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Andrew R. Murphy. *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001. xvii + 336 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-02105-8.



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Even before 9/11, the rise of religiously inspired violence had occasioned debate on the intellectual foundations for societies in which various groups claiming a monopoly on truth denigrate others' right to exist. Murphy looks at the emergence of and rationale for religious toleration in seventeenth-century Britain and America to see if there are lessons for contemporary society. He wishes to promote dialogue among scholars in several fields: historians of seventeenth-century Britain and colonial America, philosophers concentrating on Locke and Hobbes, and modern political theorists of liberalism like John Rawls and those seeking to go beyond tolerance into identity politics. There is a normative purpose to Murphy's research; that is, he seeks to persuade that aiming at a *modus vivendi*, as in the seventeenth century, may be all that is possible in a time of religious absolutism. He also denies that modern identity politics, by which he means affirming the equal value of lifestyles, can be justified as an extension of early toleration to new circumstances because the intellectual foundations of toleration and identity politics are not the same.

Murphy's ambitious book concentrates on distinct episodes over a seventy-year period to show the ambiguous contours of the early toleration debates: Massachusetts Bay versus Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson; the roles of parliamentary Puritans,

Cromwell, the New Model Army, and the sectarians from 1647-1660; Hobbes and Locke; William Penn and the Keithian controversy in Pennsylvania; James II's attempt to grant Roman Catholics religious liberty; and the results of Act of Toleration following the Revolution of 1688. In each section Murphy seeks to demonstrate that there was no inevitability to the triumph of toleration and that the arguments of both sides had merit as each utilized Scripture in seeking to preserve a Christian community. These historical sections are framed by Murphy's analysis of contemporary theories of toleration and their weaknesses. Except on the little-known Keithian controversy in Pennsylvania where he makes use of manuscript sources, Murphy relies on published primary sources and makes judicious summaries of existing scholarship.

Murphy argues that the seventeenth century's definition of religious liberty or toleration is different from our own. Toleration then required no surrender of one's exclusive claim to know truth. One could dislike and devalue an opponent, but the government would deny neither the right to hold contrary views privately nor to espouse them publicly so long as there was no threat to the community's moral standards. Before 1640 the Puritans and royalists assumed that religious dissent weakened the commonwealth; after years of debate the British decided that allowing religious variety could strengthen the

state. Even so, the religious toleration advocated by the Levellers, Cromwell, Williams, Penn, and James II was more expansive than what prevailed after the so-called Act of Toleration.

The basic themes of the book are that (1) toleration did not emerge as a clear-cut, virtually inevitable response to certain theological or philosophical principles, like natural rights, but came as a hesitant response to historical and political issues; (2) the causes of the emergence of toleration were neither simply Protestantism nor skepticism nor revolution nor Erasmian because each of these was also used to justify religious uniformity; (3) the arguments used for toleration had all emerged before 1660 and Locke's treatises added nothing new, and his significance and that of the Enlightenment have been over-estimated; (4) the origin of toleration was in sectarian Protestantism; (5) the Williams-Hutchinson-Keithian controversies should be seen as posing the same issues of religious perfectionism, and the response of the young societies already facing external threats was similar in spite of the fact that Massachusetts Bay was committed to one truth and Pennsylvania had religious toleration as law; (6) terms like "conscience," "will," and "persuasion" change meanings as beliefs become inward and subjective; (7) modern liberals' view of the origins of religious liberty is simplistic history which leads to inadequate political theory.

Murphy is correct that natural rights had little to do with the origins of toleration in the seventeenth century;

he is also right to focus on the sectarian religious origins which were as important in creating disorder as focusing the debate. He is also right on Locke. I also agree that early toleration was a source of instability—in Rhode Island, Commonwealth England, early Pennsylvania, under James I. He provides a good place to catch up on the recent literature on a wide variety of issues, but his brevity in each section will mean that scholars holding opposing conclusions will not be convinced. In a withering critique, Murphy suggests that Rawls not only distorts history, but becomes an advocate of intolerance at the point at which toleration becomes not a *modus vivendi* but a moral imperative. I wonder if the simplistic use of the Enlightenment and Locke in modern theorists is like Locke's view of a state of nature; that is, more a conceptual device to be used as a starting point rather than an historical event. A more basic issue is whether in America the rationale for religious toleration changed so drastically in the Revolutionary period that the sectarian origins became intellectually irrelevant. The frequency of repetition suggests that Murphy believes that the historians will read only the historical sections and political scientists only the first and last chapters; so that his hope for dialogue is futile. Finally, since all the seventeenth-century theorists believed in a magistrate's duty to promote Christianity, even when they advocated toleration, can their example be extracted to our times when liberals expect the state to be neutral on religion and many moral issues? I hope that Murphy's book succeeds in provoking debate on ways to achieve toleration in our age of competing claims to exclusive truth.

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