

Locke on Property

Penultimate version.

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Abstract

This paper critiques Locke's account of private property. After sketching its basic principles as well as how contemporary Lockeans have developed them, I argue that this account doesn't and cannot work philosophically. The main problem is that the account requires the determination of objective value of resources in historical time, but this doesn't exist. I conclude that the ultimate philosophical failure of this tremendously influential kind of account does not entail that it is valueless. Rather, the suggestion is that understanding and overcoming its problems promises one way to overcome more general problems of systemic injustice regarding private property and the environment in our modern world.

Introduction¹

Locke's account of private property is perhaps the most influential one in Western legal-political thought. In it, Locke brilliantly rethinks and unifies a set of core old and new intuitions and ideas about justice and property. The old thoughts include how human beings naturally strive (labor) to preserve themselves and humankind as well as the importance of law and reason to capture justice. The new, modern ones include the importance of individual rights, freedom, and equality—ideas Locke combines with his innovative proposal that originally (only) each person has natural political power. The result is an account of just property relations that is consistent with both philosophical anarchism and Locke's own revolutionary political engagement, and, so, with Locke's defense of each individual's natural executive right and a right to revolution. As we will see, I do not think the Lockean account of property ultimately works philosophically, but this doesn't make it less valuable. Locke's insights on their own and as explored by those coming after him empower us to see important complexities and concerns related to our attempt to envision just property relations in modern societies.

To make my case, I briefly present the core ideas that make up Locke's account of property as well as some central, well-known lines of objections and contemporary attempts at improving the account. I argue that all Lockean accounts depend on the possibility of identifying an objective way of valuing objects and productive activity in historical time, but that this is in principle impossible. In addition, I argue that this kind of approach faces insurmountable problems with regard to capturing just private property relations once we include trade in our analyses and, even more so, once our access to means becomes dependent on participation in an economy. I then draw attention to a much less studied objection, from Hannah Arendt, that even though Locke famously says that we have a right to "the labor of our body and the work of our hands," he fails to pay attention to the common language as well as an important philosophical distinction between "labor" and "work." I propose that Arendt's objection is important for Locke's own account, later Lockean accounts, as well as Marxist accounts since their theory of the relation of labor to property is derived from Locke.

1. Locke on Just Property Relations

Early modern and modern² political thinkers characteristically strive to provide accounts that fit with liberal ideas of freedom and equality as well as with our natural, human animalistic desire to

¹ Thanks to Jessica Gordon-Roth and Shelley Weinberg for generous help with this text.

² I'm following those who think of Kant's work as marking the transition from early modern to modern philosophy.

preserve ourselves. Central to all these efforts are explanations of how our reasoning powers enable us to be morally responsible for our actions and of how we act in morally responsible ways. In the context of legal-political philosophy, this means that they propose theories of how we interact in just ways, including how we respond to (threats of) unjust behaviors. It is also characteristic of these approaches that reason is seen as giving us access to laws (of nature and/or of freedom) that enable us to interact in such morally responsible ways. Typical too, especially in the early modern accounts, is an effort to explain how all of this is compatible with a theological understanding of God. Hence, when we interact justly, instead of finding ourselves subjected to others' arbitrary choices or will,³ we are subjected only to law, and being so subjected is to live as God intended us to. As we see below, Locke shares these ambitions with the other early modern and modern accounts of property, although he has his own take on all of them.

Note, however, that Locke distinguishes himself from the other early modern thinkers by seeking an account that is compatible with the claim that (only) each individual has natural political power or a natural executive right: "the *Execution* of the Law of Nature... is [originally] put into every Mans hands" (*Two Treatises*, II: 7, cf. II: 8, 13, 74, 87).⁴ Consequently, the public authority is seen as only having artificial political power, which it obtains when it is entrusted with the individuals' natural executive power through their actual (implicit or explicit) consent. These arguments are important to Locke: showing the possibility of justice in the state of nature is necessary both to justify his claim—as A. John Simmons shows us so well in many of his writings on Locke—that actual consent is necessary for political legitimacy and that political justification, in contrast, is tied to whether or not what is coercively upheld by anyone (an individual or a state) is the laws of nature.^{5, 6} It follows that if Locke's account of private property is to work philosophically, it must show how each individual can acquire private property unilaterally or "without any express Compact of all the Commoners" (II: 25).⁷ As hinted in the introduction, neither Locke nor those who take up his lead are able to provide such an account because they mistakenly assume that it is possible to identify an objective way of valuing objects and activities in historical time. And without this assumption, the account is unable to explain how we can interact subjected only to laws of nature and not find ourselves coercively subjected to another's arbitrary choices or will instead. To see all of this, we first need to know some more about Locke—on justice in general and on property in particular.

