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John Locke

One of the most influential philosophers who also influenced the field of politics, religion, and society is John Locke. From his early beginnings, to his works and to his philosophical and political belief, Locke has questioned the legalities of politics and philosophy and added his own perspective through empiricism and common sense. His two works the “ Two Treatises of Government” and the “ An Essay of Human Understanding” was met in scepticism but was accepted entirely as a position that reflects the time of the Enlightenment. According to Bode (2008) John Locke was born in 1632 in Somerset, England. The period was then in conflict between the Royalists and the Religious sects comprising the Protestants, Anglicans and the Catholics. Locke’s father was a lawyer, clerk to the Justices of Peace and a captain for the Parliamentary army. When King Charles I was defeated and killed by the Parliamentary army, uncertainty brewed around the region. The monarchy was abolished, including the House of Lords and the Anglican sect. As his father was a part of the Parliamentary army, Locke was able to receive high quality education. He was able to enter the exclusive Westminster School in London, and received a scholarship in Christ Church at Oxford. Locke was interested in the classical sciences, especially in the medical aspect of sciences; this interest led him in taking a medical degree in Christ Church.

Faiella (2005) added that Locke was distinguished by many of his fellow students due to his talents and learning application. Oxford’s curriculum provided Locke a means to practice several subjects he used in his major

works such as rhetoric, grammar, moral philosophy, geometry, and Aristotle's Greek language. For Locke, the curriculum was dogmatic, leading him to ask the need to learn for "obscure terms and useless questions". Although he took a medical degree, he never formally became a doctor. However, this did not stop Locke in practicing his medical knowledge to the people in need. Many used to call him Dr. Locke due to his practice. In his time in Oxford, he started focusing on philosophy. He befriended scientist Robert Boyle and Locke became interested with his scientific experiments. Boyle was a known figure in the Royal Society which comprised members known in both scientific and philosophical fields from London to Oxford. Locke officially became a member of the Royal Society in 1668 as part of the Oxford Group.

After his studies, his life went to a shift as he rescued Lord Ashley, who was destined to be the first Earl of Shaftesbury. With Locke's degree in medicine, he was employed as Lord Ashley's personal physician. Lord Ashley was impressed with Locke's talents and appointed him to various positions like being the secretary and his personal advisor. Ashley became Locke's mentor in the field of politics as Lord Ashley was very liberal as part of the Whig Party. Both of them believed in a Protestant constitutional monarchy, civil liberty, Parliamentary rule, and expansion for England. Locke also helped Ashley draft constitution for the new American colony, Carolina. The constitution took into consideration the freedom to worship any religion, except atheism, and those who deny the existence of God. Thanks to Lord Ashley, Locke was able to gain connections in society. He was also able to gain political experiences on how English politics works. For Locke, this

knowledge, experiences, and perspectives enabled him to reassess his philosophical thinking.

McCain (2005) noted that Locke's contributions to philosophy did not only limit to the major field of the study but also to its branches. The first important contribution Locke did in the field of philosophy is his ideals in political philosophy, in both practical politics and political philosophy itself. Locke provided a strong theoretical basis for the legitimacy of the sovereignty supported by the Glorious Revolution. His belief is most noted in the Preface of his book *Two Treatises of Government* which were published in 1689. The book influenced not just British politicians and experts but also the Founding Fathers of the United States. Like the *Essays in Human Understanding*, the *Treatises* were separated into two. The first book focuses on the establishment of civil society through a divine-sanctioned patriarchalism, and Locke's position over Sir Robert Filmer's arguments that the Scriptures justify all the governments appealing to the divine right of kings. The Second Treatise outlines Locke's theory of civil society starting from the state of a nature, similar to Thomas Hobbes' concept of a state, where war of man against every man. Locke argues that all men were created equally by God. Locke explains the idea of rise of property and civilization, stating that governments can be considered legitimate if the people consented to their appointment. Without such consent, the government must be overthrown. The *Treatises* was contested at first in Britain as it was neglected upon publishing. It only became known in the 18th century as the *Two Treatises* presented the Glorious Revolution's position in Britain and its legality. Many challenged the *Treatises* such as J. G.

A Pocock's argument that the Treatises do not have enough leverage in affecting British political theory. However, Locke's position exemplifies freedom especially in the American colonies during 1765. Most of the marginalized groups used Locke's ideas to campaign for the abolishment of slavery and colonialism. For the Founding Fathers, the Two Treatises had served as a minor foundation to the Declaration of Independence.

Locke's most notable work the "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding" also contributed in the field of philosophy. The Essay was Locke's most prized and major work which he was noted to be proud of and believed that it could still be revised. The Essay was divided into four books, and included an Epistle to the Reader, and a dedication of Locke to Thomas Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke and the President of the Royal Society in 1690. Each book had its own subject, each showing Locke's analysis of each subject. For book one, Locke attacks the belief of "innate ideas" which were formed in mind from experience. Locke used the word idea broadly which was criticized by critics. Ideas are "whatsoever is in the object of the understanding when a man thinks". Locke agrees that some ideas are already in one's mind even in an early age; however, he argues that some ideas were developed by people while they are in their mother's womb like the concept of color and taste. Locke argues that if each person has a universal concept over the senses, it is not an innate idea, but it is due to the experiences a person has over that sense. Locke also argues in the first book the concept of truth, noting that there is no truth that all people accept such as identity.

The second book discusses the concept of the development of an idea, on how it is developed from experience through the senses or through one's perspective. It also argues the existence of an intelligent being such as God. The book states " Thus, from the consideration of ourselves, and what we infallibly find in our own constitutions, our reason leads us to the knowledge of this certain and evident truth, that there is an eternal, most powerful, and most knowing being; which whether anyone will please to call God, it matters not". The third book concentrates on Locke's concept of words and languages and how important these two are to each other. Words are the result of a person's idea, and through man's capacity to separate sounds to conceptualize thought, their words become a language. Locke also mentions the abuse of words in one of the sections of the third book, calling out to metaphysicians who make up words without any meaning. He criticizes the usage of these words as they do not represent clear ideas. Locke also discussed language's capacity to demonstrate incoherent thinking. To Locke, he sees incoherent thinking as an abuse to language since it affects the obscurity of the terms used to define an idea. The fourth book of the Essay tackles the general concept of knowledge in general, summary of ideas and perceptions. Locke discussed the limits of knowledge and how it could be proven as an accurate knowledge or truthful knowledge. Locke wrote in the Essay that there is a difference with the idea of claiming to know something and the claim that it is an actual idea. This is seen in Chapter IV of the fourth book which states " I doubt not my reader by this time may be apt to think that I have been all this while only building a Castle in the Air; and be ready to say to me, to what purpose all of this stir? Knowledge, say you, is only the

Perception of the Agreement or Disagreement of our own ideas.” Many criticized the Essay, especially by rationalists as they see Locke’s arguments regarding the conceptualization of an idea. Gottfried Leibniz had even created his own perspective over the Essay and argued against Locke’s empiricist stance over ideas, knowledge, and conceptualization. However, there were others who used the Essay as their basis for their own empiricist ideals such as David Hume .

References

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