

## John Locke

### English Philosopher

John Locke was born in 1632 in England. His father was a lawyer who had served in the military. Locke studied at Christ Church in Oxford, and it seemed likely that he would become a minister. Instead, he became a doctor. In 1667, he became the personal physician for a wealthy politician and moved to London.

In London, Locke pursued his interest in philosophy, which had begun during his medical studies. He was particularly interested in issues of religious freedom and the rights of citizens. He continued to read, write, and discuss political philosophy. In 1683, Locke fled to Holland when his ideas were seen by the English government as a challenge to the king's authority. In 1689, he returned to England after a series of events in Great Britain known as the Glorious Revolution. As a result of the revolution, Parliament forced the new rulers to respect its authority by accepting a Bill of Rights, which limited the monarch's power.

Locke supported the changes brought about by the Glorious Revolution. In 1689, he published *Two Treatises of Government*, which outlined his view of government. Locke did not believe in the divine right of monarchs to rule. Instead, he supported a government in which the monarch's power was limited in order to respect the rights of the people. He also believed there were certain natural rights that belonged to all people.

*Man [who is] born . . . with a title to . . . all the rights and privileges of the law of nature, equally with any other man, or number of men in the world, hath [have] by nature a power, not only to preserve his property, that is, his life, liberty and estate, against the injuries and attempts of other men; but to judge of, and punish the breaches [violations] of that law . . . as he is persuaded the offence deserves.*

In exchange for protection of these natural rights, the people gave power to government to make and enforce laws. Locke argued that government's authority existed only by a social contract, or agreement, among free people to let it exist. Therefore, if the government failed to respect the natural rights of the people, it could be overthrown.

## Baron de Montesquieu French Philosopher

Charles-Louis de Secondat was born in 1689 outside of Bordeaux, France, to a wealthy family. After studying science and history, he became a lawyer. After his uncle's death in 1716, he inherited his title and became Baron de Montesquieu. He became a member of the Bordeaux and French Academies of Science, where he studied the customs and government of European countries.

In France, the king and nobility lived extravagantly. King Louis XIV, for example, renovated and expanded his royal palace, Chateau de Versailles, at great expense. Visitors were awestruck by its luxurious grandeur and were entertained with lavish balls, dinners, performances, and celebrations. Montesquieu disapproved of the lifestyle and freedoms of the wealthy French elite. In 1721, he published his first major work, *The Persian Letters*, in which he wrote about the people of Europe from the perspective of foreign visitors. This book was a criticism of several French institutions, such as the king's court and the Catholic church.

Published in 1748, *The Spirit of the Laws* was Montesquieu's most famous work. In it, he discussed three types of government. In describing the pros and cons of each type, he stated that the success of a democracy depends on keeping an appropriate balance of power within the government. Montesquieu proposed that power be divided among three groups of officials, or branches, of government. This idea became known as "separation of powers." Each branch would be separate and equal, but with different powers to avoid placing too much power in the hands of one individual or one group of individuals.

*When the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person, or in the same body of magistrates [public officials], there can be no liberty . . .*

*Again, there is no liberty, if the power of judging be not separated from the legislative and executive powers. Were it joined with the legislative, the life and liberty of the subject would be exposed to arbitrary control, for the judge would then be the legislator. Were it joined to the executive power, the judge might behave with all the violence of an oppressor.*

In looking at the countries of Europe, Montesquieu thought England provided a good model of government. In England, power was divided among the Parliament (which made laws), the king (who enforced laws), and the courts (which interpreted laws).

## John Adams

### American Founding Father

John Adams was born in 1735 in Braintree, Massachusetts. His father was active in the local church and in local politics. After graduating from Harvard College in 1755, Adams taught school in Worcester, Massachusetts. He then decided to pursue a career in law and studied under attorney James Putnam. Over the next several years, Adams became one of Boston's most successful lawyers.

