



## Review Paper

# Locke, natural law, and the basis of religious sincerity

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## Abstract

*This paper unveils the belief that there exist some natural duties that individuals are obliged to fulfill. This permits one to abandon the hopeless question of sovereignty in the state. The various means to gain access to the content of natural law with complete certainty is also an indispensable preoccupation. First, the possibility of arriving at this knowledge is thanks to the dependence on the natural faculties of the individual. Second, by demonstrating that God exists while laying much emphasis on the argument from design. An omniscient God who is the creator of the universe and everything in it would not have created human beings without giving them certain objectives to attain or purposes in their lives to be fulfilled. Individuals are expected to refer to their natural duties. The content of our natural duties is deduced through a rational reflection on one's own human nature. These rational and inherent reflections are those that force people to act through three different natural duties. First, people always owe themselves the duty to ponder over the creations of God based on his knowledge that is manifested and evident in nature. The second duty is to be involved in praiseworthy activities involving God worship, adoration and honor which an omnipotent and benevolent God that he is deserves. Third, man must not only be concerned about the satisfaction of material needs as a prerequisite to a happy life but should equally partake in societal activities through speech, language, and the preservation of his life in particular and those of others in general.*

**Keywords:** Natural law, sincerity, state, god, religion, Locke, society.

## Introduction

From time in memoriam, many thinkers were of the opinion that John Locke was among one of the most prominent thinkers who spearheaded the Enlightenment ideologies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in various aspects of the society. Nowadays, the opinion according to which it is believed that Locke still remains one of the most influential authors of the Enlightenment is incontestable because of this primordial and essential part he played in the Enlightenment in designing the major tenets of the Age of Reason.

This catalyst role is evident because his principles were studied, digested and discussed in many cafes and salons by both the high ranking personalities and those of the lower class. This significance was equally portrayed upon the political, moral, and religious life of the people of that epoch.

A similar perspective is portrayed by Stephen who considered Locke's works as "the principal keynote of the eighteenth century England in terms of speculation<sup>1</sup>".

His works were also constantly cited and widely read by the American writers of that era, and to some extent by the modern society thinkers. This gross indebtedness results from the political, religious and philosophical essentiality of his views.

## The tenability of natural law and God's existence

Locke reconstructs his political thought by returning to the question of natural law. In this perspective, he portrayed that the duty of a particular person is when he or she has the right to practice any given religion as he deems fit. Inner judgment is perceived as the goal of a sincere religious practice. This is because the visibility of such an occurrence appears unreal especially when a sincere religious practice has to be mingled with the existing sovereign authority. The resolution to be derived in this case is that, since there is the uncertainty existing in merging the above together, judgments mixed with actions are necessary in relation to a sincere religious practice, while at the same time implementing respect for the just wishes of the authority.

In order to be able to ascend to religion of any sort, one needs to pass through a natural law which determines the course for particular actions. Equally, since the approach to any political authority is preoccupied by the prevention of practices and behaviors that are not in line with the dictates of natural law, it will therefore be more advisable to harmonize these two in order to comfortably acknowledge the right to tolerance especially religious with more emphasis on freedom. It is thanks to the indispensable role of the natural law that permits one to be able to resolve some plaguing issues involving the various expectations of the civil law and the morality of religious

worship in terms of its activities and moral character. The problematic nature presented by the Tracts precisely in chapter two of the text, where the right to religious freedom to be limited to judgment and the problem of attempting to amplify and justify the existence of “absolute sovereign political authority” are revealed. The result of this being the right to the toleration and freedom of religion as a simple demonstration of natural law serving as a remedy to the problem related to sovereignty. Second, it is resolved by the confidence that the political authority’s version cannot be justifiable merely for justifying sake, but it is always depending on how far the government’s goals are attainable being a precondition for this establishment and last, the conviction that such power manifested cannot be an absolute power.

