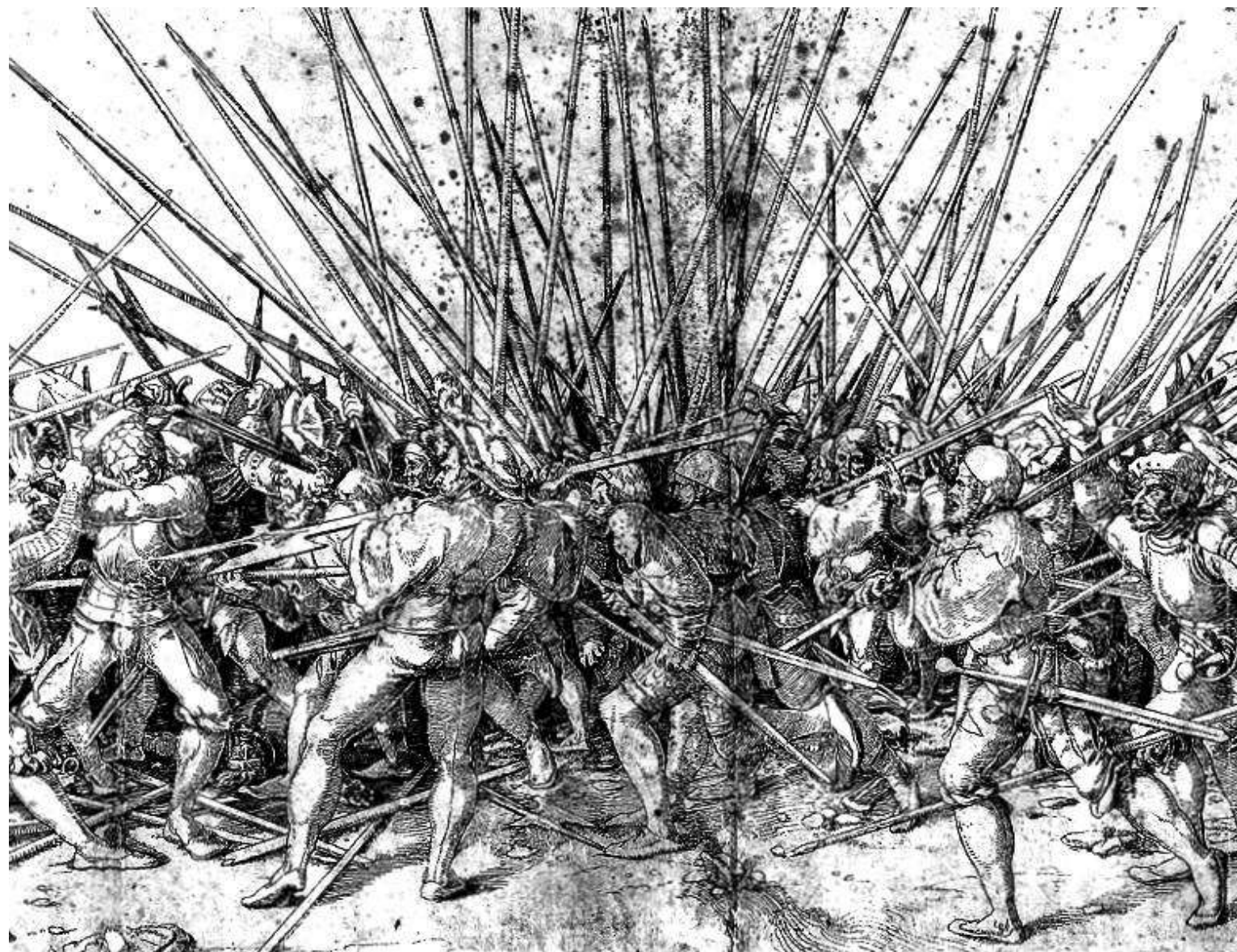




# Political Philosophy

Week 4.

