

## FREEMASONRY AND PHILOSOPHY – FREEMASONRY’S DEBT TO JOHN LOCKE

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*“The end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom. For in all the states of created beings, capable of laws, where there is no law there is no freedom.”<sup>1</sup>*

— John Locke

### INTRODUCTION



John Locke (1632—1704) was an English philosopher, academic, and physician. His most influential philosophical works include *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1667), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), and *Two Treatises on Government* (1689/90). He was a physician, member of the Royal Society and a Freemason; he moved in the same circles as Isaac Newton and was a considerable influence on early speculative Freemasonry<sup>2</sup>.

John Locke is considered the most influential philosopher of modern times. He initiated the dominant philosophical tradition in Western Philosophy that is known as British empiricism, but Locke’s importance reaches far beyond the limits of the discipline of philosophy. His influence on understanding and thought, on the way we think about ourselves and our relations to the world we live in, to God, nature and society, has been immense. His message was to set us free from the burden of tradition and authority, in knowledge and understanding,

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<sup>1</sup> Locke, John *Second Treatise of Government*, Ch. VI, sec. 57

<sup>2</sup> <https://ledroitmain.international/the-origins/?lang=en>

government and religion. “God commands what reason does” are the words that best reveal the tenor and unity of Locke’s thought.

It has been said that Freemasonry is a child of the Enlightenment, but it is perhaps that it grew within and alongside the Enlightenment. Speculative Freemasonry was around as early as the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century in Scotland. Elias Ashmole was initiated in 1646 in Warrington in England<sup>3</sup>, but it was towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century that Speculative Freemasonry began to flourish in England, Ireland and Scotland.

This paper will look at the influence of John Locke on early Freemasonry in terms of its toleration of religious beliefs, its epistemology and its governance.

### **Was John Locke a Freemason?**

It is believed that John Locke became a member of the society in 1668, a year after he became private secretary to Anthony Ashley Cooper, Lord Ashley (qv), a powerful Whig politician. Some believe that he acknowledged his membership in Freemasonry in a letter (since lost) to the Earl of Pembroke (who was a Mason) on 6 May 1696, however Harrison disputes his membership<sup>4</sup>. Whether or not he was ever initiated, Locke was in regular contact with many known members of the Craft and with many others whose works and interactions suggest membership (e.g., Isaac Newton and Anthony Ashley Cooper)<sup>5</sup>.

WBro Ronald Paul Ng believes that Locke was a Mason. He says:

“Was Locke a mason? The answer is probably yes. There is an entry on the “Leyland Manuscript” in Albert Mackey’s “Encyclopedia of Freemasonry” in which he quoted a passage by the famous Dr. Oliver in the Freemasons’ Quart. Review, 1840, p 10, where Dr. Oliver said, “... this great philosopher [Locke] was actually residing at Oates, the country-seat of Sir Francis Masham, at the time when the paper [Leland Manuscript] is dated; and shortly afterwards he went up to town, where he was initiated into Masonry.”

However, according to Albert Mackey<sup>6</sup>,

“After having been cited (that is the Leland MS) with approbation by such writers as Preston, Hutchinson, Oliver, and Krause, it has suffered a reverse under the crucial examination of later critics. It has by nearly all of these been decided to be a forgery - a decision from which very few at this day would dissent.”

Today the Leland MS is regarded a forgery, albeit a pious forgery<sup>7</sup>.

Locke in a letter to Lord Pembroke<sup>8</sup>, says (referring to the wife of Sir Francis Masham with whom he was residing), “... for the reading of my Lady Masham; who is become so fond of Masonry as to say, that she now, more than ever, wishes herself a man, that she might be capable of admission into the fraternity.”

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3 <https://internet.lodge.org.uk/index.php/pastmeetings/193-beresiner>

4 Harrison, David *The Masonic Enlightenment: Symbolism, Transition and Change in English Freemasonry during the Eighteenth Century*. PhD Thesis University of Liverpool, December 2007

5 <https://www.commonwealthbooks.org/pages/the-enlightenment-and-freemasonry>

6 [http://www.themasonictrowel.com/new\\_files\\_to\\_file/the\\_leland\\_manuscript.htm](http://www.themasonictrowel.com/new_files_to_file/the_leland_manuscript.htm)

7 <https://skirret.com/papers/leyland-locke.html>

8 [http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/spirit\\_of\\_masonry.htm](http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/spirit_of_masonry.htm)