Locke, as mentioned above, sets out to justify the claim that each individual has a natural executive right. To do this, he must show that just interactions—including just punishments—are possible also in the pre-state condition ("the state of nature") and in good early modern fashion this requires him to show that freedom and equality are possible in the state of nature by each and all governing their interactions by the laws of nature.⁸ Unsurprisingly, we therefore find Locke saying that the state of nature is

"... a *State of perfect Freedom* [for everyone] to order their Actions... within the bounds of the Law of Nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the Will of any other Men...

³ To be subjected to another's arbitrary will is to be enslaved rather than free. See Charles Mills chapter "Locke on Slavery" in this volume for more on this topic.

⁴ Here and for the remainder of this chapter, I cite the first and the second of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* by referencing the treatise and paragraph number: (I: 67) or (II: 7).

⁵ These are core themes in all of Simmons's major writings on Locke. See for example (Simmons 1981, 1992, 1993, 2001).

⁶ For an excellent discussion of whether or not this philosophical commitment is consistent with Locke's view that the public executive power must have significant discretion, see Mark Goldie's "Locke and Executive Power" in this volume.

⁷ For more on this innovation of Locke's in early modern theories of property, see Hillel Steiner and Peter Vallentyre (2000).

⁸ See Savonius-Wroth's "Locke on the State of Nature" in this volume for more on the general features of Locke's account of the state of nature.

[and also] A *State also of Equality*, wherein all the Power and Jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another... and [no] Subordination or Subjection” (II: 4, Cf. I: 67 and II: 3, 6f, 54f, 61, 87).

Importantly, as we see in this quote too, the contrast is between being restricted by the laws of nature when interacting and being subjected to another’s will or what Locke elsewhere describes as another’s “absolute power” (II: 17) or their “inconstant, uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will” (II: 22). Moreover, to live in a perfectly free manner is not to do whatever one wants to do at all times since “... it is *not a State of Licence*” (II: 6). Locke explains: “though Man in that State [of Nature] 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” (II: 6). When true freedom and justice prevail, what is being upheld are laws aiming at preservation. That is, whether we consult “*Revelation*” or our “*Reason*” (II: 25),⁹ we find that these laws aim to protect each person’s freedom and equality by specifying a set of individual rights that are compatible with and grounded on “*the Fundamental Law of Nature*,” which states that human beings are “...*to be preserved as much as possible*” (II: 16).

Human beings cannot create life; only God can, which is why, Locke maintains, human beings are God’s property (II: 6). Moreover, in all animals, including human beings, “God... planted a strong desire for Self-preservation... as a principle of Action” (I: 86, cf. I: 52-6). Moreover, in contrast to other animals, which rely solely on “Sense... and Instinct” to preserve themselves, human animals also have “*Reason*,” which is “*the voice of God*” in them, and reason tells human beings that they have a right to “*Property in the Creatures*” that are “necessary or useful” to us (I: 86). Since we did not—indeed, cannot—create life and the natural resources on the planet, we must view both as belonging to us in common (II: 26) and ourselves as authorized to use them for purposes of self-preservation and preservation of humankind. Moreover, since all human beings are, exactly instantiations of the same kind of being, sound reasoning regards everyone as free and equal and is oriented towards self-preservation as well as maintaining the whole species if possible. Hence, Locke famously states,

“The *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions... For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker; All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the World by his order and about his business, they are his Property, whose Workmanship they are, made to last during his, and not one another’s Pleasure. And being Furnished with like Faculties, sharing all in one Community of Nature, there cannot be any... *Subordination* among us... Everyone is *bound to preserve himself*, and not to quit his Station willfully; so by the like reason when his Preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, *to preserve the rest of Mankind*, and may not unless it is to do Justice on an Offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the Preservation of the Life, the Liberty, Health, Limb or Goods of another” (II: 6)

A puzzle soon arises: if all the natural resources are owned in common, how do we go about obtaining a part that is ours in particular? How can I, for example, make an apple *mine*? And being able to make something mine—to have “*private Possessions*” (II: 35)—is necessary to assume responsibility for preserving myself well over time and to use my skills to improve or cultivate the materials such that I can live in a good way, one consistent with “the best advantage of Life, and convenience” (II: 26)? Locke’s answer to this question brings us to his famous

⁹ As mentioned above, Locke does both: the *First Treatise of Government* explores revelation (in the Christian Bible), while the *Second Treatise of Government* explores our natural reason.

account of unilateral private property acquisition, including his ‘enough-and-as-good’ proviso.¹⁰ Let me explain.