Locke, Rousseau and  
The Rights of Man









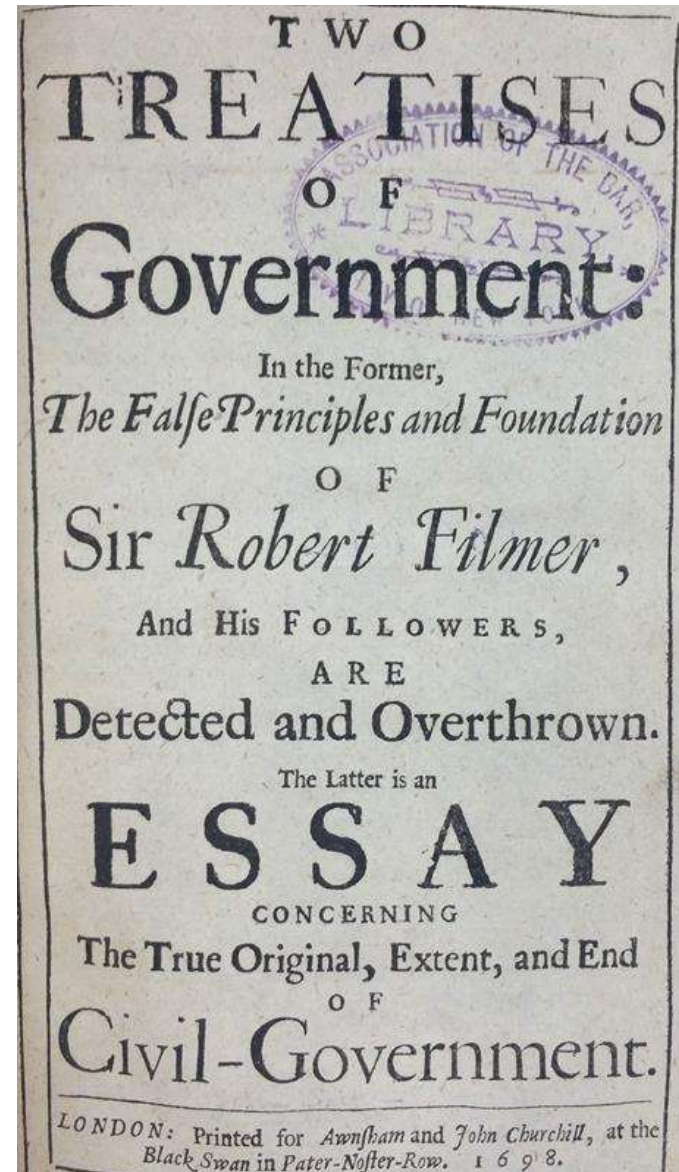






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# John Locke (1632-1704)

- English Empiricist philosopher and medical doctor
- Lives through the English Civil War and Restoration, observing first hand the machinations of government via his patron, Anthony Ashley-Cooper
- Spends the 1680s in exile in the Netherlands, as Shaftesbury's influence falls, and where he completes his major philosophical and political works...
- And returns in 1688 amid the Glorious Revolution:
- *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) criticised innate ideas and argued for tabula rasa
- *The Second Treatise of Government* (also 1689) challenges many core Hobbesian ideas about the violence of the state of nature



# Why do Locke's politics matter now?

‘The *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty or Possessions.’

- In nature, all are free and equal
- We are bound not just to preserve ourselves, but others
- Government is founded in the consent of the governed
- There should be religious toleration for all (other Protestants and maybe Jews, but definitely not Catholics or atheists)







Parliament By prosecutions in the Court of  
Kings Bench for matters and causes cognizable  
only in Parliament and by diverse other arbitrary  
and illegal courses And whereas of late years  
partial corrupt and unqualified persons have  
been returned and served on Jurors in Trials  
and particularly diverse Jurors in Trials for  
high Treason which were not freeholders And  
whereby double hath been required of persons  
committed in criminal cases to elude the benefit  
of the Statute made for the benefit of the Subjects  
and contrary fines have been imposed And  
illegal and cruel Punishments inflicted And  
several Grants and Promises made of fines  
and forfeitures before any Conviction or Judgment  
against the persons upon whom the same were  
to be levied All which are vitally and directly  
contrary to the known Laws and Statutes and  
freedoms of said Kingdom And whereas the  
said late King James the second having







Over to you

Let's work on Locke's key arguments:

1. Political power is founded on 'consent' of the majority (p. 260): how does Locke argue this, and what makes this view so significant for its time?

2. What's the significance of Locke's views on property?

... He argues that while the Earth belongs to everyone in common, each person can rightly claim something as their property when they mix their labour with a natural resource... (p. 251)



# Government needs the consent of the governed

- 'Man being ... by nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent'
- 'The only way whereby any one divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the *bonds of civil society*, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite in a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any, that are not of it'







# Government needs the consent of the governed

- ‘when any number of men have made ... a community, they have thereby made that *community* one body ... which is only by the will and determination of the *majority*’
- Driven by the ‘*consent of the majority*’, realised through ‘assemblies’, each person should rightly put ‘himself under an obligation, to every one of that society, to submit to the determination of the *majority*’.
- ‘what begins and actually *constitutes any Political Society*, is nothing but the consent of any number of Freemen capable of a majority to unite and incorporate into such a Society’







# Locke on property

- ‘Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*.’
- Whilst God gave the world to all in common, he *also* ‘gave it to the use of the Industrious and Rational, (and *Labour* was to be *his Title* to it;)’
- ‘I think it will be a very modest Computation to say, that of the *Products* of the Earth useful to the Life of Man 9/10 are the *effects of labour*’
- But he adds a condition implying responsibility: ‘at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others.’

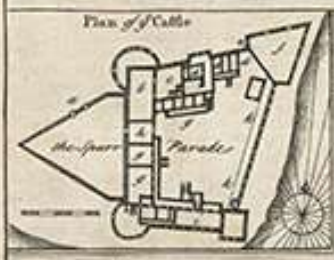
East Prospect of Cape Corle, or Coast Castle, by M. Smith, 1727.



- a. the Gate
- b. Garden Wall
- c. upper door
- d. Druggall & Tavern
- e. upper Hall
- f. lower Hall
- g. Great Hall
- h. Water Closet
- i. the Race
- k. Chapel
- l. Chapel
- m. Chapel
- n. Chapel
- o. Chapel



Plan of the Castle



- a. Gate way
- b. Warehouse
- c. Warehouse yard
- d. Apartments
- e. Water gate
- f. Greenhall point
- g. Barracks & Stores
- h. the square tower
- i. Chapel
- k. playground of guns

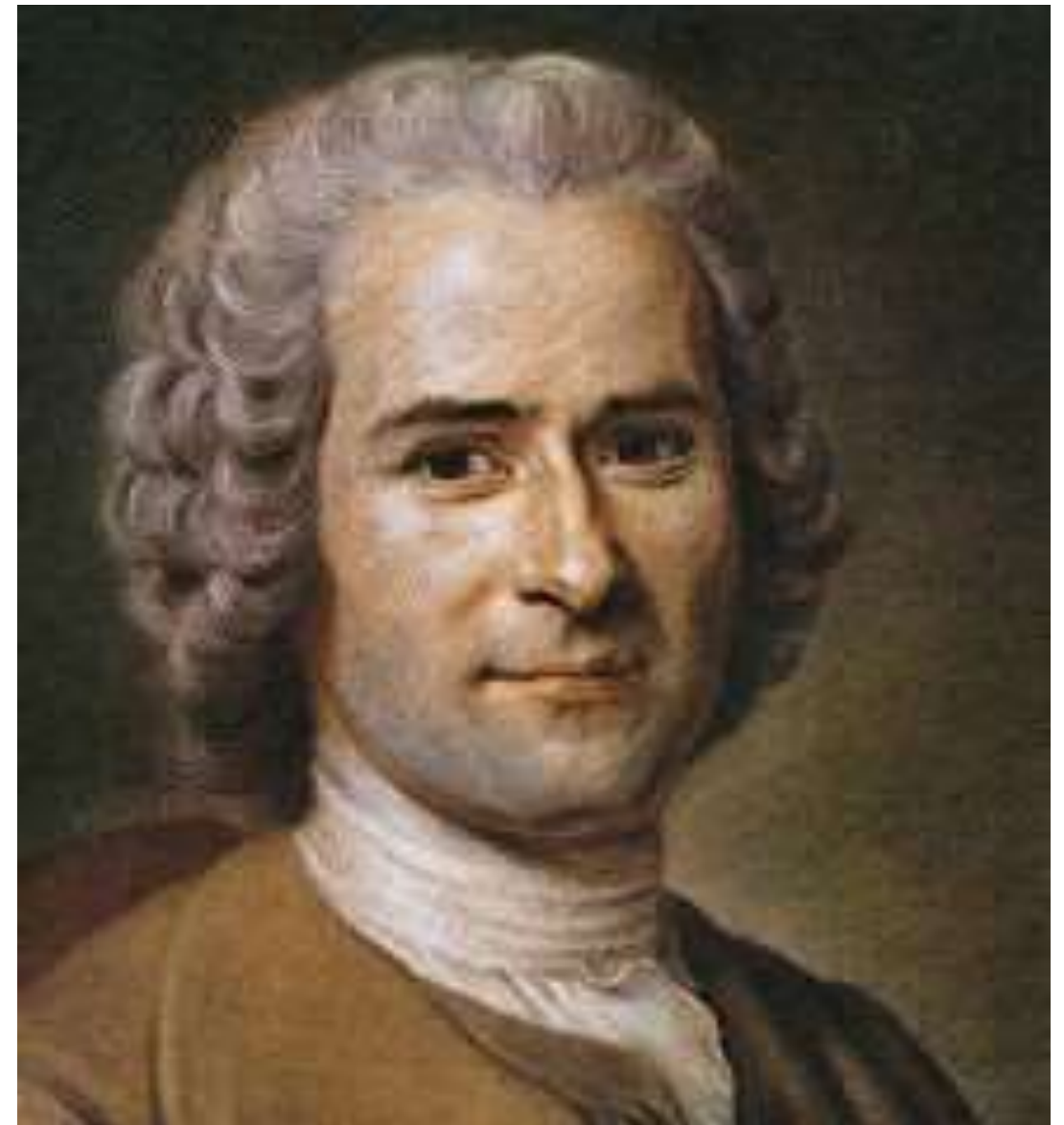
North-west Prospect of the same.





