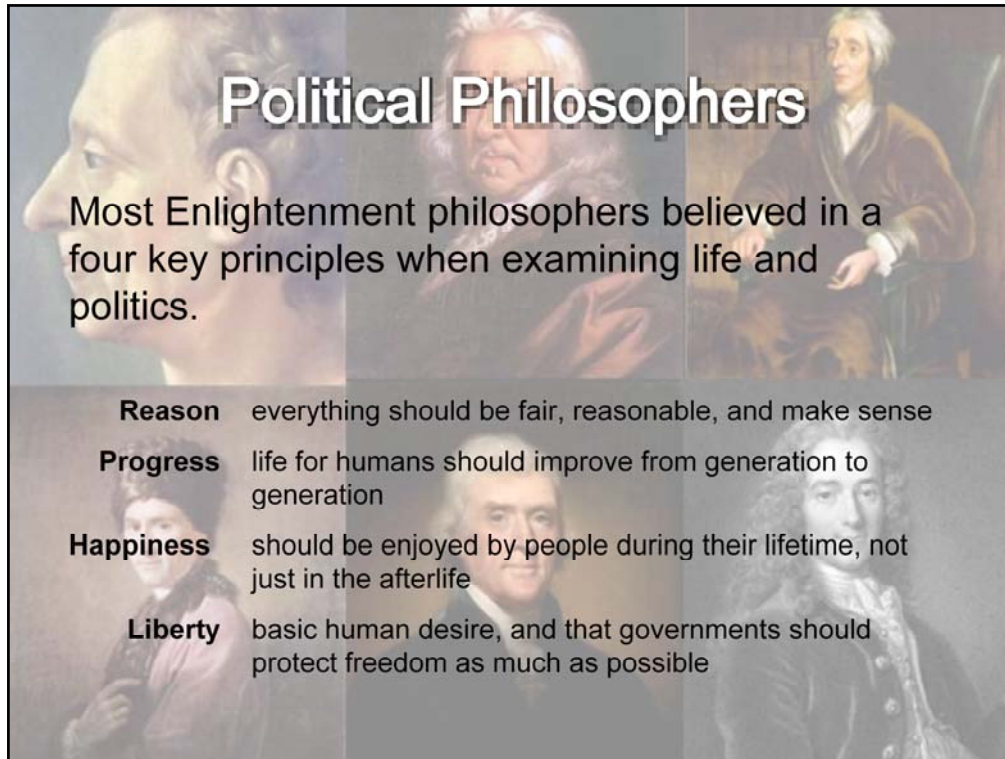


During the 1600s and 1700s, Enlightenment thinkers sought to bring about human progress by applying reason and scientific knowledge to all areas of life.

During this period, philosophers applied reason and logic to government and law and looked for reasonable explanations for government and politics. During the Enlightenment, many people began to question commonly held ideas, like the divine right of kings, and challenge “old ideas.” The group of thinkers from the 1600 and 1700s that questioned and examined politics were known collectively as the political philosophers.

