

The the right to life, liberty, and the

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



The Declaration of Independence affirms that citizens have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. A series of clauses in this declaration were influenced by John Locke's philosophy in *Second Treatise of Government*. Many years before the declaration was written, the philosopher wrote that "no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions" (Locke, 1980). The quantity and quality of property, or "possessions", generally appear to mold the capitalist society of the United States in the current scope.

With that being said, it is worth noting that the mentality in the aforementioned quote – about property greasing the economy and Rousseau's naivety – prevails as the closest to reality. Thus, I am in accordance with the quote. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, as elucidated in *A Discourse on Inequality* and *Second Treatise of Government* respectively, have diverging views on the topic of private property. In summary, Locke views private property as a fundamental right, while Rousseau views it as the basis for inequality in society. Although Rousseau is correct in some aspects, especially in regards to property being a foundation of disparity, Locke holds the upper hand through his argument of the materializing unfairness being something to manage.

Rousseau was not unsound when he explained that property leads to inequality. For instance, when one has more land than another being, it is only natural for the individual to seek out methods to obtain more land, whereas those who do not have as much land have envy over those who do – with some possibly devising strategies to gain the same amount of land, or

more. From this situation alone, private property, as Rousseau argues, breeds inequality.

As seen in the compelling film, “ Do the Right Thing”, the battle over property matters led to complete chaos in the town, with one death of a civilian upon the hands of a police officer. Rousseau argues that inherent goodness does not exist since humans in a state of nature do not possess the capability of abstract thought. Hence, there is no such concept as morality in the state of nature, meaning no one could have possibly held the capabilities of being “ good” (Rousseau, 1984). However, it is not clear if being in a state of nature would have reversed this problem. Just because there generally was not as much property to fight over (before well-mannered civilization occurred) does not mean that there would have been an absence of disagreements over other matters, such as race (as demonstrated in the film “ Rosewood”), gender, and relationships.

It is true that the more advanced society seemingly becomes, individuals become increasingly dependent on property and materialism. The conflict in “ Do the Right Thing” was fueled by racial inequality, along with property means. The pride that Sal, owner of a white pizzeria in a primarily black neighborhood, had over being in possession of property that warranted admiration is the reason for the intense emotions associated with the destruction and fall of the establishment at the end of the film. At one point, Sal exclaims, “ the fuck is wrong with you? This ain’t about money. I could give a fuck about money. You see this fucking place? I built this fucking place with my bare fucking hands.

Every light socket, every piece of tile – me, with these fucking hands” (Lee, 1989). The fall of the establishment is juxtaposed with the death of Radio Raheem, a significant and slightly unlikable character in the film. In spite of his likability factor however, there should be no analogy. The fall of the pizzeria should not be compared to against the death of Raheem, as there is simply no comparison and analogy with the death of a human and the death of property.

In fact, Rousseau’s argument seems to align with the idea of socialism and communism, as he is not an advocate for the inequality created by ownership of property (Rousseau, 1984). Though socialism and communism may work in some countries, in the context of American society, civilization likely would not succeed as a whole if Rousseau’s ideas were infused into society. Thus, the concepts are definitely idealistic. Locke accepts that inequality will exist, as it is nearly impossible for everyone to be equal in the sense of property.

Locke’s ideas in The Second Treatise of Government not only make the most sense for American society, but it is also the one that rings most true to actuality today. Locke held the belief that natural competition is prevalent in society; though the weak are evidently beaten out by the stronger in this competition, the power is only temporary and not absolute. As such, all civilians have a right and responsibility to enforce the law of nature (and punish those who break it). This leads to equality being maintained. Therefore, while it is correct that everyone in society has the right to property, not everyone will be satisfied with the amount of property

that they hold. As such, conflict could ensue. But as Locke notes, individuals would consent to the fact that it is simply not possible for everyone to hold an equal amount of possessions (Locke, 1980).

Without the concept of property, humans would not be able to survive since survival would depend on receiving the consent of everyone else before getting a necessity, such as food and water, if the earth belonged to every individual (Locke, 1980). To be more specific, a piece of bread belongs to everyone only until someone else claims it as theirs, in which case, it would no longer belong to society but specifically to that person. There is one caveat with Locke's philosophy however; Locke maintains the idea that humans are inherently good. Be that as it may, with every individual having the right to private property, the idea that humans are inherently bad and selfish, as illustrated by Thomas Hobbes in *The Leviathan* holds more true to reality. This is exemplified in the film, "Wall Street", as the protagonist, Bud Fox, increasingly tries to gain more wealth until he wakes up to his moral conscience and decides to bring down the selfishness of Wall Street personified in Gekko. He tries to cease the cheating and manipulation, even at the cost of his own freedom, as he winds up in prison.

(Beforehand though, the obsession with materialism and wealth is thematically illustrated throughout the film. And though Bud returns to having morality, Gekko does not change.) Furthermore, Rousseau was not entirely incorrect or illogical in his philosophy.

Generally speaking, many individuals, once they get a taste for a more exquisite and luxurious life, strive for even more to chase that feeling of

ecstasy. “Wall Street” had an exemplar role in showcasing the loss of humanity and morals in the race to obtain material goods and wealth. Gordon Gekko, though not an epitome of a great human, was still enviable and admirable to a degree. This would correspond well with the fact that many people, after seeing the film, were inspired to join the business world and model themselves after Gekko, which completely opposed the takeaway from the film and aligns with the aforementioned quote (Weiser, 2008).

Locke systematically believes that property defines who we are as individuals, and especially in capitalist American society, this is correct. The most popular degree in America, as of 2016, is involving the field of business (USDEO, 2016). This would correlate with the notion that many Americans have about business bringing in a higher income than a degree in, perhaps, English literature.

It is not easy to question that if wealth and power were not held in such high regards, if so many people would be seeking the business degrees. And at a larger scope, students and pupils in modern society are highly encouraged to pursue advanced degrees in order to obtain a well-paying job, live a better life, and generally enhance the possibility of owning larger houses, special technologies, fashionable clothing items, and other items that would be classified as property. In short, though the concept of Rousseau’s philosophy would be ideal, in which no conflict would exist because everyone would be equal in the amount of property owned, it is simply not realistic. Therefore, John Locke’s idea is more sensical, in that with the natural right to property, comes the inevitability of inequality. In consonance with Locke’s other theory, in order to alleviate the tensions that

would arise from said inequality of property among individuals, the government and citizens would enter into a social contract to properly govern the people.

This is possibly the only sound manner for governing and managing inequality.