

Theoretical Limitation of Modern Political Theory

With special reference to John Locke

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Abstract:

This paper is a discussion on the secular nature of modern political theory. By taking up John Locke as a case to examine the problem of secularizing political theory, the paper focuses on Locke's religious premise namely, human beings as creatures of God. Recent works on Locke's political thought by Jacob De Roover and Elizabeth Pritchard has been discussed as to illustrate the theoretical complexity involved in this presumption. The paper concludes by discussing the complex religious presumption of Locke in relation with James V Schall's argument concerning the problem of modern political theories and the need for transcendence.

Key words: secular, religion, political, Locke, Two Treatises

Introduction

Modern political theory, namely liberal democracy, rests upon the idea that there is a boundary between religion and secular sphere. Accordingly, a revisit of the discussion on political theory by modern thinkers such as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Rousseau and Machiavelli in their political works would reveal that theological issues are set apart or either silenced when a political theory is given the stage. This is very much in contrast to medieval political theories of Augustine and Aquinas, as well as the Greek philosophers who have dealt with political theory in relation to ethics and theology or metaphysics. By separating the 'political' from the 'religious', modern liberal democracy propounds natural rights as universal rights. It elevates the conception of the individual as a rational being whose abstract rights of equality and liberty are applicable irrespective of religion and culture.

What is crucial in modern theory is the step it has taken to secularize politics, i.e to make political theory independent of faith and religious propositions. It has embarked upon 'reason' or 'rationality' as an anchor, referring to objective principles to explain human nature and social arrangements. However, one of the most renowned political philosophers, John Locke has made several theological propositions as premises for his political theory. Even though his political theory is known as modern, a revisit of his premises reveals that a great deal of his argument relies upon some theological notions. This paper attempts to discuss Locke's political theory and its relation to the theological premises he has used in his theory to illustrate the limitation of modern political theory.

A discussion on modern political theory would, in any case, be incomplete without John Locke whose contribution to philosophy is enormously significant. His idea of natural rights makes him immortal in political philosophy. The present-day discussions on human rights often turn the pages of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, written in the 17th century, to understand better the present problems of liberal democracy. The reason why we need to turn the pages of the *Two Treatises* today is due to its place in the history of political thought. Locke has written *The Two Treatises* in the dawn of a new world, acting as a milestone for change in political thinking as a step towards democratic reasoning. The *Second Treatise* consists of premises such as 'man as a creature of God', 'the world as a property of God' and 'the law of nature' which seemed to be divinely sanctioned. Locke expresses this in his description of the equality between mankind:

For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the world by his order and about his business, they are his property, whose Workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's pleasure. And being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of Nature, there cannot be supposed any such Subordination among us that may authorize us to destroy one another as if we were made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for ours.¹

However, there is no definition of the law of nature, no elaboration of religion and political relation in his political work. These religious concepts and Locke's reference to 'man' as a creature of God has made some scholars to claim a religious basis for Locke's political theory. While Locke is considered a precursor of secular political theory, this image he has might be a result of an absence of a serious reading of the religious premises he used in his argument.

The problem and its significance

The issue that is at hand is related to what Leo Strauss calls 'Theologico-political' problem. Central to the issue is the justification of political power. Why would one accept political authority? The reasons that were given were religious as well as traditional in pre-modern. The problem concerns the extent to which religious premises are employed to justify political power. In other words, the theologico-political problem involves how far 'reason' has been used to justify a political set up in order to make it independent of theology.²

In the process of discussing this issue, the paper attempts to bring a better understanding of the challenges that Locke faced. In other words, it is an appreciation of the challenges that modern political theory has faced in taking a different path from the pre-modern method of political reasoning. There is a solidarity in the pre-modern political thinking, an inner consistency to a religious history and worldview. The interrelation between religion and politics was rather, whole and part, politics being part of the whole.³ The problem with Locke's theory is how he relates the religious worldview to a rationally constructed political worldview in taking a different path.