Adams firmly believed in the traditions of English law. For example, he defended the British soldiers charged in the Boston Massacre in 1770. After 1770, Adams became an outspoken critic of the way the British government treated its subjects in the American colonies. He increasingly supported a fight for independence against British rule. In 1774, he was elected as a delegate from Massachusetts to the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia. This congress met to discuss colonial opposition to England. Adams actively participated in this congress and in the Second Continental Congress in 1775. He nominated George Washington to serve as commander in chief of the Continental Army. He also spoke strongly in favor of drafting a declaration of independence from England. He suggested that Thomas Jefferson be one of the writers of this declaration.

In 1776, Adams wrote *Thoughts on Government*. In this book, he provided an outline for government if the colonies were to declare independence from England. He believed that history was providing the colonies with a unique opportunity to form their own independent, free governments. Adams's vision reflected the influence of ancient and modern philosophy. He wrote about a democratic form of government in which a small group of people represented the society as a whole and made the laws.

*How shall your laws be made? In a large society, inhabiting an extensive country, it is impossible that the whole should assemble, to make laws: The first necessary step then, is, to depute [give] power from the many, to a few of the most wise and good . . .*

*The greatest care should be employed in constituting this Representative Assembly. It should be in miniature, an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason, and act like them. That it may be the interest of this Assembly to do strict justice at all times, it should be an equal representation, or in other words equal interest among the people should have equal interest in it.*

*Thoughts on Government* was circulated throughout the colonies and became a framework for several state constitutions. Adams was also a principal drafter of the Massachusetts Constitution, which was ratified and went into effect in 1780.

## Thomas Jefferson American Founding Father

Thomas Jefferson was born in 1743 in Shadwell, Virginia. His father was a successful planter, and his mother was a member of one of the most distinguished families in Virginia. After studying at the College of William and Mary, Jefferson became a lawyer. Although he earned a reputation of being extremely knowledgeable, he was also seen as shy and reserved. Nonetheless, in 1768, he was elected to Virginia's House of Burgesses.

As a legislator, Jefferson was strongly opposed to Britain's authority over the American colonies. In 1774, he wrote *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*. In it, he encouraged the growing sentiment for the colonies to declare independence. In 1775, he was appointed a delegate to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. The purpose of this congress was to organize the colonial war effort in rebellion against England. In 1776, he was appointed to a five-man committee to draft a formal declaration of independence from England. Because he was a gifted writer and scholar of philosophy, Jefferson was nominated to write the first draft of the declaration.

In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson outlined the grievances that the colonies had against King George III. Most important, Jefferson expressed his belief that all men have certain natural rights. Because these rights exist with or without a government, a government cannot take them away. Thus, if a government failed to respect these natural rights, the citizens of that government had a right to overthrow it.

