**Hierarchical Structure Within John Locke’s Theory of Property**

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Plato and John Locke are seen by many scholars as complete opposites. John Locke is seen as the founder of Lockean liberalism or as seen today as the conservative party. Plato was born before the modern period (about 428 B.C.E.) and was a philosopher in classical Greece. On the other hand John Locke was born in 1632 in the northeast region of England. When he was little Locke had lots of experience with school and eventually graduated from Oxford University. The lives of John Locke and Plato are very different because they came from two completely different time periods that had different out looks on the world and how people interacted with each other. Plato was much more interested in the community and how people could interact to make the individuals as virtuous as possible. On the flipside, John Locke is much more concerned with the individual rights of man and preserving what they work for. Although, most scholars today see John Locke’s theory of property rights as a good thing, I believe it serves as a hierarchical structure that has affected American society today and we should look to Plato’s ideals on property for guidance, because the emphasis is on community building, making others happy, and the seeking of knowledge and virtue.

Before I address both Locke and Plato’s political philosophies I must first discuss some secondary literature from Steven Forde and Allan Bloom. First I will address Steven Forde, and his article, “The Charitable John Locke”. The article starts of by addressing the fact that many scholars today stereotype John Locke’s classical liberalism as simply allowing people to accumulate as much property as possible, while removing any obligation to share.[[1]](#footnote-1) After this assertion is made Forde sets up his argument that John Locke’s theory of property actually promotes citizens to help and promote the common good of other citizens. The first part of his argument rests on the assertion that “the goods of nature originally belong to mankind in common and no one has a right to private dominion over any one else.” This means that people have an obligation to share with others who may be in need of food to stay alive. Forde’s second argument is based in Locke’s conception of natural rights. Forde argues that Locke’s views on natural rights supports the preservation of mankind, and that men are not suppose to harm another in his life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. For Locke the good of mankind out weights the individual rights that we are naturally entitled to. The final point that Forde argues is the spoilage limit that Locke places in his society is yet another example of Locke elevating the communal good over the individual right. This approach to John Locke’s Theory of property focuses on the aspects of communal good, something that many other scholars do not see.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Moving from Forde to Allan Bloom and his interpretive essay of Plato’s *Republic*. The Goal of Bloom’s interpretive essay was to demonstrate how he believes Plato’s *Republic* should be read and interpreted. The idea that Bloom suggests and shows in his writing is this Ironic interpretation that comes from the idea that Socrates is trying to make the link between philosophy and every future philosopher. Socrates knows that he cannot be open about philosophy, so he has to come up with other ways to teach them, so *The Republic* is that tool to teach future philosophers. This means the city is set up as a theoretical “just way” of life that Socrates may or may not envision being a real thing. Bloom is trying to show that Socrates is not afraid of ridicule and that is what it takes to become a philosopher. One example of this is Socrates is able to abstain from intercourse and other personal desires because he believes it is not what philosophers do. The ironic interpretation also puts forth the fact that the whole goal of the book is to show Glaucon and Thrasymachus what a just city is, and how to live a just life. The conclusion is that the philosophic life is the most just lifestyle. Moving forward I will cover the problems I see with John Locke’s Theory of Property, the benefits in Plato’s *Republic,* and finally I will discuss how Locke’s theory on Property rights has affect society today and how we should look to Plato for better ideas on property.

**1. Locke’s Theory of Property**

John Locke’s Second Treatise of Government is the founding statement and justification of the right to private property[[3]](#footnote-3). Locke’s theory of property starts when man is in the state of nature. Locke starts off by suggesting that, “god has given the earth to mankind in common,” this means that everyone is entitled to some sort of land. He then moves onto explain how man can come to claim this property as his. The way you obtain property in Locke’s society is measured by the amount of work and labor you put into that land with your own hands.[[4]](#footnote-4) There is some restraint when it comes to this accumulation of property, you must only take enough so that there is some left in common for others.[[5]](#footnote-5) When it comes to nuts that fall from trees, or deer that run free in the wild, or the apples hanging from trees if you use your labor to remove them from society they become your property. If any of the food you get from your labor spoils before it is used, then you have taken too much. In the state of nature people have control and provide protection for their own property, up until the formation of the new political society. Once everyone has entered the new political society, the main role of the government is to protect the private property rights of individuals. These limiting conditions that Locke proposes before the invention of money seem morally sound, but as we will see once the invention of money occurs, neither of these conditions survives.