Whether Locke was or was not a Freemason, it would appear that he had an influence on the young John Theophilus Desaguliers. In Alain Bauer's "Isaac Newton's Freemasonry"<sup>9</sup>, it says that:

"Noticed very early on for his abilities and gifts, he (Desaguliers) went to Christ Church College, Oxford. Although the course of studies still followed the classical pattern, special attention was already being paid to the philosophy of Locke, who was also a former student of Christ Church. In the realm of scientific knowledge, Locke was especially opposed to the innatism of the Neoplatonists at Cambridge – for whom all truth came from a divine predisposition – and, in the domains of politics and religion, to defining and justifying the concept of tolerance."

In a 2016 paper<sup>10</sup>, Soares says, "Months after his nomination (Royal Society), in his (Desaguliers's) first trip to France in February 1715, Desaguliers met Pierre Coste (1668 - 1747), who was considered as the main advocate of John Locke's work in the Continent ...". Desaguliers later was appointed a demonstrator at the Royal Society by Isaac Newton and as his secretary. Desaguliers was of course the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grand Master of the Premier Grand Lodge of England in 1719/20.

### **John Locke – A brief history**

Locke was born on 29 August 1632, in Wrington in the North Mendip Hills of Somerset about 12 miles south west from Bristol.

Locke's parents were Puritans. Locke's father was an attorney who served as clerk to the local Justices of the Peace; he was also a captain of cavalry for the Parliamentary forces during the early part of the English Civil War.

In 1647, Locke was sent to Westminster School in London under the sponsorship of Alexander Popham<sup>11</sup>, a member of Parliament and Locke's father's former commander. After completing studies at Westminster, he was admitted to Christ Church, a constituent college of the University of Oxford 1652. Although he was a capable student, Locke was irritated by the undergraduate curriculum of the time. He found the works of modern philosophers, such as Descartes, more interesting than the classical material taught at the university. Through his friend Richard Lower, a physician, whom he knew from Westminster School, Locke was introduced to medicine and the experimental philosophy being pursued at other universities and in the Royal Society, of which he eventually became a member<sup>12</sup>.

Locke was awarded a bachelor's degree in 1656 and a master's degree in June 1658. He was made a bachelor of medicine in February 1675, having studied the subject extensively during his time at Oxford and, in addition to Lower, worked with such noted scientists and thinkers as Robert Boyle, Thomas Willis and Robert Hooke. In 1666, he met Anthony Ashley Cooper, Lord Ashley, who had come to Oxford seeking treatment for a liver infection. Ashley was impressed with Locke and persuaded him to become part of his retinue.

*Locke moved into Ashley's home at Exeter House in London, to serve as his personal physician. Ashley, as a founder of the Whig movement, exerted great influence on Locke's political ideas;*

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9 Bauer, Alain *Isaac Newton's Freemasonry*, Inner Traditions, Rochester Vermont, 2007 ISBN 978-1-59477-172-9

10 Soares, Luiz Carlos, "John Theophilus Desaguliers: A Newtonian between patronage and market relations", *CIRCUMSCRIBERE* 18 (2016): pp. 12-31.

11 Interestingly Popham was in possession of a house in Great Queen Street upon which the Grand Lodge was built. (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/72144/72144-h/72144-h.htm>)

12 <https://makingscience.royalsociety.org/people/na8232/john-locke>

he became involved in politics when Ashley became Lord Chancellor in 1672. Although Locke was associated with the influential Whigs, his ideas about natural rights and government are today considered quite revolutionary for that period in English history.

Locke fled to the Netherlands in 1683, after being suspected of being involved in a plot to assassinate Charles II and his brother James, Duke of York, although there is little evidence to suggest that he was directly involved. During his five years in the Netherlands, Locke met with others from among the same freethinking members of dissenting Protestant groups such as Spinoza's small group of followers (Baruch Spinoza had died in 1677). Locke was apparently receptive to Spinoza's ideas, most particularly to the rationalist's well thought out argument for political and religious tolerance and the necessity of the separation of church and state. While in the Netherlands, Locke had time to return to his writing, spending a great deal of time working on the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and composing the *Letter on Toleration*.

Locke accompanied Mary II back to England in 1689 after the Glorious Revolution. The bulk of Locke's publishing took place upon his return from exile.

