

John locke provisos

Philosophy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

John Locke was an English philosopher who had the idea that all people have natural rights. Their natural rights included that of life, liberty and property and the idea of these rights being held by each individual is often said to be the primary influence of the American Declaration of Independence. Locke further explains his rationale behind natural rights in *Two Treatises of Government* and particularly property right in his “Provisos,” stating the conditions that make property public or private.

Locke’s “Provisos” discusses the idea that property becomes private when a person labors upon the property. His reasoning that the land becomes the person’s private property is that a person has the right to the fruits of his labor, and he also has the right to the resource that bore his fruits, in this case the property. As Locke says, “He by his labor does, as it were, enclose it from the common” (page 437). By this he means that by laboring over the land, the land is taken away from the rest of society, the common, and becomes the private property of the individual.

Locke also believes that “as much as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property” (page 437). In this, he is stating that a man can own as much as can be useful to him; claiming property in excess and not being able to make it productive is wrong because the property will then go to waste instead of bearing fruit. This is wrong because “nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy” (page 436) and having land lying to waste is along the same lines as ruining the land.

This idea from Locke's "Provisos" follows from his idea of general property rights. He believes that land that has not been influenced by an individual's labor is land available for all of society. Man should still respect the land and not exploit it, but "were it not for the corruption and viciousness of degenerate man, there would be no need of any other, no necessity that men should separate from this great and natural community" (page 441).

However because mankind cannot be trusted, Locke believes that once a man does put forth effort to improve a piece of property, that land and the products of it belong to him. Although that land might belong to one man, it is still benefiting the rest of society because "the provisions serving to the support of human life produced by one acre of enclosed and cultivated land are ten times more than those which are yielded by an acre of land of an equal richness lying waste in common" (page 437). This is similar to the way in which both a farmer and society benefits from his harvest.

The farmer and society both can receive nourishment from his harvest and what harvest goes to the rest of society, he is repaid for, which allows him to continue sowing seeds that will continue to nurture the common. A situation of private property that would conflict with one of the Lockean provisos is property that is acclaimed through forcing Native Americans to agree with the American customs that were being imposed and the American rule, or to leave, such as with the Indian Removal Act that was signed into law in 1830.

The Native Americans had worked the land and made it suitable to support their lifestyle and in the quest to achieve Manifest Destiny, nothing would hinder the determined minds of the Americans. According to Locke, the land

rightfully belonged to the Native Americans because they had labored on the land to make it prosperous. They did not exploit it; they used the resources wisely and nothing went to waste with their minimalist lifestyle. With the Indian Removal Act that President Andrew Jackson signed into effect, all Native Americans had to be relocated to areas west of the Mississippi River.

The Native Americans were removed on the basis that American colonizers needed the land and wanted to achieve Manifest Destiny. Another situation involving private property that would violate one of the Lockean provisos would be that of the government seizing land due to unpaid taxes. In this situation, a farmer could have yielded a large harvest, but the demand for his crop declined greatly to the point that he is unable to make a large enough profit to pay his taxes.

This could fall into a pattern for many years to come, eventually reaching the point that the government can no longer just keep putting the farmer into more debt. The farmer would have to claim bankruptcy and the government would seize his land. This would violate Locke's idea that the land a man works, is his. The farmer was doing the best he could, was benefiting society, and never consented to losing his right to his land, but the government took it away anyway.

I believe that Locke correctly draws the line on private property because we have the right over our own bodies, and if the work of those bodies can combine with resources to create something, then we have the right to claim that product and the resources we used to make it. No one else put forth the effort and therefore the fruit of our efforts are ours. I believe that hard

workdeserves reward and that reward is the right to the product. As Locke says, “ The labor of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his” (page 436).