



John Locke Global Essay Prize 2025 Prompts Breakdown
Politics Category - Key Issues and Questions to Address



Politics Q2

David Hume celebrated the wisdom of "unlettered men". In a democracy, do the votes of the unlettered tend to protect a country against the bad ideas of the lettered or do the votes of the lettered tend to protect a country against the bad ideas of the unlettered?

Key Issues and Questions to Address

1. Conceptual foundations:

How do Hume's and Locke's theories of knowledge and understanding inform their views of ordinary citizens' judgment?

What did Hume specifically mean by the "wisdom of unlettered men"?

How do Locke's views on natural rights and natural reason relate to political participation?

2. Historical context:

How did education and literacy differ in Hume's and Locke's times compared to today?

What historical events might have shaped their views on education and politics?

How did their empiricist approaches inform their trust in common understanding?



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3. Epistemological considerations:

Does Locke's theory of knowledge support or challenge Hume's view of common wisdom?

How do both philosophers address the relationship between education and good judgment?

Where might they disagree about the capabilities of ordinary citizens?

4. Democratic theory:

How would Locke's consent-based government handle differences between educated and uneducated voters?

Does Hume's skepticism suggest limits to both educated and uneducated political reasoning?

What balance of power between social classes would each philosopher likely support?

5. Contemporary relevance:

How have educational divides in voting patterns changed since these philosophers' times?

What would Hume and Locke make of modern democratic challenges around expertise?



How might they view the relationship between higher education and political polarization today?

6. Empirical evidence:

What evidence exists about differences in voting patterns across educational levels?

Are there systematic differences in policy preferences by education?

What biases affect both educated and uneducated voters?

7. Balancing perspectives:

How might democratic systems incorporate both expert knowledge and common wisdom?

What democratic mechanisms might help mitigate problems from both groups?

Would Locke and Hume agree on how to balance these forces?

8. Overcoming the dichotomy:

Is the educated/uneducated dichotomy itself problematic from these philosophers' perspectives?

How might both Locke and Hume view different kinds of education and expertise?



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What common ground exists between these philosophers on the question?