Locke's close friend Damaris, Lady Masham invited him to join her and her husband Sir Francis Masham at Otes, the Mashams' country house in Essex. Although his time there was marked by indifferent health from asthma attacks, he nevertheless became an intellectual hero of the Whigs. During this period, he discussed matters with such figures as the poet John Dryden and Sir Isaac Newton.

Locke died on 28 October 1704, and is buried in the churchyard of All Saints' Church in High Laver near Harlow in Essex, where he had lived in the household of Sir Francis Masham since 1691. Locke never married nor had children. There is a memorial in Christ Church, Oxford to his honour.

The following is an extract from the *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, Vol XI Part 1 (1909)<sup>13</sup>.

The most interesting monument, that of the celebrated philosopher John Locke, is still in its original position on the exterior of the south wall with a Latin inscription, said to have been written by himself, commencing "Siste Viator". This has been translated as follows:

Stop Traveller. Near this place lieth John Locke. If you ask what kind of a man he was, he answers that he lived content with his own small fortune, bred a scholar, he made his learning subservient only to the cause of truth. This thou wilt learn from his writings, and will shew thee everything else concerning him with greater truth, than the suspected praises of an epitaph. His virtues indeed if he had any were too little for him to propose as matter of praise to himself, or as an example to thee. Let his vices be buried together. As to an example of manners, if you seek that, you have it in the gospel; of vices I wish you may have one nowhere; of mortality, certainly (and may it profit thee) thou hast one here, and everywhere.

This stone, which will itself perish in a short time, records that he was born Aug. 29 in the year of our Lord 1632, and that he died Oct. 28 in the year of our Lord 1704.

John Locke lived for the last ten years of his life at Otes with the family of Sir Francis Masham, to whom he seems to have been much attached.

### **Locke's Religious Beliefs**

Locke was brought up in a Puritan family within the Church of England. However it appears that like Milton and Newton, he was a Unitarian<sup>14</sup>. The Revd Henry Acton also asserts that

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13 <https://www.esah1852.org.uk/library/files/T2110000.pdf>

Milton, Locke and Newton were Unitarians<sup>15</sup>. In 1683, when Locke's patron Anthony Ashley Cooper, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, lay dying in Amsterdam, driven into exile by his outspoken opposition to Charles II, he spoke to the minister Robert Ferguson, and professed himself an Arian<sup>16</sup><sup>17</sup>.

Herbert McLachlan, principal of the Manchester Unitarian College, who gave the conclusion of his book *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke and Newton* (1941) the title "Milton, Locke, Newton and Other Unitarians." McLachlan writes, "The evidence, direct and indirect, is conclusive. John Locke was a Unitarian; cautious, conservative and scriptural; in all three respects resembling most Unitarians before the nineteenth century". Formally, Locke belonged to the dominant Anglican Church, but within the Anglican Church, he was an advocate of the broad church, or latitudinarianism. The broad church held that all that was required to belong to the Church was that you believed what Jesus taught about God and human salvation<sup>18</sup>.

### **A Letter Concerning Toleration**

*A Letter Concerning Toleration* was originally published in 1689. This work appeared amidst a fear that Catholicism might be taking over England, and it responds to the problem of religion and government by proposing religious tolerance as the answer.

Locke gives three reasons<sup>19</sup> for barring governments from using force to encourage people to adopt religious beliefs. First, he argues that the care of men's souls has not been committed to the magistrate by either God or the consent of men. This argument resonates with the argument used in the *Two Treatises* to establish the natural freedom and equality of mankind. There is no command in the Bible telling magistrates to bring people to the true faith, and people could not consent to such a goal for government because it is not possible for people, at will, to believe what the magistrate tells them to believe. Their beliefs are a function of what they think is true. Locke's second argument is that since the power of the government is only force, while true religion consists of genuine inward persuasion of the mind, force is incapable of bringing people to the true religion. Locke's third argument is that even if the magistrate could change people's minds, a situation where everyone accepted the magistrate's religion would not bring more people to the true religion.

Locke's views on religious freedom differ from those expressed by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*, in that they support toleration for various Christian denominations. Hobbes did allow for individuals to maintain their own religious beliefs as long as they outwardly expressed those of the state. Locke's rejection of Catholic Imperialism was basis for his rejection of government's interest in spiritual salvation.

