

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Justifying Private Property

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Locke, J. (2008, March). [Chapter 5]. In J. Bennet (Ed. & Trans.), *Second treatise of government* (pp. 10–18). Early Modern Texts. <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf> (Original work from 1689)

Comment

John Locke would disagree with Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill about private property. Recall that Hobbes denies a natural right to private property, arguing that private property is merely *conventional*, created by the state to promote security and stability. Bentham and Mill, meanwhile, argue that private property is only *instrumentally* valuable insofar as it is needed to promote greater happiness or social utility.

In this section from the *Second Treatise of Government*, however, Locke goes to great lengths, and uses a lot of examples, to defend a natural and *intrinsic* right to private property. In a clear rejection of Hobbes, Locke argues that property rights are *not* conventional, but exist even outside civil society and in the state of nature itself.

Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. What are John Locke's arguments that there is a natural right to take something previously available to everyone (something held in common) and making it one's own private property? What conditions does Locke specify for a person to rightfully do so?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.