

Locke's Tolerance Theory and the Workmanship Argument

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John Locke's tolerance theory involves the core issue of the relationship between reason and belief in the philosophy of religion. However, there is always controversy over whether the scope of adaptation of this theory is within a religion, between religions, or in a broader field. Considering that the overall moral approach of Locke's philosophy requires the workmanship argument as a defense, and examining it from this point of view, it can be found that Locke's efforts to transcend Creationism with this argument have resulted in a successful breakthrough, which makes tolerance not only a religion topic, but also a social principle.

Keywords: John Locke, the workmanship argument, tolerance theory, moral approach

Introduction

Tolerance, as one of the most famous topics in Lockean study, has always had two core controversies, firstly, whether it refers to a principle within the same religious scope or to the criteria for handling relationship between religions; secondly, this principle can solely limit to the scope of religion, or it also can become a general principle in dealing with broader social and cultural relation. Researchers have a clear awareness of this issue. Zuckert's criticism of Waldron being particularly representative, he points out that the approach of limiting Locke's ideas to specific Western religious frameworks is not appropriate and should be replaced with more compatible concepts such as "religion" or "natural religion" (Zuckert, 2005, pp. 427-428). In Lockean study, researchers seem accustomed to confuse the use of specific religions with the general concept of "religion". However, they all may have overlooked that it was Locke who transitioned the perspective from specific religions to the general religion, and then to talk about tolerance issues. And the success of this measure is actually due to the fact that Locke's overall moral approach to his ideological system relies on the workmanship argument.

The Moral Necessity of the Workmanship Argument

Moral life is composed of the known world governed by reason and the unknown world governed by belief in Lockean philosophy. The first part points to moral commands based on revelation. The second part is moral knowledge based on human reason, which includes two functions, intuition and reasoning. Intuition is a direct act of reason to accurately and consistently accept the provisions of natural law, without the need to rely on other

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rational assumptions. Reasoning, on the other hand, is an indirect act based on different propositions and evidence, and it is the most reliable and important means of expanding human knowledge.

Moral commands provide a solid metaphysical premise for moral life, and moral knowledge actively expands the practical field of an agent from the perspective of empirical epistemology, and further expands the overall human life. In this regard, moral life bridges the gap between reason and revelation, providing guarantees for the integrity and continuity of humanity. But a further question arises: how can we guarantee the effectiveness of morality?

The workmanship argument is in this very moment introduced into moral life. Locke argues as follow:

The idea of a Supreme being, infinite in power, goodness, and wisdom, whose workmanship we are, and on whom we depend; and the idea of ourselves, as understanding rational beings, being such as are clear in us, would, I suppose, if duly considered and pursued, afford such foundations of our duty and rules of action, as might place morality among the sciences capable of demonstration. (Locke, 1963, p. 368)

In this context, the Supreme being is an epistemological concept, and the moral phenomenon of humans being able to obtain the obligations and rules of practical behavior through reason points to an ontological premise. If the Supreme being wants to serve as both epistemological and ontological object, then it is workmanship that can connect these two different fields.

The workmanship argument compares the Supreme being to the divine workman, creating this world with his ideas, and therefore this world is his unquestionable property. As one of the creations, humans also belong to him. Due to the fact that humans have the analogous ability, when they make things with their own ideas, they have ownership of their works as well. Locke reiterates this argument in *Two Treatises on Government*, and he once made another version in his early natural law papers, in which the Supreme being is compared to the first mover.

There are three elements in working or making, namely creation, will-driven body, and action organized according to reason. The formation of this argument must also meet two conditions. Firstly, the prototype concept of our maker must be a standard description in common usage. Secondly, there must be such a Supreme being, so that the term “workman” truly refers to it (Tully, 2014, pp. 53-55). Such a supreme being is clearly confirmed in *Two Treatises*, and Locke acknowledges the existence of a “workman”, it is said “the ordinary appellations of God in Scripture is, ‘God our maker’, and ‘the Lord our maker’” (Locke, 1963, p. 252).

Under this argument, Locke affirmed the completeness of species in the world from the perspective of creative perfection, laying the foundation for the chain of physical existence. In this context, reality is simply a way to express the similarities and differences between existing things for the convenience. This phenomenon is summarized by Locke as the “nominal essence”. In this regard, the naturalistic tendency reflected in the creationism of the species chain is the key to the formation of the essentialism. Locke does not agree with the definition of “human” under realism and essentialism, which will inevitably limit the exploration of the rich connotation and value of human beings.