"That church can have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate," Locke argued, "which is so constituted that all who enter it *ipso facto* pass into the allegiance and service of another prince". If this were to be tolerated, "the magistrate would make room for a foreign jurisdiction in his own territory and...allow for his own people to be enlisted as soldiers against his own government".

Locke goes on to say:

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14 *Memorable Unitarians*, British and Foreign Unitarian Association, London 1906.

15 Revd Henry Acton, *Religious Opinions and Example of Milton, Locke and Newton*, London 1833.

16 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arianism>

17 That is a follower of Arius

18 Jan Garrett, *John Locke on Reason and Faith*, <https://people.wku.edu/jan.garrett/rsn&fth.htm>

19 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/#Tole>

“The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it in so clear a light.”

later saying,

“All the life and power of true religion consist in the inward and full persuasion of the mind; and faith is not faith without believing.”

Here Locke is expressing both a desire for the separation of Church and State, and a desire for religious toleration. He goes on to consider the situation of the Jews:

“If we allow the Jews to have private houses and dwellings amongst us, why should we not allow them to have synagogues? Is their doctrine more false, their worship more abominable, or is the civil peace more endangered by their meeting in public than in their private houses? But if these things may be granted to Jews and Pagans, surely the condition of any Christians ought not to be worse than theirs in a Christian commonwealth.”

As for Mohammedans and other religions, Locke has this to say:

“And what if in another country, to a Mahometan (*sic*) or a Pagan prince, the Christian religion seem false and offensive to God; may not the Christians for the same reason, and after the same manner, be extirpated there?”

Anderson in his *Constitutions*<sup>20</sup> says:

“But though in ancient Times Masons were charg’d in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country or Nation, whatever it was, yet ‘tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all Men agree, leaving their particular Opinions to themselves; that is, to be good Men and true, or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Denominations or Persuasions they may be distinguish’d; whereby Masonry becomes the Center of Union, and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must have remain’d at a perpetual Distance.”

Locke is less tolerant with atheists:

“Lastly, those (*atheists*) are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all; besides also, those that by their atheism undermine and destroy all religion, can have no pretence of religion whereupon to challenge the privilege of a toleration. As for other practical opinions, though not absolutely free from all error, if they do not tend to establish domination over others, or civil impunity to the Church in which they are taught, there can be no reason why they should not be tolerated.”

Compare this with Anderson’s *Constitutions*<sup>21</sup>:

“A Mason is oblig’d by his Tenure, to obey the moral law; and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid Atheist nor an irreligious Libertine.”

Locke’s contemporary, Jonas Proast<sup>22</sup>, responded<sup>23</sup> to Locke’s *Letter* by saying that Locke’s three arguments really amount to just two, that true faith cannot be forced and that we have no more reason to think that we are right than anyone else has.

Revd James Anderson and John Theophilus Desaguliers were responsible for what are known as Anderson’s *Constitutions*. Desaguliers was Isaac Newton’s assistant and a member of the Royal Society; he was appointed as Newton’s assistant after Locke’s death, but moved in the

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20 Anderson, James *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons*, London, 1723

21 *ibid*

22 Jonas Proast (c.1640–1710) was an English High Church Anglican clergyman and academic. He was an opponent of latitudinarianism.

23 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/#Toler>

same philosophical and scientific circles, so is likely to have known of Locke's work, and might even have met him at some point (see also Soares *qv*).

## **Two Treatises on Government**

Today, Locke is often referred to as one of the founding figures of modern liberalism. His most famous political work, *Two Treatises on Government*, is the most prominent work on natural law theory in the Western world. In his *Two Treatises of Government*<sup>24</sup>, Locke defends the claim that men are by nature free and equal against claims that God had made all people naturally subject to a monarch. He argued that people have rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and property. Locke's revolutionary thesis was that governments exist by the consent of the people in order to protect the rights of the people and promote the public good; governments that fail to do so can be resisted and replaced with new governments. Locke also defends the principle of majority rule and the separation of legislative and executive powers.

### **The *First Treatise***

The *First Treatise* is a counter to Sir Robert Filmer's assertion regarding the divine right of kings. Firstly Locke argues against the scriptural support that Filmer had offered for his thesis, and secondly he argues that the acceptance of Filmer's thesis can lead only to slavery (and absurdity).

