

John Locke: Father of Liberalism

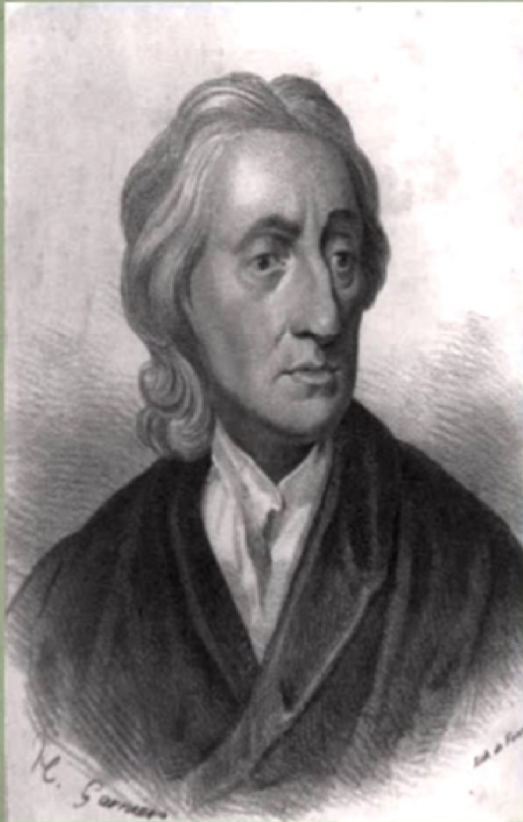
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John Locke, the Man



- 1632-1704
- Born to a lawyer of modest means in rural England.
- Attends Oxford in philosophy and medicine.
- Controversial political figure.
- Contribution to liberal political philosophy immense.

List of major works

1. 1689 - **A Letter Concerning Toleration.**
2. 1689/90 - **Two Treatises of Government**
3. 1689/90 - **An Essay Concerning Human Understanding**
4. 1691 - **Some Considerations on the consequences of the Lowering of Interest and the Raising of the Value of Money**
5. 1690 - **A Second Letter Concerning Toleration**
6. 1692 - **A Third Letter for Toleration**
7. 1693 - **Some Thoughts Concerning Education**
8. 1695 - **The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures**

What is liberalism?

Liberalism is a political and moral philosophy based on the rights of the individual, liberty, consent of the governed, political equality, right to private property and equality before the law.

Liberals espouse various views depending on their understanding of these principles but generally support private property, market economies, individual rights (including civil rights and human rights), liberal democracy, secularism, rule of law, economic and political freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion, constitutional government and privacy rights.

Development of Liberalism

Liberalism became a distinct movement in the Age of Enlightenment, gaining popularity among Western philosophers and economists.

Liberalism sought to replace the norms of hereditary privilege, state religion, absolute monarchy, the divine right of kings and traditional conservatism with representative democracy, rule of law, and equality under the law. Liberals also ended mercantilist policies, royal monopolies, and other trade barriers, instead promoting free trade and marketization.

Leaders in the British Glorious Revolution of 1688,

The American Revolution of 1776

The French Revolution of 1789 used liberal philosophy to justify the armed overthrow of royal sovereignty.

Central Concepts in Locke's Liberalism

1. Natural Law and Natural Rights
2. State of Nature
3. Property
4. Consent, Political Obligation and the Ends of Nature
5. Locke And Punishment
6. Separation of Power and the Dissolution of Government
7. Toleration
8. Education and Politics

1. Natural Law and Natural Rights

“The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions: 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... Every one, as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind, and may not, unless it be to do justice on an offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another” (Locke, Second Treatise of Government, Chapter II).

A central argument made by Locke is that each individual has a natural right to life, liberty and property, even in the state of nature. These natural rights flow from natural law and are governed by it. These rights are pre-political and are, thus, in effect granted by God and held by every individual from birth. Natural law mandates that everyone respects these natural rights in each other. The only reason for which one can justifiably violate them is when somebody is threatening to violate other’s natural rights. Thus, if someone threatens to take away another person’s life, then that person is justified in taking the offender’s life, to preserve his or her own right to life. Otherwise, natural law demands that everybody respects each other’s natural rights.

2. State of Nature

Locke writes “want [lack] of a common judge, with authority, puts all men in a state of nature” and again, “Men living together according to reason, without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them, is properly the state of nature.” (Two Treatises 2.19)

3. Property

Macpherson's interpretation, Locke is thought to have set three restrictions on the accumulation of property in the state of nature: (1) one may only appropriate as much as one can use before it spoils (Two Treatises 2.31), (2) one must leave "enough and as good" for others (the sufficiency restriction) (2.27), and (3) one may (supposedly) only appropriate property through one's own labor (2.27).