As mentioned, Locke argues that when we engage natural resources in value enhancing ways (labor) we “mix” some of what is inherently ours—the productively creative powers I have in virtue of being a person—with the natural resources. So, for example, when I pick an apple or plow a field and grow potatoes, I add value to the apple (it’s now ready to be eaten) or the land (I make it fertile and I multiply the number of potatoes in the world); I labor. In contrast, if I just throw the apple on the ground or the potatoes on the top of the land or don’t plow the field before I put them in, I don’t labor on, but waste (“spoil” or “destroy”) the natural resources (the apple or the potatoes), which means that they go back to the commons and anyone can pick them up and use them productively (II: 31, cf.38). I don’t, in other words, have a right to waste the natural resources but only to use them to create life-sustaining conditions—which is sometimes referred to as Locke’s “waste” restriction. The “enough-and-as-good” proviso, in turn, deals with fairness, including as scarcity of natural resources arises. Locke proposes that when I acquire a portion of the natural resources or land on the planet, I must make sure that I only take my fair share, that share which is consistent with relating to everyone as free and equal. And how do I do this? By making sure that I leave at least “enough-and-as-good” natural resources behind for others. Locke argues:

“Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labor* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands... are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this *labour* something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other Men. For this *Labour* being the unquestionable *Property* of the Labourer, no Man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others.” (II 27)

To illustrate with a thought experiment, imagine that nine people and I people arrive on an uninhabited island at the same time. I have a natural, enforceable right to 1/10th of the natural resources on the island, so, say, 1/10th of the wild berries, the forests, the beaches, the land, etc., and I acquire it by laboring on it, by engaging with the natural resources in a value-producing way. Now, if we all use our reasoning powers properly, we will agree to this, but even if we don’t (because some are unreasonable), I have a right to acquire my fair share, so understood, unilaterally or without “the express consent” of all the others since my labor on the common natural resources subject to the “enough-and-as-good” proviso “*fixed* my *Property* in them” (II: 28). Moreover, Locke maintains that because our reasoning powers enable us to create value, most of the material life-sustaining resources on the planet today are a result of value-adding activities (labor) by human beings. Indeed, Locke thinks that 99/100th of the value is a result of labor (II: 40). Finally, with the invention of money we are able to keep values “without spoiling” (II: 47). Since the means of exchange or money—gold or silver, say—has no inherent value, only people’s “consent” authorizes its use. And since the introduction of money enables people to store values, by consenting to its use, people must thereby be seen as also tacitly and voluntarily agreeing to “disproportionate and unequal Possession of the Earth” (II: 50).¹¹

¹⁰ Oftentimes the “enough-and-as-good” proviso is referred to as simply the “Lockean” proviso. I follow A. John Simmons in thinking that Locke has several (and not just one) provisos.

¹¹ For more on this topic, see Justin Clark’s chapter “Locke on Money” in this volume.

1.1 The Problem of Identifying the Objective Values of Natural Resources and Activity in Historical Time

Each and all of the main thoughts constitutive of the above account—God, laws of nature, labor, waste, natural executive right, free and equal, the enough-and-as-good proviso—have drawn a lot of scholarly discussion over the centuries. In fact, there simply is no overstating how much influence this account has had on property discussions in modern theories and it is impossible to give all the related literature its due here. Instead, I will keep my focus on the account of property and argue, rather boldly perhaps, that none of the existing, deeply influenced accounts satisfactorily overcome the philosophical problems found in Locke's own, original account; indeed, that these problems probably cannot be overcome is an important philosophical insight.

