Van Schoelandt's Argument of the Place of Public Reason

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ABSTRACT

Schoelandt proposes a solid justification to defend the value of public reason when two prominent strategies—the strategy of idealization of reasoning and requiring liberal values fail to respond to the illiberal dissenter objection. Schoelandt reflects on the place of public reason. Schoelandt argues that the place of public reason is to be a basic feature of a form of the moral community instead of giving permission to liberal laws. He has a valid point of view. I will first examine Schoelandt's position on the place of public reason. I will then attempt to contextualize Schoelandt's arguments about public reason and the issues he discusses. Lastly, from the standpoint of devotedness to all individuals, I will illustrate the three viewpoints of the author separately.

Keywords: Public reason; Interpersonal justification; Moral community.

1. INTRODUCTION

Schoelandt proposes a solid justification to defend the value of public reason when neither strategy of idealization of reasoning nor strategy of requiring liberal values could respond to the problem of illiberal dissenter successfully. Schoelandt reflects on the question that what requires public reason? He argues that public reason "guides public discourse" and functions as a constitutive element of the moral community, rather than giving permission for coercion.[1]

Public reason requires the justification of coercion appealing to reasons acceptable by all citizens. Contrasted with impersonal justification appealing to the truth or genuinely of reason, interpersonal justification directly concerns an agent's own beliefs and values. In other words, interpersonal justification requires an agent to endorse the law based on the reasons following his own beliefs and values rather than the correctness of some objective principles. [2-4]

However, theorists raises a problem: given the view of the illiberal dissenter, how to interpersonally justify coercion to protect basic liberal values?[5] Quong gives an imaginary example of Carl. There are sufficient reasons for Carl to believe that he is required to kill infidels due to his religious commitments.[6] Basic liberal laws of protection for all people are not justified to him.

When he lives in a liberal society, he feels that the basic liberal law is imposed on him, and he can not accept it from his religious commitments. It is easy to justify coercion to protect basic liberal rights against infringement by illiberal people like Carl from the impersonal aspect, just by appealing to the rightness or value of reason itself.[7-9] Nevertheless, how could liberal principles pass the interpersonal justification test that includes illiberal dissenters like Carl?

There are two strategies for coping with this illiberal dissenter objection in scholarship. One strategy is to idealize citizens who have reasons to endorse, but they don't actually endorse. Due to errors in reasoning or inadequate information, agents fail to endorse what they have reason to endorse. There are two versions of idealization strategies: moderate idealization and radical idealization. Gaus, an advocate of moderate idealization, argues that "the political power is justified if and only if it can be accepted by the citizens after a respectable amount of reasoning," highlighting "such reasoning must be accessible to the agents in question."[10] However, moderate idealization is not robust enough to show the errors of illiberal dissenters' reasoning and change their whole world-view. Specifically, moderate addition of new information may be interpreted from the illiberal values system or be paid little attention to, thus conserving the original system of illiberalism. Likely, illiberal dissenters will not accept new information and

respond to challenges to his illiberal commitments in an unreasonable way. Essentially, moderation idealization is insufficient to justify liberal law.

Gas proposes a radical version of idealization to address the issues. The definition of the radical idealization version of public reason is "a law is justified if and only if it can be accepted by the citizens who are a fully rational agent."[11] It ensures the illiberal dissenter will fundamentally change his world-view after careful reasoning. However, radical idealization not only goes beyond a respectable amount of reasoning but also beyond the human reasoning capability. Therefore, this kind of interpersonal justification won't be accepted by an actual agent since the justification appeals to superhuman reasoning capability the agent could never get. Also, we can not ensure a fully rational agent with superhuman reasoning will settle on liberal principle in the end since liberal principles are created by partially rational agents, not by fully rational agents. Therefore, in a word, the radical version of the idealization strategy also fails to justify liberal law.

Another strategy proposed by Quong is to require liberal values. This strategy limits the justificatory public to "reasonable" people who accept and give deliberative priority to liberal principles. Those "reasonable" people are contrasted with "all things considered reasoners" who endorse liberal laws but weigh liberal values against other illiberal values. In light of the comprehensive values of "all things considered reasoner," liberal values can be defeated.

Quong argues that it is easy to justify liberal laws to those reasonable people who accept and prioritize liberal principles. Quong interprets his strategy as interpersonal justification by resorting to "the role of citizens."[11] Schoelandt argues that only when the agent label himself as a member of liberal citizens from his own beliefs could this justification be regarded as interpersonal justification; otherwise, it is just impersonal justification since it appeals to the objective principle of citizenship. Schoelandt argues from the perspective of Quong that justification of liberal laws must appeal to reasonableness, and agreement or consensus is superfluous. Thus Quong's prominent strategy of requiring liberal values is a kind of impersonal justification and gives up the foundations of the public reason project.

Schoelandt reflects on the place of public reason, given the dilemma of these strategies between denying the justification of liberal law or abandoning the justification definitive of public reason. In this paper, I aim to explore the question about "the place of public reason" in Schoelandt's paper. Schoelandt believes that "interpersonal" justification "is necessary as a constitutive element of a kind of moral community.[1] I agree with his opinion. Firstly, I will describe Schoelandt's view about "the place of public reason" in

detail. Then, I will try to dig out the background of Schoelandt's argument about the place of public reason and the questions Schoelandt tries to deal with. At last, I will illustrate the author's three opinions separately from the view of being loyal to all people.

2. SCHOELANDT'S ARGUMENT OF THE PLACE OF PUBLIC REASON

Schoelandt argues that "interpersonal" justification "is necessary as a constitutive element of a kind of moral community." It means that interpersonal justification, which "is justification to someone," is not a necessity for justifying political coercion and liberal laws, though interpersonal justification is relevant to justifying political coercion. Instead, the author emphasizes that "interpersonal" justification is necessary to constitute "goods ."In other words, it is social morality rather than political liberal laws that the place of public reason is in.

Why is interpersonal justification "necessary as a constitutive element of a kind of moral community"? The author believes that "interpersonal justification is essential for our free and equal status and grounds these practices of social authority and responsibility." In other words, public reason plays an essential role in free and equal status and lays a foundation for social responsibility and social authority to some extent.

At first, the author claims that recognizing others' free and equal status implies the requirement of interpersonal justification. While recognizing another as free and equal, we value other people as "a co-member of the moral community" when dealing with moral demands. It means that when it comes to respecting "the subjects of the moral demands as free and equal, "it is "demands that they can be endorsed from their own perspective" that are only issued. People's free and equal status is based on their own commitment instead of one authoritative command which derives from "our superior insight into impersonal reasons."

In addition, the author believes that, to some extent, interpersonal justification lays a solid foundation for moral responsibility. First, interpersonal reasons help us shape our moral emotions, which is associated with the question "how we should feel and relate to the culprit."The author uses the term "moral reactive attitudes", to illustrate it. Schoelandt takes one exculpating case of Elvira, for example. Elvira did some perceived offensive behaviors, and Abraham is indignant at her. However, when Abraham takes Elvira's actual situation that "she acted in the midst of psychotic episode" and "was non-culpably ignorant of the consequences of her action," or "an emergency necessitated her action" into consideration, Abraham changes his attitude and shows pity toward her. Similarly, when it comes to a culprit who is actually dominant by some misguided view and shows no ill will, we feel pity toward him.

Furthermore, with this kind of moral emotion, we

recognize them as co-member in a moral community and hold moral responsibility for each other by norms regulating treatment. Specifically, outsiders are given the protection of liberal rights, such as free speech and not being used for medical research, which is strictly restricted from harsh treatment. We are also restricted by "our private morality and other ideals and by stable conventions for peaceful coexistence." Thus, interpersonal justification strengthens the relationship between fellow humans both in moral emotional aspects and in practically living together aspects.

What is more, from Schoelandt's perspective, interpersonal justification constitutes a stepping stone to social authority. For example, it is mutual trust that contributes to peaceful and prosperous markets as well as effective coercive systems to some extent.

From these arguments above, Schoelandt draws a conclusion that it is the free and equal social order that makes interpersonal justification accessible, and only in this situation can public reason shine a light on " the possibilities for social morality, "like moral responsibility and moral authority, in the pluralistic human society.

3. SOME COMMENTS

I totally agree with Schoelandt's argument that "interpersonal" justification "is necessary as a constitutive element of a kind of moral community."

To begin with, let us discuss the background of Schoelandt's argument about the place of public reason. In other words, why does Schoelandt try to cope with the question——what is the place of public reason? From the first three parts of the essay Schoelandt, we draw a conclusion that public reason is not a necessary part of political liberalism, though it is typically thought highly of. From this perspective, we can deduce that political liberalism and public reason are essential for people. Moreover, people may be likely to be caught in a psychological conflict between political liberalism and public reason.

Furthermore, why might people be caught in a psychological conflict between political liberalism and public reason? We have already known from the essay of Schoelandt that public reason has a close link with equal and free status. When we try to prefer public reason to impersonal reason, we also highlight equal and free status among all kinds of comprehensive doctrines, including the doctrines violating basic liberal values. In this way, we can also claim that people may be likely to be caught in a psychological conflict between political liberalism and equal and free status among all doctrines. Let us look at the latter one in detail. While people stress the equal and free status among all doctrines and respect everyone's own commitments, people try to have a "universality" standing point including all people. In

contrast, if people only respect liberalists and their liberal views, they will have a "partiality" standing point including a small group of people."Universality" usually connects closely with "justice," which, according to Richard Rorty's views, is seen as a larger loyalty because "there has to be some sense in which he or she is 'one of us.'"[12]Thus, the fact that people might be caught in a psychological conflict between political liberalism and public reason can be described as the fact that people are being caught in a moral dilemma between conflicting loyalties——loyalty to a smaller group, all liberalists, and a larger group, all people including liberal dissenters.

When Schoelandt talks about free and equal status, I think it shows that he tries to address this moral dilemma and decides to choose to be loyal to a larger group, all people, including liberal dissenters, rather than to be loyal to a smaller group, all liberalist. It will be natural for us to respect every individual's own commitments when dealing with moral demands if we are loyal to a fellow human. In contrast, if we are loyal to all liberalists, we will be likely to respect only liberalists' commitment and dismiss others who are not liberalists when coping with moral demands. Thus, that is why "equal and free status implies the requirement of interpersonal justification," and we are supposed to shape the social order for interpersonal justification.

How can moral responsibility become possible when we hold an interpersonal justification position? If we hold an interpersonal justification position, are we loyal to all people, including some liberal dissenters? When we are loyal to all people, we will think of "all people" as a big group of fellow humans and recognize that anyone of "all people" is "one of us."In another word, we extend the boundary of "our group" from all liberalists to all people. If he or she, even a dissenter, is "one of us," he or she is like me, and I can experience his or her pain. Thus, it is natural for us to show our sympathy to him or her, even a dissenter, and at the same time form a strong sense of community. If so, we will feel obliged to be responsible to each other and bound well enough to form a symbiosis community. So, everyone in the community will be willing to restrict his behaviors. In this way, we are likely to have moral emotions and more willing to shoulder moral responsibility for each other. That is the way of "feeling about, and relating to, the culprit."

How can moral authority become possible when we take an interpersonal justification standing point? Let us take an interpersonal justification standing point. We will be loyal to a large group, whole human-being, which enables us to have a kind of thin morality rather than thick morality.[]Though thin morality, which is quite different from think morality, see as laws and abstract principles that connect well with social authority, thin morality also relies on some morality such as honesty, integrity, and mutual trust, which to some extent maintain a stable and positive relationship. In contrast,

without this kind of thin morality, including honesty, integrity, and mutual trust, the society will hardly have the capability to function well and properly and be likely to fall into anomie where social authorities tremendously collapse. Here comes an extreme example, the Great Cultural Revolution in the middle of the 20th century in China. At that time, impersonal doctrines, Mao Tse-tung thought, were so prevalent throughout China that all moral relations and trust almost vanished. Distrust abounded everywhere, such as the fact that government officials and folks distrusted each other because folks, who thought they followed the superior doctrines, actually intentionally disclosed the behaviors of leaders. These folks tended to disobey the rules of leaders and disturb the order of local government. As a result, it was difficult to form authority of leadership when all citizens were supposed to believe in one kind of communism. Therefore, mutual trust, which connects closely with interpersonal justification, is necessary for forming moral authority.

4. CONCLUSION

Schoelandt offers a strong argument in support of the value of public reason when neither a strategy of idealization of reasoning nor one of requiring liberal values could be successful in addressing the problem of illiberal dissenters. Schoelandt contemplates the question of what requires public reason? Schoelandt argues that public reason acts as a guide for public discourse and functions as a constitutive element of the moral community as opposed to giving permission for coercion to prevent the infringement of liberal laws by deeply illiberal individuals.

From my perspctive, Schoelandt deals with a moral dilemma between loyalty to all liberalists and all people, including the illiberal dissenters. From the perspective of being loyal to all people, we can have a better understanding of Schoelandt's argument. Being loyal to all people, which is equivalent to free and equal status among people, is consistent with interpersonal justification. In addition, it is natural for people who are loyal to all people to have moral emotions and moral responsibility to the culprit because of recognition as "one of us" and the capability of feeling the pain. At last, thin morality relying on mutual trust, which is the form of being loyal to all people, is indispensable to form moral authority.

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