John Locke's Views On Private Property

John Locke, an English philosopher, is regarded highly as an influential thinker. His works have laid the foundation to what now is known as political liberalism and modern philosophical empiricism. An inspirer of both the Constitution of the United States and European Enlightenment, his works have been considered to be highly significant in the political context. This assessment would critically assess John Locke's argument that he made regarding the concept of private property. Locke's idea regarding the private property has been celebrated in Chapter V, 'Of property', of The Second Treatise of Government.

As per Locke, considering the natural state of things, a condition which defines as the people having equal rights for using the natural resources which are provided by nature, no one has any exclusive rights for these resources. However, these resources would have been deemed useless for the survival and well-being of humans if they could not be appropriated for personal use. The question that emerges here is that how the shift to private ownership from initially being un-owned resources is justified morally? In addition, another question which arises is how a legitimate claim can be made to get exclusive rights for a resource which anyone could use in the natural state (Locke 1764).

The treatment provided by Locke to these problems is considered to highly controversial between the scholarly groups. Locke has a high status and regards for the non-academic libertarians and his leading ideas are known widely (Locke 1764). However, considering that the majority of his work remains to be unread by a large population would be a safe guess. Considering the transition from the shared dominion to private ownership, this was Locke's concept of self-ownership also known as the 'property in one's person'. Locke's work on private property which is considered to be highly influential in political history provides critical ideas. Locke's describes that although the earth and its creatures are common to everyone, every individual has the rights and property for himself. This extends to the idea that the work of the hands and the labour done by the body are the property of the respective individual (Locke 1764). Locke beautifully describes that when something which was provided by nature was moulded under the efforts of an individual makes it that individual's property. To understand his idea of private property, Locke even provided an example using acorns. In this, an individual has a right on the acorns as they were picked by the person. The labour of his work helped put a distinct nature to the scenario of what was common and what was his. By adding more to what has been provided by nature gives the individual its respective right (Locke 1764).

Although this argument provided by Locke seems plausible, it raises a question that if that which was common to others, won't assuming its right to oneself make it a robbery? According to Locke, seeking consent from the universe would result in universal starvation. Considering the moral aspects, requiring such consents is not necessary as humans have their preservation rights. Therefore, even though consuming natural goods without the consent of the public cannot be considered moral, the act of self-preservation has been defended as an individual's personal right (Locke 1764).

Locke's idea about considering the relation between property and the person, it has been provided that in the seventeenth and eighteenth's century regarding property an attribute to the

person was a common practice. For example, property in one's happiness, property in one's labour, property in one's conscience and property in one's freedom. Another way of looking at this idea is like people consider a thing such as a computer to be their property, however, philosophers in the earlier times considered to be having a property in the computer (Locke 1764). Regarding the private property, Locke argued that it is the primary role of the government to provide protection to the property rights of the people. In this Locke had included liberty, life and external goods such as estate in the property's generic conception. This indicates that Locke was not just referring to the objects of material value, but he also meant that government should work to providing protection for the people's fundamental rights as these significant for achieving happiness and self-starvation in one's life (Locke 1764).

Locke has also stressed on labour as being an important foundation for the concept of private property. The reason for this has been said to be as basic as sustaining ourselves, even if involves labour where something was merely picked from the grounds such as the acorns (Locke 1764). Furthermore, Locke discusses that it is not possible for humans to be able to survive without engaging in labour. Therefore, coercively expropriating fruits of the labour of another person is violating their self-preservation fundamental rights and since labour is involved in all the activities which help in sustaining life, this issue becomes highly significant (Locke 1764).

It has been presented that Locke is considered to be first who pinpointed 'labour' as an important entity which is related to the acquisition of the titles related to different properties. Hunder (1972) has also discussed the concept of 'labour' and its importance for the people. According to Hunder, Locke made an entrance into the debate surrounding the problem associated with labour. Before, Locke had provided his arguments about property and the nature of labour for a person, the issue that baffled everyone was regarding the unemployment of people. It thought that there was a lack of diligence when considering the labour problems which was unemployment's main cause and this was the reason for which such discussions about labour emerged. Hunder (1972) considers Locke's work in the 'The Second Treatise of Government' to of high significance. The researcher has provided that this work of Locke's laid the foundations on which the modern labour concepts would be built (Hunder 1972).

Workers in the seventeenth century were considered as a prime, precious and fundamental form of a commodity with the help of which any manufacturing could be done. However, Hunder highlights that the workers who provided labour were although a central production factor, was still considered socially inferior. Locke analysed this relationship and provided a generalised form which was able to transcend the limitations which the economic problems offer. According to Locke, the concept of labour that it was an act or agency which helped the man to improve the social and the natural world, and therefore it cannot be discussed solely on the basis of economic and production growth (Hunder 1972).

Just like Locke's idea of private property, Hunder (1972) provides that the addition of humanity via labour entitles the people to pieces of nature which can be considered as a private right. For Locke, as discussed before, labour served as a primary expression for the humanity, and the vehicle that allowed the men to possess objects and thus make these objects a part of themselves that will be distinct from others. Another philosopher-researcher Sahlins (1974) discussing the affluent society provided that the labours' international division allows the market in providing various kinds of products. According to Sahlins (1974), the natural products found in the environment can be accessed directly and as Locke mentioned available for anyone to

consume. Sahlins, however, does not deny that accessing them might require knowledge and skills. The philosopher has presented that having a property or a specific amount of goods does not mean anything other than presenting the relation between people in terms of social status and that it is the growth which is important (Sahlins, 1974).

Hunder (1972) also agreed with the idea that growth in the sector is the key requirement for any individual. According to Hunder, Locke agreed with the same idea and attributed labour to be that entity which facilitates this growth. The work of Locke was able to establish labour as social philosophy's prime ingredient. The arguments made by Locke for labour and private property provided a new direction to the workers. This direction was important as it saw the human relationships as the commodity relationships' models and the human as the commodity. Locke was able to distinguish the fact that the success and quality of one's work could be established as a factor of moral worth which would be subject to the market's social evaluation.

Locke's argument provides great detail into entitlement through private property which also extends to labour. Considering the modern century's global distribution of capital various views have been presented. Some of these aim towards maximising the rights to individual property while others focus on meeting basic welfare, others towards continued growth. Hunder (1972) and Sahlins (1974) have provided their opinions about labour and private property which seem to be in agreement with Locke's arguments. It just comes down to the interpretation of the arguments as governments could see them differently plus there could be lack of understanding which might result in negative evaluation for Locke's work which focused on private property and its importance. Nevertheless, his work continues to provide valuable chains of thoughts to the field of philosophy and also to politics.

References

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