Crucial to the discussion is the notion of 'secular'. Even though Locke did not discuss it in his work, this precept underlies his political teaching. By 'modern' the definition may be confined to a distancing of one's theory from the shackles of religious premises and to rely more on the rational interpretation of human nature and deriving political principles by 'reason', but this is not confined to politics. By saying that one is a modern thinker, it also applies to other areas of inquiries such as science. The 17th century witnessed a turn in scientific thinking where sciences were taking their departure from religious dogmas. So is the case with politics. From the religiously entangled political theories of the medieval period, there was a step towards a discussion of political theories independent of dogmas. This move is a result of the enlightenment glorification of 'reason'. Also, it was an outcome of the social-religious problem that was caused by the tug of war for power between religious institutions namely the church and political heads, the kings. The theoretical development can be traced both in theory as well as in Europe's bloody religious war history.

'Secularism' was behind the idea of bringing political discussion independent of religious issues. It is significant to understand Locke's political theory as Locke's opponent Robert Filmer had to deal with Catholic theologians, Bellarmine and Francis Suarez, in explaining Monarchy as the right form of government. The theoretical background of the *Two Treatises* is in part a religio-political problem.⁴

The paper confines with reading Locke's work, *The Two Treatises of Government* as the primary reference and source. This has been taken to be a rational explanation of the basis for natural right. However many scholars omit the religious premises Locke used in his argument. Locke is considered to have argued rationally without the support of religion, giving political theory an independent status from religious

¹ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d), 289

² Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C.A Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), 134-195

³ James L. Wiser, *Political Philosophy: A History of the Search for Order* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 1-56

⁴ Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5-23

precepts. The important issue is the reason why the theological presumptions are considered essential. It creates a particular problem in its universality. We find that Locke's political theory has limitations. Corbett says,

The universality of Locke's political thought- and hence his status as the *philosophic* progenitor of liberal democracy- is threatened by arguments that would condemn or celebrate both him and liberal democracy as manifestations of a particular religious heritage⁵

The secular ground of Second Treatise

The *First Treatise* mainly consists of polemic a refutation of Filmer's exegesis. The *Second Treatise* consists of Locke's main political teaching. Locke explains the origin, extent, and limit of political power by explaining the natural condition of man. He gave a justification for his political conclusion by postulating a hypothetical state of nature. His social contract theory begins with a condition before the creation of political society. Locke says,

To understand Political Power right, and derive it from its Original, we must consider what State all Men are naturally in, and that is, *A state of perfect Freedom* to order their Actions and dispose of their Possessions and Persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature; without asking leave, or depending upon the Will of any other Man.⁶

The main difference between political society and the state of nature is that there was no authority to decide conflicts in the state of nature. Subsequently, the problems that arise in the state of nature led to mankind forming a political authority by a social contract, each giving his or her consent.⁷ Though this is hypothetical, it is taken as an abstract principle which underlies our present liberal democratic justification.

This paper concerns the premises that support this hypothesis as well as the basis for which Locke limits politics as temporal matter. This leads us to Jacob De Roover's analysis of the conceptual root of Locke's concept of toleration. In his book *India Europe and the limit of secularism*, Jacob de Roover argues that Locke's work is limited to Christianity. He refers to the *Letter Concerning Toleration* among Locke's work. Rather than Locke's main intention in writing the book, he looks at the conceptual problem with which Locke's arguments are entangled within. He claims that the idea of toleration and secularism is conceptually intelligible only with Christian theology in the background. According to Roover, conceptual roots are enormously important. At the background of Locke's work, there is the tension between religion and the secular world which arises out of Christian theology which is shaped by the Reformation.⁸ Roover suggests that this background forms the limitation of Locke's theory of Toleration. Locke's *Two Treatises* progresses with the assumption that religion in some way can be demarcated from political business. Locke defines limit of political power as

for all the power the government has being only for the good of the society, as it ought not to be arbitrary and at pleasure, so it ought to be exercised by established and promulgated laws; that both the people may know their duty, and be safe and secure within the limits of the law; and the rulers too kept within their bounds, and not be tempted, by the power they have in their hands, to employ it to such purposes, and by such measures, as they would not have known, and own not willingly.⁹

Similarly, we will see that Lockemay be understood to have said this by this theological background alone which Roover has discussed concerning root of the concept of *toleration* in Locke.

Religion and political division in the West

⁵ Ross J. Corbett, "Locke's Biblical Critique," *The Review of Politics* 74, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41346115>.

