Cicero's *Republic* and Christian Arguments for Rebellion against Tyrants

Most political theorists are familiar with Augustine's story of Alexander asking a captured pirate where he got the right to steal from other ships, and receiving the answer that he got it from the same place Alexander got the right to conquer other countries. Most will recognize Augustine's famous summation of the point of the story: "Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms?[1] [1] However, few are aware of the story's first appearance in the work of a major pre-Christian political philosopher, the idea that much earlier philosopher intended to express with it, Augustine's original purpose for quoting the story and embracing the idea, the role that idea plays in Augustine's larger concept of politics, or the significance that Augustine's embrace of that idea would have for the history of Christian political theory.

To measure the damage this ignorance does to our broader understanding of the whole field of political philosophy, consider the following quotations:

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1 [1] Augustine, *City of God*, Book IV, Chapter 4; see also Book II, Chapter 21 and Book XIX, Chapter 21. I quote Henry Bettenson's translation (Penguin). Throughout this paper, I have modernized the texts I quote in such matters as spelling and punctuation. Also, in some of the older, more outdated English translations of non-English works, I have modernized some outdated grammatical usages.

1. "Someone who kills a tyrant in order to liberate his country is to be praised and rewarded.

2. "Tyrannical government is unjust . . . . Therefore the overthrow of this kind of government does not have the character of sedition. . . . Rather it is the tyrant who is guilty of sedition.

3. "No one is obliged to obey someone whom it is legitimate and even praiseworthy to kill . . . . Therefore no one is obliged to obey a tyrant.

4. "Whoever seizes power by violence does not become a true ruler and lord, and therefore it is permissible when the possibility exists for someone to reject that rulership.

Now suppose you were to ask the average professor of political theory: What is the earliest century in which these revolutionary statements might have been considered mainstream and even accepted conventional wisdom? My guess is the most common answers you would get would be the 17th and 18th centuries, on grounds that rebellion against tyrants was rejected by mainstream political thought until John Locke in the late 17th century the only difficulty being to decide at what point Locke's radical idea of a right to rebellion could be considered "mainstream and "accepted conventional wisdom.

In fact, all four quotations come from Thomas Aquinas writing in the 13th century.2 [2] And in writing to exult tyrannicide as an act worthy of praise and reward, Aquinas was only expressing the conventional wisdom of his time. In fact, in medieval political thought Aquinas represents the conservative end of the spectrum on the subject of resistance to abusive government. As the "Thomist school of thought coalesced around Aquinas's writings, a rival

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2 [2] Quotations one, three and four come from *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Book II, Distinction 44, Question 2; quotation two comes from *Summa Theologica*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 42, Article 2. I quote Paul Sigmund's translations (*St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics*, Norton).

school of thought that was even more sympathetic to resistance against abuses of power coalesced around the ideas of William of Ockham.

The Christian argument for rebellion against tyrants did not originate with Locke or even with his late medieval and early modern influences. It originated shortly before the time of Christ himself, in the thought of Cicero , and in the early 5th century with Augustine's appropriation of Cicero 's framework of political ideas. While rebellion against tyrants was not a matter of much interest for Augustine, it was a point of significant concern for Cicero , and the political ideas Augustine appropriated from Cicero were originally developed in part because Cicero was concerned to vindicate rebellion against tyrants. Thus, although Augustine did not develop a theory of rebellion against tyrants from the Ciceronian ideas he appropriated, it was those ideas that led subsequent Christian thinkers more or less directly to the conclusion that tyrannicide is not a sin.

This paper does not seek to produce new insights in the scholarly knowledge of Cicero, Augustine or any other particular thinker. It is aimed rather at restoring an awareness of a very long-term trend in western political thought. The paper's purpose is to bring the vital "prehistory" of the right to rebellion to the attention of political theorists, since the field as a whole is not now sufficiently engaging with it. To accomplish this purpose I need only point to plain and obvious facts about what each thinker says, and I have therefore felt no need to quote extensively from the primary texts or engage with the secondary literature. While scholars of Cicero or Augustine will not find new information about their subjects here, scholars of Locke and other post-medieval figures who have conceived of the right to rebellion in isolation from its 2,000-year history in pre-Christian, early Christian and medieval Christian thought will

hopefully find this paper helpful as a first step toward integrating that history into their scholarship.

