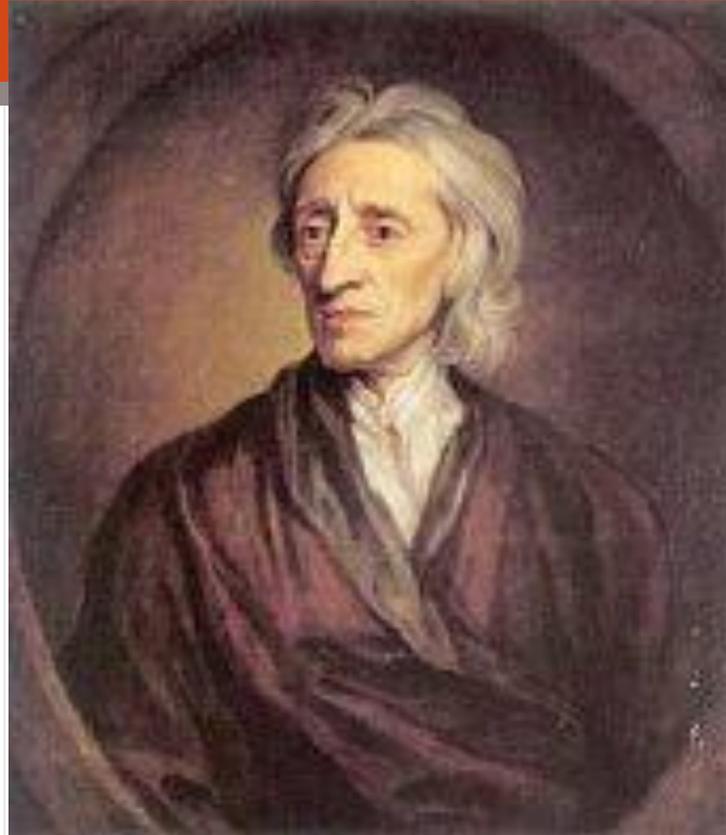


# The Philosophy of John Locke

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# Learning Objectives

- Identify the Major Works of John Locke
  - *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
  - *Two Treatises of Government*
- Recognize Locke's basic beliefs on "Human Understanding"
- Discuss the difference between Locke's and Hobbes' "state of nature"
- Identify Locke's philosophy on:
  - Human Nature and God's Purpose
  - State of Nature
  - State of War
  - Private property
  - Social Contract Theory
  - Function of Civil Government
  - Three Forms of Power
  - Rebellion and Regicide

# John Locke 1632-1704

- Born to Puritan parents
  - 1647 Westminster School in London
  - 1652 Christ Church, Oxford (Medieval education) BA in logic, metaphysics and classical languages
  - 1658 qualified for an MA
  - 1674 Bachelor of Medicine

# Thomas Locke – Diverse Interests

- British philosopher, Oxford academic and medical researcher
- Governmental official charged with collecting information about trade and colonies
- Economic writer and opposition political activist
- Revolutionary whose cause ultimately triumphed in the Glorious Revolution of 1688

# Thomas Lock & Reason

- Advocated the use reason to search after the truth
  - Important to distinguish the legitimate from the illegitimate functions of institutions
  - Believed that using reason to try to grasp the truth, and determining the legitimate functions of institutions will optimize human flourishing

# Major Works

- *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
- *Two Treatises of Government*
- *Letters Concerning Toleration*
- *The Reasonableness of Christianity*
- *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*



# *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

- First of the great English empiricists
- Adopted Descartes' "way of ideas"; though it is transformed so as to become an organic part of Locke's philosophy
- Most important of his goals was to determine the limits of human understanding

“For I thought that the first step towards satisfying the several Enquiries, the Mind of Man was apt to run into, was, to take a Survey of our own Understanding, examine our own Powers, and see to what Things they were adapted. Till that was, I suspected that we began at the wrong end, and in vain sought for Satisfaction in a quiet and secure Possession of Truths, that most concern’d us whilst we let loose our Thoughts into the vast Ocean of *Being*, as if all the boundless Extent, were the natural and undoubted Possessions of our Understandings, wherein there was nothing that excepted its Decisions, or that escaped its Comprehension. Thus Men, extending their Enquiries beyond their Capacities, and letting their Thoughts wander into those depts. Where they can find not sure Footing; ‘tis no wonder, that they raise Questions and multiply Disputes, which never coming to any clear Resolution, are proper to only continue and increase their Doubts, and to confirm them at last in a perfect Scepticism. Whereas were the Capacities of our Understanding well considered, the Extent of our Knowledge once discovered, and the Horizon found, which sets the boundary between the enlightened and the dark Parts of Things; between what is and what is not comprehensible by us, Men would perhaps with less scruples acquiesce in the avow’d Ignorance of the one; and employ their Thoughts and Discourse, with more Advantage and Satisfaction in the other” (I, 1.7)

# *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

- Humans have no innate knowledge
  - At birth the human mind is a blank slate (*Tabula rasa*)
- Ideas are the materials of knowledge. All ideas come from two kinds of experience
  - **Sensation** tells us about the things and processes in the external world
  - **Reflection** is an internal sense that makes us conscious of the mental processes we are engaged in
- Some of our ideas we get from sensation, some from reflection and some from both

