

The Situations and Meaning of Individuals in Modern Society (1): On the Jon Locke's Concept of Individual and his Model of Society

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Abstract

The idea that free, equal, and independent individuals form society became dominant in the late 17th century. This idea negates the old imaginary in which individuals are subordinate to society as an organic body headed by a King or any supreme authority, and forms the conceptual framework to both liberalism and socialism. However, there are also many studies in philosophy, sociology, politics, economics, psychology, etc., that dispute this relationship between society and individuals and support the argument that human beings are not independent actors separate from society. In this introductory essay, I try to explain how Locke's 'free man' was dependent on the society of his age, and that this model of society was non-political. His idea of individuals is closely related to his own idea of self and personal identity; and engendered the idea that the individual is an independent and autonomous being. The relationship between the individual and society is close and inseparable; and it elicits scrutiny of the fundamental and essential features of the relationship, and how the ideas of 'self' and 'individual' emerged historically.

Keywords

Locke's model of society, individuals as rational creatures, property based on man's own body and work, relationship between society and individuals, self and individual