Cicero 's Pirate

The story of the pirate and Alexander appears in Cicero 's *Republic*, published in 51 B.C. As in Plato's *Republic*, a group of friends are discussing justice and the question arises whether politics should be governed by the rules of fair play or simply by the interests of the stronger.

Philus, consenting to play devil's advocate and speak against justice, recounts the story of the pirate who claimed that his piracy was, in principle, no different from Alexander's conquests. "This pirate was, truly, something of a philosopher in his way,&#65533; Philus argues, "for worldly wisdom and prudence instruct us by all means to increase our power, riches, and estates.&#65533; Your neighbors are always out to get you, Philus asserts, so the survival of the political community depends on your getting them first. And to win the contest for survival you must disregard justice, which "commands us to have mercy upon all; to exercise universal benevolence; to consult the interests of the whole human race; to give every one his due; and to injure no sacred, public, or foreign rights.&#65533; Philus succinctly sums up the case against justice: "If we were to examine the conduct of states by the test of justice, as you propose, we should probably make this astounding discovery, that very few nations, if they gave back what they have stolen, would possess any country at all.&#65533;3 [3]

3 [3] Cicero , *On the Republic*, Book III. I quote Francis Barham's 1841 translation.

So Cicero 's analysis is driven by the general problem of justifying the supreme authority of moral rules in political life. The difficulty he faces is that injustice appears to benefit the community even to the extent that it seems to be necessary to the community's survival.

Against this, Scipio and Laelius make two arguments, one that passes by briefly and the other more detailed and important. First, they briefly argue that honesty is the best policy the political community is actually more likely to survive, not less likely, by being good. Then, more importantly, they argue that justice is the only reason the political community exists in the first place. Therefore, a political community that gives up on justice has destroyed its own foundations.

The purpose of the political community, according to the argument, is not to ensure the political community's survival at any cost, but to establish justice. "Justice is the very foundation of lawful government in political constitutions, declares Scipio. It must be so, because a shared idea of justice is what makes a group of people into a political community (as opposed to just a group of people) in the first place. "Can we call the state of Agrigentum a commonwealth, where . . . there is no universal bond of justice, nor social consent and fellowship, which should belong to every people, properly so named?4 [4] Upholding justice does include protecting the community against unjust violence. But to protect the community by the commission of unjust violence would itself defeat the purpose of upholding justice which is the only reason there is a political community in the first place.

4 [4] Cicero , *On the Republic*, Book III.

This conception of the political community as being fundamentally defined by a shared understanding of justice has roots in Plato and especially Aristotle. However, Cicero is its paradigmatic champion. The intellectual tradition following Cicero on this point, of which we will trace a few outlines below, stands over against a rival intellectual tradition with at least some roots in the sophists (represented in Plato's *Republic* in the person of Thrasymicus) and Thucydides, and most famously represented by Machiavelli and Hobbes holding that the political community is defined by a shared *enforcer* of justice as opposed to a shared *understanding* of justice. Or, to put it another way, the Ciceronian tradition holds that the political community is founded on mutual submission to a common idea, whereas the Hobbesian tradition holds that it is founded on mutual submission to a common power.

Cicero presses this to a radical conclusion: where justice is not enforced, there is, strictly speaking, no political community and no government. "Wherever I behold a tyrant, declares Scipio, "I know that the social constitution must be, not merely vicious and corrupt, as I stated yesterday, but in strict truth, no social constitution at all.5 [5] What we call the "government in such a society is not really a government, because it does not do what governments exist to do: preserve justice. So a government that abandons justice has ended its own existence as a government by doing so.

And if a tyrannical government is no government at all, of course it follows that rebellion against tyrants is morally permissible a position of which Cicero was probably the most famously vigorous champion until Locke came along.

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5 [5] Cicero , *On the Republic*, Book III.