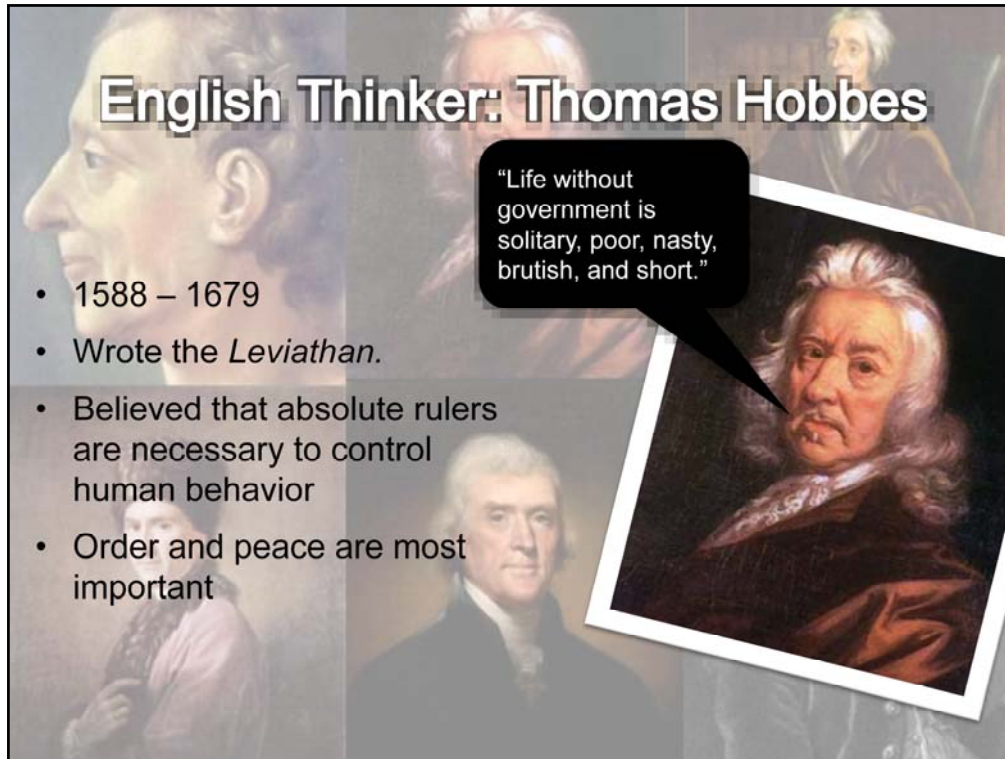


Political Philosophers

Most Enlightenment philosophers believed in a four key principles when examining life and politics.

Reason	everything should be fair, reasonable, and make sense
Progress	life for humans should improve from generation to generation
Happiness	should be enjoyed by people during their lifetime, not just in the afterlife
Liberty	basic human desire, and that governments should protect freedom as much as possible

Enlightenment philosophers believed in a few key principles when examining life and politics. First, they believed that reason is the idea that everything should be fair, reasonable, and make sense. Reason is the law of nature. Next, they felt that progress meant that life for humans continues to improve from generation to generation. Also, happiness or comforts of life should be enjoyed by people during their lifetime, not just in the afterlife. Finally, they maintained that liberty is a basic human desire, and that governments should protect freedom as much as possible.



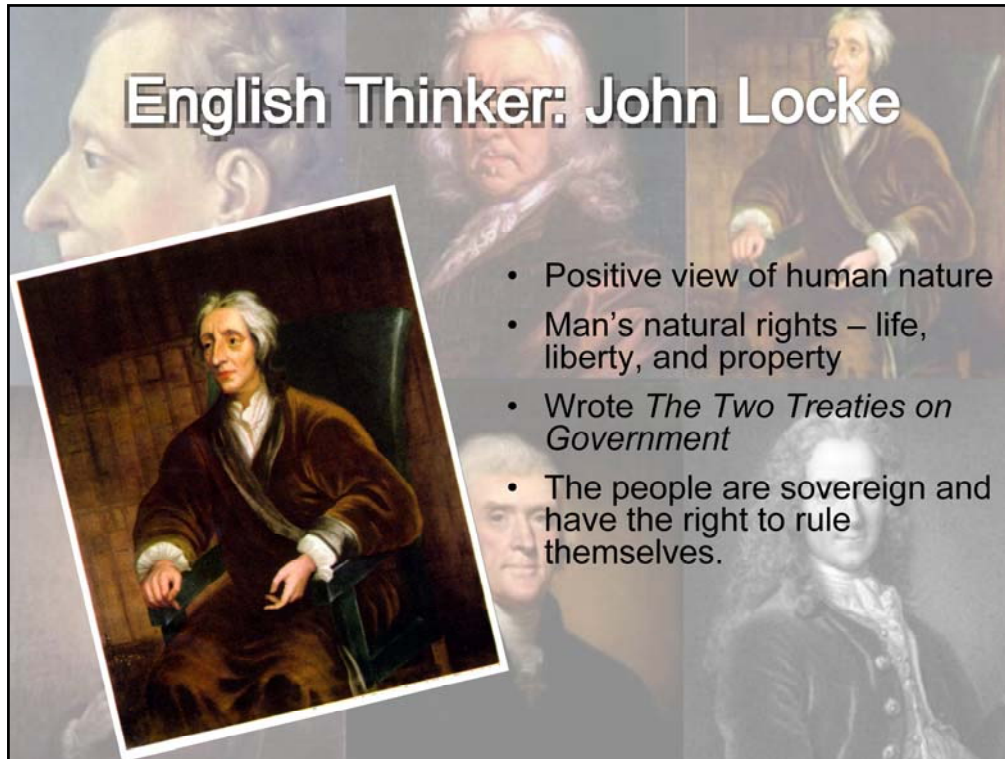
English Thinker: Thomas Hobbes

- 1588 – 1679
- Wrote the *Leviathan*.
- Believed that absolute rulers are necessary to control human behavior
- Order and peace are most important

“Life without government is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

Thomas Hobbes was an English philosopher who lived during the violent and chaotic times of the English Civil War. He believed that people lived in a “primitive” state of nature and would do great harm to each other if there was no government. The events that took place during his lifetime convinced him that man was evil and a strong government was necessary.