However, in relation to the aspirations of civil law directed towards the protection of the citizens and the enjoyment of their wealth and goods within the state, the civil authority bases his interests on the moderation of unexpected activities thereby rendering religious freedom justifiable within the state. This assertion is a reminder of the fact that it denies total reliance that sovereignty is what actually determines the true religious actions of choosing the right form of religious worship expected to be implemented by the state. However, what causes this leap is the return to a policy of dependence on the natural law. Here, the idea that the government has as an obligation to force ceremonies deemed necessary is opened for rejection on the grounds that, any magistrate can decide to force material obligations on his people as he deems necessary which will eventually tamper with freedom of conscience and result to sin. In relation to religious laws preoccupied by ceremonies they are considered necessary and ordered because they are not hypothetical<sup>2</sup>.

Similarly, another argument which portrays the difficulty to determine the disparity between the views advanced in relation to the question of political authority is the exceptional assertion connected to the business of the magistrate which involves the common good of the people, protection, and peace preservation. The spiritual or private good of man is therefore excluded from what the magistrate ought to seek. The kick-off point concerning the difference revealed above is on the notion of political authority and its justifiability. Concerning the goals aimed by civil law, no particular and clear difference is noticed given that, the presence of the magistrate above everyone else is to guarantee the common good since God prescribes the presence of three significant elements being order, society and government within the state. A similar assertion related to political authority experienced with the magistrate’s obligation is to ensure the good, to preserve and maintain among people.

This point of departure is evident from a second position. For instance, the discussion progresses from the declaration that “God wishes that there should be order in the society” and finally concludes with the statement that, “the existence of the sovereign in the society is obligatory” and that since the

magistrate serves as the sovereign within the state, his duty is therefore the regulation of any actions judged by him to be indifferent and worth regulating. That is why the principal purpose for establishing government is to attain this goal. This statement implies that the aspect of political authority does not in any way involve the different ways that the magistrate deems liable to be regulated and that is why the idea of sovereignty suddenly disappears from the stage. A clearer understanding unveils the belief that there also exist some natural duties that individuals are obliged to fulfill as members of the society. This clear cut assertion is what permits one to abandon the hopeless question of sovereignty in the state. At this level, the method through which an individual can have access to the content of natural law with complete certainty is revealed as such a possibility to arrive at this type of knowledge is entirely dependent on the natural faculties of the individual.

The justification of God’s existence is of primordial importance especially when laying much emphasis on the argument from design. The main conviction being that, an omniscient God who is the creator of the universe and everything in it would not have created human beings, especially, without giving them certain objectives to be attained or purposes to be fulfilled. Such purposes individuals are expected to fulfill refer to what Marshall termed our natural duties<sup>3</sup>. There exists the possibility to deduce the content of our natural duties through a rational reflection on one’s own human nature, given that, human nature is one of the purposes of God to have created human beings as they are. These rational and inherent reflections of individuals, as well as the power which forces individuals to act in one way or the other which urges different people, gives the possibility for individuals to recognize the fact that, there are three different natural duties to be exercised by individuals. First, people possess the knowledge which permits them to wonder about God’s projects and realizations, obliging them to praise God, honor and glorify him for manifesting and justifying his greatness as a wonderful creator. This obligation causes one to go beyond the search for material or physical needs required for the preservation of life and society in order to be fully prepared and engage expression, communication and action as means to preserve oneself and the maintenance of the established society<sup>4</sup>.

In the same point of view, the part played by language and speech as a proof to the natural nature of the society is a similarity to the one propounded by Aristotle when he confirms that there is always an aim for whatever nature creates. Fortunately, human beings are the only creatures who possess the power of language especially speech that eases understanding and the ability to distinguish between the expected and unexpected, as well as identifying the just and the unjust actions in the society<sup>5</sup>. Related to this mentioned belief based on the political deductions as a result of speech, is the assertion which portrays that words can sometimes represent the opposite of things or actions such as the good that can be replaced by the evil and vice-versa. For these reasons, it is

essentially important to identify the three natural duties being i. the duty to worship ii. the duty to preserve one's society iii. the duty to preserve oneself<sup>6</sup>. Such a reason better explains why the discussion of these three major duties of nature matters so much as it summarizes all the requirements men owe God, others and what they owe themselves.

Consequently, given that one of the duties individuals possess is that of the preservation of themselves and one another, they therefore have as a duty in addition to this, the establishment of the type of government which eases the process for them to attain their ends in life. This could be understood as the prevention of the citizens from establishing an authoritarian figure. Thus, the reliance on natural law is a practical instrument that facilitates the fulfillment of one's natural duties.

