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## Locke, on Theology and Property

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that the type of ethics derived from the Lockean system of justice is teleological rather than deontological, as authors like Nozick and Simmons tend to suggest. I argue that the individual cannot be considered as an end in itself, but perhaps as a means to fulfill some other ulterior purpose, namely, to comply with divine will.

The main Locke's conceptualization on anthropology derived from Acosta's works. The form in which Acosta studied Amerindians people and what he maintain about this people was more than important to Locke interest. Thus, is important to the study about Locke and his main thesis on theology and property studied, at least, the main thesis of Acosta on Amerindians.

Locke use Acosta argumentation about the characterization of barbarianism on Amerindians in the passage 102 of the Second Treatise. This is not fortuitous, but answer an important question: "what is the amerindian's natural situation?". To answer this, Locke ground his thesis on Acosta's thoughts and research. Because of that, there is a necessary relation between Locke thoughts, thesis on Amerindians and the Acosta ones. The relation between anthropology and theology in Acosta works ground the lockean system not only about the theology but also the property one.

In this way, the lockean conquest project grounds, also, on the Acosta's thesis about America and Amerindians. The person (a main concept in Locke) is the subject who can perform property, and it only could be possible is the subject is not a barbarian. The theology project that God writes in the hearts of the subject necessarily obligates the subject to perform property is he knows, by the culture in

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which he sustains his own life, the proper ways in which he could perform it. In the Amerindian ways of culture neither does not be possible that their people perform property at all, nor be sovereigns. The Christian ones who lived in Europe does.

*Keywords:* Locke; Acosta; Theology; Property; Amerindians; Conquest; Culture; Teleological Ethic; Deontological Ethic.

### **Acerca de la teología y la propiedad en Locke**

#### RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es demostrar que el tipo de ética derivada del sistema de justicia lockeano es más teleológico que deontológico, como tienden a sugerir autores como Nozick y Simmons. Sostengo que el individuo no puede considerarse como un fin en sí mismo, sino quizás como un medio para cumplir algún otro propósito ulterior, a saber, cumplir con la voluntad divina.

La principal conceptualización de Locke sobre antropología derivó de los trabajos de Acosta. La forma en que Acosta estudió a los amerindios y lo que sostiene sobre este pueblo fue más que importante para el interés de Locke. Así, es importante el estudio sobre Locke y sus principales tesis sobre teología y propiedad estudiadas, al menos, las principales tesis de Acosta sobre los amerindios.

Locke utiliza la argumentación de Acosta sobre la caracterización de la barbarie entre los amerindios en el pasaje 102 del Segundo Tratado. Esto no es fortuito, pero responde a una pregunta importante: "¿cuál es la situación natural de los amerindios?". Para responder a esto, Locke basó su tesis en el pensamiento y la investigación de Acosta. Por eso, hay una relación necesaria entre los pensamientos de Locke, las tesis sobre los amerindios y las de Acosta. La relación entre antropología y teología en las obras de Acosta fundamenta el sistema lockeano no sólo en lo que respecta a la teología sino también a la propiedad.

De esta manera, el proyecto lockeano de conquista se sustenta, también, en la tesis de Acosta sobre América y los amerindios. La persona (un concepto principal en Locke) es el sujeto que puede realizar una propiedad, y sólo podría ser posible si el sujeto no es un bárbaro. El proyecto de teología que Dios escribe en el corazón del sujeto obliga necesariamente al sujeto a realizar una propiedad si conoce, por la cultura en la que sostiene su propia vida, las formas adecuadas en que podría realizarla. En las formas de cultura amerindias no es posible que sus pueblos ejerzan propiedad alguna, ni sean soberanos. Los cristianos que vivieron en Europa sí.

*Palabras clave:* Locke; Acosta; Teología; Propiedad; Amerindios; Conquista; Cultura; Ética teleológica; Ética deontológica.

