

Locke and the Social Contract

Work and the Human Condition: Winter 2009

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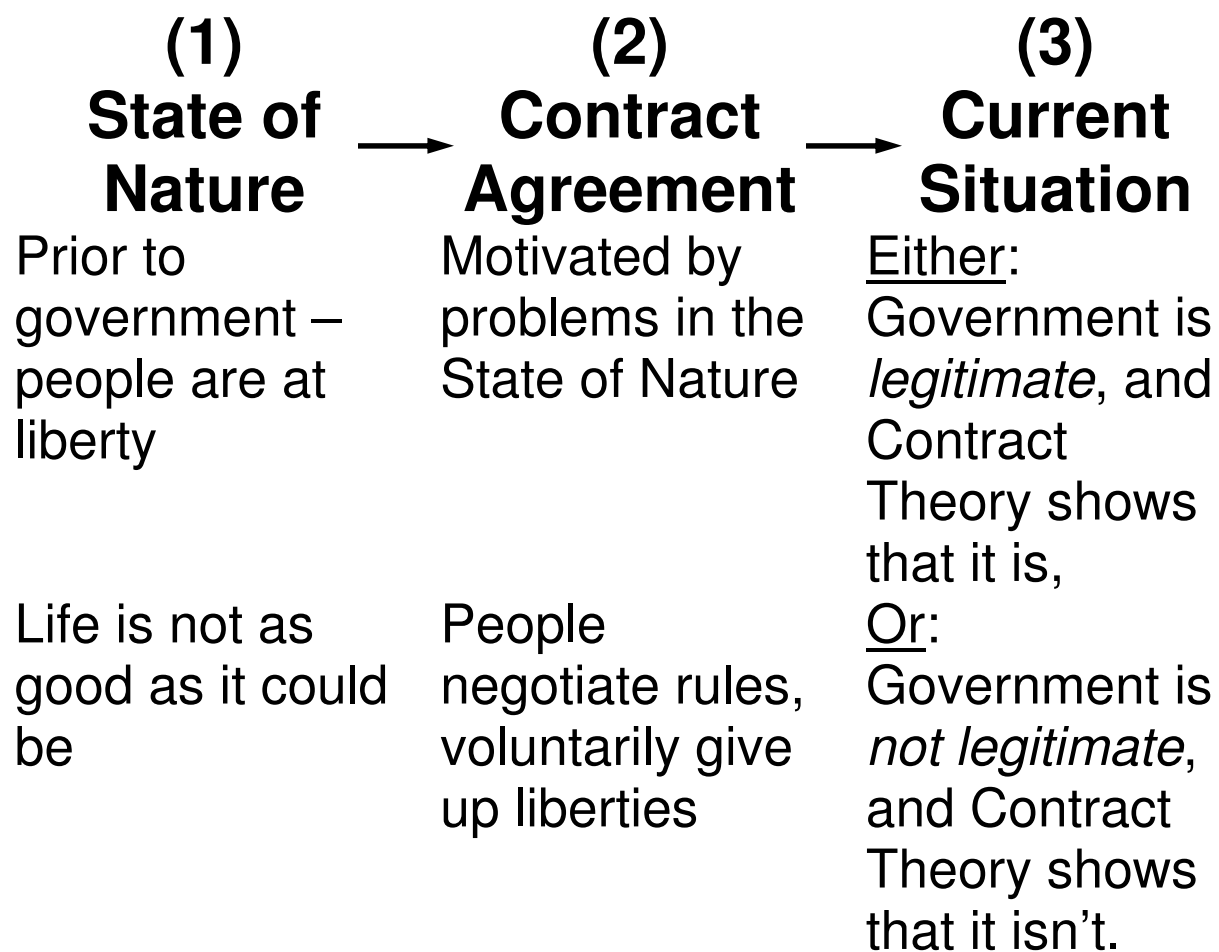
I. Locke and His Times

1632		Locke born
1642-51	English Civil War	
1642-3		Father in Parl'y army
1645	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>	
1647-52		At Westminster School
1649	Charles I executed	
1649-60	Rule by Parliament and Oliver Cromwell	
1652-8		At Oxford
1660	Restoration: Charles II	
1665		Meets Lord Ashley, (Earl of Shaftesbury)
1670-5		Holds gov't offices, w/ Shaftesbury's help
1679-81	Exclusion Crisis	Drafts <i>Two Treatises</i>
1682-3	Suppression of Radical Whigs	Shaftesbury, Locke flee to Holland
1685	Charles II dies; James II succeeds	
1688	"Glorious Revolution"	
1689		Returns to England, publishes <i>Two Treatises</i>
1704		Locke dies

II. Locke's Social Contract

A. Contract Theory in General

Three Stages



B. Locke's Contract Theory

Project: To justify strict limitation on monarchy, while maintaining traditional hierarchy.

Locke's State of Nature

- Men (he really means men...) are at perfect liberty
- People are subject to Law of Nature, based on God's creation
- People are rational, able to discover and understand the Law of Nature
- People live in families, w/ husband and father in charge ("stronger and more able")
- War is justified
- Slavery is justified
- Crucial: *Property*

Locke on Property

- God gave the Earth to humanity in common.
- People have property over their bodies and their activities –“the labor of our bodies and the work of our hands.”
- By removing something from nature, a person “mixes his labor” with it – this makes it *his property*.
- An interesting passage: Ch. V, 28.
- A restriction on property: You can take only as much as...
 - I. ...you can make productive use of (no wasting), and
 - II. ...leaves “enough, and as good” for others
- Money is introduced, thus allowing for:
 - I. Commerce and trade, and
 - II. Accumulation of wealth
- Wage labor (cf. V, 27) – why? Accumulation!

Locke's State of Nature Has...

- **Law of Nature**
- **Hierarchical Families**
- **War**
- **Slavery**
- **Property**
- **Money, Trade and Commerce**
- **Servants and Masters**

Locke's State of Nature Lacks...

- **Police**
- **Fire Protection**
- **Military**
- **In short: A central agent of authority and force**

Origin of Government

Heads of households want to be more secure in their property.

Therefore, they come together and agree to give up some of their liberties in exchange for the establishment of a central government.

They also authorize taxation to support services that secure their property:

- Police
- Fire Services
- Military
- Minimal regulation of markets

Limitations on Government

Property rights are *prior* to government.

Government is justified *in order to protect* property.

Taxes are authorized only for specific purposes.

Therefore, extension of government beyond those bounds is *illegitimate*.

III. Observations

Locke's account, if successful, justifies limited government with strong protection of property rights.

Locke appeals to the state of nature and to how humans are within it – human nature.

People in Locke's state of nature have fully developed reason, and can recognize God's law within nature.

God's creation itself is conceptualized with reference to property.

IV. Critique

State of nature is either *historical* or *abstracted from current society*.

(a) No good reason to think that it is historical.

(b) No good reason to think that *all* people *at all times and places* are as Locke suggests.

In particular:

- Human reason
- Families
- Possessiveness
- Origin of property rights (metaphorical)

In short: *Locke loads the whole weight of his argument onto “human nature”!*