

work provided the immediate background for the brilliant work of Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) in mathematics and the mechanical and physical sciences later in the century. Newton discovered and explicated, in the *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica** (London, 1687) and other works, some of the most important rules governing nature and explaining the order of the universe. His work simultaneously manifested and contributed to a faith in the capacity of rational observation and experiment to unlock the mysteries of the physical world and encouraged a belief in the ultimate regularity and comprehensibility of that world. Inevitably, these striking achievements in science suggested the existence of similar—equally natural and discoverable—laws governing human behavior and relationships among people.

Published in London in 1690, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding** was not only Locke's most ambitious and important work but also the foundation for much eighteenth-century thought about religion, morals, psychology, and aesthetics. Widely used in American colleges and, according to one recent study, present in 45% of a representative group of American libraries between 1700 and 1813, this influential work went through seven American editions before 1813. In it, Locke applied the principles of rational observation to the analysis of the human mind in an effort to provide a foundation for the science of man comparable to that developed by Newton for the science of nature. Stressing the impossibility of any person's knowing anything through the medium of others, Locke made individuals autonomous in and responsible for their judgments in both religion and politics. The theory of knowledge that formed the core of the *Essay*, to which Locke gave practical application in his shorter essays on religious toleration (1689) and education (1693), was radically anti-authoritarian and individualistic in its implications.

Locke developed these implications for the political realm in his *Two Treatises on Governments*.¹ Written in the early 1680s during the crisis over efforts by some Whig politicians to exclude Charles II's Catholic brother James from the English throne, this work was not published until 1690, in the wake of the Glorious Revolution.

* Nearly all the books mentioned in this essay were on the Library Company's shelves in 1787. Those marked with an asterisk are listed (in one edition or another) in the 1789 *Catalogue*. Most of the other titles mentioned were available in Philadelphia in the libraries of such notable public figures as Benjamin Franklin, John Dickinson, and Benjamin Rush, or in the Loganian Library, the extensive collection that James Logan left in trust to the city in 1760. The entire Loganian Library was incorporated into the Library Company in 1792, and many other of the Signers' books have since joined those books on our shelves. Works in the Loganian Library are designated by a parenthetical "Logan."

Along with the *Leviathan* (London, 1651) (Logan) by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), the *Two Treatises* is one of the two classics of early modern English political thought. Locke's immediate purpose in the *Two Treatises* was to refute the patriarchal doctrines of Sir Robert Filmer (c. 1587–1653), whose *Patriarcha; Or the Natural Power of Kings* was posthumously published in London in 1680. During the eighteenth century, it was conspicuous by its absence from most American libraries. The Library Company of Philadelphia did not acquire it until 1828. Working within the providentialist stream of absolutist political philosophy that regarded political authority as conferred by God upon a specific ruler and his descendants, Filmer both traced the original locus of that authority to the household and used the family as a symbolic representation of the state. The authority of kings within the state, according to Filmer, was equivalent to that of fathers within the family. Like the patriarchal authority of fathers, the political authority of kings was natural, divinely sanctioned, and, in the final analysis, absolute and unlimited.

In contrast to Filmer, Locke traced the origins of political society to the free consent of the individuals who composed it. In doing so, he placed himself firmly within the classical tradition of the natural-law theory of the state, the most prominent modern exponents of which were the English ecclesiastic Richard Hooker (1554?–1600), whose *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity** appeared in 1593–97; the Dutch statesman and legal theorist Hugo de Grotius (1583–1645), whose *De Jure Belli ac Pacis Libri Tres** came out in 1625; the German philosopher Samuel, Baron von Pufendorf (1632–94), whose *De Jure Naturae et Gentium** was published in 1672; and Thomas Hobbes, against whose doctrines Filmer had initially taken up his pen. All of these writers postulated an original state of nature in which men, living as individuals outside of and free from the restraints of organized civil society, had total autonomy. They also employed the concept of consent, usually exercised through the medium of a social contract, to explain how free individuals came together to form a legitimate political society. For them, as for Locke, secular political authority derived not from God, the family, or force, but from the consent of the parties to the initial social contract.

To some extent, Hobbes had already departed from earlier natural-law writers by emphasizing the egalitarian character of the state of nature and the excessively self-interested character of human nature. This self-interestedness, according to Hobbes, first drove men into the brutish patterns of behavior that produced a war of