Hobbes wrote a book called the *Leviathan* in which he argued that people should submit to government because they need protection from the evils of mankind. In the book he states, “life without government is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” He felt that a strong absolute ruler was the best form of government. By putting all power in one person’s hands, society would be the most orderly, even if this arrangement had limited freedoms. Essentially, Hobbes believed that order and peace are more important than personal freedoms.



John Locke was another English philosopher, however, unlike Hobbes, he held a positive view of human nature. He believed that humans were sovereign, meaning independent, but will consent to live under government in order to have their natural rights protected. He believed man's natural rights were life, liberty, and property.

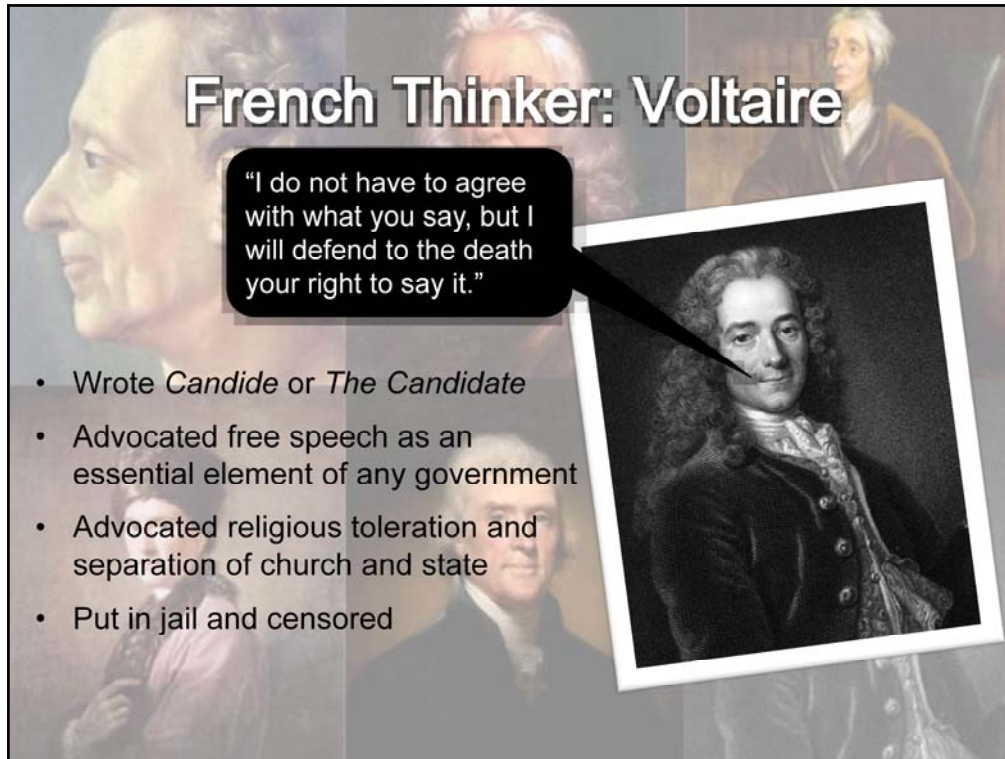
At the time when Locke lived, owning property was a prerequisite in order for citizens to participate in government. Locke valued freedom and believed that any government that abused these rights should be overthrown. Locke's wrote his ideas in his book *The Two Treatises of Government*.

Both Locke and Hobbes lived through the English Civil War, the Restoration, and the Glorious Revolution – all events which contributed to the development of their beliefs. Locke believed that the government and the people should rule, while Hobbes believed that a country needed an absolute ruler to control the peoples' evil tendencies.

