

Locke's second treatise of government assignment



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Locke believed that the mind is blank upon birth. As a person grows and develops, so does their mind. He urged individuals to formulate theories and to test them through experiments. The fundamental claim is that human knowledge begins with sense experience and primarily is derived from it. Locke begins his philosophical examination of knowledge by trying to disprove the claim that some of our knowledge is original, in the sense that it comes from ideas which are innate or inborn.

Locke's attempted refutation depends on a questionable assumption: if an individual has an idea, then that individual would understand it and assent to its content. Also, Locke believed in religious freedom and the separation of church and state. He thought that God established divine law. This could be discovered by reasoning, and to disobey it was morally wrong. He also held the opinion that no one should dictate the form of another's religion. But Locke points out that there is widespread disagreement over the concept of God. Furthermore, it does not seem to be present at all in small children.

We form ideas as the endpoint of the action of physical bodies on our own bodies. Locke points out that sometimes he uses 'idea' to refer to the end product, what exists in the mind, and sometimes he uses it to refer to the quality in the body which causes the idea. The ideas of sense are the first ideas we have. Once the mind begins to be populated with them, it can operate upon them. Locke classified ideas as simple and complex. All complex ideas are said to be made up, ultimately of simple ideas, and their complexity is the work of the mind. A simple idea is none un-compounded appearance," said Locke.

But it should be noted that the relation of simple to complex ideas is not the relation of part to whole. In general, our simple ideas are the effects of the operations of sensation or the observation of the workings of our own minds. In a famous passage (Section 1 1), Locke compares the mind to a "dark room" with only a narrow inlet. Ideas are analogous to the images projected onto the back of the room. Besides the right to self preservation, Locke also believed that all individuals had a natural right to property. This natural right carried with it two preconditions of natural law.

First, since the earth was given by God to all individuals, people must be sure to leave enough property remaining for others to have, and secondly nothing may be allowed to spoil. These conditions met, an individual was granted exclusive rights to any object that they mixed their labor with. For Locke, mixing labor was in effect placing a part of the self into an object, and thereby making it part of the individual and therefore their property. Human nature being the way it is, people eventually found a way around the natural law restrictions on property accumulation through the creation of money.

Instead of only being allowed to accumulate as much property as could be used without spoilage, people created money as a means around the natural law. Since money does not spoil, the burden of upholding the law now became that of the consumer rather than of the producer. People were granted the ability to accumulate unlimited money used upon their industriousness. This meant that some people acted more rationally than others, and thus were more deserving of property. Locke also argued that when people agreed to start using money, they also agreed to the "disproportionate and unequal possession of the Earth. He believed that

people would be free to sell their labor to one another in exchange for money. When this happened, any property the laborer produced became the property of the buyer. For Locke the state of nature was still a horrible place, but God's law created moral essentials preventing humans from partaking in the total free for all. People left the state of nature, according to Locke, not out of fear of violent death, but as a matter of convenience and in order to protect their property. They did not give all of their rights to an absolute authoritarian government.

Instead, they formed two distinctively separate agreements: the contract of society and the contract of the majority of society and government or "trustee relationship" as it is often referred to. The contract of society took place when people gave up the total freedom that they enjoyed in the state of nature to form society. This society was made up of two types of people: Property and non property owners. Property owners being rational individuals were given the right of suffrage, while non property owners, viewed as not being industrious, were not.

Property owners were further said to be of civil society while non property owners were only considered to be in but not of society. In order to fulfill the contract of the majority of society and government, the society as a whole contracts an impartial third party to act as the government. This agreement is often referred to as a trustee relationship because the government has no rights, only responsibilities to the people, and therefore acts only in the best interest of the members of the society.

The government is given its power to act by the property owning portion of the population, not by the society as a whole. Another point that makes Locke's theory different is that society has the power to overthrow the government. Since a majority created it, they have the power to remove it. Locke stated that society could overthrow the government without returning to the state of nature because the social contract would still be in effect. All that was needed would be for the society to elect another government, by majority rule, to replace the old one.

This introduces the idea that government should be accountable to the people. Locke was in favor of a limited government. The importance and autonomy of the individual in society was of very importance to Locke. The extent to which this was true is that people existed as individuals before societies and governments came into being. They each possessed certain rights, and all had the freedom to do as they pleased, unrestrained and with some restrictions placed upon them by God, according to Locke. This freedom of the individual was important, for it was the foundation for modern liberal democracy.