Once the invention of money comes along for Locke, he believes that you may accumulate as much gold or silver as one would like because it does not spoil.[[6]](#footnote-6) So he has essentially negated the original right to labor and now you are able to buy other peoples labor and products of their labor, without having to actually put the labor in yourself. So, property holders can now employ people, and property is held just by the fact that that you worked it once, not that you are still working the land by yourself. Also the idea of a tacit agreement that all man came together and put a value on money is central to Locke’s theory. This is where I have an issue with Locke, how can it be that every man has agreed to the use of money? It seems like the use of money could be forced on some peoples if they do not want to it or think it could corrupt the soul.

Also Locke is supports on the accumulation of possessions and land without limit in the second treatise when he is talking about wasted land, “So little, that even amongst us, land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste.”[[7]](#footnote-7) This means that Locke wants people to literally find every last inhabitable property and make use of it or appropriate it in some fashion. Another example is towards the end of his chapter when he is discussing money, “Again, if he would give his nuts for a piece of metal, pleased with its colour; or exchange his sheep for shells, or wool for a sparkling pebble or diamond, and keep those by him all his life; he invaded not the rights of others; He might heap as much as he pleases.” [[8]](#footnote-8)This means that people who have land may trade what they get off that land for other possessions that they will accumulate for the rest of their lives. Locke suggests nowhere in the text that there should be a limit to how much property or possessions one can accumulate, or how little one can accumulate as well. This leaves the door open for the rich to take advantage of the poor or even the smart taking advantage of the unwise people in society. The goal of a society should not be to make money it should be to help those around you and to not take advantage of them.

Locke ends his chapter on property by stating that he believes that man will only carve out and take as much as people need.[[9]](#footnote-9)Locke has a very individualized approach to how he views property and Plato has a much more community-oriented view of what property should look like in his republic.

**2. Plato’s Republic**

Before discussing and analyzing *The Republic,* there has to be some clarification to the way I interpret Plato’s *Republic.* There are two core interpretations when reading *The Republic,* The first being the literal interpretation of what Socrates is saying. This interpretation believes Socrates is trying to create a city that benefits him the most and actually creates a hierarchical structure itself. The more common, and the interpretation that I personally read is the ironic interpretation. The whole goal of the text here is to educate Glaucon and Adeimantus about how to live virtuous lives that benefit everyone around them.

For some scholars it is easy to take the literal interpretation, but I believe there is more to the story and that Socrates is trying to educate Glaucon and Adeimantus in order for others to see that making others happy and seeking knowledge is the highest form of being a virtuous human. At the beginning of book two, Glaucon try’s to revive Thrasymachus’s argument about what is just and explains that people don’t actually want to be just, but they do so because they want people to see them in a good light. This is important because it shows how selfish Glaucon is, he is only willing to act justly if he gets certain benefits and perks from doing so. Socrates try’s to prove to the brothers that justice is something we do for its own sake and that the benefits that come with it are for the betterment of the whole community.[[10]](#footnote-10) After this Glaucon goes on a rant about how the unjust person has a better life in the city because he is the leader of the city, he can have relationships with who ever he wants, and he is wealthy.[[11]](#footnote-11) This only proves further that as of now Glaucon believes the unjust life is the best because of what you get out of it. At this point Socrates starts to envision the most just city.

