

John locke narrative essay

Philosophy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

John Locke is one of the most important philosophers from the second millennium. One reason why he is so important to American history, is the influence of his writings upon Thomas Jefferson and other contributors to the writing of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution which still constitute two of the most important documents in American history.

It would therefore behoove anyone interested in the history of the Enlightenment, philosophy and Colonial America, to study one of the rare figures in history who is able to encompass all three elements and bring them together. John Locke is that individual who is one who is able to do it. One of the greatest minds; John Locke is still read and discussed to this day. One of the litmus tests of the assumed greatness of those who come before, is whether or not that individual is still discussed and viewed as important centuries, or even decades after his or her death. John Locke fully meets that requirement.

John Locke was born on August 29, 1632 twelve miles from the English town of Bristol. Both of Locke's parents were Puritan and it would be this religious upbringing that would help to mold and to shape Locke's beliefs, even if his philosophy was not always in unison with his religious upbringing. In 1647, at only the age of 15, Locke was sent to the prestigious Westminster School in London.[1] After successfully completing his studies there, Locke was then accepted to Christ Church in Oxford.

Despite finding himself unmotivated by the classical curriculum which the university offered, Locke received his degree in 1656 and then a Master's degree in 1658.[2] Locke, always fond of learning, received his Bachelor's Degree in Medicine in 1674 as well. In 1667, Locke became the personal

physician of Lord Ashley as well as continuing his medical studies and practice in London. It would be there that Locke, under the influence of Thomas Sydenham, Locke would write one of his most famous works: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Locke would also write his famous Essays while living at the household of Sydenham's.

Locke continued to write at this time and to make his philosophical views known. Lock was the exact opposite of another famous English philosopher; Thomas Hobbs. Locke's Two Treatises of Government, with most of it written during England's Glorious Revolution of 1688. This was concluded after Locke had spent five years in exile in Holland as he was suspected of being involved in the Rye House Plot due to his outspoken criticism of the English monarchy.

Locke returned to England where he continued to write and to speak out for representative government. Locke's writings would not be published until the last decade of his life. It was then that Locke, a sufferer from asthma, retreated to the house of a friend, lady Masham. During this period, Locke received many famous guests and well wishers. Among the notable guests were Isaac Newton and John Dryden. After a prolonged decline in his health, Locke died on October 28, 1704.[3] Locke never married, nor did he have any children.

During Locke's life, he was able to witness the English restoration, the Great Plague of London and the Great Fire of London. Locke just missed the 1707 Act of Union which brought Scotland under the rule of England for the next, nearly three hundred years. The shift towards a democracy in England would not be seen during Locke's life. However, Locke's greatness lies in the ability

that his writing had to influence other democracies who at the infancy of their life, relied upon the wisdom of John Locke in which to form a government.

Not only did Locke have a great influence upon the French writer Voltaire, but also on such American forefathers as Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. It was in Locke's writings about the human understanding which helped to create the greatest influence upon those who read him. Locke writes: " Whereas were the capacities of our understanding well considered, the extent of our knowledge once discovered, and the horizon found, which sets the boundary between the enlightened and the dark parts of things, men would perhaps with less scruple acquiesce in the avow'd ignorance of the one, and employ their thought and discourse, with more advantage and satisfaction in the other."[4]

Locke, unlike the philosophers before him, did not believe that man should find the limits of the Understanding. Locke argues something very different and which is contrary to the teachings of his personal hero Descartes. Locke asserts that at birth, people are born with a blank mental state and that their knowledge only comes from their experiences and not from their birth. Such assertions, though nothing new to the modern reader, had very interesting and profound reactions from those who came after him and absorbed his writings.

The writings of Locke speak to the need for a meritocracy to govern men and not the established and favored ruling class which had been the norm in Europe for a thousand years. In this, Locke speaks against the divine right of kings which most churches as well as the established authority prescribed to.

This stated that kings were there to rule by the grace of God; either good, bad or indifferent and that their offspring were to be given the authority to rule after their father is gone because it is the will of God.

Locke believed, and is confirmed by America's forefathers, that those who rule, should be granted the title, not by their lineage but by their merit. So too should the elevation of an individual through society be made possible, not by what class he comes from and how much money he has in order to buy himself a ticket into the ruling class, but rather from the skills and hard work which he needs to possess. Although contemporary America is not entirely based upon such premises and the next president of the United States will be one who can spend hundreds of millions of dollars in order to win the office, it is the merit of the individual which is judged more than the family in which the applicant came. This is the premise of American democracy which has helped to make this country, to a large degree, the land of opportunity. John Locke had a great deal of influence in this becoming a reality.

John Locke also spoke and wrote on a wide variety of other subjects and it should not be attempted to fit his beliefs into a single and neat definition. His most famous writings did deal with political thought. Locke advocated the presence of checks and balances within the government and even though humans are ruled by reason and tolerance, human nature encouraged men to be selfish and hateful as well. Locke's beliefs in the right of the individual to possess: "life, health, liberty, or possessions"[5] as well as the belief that societal revolution was not only from time to time bound to happen, but that

it was a right and an obligation in circumstances in which the government was trampling upon the rights of the individual.

Locke believed that property is natural right of man and that right is derived from the labor which that individual is willing to partake in so that he may acquire the property. Also, that property which is the sole possession of the individual, that ownership is not to be infringed upon by the government which cannot “ dispose of the estates of the subjects arbitrarily.”[6] All of the aforementioned beliefs would play a profound influence upon the Declaration of Independence as well as the Constitution of the United States. [7]

Locke also spoke about the monetary value of money and its uses within a society as well as the rules of supply and demand. Locke was not one to self contain his sphere of learning to one single aspect. Locke’s writings on The Self was also one of his more important contributions to philosophical thought. Locke defined The Self as: “ that conscious, thinking thing, (whatever substance, made up of whether spiritual, or material, simple, or compounded, it matters not) which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and is so concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends.”[8] In doing so, Locke argues against the

Augustinian view of man as originally sinful but that man is born with a clean slate who later dirties it up with the greed and hatred that all too often, acts as a great impediment to the self fulfillment of The Self. Locke would conclude on the subject by stating: “ I think I may say that of all men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education.”[9] The 19th century debate about nature vs. nurture, was

first made famous by John Locke and his belief that it is the experiences of the individual and not his birth alone, which make up The Self of the individual.

John Locke was one of those rare individuals whose talents, beliefs and writings, have lasted and have remained relevant, centuries after their death. Who within today's world will be able to make the same claim? The applicants are few and far between. Also, who within today's world will be able to influence to the same degree, the ways in which John Locke stood against the established and overly privileged and in the backdrop of threats upon his life, continue to write and to speak his or her own mind and in doing so, affect the lives of millions of people, albeit in an indirect way as was the case with John Locke? In history, we find only a few such people and only hindsight will tell if there are any more to come. If there are more individuals to come with the same motivations and lasting ability, they will stand atop the mountain of human wisdom and greatness with only a few, select individuals. John Locke will one of the few present who will be there to greet the future giants of human wisdom and ability.

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