of goods, such as money, land, houses, furniture, etc. The representative of the Commonwealth, as a concrete exponent of terrestrial power, is the civil magistrate. His mission must be limited only to protecting these civil interests.

The Church, in its turn, takes care of the needs of the soul being a voluntary society of people, which aims primarily at the relationship with God, the moral fulfillment and especially the Salvation of the soul of the individual and is different from the Commonwealth (Locke, 1689). The civil magistrate has power over the material nature of man, and may order the confiscation of a private property or can establish the death sentence of a person.

The Church is responsible only for the souls of people and has no other power than to sanction by rebuke certain behaviors that are contrary to the moral teachings preached and, in the worst cases, can proceed to the exclusion from the ecclesiastical communion of that person with inappropriate conduct religious requirements (Locke, 1689). Locke considers that in this aspect must be included those excesses of the ritualists, which put the form of the religious practice above its content. The philosopher had

sanctioned them when he calls these fanatics as "these zealots" (Locke, 1689, p. 18), who believe that only their practice provides Salvation. At this precise moment of *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, John Locke announces his basic idea of the whole text, namely that Salvation occurs only through the individual's own conscience. This own conscience, which involves learning on your own and being your own interpreter of Sacred Texts, results from the fact that the individual cannot be saved by a religion in which that person do not believe in or do not accept it. „I may grow rich by an art that I take not delight in; I may be cured of some disease by remedies that I have not faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust and by a worship that I abhor. It is in vain for an unbeliever to take up the outward show of another man's profession. Faith only and inward sincerity are the things that procure acceptance with God" (Locke, 1689, p. 21).

Locke's concern was to restrict the influence of the Magistrate (i.e. the State or the Government) on the areas for which it was designed, in which, of course, religious faith was not included. Religion must be a matter of personal belief, which involves an individual choice, guided by the voice of conscience. Locke wanted to exclude the Magistrate from making this decision, which each member of society chose according to his/her own beliefs. To this end, the author of *A Letter Concerning Toleration* considers that a member of a national church should not submit a declaration of faith in accordance with the rules of the Magistrate. The Magistrate must limit his activities to politics and economy, without requiring by law the citizens to conform to an official religion. Locke insists that the decision regarding one's religious beliefs should be left to each individual. Considering that toleration is an important and desirable element of civil life, the author of the *Letter* raises the question: *Why should we ask for the establishment of toleration in society?*

Taking over, apparently, his own contribution to *The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina*, to which he had participated twenty years prior, Locke defines the Church as "a free and voluntary society", made up of members voluntarily united with the purpose of worshipping God in a way which they consider pleasing to Him and also effective in the Salvation of their souls. No one is naturally connected to any church or sect, but everyone voluntarily joins that communion in which he believes or he has found the religious covenant and the worship that is truly pleasing to God. Locke defines a church as a "voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshipping of God in such manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls. I say it is a free and voluntary society. Nobody is born a

member of any church; otherwise the religion of parents would descend unto children by the same right of inheritance as their temporal estates, and everyone would hold his faith by the same tenure he does his lands, than which nothing can be imagined more absurd" (Locke, 1689, p. 9). These assertions are directly inspired by *The Gospels* (*Matthew*, 18:20), in which it is stated: "where there are two or three, gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them". This statement claims that a church, in order to exist, does not have to rely on a large number of believers. This idea was in fact an older one of the philosopher as he also used in *The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* for the use of the English colonists in America. Locke supports the mutual toleration of individuals of different religions and extends it to the level of relationship between churches, which must be with one another in the same relationship as individuals between them (Locke, 1689). The philosopher hoped that this mutual toleration would have been able to end the religious wars that had raged in 16th and 17th centuries in Europe as a result of theological disputes in Western Christianity after the publication of Martin Luther's *99 theses,* in 1517. John Locke considers the separation of the State from the Church as sacrosanct, because only by maintaining the balance between the two powers, - over the body and the human soul -, can be maintained peace and security in society. Otherwise, there will be religious wars that can lead to the irreparable destruction of civilization. "Nobody, therefore, in fine, neither single persons nor churches, nay, nor even commonwealths, have any just title to invade the civil rights and worldly goods of each other upon pretence of religion. Those that are of another opinion would do well to consider with themselves how pernicious a seed of discord and war, how powerful a provocation to endless hatreds, rapines, and slaughters they thereby furnish unto mankind. No peace and security, no, not so much as common friendship, can ever be established or preserved amongst men so long as this opinion prevails, that dominion is founded in grace and that religion is to be propagated by force of arms" (Locke, 1689, p.153).

