

Foundation of American Government

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Introduction to Government

- ◉ What is government?
 - ◉ Why do people create governments?
 - ◉ What purpose do they serve?
 - ◉ Where did we get our ideas about government?
-
- When writing the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson used the following concepts as influence

Thomas Hobbes - Saving Us From Ourselves

- Thomas Hobbes was born in London in 1588
- In 1651, Hobbes wrote his most famous work, entitled *Leviathan*.
- Hobbes believed that humans were basically selfish creatures who would do anything to better their position.

“For the laws of nature (as justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and in sum, doing to others as we would be done to) of themselves, without the terror of some power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions, that carry us to partiality, pride, revenge and the like” --Hobbes

- From this view of Human nature, What Kind of government is best?

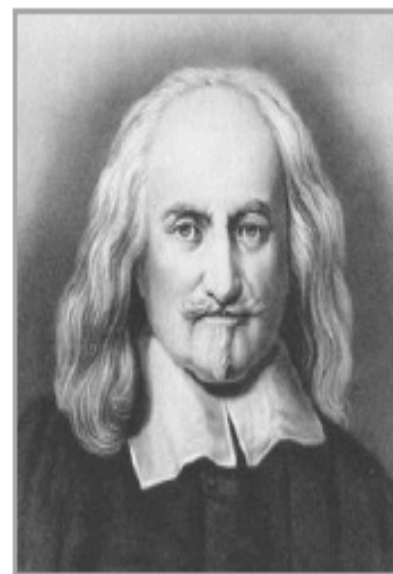
- Do you agree with Hobbes?

Why Government?

Name: _____

Nope, Not the Cartoon Tiger (the *other* Hobbes)

Thomas Hobbes was an English scholar and philosopher. He was born in 1588 and later became a tutor to a very wealthy family. As a tutor Hobbes had access to many books, traveled often, and met many important thinkers. Hobbes lived in Paris through the English Civil Wars and was interested in the nature of government. He wrote about many topics, including politics, geometry, physics, religion, and history. Hobbes was one of many scholars who tried to answer the question, "Why do we have government?"



Thomas Hobbes

Poor, Nasty, Brutish, and Short

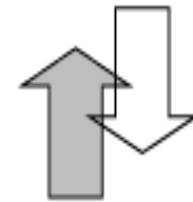
Hobbes saw humans as naturally selfish and quick to fight. He believed that before there were governments, people lived in a **state of nature**. In a state of nature, everyone had a right to everything. In order to get what they wanted, people would always be at war with everyone else. Nobody would produce anything like inventions, art, or even crops or tools because they would be afraid other people would take them away. Hobbes didn't paint a very pretty picture of life without government.

In such condition...
the life of man,
solitary, poor, nasty
brutish and short.

- T. Hobbes

Social Contract

Hobbes lived at a time when many philosophers were thinking about the nature of government. He was one of the first of his era to discuss the idea of a **social contract** between people and their government. A *contract* is an agreement in which both sides agree to something in order to reach a shared goal. In Hobbes' view, people agreed to give up some rights and power in exchange for protection. But for Hobbes, the social contract was no two-way street. He believed that once the people agreed to hand over power in exchange for protection, they lost the right to overthrow, replace, or even question the government.



Leviathan

Hobbes wrote a book called *Leviathan* (luh-VI-uh-then) to explain how he thought governments should work. Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* during the English Civil War. He wrote about the social contract, and he spent much of the book trying to show that a strong central authority was the only way to avoid the evils of war. Hobbes believed a single **sovereign**, or ruler, should have total authority over the people. He believed in a monarchy led by a king. That's because he thought that government would work best if all the power rested in one place. No three branches for Hobbes!



Monarchy? Not Democracy?

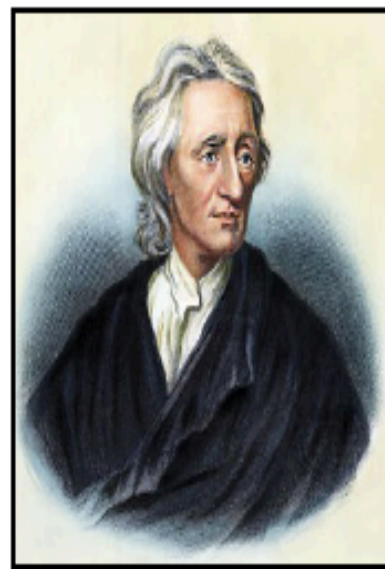
Many political thinkers—including America's Founding Fathers—built on Hobbes' ideas, especially the idea of a social contract. Hobbes was more concerned with protection and order than rights. But people like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau changed the focus from monarchy to democracy—power with the people instead of a sovereign. They began to see that people have rights that must be protected even from government.

