

MITOCW | Ethics_of_AI_Bias_clip4

Do you remember learning about modern natural right from Professor Baer before spring break?

Yes, a bit.

We studied Locke's state of nature and its connection with natural right, if that's what you're talking about.

Professor Baer also made the case that modern natural right is the basis for the American regime and the reason for this country's success.

Good.

And yes, that is exactly what I mean.

It's great that you remember reading Locke and about modern natural right being the basis for the American regime.

Oh.

Hello, Professor Knowles.

What are you doing here?

I hope I'm not bothering you.

I heard that you were discussing modern natural right, and I wanted to join.

Please do join us.

We were just starting on modern natural right.

So how does Locke view the problem of AI and bias?

Patch.

Locke would think it wrong because bias violates your natural right.

Yes, I agree.

That sounds right, but I'm not sure because we said that justice is more important than equality.

But it seems that equality is fundamental in Locke.

But then where is justice in Locke?

Let's take this step by step.

Does anyone remember the beginning? But you said you were working on these questions during spring break.

Alvis?

Well, we were discussing them, but we never actually went back to the texts from class.

Yeah.

We just wanted to figure them out for ourselves.

I guess you disapprove, Professor Muller?

On the contrary.

You are a very impressive group to have stayed here over spring break and investigated these questions.

Any teacher would be thrilled to have even one student like you, and I have five.

But you said that you got stuck.

What was your plan to get out of your impasse?

Well, your class, of course.

[LAUGHS]

Hush, Patch.

You seem not to realize that Professor Muller is in a most mild way rebuking us for not using the resources at hand.

Well, let's use them now.

Professor, please remind us of Locke's starting point.

Of course.

Let's turn to second treatise, chapter 1. Professor Knowles, where do you think we should start?

I'd say the last section of paragraph one, starting with "he that." That is exactly what I was thinking.

Glenda, could you read the statement starting with "he that?" Of course.

He that will not give just occasion to think that all government in the world is the product of only force and violence must of necessity find out another rise of government.

Good.

So Locke is giving us two options of the origin of government, force or something else-- maybe something else based on reason but not narrow or mathematical reason.

Yes, of course.

That is much better.

It would be terrible to think that politics is just about force.

I agree.

It should be about allowing people to be happy, as we said before.

But what does this alternative basis?

You can look at your books, you know.

Alvis.

It is the state of nature.

Good.

What is the state of nature?

Well, let's see.

I actually underlined this pretty extensively.

It is a state of perfect freedom and a state also of equality.

Yes.

I remember now.

But how can it be a state of perfect freedom if anyone can take your stuff and it's only up to you to protect it?

You don't remember?

That's the point.

There is no government, so we're all perfectly free in that sense.

But life is not desirable since we're all individually vulnerable.

That's why we form governments, for security.

Very good, Sophie, but you're moving too fast.

Remember Locke says but though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of license.

Do you recall why that is?

Oh, hold on.

I have it right here.

Because of a law of nature.

Yes, that's it.

Laws of nature are based on reason.

Yeah.

We talked about that before spring break.

Now I remember.

It's dumb to waste stuff, including your own life.

What about these people that waste their money on luxuries, expensive cars and things?

Yeah.

I'd be content with a cheap rundown car.

Why should someone buy a Ferrari when most of us can't afford an old Kia?

Does anyone recall Locke's answer to this?

Perhaps, once again, we are moving too fast.

Let's go step by step.

What is the state of nature like?

Alvis.

In addition to freedom and equality, there is a law.

Good.

What else?

There is punishment.

In paragraph seven, he says everyone has a right to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree as may hinder its violation.

Very good, Sophie.

I think we will see that our objection to bias is itself based on a sense that there is a law of nature.

How does Locke characterize this statement?

He says in paragraph nine that this will seem a very strange doctrine to some.

Excellent.

Does it seem strange to you?

Well, not any more strange than the state of nature.

Why is the state of nature strange?

So nature is what you experience when you go on a hike or go camping.

What Locke is describing never really existed.

What do you think existed in its place?

So humans evolved from humanoids, and they lived in tribes.

They weren't by themselves.

Right, Patch.

But what is the basis of the rule of the tribe leader?

Power.

But isn't this exactly what Locke said at the beginning?

We can have tribal rule based on power, or we can have an alternative, which Locke provides.

Besides, don't you think human beings' natural state is freedom and equality?

That all makes sense.

But then why does Locke call it a very strange doctrine?

To some.

See, I think that will find that what is required is not so much a new doctrine, say a learned latent structure for algorithmic bias mitigation or domain adaptation, but a reflection on what doctrine some find strange and others do not.

What's strange to us actually contradicts our own biases.

Psychologically, we tend to resist those things because they point out our biases to ourselves.

Oh, I see.

What we find strange is an indication of our own bias.

That's what Locke is saying.

Thank you, Professor Knowles.

And I realize that he defends this doctrine by arguing that governments can punish foreigners who break a law, which is related to the example in paragraph 14, when he says that by the state of nature exists today, since all princes and rulers of independent governments all through the world are in a state of nature.

Very good, and then he brings in the next paragraph the weight of the writings of Hooker, or shall we say the judicious Hooker.

And he ends the chapter with the idea of consent.

So political society is made legitimate only by consent.