

THOMAS JEFFERSON BASED HIS ARGUMENT FOR UNALIENABLE RIGHTS ON THE WORK OF WHICH PERSON? 17 19 16 JOHN LOCKE JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU 20 1 BARON DE MONTESQUIEU VOLTAIRE

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UNDERSTANDING THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE AND THE PRINCIPLES ENSHRINED IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE REQUIRES EXAMINING THE INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED THOMAS JEFFERSON'S IDEAS. JEFFERSON'S ASSERTION THAT INDIVIDUALS POSSESS CERTAIN RIGHTS THAT CANNOT BE JUSTLY TAKEN AWAY—SO-CALLED UNALIENABLE RIGHTS—WAS NOT CONCEIVED IN A VACUUM. INSTEAD, IT WAS DEEPLY ROOTED IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT CIRCULATING AMONG POLITICAL PHILOSOPHERS OF THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES. AMONG THESE INFLUENTIAL THINKERS, JOHN LOCKE STANDS OUT AS THE PRIMARY SOURCE FOR JEFFERSON'S ARGUMENTS ABOUT NATURAL RIGHTS. THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN JEFFERSON'S IDEAS AND LOCKE'S PHILOSOPHY, ALONG WITH RELEVANT CONTEXT ABOUT OTHER ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE INTELLECTUAL LANDSCAPE OF JEFFERSON'S TIME.

CONTEXT: THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON POLITICAL THOUGHT

THE ENLIGHTENMENT WAS AN INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENT THAT EMERGED IN EUROPE DURING THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES, EMPHASIZING REASON, INDIVIDUALISM, AND SKEPTICISM OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY. IT CHALLENGED THE DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS AND THE IDEA THAT MONARCHS DERIVED THEIR AUTHORITY FROM DIVINE WILL. INSTEAD, ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS PROPOSED THAT POLITICAL POWER SHOULD BE BASED ON RATIONAL PRINCIPLES AND THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED.

THIS PERIOD PRODUCED INFLUENTIAL PHILOSOPHERS WHOSE IDEAS PROFOUNDLY IMPACTED THE AMERICAN COLONIES AND THEIR PUSH FOR INDEPENDENCE. THE CORE THEMES OF ENLIGHTENMENT PHILOSOPHY—NATURAL RIGHTS, SOCIAL CONTRACTS, SEPARATION OF POWERS, AND FREEDOM OF THOUGHT—ARE REFLECTED IN FOUNDATIONAL AMERICAN DOCUMENTS, INCLUDING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, THE CONSTITUTION, AND THE BILL OF RIGHTS.

THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE CONCEPT OF UNALIENABLE RIGHTS

THOMAS JEFFERSON, THE PRINCIPAL AUTHOR OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE (1776), ARTICULATED A REVOLUTIONARY VIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS. HIS ASSERTION THAT "ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL" AND ENDOWED WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS—NAMESLY "LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS"—MARKED A RADICAL DEPARTURE FROM TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF RIGHTS DERIVED SOLELY FROM MONARCHY OR DIVINE AUTHORITY.

JEFFERSON'S FORMULATION OF UNALIENABLE RIGHTS EMPHASIZED THAT THESE RIGHTS ARE INHERENT TO HUMAN BEINGS, GIVEN BY THEIR NATURE OR CREATOR, AND CANNOT BE JUSTLY TAKEN AWAY BY GOVERNMENTS OR RULERS. THIS IDEA WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN JUSTIFYING AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE AND ESTABLISHING THE MORAL FOUNDATION FOR A GOVERNMENT BASED ON PROTECTING INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS.

BUT WHERE DID JEFFERSON'S IDEAS ORIGINATE? THE ANSWER LIES PRIMARILY IN THE WORK OF A PARTICULAR ENLIGHTENMENT THINKER WHOSE THEORIES ABOUT NATURAL RIGHTS AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT PROFOUNDLY INFLUENCED AMERICAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY.

JOHN LOCKE: THE PHILOSOPHER BEHIND JEFFERSON'S IDEAS

WHO WAS JOHN LOCKE?