## **Introduction**

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that the type of ethics derived from the Lockean system of justice is teleological rather than deontological, as authors like Nozick and Simmons tend to suggest. I argue that the individual cannot be considered as an end in

itself, but perhaps as a means to fulfill some other ulterior purpose, namely, to comply with divine will.

The relationship between sovereignty, property, and the person is of a necessary nature within the Lockean system, making it impossible to think that there are persons who are not sovereign or property owners. This leaves a set of cultures that Locke does not treat as rightful persons outside the universe of subjects with rights.

In the first section of this work, I will attempt to account for one of the sources of authority on which Locke bases part of his anthropological theory: José de Acosta. I will then establish a connection between Acosta's theories and Locke's stance regarding the conquest in America and the appropriation of the lands of the inhabitants of those lands, trying to demonstrate that the inhabitants living in America were not considered by the English philosopher as fully entitled subjects.

Finally, I will attempt to demonstrate that a teleological reading of Locke's ethics is possible, in contrast to what Nozick and Simmons maintain.

### **José de Acosta, Lockean Source**

José de Acosta argued that the only civilized nations were those that held a Christian creed and were situated in Europe. In this sense, for Acosta, there was a necessary relationship between *civilization* and theological belief in Christ. Outside this group of Christian nations (although not all European nations were equally so), there were other peoples who were considered barbarians. (Acosta 1984, 45).

This approach to the political configuration of non-European, non-Christian cultures solidified the Jesuit as one of the most important theorists of the colonial trend. According to Del Valle (2003, 439), Acosta attempted to determine the origin of the inhabitants discovered in America.

The studies that Acosta conducts allow him to form a typology of barbarism, determining that its existence in the New World is of a historical rather than theological nature (Del Valle 2013, 441-442; Zorrilla, 2012, 95). Acosta believes that the inhabitants of the New World possess reason (even if only potentially), but their cultural practices have distanced them from it. Therefore, Acosta states that the barbarism found in America cannot be justified by theology (there is no divine punishment to justify it), but rather is an improper mode of cultural expression.<sup>1</sup>

The individuals found in American soil are considered barbaric by Acosta because, according to him, they can be classified under at least one of the following definitions of barbarism:

(1) Those who, although they form politically stable societies, are estranged from the tenets of Christianity. Barbarians of this kind, for Acosta, are the Chinese and Japanese. In this sense, having (though not based on justified theological tenets) a set of laws and magistrates that enable stable coexistence, these, among all types of barbarians, are the least barbaric.

(2) Those who do not possess knowledge of writing but still have political standards and established governance. Among them are the Mexicans and Peruvians, and their level of barbarism is moderate.

(3) Finally, those whose level of barbarism is the greatest of all: those who do not have any political institutions and among whose relations and practices there is nothing that José de Acosta could call "civilized." Among these barbarians are the inhabitants of the Caribbean, among whose practices Acosta finds cannibalism as a representation of barbarism.

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<sup>1</sup> Acosta's studies regarding the inhabitants of the New World and their concomitant classification as "barbarians" constituted a fundamental pillar for the modernization of the Spanish Empire, as Natural History demonstrates the cultural and biological diversity found in America, enabling the opening up to a wide range of advancements in the study of mankind and its ways of life (Mauro J. Caraccioli «The learned man of good judgment: nature, narrative and wonder in José de Acosta's natural philosophy». *History of Political Thought* 38.1 (2017): 44-63, 49)

For Acosta, as well as for Las Casas, barbarism can be overcome through education, following Christian principles and civilized arts. This education should be systematic, as nothing should be left to chance, and its application should correspond to a practical purpose: the incorporation of those cultures into the Christian one, which, in turn, would enable the salvation of the souls whose bodies inhabit the New World.<sup>2</sup>

José de Acosta's approaches to the issue of barbarism and how - due to its existence - it should be overcome reflect what I consider a teleological logic based on a theocentric moral proposal: only the souls that embrace Christian commandments and, in turn, adopt Europeanized ways of being can be saved. Thus, those cultures that gradually resemble the European-Christian ideal will be more inclined toward salvation than those that move away from this set of right reasons. In Acosta, there seems to be a sort of *anthropological gradations* as some cultures increasingly resemble those existing in the Old World.