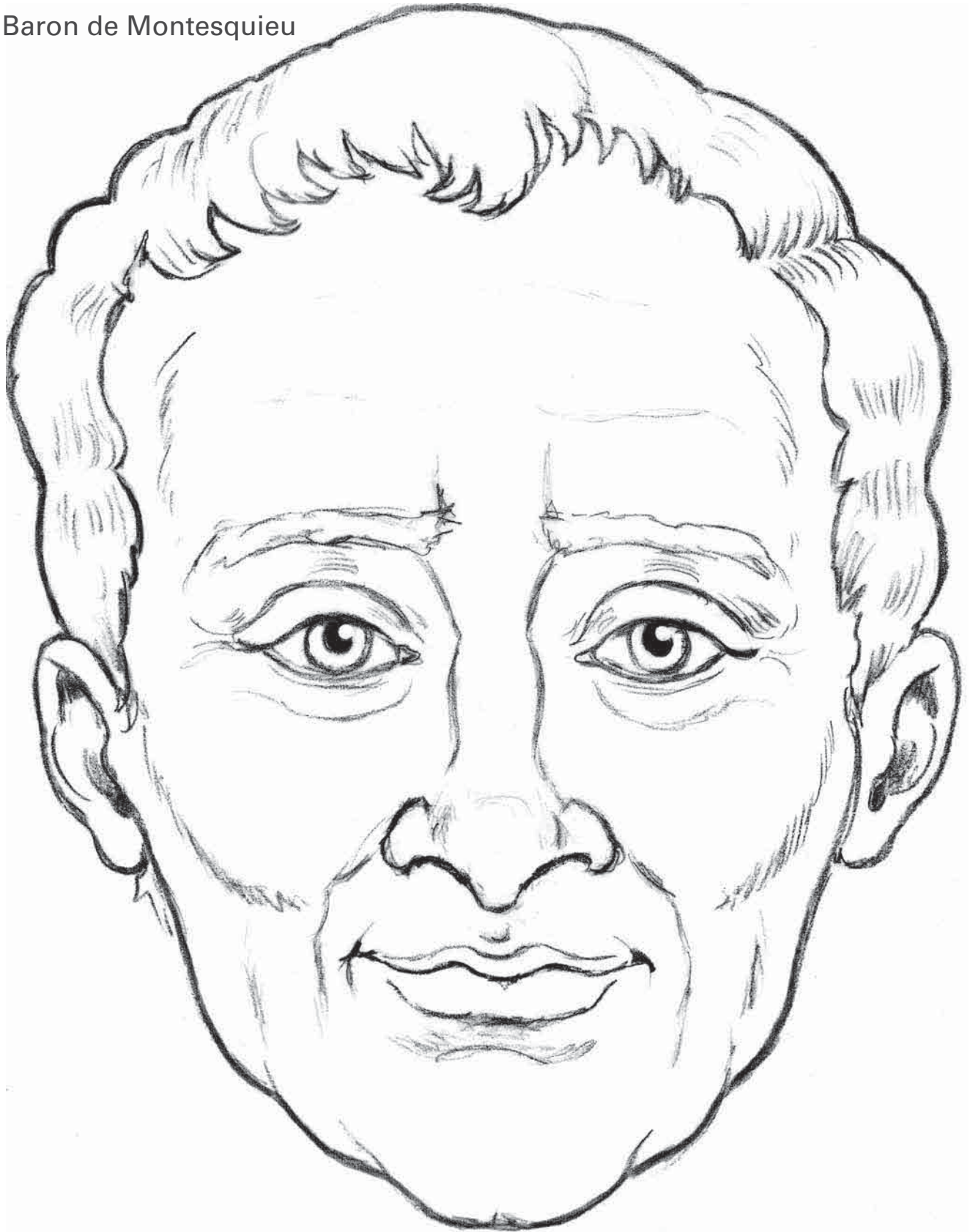
*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. —That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.*

Many changes were made to Jefferson's draft. In fact, an entire one-fifth of the draft was either revised or deleted. This excerpt, however, remained untouched.