In fact, the elaboration of *A Letter Concerning Toleration* was influenced by the personal experiences that the English philosopher has had in a country ravaged by the struggles between Protestants and Catholics. In addition, Locke was the son of a Puritan who, serving in the Parliamentary army, "had upheld the tolerant principles of the independents" (Seaton, 1911, p. 237). Then, during the years 1683-1688, as a political refugee, Locke found a place of religious toleration in the Netherlands, just as Spinoza's ancestors had discovered as well.

Locke's Theory on the Balance of Powers between the Commonwealth and the Church

However, under the influence of his involvement in the political life, Locke was the first person to support religious toleration based on the theory of functions and limits of the political authority. He advocates limiting the power of Magistrates with regard to religious worship. There is no need for a civilian arbitrator, he believed, in religious disputes. God did not authorize a Hobbesian mortal god to act in his place. For Locke, religion must be concerned with Salvation in the world beyond, and it is only a matter of interest to the individual, which means that we do not need to appoint an arbitrator to resolve disputes about doctrine or veneration. Therefore, the State does not have the authority to require a uniform faith or to impose religious tests for a civil function, nor should it have the power not to allow any type of Church. Individual believers should have the right to form churches, but these are "*purely voluntary societies*" that have no coercive powers over their members or anyone else. All these churches are entitled to toleration, Locke concluded, as long as they do not involve in practices incompatible with the membership of civil society and they are willing to tolerate others. If there are intolerant religions, they have no right to demand toleration from others.

We again find in this writing the echo of the drafting of *The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* when the author of the *Letter* argues that even idolatry should be accepted: "Now whosoever maintains that idolatry is to be rooted out of any place by laws, punishments, fire, and sword, may apply this story to himself. For the reason of the thing is equal, both in America and Europe. And neither Pagans there, nor any dissenting Christians here, can, with any right, be deprived of their worldly goods by the predominating faction of a court-church; nor are any civil rights to be either changed or violated upon account of religion in one place more than another" (Locke, 1689, p. 27). Establishing the basic principle of toleration, Locke will proclaim that it is first and foremost to follow the golden rule: "Whatsoever is lawful in the Commonwealth cannot be prohibited by the Magistrate in the Church" (Locke, 1689, p. 26). From this perspective, the limits of toleration consist of those practices that cannot receive the consent of the communion. Thus crime, torture, rape and other such practices cannot be tolerated even in the space devoted to religious ritual.

At this point, John Locke introduces the most important idea in terms of religious toleration. He refers to those practices that are at one time considered dangerous to the society (Commonwealth). In this sense, there is, at least in Christian Europe, a long tradition. In the early Middle Ages, the

fanatical religious movement of the Cathars and Bogumils introduced depravity and infanticide as sacred practices, believing that any connection to the material world had to be annihilated, and marriage and children were the main obstacles to this detachment from a world seen only as a kingdom of Satan. In relation to such practices, as those of Cathars, John Locke recorded: "You will say, by this rule, if some congregations should have a mind to sacrifice infants, or (as the primitive Christians were falsely accused) lustfully pollute themselves in promiscuous uncleanness, or practice any other such heinous enormities, is the magistrate obliged to tolerate them, because they are committed in a religious assembly? I answer: No. These things are not lawful in the ordinary course of life, nor in any private house; and therefore neither are they so in the worship of God, or in any religious meeting" (Locke, 1689, p. 25).

Locke thus specifies what could be the limits of toleration between the two powers. "By this we see what difference there is between the Church and the Commonwealth. Whatsoever is lawful in the Commonwealth cannot be prohibited by the magistrate in the Church. … But those things that are prejudicial to the commonweal of a people in their ordinary use and are, therefore, forbidden by laws, those things ought not to be permitted to Churches in their sacred rites. Only the magistrate ought always to be very careful that he do not misuse his authority to the oppression of any Church, under pretence of public good" (Locke, 1689, p. 26).

If the government can use force to enforce its civil law, in the case of religious practices only those elements that involve convincing a person to adhere to a certain set of rules are allowed. Thus, the advice, the arguments brought in favor of the Salvation are welcome; instead, torture or threats to one's life violate the limits of any form of religious toleration. In this area of argumentation a second basic principle is born that sets the limits of toleration, namely: you cannot be tolerant with those who are intolerant.

But also, atheism, as we have seen, cannot be accepted because it ruins the authority of the oaths, proving to be destructive to the social order.

Summarizing, Locke proclaims, as a kind of categorical imperative, that "all Churches were obliged to lay down toleration as the foundation of their own liberty, and teach that liberty of conscience is every man's natural right, equally belonging to dissenters as to themselves; and that nobody ought to be compelled in matters of religion either by law or force" (Locke, 1689, p. 36), because each person has the same rights that are accorded to others.