This way of studying Amerindians and seeing cultural expressions that should be *corrected* through the instruction of a certain group of Europeans (the Christians) soon translated into a justification for the conquest and colonization of these *barbaric* peoples (Del Valle 2013, 441).

This necessary form of education that a certain group of powerful individuals applies to another will also be an argument in Locke's work. Acosta's pedagogical relationship regarding the obligation of certain Europeans to instruct and educate the inhabitants of America will be appropriated by the English thinker to support his thesis of conquest.

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2 There are significant differences in the ways of observing Amerindians from the perspectives of José de Acosta and Bartolomé de Las Casas. For the latter, the notion that all inhabitants of the world have a natural inclination toward belief predisposes them to salvation once they are instructed in Christianity. Furthermore, for Las Casas, the manner in which new cultures should be educated should not involve the use of force but rather be achieved (this conversion) through dialogue. Lastly, for Las Casas, practices of cannibalism do not seem to pose a problem, as he appears to accept them as particular ways in which each culture expresses its set of basic beliefs.

Acosta argues that sovereignty exists only in Europe, specifically in those regions where Christianity is practiced. Thus, since there is sovereignty only in Europe, there is also the power to determine whether sovereignty exists (or not) in other parts of the world. This way of conceptualizing the “superiority” of certain European nations over all others will also be used by Locke to justify the conquest in America.<sup>3</sup>

### Theology, Conquest, and Appropriation

I argue that in Locke, specifically in the fifth chapter of the *Second Treatise*, there are two foundations for appropriation. One is the economic foundation, and the other is theological. The economic foundation, I contend, can be summarized as it is advantageous to cultivate all untilled land because it generates profit both for the individual worker and for all the humanity. The second, the theological foundation, translates into there being a direct order from God (Christian) that the individual should appropriate common things given by Him to mankind.

Both the first of these reasons (foundations) and the second of them, although accessible to all individuals equally, cannot be comprehended and appropriated by the inhabitants of America in the best possible way due to their cultural mode of expression.

For Locke, the men of America are individuals who, not comprehending the mandates that God impresses on the hearts of men and being culturally lazy and ignorant, can only obtain property through charity.<sup>4</sup>

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3 The term *barbarian* is used «by Acosta to define non-European populations» (de La Jousselandière, V. S. V.. La doble marginalidad de José de Acosta: religión y soberanía en el virreinato del Perú (siglo XVI). *Summa Humanitatis*, 6(1), (2012), 8). The barbarians, according to Acosta, were naturally predisposed to be slaves. This Acostan conceptualization is based on Aristotelian scholasticism. I disagree with de La Jousselandiere's thesis, as it is not limited to just “non-European populations”. Acosta also conducts a comprehensive critique of the ways in which certain regions of Europe do not adhere to the Christian creed.

4 Squadrito Kathy, «Locke and the Dispossession of the American Indian», 171. For the concept of “charity” in Locke's work, see Juliana Udi, «Locke and the fundamental right to preser-

I argue that in Locke, these two basic principles are necessarily articulated in such a way that the relationship between them culminates in the legitimate appropriation of goods arranged by God in common for humanity. The principles are: (a) that there is a divine command imposing the need for salvation and, in turn, implying that people must appropriate the goods arranged in common by God for everyone, (b) that such a command can only be apprehended through reason, so that “reason” determines belonging to the civilization. That there is a divine command (a) and that this command is understood by a group of individuals through reason (b) Legitimizing that such individuals can legitimately appropriate goods arranged by God in common to all (c).

