Course Description

John Locke figures auspiciously and notoriously in the history of political thought as a founding father of Anglo-American liberalism, an agent of British imperialism, an architect of an emerging capitalist subjectivity, theorist of political freedom, and defender of the rule of law. Across these many representations, Locke most consistently appears as a thinker known for tying politics to rationality. Locke’s legacy continues to be invoked today by critics and admirers alike as a means of interrogating whether and what kind of rationality is required for political freedom, equality and critique. What should we make of this legacy?

The course will begin with Locke’s classic political text, *The Second Treatise of Government* and a selection of its most prominent interpretations and critiques circulating in political theory today. After surveying these contemporary debates, we will explore how Locke’s rational political subject is constituted in his writings on epistemology, education, and toleration. Exploring the relation of reason, language, and experience to politics, we will consider Locke’s affinities with other prominent figures in modern political theory, ranging from Montaigne to Nietzsche. Finally, we return to the *Two Treatises* to ask: should we still read Locke as a rationalist? Are there legacies beyond liberalism for contemporary readers of Locke’s text, either troubling or promising?

In addition to students of political theory, students of public law, American political development, political philosophy, and early modern literature may find the course valuable and are welcome.

Assignments and Evaluation

There will be three requirements for this course:

1) **Research Paper (60%)** of 20-25 pages will be due at the end of the term. A prospectus for this paper (3-5) pages and a working bibliography will also be due November 3rd. No late papers will be accepted for the final research paper. General suggestions for further readings are provided at the end each week’s assignment. Students should meet with me as early as possible, at least once by mid-October, for specific suggested readings related to paper topics.

2) **In-class oral presentation (20%)** on assigned reading for the week, lasting 15-20 minutes. You are strongly encouraged to meet with me to discuss your presentation in advance (e.g. Monday afternoons). The number of presentations for each student will depend on the number of students enrolled in the class. Each presentation should: (1) **briefly** summarize the argument(s); (2) relate the argument(s) to each other (when there is more than one reading) and to past readings and discussions; (3) raise questions and critical points (positive or negative) about the reading(s). The overall goal is to stimulate thoughtful discussion.
3) **Class participation (20%)** is essential. Regular attendance and thoughtful contributions to class discussions are vital to the success of the seminar and will be considered as minimum requirements for ‘A’ grades.

Auditors may join the class with permission of the instructor. They will not be required to write a paper, but will be expected to: acquire and complete all assigned readings, participate in discussion, and make one presentation during the course of the semester.

**Required Texts:**
The following texts are required reading for this course. They can be purchased at Mary Jane Books (at the corner of Quail Street and Western Avenue). There will be additional required readings that will be made available on-line (marked with asterisk in reading schedule).

Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge University Press, 1988)
(This edition is NOT abridged; please make sure to avoid abridged editions as they often omit passages we will be reading.)
Locke, *Conduct of the Understanding and Education* (Hackett Publishing, 1996)

**Weekly Schedule of Readings and Assignments**
(All assignments are subject to change with notice)

I. **Introduction: Political Rationality and Rationalism (September 1)**

2. Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and Politics” *Essays in Understanding***

A. **FOUNDING POLITICS**

II. **Natural Rights and Civil Authority (September 8)**


Additional Reading:
Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government*  
(Princeton University Press, 1986)
Peter Laslett, “Introduction” to *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge University Press, 1988)
Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1953)
III. Rights of Resistance: Who shall be Judge? (September 15)


Additional Reading:

IV. Locke’s Liberal Legacy (September 22)

1. Louis Hartz, *Liberal Tradition in America*, pp. TBD **
   b. “Principles of Early Liberalism” pp. 18-35
   c. Recommended: “Problems and Criticisms” pp. 36-59
3. John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* pp. 3-22 (ch. 1, up through section on “original position”) **

Additional Reading:

V. Property and Identity (September 29)

2. Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, *Contract and Domination*, chs. 1-4

Additional Reading:
- Harold Laski, *Political Thought in England from Locke to Bentham*

VI. Identity and Reason (October 6)

1. Pateman and Mills, *Contract and Domination*, chs. 5-8
2. Nancy Hirschmann, “Intersectionality before Intersectionality was Cool” *Feminist Interpretations of John Locke*, pp. 155-186 **
Additional Reading:
Kirstie McClure and Nancy Hirschmann, eds. *Feminist Interpretations of John Locke* (Penn State Press, 2007)

B. FOUNDING REASON

VII. Reason, Identity, Language (October 13)

1. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, selections TBD

Additional Reading:
Peter Laslett, “Introduction” to *Two Treatises*, pp.

VIII. Reason, Identity, Language, continued (October 20)

1. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, selections TBD
2. Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*
   a. “By Diverse Means We Arrive at the Same End” (I.1)
   b. “Of Cannibals” (I.31)

Additional Reading:
Uday Singh Mehta, *Anxiety of Freedom: Imagination and Individuality in Locke’s Political Thought* (Cornell University Press, 1992), c. 3
Michel de Montaigne, “Apology for Raymond Sebond” (II.12), *Essays*
IX. Lockean Language: The Literal and the Figural (October 27)

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” **

Additional Reading:
- Cathy Caruth, Empirical Truths and Critical Fictions: Locke, Wordsworth, Kant, Freud (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) chapter 1

X. Cultivating Reason (November 3)

1. Some Thoughts Concerning Education, selections TBD
2. On the Conduct of the Understanding, selections TBD

Additional Reading:

** Paper Proposal Due: November 3 **

C. The Rhetoric of Founding

XI. Refiguring Patriarchy (November 10)

1. A Letter Concerning Toleration

Additional Reading
XII. (November 17)

1. First Treatise of Government

Additional Reading:
- Jeremy Waldron, “Adam and Eve” in *Feminist Interpretations of John Locke*
- Gordon Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought* (Blackwell, 1975)

XIII. (December 1)

1. Second Treatise

**Final Paper due: December 14, 2009**

General Sources and Background

On Locke:

On seventeenth century English politics and culture: