

14 The Two Treatises

Locke's two *Treatises of Government*¹ were first published in 1689 but were only admitted by Locke to be his own work in a codicil to his will. This secrecy resulted in very inadequate revisions for later editions and it was only with the sixth edition in 1764 that a text approximating to Locke's intentions became available. Mr P. Laslett has traced the complex history of the work and has provided a definitive text, including a collation with earlier editions.

He has also shown conclusively that the popular view that the work was written after the Revolution of 1688 (and as a defence of it) is true in only a minimal sense. Certainly there were last minute additions and revisions to justify the dethronement of James II. But there is much evidence that the main bulk of text was written between 1679 and 1682, and that its criticisms of monarchy are directed, in Shaftesbury's interest, against Charles II.

The *First Treatise* was a refutation of the defence of absolute monarchy by Sir Robert Filmer, a defence based on the dominion given by God to Adam. This *Treatise*, written with great spirit and vigour, though as usual at inordinate length, is an effective piece of destructive argument. But it is now of purely historical interest and need not concern us further.

The *Second Treatise* (specifically entitled *Of Civil Government*), however, is one of the most influential works on political theory ever written, ranking with the work of Rousseau and Marx.