Augustine's Ciceronianism

It is commonly asserted that Augustine wrote *The City of God* to defend Christianity after the sack of Rome . That is true as far as it goes, but there is more to the story and the proximate cause that moved Augustine to write the book has a direct bearing on his appropriation of Cicero 's pirate story and the Ciceronian concept of the political community defined by justice rather than power.

The historical record does not indicate that the sack of Rome had much impact on Augustine at first. "There is no sign here of any panic in Augustine or in his flock, James O'Donnell writes of Augustine's sermons in the aftermath of the sack. "There is thus little reason to think that *The City of God* as we have it would ever have been written if things had remained as they stood a year after the sack of Rome : the rhetorical opportunity the calamity offered might have been neglected. But then Augustine was approached privately in ways that set his pen moving with greater ambition.6 [6]

What drew Augustine into political thought was not political or military events, but an urgent request from his friend Marcellinus, another leading Christian figure. Marcellinus wrote to Augustine that a mutual acquaintance of theirs Volusianus, a high Roman official who had long been undecided about Christianity, was perilously close to openly denouncing the faith

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6 [6] James O'Donnell, "Augustine's *De Civitate Dei,* Georgetown University , unpublished manuscript, 1983.

because of the sack of Rome . Marcellinus urged Augustine to write an extended refutation of the argument against Christianity that Volusianus was considering.

What connects these events originating the book to the pirate story and the Ciceronian concept of the political community is Volusianus's reason for considering an open repudiation of Christianity. Of course *The City of God* was a long time in the writing and came to incorporate many subjects beyond Volusianus's specific concerns. Nonetheless, Augustine's response to Volusianus remains the heart of the book's political theory and the basis of Augustine's broader conception of politics.

Volusianus was worried that the strict moral rules of Christianity especially its injunctions of meekness, turning the other cheek and so forth inculcated political weakness and restricted rulers from doing the harsh, violent things that had to be done to protect the survival of the community. Christianity teaches that Jesus become frail and weak in order to save his people, and commands its followers to imitate him. Naturally it appeared to Christianity's critics that this was why Rome had became frail and weak after it adopted Christianity. They charged that government could not survive for long if it were run by people whose life's goal was the imitation of Christ.

In other words, Volusianus was considering almost the same argument that Cicero was concerned to refute in his *Republic* almost 400 years earlier strict adherence to goodness will weaken the state and leave the political community unable to defend itself. Thus Augustine's heavy reliance on Cicero for his response would not have been surprising even if Augustine had not been a lifelong devotee of Cicero 's philosophy. As it was, the coincidence between Augustine's lifetime of admiring study of Cicero 's works and his sudden need to provide a

response to critics of Christianity whose arguments mirror those refuted by Cicero may appear to Christians as an especially noteworthy act of divine providence.

Augustine offers a number of arguments in response for example that Christianity distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate violence, and approves of violence in the service of justice and defense of the innocent. But his main argument consists of an appropriation of Cicero 's conception of the political community.

He quotes the pirate story and subsequent discussion from Cicero 's *Republic* with strong approval. This is the context of his famous remark: "Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms?[7] [7] The importance of the first two words [illegible] "remove justice[illegible] [illegible] should now be clear. Augustine is not saying that kingdoms in general are like criminal gangs, or vice versa. He is saying this is what would be case if the political community were founded on power rather than on justice [illegible] and that it is in fact the case in any particular cities where justice is not the actual purpose intended by the rulers.

Thus Augustine, adopting Cicero 's philosophical framework, turns the critics' argument against them. Since the political community is founded on justice, not power, the rise of Christianity builds it up rather than weakening it. Pre-Christian Rome never lived up to the standard that Cicero [illegible] its own greatest philosopher [illegible] set for political communities. Augustine observes that if Cicero is right that "a state cannot be maintained without justice,[illegible] it follows

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7 [7] Augustine, *City of God,* Book IV, Chapter 4; see also Book II, Chapter 21 and Book XIX, Chapter 21.

that "there never was a Roman commonwealth.8 [8] Augustine does concede that Cicero 's standards are very strict, and proceeds to offer an alternative analysis that does not go quite so far as to conclude that there never was a Roman commonwealth until the rise of Christianity. However, the basic thrust of the analysis is the same the basis of the political community is justice, not power, so a greater adherence to justice is not detrimental to the political community.