# *Two Treatises of Government*

# *First Treatise of Government*

- Polemical work refuting the patriarchal version of the “Divine Right of Kings” doctrine put forth by Sir Robert Filmer
- Filmer claims that all “legitimate” governments are “absolute monarchies”
  - Kings are descended from the first man Adam
  - Locke denies that either scripture or reason supports Filmer’s premise or arguments

# *Second Treatise of Government*

- Positive theory of government – he explicitly says that he must do this

*“lest men fall into the dangerous belief that all government in the world is merely the product of force and violence”*

- Uses several devices common in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century political philosophy
  - Natural rights theory
  - Social contract theory

# *Second Treatise of Government*

- I – definition of Political power
- II-VII – bases of government, states of nature, war, slavery, the nature of property
- VIII-XIV – the nature of political power and legitimate civil government
- XV – recapitulates the fundamental distinctions between paternal, political and despotic power
- XVI-XVIII – elaborates the nature of illegitimate civil government
- XIX – conditions under which legitimate revolution may occur

*“Political power, then, I take to be a right of making laws with penalties of death, and consequently all less penalties, for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community, in the execution of such laws, and in the defense of the common-wealth from foreign injury; and all this only for the public good”*

# Human Nature and God's Purposes

- God created man and we are, in effect, God's property
- The chief end set us by our creator as a species and as individuals is survival
- God created men as equal to one another
- Murder and suicide violate the divine purpose

*“...by his order and about his business, they are his property whose workmanship thy are, made to last during his, not one another’s pleasure: and being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature, there cannot be supposed any subordination among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another’s uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for our’s”*

# Natural Rights

- Means necessary to survival are the rights to life, liberty, health and property
  - Natural rights are those which we have in the state of nature before the introduction of civil government
  - All people have these rights equally
  - Golden Rule – one should not violate other's natural rights
- Laws of nature revealed by reason

# State of Nature

- A state in which we follow the Golden Rule – Not equated with the state of war
- Not meant as a “utopia” –an analytical device that explains why it becomes necessary to introduce civil government
  - Laws of nature can be violated
  - We have the rights to enforce the law and to judge on our own behalf
  - Miscarriages of justice because the person wronged are more likely to judge it of greater severity

# State of War

- Is a state in which someone has an intention of violating someone's right to life
  - The person attacking is the unjust aggressor
  - Not the normal relationship between people enjoined by the law of nature
  - State of nature is not equated with the state of war

# Slavery

- Only a person who has been an unjust aggressor who is defeated in war can be a legitimate slave
- **Illegitimate slavery** is that state in which someone possesses absolute or despotic power over someone else without just cause
- **Illegitimate slavery** is that which absolute monarchs wish to impose upon their subjects

# Private Property

- We are supposed to make use of the earth “*for the best advantage of life and convenience*”
- Lock holds that we have a property in our own person
  - The labor of our body and the work of our hands properly belong to us
  - When an individual adds their labor to a foreign object or good, that object become their own property because they added labor

# Private Property Qualifications

- We cannot waste goods

*“As much as anyone can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils, so much by his labor he may fix a property in; whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others”*

- Must leave enough for others so that they do not suffer

# Money

- Before money, there was a degree of economic equality imposed on mankind both by reason and the barter system
- Introduction of money is necessary for the differential increase in property, with a resulting economic inequality
  - Money causes inequalities
  - Inequities causes quarrels and contentions and increased numbers of violation of the law of nature
  - Decision to create a civil government

# Social Contract Theory

- Legitimate government is instituted by the explicit consent of those governed
  - Individuals transfer to the government their right of executing the law of nature and judging their own case
  - **Universal consent** is necessary to establish a political community
  - **Majority consent** is necessary to answer the question of who is to rule: a king and his heirs, a group of oligarchs, or a democratic assembly

# The Function of Civil Government

## A Legitimate Government

- Preserves the rights to life, liberty, health and property of its citizens
- Prosecutes and punishes those of its citizens who violate the rights of others
- Provides an impartial judge to determine the severity of the crime and set punishment
- Is formed of separate judicial, legislative, and executive branches – the legislative is the most important

# Legislative Branch

- First rule of legislative power is the preservation of the society
- Every member of society must adhere to the laws laid down by the legislative body
- Limits to the power of the legislature include:
  - Must govern by fixed “promulgated established laws” that apply equally to every one
  - Laws must be designed solely for the good of the people
  - Must not raise taxes on the property of the people without the people’s consent
  - Does not have the power to transfer its power

# Forms of Power

- Paternal power is limited and last only through the minority of children, and has other limitation
- Political power, is derived from the transfer of power of individuals to enforce the law of nature - has with it the right to kill in the interest of preserving the rights of the citizens or otherwise supporting the public good
- Despotic power – implies the right to take the life, liberty, heath and at least some of the property of any person subject to such power

# Rebellion and Regicide

- When governing bodies cease to represent the people and instead represent either themselves or some foreign power, the people may and indeed should rebel against their government and replace it with one that will remember its trust

# Illegitimate Civil Governments

## An Illegitimate Civil Government

- Seeks to systematically violate the natural rights of its subjects
- Seeks to make them illegitimate slaves
- Puts itself in a state of nature and a state of war with its subjects

# Summary