

John locke and land ownership

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John Locke and Land Ownership John Locke in *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* makes several key arguments about what makes land ownable, these ideologies differ from how land ownership works in America but it is easy to see how America's early days could have aligned with this ideology. In this paper I will focus on two key principles that Locke believed in that are basic requirements for land ownership.

The first of these is that land ownership is obtained through labor and that items on the land have no value until labor is applied and the second describes government's role in land ownership as simply being that the labor applied to land precedes government and government cannot dispose of the estates of the subjects arbitrarily and instead should be limited to securing the life and property of its citizens, and is only necessary because in an ideal, anarchic state of nature, various problems arise that would make life more insecure than under the protection of a minimal state.

These two principles allow for the easy identification of claimed lands. While at the same time provide themotivationand encouragement to individuals so that they will want to find land that they can then harness through labor and thus make their own land. It is because of these reasons and more that land ownership through labor is a must for a successful society and a functioning government. In order to ensure that these principles are being viewed and judge from the same sense of meaning a few key words need to be defined as used in this paper.

The term land ownership is vital to this paper and its meaning will be defined as, " the owner of contiguous property that has been improved upon from nature to provide for one's living". The term labor will only be used in <https://assignbuster.com/john-locke-and-land-ownership/>

reference to labor upon an individual's land and will reference, "human time and effort put in to a particular task". The term government will reference only the actual ruling body that "influences daily life based on policies and procedures they enact". At the last term reward will refer to, "an item or exchange of labor promised or normally expected given in exchange for labor or with no expectation of any kind of return.

The principle that labor is a prerequisite to land ownership fits in perfectly with the needs and situation of the early American nation. Outside of key city areas a majority of this nation's land was unclaimed and unused bearing none of the fruits of labor and essentially leaving all of its value unclaimed and untouched. With a bounty of land larger than anyone person could actually work and apply labor to, it made sense to encourage land expansion. With land expansion individuals could claim land through labor and the value and goods on that land would no longer go to waste as unused items that could have benefitted society as a whole.

The second principle helps to place limits on what the government can do once a parcel of land is owned by an individual. It is safe to say that any reasonable person would not like to see their possessions and livelihood wiped away with one fell swoop, but if governments have no restrictions in the use of their power it would be all too easy to force someone from their land, effectively robbing them of all their possessions and the livelihood that past labor has brought them.

This is why Locke insisted that the government role in land ownership remain limited in scope only to the extent that is needed to ensure this doesn't happen. Without this assurance from governmental takeover acts <https://assignbuster.com/john-locke-and-land-ownership/>

similar to his could become standard practice. An unjust government might routinely perform these actions, unjustly claiming the land. This would result in a diminishment of the value of labor and would remove the incentives to work land and would result in a decrease in goods.

Because of this looming threat it is clear that government must have some restrictions on acquiring land to avoid unjust actions and encourage a general sense of trust and security in the government. A government that is without citizens that have some sort of trust and security provided by having a reliable, continual and trustworthy shelter is bound to fail since this is a basic need of humans in general. Modern science can help prove the stress and additional energy expenditure humans endure if they can't find a sense of comfort, safety and belonging a study performed by Dr.

Gilman while at Princeton University showed, “ humans that are in constant fear of loss of shelter expend an average of 2900 calories daily” (Gilman 03/01/2012), along with this extra energy expenditure a lack of shelter creates stress that in turn creates a reduction in productivity. This stress can actually change the human brain reaction method resulting in it , “ going from more sophisticated but slower modes to the faster behaviors of the older brains when we are under stress” (Gilman 03/01/2012).

This change in brain behavior limits creative thinking and essentially devolves human thought to a lower state this combined with the increased calories expenditure creates a vast pool of diminished talent that when viewed in a large scale population level, results in a huge waste of resources that could be easily reduced by the assurance of land ownership and security. The easiest way for a government to meet this need is to let

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individuals provide additional goods to society by applying labor to their land thereby reducing their energy requirements and providing goods for the benefit of all.

With all the complications that are possible when it comes to providing for the needs of the many, it only makes to allow individuals the freedom of land ownership that will help reduce their needs while simultaneously benefitting others. This notion of having some sort of fruit from your labor is fundamental to increasing one's value and having a desire to perform work that can be beneficial to all. A study from Yale University performed by Dr.

Greene helps to illustrate just how deeply rooted this concept is into human psychology, an individual will work perform work equivalent to their valuation of a reward. The study was meant to determine the amount of work an individual would perform without a reward versus the amount of work performed for a reward. The study concluded that, " any individual who was assigned a task performed that task to completion with more detail and more efficiently when rewarded as compared to no reward" (Mark et al. 1978).

This study helps to demonstrate that human psychology insists that any individual will perform more work and therefore be a more productive member of society if only that individual receives something for the labor they put in. As mentioned earlier if an individual lives under constant threat of having everything taken from them it is essentially making them perform labor on their land without a reward resulting in less work being performed and less goods for all of mankind, the only solution that removes this fear is

placing limits on when and if a government can take someone's land from them.

With removal of this fear an individual can and likely will utilize labor to its fullest extent thereby adding value to the land. It is clear that the benefits of land ownership as defined through the use of labor allows for the creation of the best society possible, one that can help to provide for mankind as a whole, increase the value and abilities of its citizens that actively partake and utilizes the resources at hand to the best of its abilities without waste and undue stress. A society that is free of these constraints and provided with the best possible reward for work and sense of security can only flourish and enjoy the fruits of their labor helping to create the best future possible.

Works Cited: Gilman, Robert. Context Institute, " The Inside Story Understanding the structure of the brain. " Last modified 03/01/2012. Accessed September 22, 2012. Mark, Lepper, and Greene David. Lawrence Erlbaum, " The Hidden costs of reward : new perspectives of the psychology of human motivation. " Last modified 1978. Accessed September 22, 2012.