

John Locke
2021-2022
Semester 1

Course Summary:

This course will offer a close reading of some of John Locke's most important philosophical writings, such as *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), and the *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689). The course will introduce students to the historical context of his work and its legacy, particularly the *Essay's* role as the most influential statement of empiricism in the early modern period. Students will also be exposed to contemporary secondary literature.

Course Organiser:

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Course Structure: This course will be delivered as a two-hour seminar, held weekly. However, we will use a “flipped classroom” approach, which means that students will be expected to do the reading and watch pre-recorded lectures in advance of the seminar. The seminar itself, then, will be devoted to discussion of these materials. Philosophical learning is very much a matter of engaging and thinking together with others, rather than the achievement of a state of possessing information. This is why it is extremely important that you read through the assigned texts and view the pre-recorded materials in advance so as to be prepared to actively take part in discussion.

The seminar time and location, as well as office hours, will be announced on the Learn page of the course.

Assessment: There are three pieces of assessment for this course:

- Mid-term essay (approx. 1500 words) (40%):
 - Due Thursday, 21st October, by 12pm
- Final essay (approx. 2500 words) (55%):
 - Due Thursday 9th December, by 12pm [Coursework dissertations are due 14th December, 12pm]
- Participation (5%)

The Mid-term essay will require an explanation of a central argument, distinction, or problem from the material covered in the first five weeks of the semester. The Final essay will afford an opportunity for a broader critical engagement with some topic covered during the semester. Questions and guidance for each essay will be posted at least 4 weeks before the deadline on

Learn. The assessment of participation will be based on presence and engagement in tutorial.

Citations: The Mid-term and Final essays should refer to Locke's works in the standard scholarly format, which is as follows. References to Locke's works are cited parenthetically in the text, employing an abbreviation for the title, followed by the book, chapter, paragraph and page number referenced. For example, a reference to Book 1, Chapter 2, Paragraph 3, which appears on page 49, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* should look like this:

"[quoted text here]" (E 1.2.3 49).

References to secondary literature and other primary sources may employ any standardized reference system.

Marking Schemes

For Philosophy-specific marking guidelines go here:

[Grade-related marking guidelines for Philosophy](#)

For the University's general marking scheme go here:

[Common Marking Scheme](#)

Main Texts

These are the main texts that we will be studying. The books are available in electronic format, but you may prefer to have a physical copy.

- John Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Originally published 1689.

The standard edition of this work is edited by Peter Nidditch, published by Oxford University Press, 1975. We will spend the most time on this work, so if you prefer to buy only one physical book, I would recommend this one. An electronic copy is available on Oxford Scholarly Editions Online, which you can find through discovered.ed.ac.uk.

- —. *Two Treatises of Government*. 1689.

A good edition is edited by Peter Laslett, published by Cambridge University Press, 1988. An online edition is available through discovered.ed.ac.uk edited by Ian Shapiro and published by Yale University Press.

- —. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 1689.

There is a Hackett Classics edition that can be found fairly cheaply. This is also sometimes published together with the *Two Treatises of Government*. The online edition of the *Two Treatises* by Shapiro also includes the *Letter*.

All optional secondary readings are available in electronic format through the University library at discovered.ed.ac.uk.

Learning Resources

You should regularly check your university email and check for announcements on the course *Learn* page. Sometimes, there will also be announcements and discussion on MS Teams.

The course *Learn* page will provide information concerning:

- General information and announcement about the course
- Lecture notes and slides
- Tutorial arrangements
- Information about assessment arrangements

University of Edinburgh Library

The library's hard-copy and online resources can be searched online via *DiscoverEd*.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Introduction to Locke's Project

This week will introduce Locke's life and work, especially his project in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

Reading: Locke's *Essay*, Epistle to the Reader, Table of Contents (please skim), and Book 1, Chapter 1, "Introduction"; Mark Goldie, "Locke's Life" in *A Companion to Locke*, edited by Matthew Stuart (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2016).

Week 2: Locke's Anti-Nativism

This week we will examine Locke's arguments against the existence of innate ideas and innate knowledge, their validity, and their motivation.

Reading: Locke, *Essay*, Book 1, Chapters 2-4

Optional Secondary Reading: Raffaella De Rosa "Locke's Critique of Innatism" in *A Companion to Locke*, edited by Matthew Stuart (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2016).

Week 3: Ideas

This week we will look at Locke's taxonomy of ideas, including the distinction between simple and complex ideas, the distinction between ideas of sensation and ideas of reflection, and the distinction between ideas of primary and of secondary qualities.

Reading: Locke, *Essay*, Book 2, Chapter 1 (up to about §12), Chapters 2-8. Please read Ch. 8 "Other Considerations concerning simple Ideas" especially carefully.

Optional Secondary Reading: Matthew Stuart, "Locke's Colors" in *The Philosophical Review* (2003).

Week 4: Power, Free Will, and Action

This week we will look at one of the longest and most difficult chapters in Locke's *Essay*, "On Power." Locke begins with the origin of the idea of power, but quickly changes subject to discuss his views about liberty and freedom of the will, and the nature of action and motivation.

Reading: Locke, *Essay*, Book 2, Chapter 21, "Of Power." [Warning: this is only one chapter but it is just over 50 pages long and very difficult!]

Optional Secondary Reading: Don Garrett "Liberty and Suspension in Locke's Theory of the Will" in *A Companion to Locke*, edited by Matthew Stuart (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2016).

Week 5: Substance and Sorts of Substances

This week we will look at Locke's views concerning our ideas of substances, including the idea of substance in general and our ideas of sorts of substances, like the ideas of gold, horses, and cornflowers. We will also look at Locke's views about the meaning of names of sorts of substances .

Reading: Locke, *Essay*, Book 2, Chapter 23 "Of our Complex Ideas of Substances" and Book 3, Chapter 6 "Names of Substances."

Optional Secondary Reading: Kenneth Winkler, "Locke on Essence and the Social Construction of Kinds" in *A Companion to Locke*, edited by Matthew Stuart (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2016). Peter Anstey, "Species" in *John Locke and Natural Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

Week 6: Personal Identity

This week we will look at Locke's extremely influential account of personal identity.

Reading: Locke, *Essay*, Book 2, Chapter 27 "Identity and Diversity."

Optional Secondary Reading: Shelley Weinberg, "The Metaphysical Fact of Consciousness in Locke's Theory of Personal Identity." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (2012). Antonia LoLordo, *Locke's Moral Man*, Chapter 2 "Personality" (Oxford: OUP 2012).

Week 7: Knowledge

This week we turn to the core of Locke's epistemological project: his account of what knowledge is, what we know, and how. We'll examine the four types of knowledge, the three degrees of knowledge, and how the nature of our ideas bears on what we know.

Reading: Locke, *Essay*, Book 4, Chapters 1-4, also please go back to Book 2, Chapters 31-32.

Optional Secondary Reading: Antonia LoLordo, "Locke on Knowledge and Belief" in *A Companion to Locke*, edited by Matthew Stuart (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2016). Lex Newman, "Knowledge" in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Week 8: Sensitive Knowledge and Scepticism

This week we will look at Locke's account of our perceptual knowledge of the world, which he calls "sensitive knowledge." We will also consider his response to the external world sceptic.

Reading: Locke, *Essay*, Book 4, Chapter 11. Also please reread the relevant portions of last week's reading, especially Book 2, chapters 31-32 and parts of Book 4, Chapter 4.

Optional Secondary Reading: Jennifer Smalligan Marušić, "Locke's Simple Account of Sensitive Knowledge" *The Philosophical Review* (2016). Jennifer Nagel, "Sensitive Knowledge: Locke on Scepticism and Sensation" in *A Companion to Locke*, edited by Matthew Stuart (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2016).

Week 9: Political Philosophy

This week we leave behind Locke's *Essay* and look at his political philosophy. We will discuss his conception of natural law and his version of social contract theory.

Reading: Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Second Treatise [i.e. Book 2], Chapters 1-11.

Optional Secondary Reading: S. Adam Seagrave, “Locke on the Law of Nature and Natural Rights” and A. John Simmons, “Locke on the Social Contract” both in *A Companion to Locke*, edited by Matthew Stuart (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2016).

Week 10: Locke, Slavery, and Race

This week we will grapple with Locke’s difficult and contradictory engagement with slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. While we will spend some time on primary reading, our focus will be on understanding Locke’s involvement in and influence on the slave trade, both through his own personal investments and his role in drafting the constitution for the Carolinas.

Reading: Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Second Treatise [i.e. Book 2] Ch. 2 “Of Slavery” and Chapter 16 “Of Conquest”; Charles Mills *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1997), Ch. 1 and Ch 2, the subsection “The Racial Contract underwrites the modern social contract and is continually being rewritten” pp. 62-81 (focus especially on the parts on Locke); and William Uzgalis, “John Locke, Racism, Slavery, and Indian Lands” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*, edited by Naomi Zack (Oxford: OUP 2017).

Week 11: Religious Toleration

In our final week of class, we will examine Locke’s arguments in support of religious toleration and on the limits of a government to impose religion upon its subjects. We’ll also consider Locke’s puzzling claims about the proper extent of religious toleration, in particular his claim that atheists are never to be tolerated.

Reading: Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* [sometimes this is referred to as the first of the four letters concerning toleration], pp. 5-47 (through the discussion of atheism).

Optional Secondary Reading: Alex Tuckness, “Locke on Toleration” in *A Companion to Locke*, edited by Matthew Stuart (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2016).

Learning Outcomes

On completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Interpret, analyse, and evaluate arguments in historical philosophical texts.
2. Understand Locke's project in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* and its philosophical legacy.
3. Critically assess competing positions in the secondary literature on Locke.
4. Develop an original interpretation of some topic or issue in Locke's philosophical works.