

Lesson #20

Political Theory – The School of Life

(Chinese version available too)

John Locke

17th century English philosopher.

Major contribution of 3 issues that still affect us to this day. 1. How we should educate our children?, 2. Who should rule over us?, and 3. What should we do with people of different religious backgrounds?

He was born in 1632. Died in 1704.

Influenced by English civil war and the beheading of King Charles.

1. He addressed what to do with various religious views within a society.
 - a. Promoted freedom of belief.
 - i. Wrote essay “Toleration” in 1689.
 - b. Advocated toleration on the basis of 3 points.
 - i. Humans can’t totally evaluate the truth claims of all religions.
 - ii. Enforcing one “true” religion wouldn’t work because people can’t be compelled into belief through violence.
 - iii. Coercing religious conformity leads to far more social disorder than allowing diversity.
 - c. The Role of the State is to preserve the comforts of society and nothing to do with men’s souls. Religion is a personal choice. Set their own rules and let the people choose which religion to follow.
 - i. By 18th century all other nations looked at England with envy.
 - ii. What one believed was irrelevant to one’s status in the State.
 - d. His idea had a remarkable influence on the world’s societies!
2. Wrote “Government” in 1689.
 - a. Who should rule the country and on what legitimate basis?
 - i. Authority of God to rule – Locke
 - ii. Authority of Kings to rule – Hobbs

1. "State of Nature" defines that people are really bad if left to themselves so they need to be ruled by a **dictator**.
 - b. Locke agreed with Hobbs that before government there is a State of Nature.
 - i. State of Nature, according to Locke, is not as bad as Hobbs argues.
 - ii. People 'freely' give up some of their rights to the government i.e. "consent".
 1. People still retained their "natural rights" because they are, "inalienable".
 - a. Not ruler can take those away from you.
 2. Government's role is to preserve those "natural rights".
 - a. If the government violates those "natural rights" then the people have the right to overthrow that government.
 - c. Locke's ideas hugely influenced western societies, particularly the American Declaration of Independence.
 - i. Separation of Church and State.
 - ii. 2nd amendment is there to defend against a government that violates our civil rights, even with arms.
 1. Locke: People should always have the means and right to overthrow the government.
3. Education: "Thoughts on Education" written by Locke in 1693. **Some people say that it's the most influential book every written on education!**
 - a. Locke – We start off life with minds full of blank pages.
 - i. Counter to popular view that our minds already have complete thoughts about many ideas. Locke countered that idea.
 - b. Locke argued that everything we know is from "experience" and "internal" reflections about the world.
 - c. Locke argued that education is absolutely crucial to how people turn out.
 - d. We are very vulnerable to ideas placed in our heads as children.
 - i. Create the foundation of our "selves". Last an entire lifetime.
 - e. He was against useless subjects being taught to children e.g. Latin, Greek and Poetry.

- i. Learn only what would be practically useful e.g. science, ethics, business and psychology.
- ii. Should study at the “School of Life”!