Here, worship appears to be a duty which people owe both to God and other persons when categorically stated and supported by Aquinas that, men are obliged to belong to a religious society in order to interact with others for better clarification, to settle their differences with men and to give God deserved worship shamelessly depending on the degree of his worthiness<sup>7</sup>.

Another evidence of strong belief in the duty of "God worship" is because it serves as a prerequisite for anybody to receive the protection of the civil laws. That is why article 101 of the Carolina Constitution stipulates that, for anybody who is more than seventeen years to benefit from or enjoy protection by the law, or to deserve an honorable or profitable position in the society, the person must first of all belong to a particular church or profession with his name registered in one religion at a time. To sum up, ceding ourselves to authoritarianism or absolutism is to be abandoned to a person's duty to preserve himself since the it is necessary to be free from absolute and arbitrary power that ensure man's preservation, which he cannot be separated from.

### **The Similarities and Dissimilarities between Natural Law and Religious Sincerity**

Since the question of tolerance handles aspects related to nature and religion, it is therefore important to highlight the extent to which these two aforementioned concepts are related and differ. The main reasons justifying these claims appear complex to establish especially when consulting earlier works. First, it is believed that natural law has a significant role to play as far as religious sincerity is concerned as a component of sincere religion. This component could be better understood as "constitutive" which teaches us about the various actions that are involved in a particular activity. This constitutive aspect could be opposed to actions considered as "regulative"<sup>8</sup>. The term "sincerity" is also closely linked to the etymology of the Latin word *sincerus*, being a terminology used at that time to describe in detail, the inner content of a container as either sound, pure or clean. Thus, in relation to human beings, a sincere person could be understood as one who does not nurse or harbor any evil intentions.

This relationship is so because, for any behavior considered as religiously sincere, it must first of all be closely in connection with what is prescribed by the natural law. For one to be sure of deriving a proper difference between natural actions and religious actions, it is important to begin by deciding in clearer terms what a sincere action entails. First, sincerity is better understood to mean the types of action that are easily or visibly communicated through expression, especially when such an action effectively portrays an individual's state of mind or how the person feels. Here, sincerity is seen to be closely connected to truthfulness which is termed as the feeling or belief that is honestly reported<sup>9</sup>. The reconstruction of political thought gave the way forward to resolve the problem characterizing natural law and sincere religion. What appears as a possible solution to this issue at stake is the reconstituting of political thought in the domain of natural law. Religious liberty is taken simultaneously in the sense that, what renders a religious act as such is what relies solely and necessarily based on religious grounds<sup>10</sup>. So, the right to religious liberty must be protected from any intervention of a particular right.

If these cases are taken into account, the various rights enjoyed by the individuals in terms of religious liberty will obviously give room for a system of "non-interference" to be adopted by everyone. This new system of non-interference is what renders it as an additional or extra-legal power. In this sense, since an additional legal power can hardly be granted to both the other individuals and the established sovereign authority, it is therefore believed that one out of the two propositions should be eradicated. It is because of this desire to relinquish one of the propositions that religious freedom consists only in a liberty of judgment by excluding the second proposition. Condemning the government's intention and act of forcing the citizens to be part of a favored religion is permitted because the issue of conscience is very delicate and must be dealt with<sup>11</sup>. Whatever the case may be, what does matter is the fact that, the actions that characterize religious worship are only necessary if and only if the worshipper who belongs to that particular religion deems it to be necessary. Finally, the self-realization about the recognition of the right to a religious liberty that embodies religious actions is sure since through the call of the natural law a possible alternative that goes a long way to harmonize religious freedom and issues concerning political authority are realized. Here, sincere religion is fully guaranteed and depends on the natural law prescriptions. That is why natural law greatly limits the manifestation of sincere religious practice.

Through the appeal to natural law a possible alternative is met that goes a long way to harmonize religious freedom and issues concerning political authority. That is why religious worship stands as homage to God who is adored in an acceptable manner, a connected limited to God and existing only between him and the individual, is not related in any means with the connection existing between the governor or a neighbor which may produce actions that disturb society. This indirectly implies that, people are meant to be left on their own freewill to practice

their religion since it is not the concern of others. This non-interference actually shows the indifference and lack of concern when it comes to such an affair which touches actions of individuals involving the worship of God. Concerning the reason justifying the toleration of religious worship, it is a necessary practice which does not in any way produce actions that disturb the peace and tranquility of the community or violate the rights of other people.