JOHN LOCKE (1632–1704) WAS AN ENGLISH PHILOSOPHER AND POLITICAL THEORIST OFTEN REGARDED AS THE FATHER OF LIBERALISM. HIS WRITINGS LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR MODERN THEORIES OF GOVERNMENT, INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS, AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT. LOCKE'S IDEAS ABOUT NATURAL RIGHTS AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT TO PROTECT THOSE RIGHTS BECAME CENTRAL TO ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT AND DIRECTLY INFLUENCED POLITICAL LEADERS LIKE JEFFERSON.

LOCKE'S KEY IDEAS ON NATURAL RIGHTS AND THE STATE OF NATURE

LOCKE BELIEVED THAT BEFORE THE FORMATION OF GOVERNMENTS, HUMANS EXISTED IN A STATE OF NATURE CHARACTERIZED BY EQUALITY AND FREEDOM. IN THIS STATE, EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAD NATURAL RIGHTS TO:

- LIFE
- LIBERTY
- PROPERTY

THESE RIGHTS, ACCORDING TO LOCKE, WERE INHERENT AND INALIENABLE—THEY COULD NOT BE LEGITIMATELY TAKEN AWAY OR SURRENDERED. LOCKE ARGUED THAT INDIVIDUALS FORMED GOVERNMENTS THROUGH A SOCIAL CONTRACT TO PROTECT THESE NATURAL RIGHTS MORE EFFECTIVELY.

LOCKE'S SOCIAL CONTRACT AND THE RIGHT TO REVOLUTION

LOCKE MAINTAINED THAT GOVERNMENTS DERIVE THEIR AUTHORITY FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED. IF A GOVERNMENT FAILS TO PROTECT THE NATURAL RIGHTS OF ITS CITIZENS OR BECOMES TYRANNICAL, THE PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO OVERTHROW IT—A CONCEPT THAT PROVIDED A MORAL JUSTIFICATION FOR REBELLION.

INFLUENCE ON THOMAS JEFFERSON

JEFFERSON'S DECLARATION THAT INDIVIDUALS POSSESS UNALIENABLE RIGHTS DIRECTLY ECHOES LOCKE'S ASSERTIONS. JEFFERSON EXPLICITLY ACKNOWLEDGED LOCKE'S INFLUENCE BY QUOTING LOCKE'S WORDS IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND ALIGNING HIS REASONING WITH LOCKE'S NATURAL LAW PRINCIPLES. FOR EXAMPLE, JEFFERSON'S EMPHASIS THAT RIGHTS ARE ENDOWED BY THE CREATOR AND CANNOT BE JUSTLY TAKEN AWAY MIRRORS LOCKE'S ARGUMENT ABOUT THE NATURAL RIGHTS INHERENT TO ALL HUMANS.

OTHER ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

WHILE LOCKE'S INFLUENCE IS MOST PROMINENT, OTHER ENLIGHTENMENT PHILOSOPHERS ALSO CONTRIBUTED IDEAS THAT SHAPED JEFFERSON AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY ETHOS.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

- ADVOCATED FOR THE CONCEPT OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT.
- EMPHASIZED THE GENERAL WILL AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY.
- HIS IDEAS INFLUENCED NOTIONS OF COLLECTIVE SOVEREIGNTY AND CIVIC VIRTUE.
- ALTHOUGH ROUSSEAU FOCUSED MORE ON THE COLLECTIVE AND THE GENERAL WILL, SOME OF HIS IDEAS ABOUT FREEDOM AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT INTERSECTED WITH LOCKE'S IDEAS ABOUT NATURAL RIGHTS.

BARON DE MONTESQUIEU

- PROPOSED THE SEPARATION OF POWERS WITHIN GOVERNMENT AS A SAFEGUARD AGAINST TYRANNY.
- HIS WORK, *THE SPIRIT OF THE LAWS*, INFLUENCED THE STRUCTURE OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION.
- WHILE MONTESQUIEU DID NOT FOCUS SPECIFICALLY ON NATURAL RIGHTS, HIS IDEAS ABOUT BALANCED GOVERNMENT HELPED SHAPE THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK PROTECTING INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS.

VOLTAIRE

- CHAMPIONED CIVIL LIBERTIES, INCLUDING FREEDOM OF SPEECH, RELIGION, AND SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE.
- HIS ADVOCACY FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY AND SKEPTICISM OF AUTHORITY REINFORCED ENLIGHTENMENT PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING HUMAN RIGHTS.