Let me start by exploring Locke's account of labor. The general problem is how to distinguish between activity that does and does not count as labor (in Locke's sense of the word). It seems fair to say that Locke's thoughts on labor express and presumably reinforce the European disrespectful and destructive attitudes towards peoples who are not settlers. This would, for example, apply to the European Roma, the many of the (reindeer-, not sea-) Sami groups, and native American peoples. Traditionally, their way of life did not involve settling on land (and striving to make it as productive as possible) and instead involved living in tune with the land's natural, including seasonal, processes (II: 43). For example, when Locke says, "... in the beginning all the World was *America*" (II: 49), he is saying that the native American people did not own the land they lived on because their nomadic way of life did not give rise to land claims. Hence, although they were seen as acquiring the natural resources they accumulated when they lived somewhere for a period, they did not acquire the land—and, so, by implication, Locke thought that Europeans could settle on any parcel of land in America without depriving the native populations of their land rights. Locke thought that we should always seek to maximize the values we can create from the natural resources at all the times. But obviously, there is more than one way to engage the land in life-sustaining, productive ways and nomadic peoples certainly did and do have one way. And current sustainability issues require all of us to rethink how to live in tune with the long-term life-sustaining biological processes on the planet as we strive to become wiser about property.

Additional to Locke's connecting labor to maximizing material resources, there are many other concerns with what it means to "mix" ourselves with the natural resources through labor (and, by extension, what counts as value-producing ways of using natural resources). For example, Robert Nozick famously asks "If I own a can of tomato juice and spill it in the sea so that its molecules... mingle evenly throughout the sea, do I thereby come to own the sea, or have I foolishly dissipated my tomato juice?... [And w]hy should one's entitlement extend to the whole object rather than just to the *added value* one's labor has produced?" (Nozick 1974: 175). The more general problem is that the labor-waste restriction seemingly appeals to 'natural' uses of things, but it is unclear exactly what the natural use of a thing is for human beings. For example, it seems impossible to identify what counts as added value simply by appeal to a thing's natural function. To illustrate, notice that a productive use of a tomato plant is not necessarily that defined by its natural function to produce seeds and thereby enable more tomato plants to grow. Rather, 'the natural use' presumably refers to the fulfilment of some human need. But the problem then concerns delineating the parameters of human needs. For example, are productive uses only those involved in fulfilling subsistence needs, or do they also include 'artificial' needs such as our desire for art? If we can extract the color from tomatoes to use it for painting or let tomatoes rot so that we can take amazing pictures of the rotting process, then is this a 'natural' use of tomatoes or is it to waste them? If we want to argue that natural uses include Locke's notion of 'conveniences', then natural uses must include 'cultural' or 'artificial' uses of things. But if so, and if we want to leave space for person's freedom, then there does not seem to be much that counts as waste. Almost anything can be claimed to be art or to be fulfilling some 'artificial' need. The distinction between waste and productive use (labor) therefore is notoriously

problematic. Without an objective criterion or an objective list of human needs, one that is suitably flexible to particular societies and how lived life changes over time, there is no way to differentiate waste from what kinds of human activities count as a productive use of goods. Drawing this distinction objectively is still a challenge to Lockean theories and becomes even more pressing once we turn to the “enough-and-as-good” proviso.

Lockean accounts of distributive justice—of what kind of rights individuals have to material things and land—centrally involve Locke’s enough-and-as-good proviso. The proviso is found and developed in a range of natural rights accounts of private property: from what are often called leftwing libertarian to rightwing libertarian accounts as well as to various kinds of liberal and Marxist or egalitarian accounts of just property relations. The enough-and-as-good proviso states that each individual has a unilaterally enforceable right to acquire $1/n^{\text{th}}$ (where n =number of people) of the natural resources through laboring on them since by only taking $1/n^{\text{th}}$ they leave “enough and as good” natural resources behind for others. This principle is seen to enable a fair distribution of natural resources between interacting people. Redistribution, in turn, is necessary once there is scarcity and newcomers. To illustrate, think again of the ten people arriving at an uninhabited island at some historical time t_0 .¹² According to this principle, each of these people have a right to acquire $1/10^{\text{th}}$ of the natural resources on the island through labor. Assume that they do and live peacefully together there for 5 years, at which point a newcomer swims ashore. What does this 11th person have a right to acquire?

