John Locke and the Making of America  
Yeshiva College, Spring 2018

Instructors: Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik and Dr. Neil Rogachevsky

Perhaps more than any other European political thinker, the thought of John Locke—about politics, religion and education—was extremely impactful in the making of America. In the first part of this seminar, we will study Locke's philosophy, focusing on his views on government, religion, the family, and consider Locke’s influence on the American founding. We will consider some of the significant thinkers who adopted, criticized, rejected, or attempted to transform Lockean democracy, and to apply its lessons to the American experience these thinkers include Thomas Paine, Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. The second part of the course will focus on the philosophical debate between these last two, Adams and Jefferson; the intellectual polestars of America, they went from best friends, to political and philosophical enemies, to friends again. We will analyze how questions regarding Locke and the nature of democracy lay at the heart of their debate, and how that debate is relevant today.

Expectations: We will be making our way through many of Locke's major writings, as well as some of the foundational texts of the American regime. Students will be expected to carefully read between 100 and 150 pages a week. Prior to every class, students will be expected to have read and reflected upon the readings of that week, and to participate in class discussions about them. Students will have been given a question to facilitate reflection on the readings for the week ahead, and will be asked to respond before class with several paragraphs of reflection in response to the question. In addition, students will write a paper, by the end of the term, that will reflect on one aspect of the Lockean impact on America.

Grading:
25%: Class Attendance and Participation
25%: Readings Essay Questions
20%: Paper
30%: Final

SCHEDULE:

Week I – JOHN LOCKE I: Monarchy, The Bible, and the Ideal Government  
Reading: First Treatise on Government

Week II – JOHN LOCKE II Rights, Man and the State of Nature  
Reading: Second Treatise on Government

Week III– JOHN LOCKE III  
Reading: Locke, Letter Concerning Toleration  
John Milton, Areopagitica, selections

Week IV: JOHN LOCKE IV Locke, Children and the Family:  
Locke, Some Thoughts Concerning Education

Week V – Locke and the American Founding

VI America and France: Similar Revolutions?
Readings: Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*

Week VII Locke, Burke, America and France
Readings: Edmund Burke: “Speech on America,” Reflections on the Revolution in France

Week VIII: John Adams, John Locke, and the French Revolution
John Adams, *Discourse on Davila*

Week IX: Adams vs. Jefferson– the Debate that Defined America
Gordon Wood, *Friends Divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson*

Week X: Locke, Religion and America: Adams and Jefferson in Correspondence
John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Correspondence, 1808-1826

Week XI – God and Man in Jeffersonian Democracy
Readings: Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (Excerpts)

Week XII – Locke, Education and Intellectualism in America
Readings: Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (Excerpts)

Week XIII - Lockean America, Yesteryear and Today: A Conclusion