SUMMARY: THE CENTRAL ROLE OF JOHN LOCKE IN JEFFERSON'S PHILOSOPHY

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE ON THOMAS JEFFERSON'S ARGUMENT FOR UNALIENABLE RIGHTS WAS JOHN LOCKE. LOCKE'S THEORIES ABOUT NATURAL RIGHTS, THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, AND THE RIGHT TO OVERTHROW OPPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS PROVIDED THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKBONE FOR JEFFERSON'S DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

JEFFERSON'S EXPLICIT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF LOCKE'S INFLUENCE UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCKE'S IDEAS:

- RIGHTS ARE INHERENT AND CANNOT BE JUSTLY TAKEN AWAY.
- GOVERNMENTS ARE CREATED TO PROTECT THESE RIGHTS.
- WHEN GOVERNMENTS VIOLATE THESE RIGHTS, CITIZENS HAVE THE MORAL RIGHT TO RESIST OR OVERTHROW THEM.

THIS PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION HELPED SHAPE THE PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY, EMPHASIZING INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY, GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY, AND THE MORAL LEGITIMACY OF REBELLION AGAINST TYRANNY.

CONCLUSION

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S ADVOCACY FOR UNALIENABLE RIGHTS WAS ROOTED IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT PHILOSOPHY OF JOHN LOCKE. LOCKE'S EMPHASIS ON NATURAL RIGHTS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND PROPERTY, ALONG WITH HIS SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY, PROVIDED THE MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATION FOR JEFFERSON'S REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS. WHILE OTHER ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS LIKE ROUSSEAU, MONTESQUIEU, AND VOLTAIRE CONTRIBUTED TO THE BROADER IDEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE, LOCKE'S INFLUENCE REMAINS CENTRAL TO UNDERSTANDING JEFFERSON'S REASONING AND THE FORMATION OF AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEALS.

BY RECOGNIZING LOCKE'S IMPACT, WE GAIN A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE AND THE ENDURING PRINCIPLES OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND LIMITED GOVERNMENT THAT CONTINUE TO SHAPE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES TODAY.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

THOMAS JEFFERSON BASED HIS ARGUMENT FOR UNALIENABLE RIGHTS ON THE WORK OF WHICH PHILOSOPHER?

JOHN LOCKE

WHICH THINKER INFLUENCED THOMAS JEFFERSON'S IDEAS ABOUT NATURAL RIGHTS IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE?

JOHN LOCKE

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S CONCEPT OF UNALIENABLE RIGHTS IS PRIMARILY DERIVED FROM THE WRITINGS OF WHICH HISTORICAL FIGURE?

JOHN LOCKE

THE PRINCIPLES OF UNALIENABLE RIGHTS THAT THOMAS JEFFERSON EMPHASIZED ARE MOST CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE WORK OF WHICH ENLIGHTENMENT THINKER?

JOHN LOCKE

AMONG THE OPTIONS, WHOSE PHILOSOPHY DID THOMAS JEFFERSON DRAW UPON TO JUSTIFY NATURAL RIGHTS AND INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS?

JOHN LOCKE

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF UNALIENABLE RIGHTS: AN EXPERT ANALYSIS

WHEN EXAMINING THE IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE AND THE DRAFTING OF FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS LIKE THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, ONE FIGURE LOOMS LARGE: THOMAS JEFFERSON. YET, TO FULLY APPRECIATE HIS REASONING AND PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS, IT'S CRUCIAL TO UNDERSTAND THE INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED HIS ARGUMENTS, PARTICULARLY HIS CONCEPTION OF UNALIENABLE RIGHTS. AT THE HEART OF THIS INTELLECTUAL LINEAGE IS THE WORK OF JOHN LOCKE, A 17TH-CENTURY ENGLISH PHILOSOPHER WHOSE IDEAS ON NATURAL RIGHTS AND GOVERNMENT PROFOUNDLY IMPACTED JEFFERSON AND THE BROADER ENLIGHTENMENT MOVEMENT.