⁶ Locke, *The Two Treatises*, 287

⁸ Dick Howard, *The Primacy of the Political: A History of Political Thought from the Greeks to the French and American Revolutions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 125-188

⁹ Locke, *The Two Treatises*, 378

Concerning the basis for discussing politics as independent of religious sphere, Roover began the chapter by asking the question, “Where did the separation of human society into a political sphere and a religious sphere originate? Which conceptual background made this into a significant and sensible distinction?”¹⁰ This can be asked of Locke’s *Two Treatises* too. Roover elaborates how the very idea of a separation of politics and religion arises in the west. To him, the idea of the two kingdoms in his chapter on *the political theology of the two kingdoms*¹¹ serves as the canvas for Locke’s religious work namely *Letter on Toleration*. According to him, Protestant Reformation is associated with the development of the idea of the separation of religious and the secular. Built upon the Biblical distinction between the two world, the idea of secular, or the very idea of separating religion from politics has Christianity in the background. Therefore, according to Roover, making sense of the distinction between the two realms of spirituality and worldly things is deeply theological.

Roover’s discussion suggests that the very division of secular and religious have been based on the Biblical verses. Here we may find that concepts play an important role in understanding the world as two realms. Roover says, “Without the support of a cluster of Christian-theological notions – soul and body, the earthly and the spiritual life, divine power and the kingdom of Christ, and so on – this distinction would dissolve into thin air.”¹² Roover, turning to the Bible also refers to Mark 12:17 where we find Jesus himself referring to the division of the temporal kingdom and his spiritual kingdom and John 18:36 where Jesus also says, “My Kingdom is not of this world”. What Roover suggests by these verses is that there is a case already in the Bible itself, conceptually on the division of religion from politics. In the section on *Conversion, Law, and Liberty*, Roover points out how it is the interplay of the spiritual power and that of temporal power which forms part of the development of the division. The important point he begins with is that the division does not arise because of a struggle between the two realms for power, but rather as something as a theological necessity in Christianity itself. It is the very manner in which Christianity understood human experience.

According to him, one of the central questions in theology was “How should Christians live in the saeculum, this temporal worldly age that would last until the second coming of Christ?”¹³ This expresses that the temporal realm was considered as something which must serve man for God’s purpose to be fulfilled on earth. Embedded in this is the secondariness of the temporal matters. Regarding the seat of authority, the spiritual power was vested in the hands of the clergy.

What justifies the religious power to often intervene in the temporal power was the manner in which human is perceived. The theology of medieval times emphasizes the need for the ‘grace of God’ for mankind. This is because the central theme is the fallen nature of man which is so corrupted and perverse that human will alone cannot restore it to its original condition. Man accordingly is always under the curse of God. All men are plagued by this corruption. This constitutes how the world and humanity at large are conceived. It is conceived as constantly in need of restoration. Roover suggests that ‘conversion’ was the process by which man is restored to his original nature, i.e., the image of God. But this process was exclusive for a few people alone, and it took a great deal of seclusion and sacrifice to undergo and practice faith as to experience this. The monks were the ones who were exclusively experiencing this process. According to Roover, this process of self-denial and fighting the carnal nature illicit more and more of man’s depravity and the need for God’s Grace. We can find this in the writings of Augustine.¹⁴ Then Roover discusses how the church came to take the form of a monastery and how the priest became the prominent figure of the religion. They were the instruments by which God’s grace would go through. The significance of the priests and their place cannot be underestimated. It is what gives them the claim over the temporal realm as well.

Thus, it is the need for grace and salvation which has made the priests as an important figure in the lives of believers. And the implication that all men are in need of this grace and are subject to sin becomes

¹⁰ Jacob D. Roover, *Europe, India and the Limits of Secularism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), 86

¹¹ Roover, *Europe, India*, 86-110

¹² Ibid., 86

¹³ Ibid., 88

¹⁴ Ibid., 95-98

an anchor to say that in the spiritual realm they command. But this power to dictate rules and principles then extend to the temporal realm as well when the political actions of men which seem to have consequences in relation to salvation and sin. This has been discussed by Roover to show how power was vested to a great degree in the hands of the religious heads.

With the emergence of the Protestant idea of conversion as something which every believer must undergo and the idea of faith and salvation as primarily a personal relationship between an individual and God made the idea of priestly power redundant in everyday matters. Subsequently, religion was considered as a private matter as the main concern is salvation and faith which is personal. The power of the priests or any religious institution remains only with this matter and do not extend to social arrangement. The state and church were thus separated in their domain. We need to capture this development as the steps which have been taken as a prelude to modern division of the secular and religious. Though it is theological, it has ramifications in political and social conditions in Europe.

The Treatises and the secular-religious division

Roover's discussion is extremely important. His discussion is implicit in Locke's distinction of the political from the religious. To claim that political power is a management of earthly affairs while saying man as a creature of God with duty on earth requires Locke to separate the religious from the earthly. It depends upon the theoretical development discussed. This makes his *Two Treatises* intelligible only with this background. If not then one would have to give another explanation on how Locke would distinguish his political discussion from his religious discussion. What is more important is the very basis upon which Locke has made his political discussion as a temporal affair and not mix it up with theological issues in the *Two Treatises*. As he says,

The great end of Mens entering into Society, being the enjoyment of their Properties in Peace and Safety, and the great instrument and means of that being the Laws established in that society; the *first and fundamental positive Law* of all Commonwealths, is the establishing of the Legislative Power; as the *first and fundamental natural law*, which is to govern even the Legislative itself, is the preservation of the Society, and (as far as will consist with the publick good) of every person in it.¹⁵

Locke's definition of political society has confined it to the things to the world. But to this, he has made a presumption of setting the political aspect as something separable from such religious affair.

Therefore, Locke's *Two Treatises* is free of the medieval theological debates on the power of the church, the authority of the pope nor in any way does it have any relevance for finding an explanation for the relationship between church and state. Perhaps Locke's focus on the political issues rather than theological issues has blinded many readers to this underlying theoretical distinction he made. Roover suggests that the concepts, such as toleration have intelligibility only with the Christian background. Similarly the distinction between the religious and the secular in the *Two Treatises of Government*, precisely Locke's discussion on politics which deal only with politics as temporal matters, as his very definition of politics suggests, can only be done when his *Two Treatises* is presumed to rest upon the division of the secular and religious division he adopted from a Christian theology.

Secularization of the Sacred

However, Locke's theological premise, in particular, humans as a creature of God, with duties and obligations cannot simply just that Locke presents a political theology. Elizabeth Pritchard finds in Locke's political writings, an attempt to use the theological notions in a way that would serve his political project. She finds in Locke that the theological premises only serve his theoretical interest in politics and do not really function as they would have in a theological enterprise. So there is a reason to say that the employment of religious premises do not provide sufficient justification for saying that religion encapsulates Locke's political theory.

¹⁵Locke, *The Two Treatises*, 373

Pritchard suggests one to reconsider the manner in which Locke is understood to contribute to secularism. We are pushed back once more to re-examine what is meant by secularism. If Locke is said to be a modern thinker, which in a way is equivalent to saying being a secular thinker, we need to specify what secularism means. This is what Pritchard begins within her book *Religion in Public*.¹⁶ So far, the discussion has presumed secularism as a distinction of religion from political matters by projecting Locke as attempting to reduce religious presumptions with the political premises. The fact that there are religious premises makes Locke unfit to be labeled as a modern thinker in the true sense. But, Pritchard suggests that Locke's religious premises need not necessarily mean his religion encapsulate his politics. The presence of religious premises in Locke's political theory, on the other hand, has made political use of religious postulates. Pritchard alleges that Locke can be considered as contributing to secularism in a different manner.

The important point here is how one would understand the premises that are religious in nature as contributing to a 'secularization of the political.' Pritchard answers this by reconceptualizing the word 'secular'. She says,

Stories of secularization routinely read as enormously cleanup operation. Mixed-up religious and political powers are finally extricated and confined to their respective rooms, possessive spirits are sent packing, liminal and festive orgies are curtailed, and, boundaries are installed all around....In this book, I turn this conventional wisdom on its head and offer a reading of secularization as the promotion of worldliness of religion. I argue that secularization is religion placed into circulation. Moreover, I argue that such a project is advocated by John Locke (1632-1704) as part of a political theology¹⁷

We have discussed that Locke's step towards secularizing political theory, thereby being a modern thinker, is in making his political theory free of theological issues which medieval philosophy is often found to entangle itself with. However, it has to be acknowledged that Locke in the *Two Treatises* uses Biblical words as well as God as the creator of human beings and to use this has normative implications. Is it not essential to do away with the essentiality of his religious premises? Pritchard suggests that rather than discarding the religious premises, we need to examine the manner in which these premises are not really functioning as they would in a theological context. This can be taken up by examining two points which Pritchard has discussed. Firstly, the notion that human beings as children of God and the second, the concept of 'God' in the *Treatises*.

Humans as a property of God

The idea that God created mankind and they are his property, is one of the most apparent premises in the *Second Treatise*. To quote Locke, "For Men being all the workmanship of one Omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker; All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the world by his order and about his business, they are his property, whose Workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's pleasure."¹⁸ This line defines the relation between mankind themselves and the natural world. It is also an anchor to defend a truth claim that all men are equal and free.

We have discussed the essentiality of the theological root in Roover's discussion. From the idea that man is a creation of God and God alone owns them, Locke concludes that men are equal and at liberty without a natural political head. Pritchard has questioned the implication and use of these particular religious premises in Locke. She has brilliantly brought our attention to the further conceptual changes Locke has made in making use of this particular line. Rather than claiming that Locke has made religion his foundation, she claims that he has somewhat secularized this Biblical foundation. She finds here a turn away from true theology. In other words, Locke's religious premises do not add religious impulse to his political argument. She claims that they are instead used in a limited sense, they serve to support his political claim

¹⁶Elizabeth A. Pritchard, *Religion In Public: Locke's Political Theology* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 1-2

¹⁷Pritchard, *Religion in Public*, 1

¹⁸Locke, *The Two Treatises*, 289

merely. This would in a way show that Locke was not refuting the idea of an individual in the sense of being in relation to God as Christian theology would have us to be. Pritchard claims,

Locke distributes sacrality, as a portion of a perfect property, to each person qua a creature of God. Locke also balances this individuality by linking humans as God's common property, as God's body, so to speak. This sacrality, however, is to remain transcendent; that is, it cannot be embodied in any persons, group or political regimes.¹⁹

Pritchard indicates that Locke's characterization of the creaturehood of mankind has made it impossible to claim any divine intimacy between one particular person such as the 'King' as to justify power over another. She finds that Locke has distributed this aspect of being a creature of God just make sure that any claim of one person being divinely ordained as king or religious head being closer to divine goes against the idea of all of mankind being creature of God. The 'creaturehood' of man implicates that the claim such as the divinity of a particular body such as the church as to stand above the state, or even the claim that the state is a divine institution amounts to nothing but an undermining of the equal status of mankind by virtue of being under one creator with the same obligation.

Distancing the Individual from the Creator

Pritchard characterizes the relation between man and God in Locke's argument as a distant one, with no divine intimacy. If one claims to be more intimate with the divine or have the direct conferment of political power, there is the possibility of claiming that one's political authority is given and sanctioned by God. This was the case with Theory of Divine Monarchy. But, by the simple axiom that mankind as a whole is created by God, we can safely conclude that this axiom suffices to explain the obligations and equal status of mankind. But in the process, Pritchard accuses Locke of subtracting all that religious experience of transcendence has to do with mankind. To quote Pritchard

Although Locke's God is distant, we are allowed to console ourselves with the thought of being all God's children. The price of Locke's political theology is that one can no longer claim intimacy with the divine (there can be no visible installation of God's body on earth) or personal (Locke will not countenance "the god within" of so-called enthusiasts). Locke resembles an exorcist; convinced that divine imposters pose a threat to the bodies of others, he casts out the spirits of the possessed bodies of the kings and enthusiasts²⁰

Thus, Pritchard's allegation concerns what is absent in Locke's theological precepts. According to her allegation, what is omitted may be what would be expected of religion in its true essence. In other words, Locke's religious precepts had a role only to the extent that they serve Locke's liberal project of equality and liberty of mankind in its jural sense. Beyond the mere relational aspect of human obligation in the social sphere, the concept of God does not provide the mystical aspect of religion. She claims that Locke has used theology for his political purpose.

From Pritchard's discussion, it is preferably the case that Locke did not derive the political conclusions from the implication that the religious premises would have, but instead employ them as to suit his purpose. To quote Pritchard

Contra to those who insist that liberalism represents the official end of political theology, Locke makes his theological claims do political work. First, Locke and writers almost too numerous to mention the claim that God is utterly transcendent, and moreover, they exploit this claim as a way to curb human pretensions to divine illumination and thus the potentially intolerant and coercive measures such as conviction might engender. Locke's insistence that the deity does not inhere in the kings or scriptures or consecrated hosts voids attempts to wrap state power in a sacred cloak of divine right.²¹

¹⁹Pritchard, *Religion in Public*, 63

²⁰Pritchard, *Religion in Public*, 67

²¹Ibid., 78

Thus, Pritchard's allegation strengthens the case that Locke indeed has distanced his political thought from the core theological impulse. However, she also helps to present Locke as retaining Biblical premises for his own project. The *Two Treatises* has the political project as primary and not to conclude political postulates from the theological implications. This is perhaps the reason why Locke is silent on theological issues in his *Treatises*. His work seems to be intelligible with the most basic premises that serve only his political purpose of saying all are equal and at liberty. The absence of the intimate relation of individual and God, the subtraction of the divinity of political body and the role of church, and the elevation of individual's reason without taking up the deeper transcendental experience of the Divine, in relation to salvation, sin and meaning of life suggests that Locke has indeed secularized the sacred.

Transcendence and Locke's Political theory

Thus we have discussed that Locke's political theory as having an intricate relation with theology whether he is committed in its fullest sense or not. The theoretical change that occurred from pre-modern to modern has been discussed by James V. Schall who elaborates how the 'transcendence' or things beyond politics acts as a larger context upon which politics is defined in the pre-modern thinking. He illustrates why political theory needs to be framed by the larger definition of the 'Highest Good' and the very explanation of the purpose of life. By explicating how politics has claimed truth beyond its jurisdiction in the contemporary world, he argues for the need for a check on the jurisdiction of political theory. And by comparing the classical philosophers like Aristotle and Plato to the modern thinkers like Machiavelli and Hobbes, he introduces how political theory has been turned into philosophy itself, as a definition of reality. His discussion becomes an important point for examining the case of Locke at hand.

Politics and its limit

Schall alleges that modern philosophers have contributed to the removal of the theoretical check of politics. He alleges that they have removed the significance of the transcendental premises. Schall did not name Locke as one among those.²² This sets a stage to inquire if Locke can indeed be said to retain a transcendental check on politics as Schall has proposed.

In order to inquire, we need to see how Schall describes the 'transcendence' in classical philosophy gives politics its proper place. He refers to the Greek thinkers to claim that the inquiry into metaphysics precedes the political. In their context, the meaning and the role of politics was given by beginning with the inquiry to the fundamental questions of ethics. According to his suggestion, we have something to learn from the past. To him, politics is not everything, and this has been recognized in the classical political thought. Politics is part of a whole and the recognition of the limit of politics as a temporal arrangement is crucial to understand politics correctly.

Accordingly, Schall claims that there is a limit to what politics may claim. This limit is a result of the theoretical check which philosophy offers. He says that classical political philosophy has always recognized the higher disciplines such as metaphysics. He claims that the proper place of politics would only be understood with metaphysics explaining the whole within which politics as part of the whole.²³ Metaphysics explains what is given. Concerning the nature of 'man' he says, "Man's being was totally political, yet the political was ordered to what was beyond the political."²⁴ According to Schall metaphysical definition of man is prior to political philosophy. The task of political philosophy is not to give definitions of 'what is' regarding man and his purpose, or the nature of the highest Good. Referring to Aristotle regarding the task of metaphysics he says

In the classical philosophical tradition, this highest activity implied that however interior its depth in the rational being, the reach of reason transcends itself to seek to know a *what* is that the human intellect does not itself constitute in being. That is, the very concept of happiness, with which Aristotle began his reflections on ethical and political philosophy, includes both (1) the self-

²²James V. Schall, "Transcendence and Political Philosophy," *The Review of Politics* 55, no. 02 (1993): 255, doi:10.1017/s003467050001737x.