John Locke



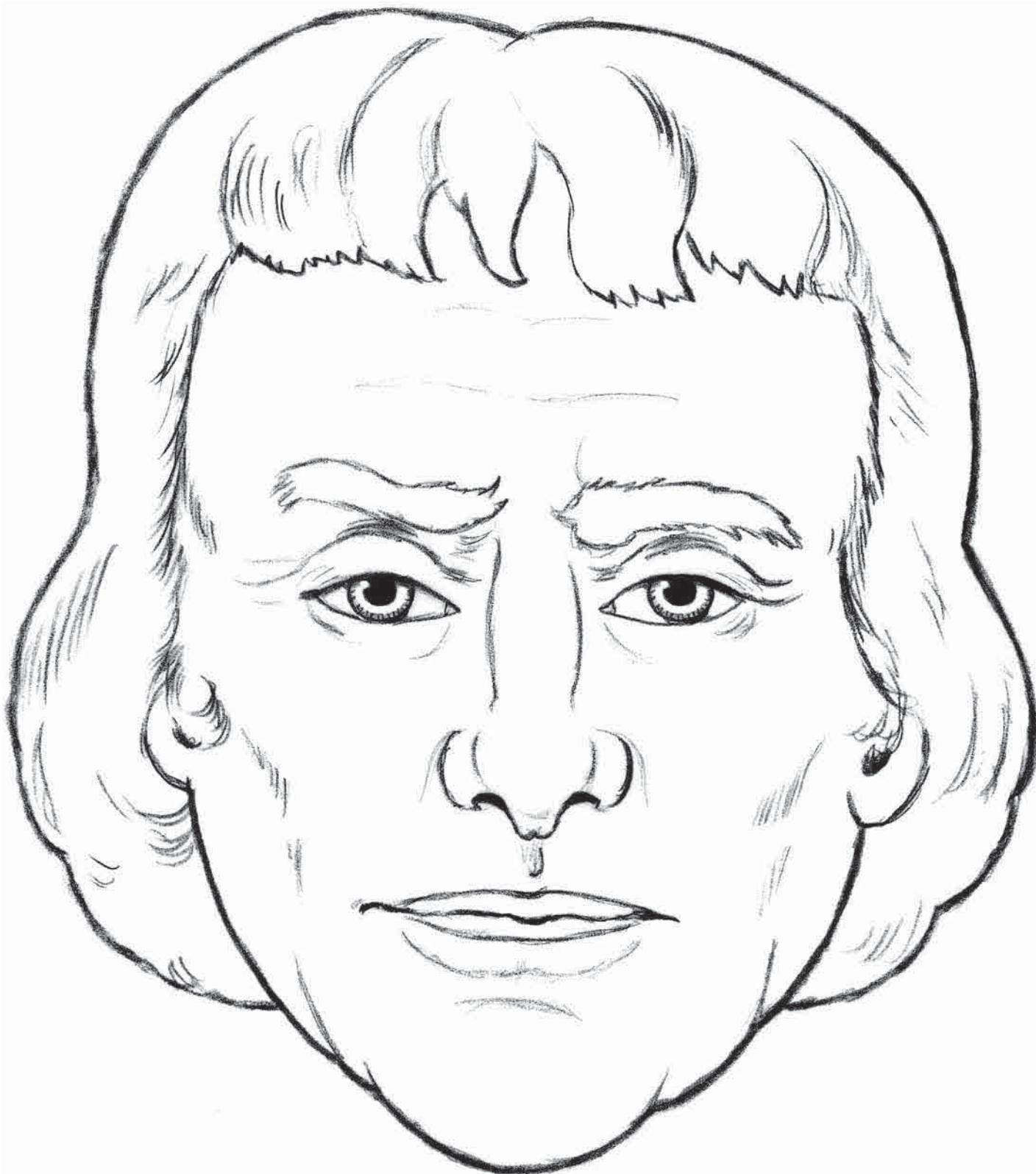
Baron de Montesquieu



John Adams



Thomas Jefferson



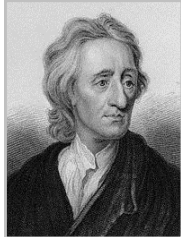


# The Enlightenment

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## A Time of New Ideas

The **Enlightenment** was a period of time when people developed new ideas about human existence, including peoples' basic rights and the level of control they should have over their government and their futures. The Enlightenment began in Europe around 1715. People in cities like Paris gathered in **salons** to discuss philosophy and ways to improve the human experience. Many of their ideas were based in science and reason, which is why this time was also called the Age of Reason.



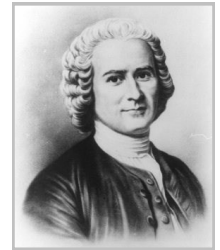
Locke

### Natural Rights

Enlightenment thinkers believed that human beings are born with fundamental, basic rights. These **natural rights** included the right to life, liberty, property, and the freedom to find happiness. In order for people to enjoy these natural rights, other rights needed to be protected. Enlightenment thinkers believed people should have the right to express themselves, to move around freely, and to petition the government.