Filmer's text presented an argument for a divinely ordained absolute monarchy through Adam's divinely ordained authority. He suggested that this absolute authority came from his ownership over all the world. To this, Locke responds that the world was originally held in common (a theme that will return in the *Second Treatise*). But, even if it were not, he argues, God's grant to Adam covered only the land and brute animals, not human beings. Nor could Adam, or his heir, use this grant to enslave his fellows, for the law of nature forbids reducing one's fellows to a state of desperation, if one possesses a sufficient surplus to maintain oneself securely. And even if this charity were not commanded by reason, Locke continues, such a strategy for gaining dominion would prove only that the foundation of government lies in consent.

Locke argues in the *First Treatise* that the doctrine of the divine right of kings will eventually be the downfall of all governments. If Filmer is correct, there should be only one rightful king in all the world — the heir of Adam. But since it is impossible to discover the true heir of Adam, no government, under Filmer's principles, can require that its members obey its rulers.

The founders of the Premier Grand Lodge recognised the need for one who would be the head and ruler of this Grand Lodge, its Grand Master. From this time, although the powers of the Grand Master are said to be nigh on absolute, nevertheless Grand Masters are elected and answerable to the membership through the regular Communications of Grand Lodge. In other words the Grand Master is a *primus inter pares* who rules with the consent of the members of Grand Lodge.

### **The *Second Treatise***

In the *Second Treatise*, Locke begins with a description of the state of nature, wherein individuals are under no obligation to obey one another, but are each themselves judge of what

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24 Locke, John *Two Treatises of Government* (editor Peter Laslett), Cambridge University Press 1988

the law of nature requires of them. It also covers, among other things, property, representative government, and the right of revolution.

## State of Nature

Locke defines the state of nature in terms of people in a state of freedom of acting and disposing of their own possessions as they think fit within the bounds of the law of nature. People in this state do not have to ask permission to act or depend on the will of others to arrange matters on their behalf. The natural state is also one of equality in which all power and jurisdiction is reciprocal and no one has more power than another. This last sentence should remind us of the Second Degree Working Tools Charge:

The 1...1 demonstrates that we are all sprung from the same stock, are partakers of the same nature and sharers in the same hope; and although distinctions among men are necessary to preserve subordination and to reward virtue and ability, yet ought no eminence of station make us forget that we are brethren, for he who is placed on the lowest rung of fortune's ladder is equally entitled to our regard as he who has attained its summit, for the time will come — and the wisest of us knows not how soon — when all distinctions, save those of goodness and virtue, shall cease, and death, the leveller of all human greatness, shall reduce us to the same state.

This is in direct contrast to Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathon* in which the monarch has an absolute power, ordained by God, over the lives and religious beliefs of his subjects. James I wrote a treatise for his son on how to justly rule as a monarch in which he wrote that the king is “the absolute master of the lives and possessions of his subjects; his acts are not open to inquiry or dispute, and no misdeeds can ever justify resistance.” Thus the first four English Stuart monarchs, James I, Charles I, Charles II and James II had created a century of absolutism, civil war and chaos. As Locke had written, James II was guilty of breaking the “original contract” between sovereign and people, and had therefore suffered the just wrath of Parliament and people<sup>25</sup>.

Hobbes believed that when men entered civil society they relinquished their natural rights entirely and instead relied upon the positively enacted human law of their new sovereign. Locke, on the other hand, believed that only one right was relinquished, the right to enact the law of nature which was now replaced with a system of law.

Essential for Locke is that whatever government the people may choose to establish, all people are bound by the laws it promulgates; whether you are a peasant, a noble, or a king, the law binds all equally. If people in power exempt themselves from obeying laws, they will begin to act only for their own private advantage as opposed to acting for the common good, which is the only legitimate goal of political authority. Universality is always to be upheld, and particularity always to be shunned. For Locke, “Where-ever Law ends, Tyranny begins”. Locke is a strict constitutionalist in this regard, expecting well-established rules to govern the governors as well as the governed.

## Locke and the Law of Nature

Locke emphasises the importance of living by the law of nature.

“In transgressing the law of nature, the offender declares himself to live by another rule than that of reason and common equity, which is that measure God has set to the actions of men”

The natural law<sup>26</sup> concept existed long before Locke as a way of expressing the idea that there were certain moral truths that applied to all people, regardless of the particular place where they lived or the agreements they had made. The most important early contrast was between laws that were by nature, and thus generally applicable, and those that were conventional and operated only in those places where the particular convention had been established.