IN THIS IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION, WE WILL ANALYZE HOW JEFFERSON'S ADVOCACY FOR UNALIENABLE RIGHTS IS ROOTED IN LOCKE'S PHILOSOPHY, CONTRASTING IT WITH THE IDEAS OF OTHER ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS SUCH AS JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, BARON DE MONTESQUIEU, VOLTAIRE, AND THE NUMERUS OF OTHER INFLUENTIAL FIGURES. WE WILL ALSO EXAMINE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF LOCKE'S WRITINGS THAT JEFFERSON INCORPORATED, THE CONTEXT THAT MADE LOCKE'S IDEAS COMPELLING, AND HOW JEFFERSON ADAPTED THESE CONCEPTS TO THE AMERICAN CONTEXT.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF UNALIENABLE RIGHTS

BEFORE DELVING INTO THE PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES, IT'S ESSENTIAL TO CLARIFY WHAT UNALIENABLE RIGHTS ARE. THESE ARE

RIGHTS CONSIDERED INHERENT TO ALL HUMAN BEINGS, EXISTING INDEPENDENTLY OF GOVERNMENT OR SOCIETAL RECOGNITION. THEY ARE INALIENABLE, MEANING THEY CANNOT BE JUSTLY TAKEN AWAY OR DENIED. IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, JEFFERSON FAMOUSLY STATES THAT THESE RIGHTS INCLUDE “LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS,” FRAMING THEM AS FUNDAMENTAL AND SELF-EVIDENT.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION FOR THESE RIGHTS IS VITAL BECAUSE IT ESTABLISHES THE MORAL BASIS FOR REVOLUTION, GOVERNMENT LEGITIMACY, AND INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS. JEFFERSON’S ARTICULATION OF THESE RIGHTS WAS REVOLUTIONARY BECAUSE IT SHIFTED THE BASIS OF AUTHORITY FROM DIVINE RIGHT OR TRADITION TO NATURAL LAW AND HUMAN REASON, A SHIFT LARGELY INSPIRED BY THE WRITINGS OF JOHN LOCKE.

JOHN LOCKE: THE PHILOSOPHER BEHIND THE PRINCIPLES

Who Was John Locke?

JOHN LOCKE (1632–1704) WAS AN ENGLISH PHILOSOPHER AND POLITICAL THEORIST WHOSE IDEAS HELPED SHAPE MODERN LIBERAL THOUGHT. HIS SEMINAL WORKS, ESPECIALLY TWO TREATISES OF GOVERNMENT, LAID OUT A COMPELLING ARGUMENT FOR NATURAL RIGHTS AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, DIRECTLY INFLUENCING ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS AND THE FORMATION OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES.

LOCKE’S PHILOSOPHY IS CHARACTERIZED BY SEVERAL CORE PRINCIPLES:

- THE BELIEF THAT HUMANS POSSESS NATURAL RIGHTS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND PROPERTY.
- THE IDEA THAT GOVERNMENTS ARE FORMED THROUGH A SOCIAL CONTRACT TO PROTECT THESE RIGHTS.
- THE ASSERTION THAT IF A GOVERNMENT FAILS TO SAFEGUARD THESE RIGHTS OR BECOMES TYRANNICAL, CITIZENS HAVE THE RIGHT TO OVERTHROW IT.

LOCKE’S INFLUENCE ON JEFFERSON’S ARGUMENT FOR RIGHTS

JEFFERSON’S ADOPTION OF LOCKE’S IDEAS IS EVIDENT IN THE LANGUAGE AND CONCEPTS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. JEFFERSON EXPLICITLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE INFLUENCE OF LOCKE, ESPECIALLY HIS ASSERTION THAT RIGHTS ARE UNALIENABLE AND DERIVED FROM NATURAL LAW. JEFFERSON’S DECLARATION THAT “ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL” AND ENDOWED WITH “CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS” ECHOES LOCKE’S ASSERTION THAT RIGHTS ARE INHERENT, NOT GRANTED BY GOVERNMENT.

SPECIFICALLY, LOCKE’S INFLUENCE MANIFESTS IN:

- THE EMPHASIS ON NATURAL RIGHTS EXISTING PRIOR TO GOVERNMENT.
- THE NOTION THAT GOVERNMENT’S LEGITIMACY DEPENDS ON PROTECTING THESE RIGHTS.
- THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO REVOLT WHEN GOVERNMENT VIOLATES THESE RIGHTS.