Why Government?

Name: _____

A Man with Many Hats

John Locke was born in England in 1632, at about the same time that Hobbes was about to begin his life's work as a philosopher. 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.



John Locke



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.

People need:

- ✓ Life
- ✓ Liberty
- ✓ Property

A GOVERNMENT CAN:

- ✓ Offer Protections
- ✓ Provide Services

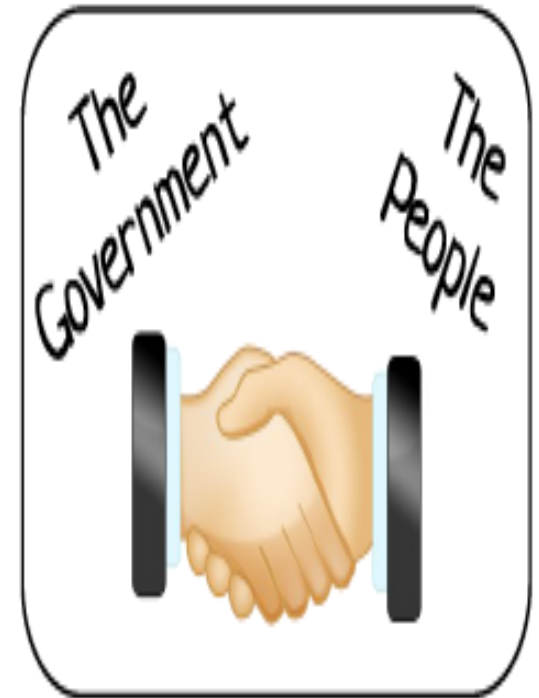
Why do we need a government?

Locke also wondered what life would be like if people didn't have a government. Like Hobbes, he believed this would lead to a **state of nature** with 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. But Locke also believed that governments should protect people's natural rights.

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. For Locke, the social contract between a government and its people worked both ways: The people agree to give up some freedoms, but only if the government agrees to protect everyone's rights. If the government fails to deliver, the people have the right to revolt like the colonists did during the American Revolution. This two-way exchange between citizens and government was very different from Hobbes' view.



Thomas Hobbes - Saving Us From Ourselves

- **State of nature** is the philosophy regarding how humans would act in their most basic state without a civil government. Hobbes believed the state of nature in which man lived before the formation of society was founded on a savage selfishness, which drove man to obtain pleasure without concern for justice or mercy toward other men.
- **Questions to consider:**
- What current event does this picture portray?
- Do you believe that this picture represents a man in a state of nature? Why or why not?



Published July 20, 2010, FoxNews.com

Amid a chaotic media circus, troubled actress Lindsay Lohan arrived at a Beverly Hills court Tuesday morning to surrender for a 90-day jail sentence.

Thomas Hobbes - Saving Us From Ourselves

- State of war-Hobbes believed that in the state of nature, people were always at war with one another, a war of all against all. Each individual was endowed with the right to do anything they pleased and people were in constant fear for their lives.



- Questions to consider:
- What is the conflict represented in this picture?
- Does this event represent a *state of war*?

Keep it Simple

- ⦿ “State of Nature” is a society without a government, Hobbes believed people would take whatever they wanted, gaining pleasure for themselves without regard to justice
- ⦿ Hobbes believed that humans were naturally selfish creatures who would do anything to better their position.
- ⦿ Hobbes believed that government saved us from ourselves
- ⦿ State of War-Hobbes believed that in the state of nature, people were always at war with one another, a war of all against all.
- Believed in Social Contract Theory, people need
- ⦿ to be governed in order to survive.

A Key to John Locke

- **Inalienable rights:** Rights that cannot be taken away from anyone, for example freedom of speech.
- **Equal rights:** The belief that all persons, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, age, etc., have the same rights as everyone else.
- **Questions to consider:**
 - What is happening in this painting?
 - Which principles of democracy are illustrated by this painting?



