

## The Consequences of Ideas

### Lesson 12: John Locke and the Original Intention

What is the One DUTY of the President of the US? "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

#### I. Introduction

- a. While the existence of legal rights has always been uncontroversial, the idea that certain rights are natural or **inalienable** also has a long history dating back at least to the stoics, through the Reformation and the Enlightenment to today.
- b. During the Enlightenment, **natural law** theory challenged the divine right of kings, and became an alternative justification for the establishment republicanism's social contract with government.
- c. John Locke discussed natural rights in his work, identified them as being "life, liberty, and estate (property)" and argued that such fundamental rights could not be **surrendered** in the social contract.
- d. Natural laws and the idea of the **social contract** were claimed as justification for the rebellion of the American colonies.
- e. While a number of thinkers, stretching from Plato and Aristotle made important contributions, Locke, who is the **philosophical** father of our country, influenced the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution more than any.
- f. The primary sworn duty of the President and the Congress of the United States is to **preserve**, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.
- g. Thus, it is an imperative for us to understand the **original intention** of those who articulated the philosophy which undergirds our Constitution in order to assess whether or not it is being preserved, protected, and defended.

#### II. The Purpose of Government

- a. Locke's political philosophy stemmed from the commonly-accepted Deist idea of **Natural Law**, under which man had Natural Rights, not given to him by any ruler.
- b. Under Natural Rights the right of property is **paramount**. Men came together in an organized community under a Social Contract between every member in order to gain advantages they could not have individually.
- c. This Contract of Society was the foundation of the **Contract** of Government, under which all political power is a trust for the benefit of the people, and the people themselves are at once the creators and beneficiaries of that trust.
- d. The existence of the State is based on a contract between ruler and subjects, who give him power only so that their own welfare is **increased** and their property protected in a way not possible if they alone were to attempt to protect it.
- e. The ruler who keeps the contract is owed **loyalty** by the beneficiaries of his fidelity to the contract. If not, the subjects were obliged to replace him.
- f. Further, Locke thought that everyone must submit to the **majority**, or there would be no social contract and therefore there could be no contract of government.
- g. It was Thomas Jefferson's passionate belief in the ideas of Locke that led him to base the powers of the governed on "**unalienable** rights."
- h. In fact, most of his Declaration of Independence is a bill of particulars in an **indictment** of King George III for his failure to keep the contract with his American subjects.
- i. Under the grievances listed in the Declaration, the king had broken the contract, and it was therefore **void**. This hypothetical contract between the society and the government, therefore, is fundamental to our system of government.
- j. The state, Locke maintained, was concerned only with public order. Its authority extended solely to those aspects of behavior which had to be regulated for the protection of the public; imposing severe **limitations** on the role of government
- k. Locke in his works dealt with and expanded upon the concept of government **power**: it is not, nor can it possibly be, absolutely arbitrary over the lives and fortunes of the people. It is limited to the public good of the society.
- l. It is a power that has no other end but **preservation**, and therefore can never have a right to destroy, enslave, or be designed to impoverish the subjects or to empower legislators to *make a prey of them when he pleases...*" (Locke.)
- m. To Locke, natural **justice** (the guarantee that procedures will be fair) exists and this is so whether the state exists, or not, it is just that the state might better guard natural justice.
- n. If a government subverts the ends for which it was created then it might be deposed; indeed, Locke asserts, revolution in some circumstances is not only a right but an **obligation**.

#### III. Property Rights

- a. He was concerned with principles and rights, and **property** rights are uppermost. He wrote in "The Second Treatise of Government," . . . *every man has a property in his own person. This nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his . . .* "
- b. He said that whatever is removed out of the state that nature provided and is mixed with someone's labor, becomes that person's property (one's life was his property). This view of property is the essence of political **freedom**.

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- c. No government could take the fruits of one's labor and intellect without a **compelling** public need and without compensation, and then only through due process of law.
- d. He wrote in the Second Treatise that men unite in a society "for the **mutual** preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates, which I call by the general name 'property'."
- e. He said that the supreme power (the **legislative**) "*cannot take from any man any part of his property without his own consent. To achieve his ends man gives up, in favour of the state, a certain amount of his personal power and freedom.*"
- f. In **exchange** for the preservation of property provided by government everyone should pay his share (a small, flat tax), but only with the consent of the majority.

#### IV. Human Nature

- a. Locke was an **empiricist**, who, along the lines of Aristotle thought all knowledge comes to us through experience. "No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience."
- b. Disagreeing with Plato, he thought that there is no such thing as **innate ideas**; there is no such thing as moral precepts; we are born with an empty mind, with a soft tablet (*tabula rasa*) ready to be writ upon by experimental impressions.
- c. Locke maintained that the original state of natural man was happy and characterized by reason and tolerance. He maintained that all human beings were **equal** and free to pursue life, health, liberty, and possessions.
- d. He thought of man as a **moral** being, who individually, contracted out "into civil society by surrendering personal power to the ruler and magistrates," and did so as "a method of securing natural morality more efficiently."

#### V. The Christian Response to Locke

- a. The political philosophy of John Locke has guided the American experiment with democracy and the republican form of government successfully for over two hundred years, but, it is not without its problems from a Biblical **perspective**.
- b. It must be noted that John Locke was a **Deist**, not a Christian and so many of his ideas must be seen through that prism in order to be evaluated from a Biblical point of view.
- c. When Locke (or anyone else for that matter) uses the word "**natural**" as in natural law; natural rights; etc, the philosophy undergirding their proposition is that of rationalism, or that which may be determined by rational thought processes.
- d. This does not infer that such ideas are to be found in the Bible, but only that reasonable men may reasonably deduce from logical contemplation of a matter that certain things must be true. These may or may not align with **revelation**. *Prov 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. KJV*
- e. Locke's idea of property rights being foundational to the liberty of the person does not find a perfect correlation in Biblical revelation. However, God does establish personal property rights as fundamental in **His Law**. *Ex 20:15 Thou shalt not steal. KJV*
- f. Locke proposes that citizens are under a social contract with their rulers which, if abrogated by the rulers, **breaks** the contract between the governed and the governor.
- g. This is at odds with the Biblical commands which place citizens in a **submissive** role to the governor even if his rule is odious to them and violates their notions of the public good. *Rom 13:1-2 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. KJV*
- h. From this assumption, Locke goes on to state that in such cases the ruler must be replaced either through legal political processes or open **rebellion** if necessary. This is problematic for the Bible believing Christian.
- i. The role of government in Locke's view is extremely **limited** but such limitations, however politically desirable they may be have no Biblical foundation. *Rom 13:3-5 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. NIV*
- j. Finally, consistent with the Deist belief, Locke asserts that the basic **nature** of man is rational and good and that given a choice man would behave in ways that are good and consistent with the public good of others.
- k. This **over**-valuation of man's basic human nature is completely at odds with Biblical revelation. *Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: KJV*

#### VI. Application

- a. If you believe that God acts sovereignly in the affairs of nations then there is no need to **worry** about what is happening in our country. Are you **worried** about what you see happening?
- b. Whether we believe the political agenda being enacted by our government conforms to the original intent of the founders of the Constitution or not our Biblical responsibility to our present government officials remains unchanged.
- c. To what extent do you find yourself spending more time complaining about their actions than you spend in praying for them?