JEFFERSON’S FRAMING OF RIGHTS AS “UNALIENABLE” STEMS FROM LOCKE’S CONCEPT THAT RIGHTS ARE NATURAL AND CANNOT BE JUSTLY FORFEITED OR TAKEN AWAY, UNDERSCORING THEIR FUNDAMENTAL STATUS.

ADDITIONAL ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS AND THEIR IMPACT

WHILE LOCKE IS THE PRIMARY INFLUENCE, JEFFERSON AND OTHER ENLIGHTENMENT FIGURES ALSO ENGAGED WITH IDEAS FROM ROUSSEAU, MONTESQUIEU, AND VOLTAIRE. UNDERSTANDING THEIR IDEAS CLARIFIES WHY JEFFERSON PRIORITIZED LOCKE’S PHILOSOPHY.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

ROUSSEAU (1712–1778) EMPHASIZED THE CONCEPT OF THE GENERAL WILL AND THE IMPORTANCE OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY. HIS

IDEA THAT SOVEREIGNTY RESIDES WITH THE PEOPLE INFLUENCED DEMOCRATIC THEORY BUT WAS LESS FOCUSED ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AS LOCKE ENVISIONED. JEFFERSON DID NOT DIRECTLY BASE HIS RIGHTS ARGUMENT ON ROUSSEAU'S IDEAS BUT WAS INFLUENCED INDIRECTLY THROUGH THE BROADER ENLIGHTENMENT EMPHASIS ON POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY.

BARON DE MONTESQUIEU

MONTESQUIEU (1689–1755) IS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS THEORY OF SEPARATION OF POWERS—A STRUCTURAL APPROACH TO PREVENT TYRANNY. WHILE HIS IDEAS COMPLEMENTED LOCKE'S EMPHASIS ON LIMITED GOVERNMENT, MONTESQUIEU'S FOCUS WAS MORE ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF GOVERNMENT THAN ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS.

VOLTAIRE

VOLTAIRE (1694–1778) CHAMPIONED FREEDOM OF SPEECH, RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE, AND CIVIL LIBERTIES. HIS ADVOCACY CONTRIBUTED TO THE BROADER ENLIGHTENMENT ETHOS OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS, BUT JEFFERSON'S EXPLICIT FOUNDATION FOR RIGHTS WAS MORE DIRECTLY ALIGNED WITH LOCKE'S NATURAL LAW PRINCIPLES.

WHY LOCKE'S WORK WAS CENTRAL TO JEFFERSON'S ARGUMENT

JEFFERSON'S SELECTION OF LOCKE'S PHILOSOPHY WAS DELIBERATE AND STRATEGIC. LOCKE PROVIDED A CLEAR, RATIONAL BASIS FOR THE IDEA THAT RIGHTS ARE NATURAL, INALIENABLE, AND UNIVERSAL—CONCEPTS VITAL FOR JUSTIFYING REVOLUTION AND RESISTANCE AGAINST TYRANNY.

KEY ASPECTS OF LOCKE'S INFLUENCE INCLUDE:

- NATURAL LAW AND RIGHTS: LOCKE ARGUED THAT NATURAL LAW GRANTS INDIVIDUALS INHERENT RIGHTS TO "LIFE, LIBERTY, AND ESTATE," WHICH CANNOT BE JUSTLY VIOLATED. JEFFERSON ADAPTED THIS TO "LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS," BROADENING THE PROPERTY CONCEPT TO INCLUDE PERSONAL FULFILLMENT.
- CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED: LOCKE POSITED THAT LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT ARISES FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED. JEFFERSON ECHOED THIS IDEA, EMPHASIZING THAT GOVERNMENTS DERIVE THEIR AUTHORITY FROM THE PEOPLE AND THAT PEOPLE RETAIN THE RIGHT TO ABOLISH OPPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS.
- RIGHT TO REVOLUTION: LOCKE EXPLICITLY STATED THAT WHEN GOVERNMENT FAILS TO PROTECT NATURAL RIGHTS, CITIZENS HAVE THE RIGHT TO OVERTHROW IT—A PRINCIPLE JEFFERSON EMBRACED, JUSTIFYING THE AMERICAN COLONIES' REBELLION.