# Does Locke justify slavery?

- Locke drafted up the constitution of the Carolinas, conferring slaves as hereditary property, and owned shares in the Royal African Company
- His writings also justify press-ganging beggars into military service, and 'soundly whipping' any children who beg...
- But he justifies slavery in rare cases where one would otherwise be executed, e.g. starting an unjust war, and forbids hereditary slavery
- 'Slavery is so vile and miserable an estate of man ... that 'tis hardly to be conceived' that anyone would support it
- In his later career, Locke works to reform Virginia's constitution, restricting incentives for slave ownership and hereditary hierarchy





# Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-88)

- ‘Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains’
- All human beings are naturally free, but states subvert this freedom, demanding obedience and stifling dissent
- The people themselves are sovereign, and each person shares both a particular will and a general will – aiming at the common good
- The best state will attempt to realise the general will by guaranteeing freedom and equality
- Through *The Social Contract* (1762) and *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau’s republican and naturalist political philosophy became influential across Europe

# Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789)

- Written by the Abbé Sieyès and the Marquis de Lafayette, in consultation with Thomas Jefferson, who had written the American Declaration of Independence
- A major statement of the French Revolution, and a concise exposition of Enlightenment political values, drawing on Locke, Rousseau and Montesquieu's case for checks and balances (itself Machiavellian)
- All men are equal by nature, religious dissent should be tolerated, and the state exists to realise the common good or 'general will' of its members...





Over to you

Focus on either Rousseau, or the Declaration, and discuss one of these questions:

1. Through submission to the general will, we become free. We might even be 'forced to be free'. What does Rousseau mean by the general will, and what kind of government seems to follow from it? (e.g. p. 170, Book II, ch1)
2. What exactly are the rights of Man? What benefits and problems might arise from such a view of human nature?





# The General Will

- The cause of our enslavement is our pursuit of our particular wills, which are in conflict with each other
- The solution, for Rousseau, is to submit our particular will to that of the *general will*
- ... A form of government aimed at the collective good, which aims at universal freedom and equality
- Thus we can legitimately be 'forced to be free'
- For Rousseau, we can only genuinely be taken to have consented to submit our particular wills under a general will in a strong form of direct democracy
- The state also must be geographically small, otherwise people will just use the democratic mechanism to pursue their own particular interests





- ‘Tranquillity is found also in dungeons; but is that enough to make them desirable places to live in? To say that a man gives himself gratuitously, is to say what is absurd and inconceivable; such an act is null and illegitimate, from the mere fact that he who does it is out of his mind. To say the same of a whole people is to suppose a people of madmen; and madness creates no right. Even if each man could alienate himself, he could not alienate his children: they are born men and free; their liberty belongs to them, and no one but they has the right to dispose of it.’
- ‘To renounce liberty is to renounce being a man, to surrender the rights of humanity and even its duties. For him who renounces everything no indemnity is possible. Such a renunciation is incompatible with man's nature; to remove all liberty from his will is to remove all morality from his acts. Finally, it is an empty and contradictory convention that sets up, on the one side, absolute authority, and, on the other, unlimited obedience.’





- ‘The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.’
  - ‘The source of all sovereignty is essentially in the nation’
  - ‘The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man; every citizen then can freely speak, write and print, subject to responsibility for the abuse of this freedom in the cases determined by law.’
- From the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789)





‘The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion – formulas which were designed to solve problems *within* given communities – but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them’

- Hannah Arendt, “The Perplexities of the Rights of Man”,  
in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*





‘Not the loss of specific rights, then, but the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever, has been the calamity which has befallen ever-increasing numbers of people. Man, it turns out, can lose all so-called Rights of Man without losing his essential quality as man, his human dignity. Only the loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity’. (Arendt)



# Far-right Italy minister vows 'action' to expel thousands of Roma

**Matteo Salvini shrugs off critics who say policy reminiscent of fascist past**



▲ Protesters in Rome make their feelings clear after Matteo Salvini pledged to create a 'register' of Roma people.  
Photograph: Simona Granati/Corbis via Getty Images

## Next week... *The Rights of Everyone Else*

- We'll continue our journey through the French Revolution, exploring how others traditionally excluded from political power and representation used the language of natural rights and equality to champion their causes
- We'll read from Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, as well as Marie Olympe de Gouges, and excerpts from Toussaint Louverture, leader of the Haitian Revolt against the new French Republic
- How does each extend the language of liberty and equality inherent in (white male European) Enlightenment thought?
- Do their ideas indicate that such a tradition was inherently repressive, or always carried the seeds within it for a more total freedom and equality?
- Email any questions to [dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk](mailto:dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk)