

Gentrain Unit 10 – Philosophy of John Locke, October 23, 2013, Dr. Cindy Ausec

John Locke 1632-1704

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

Major Works

- *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
- *Two Treatises of Government* (originally published anonymously)
- *Letters Concerning Toleration* (originally published anonymously)
- *The Reasonableness of Christianity*
- *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding

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

First Treatise of Government - aimed at refuting the patriarchal version of the “Divine Right of Kings” doctrine put forth by Sir Robert Filmer

Second Treatise of Government

- Positive theory of government - uses several devices which were common in the 17th and 18th century political philosophy
 - Natural rights theory
 - Social contract theory
- Human Nature and God’s Purposes
 - God created man and we are, in effect, God’s property
 - The chief goal set us by our creator as a species and as individuals is survival
 - Men were created equal to one another - murder and suicide violate the divine purpose
 - The means necessary to survival are the rights to life, liberty, health and property
 - Natural rights 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
- State of Nature is one in which we follow the Golden rule - not equated with the state of war

- Not meant as a “utopia” – analytical device that explains why it becomes necessary to introduce civil government and the legitimate function of 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 is more likely to judge it of greater severity than might an impartial judge
- State of War - is a state in which someone has an intention of violating someone’s rights
- Private property - when an individual adds their labor to a foreign object or good, that object becomes their own property because they have added labor
 - Introduction of money: Money causes inequalities → quarrels and contentions and increase in number of violations 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 to answer the question who is to rule such a community: a king and his heirs, or 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 and 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
 - Has separate judicial, legislative, and executive branches – the legislative is the most important
- Three forms of power which are not equivalent
 - *Paternal power* is limited and lasts only through the minority of children
 - *Political power* is derived from the transfer of individual power to enforce the law of nature- has with it the right to kill in the interest of preserving these rights
 - *Despotic power* implies the right to take the life, liberty, health and at least some of the property of any person subject to such power

Rebellion and Regicide

- When either through abuse of power or an impermissible change, these 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