²³Schall, "Transcendence," 250,251

²⁴Ibid., 254

remaining the self, not a god or a beast (*Politics* 1253a29), and (2) the self reaching what is the highest cause in itself. The human intellect seeks to know what it can about the first cause because it knows finite things that do not fully explain either their existing at all or their existing as this and not that particular kind of a being.²⁵

The problem is that politics has crossed its limit. It has done so because metaphysics and ethics are no more precedence in the investigation of political themes in modern reasoning. In the process, politics has become 'the spurious description of reality.' It has replaced metaphysics. It attempts to explain everything that concerns about being human and claims to be the interpreter of what is good and wrong. In the process, what concerns humankind is turned into the problem of social arrangement merely and to give cheap answers to the most crucial questions about our nature.²⁶

Schall draws his readers to the danger that is involved in limiting the aspirations of man and reality to merely the temporal affairs and ordering of life. The modern political theory has treated politics as if it is the highest discipline i.e. it defines the rightness and wrongness of human actions by the standard derived from temporal needs. Ultimately, the moral horizon of life is narrowed down to the achievement of social order. This is not to undermine the importance of social order. This has happened because modern philosophers such as Hobbes and Machiavelli has undermined this theoretical aspect of metaphysics due to their scientific and positivistic principle. Concerning this, he says

This conclusion is, no doubt, the "lowering of sights" from Machiavelli that specifically rejected the personal incapacity of most men to be virtuous in the classical sense. The very notion of transcendence and a consequent distinction between good and evil knowable by the human intellect as given has disappeared. This difference between what men do "do" and what they ought to do is, in essence, the root of the difference between classical natural law and modern natural right.²⁷

The resultant problem is that the fundamental question of life is answered by politicians and determined by them. Schall claims, "Controversies about the place of Machiavelli in political philosophy essentially revolve around this consideration of giving to the politician the distinction between good and evil."²⁸ When the theoretical check on politics has been undermined, then it assumes the task of interpreting reality. But the reality it would project would be an outcome of human experience which anchors on the priority of materialistic ends. To quote Schall, "Politics, in its self-justification, when its intrinsic limitations are not intellectually understood, can become a spurious description of the order of reality, itself independent solely on human projections."²⁹ Schall wants to remind the modern political theorists that humanity cannot simply be limited to the materialistic ends. Rather humanity in the true sense of the term transcends their biological need and it is in understanding this in the metaphysical sense that politics as a temporal arrangement serve the purpose of serving such ideals. It is the very nature of human being to be part of a whole.³⁰

Schall makes a clear distinction between political philosophy and philosophy itself. He sees the danger of equating political philosophy as philosophy itself. So, the concern with Schall is in elaborating the case that politics is not to tell us how life should be nor what it is to be human. The importance for the recognition of the significance of things beyond politics is to understand that politics serve a higher discipline. This means that politics is part of the larger experience of man.

Thus, there is a problem with modern political philosophy or the way in which politics is theorized in modern times. He claims that the central questions that concern life namely, the question of what would constitute happiness is subsequently dealt in a very naïve manner. It is reduced to what would satisfy the social needs or human needs in society. This was not the case in the classical thought of Aristotle and Plato who recognized the higher discipline. Questions on virtue, happiness and the question on what is 'Good'

²⁵ Ibid., 249

²⁶ Ibid., 263

²⁷ Ibid., 257

²⁸ Ibid., 250

²⁹ Ibid., 248

³⁰ Ibid., 264

have been dealt by Greek thinkers in a way that encompasses the whole experience of man. There are things that human beings experience beyond the temporal needs.