While this Ciceronian conception of the political community originally appears early in *The City of God* in the context of replying to Christianity's critics, it remains the basis of Augustine's analysis of politics for the remainder of the book, particularly in Book XIX, where the main political theory is laid out. There, Augustine writes that while the "city of God and the "city of this world have different ends, the city of God (that is, Christians) nonetheless has a duty to contribute to the worldly political order: although the city of God "leads what we may call a life of captivity in this earthly city as in a foreign land . . . yet it does not hesitate to obey the laws of the earthly city by which those things that are designed for the support of this mortal life are regulated. This is because the worldly political order is not just a human power structure, it is a divine ordinance for maintaining civil peace. While this civil peace is often made to serve the ends of the wicked, God ordains that Christians should "make use of this peace also, until this mortal state, for which this kind of peace is essential, passes away.9 [9]

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8 [8] Augustine, *City of God* , Book XIX, Chapter 21.

9 [9] Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 17.

Ciceronianism and Rebellion in Aquinas

Augustine's political theory, including his embrace of Cicero 's conception of the political community, has formed the basis of most subsequent Christian political thought. To be sure, there is an important body of Christian thought that does not follow this conception, understanding the worldly political order as based on power rather than on justice, but historically this has been the minority report of Christian political theory.

The issue of rebellion against tyrants was not a high priority for Augustine and his legacy does not include a substantial contribution to this topic. However, the appropriation of Cicero 's ideas into Christian thought did not change the fact that those ideas implied approval of rebellion against tyrants. It is therefore not surprising that subsequent Christian thinking, which was predominantly Augustinian and Ciceronian, also came predominantly to favor rebellion against tyrants.

This paper is not the place to fully map out the history of how Augustine's ideas were developed by later Christian thinkers. When Cicero 's ideas entered Christian political philosophy, they encountered other elements that were not so friendly to rebellion. (This helps explain why approval of rebellion against tyrants is missing from Augustine's appropriation of Cicero 's ideas.) The process by which the Ciceronian element came to predominate over other, more unrebellious arguments in Christian thought cannot be reviewed here.

However, it is necessary to establish that Augustine's Ciceronianism had a fundamental influence on subsequent Christian political thought, and that it was this influence that undergirded the predominant view that rebellion against tyrants was permissible. This can be

seen in the argument Aquinas offers for rebellion against tyrants. Aquinas is a good place to seek an illustration of Cicero 's influence via Augustine for two reasons. First, of course, is his colossal importance in the history of Christian political thought. While Aquinas's grand theological/philosophical synthesis has always been controversial, it serves as the cornerstone of one of the most important thought traditions in Christian intellectual history. Second, Aquinas represents the conservative side of the medieval spectrum on the topic of the relationship between government and citizen. Even where nonviolent civil disobedience was concerned, he strongly emphasized that such disobedience should be undertaken only when absolutely necessary to avoid disobeying God.10 [10] By extension, the same principle must apply to violent resistance. As has already been noted, the other major school of medieval thought, growing out of Ockham, was more sympathetic to political resistance than Aquinas had been. Those who were not in the Thomist tradition and who did not agree with Aquinas on this issue were more likely to disagree with him by favoring rebellion more rather than less.

Aquinas's purpose in taking up the question of rebellion against tyrants is to deal with an objection to Aquinas's position on rebellion more generally. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas wishes to defend the position that "sedition is always a mortal sin. Against this view, he must consider the objection that "those who liberate a society from the power of a tyrant are praised. But this cannot be done without some dissention in the society when one group tries to keep the tyrant and another tries to overthrow him. Therefore sedition can take place without sin.

10 [10] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Question 96, Articles 4-5.

