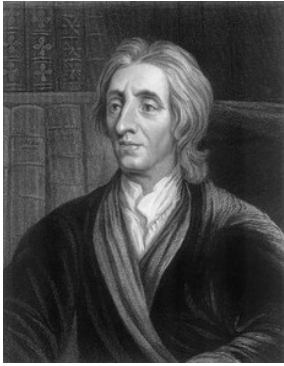


John Locke



John Locke was born into a Puritan family in Bristol, England in 1632. Locke's father, an attorney, was part of the parliamentary army fighting against the monarchy during the English Civil War. He wanted his son to become a minister, but Locke decided against this and instead studied medicine. As a student at Oxford University, Locke was influenced by John Owen, Dean of Christ Church College. It was Owen who first introduced Locke to the idea of religious freedom and the idea that people should not be punished for having different views on religion. However, Locke, a Protestant, continued to oppose Catholic and atheist (the belief that there is no God) influence in England. He remained entirely tolerant only of different forms of Protestantism. Aside from Owen, Locke was also deeply influenced by the writing of the French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes, who proclaimed that all men possess the ability to reason (the power of comprehend, infer, or think especially in orderly ways). Locke also believed that people develop reason and can therefore rationally settle their differences by seeking a middle ground and compromising.

- Describe Locke's family background.
- In what ways did John Owen and René Descartes influence Locke?
- Why did Locke believe people could rationally settle their differences?

After college, Locke continued to passionately study and read. He expressed his views about freedom and religion and the rights of citizens. In 1682, after the English government saw his ideas as a challenge to the king's authority, he fled to Holland. Locke returned to England in 1689 after the Glorious Revolution had forced the new British monarch to respect the authority of Parliament and accept the English Bill of Rights limiting the king's power. In 1690, Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* was published where he expressed his belief that people have the natural right to govern themselves and to look after the well-being of society. He wrote, "The state of nature (a society with no government or laws, like on a deserted island) has laws of nature to govern it, which [treats] everyone [equally]. Reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind...that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, or possessions."

- Why did Locke flee to Holland?
- What ability did Locke believe people had?
- Did Locke believe people were capable of governing themselves? Why or why not?

Locke did not believe that God had chosen a group or family of people to rule countries. He rejected the idea of divine right (the belief that monarchs are chosen by God), which many kings and queens used to justify their right to rule. In his own society, Locke supported a monarchy (rule by king or queen) whose power is limited to ensure that the rights of the people are respected. He argued that governments – including the limited monarchy under which he lived – should only operate with the consent, or approval, of the people being governed. Locke wrote, "[We have learned from] history we have reason to conclude that all peaceful beginnings of government have been laid in the consent of the people." Governments are formed, according

to Locke in his *Second Treatise*, to protect the right to life, the right to freedom, and the right to property. These rights are absolute, belonging to all people. Locke believed that ideally government power should be divided equally into 3 branches of government so that politicians do not face the “temptation...to grasp at [absolute] power.” If any government abuses the rights of the people instead of protecting them, the people have the right to rebel and form a new government. He writes, “Whenever [the preservation of life, liberty, and property for which power is given to rulers by a commonwealth] is manifestly neglected or opposed, the trust must necessarily be forfeited and then [returned] into the hands of those that gave it, who may place it anew where they think best for their safety and security.” Locke’s idea that only the consent of the governed gives validity to a government inspired the founders of new democracy, such as the writers of the United States Constitution.

- What did Locke think about the idea of divine right?
- According to Locke, what is the purpose of government?
- What did Locke think people should do if governments abused people’s rights?