

PPE 300 Handout  
Locke, "Of Property," 2-6-19  
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### **Exercise One: Argument Reconstruction (Mixing Labor)**

The conclusion of the argument in the passage below is that 'when someone mixes their labor with something in nature, they have an exclusive property right to that thing.' With your group-members, reconstruct the argument Locke uses to get to that conclusion.

"Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other men. For this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others." (27)

### Exercise Two: Objection Generation (Mixing Labor)

Read the following three passages. Then answer the two questions below with your group-members.

“supposing the world given, as it was, to the children of men in common, we see how labour could make men distinct titles to several parcels of it, for their private uses; wherein there could be no doubt of right, no room for quarrel.” (39)

“considering the plenty of natural provisions there was a long time in the world, and the few spenders; and to how small a part of that provision the industry of one man could extend itself, and engross it to the prejudice of others; especially keeping within the bounds, set by reason, of what might serve for his use; there could be then little room for quarrels or contentions about property so established.” (31)

“Thus the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property, without the assignation or consent of any body.” (28)

First, Locke thinks that his theory of property would leave no room for disagreements over property rights. But how might there still be disagreements over property rights, even if everyone accepted Locke’s theory?

Second, how might we object to Locke’s theory of property in the first place?

### Exercise Three: Detective Work

With your group-members, read through the following passages, which are organized into parts. Sketch the main claims in each part. After doing so, brainstorm whether any problematic implications follow from these claims, when considered together.

#### **Part One Passage:**

"...if [any of the products of nature] perished, in his possession, without their due use; if the fruits rotted, or the venison putrified, before he could spend it, he offended against the common law of nature, and was liable to be punished; he invaded his neighbour's share, for he had no right, farther than his use called for any of them, and they might serve to afford him conveniencies of life."

"God hath not let one man so to the mercy of another, that he may starve him if he please. . . . he has given his needy brother a right to the surplusage of his goods; so that it cannot justly be denied him, when his pressing wants call for it." (First Treatise, Ch. 4, Paragraph 42)

#### **Part Two Passage:**

"land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste; and we shall find the benefit of it amount to little more than nothing." (42)

#### **Part Three Passage:**

"For I ask, whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage, or husbandry, a thousand acres yield the needy and wretched inhabitants as many conveniencies of life, as ten acres equally fertile land do in Devonshire, where they are well cultivated?" (37)

#### **Part Four Passage:**

"Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property." (27)