On the contrary, Locke focuses on the special moral attributes of human. The dual feature of human categorizing species through abstract abilities and drawing boundaries for their own species through reason makes them unique distinguishing from all other species, which gives them an unparalleled moral position. Locke combines the Greco-Hebrew viewpoints of human as rational creature and the image of Creator, proposing human to be “a corporeal rational creature” (Locke, 1963, p. 298). The term “corporeal” refers to species similarity,

while “rationality” is a consideration of the limit of abstract ability. And what is the minimum limit of abstract ability? The answer is the insight into the Creator of this world, which is a moral similarity shared by everyone (Waldron, 2002). In fact, Locke transitions this issue to moral argumentation from an anti-naturalistic perspective. Moral approach allows Locke to break through to an open realm, thereby gaining an unchanging natural foundation for the understanding of “humanity” while also gaining room for generative change.

Reconciling the Workmanship Argument With Creationism

In addition to the workmanship argument of combining creation and rationality to infer the similarity between human beings and the Supreme being, there is also another way to argue, that is, to infer the similarity between human image and Creator. “Species similarity” cannot be established in this model, because it cannot prove the species consistency between Creator and human. However, according to David Hume later, the concept of causality from experience formed by the similarity appearing in custom cannot prove something “single, individual, without parallel, or specific resemblance” (Hume, 2007, p. 26). Therefore, species similarity cannot prove the moral attributes of an agent from the Supreme being.

Creationism in the *First Treatise* is the theoretical premise to ensure the re-connection between supernatural and nature. In the *Second Treatise*, however, Locke turns to the workmanship argument as he must deal with the ownership issues brought by subjective philosophy and Creationism. But this potential idea may only be an ideal, as there is a fundamental difference between creation and making. In fact, he has once pointed out the difference between four causal relationships—creation, generation, making, alteration—in *Essay on Human Understanding*. We call something creation only “when the thing is wholly made new, so that no part thereof did ever exist before”, and we call something making only “when the cause is extrinsic, and the effect produced by a sensible separation” (Locke, 1963, p. 43).

Realizing the difference between creation and making, Locke attempts to reconcile them in moral significance. When discussing the nature of matter and mind, he believes that acknowledging the eternal nature of matter does not negate the existence of a creator, but it does negate the most important work it makes, namely creation. If creation is the most important work—but not the only one—it means that making is broader in scope than creation. The reason creation to be the most important is that it endows people with a moral status, which cannot be given by the similarity argument of making. But making allows one to imagine the Supreme being to be other forms beyond creation. More precisely, creationism still relies on specific religion, while the workmanship argument liberates the cognition and imagination of the Supreme being. This scope is theism in a broad sense. This statement actually echoes Locke's epistemological viewpoint, in which the Supreme being is the result of the application of infinite ideas in space and time, and the union of ability and eternity becomes the cause of everything, that is, “omnipotence”, and the reflection of omnipotence becomes “omniscience”. This purely epistemological deduction cannot be equated with any specific religion, therefore, it is appropriate to call Locke a deist.

Tolerance Theory in Narrow Sense

The inference above goes far beyond the scope of theology, and the concept of “religion” that leans towards social and cultural connotations is more suitable for the new trend in natural and social views. Locke has to seriously consider the issues between different beliefs under new background, and “tolerance” becomes his general standpoint when dealing with this issue.

Stanton (2006, p. 84) explicitly reminded that Locke's theory of tolerance should be systematically understood, and all his propositions should be regarded as elements of this theory. Investigating into the theory of tolerance solely from a religious perspective, it can only provide discrimination between different doctrines and faith truths, and such judgments are likely to be arbitrary. Chap. 18 to 20 of the fourth volume of *Understanding* respectively discuss three issues: faith and reason, as well as their respective scopes, fanaticism. As the conclusion of Locke's epistemology, the focus is on refuting religious fanaticism and arbitrariness that may arise in faith. These three chapters seem to be irrelevant to the composition of knowledge, or at least detached from it, which is the main theme of volume 4. But it is precisely this treatment that provides evidence for Locke's transition from epistemology to ontology, revealing his three purposes in dealing with the issue of understanding: firstly, this may be the demand of his times, it is an antidote to religious passion in his ethics of faith (Kotwick, 2016, p. 104). Secondly, this may be the boundary between the fallacy of knowledge in terms of motivation and acquisition methods. Thirdly, the concept of the object of religious belief cannot be found in epistemology, and it is necessary to turn to revelation to obtain it. Therefore, moral argument is put on the agenda after epistemology, and it is the correction of arbitrary judgments that may be caused by religious enthusiasm. Philosophers after Locke, especially Kant, basically advanced this idea and went further.