Schall emphasizes what ought to be the question with which moral and political questions must begin. He finds it essential to give ethical questions, on good and virtue a place that was given in Aristotle.³¹ Moral deliberations at a philosophical level must guide politics. Without this politics is clueless as to what is good for humanity. He says, "The primary task of political philosophy is to situate life itself in an intelligible context, in the whole, so that politics, as itself something essential to this life, to this whole, need not, however, function as a substitute metaphysics"³² Thus, Schall concerning the danger of the implication of identifying political with transcendence Schall concludes,

To politicize what is not political is to subvert or destroy it. The first line of defense for anything, then, particularly for politics is theoretical. This position means that the contemplative order ultimately "upholds" the practical order by knowing what politics is in the order of things.³³

The problem of the Theoretical check-in Locke

In relation to Schall's claim regarding the limit of political theory, a question may be raised if Locke has recognized this limitation to politics. This is to ask if Locke's explanation of the social reality in his political argument reduces the nature of human being and his purpose to the question of human temporal arrangements.

We need to examine if there is a theoretical check on politics in Locke. The theological premises seem to have made him have a theoretical check. This is because, if Locke's political theory has religious assumptions as an essential constituent, then they would explain things which are beyond politics. Politics in this sense, for Locke, would be part of the whole. Theology would explain his context and the individual as in the theological framework of creation. It seems appropriate to say that the theological premises concerning man as a creature of God in the 'Great chain of being' serves as the metaphysics which explains 'what is'. If so, then Locke's political theory can be said to be in the category of the classical thinkers as Strauss has discussed.

The theological background would define what it is to be human; it explains the relation between man and other beings and also gives the normative principles upon which man must act towards others. It situates man in the 'whole' as Schall puts. Politics in this sense would be part of the whole experience of man. The conceptual roots reveal that Locke is indebted to this theological development for his political theory. If the very concept of individual and liberty seems to be intelligible only with the background. This is also implicated by the absence of any further conceptual definition one would have expected of a philosopher like Locke. Thus Roover's case has given us the plausibility of claiming that transcendence in Schall's sense is present in Locke.

However, one might not find this theoretical check as evidently clear as one would expect to see as Schall has described of in Greek political thought. This is because of the difference which Locke has from Aristotle and the classical thinkers. Aristotle's *polis* as Schall has put it proceeds with a metaphysical definition of man; and not only this, there is a whole lot of tradition which serves as the background to start his definition of a 'polis'. It also is the case that happiness or the definition of Good regarding a society that Aristotle proposes requires everyone to approve of it as profoundly true.³⁴ Locke has postulated the primacy of individuals connect in the creation of political society. It cannot be assumed that in spite of the transcendental propositions namely the religious premises, Locke's political theory cannot really be limited to politics as Schall has deemed essential.

This position is further weakened by Pritchard's case. We find that Locke's notion of the religious premises has made it impossible to claim a relation between divine and temporal power. He has rather

³¹Ibid.,259.

³² Ibid., 248

³³ Ibid., 248

³⁴James L. Wiser, *Political Philosophy: A History of the Search for Order* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 1-57

made, according to Pritchard, a distribution of sacrality to all individuals. This makes it impossible to divinize a political body over and above a particular individual will. In Locke, there is a confinement of politics to the temporal affairs. He describes it as purely a temporal affair nothing to do with the religious matter.³⁵ The very idea of the question of 'Highest Good' dissipates and the purpose of life has become an individualistic religious inquiry. What is implicit in Schall's case for the transcendence is social as prior to the individual, and the presumption that there is the highest 'Good' and common ethics shared by all. Yet the turn to the primacy of the individual, as found in his social contract, has made Locke's case different from the classical Greek and Medieval thinker which Schall discusses.

Conclusion

Thus, Locke, despite his religious premises, cannot be said to be in the category of the pre-modern thinkers and yet he is not secular in the absolute sense. The discussion has revealed the theoretical complexity in secularizing politics or in separating political theory from religious notions. Considering Locke as one of those great achievers in bringing about change in thinking politics, the discussion manifests how complicated modern political theory can be in its presumption. The problem is mainly related to the basis upon which politics is separated from religious or in other words the theoretical separation of the secular from the religious. The difficulty in modern theory is often in understanding the extent of human freedom, in terms of exercising religious freedom. The problem often returns to the question of what exactly defines the religious sphere as distinct from political matters. As aforementioned, the religious premises which are often disregarded in discussing Locke's theory turns out to be essential in his argument. Locke's *Two Treatises* serve as a significant subject of investigation for this issue as it reveals the necessity of theological premises despite its success as a modern political theory.

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³⁵ Locke, *The Two Treatises*, 286.