To deal with this objection, he argues that tyrannicide is not sedition. "Tyrannical government is unjust because it is directed not to the common good but to the private good of the ruler, as is evident in Book III of the *Politics*, and Book VIII of the *Ethics*. Therefore the overthrow of this kind of government does not have the character of sedition. . . . Rather it is the tyrant who is guilty of sedition because he spreads discord and division among the people under him so as to control them more easily.11 [11] A tyrant does not do what government is supposed to do; government is supposed to serve the common good, but tyrants serve their private good. Therefore tyrannical government is unjust and because it is unjust, it may be resisted (provided, the conservative Aquinas hastens to add, that resistance in those particular circumstances will do more good than harm).

This argument takes for granted something like the Ciceronian position that because it is justice, not power, that defines the political community. At the heart of the argument is a clear distinction between "the common good and "the private good of the ruler. Thus the community as such is distinct from the government as such, and the community is defined by an idea ("the common good) rather than by the power structure of government. While "the common good is not the same as "a common understanding of justice, the latter is obviously a very important part of the former, and in particular it is the part of the former that is most relevant to the community's relationship to government as we will see in a moment. So while Aquinas's concept is more complex than Cicero 's, it is clearly part of the same family of ideas.

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11 [11] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 42, Article 2.

For Aquinas, the relationship between the community and the state is based not on power but on justice resistance is justified on grounds that the tyrant commits an injustice against the community. When asked why tyrannicide is not sedition, Aquinas's answer is that the tyrant's rule is "unjust. This point is even more clear, and more strongly stated, in Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, where he writes that "whoever seizes power by violence does not become a true ruler and lord, and therefore it is permissible when the possibility exists for someone to reject that rulership.12 [12] The relationship between the community and the state can only be established upon the basis of justice; where that basis is lacking, no such relationship can exist and no "ruler and lord, properly so called, has been established.

In these passages we see not only that Aquinas endorses tyrannicide and does so on Ciceronian grounds, but that he assumes his readers will already agree with that position. Notice that in the *Summa Theologica*, both the objection and the response simply take it for granted that tyrannicide is acceptable, with no need for either argument or citation of authority to justify the assertion. The same pattern appears in the *Sentences*. In Aquinas, that is particularly noteworthy like all the high medieval scholastics, Aquinas works so hard to justify his positions that one sometimes feels he would cite scripture, Aristotle and the church fathers to back up a claim that the sky is blue. That Aquinas, who took nothing for granted, would be willing it to take it for granted that tyrannicide is not a sin is an important manifestation of just how firmly established and conventional this position was.

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12 [12] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Book II, Distinction 44, Question 2.

It is also worth noting that in Aquinas we no longer see the cautious hedging of Ciceronianism that we saw in Augustine. Where Augustine felt the need to admit that perhaps it was going too far to say that a tyrannical government ceases to be a government, since it would imply that before Christianity "there never was a Roman commonwealth,&#65533; Aquinas seems to feel no problem in asserting that a tyrannical government is no government at all. In the *Sentences*, he writes that the power of a tyrant is "not from God&#65533; and creates no obligation of obedience: "The Christian is obliged to obey authority that comes from God but not that which is not from God. . . . Authority can fail to come from God in two ways, either from the way it was acquired or from the way it has been used.&#65533; Thus not only does a person who seizes power by violence not become a "ruler and lord,&#65533; as we saw earlier, but even legitimate governments can become tyrannies (and thus dissolve their political relationship to the community, giving up their status as governments) by abusing power. The Ciceronianism that predominates in the history of Christian political thought is, for the most part, a robust Ciceronianism that makes no concessions to the legitimacy of tyrannical governments.