For Locke, the theory of tolerance is especially about the relationship between religion and the political community, in which knowledge both are applied for common good. On the one hand, in the time before Locke, Christianity had absolute influence in political ethics, and the actual political order was combined with this spiritual order. Therefore, the political community may be understood as an organization related to the core purpose of religion, which is not limited to seeking its present welfare, but also preparing for the welfare of the future (Stanton, 2006, p. 86). Therefore, the collusion between the political community and religion on the issue of happiness is the historical reason for this mixed situation. Hobbes, as Locke's main critic, was more or less trapped in this dilemma in his authoritarian tendencies when dealing with related issues (cf. Edwards, 2009). On the other hand, the main difference in the debate between religions lies in whether the transcendental affairs emphasized by a certain religious doctrine can construct hierarchical differences in reality.

By this taken, refuting religious fanaticism is clever treatments by Locke to cut off the connection between knowledge and specific religious elements. Such elements are committed to deepening faith rather than increasing knowledge, and therefore cannot serve as the basis for assuming supernatural understanding advantages and governance. And this is the key to eliminating religious politics in specific religious contexts. In the theory of natural law later on, the orientation of complete secularization and rationalization of political communities allows Locke to clearly declare that its power should not override spiritual affairs.

Tolerance Theory in Broad Sense

Locke declares his tenet as "I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other" (Locke, 1963, p. 9). But how does Locke distinguish them? The answer is when he implements the idea of "agreement" in the field of epistemology to the idea of "social contract" in the field of practice, afterwards they will naturally be distinguished.

Individuals initially have perfect moral abilities in natural states, only obeying the judgments of natural law, and thus have complete freedom, which also means natural equality between different individuals. However, due to the methodological characteristics of Locke's fusion of empirical epistemology and moral voluntarism, they

both cannot exceed their own idealism. Their theoretical construction is limited within themselves, resulting in no common standard for the construction of relationships between individuals. Sociality, as a way of human existence, is a set principle for handling relationships between individuals. However, Locke differs from previous interpretations of sociality in that he no longer portrays it in terms of moral reality, but sees it as a functional attribute. Social contract is an inevitable choice in this context, and the political community immediately emerges as a carrier of “corrected justice”. The three classic categories of natural rights: life, freedom, and property, in fact, contain an advancing logic. Life is a metaphysical basis for moral life, freedom to be the active expression of this form, and property is the result of practice of life under free choices. It is the main content of “corrected justice” in political communities, and also of the goal to make social prosperity under consensus.

On this basis, a political community should prevent the disorderly state. Furthermore, Locke makes a clear distinction between the responsibilities and purposes of the government and the church. For personal happiness, the former involves the happiness of this life, while the latter is related to the happiness of the afterlife. As for standardization, the former plays a normative role in the field of public affairs, while the latter belongs to the guidance of the private spiritual field.

Once this principle is established, the church completely loses its legitimacy to interfere in public affairs. Then the only thing left may be government intervention in faith. According to Locke, when the power of a government official extends to the level of personal beliefs, he goes beyond his own power. For the vitality and power of true religion lies solely in inner conviction (Locke, 1963, p. 11). In addition, there is only one truth, and once officials interfere with faith, people lose the possibility of spontaneously seeking it. And if people's beliefs are subject to authority, they will lose their faith without doubt.

It seems that the principles of happiness, equality, and justice in constructing a secular order of life are inevitably co-constructed by the two traditions of reason and faith to Locke. On the issue of happiness, Locke essentially proposed a dual happiness theory: the moral non-realistic common good pursued by the political community and the maximum good with moral reality. The common good and maximum good correspond to the sacred and secular order “righteousness” and “justice”. Justice is both the lowest guarantee and the highest ideal of justice.

It was during this process that the historical cause and starting object of tolerance—specific religions—began to gradually diminish its position. With the help of the workmanship argument, Locke finally achieved the intention of accommodating faith with reason, thus transforming tolerance into a purely civil affairs theory. What's more, government will strive to provide assistance to citizens in their spiritual life, by building different social cultures to help people pursuit maximum good. In this sense, the value of the government is to provide an ideal way of life. Tolerance has thus become a broad social and cultural principle, as different concepts have equal rights in proving themselves to be an ideal moral life.

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