## The Social Contract

If there was no government at all, people would live in a **state of nature** with no rules and complete freedom—but without any protection from each other. One Enlightenment idea was the **social contract**: citizens give up some freedom they would have in a state of nature (like the freedom to rob and kill people), and in exchange the government protects citizens' right to life, liberty, and property. To Enlightenment thinkers, the relationship between a government and its citizens was like an agreement. Citizens agree to obey a set of rules, and the government agrees to protect citizens' rights.



Rousseau

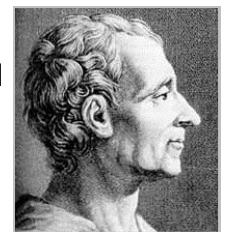


### Consent of the Governed

Enlightenment thinkers believed that governments had a responsibility to hold up their end of the social contract. If a government failed, then citizens would no longer agree to be governed and they would have the right to revolt. This idea is known as **consent of the governed**. Traditionally, a government protected citizens from foreign invaders, but the government also had absolute authority over the people. A king ruled his citizens whether they consented or not. To Enlightenment thinkers, this was unacceptable.

## Republicanism

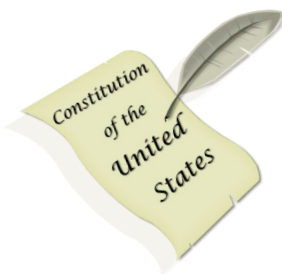
Since the Middle Ages, European leaders had gained power through *heredity*, or family ties. Kings and queens took the throne after another family member died. The people had no say in this process. Many Enlightenment thinkers believed in **republicanism** – the idea that a country's leader should be chosen by the citizens in a general election. Even so, some Enlightenment thinkers frowned on the idea of a democracy. They feared what would happen if a mob of uneducated people had the power to vote.



Montesquieu

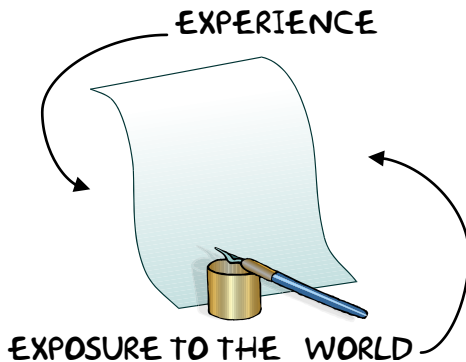
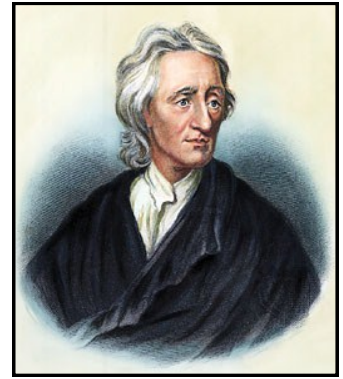
### Influence on America

The brightest Enlightenment thinkers, with names like Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Locke, became very famous. They influenced leaders in Europe, and became popular with Americans who wanted independence. When our Founding Fathers created a government for the new United States, they embraced many Enlightenment ideas. America's Constitution recognized that citizens were born with basic rights. And even though some of the Founders agreed with those concerned about democracy, the Constitution gave citizens the power to vote. The Enlightenment ended around 1789, about the same time the Constitution was born.



## A Man with Many Hats

John Locke was born in England in 1632. Locke considered becoming a minister, started his career as a doctor, but ended up as a philosopher and political scientist. He had many interests and produced a number of writings that influenced future leaders. One of those leaders was Thomas Jefferson, who helped America gain independence from Britain nearly 150 years after Locke was born. Jefferson studied Locke's writings, and Locke's ideas show up in our own Constitution.



## The Blank Slate

One of Locke's books, called *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, took over 18 years to write! In it, he says that people are born with a mind like a **tabula rasa**, which means a blank slate or page. During life, that blank slate gets filled up with the things a person experiences with the five senses. He said people learn and develop differently because they are exposed to different things. The one thing people have in common is that they are human and share a human nature that is the same for all people everywhere.