Cicero and Locke

Locke was, like Augustine, a lifelong devotee of Cicero 's writings, and much of his philosophy (going well beyond the topic of rebellion) is indebted to Cicero .13 [13] Those who are familiar with Locke's argument for rebellion against tyrants may have already noticed many

13 [13] See John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion, and Responsibility*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 229-326.

points of contact between his argument and the Ciceronian arguments briefly reviewed above. The most important instance is the argument that a tyrannical government ceases to be a government at all; this is how Locke, like so many Christian thinkers before him, squares rebellion against tyrants with the scriptural injunctions to obey government.14 [14] There is also a strong family resemblance between Aquinas's argument that it is the tyrant, not the rebel, who commits sedition and Locke's argument that the tyrant is the real rebel, and the one we call the "rebel" is only defending himself against an aggressor.15 [15]

Evaluating Locke's connections to historical Christian doctrine on this subject, we can say that Locke's argument for a right to rebellion is original or innovative only in that it is much more detailed and well thought out than those of any previous Christian thinker of similar intellectual stature. For most Christian political theorists, the problem of tyranny is either ignored (as in Augustine) or comes in only peripherally, a tangential concern connected to more important matters (as in Aquinas). In Locke, it is extensively analyzed. For example, the idea of government by consent has deep roots in Christian political thought; Ockham writes that "no one should be set over a body of mortals except by their choice and consent," while Aquinas writes that a ruler may be resisted if he "has violently seized power against the will of his subjects, or has forced them to consent."16 [16] But it was Locke who mapped out in detail how this idea

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14 [14] See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Treatise II, Sections 211-222; I cite the section numbers from the Everyman edition.

15 [15] See Locke, *Two Treatises*, Treatise II, Section 226.

16 [16] William of Ockham, *Dialogue on the Power of the Emperor and the Pope*, Third Dialogue (see Ewart Lewis, *Medieval Political Ideas*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1954, p. 83); and Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Book II, Distinction 44, Question 2. Interestingly, earlier in the same passage, Ockham states that the phrase "natural law" is sometimes used to mean "that which ought to be kept by those who use natural equity

shapes our conception of the right to rebellion. Perhaps most important, where earlier major thinkers had taken it for granted that the difference between a tyrant and a legitimate ruler would be obvious, Locke provides a lengthy discussion of the practical problem of knowing when a ruler has gone beyond the level of ordinary bad behavior that any merely human government will always contain which must be borne as the cost of having a government at all and reached the level of *bona fide*, legitimately resistible tyranny.

This, of course, is how we ended up with our current state of professional ignorance of the 2,000-year history of the right to rebellion in Christian thought. Locke was the first top-ranking Christian political thinker to provide a detailed discussion of the right to rebellion, including a practical road map for figuring out when this right comes into play amid the messy ambiguities of real-life politics. And, largely because of this, he was also the thinker whose work marks the start of a period of history that has been particularly defined by the influence of revolutionary ideologies. So naturally Locke has come to be seen as the paradigmatic theorist of the right to rebellion and the "prehistory of that right faded into the background. No one who wants to study the political problem of rebellion against tyrants starts by picking up a copy of Aquinas and rightly so.

Why the change? Why did rebellion, which had remained in the background of Christian political thought for so long, suddenly burst into the foreground with Locke, such that we barely

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alone, without any human custom or statute, which is natural because it is [not] contrary to the original state of nature, and because it ought to be followed or observed if all men lived according to natural reason or divine law (see Lewis, *Medieval Political Ideas*, p. 80-81). So Locke's conception of the "state of nature also has a long history in Christian political theory.

remember the idea having existed before? While I do not claim to know, I have a hypothesis to offer.

Locke's career also marks a very similar turning point in the history of religious freedom. We may get some insight by asking why it was Locke who brought the idea of religious freedom to full development and touched off a period of history particularly marked by the success of this idea.

The idea of religious freedom had been around for some time before the late 17th century. Martin Luther made an argument for religious freedom very similar to Locke's, at least in its basic outlines, in his 1523 treatise *On Secular Authority*. Others still earlier had proposed similar ideas in the Middle Ages. And by the time Locke wrote the *Letter Concerning Toleration* several European countries were practicing, or had experimented with, religious freedom. It was popular in the Netherlands , where Locke lived as he wrote the *Letter*. And many eastern Europeans had kept the peace between Catholic and Orthodox populations for centuries by applying a live-and-let-live policy, so while western Europe tore itself to shreds over the Reformation, in eastern Europe they just extended the principle of live-and-let-live. When Johann Eck, Luther's great theological rival, wrote to King Sigismond demanding that he suppress the Reformation in Poland , Sigismond replied: "Permit me, sir, to be the king of both the sheep and the goats.[illegible] His son, Sigismond II, proclaimed himself "king of the people, but not of their consciences.[illegible]17 [17] Transylvania declared in 1568 that "ministers should everywhere preach and proclaim [the