There are different Locke-inspired answers. For example, prominent Lockean like Nozick (rightwing libertarian) as well as Simmons and Hillel Steiner¹³ (leftwing libertarians) argue that the newcomer does not have a right to land but only to some material resources. In *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Nozick famously proposes that the standard determined by the “enough-and-as-good” proviso must view each person’s right to access $1/n^{\text{th}}$ of values of the *original* natural resources in the world (t_0), where n refers to the total number of people living in the world now (t_1).¹⁴ Therefore, what the newcomer has a right to may not be very much as it depends on what that original value is and how many people now exist on the island. Simmons and Steiner do not object to Nozick’s argument that the newcomer doesn’t have a right to land, but they argue that it cannot be the case that just by coming later, one has right to less of the original resources. Hence, Simmons and Steiner each argue—in different ways—that everyone must have a right to acquire (through their labor) sufficient material resources for a decent human life. Correspondingly once economics get going, the newcomer would have a right to be paid a (minimum) wage sufficient for a decent life. If no jobs are available, the newcomer would have a right to be paid unemployment benefits at this sum.

Some Locke-inspired accounts, such as Michael Otsuka (2003) and Gopal Sreenivasan (1995) do not agree with Nozick, Simmons, and Steiner that the newcomer (or anyone) doesn’t have a right to land. For whether or not one has a right to land results in very different kinds of life one can live. Otsuka interestingly also sees that Locke’s own account cannot factor in disabilities that make it impossible for some to labor in exactly the same ways as those without disabilities.¹⁵ To have a disability, he suggests, is to start with less in the way of natural material resources, and, so, should entail having a right to more, not fewer natural resources in a world that strives to ensure equal starting points. To illustrate the principle, Otsuka asks us to imagine an island with beautiful beaches everybody loves as well as farmland in the middle. Then assume

¹² Historical time is a tracking of time in some way. At I’m writing this, we are in year 2020 in the Gregorian calendar and in year 1441 in the Islamic calendar—two ways of tracking historical time.

¹³ See (Steiner 1994).

¹⁴ This principle can also argue for a global redistribution of resources to fight poverty—as Thomas Pogge (2008) does with his “global resource dividend”. Charles Mills (1999) employs it (even if Nozick didn’t but should have) to justify reparations to African American communities in the US context to make up for the lack of property accumulation due to unjust original distribution.

¹⁵ Steiner (1999, 2011) develops a similar account in relation to children and distributive questions involving natural and inherited luck (DNA and talent) in some of his recent writings.

four people on this island, two with physical disabilities that make farming impossible and two without. The people without disabilities get the farmland while those with disabilities get the beaches (and can charge the two others a price, say farm produce, for access). In a market-based economy, this could mean, for example, that people with disabilities get the opportunity to get state-issued bonds with a reliable, stable income.

Despite the ingeniousness of these accounts, I believe they all share a fatal flaw—a flaw that exists already in Locke’s own account. The problem is that they assume that there is an objective way of valuing resources in a (non-arbitrarily chosen) particular historical time. But this is not true. Kant makes this kind of objection to any account that tries to specify the distinction between ‘mine and thine’ by identifying an allegedly objective, timeless “quantity” (“enough”) and “quality” (“as good”) of objects in historical time or in the empirical world (Kant MM 6: 266).¹⁶ There is no objective value (quality) of, say, apples, just as there is no objective, eternal way of identifying what constitutes “one apple” (quantity). But then it is also not the case that the empirical world is such that there is an objective, individually accessible way of delineating one’s “fair share of resources.”

We can, then, distinguish between two kinds of indeterminacy problems with Locke’s “enough-and-as-good” proviso. On the one hand, it appears impossible to say what the general principle—the law of appropriation—is. As we saw above, what should count as the objective reference point? The time when the first people arrived somewhere? Why? And should or should not these particular people have a right to a larger starting point of natural resources than those coming later (say, 1/10th rather than 1/200th)? On the other hand, there is the problem of how to apply this principle (assuming there is a correct one) to actual interactions. How do we apply it to this original group of people? Who in particular gets which trees, lakes, beaches, mountains, etc.? No two things, say no two apples, are empirically identical, so how do we divide everything up? There is no one, objectively correct answer to this question, but many reasonable ones. Consequently, if I enforce my choice regarding application against the others, it seems that I subject them to my unilateral choice about the matter, and so, to use Locke’s own words, I subject them to my arbitrary will and not to the laws of nature. More generally, it seems that Locke is unable to explain how I can have a right to interpret (legislative power), apply (judiciary power), and enforce (executive power) the laws of nature regarding property—and, so, I cannot have a natural executive right.