The Ideal of a Good Christian: "He That Denies Not Anything That the Holy Scriptures Teach in Express Words"

In the end of *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke, in a philosophical way, defines the Christian ideal of toleration by a somewhat strange phrase at first sight, which implies a double negation: "he that denies not anything that the Holy Scriptures teach in express words, nor makes a separation upon occasion of anything that is not manifestly contained in the sacred text- however he … cannot be either a heretic or schismatic" (Locke, 1689, pp. 44-45), but is in fact a good Christian. The formula that intrigues here is condensed into the expression "he that denies not". We would have expected a good Christian to be the one who affirms the Scriptures, not the "one who does not deny." The principle of toleration is condensed in this seemingly strange formulation. It is not important to just say one thing is true, because this truth can be extremely ruinous and especially dangerous once fanatically assumed.

Even from antiquity, the Athenian sophist Protagoras proceeded in this way; in his vision, any statement had to become a truth, for only such a truth, imposed unscrupulously by abusive persuasion, used at any cost, could enforce his own opinions, regardless of their moral value.

That "truth" born out of an assumed statement represents a firm adherence to a certain idea, which sometimes leaves no room for dialogue. But when you do not deny something, the gates are wide open to interpersonal toleration, dialogue and comprehension, in the spirit of Peace of Westphalia, which marked the time in which John Locke lived. Thus, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* reflects the fact that the era of the Thirty Years War is over, that those strong and intolerant statements were beginning to give way to a new kind of discourse in which people had to exercise the limits of toleration starting from a knowledge that was aimed primarily at not to "deny" and less to affirm a sacrosanct truth.

The main cause of intolerance originates, in Locke's view, in a great deal of confusion that the Church and the Commonwealth can overlap, or, in other words, the Church and the State would in fact be one and the same (Locke, 1689). This confusion causes politics and religion to come very close together, up to a possible identification, which leads to the emergence of what Locke calls the "Church-State". This overlap, however, seems to be profoundly at odds with the human nature seen by the British philosopher as been composed of an immortal soul, oriented towards God, and a mortal body, connected to the Earth. In Locke's vision, the Church, which concerns the soul and its Salvation, cannot be mixed with the State, which intends to protect those things which depend only on the terrestrial order,

such as life and property, without having any attributions regarding Salvation and especially the connection of the individual with God.

The Metaphysical Foundations of Tolerance

All of Locke's theory of religious tolerance actually conceals something much deeper, aimed at a metaphysical level of interpretation of tolerance, which refers directly to the condition of the soul in front of divine justice.

As this has been amply demonstrated in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, but especially in *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, the text on which John Locke worked in his later years, on the position of a philosopher who considered Christian teachings to be fundamental who could not accept the Platonic idea of metempsychosis.

The radical rejection of the idea of the reincarnation of the soul, respectively of its return in successive life cycles, will motivate, to a large extent, Locke's empiricism, his tolerant vision in matters of religion. His ideological conflict with the Neoplatonic professors at Cambridge was precisely determined by the arguments against any form of multiple identity of the soul. A soul with such a multiple identity could not be judged even by a Divine court for its deeds, and its responsibility for them would become impossible. Thus, Locke's radical empiricism, whose purpose is to build a unique identity for every human being, is politically accompanied by the idea of accepting religious tolerance as a supreme value because each individual builds, starting from the uniqueness of his personal life experience.

In his *Essay*, Locke proved to be an anatomist and physician, who saw the human being under the spectrum of his external, physiological determinations, as a being who possesses a specific body. But when it comes to personal identity, there is a much more complicated issue than mere intelligence, namely self-awareness or self-consciousness, which is "essential to it," which causes the data of the problem to change radically (Dumitrescu, 2020).

In Chapter 27, *Of Identity and Diversity*, from the second volume of his *Essay*, Locke will have to find man's personal identity in his self-consciousness: "For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes everyone to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and so far as this

consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person" (Locke, 1828, p. 55).

Self-awareness is what underlies the concept of person. The self, which is based on self-consciousness, thus becomes the object of reward or punishment in the case of a judgment on the deeds made by the man who assumes it (Dumitrescu, 2020). Thus, we can establish three visions about identity that are outlined in Locke's thinking regarding the human being. First it is a physical identity, which appears at birth, followed by the identity of one's own self-consciousness, and, finally, an identity correlated with conscience and moral responsibility for the deeds that someone does at one moment as a person who assumes those deeds.

We consider that John Locke identifies three ages of human identity. A first age is that of a physical identity, which is constituted as a first identity and differentiates a subject in relation to other subjects by the form and time of its appearance in the world. A second age appears around the age of four, when the consciousness of one's own self appears. And finally, with adolescence around the age of twelve, personal identity appears when an individual is able to understand the distinction between good and evil and when he has an ethical conscience about his deeds and is equally responsible for them.