A similar observation that is evident relates to the belief that, various opinions and speculations and the practice of religious worship, all merit an absolute right to be tolerated within the community. A sincere worship is inherent in religion as well as the form of worship that is characterized by the individual's manifestation of pride, ambition, revenge and even the other emotional aspects combined. When this emotional combination is realized, then the person develops consciousness of what is permissible and what is not, which amount to his being considered as innocent or guilty in face of his various actions<sup>12</sup>. This explains why sincere worship is regarded as the practice which is limited to reasons that are peaceful as it attempts to respect the rights of other individuals and groups. The domains where perfection and total freedom exists are religious worship and speculation and not the one derived from the magistrate's command that does not expose signs of guilt or sin as long as they are sincerely done basing on man's knowledge and inner conviction. However, in a case where revenge or pride is combined with conscience to produce guilt, then, the judgment day will determine the punishment.

The technique to be implemented by the government when it concerns the affair related to catholic worship calls on the attention of the government to be careful not to tolerate the doctrine of the Catholics because loyalty to the pope comes before the adherence to the civil authorities in place. Given that people always profess their religions in a whole and interpret things wholly, it results to the juxtaposition of other harmful doctrines with speculations and religious practices that lead to more destruction of the society in which they are part of, like the case of the roman Catholics who are answerable to the pope than paying allegiance to the prince. Therefore, the act of mixing these aspects with religious practices must not be tolerated by the magistrate<sup>13</sup>. The conviction derived here is the acknowledgement that there exist inadequacies as far as religious sincerity is concerned. Given that such shortcomings are evident in sincere religion, the authority of the pope is not therefore recognized as part and parcel of a sincere religious worship which merits itself as a right and protection from non-interference. Nonetheless, other acts of Catholic worship merit to be tolerated because even if an individual professes sincere and conscious God worship under the guidance of the pope, there will be nothing wrong since it is done sincerely while appealing to conscience to, prevent acting as a bad example to the prince or to a neighbor.

The major concern is that, religious sincerity is inherently linked to and limited by the prescriptions of the existing natural law.

For instance, it is believed that, because natural law which originates from God preventing people from acting in a manner that could harm other individuals, no one can believe that when he hurts one another's natural rights, it is actually an act that pleases God. Sincere religion is better experienced when judgment is merged with action without underestimating the necessity for order within the society. When this is finally achieved, then the goals of individuals and groups will be fulfilled for the simple fact that, judgment which is an inner conviction will surely assure personal salvation. Actions on the other hand, shall be guaranteed and limited by the natural law derived from God. This will remind individuals to do just the things that are pleasant to God and consequently the same for the civil political authority. When this becomes effective, social order will set in because peace will be enjoyed by the individuals in terms of the civil and ecclesiastic perspectives.

Here, more emphasis based on the refusal of the government's interference into religious aspects is revealed. The reason for this is because, if it is universally applied by the government, then, the outcomes will be very disastrous<sup>14</sup>. To avoid such deplorable consequences from occurring, it is necessary for individuals to practice their various form of worship that they deem fit for their salvation. On the contrary, if everyone is given the opportunity to impose their religions on other people, then the outcome will be the probability of introducing many fake or false religions on others. This idea of universalizing argument is the emphatic condemnation of the use of any form of force or power as a pretext to ensure the progress of the people's religions and worship.

Although in the context of a dictatorial government, there will be a denial that it is actually acting on such a rule, it will instead be giving the impression that the rule it acts upon is that which seeks to use force as an indispensable means to promote true religious practice in the state. The problem about this version of consequentialism and the reason for using force are not revealed as the different governments may not be able to act based on it. On the other hand, those who prefer to believe more in persecution would develop a different thesis according to which they can declare that the real guarantee for the promotion and realization of a true religion is only a reality if found in a situation where everyone takes it upon himself to impose his own particular religion on other people. From this context, the use of force now becomes an advantageous method to attain this end. Here, those who believe in the role of force are convinced about its efficacy when true religion is expected to be put in place<sup>15</sup>. This believe in force is actually what condemns in all its forms and for whatever reasons warranting its application.

