

Humanities 4: Lectures 3 & 4

John Locke

Locke's Main Topic

What is the Nature of Political Authority?

Outline of Lecture

I. Historical Context

- Biography and Political Events

II. Philosophical Context

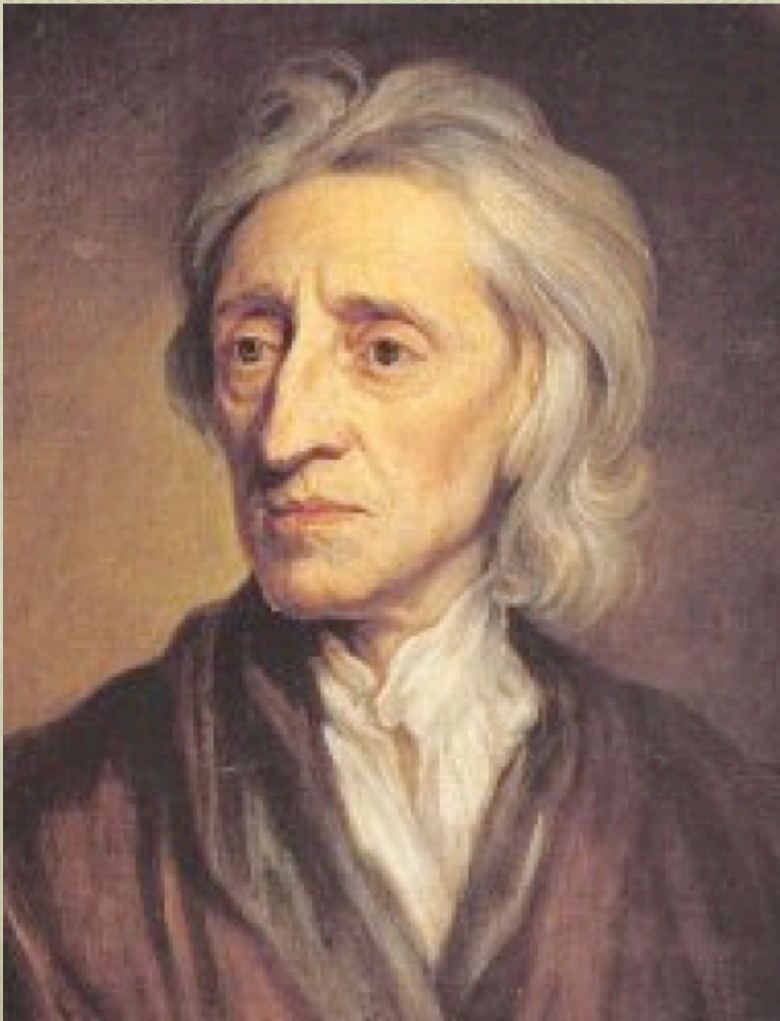
- Filmer and Hobbes

III. Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*

- Position
- Objection to Absolutism
- Role of Property
- Form of Government
- Objections

IV. Concluding Remarks

I. Historical Context: John Locke



- Founder of Classical Political Liberalism
- Modern Empiricist Philosopher

Biography

Life (1632-1704)

