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Philosophy 335

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Summary 3

Locke in his “*Second Treatise”* is presenting his views on how a government may form. He discusses in detail about his view on the state of nature and what property is. He believes that understanding the state in which all people are in naturally is key to understanding on how a government is formed. In what follows, I will present Locke’s views as presented in the “*Second Treatise”* and what Thomas Hobbes may have thought about Lock’s views.

As stated about Locke felt that to understand the emergence of a government you first must understand that natural state that exists between men before a government is present. Locke defines this “initial state” as being a “…state of perfect freedom of acting and disposing of their own possessions and persons as they think fit within the bounds of the law of nature (Locke, *Second Treatise*).” He elaborates on this point further saying that in this state people do not ask permission to act in any way. It is a state where all people are looking for their best interest. Locke also presents a very Hobbesian concept, that all men are equal in this state, meaning that no individual is naturally given any benefit that puts them above any other man. In this state there is no relationship of subordination or subjection with the exception that God can set people above others and confer them with an undoubtable right to dominion and sovereignty. Something that is against the Hobbesian view of the state of nature that Locke seems to presents is that man is naturally a social animal and will keep their promises.

Locke also delves into the concept of property and how government is created specifically to protect it. First it helps to define property in Locke’s context; property to Locke is all that a person owns, including their own life. So to Locke property is one’s life, liberty, and estate. Locke states that property must exist outside the context of government. In the state of nature the work that an individual puts into obtaining or improving something is that makes it his. By making the claim that government was made specifically to protect its citizens property, Locke is claiming that government serves a private interest, as opposed to a political one. Locke considers that for a government to be legitimate it must be built in a way to ensure that individual’s property must be protected from the government as well. Because of this he objects that an absolute monarchy is not a valid for of government due to its unlimited power over its citizens.

I believe that had Hobbes been presented Locke’s concept of property he would almost entirely disagreed. Locke explicitly states that property exists outside the will of the government, and as a consequence the purpose of government is to protect its citizen’s property. Hobbes on the other hand stats that property exists solely by the will of the government. Hobbes also claims that a rational individual should be willing to give up all of their property (with the exception of their life) in order to keep the government in power. Locke has an opposite view on this and claims that if a government attempts to take away its citizen’s property they have the right to revolt and replace the existing, failing government with a new, functional one.