The justifications for universally denying the use of force, results from the believe that, some power holders implement it through illegal means which are the outcomes of a bad judgment in relation to the consequences, whether perceived to be good or bad after the evaluation of its results. If judgment is prioritized, then, the belief in the enforcement of coercion becomes an idea

to be condemned completely. However, there is the conviction that, if everyone respects the rule of avoiding the application of force in religious issues, then it is probable that they will be free to judge and conclude on what they as individuals deem as the true religion and will happily profess it<sup>15</sup>. On the contrary, if their judgments about the true religion turn out to be false, then the result will be obviously faulty. The applicability of the rule based on the enforcement of a true religion is liable enough to result to the evil outcomes just as the rule which is related to the idea of individuals who may for one reason or the other implement and enforce their own religion. The burden of this assertion is the inability and the absence of various arguments justifying why there should be an assessment of the rules and the results derived when adopted by those who judge under conditions which appear unrealistic.

Even those who persecute others in terms of religious lines or judgments would not be implicated in these statements. The opportunity such a plunderer will use can be that, since those who make mistakes when judging what the true religion involves are supposed to avoid imposing their faulty convictions on others, it gives room for the dictator to emphasize on the idea that he is the only one who knows the true religion and as a result, he deserves the pride of place and the authority to impose such a true religion. This weakness that characterizes the argument on universality is what permits religious zealots to intend punishing those who violate religious doctrines mistakes on the pretext that the arguments which merit universal applicability do not in any way refer to them. The application of the idea of “juridical equality” that preaches equality among men to be considered as equals under a set of rules obliged to be well interpreted and obeyed, serves as an obvious attempt to remedy this plaguing issue of zealots who used them as an opportunity to persecute others.

Consequently, given that it is declared emphatically that we are all equal in face of every other individual in the society, no one therefore, has the right under whatever pretext or circumstances to treat the other person unfairly because all the rules and laws promulgated are meant for everyone to obey equally. That explains why there is the need to implement only the rules that are universally inclined. That is, the rules that are supposed to be meant for every individual irrespective of age, gender, origin, social status and class. Legislatively, if the type of rules to be adopted which concern everyone is put in place, then, no one would promulgate a law or apply a rule that will likely encourage the imposition of a true religion on the other people who are believed to be professing the false religion. From this perspective, it will be possible that, those who claim to be shareholders of the true religion will be forced to decline from embarking on the imposition of force on other persons. That notwithstanding, the argument on universality especially with the emphasis on general rules for the common good, if well analyzed, reveal the third argument as a clear cut solution to the problem posed by the presence of religious zealots and persecutors in relation to the question of enforcing or imposing

the true religion on those who are thought to have been exercising false judgments about religious affairs and professing the false religion in the state<sup>16</sup>.

## Conclusion

For any action portrayed publicly or out of the public by an individual to be considered as either a religious act or a conscientious act or one related to conscience, then, that act must be perceived carefully and adequately by that particular person as either a moral or religious act because, such acts whether they are seen as conscience derived or of being derived from a religious origin can all be ensured if they are based on any of these grounds<sup>17</sup>. That is, if they stem from religious or moral justifications. No matter the actions manifested all depends on the grounds under which they were founded. In order to redress this idea of grounds and the origins of the various actions, individuals hereby deserve some degree of extra legal power to be exercised. Such a power needs to be covered by the sovereign authority, without which they will not be able to act freely and choose from various alternatives, even in matters connected to religious worship or other religious concerns demanding the reaction of the individual<sup>18</sup>. Also, in order to embark on such a new conception of the above, we need to conscientize the entire political community. Religious liberty is solely the freedom of inner or “inward judgment”, that is, the liberty to judge or to choose the type of action to portray, but not instead the freedom to act upon the judgment one decides to carry out. This last answer is what the political debates experienced in nowadays democracy could likely face in determining the true character that is inherent in it<sup>19</sup>. In addition, it can still declared, in other words, when referring to religious liberty in the real sense, it means the liberty that is limited only to judgment and does not in any way have to be extended to actions<sup>20</sup>.

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