In Locke, there is a tropological analogy regarding Native Americans and European children and the poor. If the former are like the collective of the latter (that is, non-working individuals who must be cared for by others), it is, therefore, necessary to educate and instruct the inhabitants of the New World in the ways in which the industrious and property-owning European culture manifests itself. In this sense, the relationship between how Locke views Native Americans can be likened to his own vision of beggar subjects in his text “The Poor Law.”<sup>5</sup>

Native Americans (along with European children and the poor) must be educated in the correct ways of productive and proprietary culturalization. Thus, property-owning adults should instruct European children just as European conquerors do with Native Americans.<sup>6</sup> So, for Locke, the instruction of Native Americans

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vation: On the convergence of charity and property rights». *The Review of Politics*, 77(2), (2015): 191-215. Juliana Udi, «El derecho a la caridad: repercusiones de la teología cristiana en la teoría de la propiedad de John Locke», *Revista de filosofía*, 70, (2014): 149-160. Juliana Udi, «Justicia versus caridad en la teoría de la propiedad de Locke», *Revista latinoamericana de filosofía*, 38(1), (2012) 65-84. Juliana Udi, «Propiedad lockeana, pobreza extrema y caridad», *Revista de estudios políticos*, (157), (2012): 165-188.

5 John Locke, *Locke: Political Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), 182-198.

6 Native Americans have ideas in their souls similar to those found in animals. Locke already referred (cf. Essay Concerning Human Understanding) that there were no innate ideas. This determined, for Locke, that the souls of individuals were like a blank slate, on which new ideas given by experience are imprinted. In the case of the inhabitants of America, those experiences

in matters related to labor and appropriation not only represents a Christian necessity but also enables the maximization of resources that all of humanity can use.

To achieve this, Locke must support an extensive program of instruction and education for Native Americans. In this way, the inhabitants of America would become civilized subjects once they are instructed and educated in the correct ways of labor and appropriation.

The correct interpretation of Locke's stance regarding the invasion of America must be based on a comprehensive reading of his various essays. Locke does not determine, for example, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, that there is an obligation to invade America, nor can it be said to be jointly found in his *Second Treatise*. However, if the ways in which Locke describes Native Americans and the manner in which they lead their lives are studied in the light of other texts such as *Essays on the Law of Nature* or *On the Poor Law*, the conquest project can be considered, as I indeed believe it to be one of the clearest and most resounding manifestations of the desire to oppress the peoples of America.

This thesis of instruction permeates the possibility of understanding that Locke was an advocate for the invasion of Europe in America. If the inhabitants of the New World were like children or people who lived without any property, there had to be someone to instruct them (even by force) in the correct ways of labor.

This thesis that Locke supports the need for a program of (Eurocentric) civilization in America is advocated by, among others, Kathy Squadrito.<sup>7</sup> This program would aim to bring the inhabitants

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(and in accordance with them, the ideas that will be imprinted on the souls) must be provided by the Europeans.

<sup>7</sup> Squadrito, «Locke and the Dispossession»...172

of the New World closer to legitimate ways of labor, appropriation, and sovereignty.<sup>8</sup>

I consider that Locke's political theory, along with his concomitant theory of justice (concerning the legitimate and proper appropriation of goods by property owners), depends on a series of epistemological principles that affirm both the absence of innate ideas and the inscription of the theological maxims of Christianity in the hearts of all men, which Locke seeks to exalt.

This way of describing Native Americans as not having ideas in their minds, or whose set of ideas already inscribed more closely resembles that of animals than those of European inhabitants, illustrates how Locke ends up differentiating within his theory between those who are legitimate owners of everything they work on and those who are not: on the one hand, the industrious individuals of Europe, and on the other, the indigenous barbarians. Once again, and as in the case of José de Acosta, instruction becomes necessary due to divine mandate.

