

## International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(A High Impact Factor, Monthly, Peer Reviewed Journal)

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Vol. 7, Issue 1, January 2018

# John Locke's Political Philosophy and their views on Liberal Democracy

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**ABSTRACT:** John Locke's Political philosophy became the basis of the modern liberal political system. His ideas like inalienable rights of the individuals such as right to life, liberty, and property, Limited government based on the consent of the people and soon became the guiding spirit of modern democracies. He was the most influential modern political thinker. The defense of individual rights to property was central to his political philosophy. He was a theorist of limited government and a government under the rule of law. He considered the legislative organ of the government to be sovereign than the executive and judiciary. Many ideas that we associate with the modern democracies such as government by consent, the rule of law, religious toleration, and commitment to the market private property are the views of Lockean. He wrote on different subjects such as knowledge or human understanding, education, economics, religion, toleration, and government and politics.

**KEYWORDS:** Natural rights, State of nature, political power, origin of the government, two stages of government, limits of the government and right to dissent.

### I. INTRODUCTION

John Locke was born in 1632 in England. It was a turbulent time in England's political history. There were growing tensions between the royalists and parliamentary forces, which were culminated in the Civil War (1642-49). Locke's father fought on the side of parliamentary forces in this war. After completing his schooling from prestigious Westminster school, Locke joined Christ church college, University of Oxford. John Locke provides an excellent philosophy of education. He believes in the role of ideas, especially at a young age on individual character. He wanted children to associate with the right ideas. He is an empiricist, believed in the production of knowledge through experience. In contrast to rationalist arguments on human knowledge that is based on an individual's innate sense of reason and intellect. He believed we all start as a blank slate or tabula rasa. It is through sensations that we first make sense of our surroundings and the world in which we live. It gives us appropriate knowledge and experience of the world; we necessarily combine the experience with the reflection. In the Locke's views, we find a theology premise of his political philosophy. It was first expressed in his Essay on toleration and further developed and better articulated in his Two Treatises on Government. He believed in God as the creator, and human beings have the right to choose which god to believe in, how to practice their religion. In contrast to the royalist argument that such freedom to choose and practice religion should be seen as royal concession. Locke siding with the dissenters believed that it should be rather a matter of right which the state must protect and uphold. He preferred Christianity but objected to the use of force or coercion in matters of religion belief which according to Locke should be a matter of choice. (Boucher, David 2003). In the words of John Dunn, "the roots of Locke's later concerns could be traced in this essay; he writes that "the necessary autonomy of individual religious judgment had been proclaimed to the world of politics. The transposition of this theme from theology and epistemology to sociology and politics made each individual man the final judge of how far the society in which he lived had succeeded in avoiding force, the avoidance of which was its sole end."

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## II. STATE OF NATURE

Locke's views on the state of nature are radically different from the Hobbesian state of nature. As a social contract theorist, Locke uses the similar ideas like Hobbes's such as state of nature and contract or consent to develop his theory of natural and inalienable rights of the individuals, limited government, and right to dissent, in contrast to the Hobbesian "state of nature as a perpetual war of each against all". Lockean state of nature is "the realm of perfect freedom and equality". It is a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions, and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man, it is also a state of equality wherein all power and jurisdiction are reciprocal, no one having more than another. (Chappell, Vere (ed.).1994).

## III. NATURAL RIGHTS

In the words of Locke, human beings have certain natural rights which precede both civil and political society. These rights are such as right to life, liberty, property. These rights individuals retain even after the formation of political society and the state. However, the primary responsibility of the state is to protect these rights, the right to life or self preservation is the basic or fundamental right of each individual. According to Locke, human beings could truly realize their freedom within the conditions set by the natural laws. Although the state of nature is a "state of liberty", it is not a license to do anything that one wants, as many libertarians would argue. But it is realizable within the frame work set by the natural rights or laws. Locke stated that the individual's right to own property is as dear as their right to life and liberty. These private property individuals own when they mix their labor –physical or intellectual with the common resources provided by God. Thus the equality that Locke argued exists in the state of nature was about political and legal equality. (Jha, shefali.2018).

## IV. ORIGIN OF THE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL POWER

Locke asserted that, there some developed complexities and inconveniences that led the individuals to form the government and leave the state of nature. Both kinds of human behaviors were followed the natural laws and also violated it. However, in the absence of an impartial authority or a judge and individual being bias and prejudiced to their own acts of violations of natural laws, it was difficult to adjudicate and enforce the laws impartially. The following four reasons, human beings in the state of nature consented to subject themselves to the authority of a limited government. i. Absence of clarity on established law. ii. Absence of impartial judge to adjudicate. iii. Absence of executive authority to enforce the laws and punish the transgressors.

Locke begins by stating the apparent differences between paternal and political authority, and also refutes his claim of father or husband exercising absolute power over children and wife, respectively. Locke also argues that political authority, unlike paternal authority which is exercised over the free and equal members; it must be based on their consent. In the words of Locke, political power is about right of making laws with penalties of death. and consequently all less penalties, for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of community, in the execution of such laws and in the defense of the commonwealth from foreign injury, and all this only for the public good. According to Locke, Such political power is already available to the individual in the state of nature; they exercise it for the preservation of their life, liberty, and property. (Laslett, P (ed.) 1970).

## V. TWO STAGES OF CONTRACT AND LIMITS OF THE GOVERNMENT

Locke argues the two stages of the social contract, the first stage of the contract is between free and equal members in the state of nature is a party to this contract. The second stage of the social contract is between the member of the political society and the sovereign or government. Just like Hobbesian absolute sovereign stated by the people through a

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contract, which is not a party to contract. The Lockean sovereign is the party to contract among members of the political society, the sovereign is a party in the contract, and he could not exercise limitless power over the people.

Locke presents a theory of government; its existence is to protect the life, liberty, and property of the individual. Locke was against all forms of absolute power or tyrannical authorities. He argued that all types of authority are inherently limited. It is the demand of natural law that every man must treat others as free and equal member. Thus individual can not violate the life, health, liberty, and possessions of other persons. Even the state, as Locke said, exist to recognize and protect these rights of the individuals. (Ryan, Alan James. 2012).

## VI. RIGHT TO DISSENT

Locke's justifications for the individual's right to dissent are in the last two chapters of his magnum opus, the second treatises. These two chapters are entitled as tyranny and of the dissolution of government. He was against all forms of tyranny, religious or political. The individual possess certain natural and hence inalienable rights and government exists to protect those rights. In the words of Locke, people have natural rights to dissent against their government when it fails to protect their right to life, liberty, and property. The protection of these rights was the reason why people agreed to live in a society and form the government. They consent to play the tax to the government because it would work for common good. When the government begins to promote private interests and betray the common trust, people have the right to dissent.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Locke was the most influential modern political thinker. His work is tremendous in modern political era. He wrote many subjects such as, knowledge or human understanding, on education, on economics on religion, on toleration, and on government and politics. He has influenced a great many political thinkers. Many ideas that we associate with modern democracies such as government by consent, the rule of law, religious toleration, and commitment to the market and private property are Lockean positions. Locke led a very eventful life and witnessed much of the epoch defining events and scientific discoveries in the seventeenth and eighteenth century England and Europe. He was rightly regarded as the most influential modern English political philosopher. He was against all forms of absolutism, temporal or spiritual. His arguments for liberty and equality among the men and religious tolerance was the basis of modern discourse on state and politics. He was theorist of a limited government, his compelling account of limited government and its legitimacy based on the consent of the governed, became the basis of the modern liberal democratic form of government.

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