Natural law<sup>27</sup> is also distinct from divine law in that divine law refers to those laws that God had directly revealed through prophets and other inspired writers. Natural law can be discovered by reason alone and applies to all people, while divine law can be discovered only through God's special revelation and applies only to those to whom it is revealed and whom God specifically indicates are to be bound.

Locke's political philosophy puts the concept of consent playing a central role. His analysis begins with individuals in a state of nature where they are not subject to a common legitimate authority with the power to legislate or adjudicate disputes. From this natural state of freedom and independence, Locke stresses individual consent as the mechanism by which political societies are created and individuals join those societies. While there are of course some general obligations and rights that all people have from the law of nature, special obligations come about only when we voluntarily undertake them. Locke clearly states that one can only become a full member of society by an act of express consent. We can only become a Freemason by a free and unencumbered choice.

*Mr {surname}, do you seriously declare on your honour that, unbiased by the improper solicitations of others against your own inclination and uninfluenced by mercenary or other unworthy motives, you freely and voluntarily offer yourself a Can for the mysteries and privileges of Antient Freemasonry?*

Locke's solution to the act of express consent is his doctrine of tacit consent. Simply by walking along the highways of a country a person gives tacit consent to the government and agrees to obey it while living in its territory. This, Locke thinks, explains why resident aliens have an obligation to obey the laws of the state where they reside, though only while they live there. This should remind us of the second of the Antient Charges and Regulation to which a Worshipful Master Elect must consent before his Installation:

*You are to be a peaceful subject, and cheerfully to conform to the laws of the country in which you reside.*

By joining a Lodge, the Freemason voluntarily accepts the By Laws of that Lodge and the Constitutions and Regulations of its Grand Lodge.

### *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

Locke's main thesis is that there are "No Innate Principles." Locke taught that new born infants were a *tabula rasa* or blank slate. New born infants bring no ideas into the world with them. Children's minds develop through their upbringing, their education and the culture of their families, companions and the world in which they live. A major question for the philosophy of knowledge is whether knowledge exists independently of the individual (objectivism) or can only be understood by the individual in the context of their life experience, education, cultural norms, religious beliefs and upbringing (constructivism)<sup>28</sup>.

In the *Reasons for Preparation*, the new Entered Apprentice is informed:

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26 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/#NatuLawNatuRigh>

27 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/#NatuLawNatuRigh>

28 Shearer, David "The Epistemology of Freemasonry" Sanctum Testamentum College SRIA Study Group 2016.

*You were h... w... or b... f.... This was symbolic of your being in a state of utter darkness respecting the s...ts of Freemasonry, and to teach you to keep others in a similar state of darkness until brought to l... in the same regular manner as you yourself have been. Also, that the mind must be made to conceive before the eye can be permitted to discover.*

This emphasises that although the new Entered Apprentice was prepared in his heart by a favourable opinion preconceived of the institution, a general desire for knowledge, and a sincere wish, founded upon worthy motives, to be ranked among its members, he knows nothing of the secrets of Freemasonry, there is no innate knowledge of the craft, his learning and development will depend on his upbringing, cultural beliefs, his education and life experience. His Masonic experience will depend on his *daily progress in Masonic knowledge*.

## **Masonic Understanding and Knowledge**

Any thoughtful Freemason soon learns that the understanding to be gained from the Charges delivered during his Initiation, Passing and Raising will grow and develop over time. During his Masonic development, the mature Freemason will come to realise how much more he still has to learn. The knowledge contained in these early Charges is just the seedbed for the maturation of the Freemason's mind. The understanding of the deeper meanings of a Charge will grow as the Charge is heard over and over again, and especially when the individual Freemason gets to deliver that Charge in open Lodge. As the Freemason learns more lessons in other Masonic Orders, so his knowledge will grow as the loose ends begin to come together.

Entered Apprentices will often ask, "why don't you read the Charges directly from the ritual?". And of course the answer is that understanding comes from learning to recite the Charge from memory. The Charge is as much for the benefit of the one delivering it as for the candidate, more so perhaps. So if we accept that Masonic knowledge develops and grows with Masonic experience, how much does a Freemason really know? Since the understanding of each Freemason will grow and develop at different rates depending on the ceremonies they witness and participate in, can we say for certain whether there is one generally accepted body of Masonic knowledge? But we know from our own experience and discussions with other Freemasons, that this notion is untrue: there is a core knowledge about Freemasonry to which most Freemasons would assent.