Of the three types of identity, it seems that in John Locke's vision the first of them has the main role, being the condition for generating the other two and confirming the general empiricist vision of the philosopher. The identity acquired at birth is the one that follows the individual throughout his life and moreover it is that identity that can ensure the final judgment at a possible resurrection of his soul by the divine authority. This perspective on human identity, which completely avoids metempsychosis, has in fact led Locke's thinking to the excesses of a radical empiricism in which, at birth, the mind is presented as a "*tabula rasa*", as a "*white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas*" (Locke, 1805, p. 77).

Locke's Empiricism and Christianity

Locke's whole thinking is centered on the idea of self-awareness, which ultimately stands as the foundation for that of the person. The person is, in turn, a term with many legal implications, with direct reference to rewards and punishments. One cannot punish or reward a man who cannot say he is the same person.

Locke's empiricism thus takes the full form of its Christian meaning because it solves the idea of recognizing the identity of the person, which is both an inner identity, which consists in self-awareness, and an external

identity, identified with the appearance, for the first time in the world, at his birth, of the individual man, as a person, who has a physical presence in a precisely determined material context.

Under these conditions imposed by his radical empiricism, the human soul must have at birth no memory of another life, no predisposition to refer to the idea of the pre-existence of the soul before birth. As a result, it should look like a clean slate, like a white sheet of paper with absolutely nothing marked on it. The basic principle of John Locke's Christian philosophy thus becomes *nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu* ("Nothing is in the intellect that was not first given in the senses"). Consistent with the Christian idea that the soul cannot be subjected to successive reincarnations, the whole of Lockean thought is subordinated to a radically empiricist perspective in which absolutely all the contents of the mind spring from the experience that takes place *hic et nunc*, only here and now.

At the Last Judgment, at that Last Judgment Day, a man with multiple identities who had several lives independent of each other could not be judged. Under such conditions, the judgment of that soul became practically impossible. No one can be judged who in one life was Ramses, but in another he was Caesar, and then Henry VIII.

For Plato, there was no question of a final Judgment, but only of a possible salvation for a soul which, after reincarnation, would have become sufficiently purified to acquire the philosophical condition of existence.

In the end, Locke recalibrates both Plato's philosophy and Cartesianism because both offered, through the dualism they promoted, by emphasizing the ontological separation of soul and body, the possibility of an interpretation in the sense of Palingenesis, which was considered an illicit theory by the British philosopher (Dumitrescu, 2020).

Locke thus opts for a monism – both ontological and gnoseological – in which consciousness cannot be the keeper of eternal truths that could be found independently of sensible experience. This monistic identity approach, which may sometimes seem exaggerated, through statements such as: *there is nothing in the intellect that has not previously been in the senses*, that has become the guiding principle of empiricism, or that *at birth the human mind is like a white sheet of paper*, have more of a methodological role in asserting the priority of a soul that is identical with itself, without bearing an obscure inheritance of another existence and that must thus open the values of tolerance in relation to all concrete life experiences that definitely follow only particular adaptations in relation to their own existence.

We consider that the fundamental principle of religious toleration is based on the idea of reciprocity, respectively toleration-to-toleration and intolerance-to-intolerance, as Locke stated. This principle is also an essential landmark for a moral law on religious toleration in the contemporary, global world.

However, Locke's ideas on tolerance from *A Letter Concerning Toleration* found their way not only to America, where they influenced religious thinkers from 18th-19th centuries, especially Thomas Jefferson, who presented *A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom to the House of Delegates in 1779* (Sandler, 1960), but also to Europe of the 21st century, when both philosophers and theologians agree that Christian identity should be based on "common Christian values". Given the fact that nowadays Christianity is called to a reassessment of its position in the European space, Christians, regardless of the cult they follow, must respect each other and work together because, from a cultural point of view, Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy can be considered "stylistic variants of Europe" (Cordoneanu, 2004).

Conclusion

The theory of religious toleration and its metaphysical foundations based on a conception that denies metempsychosis developed by John Locke was restrictive because it referred only to the Christian religion. The great challenge of this text to the contemporary world is the extent to which Christian toleration, as Locke understood it, can be extended to other religions, such as Buddhism, Islam, or animistic cults from Africa, whose perspective on the identity of the individual and his conscience is very different from that of the Christianity.

Toleration becomes the supreme value of a modern-day state in the sense of respecting the individuals' right to freedom, guaranteeing their property and enhancing their work and at the same time offering them the opportunity to obtain their happiness and Salvation on their own. The civil rights of the individual and especially the institutions that must protect them become fundamental, and all other institutions and social elements must be subordinated and put to work for their defense.

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