“The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which treats everyone equally... [B]eing equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, or possessions.”

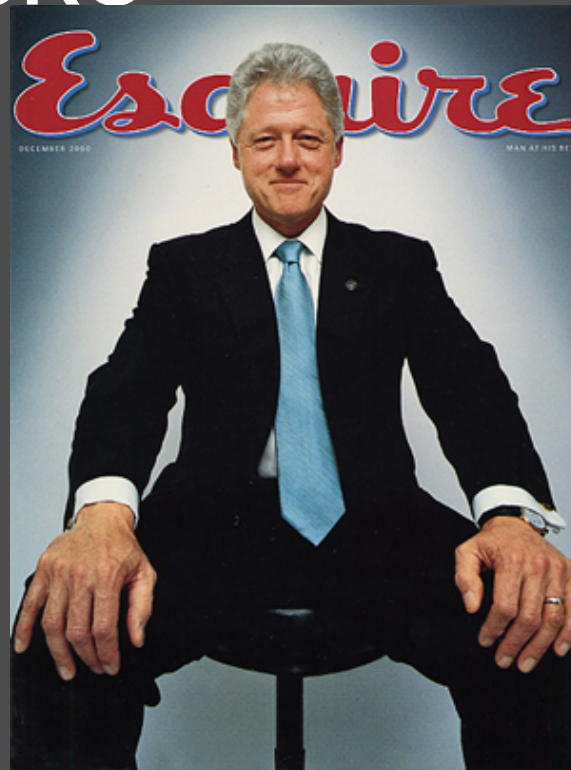
-John Locke

A Key to John Locke

- **Limited Government:** A government that does not have absolute authority.
- **Consent of the governed:** The political theory that governments gain their authority from their people. A government is not legitimate if the people do not give their consent.

“Whensoever...the [government] shall... put into the hands of any other an absolute power over the lives, liberty, and estates of the people, by this breach of trust they forfeit the power [of] the people...who have a right to resume their original liberty, and by the establishment of the new [government] provide for their own safety and security.”

-John Locke



Question to consider:
Who is this person and how do they relate to the topic of Consent of the government?

Keep it Simple

- ⦿ **Rights to life, liberty, health and property...law of God's nature, goal to survive = Inalienable rights**
- ⦿ **Inalienable rights: Rights that cannot be taken away from anyone, for example freedom of speech. These apply to ALL people = Equal Rights**
- ⦿ **Separation of Church and State**
- ⦿ **Limited Government: A government that does not have absolute authority.**
- ⦿ **Sovereignty belongs to the people.**
- ⦿ **Consent of the governed: The political theory that governments gain their authority from their people. A government is not legitimate if the people do not give their consent.**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1712 – 1778

- **Social Contract** is the idea that people join groups, and these groups make a presence known as a society. A social contract is the compact that the people agree form rules and conditions for membership in their society.
- **Equality** is the belief that all persons are entitled to equal rights and treatment before the law.
- **Civil Society** occurs after people leave the state of nature. Signs of this transfer are: people act on rules of justice rather than on instinct, physical impulse is replaced by the voice of duty, and people consult reason rather than inclinations.



An armed policeman guards a truck loaded with fuel from potential looters in New Orleans (REUTERS/Jason Reed)

Keep it Simple

- ⦿ Humans need to balance freedom and increasing dependence on each other
- ⦿ Rejects the notion of representative government, takes away too much of people's sovereignty, he supports limited government
- ⦿ People come together to protect individual sovereignty

Baron de Montesquieu

- Separation of Powers is the principle of dividing the powers of a government among different branches to guard against abuse of authority. A government of separated powers assigns different political and legal powers to the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.



President Barack Obama listens as Justice Elena Kagan delivers remarks during a confirmation reception in the East Room of the White House August 6, 2010.

•What is the above picture an example of
The process of Separation of Powers at work in
Our US system?

Keep it Simple

- ⦿ Principle of Democracy is “the love of the laws and of our country”
- ⦿ Laws of Liberty protect us from harm and allow us to do as much as possible
- ⦿ Fearful of an over powerful and corrupt government