17 [17] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 192.

gospel] according to their understanding of it . . . . No one is permitted to threaten to imprison or banish anyone because of his teaching, because faith is a gift from God.18 [18]

Yet it was Locke, not any of these other sources, who touched off the era of religious freedom in which we live. Earlier thinkers got little traction arguing for religious freedom. Eastern Europe gave up on religious freedom after its experiments with it in the 16th century. And religious freedom in the Netherlands was viewed a local curiosity, a peculiarly Dutch way of doing things arising from unique local history not a policy neighboring countries would seriously consider emulating.

As I argue elsewhere, it seems to me that the decisive change occurred in the time and place that it did because the political conflict over religion lasted longer and caused more suffering in England than anywhere else.19 [19] Because the problem was more urgent and more difficult to solve there, it was there that the philosophy of religious freedom reached its greatest heights, and ultimately it was there that the policy was most completely embraced.

I feel less confident asserting that something similar happened with the problem of rebellion, yet the hypothesis seems plausible. The same longer and more violent conflict over religion that drove England so deeply into the arms of Locke's philosophy of religious freedom may also have driven it into his philosophy of rebellion.

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18 [18] MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 262.

19 [19] See Greg Forster, *The Contested Public Square*, InterVarsity Press, forthcoming 2008, ch. 5-6.

Richard Ashcraft has pointed out that if Locke's only purpose in writing the *Two Treatises* was to justify resistance to Charles II and/or James II, there would have been little motive for him to publish it after the success of the Glorious Revolution. That problem had been solved. Ashcraft argues (very plausibly) that Locke published the *Two Treatises* because he was anxious to establish a particular understanding of why it was right to rebel against all rival explanations – he wanted to ensure that the Glorious Revolution was understood not simply as a defense of English constitutional traditions, but also as a vindication of England's devotion to natural justice and the rights of humanity as such.

A similar question might be asked about the "demand side" of the *Two Treatises*' successful publication. Why did the *Two Treatises* find such a wide audience even while being published after the Glorious Revolution, when the immediate problem was solved? Clearly Locke was not the only one who was concerned not simply about whether the revolution was right, but about why it was right.

It seems plausible that the especially long and especially violent political conflict in England created a strong desire for a detailed, well thought out doctrine of rebellion that would justify the political order without opening the door to future conflict – allowing the nation to rest from the burden of war. Locke's careful analysis of the boundary line between ordinary bad rulers and tyrants would have provided precisely what such a desire would have been seeking. In Locke's formulation, it isn't the badness of the bad ruler *per se* that justifies rebellion; it is a particular,

narrowly defined type of bad behavior.20 [20] That would have allowed Locke's philosophy to justify the existing order after the ascension of William and Mary while providing minimal openings for future violence.

Conclusion

The philosophy of rebellion against tyrants that gained such wide influence in Christian political thought after the late 17th century represented no break from the previous 17 centuries of Christian doctrine. It was innovative in the sense that it was more highly developed, but the development was entirely organic. The basic building blocks of the argument remained surprisingly unchanged from their origins in Cicero through their appropriation by Augustine, further integration into Christian thought by Aquinas, and ultimately their much fuller development by Locke. The entire field of political theory, and especially scholars of Christian arguments for rebellion against tyrants, need to recover an awareness of and engagement with this 2,000-year history of Christian Ciceronianism.

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20 [20] Specifically, "a long train of abuses, prevarications, and artifices, all tending the same way, [to] make the design [of tyranny] visible to the people� � with emphasis on the "design� of tyranny (Locke, *Two Treatises,* Treatise II, Section 225).