IN ESSENCE, JEFFERSON'S USE OF LOCKE'S IDEAS PROVIDED A MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR INDEPENDENCE, FRAMING THE COLONIES' REBELLION AS A FIGHT TO RESTORE THEIR NATURAL RIGHTS.

CONTRASTING ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS: WHY LOCKE OVER OTHERS?

JEFFERSON'S RELIANCE ON LOCKE'S PHILOSOPHY WAS NOT ACCIDENTAL; IT WAS ROOTED IN LOCKE'S PRAGMATIC AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH. WHILE ROUSSEAU, MONTESQUIEU, AND VOLTAIRE CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANTLY TO ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT, THEIR IDEAS SERVED DIFFERENT PURPOSES:

- ROUSSEAU EMPHASIZED THE COLLECTIVE GENERAL WILL AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY BUT DID NOT FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS IN THE SAME WAY LOCKE DID.
- MONTESQUIEU'S SEPARATION OF POWERS ADDRESSED THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT BUT DID NOT DIRECTLY ARTICULATE A THEORY OF NATURAL RIGHTS.
- VOLTAIRE CHAMPIONED CIVIL LIBERTIES AND TOLERANCE, WHICH INFLUENCED THE BROADER CLIMATE OF ENLIGHTENMENT BUT DID NOT PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE THEORY OF RIGHTS AS LOCKE DID.

THUS, JEFFERSON'S CHOICE REFLECTS A DESIRE FOR A PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION THAT JUSTIFIED INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND JUSTIFIED REVOLUTION—CORE TENETS OF LOCKE'S WORK.

SUMMARY: THE ENDURING LEGACY OF LOCKE'S PHILOSOPHY IN AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S ARGUMENT FOR UNALIENABLE RIGHTS DRAWS DIRECTLY FROM JOHN LOCKE'S SEMINAL WORKS. LOCKE'S CONCEPTUALIZATION OF NATURAL RIGHTS AS INHERENT, INALIENABLE, AND PRIOR TO GOVERNMENT WAS REVOLUTIONARY, PROVIDING A MORAL BASIS FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY AND RESISTANCE TO TYRANNY. JEFFERSON'S LANGUAGE IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE ECHOES LOCKE'S BELIEF THAT THESE RIGHTS ARE UNIVERSAL AND CANNOT BE SURRENDERED OR TAKEN AWAY.

WHILE OTHER ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE INTELLECTUAL ENVIRONMENT—ADDING IDEAS ABOUT SEPARATION OF POWERS, SOCIAL CONTRACT, AND CIVIL LIBERTIES—LOCKE'S FOCUS ON NATURAL RIGHTS AND GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN PROTECTING THOSE RIGHTS WAS THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH JEFFERSON BUILT HIS REVOLUTIONARY ARGUMENT.

IN CONCLUSION, WHEN JEFFERSON ARGUED THAT RIGHTS ARE UNALIENABLE AND DERIVED FROM NATURAL LAW, HE WAS FUNDAMENTALLY RELYING ON THE WORK OF JOHN LOCKE—A PHILOSOPHER WHOSE IDEAS CONTINUE TO UNDERPIN THE PHILOSOPHY OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND MODERN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- JEFFERSON'S CONCEPT OF UNALIENABLE RIGHTS IS ROOTED IN LOCKE'S NATURAL LAW PHILOSOPHY.
- LOCKE EMPHASIZED THAT RIGHTS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND PROPERTY ARE INHERENT AND CANNOT BE JUSTLY TAKEN AWAY.
- JEFFERSON ADAPTED LOCKE'S IDEAS, BROADENING PROPERTY TO INCLUDE HAPPINESS AND EMPHASIZING THE RIGHT TO OVERTHROW GOVERNMENTS THAT VIOLATE THESE RIGHTS.
- OTHER ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE BROADER CONTEXT BUT LOCKE'S FOCUS ON NATURAL RIGHTS WAS CENTRAL TO JEFFERSON'S ARGUMENTS FOR INDEPENDENCE AND HUMAN DIGNITY.

IN THE REALM OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, LOCKE REMAINS THE DEFINITIVE INFLUENCE BEHIND THE PRINCIPLE THAT INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS ARE INALIENABLE AND FOUNDATIONAL TO JUST GOVERNANCE—A LEGACY THAT JEFFERSON HELPED TO ENSHRINE IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

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