Since the land in America is *empty* or *vacant*, the reason being that it is not cultivated by its inhabitants, Native Americans would be engaging in an improper way of appropriating the goods given by God in common to all. According to Locke, if the individuals who inhabit the American soil do not engage in land cultivation and enclosure (which requires a particular set of techniques and, therefore, specific knowledge), it cannot be said that Native Americans are appropriating goods legitimately.

This differentiation in the ways Native Americans and industrious Europeans carry out their activities accounts for two modes of appropriation, one illegitimate and the other legitimate. The illegiti-

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<sup>8</sup> Tully argues that the theory of appropriation and conquest can be seen as converging in Locke's theory because through conquest, uncultivated land is discovered. Considering that land and the fruits that can arise from it should not be left to waste, it becomes necessary to appropriate it. See James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 182.

mate mode corresponds to Native Americans, while the legitimate mode pertains to industrious Europeans.<sup>9</sup>

### Locke's Ethics: Teleological

Locke's ethics is not in any way an ethics that considers the individual as an end in itself but rather as a means to an ultimate end. This is because, for Locke, the conquest of America must be considered as a type of obligation on the part of industrious Europeans to effectively fulfill the theological mandate of maximizing the goods provided by God in the world through labor and work.

This perspective allows us to observe how Locke introduces a kind of hierarchy of humanity. There will be individuals who, as in Acosta's view, more closely resemble the ideal of humanity than others. These individuals will be the hardworking people who hold a set of beliefs not only in Christian religiosity but also in a project of benefiting from the fruits of individual labor. All those individuals who do not fulfill these principles, whether due to ignorance, being in a state of madness, being infants, etc., will be under the care of others (or a certain set of institutions) to ensure that they do not interfere with the proper ways in which political communities must historically develop.

Authors like Nozick and Simmons have argued that the Lockean individual is free and equal to others. Nozick and Simmons have used the Lockean individual, Lockean conceptual categories, and their interpretation as the basis for constructing their liberal theories. Nozick even suggests that the way Locke posits the existence of the state of nature (in which the individual is in a state of

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9 Cf. William G. Batz, «The historical anthropology of John Locke», *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35(4), (1974): 663-670; Paul Corcoran, «John Locke on native right, colonial possession, and the concept of vacuum domicilium», *The European Legacy*, 23(3), (2018): 225-250; Kathy Squadrito, «Locke and the Dispossession of the American Indian», *Philosophers on race: Critical essays* (2002): 101-124; Diego A. Fernandez Peychaux, «John Locke: los racionales, las bestias y la resistencia». *Bajo palabra. Revista de filosofía* 27 (2021): 193-212; Luigi Ferrajoli, «L'America, la conquista, il diritto. L'idea di sovranità nel mondo moderno», *Meridiana* 15, (1992): 17-52.

equality and complete freedom) is a fictitious (but effective) way to propose the origin of political communities.

If individuals were always free and equal, it is challenging to understand, in light of new decolonial studies, how the invasion of America can be justified or even how the enslavement of African inhabitants can be justified.<sup>10</sup> The Lockean person is not a purely universal subject applicable to all times and places. The Lockean subject, rather, is a type of individual that applies to a certain set of individuals. Those individuals who have reason and can comprehend the principles of natural law will be the ones who can be considered persons. Thus, there will be individuals who are free and equal to each other (the so-called persons, individuals with rights), and there will be those who are mere subjects whose existence is subject to certain ends for others.

This hierarchy of anthropological categories, with individuals (children, indigenous people, women, vagabonds) whose existence is subject to the control of others, and persons (individuals with full intellectual faculties, industrious, hardworking, free, sovereign individuals, men<sup>11</sup>), demonstrates that not all individuals in Locke's theory are equal to each other. Furthermore, the existence of both groups, the former and the latter, depends on the theological directives that seek to imprint in the minds of individuals the set of divine mandates: to promote the accumulation of goods on Earth, to sustain life, and to defend it.

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<sup>10</sup> Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (New York: Cornell University Press 2014).

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<sup>11</sup> Carole Pateman, *Sexual contract*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1988).

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