What is the purpose of Masonic Ritual? Most Masonic jurisdictions will have a Rituals and Ceremonial Committee which oversees the ritual to be used by Lodges. In a paper presented by the Supreme Council 33<sup>o</sup> of the AASR Australia to the Conference of European and Associated Supreme Councils held in May 2003 in Capetown<sup>29</sup> they say:

Coming now to the *internal* aspect, it must be recognised that, ultimately, *the primary purpose of the Rite* – and indeed of the Craft and of every Order of Freemasonry (*author's emphasis*) – *is the education of its members to become better men and citizens*. It is this aim which must dominate all organisational thinking and decisions, and which must then direct all actions in shaping the meetings and ceremonials of Rose Croix Chapters and Grand Elect Knight Kadosh Councils.

The implication being that our rituals are organic and must be capable of responding to the needs of the Craft, its members and the times.

John Hamill<sup>30</sup> recently wrote:

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29 Paper submitted by The Supreme Council 33<sup>o</sup> AASR for Australia presented at the Conference of European and Associated Supreme Councils, Capetown, May 2003.

30 Ibid.

First, Freemasonry has always been free from dogma. Grand Lodge having agreed the basic form of our ceremonies, after the union in 1813, then stood back from it, except for major principles such as the former physical penalties in the obligations, and has never entered into discussion as to what the meaning of the ritual is. This has been done in the firm belief that it is part of the individual's personal journey to form their own understanding of the ritual. In addition, were the Grand Lodge to define the landmarks, that would be the first step on the road to establishing dogma.

Secondly, in addition to finding his own meaning of the ritual, discovering the landmarks surely forms part of the individual's journey, providing an opportunity to make his own study and increase his own understanding of the Craft.

This last paragraph of John Hamill is significant. It is the responsibility of the individual Freemason to create his own understanding of the Craft. It implies that each Freemason may well understand the Craft that is unique to them. There is no 'one size fits all'.

### **Conclusion – Freemasonry's Debt to John Locke**

The final decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century were among the most tumultuous in English history. Following the English Civil Wars and Cromwell's Protectorate, Charles II and his brother James II had failed to learn the lesson that Monarchs reign only with the consent of Parliament. Sir Christopher Wren was rebuilding the City of London following the Great Fire of London. Sir Isaac Newton had written his *Principia Mathematica* in which he invented the calculus and developed his laws of motion. The Royal Society was founded and included such luminaries as Robert Boyle, Christopher Wren, Robert Hooke, Isaac Newton, Sir Robert Moray (a Scottish Freemason), *John Theophilus Desaguliers* and John Locke himself. The Whig Party which had begun as a political faction that supported constitutional and parliamentary government was in the ascendancy; its leaders included Lord Ashley who invited John Locke into his circle of associates. John Locke was in the centre of all this.

The final decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century saw the development of Speculative Freemasonry in England culminating in the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge of England in 1717. The basic principles of the Premier Grand Lodge of England were inspired by the ideals of tolerance and the universal understanding of the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century – projects in which John Locke had considerable influence. It is fair to say that John Locke is probably the most influential western philosopher of modern times. His influence in the history of thought, on the way we think about ourselves and our relations to the world we live in, to God, nature and society, has been immense.

Locke helps us to understand the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in which James II was deposed by the English Parliament and replaced by his daughter Mary II and her husband William of Orange. John Locke had written that James II was guilty of breaking the "original contract" between sovereign and people, and had therefore suffered the just wrath of Parliament and people<sup>31</sup>.

Locke's influence on Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence was considerable: *The entire Declaration has been said to have "Succeeded admirably in condensing Locke's fundamental argument into a few hundred words."*<sup>32</sup>

But this paper is about Locke's influence on Freemasonry, not Western Philosophy or Western politics. Apart from his influence on *John Theophilus Desaguliers*, Locke has influenced

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31 <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-information-office/g04.pdf>

32 <https://www.johnlocke.org/john-locke-and-the-declaration-of-independence/>

Freemasonry in three areas: Tolerance of each other, Governance through consent, and Knowledge and Understanding.

Tolerance in accepting that each man has the right to his own religious opinions. Governance in proposing that a man accepts the authority of others through choice. Knowledge and Understanding in proposing that each man's developing understanding of Freemasonry is his own, and although it may be influenced and guided by others, in the end it is his own understanding and not something imposed by others.

God commands what reason does.