

## Review

Raul Raunić  
**Filozofija politike Johna Locke**  
**(Political Philosophy of John  
 Locke)**

Politička kultura, Zagreb, 2009, 273 pp.

One of the oddities of both Croatian political science and its social and political philosophy is that, although in the last 20 years there has been an increase in scholarly interest on the origins of liberal thought, the political philosophy of John Locke has been, more or less, completely neglected. This oddity is even more obvious when we take into account the flourishing cottage industry in Locke's political ideas abroad and compare it with the fact that in Croatia no major studies on Locke have been published and none of his political works have been translated. Seen in this light, Raunić's book is a welcomed corrective to this oddity.

The book itself can be read in two ways: either as a comprehensive overview of Locke's political thought or as an attempt to restore Locke's crown as a forefather of liberal tradition. Ambitious in its scope, but modest in its originality, the book does a much better job at giving us a detailed insight in all the major arguments in Locke's political philosophy than it does in offering a fresh perspective on his major political texts. Well-written and well-argued, the book covers all the important parts of Locke's political thought, with

a special emphasis on the issues of equal liberty and toleration. It offers both the historical context and a deep analysis of Locke's core political ideas, as well as an insight into his intellectual debt to other authors (especially Tyrell) and a helpful comparison of Locke's own theory to that of Filmer and Hobbes as his main targets. The best part of the book is the chapter on the question of legitimacy of political resistance (144-167) where Raunić not only gives a detailed account of the development and major changes in Locke's own position on this question, but also clearly illustrates the important theoretical innovations introduced by Locke.

The author is much less convincing when defending the book's main thesis of separating 'liberal' from 'non-liberal' Locke. It is true that from the 1960s on, influential interpreters of Locke's political ideas repeatedly warned us that, when thinking of Locke as a 'grandfather' of liberal tradition, we should also take into account those parts of his philosophy that, from today's perspective, seem to have no place under the liberal heading. This trend started with Peter Laslett's discovery, later reaffirmed by Richard Ashcraft, that Locke's major political text *Two Treatises on Government* was written before and not after 1688, and therefore could not serve as an afterthought and justification of the Glorious Revolution. Locke was not writing a liberal manifesto for future generations, but offering a theoretical advocacy of Whig politics in the concrete context of the English succession debate. One would expect that if the author's goal is to rethink and affirm Locke's liberal credentials, he would be ready to get his hands dirty and get into the ring with the interpretations that

put those credentials into doubt. However, Raunić seems very reluctant to do that.

Probably the most important attack on the easy translatability of Locke's political thought into the contemporary liberal vocabulary came from John Dunn's 1969 book which showed convincingly that Locke's ideas could not and should not be separated from their deeply theological background. Additional weight to this line of argument came from Jeremy Waldron's insistence that Locke's central idea of human equality is incoherent if separated from its theist origins and, latest, Timothy Stanton's claim that the nature of political authority for Locke, both in *Two Tracts* and in *Two Treatises*, is necessarily divine in its nature. Raunić does mention the Strauss vs. Dunn debate on the importance of religious background for the coherence of Locke's position (36) and refers to Waldon's book on several occasions, but avoids addressing this important issue in more detail. This is surprising given that a large part of his main thesis rests on the idea that the core of Locke's political argument can be consistently 'secularized'.

The major weakness of this book is the author's unwillingness to take sides and get polemical on some of the main issues pertaining to his main thesis. For example, he mentions Locke's influence on the framers of the American Declaration of Independence (167), but neglects the fact that the true weight of this influence has been repeatedly questioned, first and foremost by John Dunn. More importantly, it is odd that a book which aims to show the importance of Locke's political thought for the development of liberal tradition devotes only the final four pages to both classical and contemporary liberal thinkers' debt to

Locke. When discussing Locke's theory of property, Raunić again avoids the controversial issues. He disregards the fact that both the libertarian camp and the egalitarian camp have called upon Locke as their patron saint on issues of private property and welfare rights. He also ignores one of the main debates on Locke's theory of property in the last two decades: its importance in providing an apology for English colonial policies. By completely evading the issue of colonial controversy initiated by such authors as James Tully, Kathy Squadrito and William Uzgalis, Raunić turns a blind eye to one of the more darker aspects of Locke's political theory. Raunić's reluctance to take sides is further revealed in his use of secondary sources. His tactics is that of an intellectual magpie: referring to authors such as Strauss, Plamenatz, Macpherson, Dunn and Tully, without pointing out the radical differences in their approaches and neglecting the fact that choosing one of the schools of interpretation which these authors represent usually means closing the door to all the others.

At the end of the book, Raunić gives a short list of Locke's arguments that would strike the most contemporary liberal thinkers as anti-liberal (210-211), but most of them are based on an anachronistic reading of some of these arguments. By consistently referring to Locke's position as proto-liberal, Raunić is trying to avoid falling into the trap of anachronistic evaluations, but fails to do so on several occasions. When Raunić argues that "the problem is that Locke uses notions of 'civil society' and 'society' in the traditional Aristotelian meaning of political community of free and equal citizens" (96), or that "the principle of division of power was not develo-

ped consistently by Locke”, or else states, when discussing the problem of toleration, that “the trouble with Locke’s line of argument is that proto-liberal political morality is stuck in theological premises on salvation and does not extend... to non-religious conceptions of good” (189), all of these value statements make sense only with the benefit of hindsight. Locke’s arguments about civil society, division of power and toleration are not logically incoherent, problematic or troublesome, they can seem as such only to those who have insight into the development of political thought in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Most problematic, though, is when Raunić introduces the scheme which equates the notions of private, social and public sphere with those of state of nature, family and the government (63-64). This scheme not only imposes a vocabulary unknown in Locke’s time on his core argument, but also completely ignores James Tully’s claim that, for Locke, persons in the state of nature possess political rights. This claim is based on the fact that, unlike Grotius,

Pufendorf or Selden, Locke’s talk on natural rights goes beyond rights of self-preservation and includes the right to punish the offenders of natural law even when one’s own safety, liberty of property is not in jeopardy. The right to punish, according to Tully, is a political right. One does not need to agree with Tully’s interpretation, but if the goal is to convince the reader that Locke’s state of nature can be understood as a private sphere, then his interpretation should at least be addressed.

The verdict on Raunić’s book depends on one’s view of its target audience. The students who are interested in a more detailed overview of Locke’s political philosophy should not be deterred by a few anachronistic evaluations and the lack of polemical tone, for they will find this book useful and rewarding. Scholars, on the other hand, will find very little that is new or original in this study and will be disappointed with the author’s reluctance to contribute more seriously to the ongoing debates on Locke’s rightful place in the pantheon of liberal thought.

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