## Natural Rights

Locke imagined a set of **natural rights** that human beings share. These are the right to life, liberty, and property. **Life** refers to the fact that people want to live and will fight to survive. **Liberty** means that people want to be as free as possible to make their own decisions. **Property** represents the fact that people want to own things that help them survive, such as land, food, and tools. Locke believed these rights aren't given to people—people are born with them.

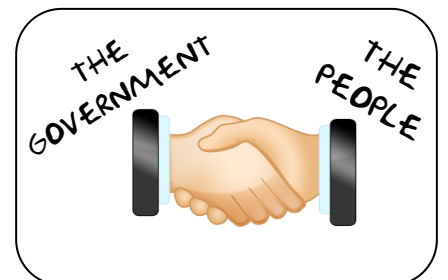


## Why do we need a government?

Locke also wondered what life would be like if people didn't have a government. In this **state of nature** there would be no rules, no one in charge, and no way for people to protect their natural rights. He believed the purpose of government is to end the state of nature and give people certain protections. Most importantly, Locke believed governments should protect people's natural rights.

## Social Contract

Locke believed a government can only be legitimate, or valid, if it is based on a social contract with citizens. A *contract* is an agreement between people in which both sides agree to something in order to reach a shared goal. A **social contract** happens between a government and its people. The people agree to give up some freedoms if the government agrees to protect everyone's rights. If the government fails to deliver, the people revolt—like the colonists did during the American Revolution.



# Baron de Montesquieu

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## A Baron is Born

Charles Louis de Secondat was born in 1689 in the city of Bordeaux, France. At age 27, he became Baron de Montesquieu (MON-teh-skew) when he inherited his uncle's fortune and title. Montesquieu was one of the great thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries. He spent a lot of time thinking about how governments should be created and maintained. His ideas guided the Founding Fathers when they wrote the United States Constitution. Even today, Montesquieu's thinking influences the way people think about government around the world.



Baron de Montesquieu



*How do the laws in our society keep us safe?*

## Follow the Rules

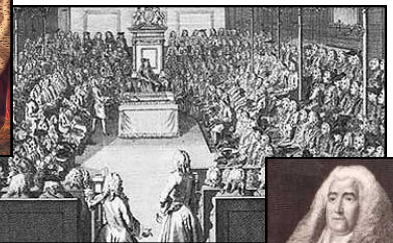
The term *liberty* means different things to different people. Some think liberty means being able to speak and act without being held back by laws and rules—in other words, being able to do whatever you want. But Montesquieu believed that **liberty** is the peace of mind that comes from being safe. He believed safety can only exist if everyone follows the law. If governments could provide and enforce clear laws that everyone would follow, it would increase liberty, reduce the problems of society, and improve human life.

## Separate...

Montesquieu studied the laws, customs, and governments of European countries to see how they created and enforced laws. He admired the government of England. The English government had three parts: a king to enforce laws, Parliament to create laws, and courts to interpret laws. The government was divided into parts, and each part had its own purpose. Montesquieu called this the **separation of powers**.



← King George III



House of Commons ↓

Sir William Blackstone, an →  
18th century English judge



## ...but Equal

Dividing the powers of government was just the first step. Each part of the government needed to be *balanced* with the other parts. Montesquieu thought that each of the parts, or branches, of government should be equal. He worried that if one branch had more power than the others, people would suffer and lose their liberty. To avoid this, he suggested that each branch have the ability to *limit* the power of the other two branches. In England, if the king tried to take too much control, the Parliament or the courts could act to stop him. Today, we call this the system of **checks and balances**.



## Sound Familiar?

James Madison, the "Father of the Constitution," liked the idea that each branch of government should have a clear role. As a result, the U.S. Constitution clearly explains what each branch is supposed to do: **Congress** makes laws, the **President** enforces laws, and the **Courts** interpret laws. Each branch has the power to check, or limit, the other branches. This keeps all branches of government balanced and equal.