4. Consent, Political Obligation and the Ends of Nature

Individuals in a state of nature where they are not subject to a common legitimate authority with the power to legislate or adjudicate disputes. From this natural state of freedom and independence, Locke stresses individual consent as the mechanism by which political societies are created and individuals join those societies. While there are of course some general obligations and rights that all people have from the law of nature, special obligations come about only when we voluntarily undertake them. Locke clearly states that one can only become a full member of society by an act of express consent (Two Treatises 2.122)

5. Locke And Punishment

John Locke defined political power as “a right of making laws with penalties of death, and consequently all less Penalties” (Two Treatises 2.3). Locke believed that punishment requires that there be a law, and since the state of nature has the law of nature to govern it, it is permissible to describe one individual as “punishing” another in that state. Locke’s rationale is that since the fundamental law of nature is that mankind be preserved and since that law would “be in vain” with no human power to enforce it (Two Treatises 2.7), it must, therefore, be legitimate for individuals to punish each other even before government exists.

6. Separation of Power and the Dissolution of Government

Locke claims that legitimate government is based on the idea of separation of powers. First and foremost of these is the legislative power. Locke describes the legislative power as supreme (Two Treatises 2.149)

The executive power is then charged with enforcing the law as it is applied in specific cases. Interestingly, Locke's third power is called the "federative power" and it consists of the right to act internationally according to the law of nature. Since countries are still in the state of nature with respect to each other, they must follow the dictates of natural law and can punish one another for violations of that law in order to protect the rights of their citizens.

7. Toleration

In Locke's Letter Concerning Toleration, he develops several lines of argument that are intended to establish the proper spheres for religion and politics. His central claims are that government should not use force to try to bring people to the true religion and that religious societies are voluntary organizations that have no right to use coercive power over their own members or those outside their group. One recurring line of argument that Locke uses is explicitly religious. Locke argues that neither the example of Jesus nor the teaching of the New Testament gives any indication that force is a proper way to bring people to salvation. He also frequently points out what he takes to be clear evidence of hypocrisy, namely that those who are so quick to persecute others for small differences in worship or doctrine are relatively unconcerned with much more obvious moral sins that pose an even greater threat to their eternal state

8. Education and Politics

Locke's epistemological positions in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* lead him to take education to be extremely important for his political philosophy. His attack on innate ideas increases the importance of giving children the right sort of education to help them get the right sorts of ideas. He also notes in the *Essay* that human beings govern themselves by a variety of different laws, the most practically efficacious of which is the "Law of Opinion or Reputation." (*Essay* 2.28.10) Since people are often highly motivated to be well thought of by others, the moral standards that are operative within a society for allocating praise and blame are powerful and important. Ideally, these social norms will reinforce natural law and thus help stabilize political society. Locke's educational writings suggest how children might be raised in such a way that they will be the sorts of citizens who function well in a liberal society

Criticisms and Controversies

- 1. Labor Theory of Property.**
- 2. Role of Government.**
- 3. Slavery.**
- 4. Interpretation**

Labor Theory of Property

One of Locke's most controversial ideas is his labor theory of property, which argues that individuals have a right to the products of their labor. Critics argue that this view ignores the role of social and cultural factors in creating wealth and that it justifies inequalities in wealth distribution

Role of Government

Some critics argue that Locke's emphasis on limited government fails to account for the need for collective action to address social problems such as poverty, environmental degradation, and inequality.

Slavery

Despite his emphasis on natural rights, Locke himself owned shares in the Royal African Company, which was responsible for transporting enslaved Africans to North America and the Caribbean. Some critics argue that this contradiction undermines the legitimacy of his views on individual rights.

Interpretation

There is ongoing debate among scholars about how to interpret Locke's work, particularly with regards to his views on toleration, religious diversity, and the relationship between property rights and economic development.

A brief evaluation of John Locke`s Contribution

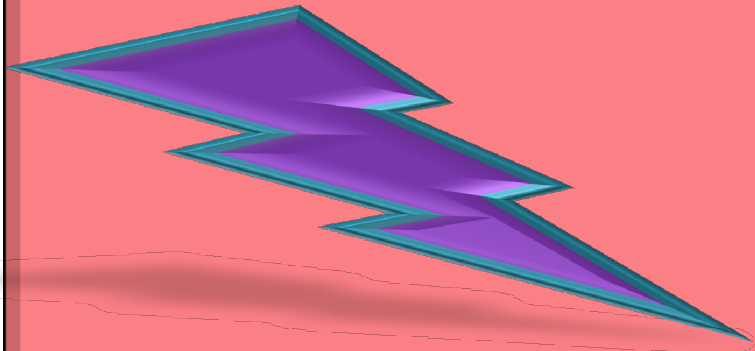
John Locke`s contributions to political philosophy have had a significant impact on contemporary debates around individual rights, limited government, and social justice. While his ideas have been subject to criticism and interpretation, they continue to shape political theory and policy today.

Locke`s emphasis on natural rights, the social contract, and the role of government in protecting individual liberty have made him a key figure in the development of liberal thought. His ideas about property rights, economic development, and international relations have also had lasting influence.

John Locke is considered the father of liberalism because he helped to establish key principles that continue to shape modern democratic societies. His emphasis on individual freedom and limited government has informed debates around civil liberties, economic policy, and social welfare for centuries

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Thank you