It is important to note that these problems do not go away but intensify once we introduce trade and market-based solutions. For example, assume that the people on our island have traded before the newcomer arrives, leaving someone—say the philosopher among them—with very few natural resources to survive on. If so, what claims does the newcomer have against the philosopher relative to each of the other more productive (given Locke’s account of labor) members of society? Locke’s philosophical anarchism and the natural executive right requires an individually determinable answer to this question. If we introduce not only trade between individuals but an economy—with shops, employees, and money—we must still explain how much and against whom in particular each person has enforceable claims and obligations. In addition, now the market value of a thing depends on demand and supply and human knowledge—and, so, as people’s taste and choices and knowledge change, so does the market price. For example, the price of oil before and after the modern scientific revolution is radically different, and today it depends on, for example, how much people choose to drive. Hence, it seems like this kind of account must accommodate how value fluctuates with human knowledge and how everybody has a right to advances in human knowledge (without depriving others of the knowledge they have obtained through their labor). And to make matters even more complex, the account must be able to avoid concluding that exactly how much one has a coercive right to depends on other people’s choices (such as what they feel like buying one day); otherwise, it

¹⁶ For more on related differences between Kant(ians) and Locke(ans), see the “Introduction to Part II” in (Varden 2020)

reproduces the original problem Locke set out to solve, namely how to envision just property relations such that what each person has a right to is determined by laws of nature and not someone's arbitrary will. And even if all of this can be explained, what does one who doesn't wish to interact with others (trade) have a right to? After all, the account strives to envision freedom and equality as possible for individuals in the state of nature and so cannot require or force anyone to interact with others either through trade or employment in an economy.¹⁷

Concluding Remarks: Bodies and the Modern Self

Let me end with one more question left for Lockean accounts of property. C. B. MacPherson (1965) worries that Locke's and other early/modern accounts of property promote "possessive individualism," that the analyses of justice become wrongly and singularly centered on how individuals (rather than, say, a flourishing society) have an enforceable right to preserve themselves. Relatedly, consider a concern of Hannah Arendt's that applies not just to Lockeans, but to all—including Marxist—accounts that use Locke's labor theory. Arendt argues that though Locke's formulation of "the labour of his body and the work of his hands" draws attention to a common distinction in many languages, namely between labor and work, Locke's philosophy—and Western philosophical practice in general—fail to pay attention to this distinction. We—and, so, modern selves in general—tend to assume that value creating activity is of only one kind, what Locke calls labor. So, whether we think about philosophy, wash our bathroom, make a sculpture, build a shed, or give a speech in the parliament, we all labor (if we do it correctly). Moreover, if the world is treating us right, we get properly paid for our value-creation (labor) and it is tracked in public policy-determining numbers like Gross Domestic Product.

However, Arendt argues in *The Human Condition*, this is the wrong way to think about it: all these activities are value creating, but they are not the same kind of activity, creating the same kind of thing ('value'). Rather, "labor" captures biologically reproductive and emotionally grounding activities constitutive of our personal lives (e.g. our everyday activities in our homes) at a given time. "Work" aims at creating a shared world with useful objects that last through time, such as roads and houses and tools. "Activity," in turn, is participation as free persons in public discussions of how to organize our political society and take care to create flourishing societies with histories, while "thinking" is academic, scholarly activity. All these activities are value-producing, but these values are not tokens of the same type and shouldn't be treated as such. For example, plastic is a terrific product of work—and, so, can be constitutive of creating a world that lasts through (a very long) time. But if we confuse it with a product of labor, say as something to serve only tonight's dinner on and then toss it into the trash destined for the landfill, we contribute to the destruction of our natural biological environment. In fact, confusing different kinds of value is part of the problem characterizing the modern world as such—a way of thinking that is internally linked to the phenomenon of empty consumerism. As we seek to re-envision good property relations, then, keeping-Arendt's thoughts in mind seems wise. Whatever is the best way to describe the different kinds of activities, a core challenge facing us may be to return to the one Locke took on: how to re-envision value-producing activity that can emotionally ground us as individuals and as societies that share one biological planet and whose core, distinguishing characteristic is that we are animals who can set ends of our own in morally responsible ways.

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¹⁷ These last paragraphs draw upon ideas developed in (Varden 2006, 2010, 2012).

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