The formation of the just and healthy city is a key distinction for Plato. The city is founded because we all need each other in some way, not for the protection against one another. Next Socrates lays out the most important needs for the city. The top priority for the city is the provision of food, the second housing, and third clothing.[[12]](#footnote-12) This is key because Socrates places food as the top priority in the city, in Locke’s ideal society the government is suppose to protect your property from other people, sharing seems to be missing from Locke’s theory. After Socrates gets done addressing how people will interact in the city and how they will have moderate meals, Glaucon says, “You seem to make these men have their feasts without relishes.”[[13]](#footnote-13) This furthers the point that within the just city Glaucon puts luxury and desire for it above everything else unlike Socrates. After the relishes and luxuries get mixed into the city bad things start to happen. The city will need more doctors because people are starting to be less healthy.[[14]](#footnote-14) There will also be a shortage of land, which leads to war because each city will fight over which is theirs and if there is war you need guardians to defend your city. All of the unhealthy things that happen in the city are a result of Glaucon wanting to introduce luxury into the once healthy city. Socrates now moves onto discuss the formation of the soul and how to fix Glaucon’s unhealthy city.

The next book starts off by addressing how the guardians are educated. In the city there is to be no poetry or stories that portray people doing unjust things or indulging in their personal desires. The guardians also need to be hard on the outside in order to fight off invaders, and soft on the inside to treat the citizens of the city justly.[[15]](#footnote-15) Here, Socrates is really trying to demonstrate to Glaucon that the health of the soul is really the most important thing. The guardians of the city are the people who are older, love the city, and are the best protectors of the city itself.[[16]](#footnote-16) Next, Socrates introduces the noble lie and myth of the metals. The noble lie is to tell all the citizens of the society that god put different kinds of metal into each of their souls at birth. There are three different types of souls, first the gold souls who are the guardians, next you have the silver souls who are auxiliaries and help the guardians, and last you have the bronze souls who are your primary producers in the city. Citizens are also to be told that if a bronze soul is allowed to be guardian, then the city will be destroyed because they have souls that love money and luxury. The guardians do not live the luxurious lifestyle that you would think, they are not allowed to own any private property, no gold or silver, their homes are provide and they must all live in common.[[17]](#footnote-17) Adeimantus vehemently denies this proposal and claims that the rulers will not be happy without any of these luxuries that Socrates has taken away from them. This is important because Glaucon and Adeimantus are still at the point where they believe luxury and money are the most virtuous aspects of life.[[18]](#footnote-18) Socrates believes his idea will work because the whole goal of the city isn’t to make one group more happy over another it is to make the whole city happy. Moving forward I will now look at how the growing love of money and wealth leads to problems in Socrates’s city and what people should love instead of money and wealth.

Socrates starts to have problems with his ideal city when talking about how it would come to into being. Socrates himself says that every man and women over the age of ten must be exiled from the city in order for this city to function. [[19]](#footnote-19) This idea seems highly problematic in the sense of, how are you going to get all of the mothers and fathers to just abandon the city they have lived in for their whole life. Not to mention how will ten year olds educate themselves when there are no leaders in the city? To me this highlights the ironic interpretation and that the whole point of the city is to teach Glaucon and Adeimantus to dislike money and wealth. When Socrates introduces philosophy to Glaucon in book five he becomes a huge fan of philosophy and starts to focus less on the gaining of political power and wealth.[[20]](#footnote-20) Here you can start to see the subtle shift in how Glaucon is thinking, the pursuit of knowledge is the new goal for Glaucon. To further the ironic interpretation Socrates himself at the beginning of book eight believes that the city he has just proposed to Glaucon will eventually fail.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Socrates sees some forms of government being inferior to others and believes there is a cycle that occurs. The cycle includes the four types of regimes that Socrates believes are the worst. These regimes include: aristocracy (best possible case), then forms the Oligarchy, after the oligarchy fails we have a democracy, and once that democracy fails we have a tyranny. Socrates sees the down fall of the aristacracy being because of a rampant mixing of the classes, there is no more strict separation between classes and this creates war and hatred between citizens. Also he sees a faction rise within his society, the bronze class in his society is only focused on moneymaking and possession of land, houses, and gold and silver. While the gold and silver classes lead the city towards virtue and the ancient establishment. With that being said as time goes on and the mixing of classes continues you will start to lose the virtuous people who seek knowledge and wisdom and start to have an abundance of people who want to acquire more wealth and want to start more wars. The destruction of the aristocracy starts when the guardians start to acquire private property and become self-interested.[[22]](#footnote-22) The new rulers love pursuing war and secretly love wealth now.[[23]](#footnote-23) So the city has now deteriorated from aristocracy to timocracy. The main difference is that a timocracy is ruled by spiritedness and they have desires to rule and be involved in political life.[[24]](#footnote-24) Also it involves the loving of money over time. After the fall of the timocracy we have the oligarchy, where the ruler is chosen based off of how much wealth they have. The city is also divided up into the rich and the poor where the rich make all the laws. We also see the emergence of the free riders in society, which are beggars or thieves, which cause problems because they are no longer helping people in the city. From here the oligarchic form of government descends into a democratic form of government, when the poor start getting sick of the rich and take over ruling. Socrates believes this is the most equal form of government because of the variety that it contains.[[25]](#footnote-25) Democracy deteriorates into tyranny. Socrates sees tyranny as the worst form of government because all laws are ignored and the leader will eventually manipulate and subject his people to slavery. This tyrant indulges in their desires and pleasures. Also he is not mentally stable and eventually loses all friends and social interaction. For Socrates this is the worst form of government because it helps no one, everyone who lives under a tyrant is not happy and wants to live in a better community. The overall message that Plato wants us to take away from this is not what forms of government are best for governing us, but to see who the leaders of those communities are and what their desires and luxuries are. If they involve money, luxuries, and sex Socrates puts them on the bottom of the list as possible choices. The one community that Plato does elevate is a community that is focused on the communal good and helping each other out. Ultimately I believe Plato thinks people should pursue knowledge and wisdom as the highest form of virtue and I believe he models that after himself.

**3. Connecting John Locke to Modern Economic Practices and Policies**

Although John Locke’s theory of property was established almost 100 years before the founding of the United States, it still managed to make its way into the beliefs of the founding fathers through the form of the Declaration of Independence and through the development of modern day capitalism. Locke, in his theory on property believes that every man is entitled to life, liberty, and property. Now comparing this with what the founding fathers were trying to do with the Dec. of Ind. when they wrote,

“all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with

certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit

Of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among

Men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever

Any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government…”

This seems like they took directly from John Locke’s Second Treatise on Government, not only did they almost use word for word his line of “life, liberty, and property”, but they also took into account of Locke’s dissolution of government and how everything is in the people’s hands. Also it is important to note that the Declaration of Independence has specific protections for certain individual rights that the government is suppose to protect and uphold. Moving from the Declaration of Independence and into modern day capitalism we can see the tie to what I think would be Locke’s ideal political society is what we have in America today. People are pretty much free to explore the free market and work and put effort into things in order to make it theirs. Not to mention he would love how little the government taxes big corporations because Locke believes it is the government’s job to protect our property against others. Now that I have made the connection between John Locke’s theory of property and the founding and growth of the United States of America, I will now address the problems and a solution that arise from using John Locke’s theory of property in our own political and economic life.

