

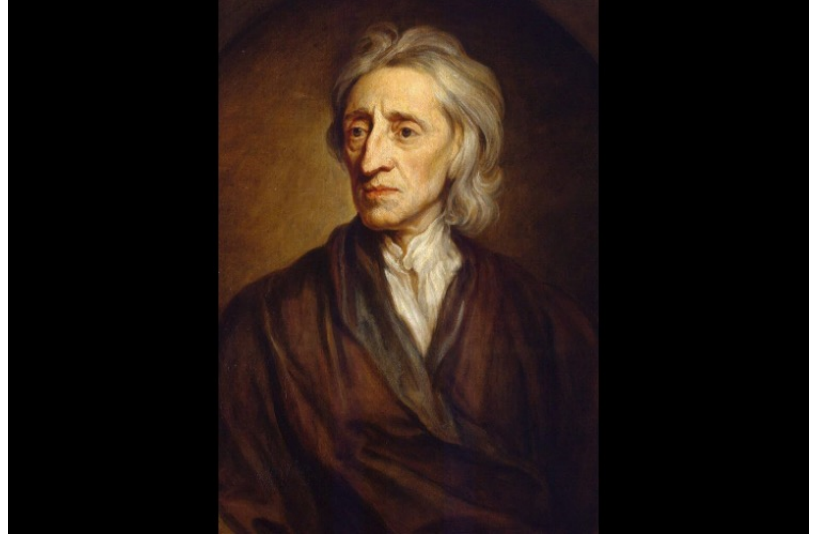


Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on August 29, 2023

Life, Liberty, and Property: The Eminent John Locke Born This Day in 1632

Despite attempts by educrats and those who would have us ignorant of history to remove him from general public knowledge and conversation, John Locke remains a familiar name and a cornerstone of conservative thought. His profound ideas have left an indelible mark on modern political philosophy and individual liberty.

Born this day (August 29) in 1632, in Wrington, Somerset, England, Locke's intellectual contributions have had a lasting impact on conservative values, advocating for limited government, natural rights, and the importance of property rights.



John Locke

Locke's early life was marked by a commitment to education, graduating from Christ Church, Oxford, and eventually becoming a lecturer in Greek and rhetoric. This academic foundation provided him with the tools to delve into various subjects, including medicine, natural philosophy, and politics. His works, particularly *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), displayed his belief that knowledge is derived from sensory experiences and reason, a notion that aligned with conservative views on the importance of traditional values and wisdom accumulated over time.

Locke's political philosophy significantly influenced conservative thought by championing the principles of limited government and individual rights. His most influential work, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), argued that individuals possess natural rights to life, liberty, and property. This idea resonated with conservatives who emphasize the importance of safeguarding individual freedoms against government overreach. Locke's belief in the social contract further reinforced the notion that government's legitimacy derives from the consent of the governed, aligning with conservative ideals of preserving established societal norms.

Conservative principles of free-market economics and property rights also find support in Locke's writings. His assertion that individuals have a right to acquire and possess private property directly aligns with conservative values emphasizing personal responsibility and self-reliance. Locke's ideas contributed to the foundation of capitalist economies and resonated with conservative thought's emphasis on limited government intervention in economic matters.

Locke's philosophical arguments have played a significant role in shaping conservative perspectives on religious tolerance and the separation of church and state. In his *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), he argued for the importance of individual conscience and the separation of religious authority from civil authority. These ideas laid the groundwork for the protection of religious liberties and the promotion of pluralism, values that conservatives often uphold in their defense of traditional institutions and values.

Throughout history, Locke's ideas have been embraced by conservative thinkers and leaders who seek



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to maintain the balance between individual liberties and societal stability. His advocacy for individualism and his skepticism of centralized authority have resonated with conservatives who prioritize limited government, individual freedoms, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Of particular interest to patriots, of course, is the influence of John Locke on the Founding Fathers. While Locke's influence has recently been reevaluated and found not to be quite as unrivaled as it was once assumed, his position in the pantheon of influences on the Founding Fathers is secure and beyond question.

Evidence of Locke's substantial contribution to the American conception of individual liberty and the primacy of property among the rights possessed by man by nature is found in the letters, essays, journals, and sermons of nearly every one of the leading lights of the firmament of Founders.

Two of the brightest of those stars, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, listed Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* as one of four books all students at the University of Virginia must read in order to understand the history of the United States. For those interested, the other three books on Madison and Jefferson's required reading list were Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government*, *The Federalist Papers*, and the Virginia Resolutions of 1799.

What follows are a few selected quotations from the writings of John Locke that were most regularly quoted by the Founding Fathers in defense of the absolute right of the people to govern themselves and to hold lawmakers accountable for any attempt to deprive the people of life, liberty, or property:

Whenever the Legislators endeavor to take away, and destroy the Property of the People, or to reduce them to Slavery under Arbitrary Power, they put themselves into a state of War with the People, who are thereupon absolved from any farther Obedience, and are left to the common Refuge, which God hath provided for all Men, against Force and Violence.

Whensoever therefore the Legislative shall transgress this fundamental Rule of Society; and either by Ambition, Fear, Folly or Corruption, endeavor to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other an Absolute Power over the Lives, Liberties, and Estates of the People; By this breach of Trust they forfeit the Power the People had put into their hands, for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the People, who have a Right to resume their original Liberty....

To understand Political Power right, and derive it from its Original, we must consider what State all Men are naturally in, and that is, a State of perfect Freedom to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the Will of any other Man....

But though this be a State of Liberty, yet it is not a State of License, though Man in that State have an uncontrollable Liberty, to dispose of his Person or Possessions, yet he has not Liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any Creature in his Possession, but where some nobler use, than its bare Preservation calls for it. The State of Nature has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions....

The Legislative being only a Fiduciary Power to act for certain ends, there remains still in the People a Supreme Power to remove or alter the Legislative, when they find the Legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them. For all Power given with trust for the



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attaining an end, being limited by that end, whenever that end is manifestly neglected, or opposed, the trust must necessarily be forfeited, and the Power devolve into the hands of those that gave it, who may place it anew where they shall think best for their safety and security....

For since it can never be supposed to be the Will of the Society, that the Legislative should have a Power to destroy that, which every one designs to secure, by entering into Society, and for which the People submitted themselves to the Legislators of their own making; whenever the Legislators endeavor to take away, and destroy the Property of the People, or to reduce them to Slavery under Arbitrary Power, they put themselves into a state of War with the People, who are thereupon absolved from any farther Obedience, and are left to the common Refuge, which God hath provided for all Men, against Force and Violence.

On October 28, 1704, at the age of 72, Locke passed away from complications associated with asthma attacks. He is buried in the churchyard of High Laver in Essex, where he'd been living since 1691. Locke never married and had no children.



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