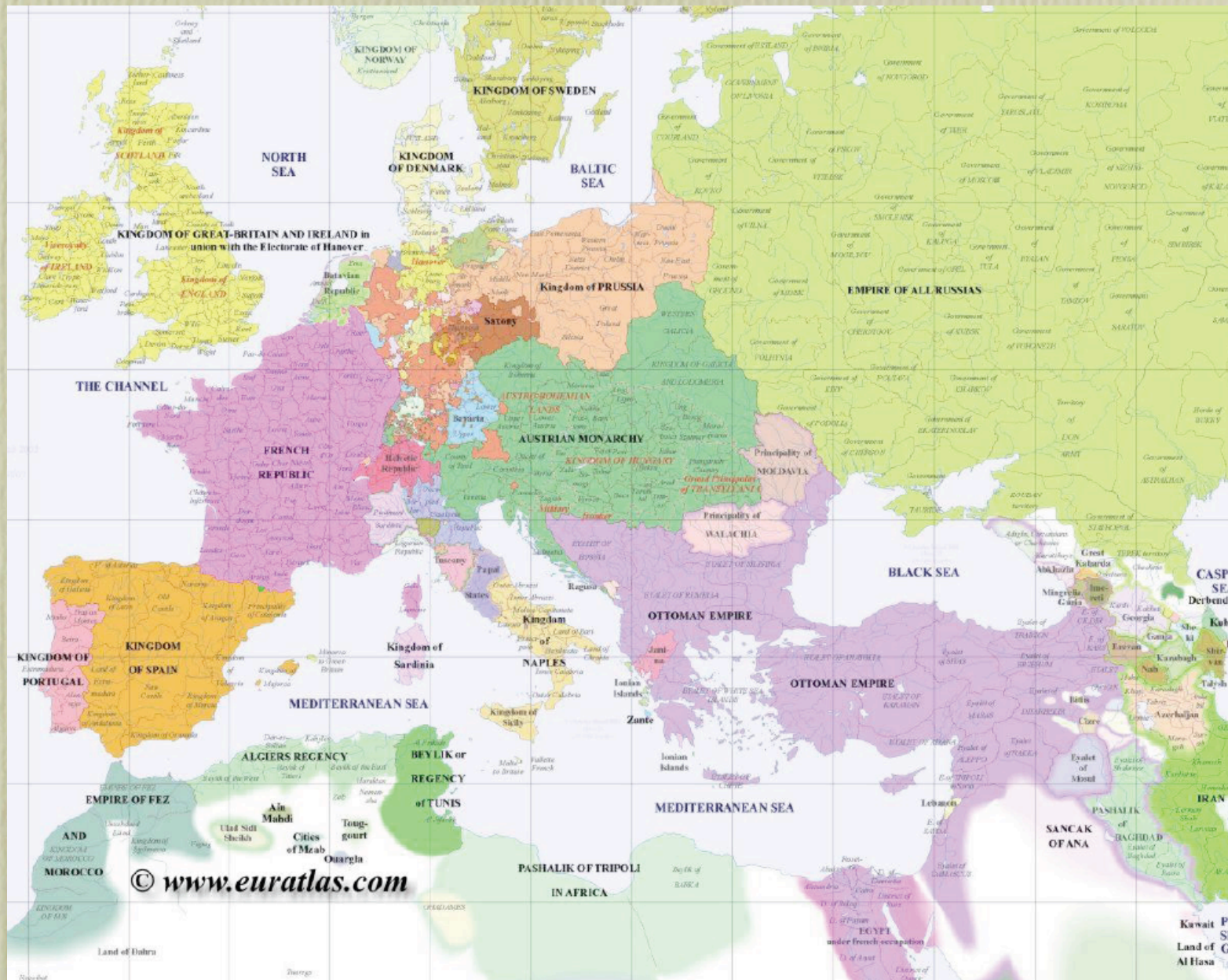
- Education
- Profession
- Exile and return

Major Works

- *First Letter on Toleration* (1689)
- *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)
- *Two Treatises on Government* (1690)

Main Political Events

- English Civil War (1640s)
- Establishment of Cromwell's Protectorate (1650s)
- Cromwell's Death and the Restoration of Charles II (1660-1688)
- Glorious Revolution (1688)



II. Philosophical Context

A. Sir Robert Filmer

1. Defends divine right of kings (descended from Adam)
 - a) Political is derivative from paternal authority.
2. In First Treatise of Govt., Locke denies that either scripture or reason supports Filmer's position and examines key Biblical passages.
3. L's main objections at beginning of Second Treatise
 - a) Adam received no authority from God.
 - b) Adam's heirs received no authority from him.
 - c) Political is distinct from paternal authority.

Philosophical Context, Cont.

B. Hobbes's Position

1. Civil war is even worse than an extremely oppressive govt.
2. Only governments with (nearly) absolute authority will not be susceptible to civil war.

C. Hobbes's Argument in *Leviathan*

1. The “state of nature”

- a) Conception of man: everyone has a right to do whatever is necessary for self-preservation and thus a right to everything.
- b) Conception of life: “war of all against all” => “nasty, brutish, and short”

Philosophical Context Cont.

2. Social Contract, Sovereign, & Absolute Power

- a) To avoid the state of nature, it is rational for each person to relinquish (almost) all rights.
- b) The mutual relinquishing of rights occurs by means of a social contract.
- c) A powerful sovereign is required to enforce social contract.

3. Implication of H's argument: Extremely limited rights

- a) No rights against the sovereign as long as the sovereign secures one's right to life. Hence =>
 - i) No right to education
 - ii) No right to property
 - iii) No right to liberty or happiness

III. Locke's *Second Treatise*

A. Locke's Position on Political Authority

I. State of nature

- a) State of perfect freedom over person and possessions, independent of the will of others
 - i) all humans are equal in nature
 - ii) reason recognizes this natural equality
 - iii) law of nature requires respect for others' freedom
- b) Natural right to possessions (including one's own body)
=> right to life, liberty, health, and property.
- c) Right to punish transgressor by demanding proportionate reparation and restraint.

Locke's Position, cont.

2. State of war

- a) When one “attempts to get another man into his absolute power”, i.e., takes away freedom, enslaves.
 - i) war requires a violation of rights.

3. Social contract

- a) By means of a social contract, men can legitimize a government to protect their natural rights.
- b) Three reasons why govt. is “proper remedy”.
 - i) §124-126

Locke's Position, cont.

4. Compared to Hobbes: Superficial similarities
 - a) state of nature
 - b) social contract
 - c) right to self-preservation in nature
5. Compared to Hobbes: Fundamental differences
 - a) right to property
 - b) the content of the state of nature
 - c) the nature of the social contract
 - d) location of authority

Locke's *Second Treatise*, cont.

B. Locke's Objection to Absolutism

- I. “What security, what fence is there...against the violence and oppression of this absolute ruler?” (§93)
 - a) Esp. problematic given that an absolute ruler has (and must have) considerable force.
 - b) “This is to think that men are so foolish that they take care to avoid what mischiefs may be done them by *pole-cats* or *foxes*, but are content, nay, think it safety, to be devoured by *lions*” (§93).

Locke's *Second Treatise*, cont.

C. Locke on Property

I. How do we acquire property?

a) property in his own person

b) “The labor of his body, and the work of his hands” (§27)

c) goods/land

i) by mixing his labor with it (§27)

ii) no consent necessary (except for public lands)

Locke's *Second Treatise*, cont.

2. Limits on Property Ownership

a) “As much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life” (§36) (cf. also §46)

b) Two stage argument

i) Prior to money

ii) After money

Locke's *Second Treatise*, cont.

D. Form of Government

I. Majority Rule

- a) “Every man, by consenting with others to make one body political under one government, puts himself under an obligation...to submit to the determination of the majority” (§97)
- b) “unless they expressly agreed in any number greater than the majority” (§99)

Locke's *Second Treatise*, cont.

2. Specific Form of Government

- a) Society can choose to have any form of government it like. (§132)
- b) However, it must respect certain laws:
 - i) It cannot be arbitrary. (§135)
 - ii) It requires standing laws and authorized judges. (§136)
 - iii) It must respect private property. (§138)
 - iv) It cannot delegate its legislative power. (§141)

Locke's *Second Treatise*, cont.

3. The Right to Rebellion

- a) People have a right to rebel against a government under two conditions:
 - i) The legislative body is altered (§212), or
 - ii) The legislative acts against its trust (§221).
- b) The middle course
 - i) Not too frequent
 - ii) Not too seldom
- c) “The end of government is the good of mankind” (§229).

Locke's *Second Treatise*, cont.

E. Objections to Locke's Position

1. Filmer?

- a) Without divine authorization, does a secular government have any authority?
- b) What justification does Locke have for the freedom and equality of individuals in a state of nature?

2. Hobbes?

- a) Without absolute power, can the government prevent civil war?

3. Today?

IV. Concluding Remarks

A. Locke and the Enlightenment

- I. Divine versus human authority
 - a) Support monarchy with secular argument
 - b) Religious pluralism as a factor
2. Critical of traditional authority
 - a) Rejects absolutism by placing limits on the power of govt
3. Assumptions about man
 - a) Insight into fundamental “natural rights”
 - b) Individualistic and egalitarian conception of man

Concluding Remarks, cont.

B. Political authority is based

1. not on divine authority,
2. but rather on the natural rights of man,
3. along with a social contract to enforce these rights,
4. and is not absolute, but rather limited.