**4. Problems Presented in American Culture Due to Locke’s Theory**

During the founding of The United States of America it is understandable to assume why they wanted to adopt Locke’s theory of property into their new society. There was plenty of fresh terrain and land up for the taking and if you put your work into that land it became yours. The Native Americans that lived in America had a much different conception of property rights, they believed in land as a shared resource. What that means is that they owned whatever they made with their own two hands. They did not accumulate goods, and they freely shared tools and other resources with friends and family who needed them.[[26]](#footnote-26) This sounds much like society that Socrates and Plato would like as well, living a simple, but happy life and providing for the common good. In todays society acquiring property and wealth is not as simple as it was during the founding of America. Today you have people like the Rockefeller family who is still benefiting from the very early land grabs that happened in America. Their family owned the first big oil company that sprouted up in America called The Standard Oil Company.[[27]](#footnote-27) That money has since been passed down through inheritance and now one of his great grand children reaps the benefits today. That money helped him become involved with American politics and even made it easier to help out his family owned business because they own shares in Exxon Mobil Oil Company. It is projected that Jay Rockefeller’s total net worth today is estimated at 120 million dollars. Locke’s theory of property has directly allowed for the accumulation of this much wealth. Why isn’t this money being used to help other people instead of just giving your self a luxurious lifestyle? You could give almost all of that money away and still live a confortable life in America today. Plato would completely disagree with this lifestyle especially someone who is a politician and in a position of power he should be using his money for the betterment of society and The United States. This is where I ask myself how much is enough? When do we say other people matter to me more than money?

These are problems that I do not believe Locke foresaw with allowing unlimited accumulation in his society. I will now discuss what happens when the people who have accumulated a lot of wealth start to control a country.

Having wealth and power go hand in hand when thinking about who owns the country. Right now in The United States I argue that the countries top one percent of all wage earners are the ones who control the countries wealth and resources. If any of these huge companies and banks wanted to shut down the entire market would crash and every person in this country except the one percent would be in trouble. The average income for the one percent in 2008 was 1.2 million dollars. The problem I see with this countries one percent is the whole American dream that you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps and get to become one of the one percent? Why do we as a society elevate these people to a pedestal that they do not deserve? I believe it is because we only value money and material possessions in today’s society. There is very little focus on the communal good and helping out your neighbor instead of adding a new addition onto your house. The focus is on individual success at the cost of others living in poverty and starving to death on the streets. Many people are having economic instability and need emergency funds to fall back on, but normally do not have any. Gallup survey’s released a poll that ask people what they thought the most important problem facing the country today was and the overwhelming answer they got was economic problems in terms of net income. [[28]](#footnote-28)Thirty-nine percent of people said that this was the biggest problem for America. People do not know where their next meal is going to come from, or in general could not afford a 500-dollar emergency of some sort if it happened.[[29]](#footnote-29) Not to mention that at this point the one percent in America and the bottom ninety percent in American virtually own the same share of all of the nation’s wealth.[[30]](#footnote-30) Looking at this it is hard to deny that we need change in America. One person who I believe has the power to completely change wealth relations in America is Bernie Sanders.

Bernie Sanders has stormed onto the forefront of American politics and has been praised for representing the common man and not the one percent. I see a lot of what Bernie is trying to accomplish as what Plato would want in his just city. Sanders wants to raise the minimum wage so that everyone no matter the job you work has the right to be able to support their family working forty to sixty hours a week.[[31]](#footnote-31) This aligns with Plato because in today’s society you need money to be able to buy the three bare essentials that Plato focuses on food, shelter, and clothing the other things you spend your money on just lead to corrupting your soul. He also supports giving students free college tuition and thinks that everyone is entitled to universal health insurance. These are all aspects of the communal good that Socrates stresses in *The republic.* I believe there needs to be an overall shift in what motivates Americans to do work. I think there needs to be less focus on money and more focus on helping each other become the best people we can be and I ultimately believe that Bernie Sanders is on the right path to doing so.

**5. Conclusion**

In our country today it is pretty evident that property rights and the accumulation of wealth are still hot issues in politics and modern culture. The gap between the rich and poor has never been larger and it seems to keep increasing. This country may have been founded on John Locke’s theory of property, but I think that is starting to change and Bernie Sanders offers the best path to this possibility. There are many different views on wealth, from Plato who believes that money should be pushed all the way to the bottom of our desires and that we should seek knowledge and be virtuous in all the things we do. The you have John Locke who believes that if you put any amount of labor into the land it becomes your and you can appropriate that land as you would like and accumulate as much wealth as it provides. Overall we cannot have a system that only benefits a handful of American’s, we need a system that benefits everyone because no one should be left behind.

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