French Thinker: Voltaire

"I do not have to agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

- Wrote *Candide* or *The Candidate*
- Advocated free speech as an essential element of any government
- Advocated religious toleration and separation of church and state
- Put in jail and censored



Voltaire was a French writer whose criticism of the French king landed him in frequent trouble. At one time, he was even detained as a political prisoner at the Bastille, a medieval fortress which was turned into a prison to hold and torture people.

His most famous work was a short novel, *Candide*, which in French means, "The Candidate." In this novel, he expressed his ideas about politics. His most famous quote is, "I do not have to agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." This expresses the idea that people should have the ability to speak freely in society without fear of being imprisoned for speaking out against the government or a ruler.

He believed that religious tolerance should triumph over religious fanaticism and extremism. He also believed that the government and religion should be kept separate. He was one of the first thinkers to promote the separation of church and state, an important idea in U.S. political philosophy. Unlike many countries, the U.S. does not have a state-sponsored religion and people are free to practice any belief, or not practice one at all. The most important effect of this separation is that our government cannot sponsor any activity promoting religious beliefs, for example, teaching Christianity in public schools.

French Thinker: Baron de Montesquieu

- Wrote the *On the Spirit of the Laws* and *The Persian Letters*
- Believed governmental powers should be separated into branches. Each branch serves to check and balance the power of the others
 - Legislative branch
 - Executive branch
 - Judicial branch

“When the legislature and executive are united in the same person, there is no liberty (freedom).”

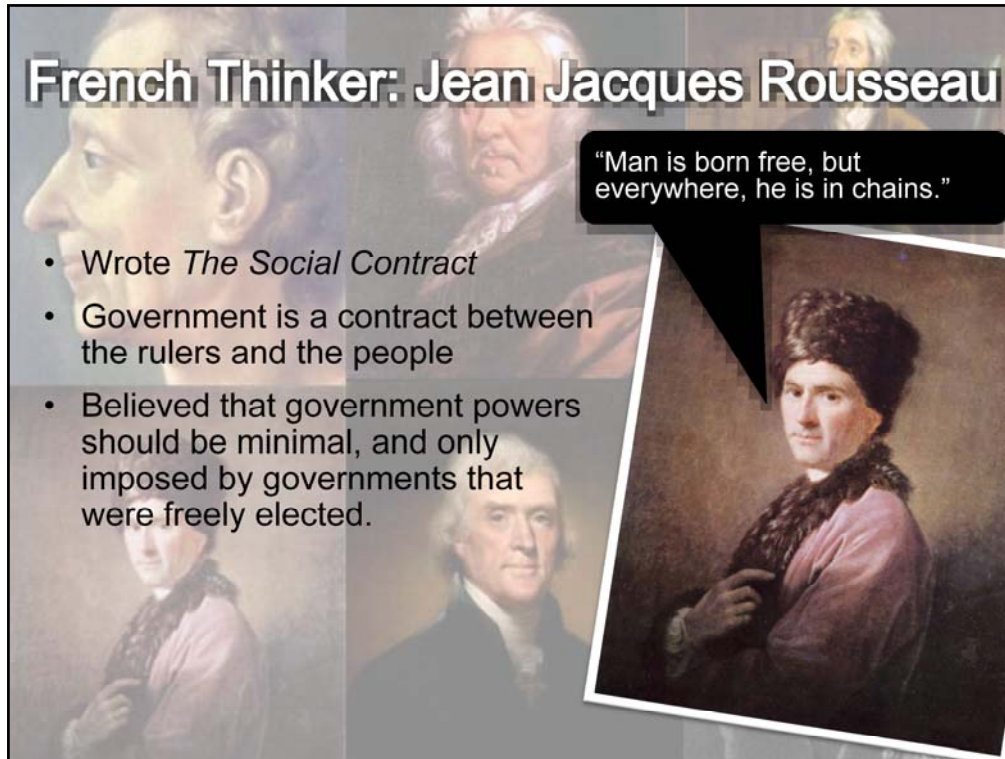
Baron de Montesquieu was a French thinker who admired the British system. He lived between 1689 and 1755 and was born of French nobility. During his lifetime, he witnessed England’s transformation from a limited monarchy to a constitutional monarchy where Parliament became the most powerful political body in the land.

His book, *On the Spirit of Laws*, expressed his belief that government should be a system that has its powers separated amongst different branches so that no one part of the government was too powerful. The idea that each branch has a check over the others was one of his key ideas. The United States Government is based on these ideas and each of the branches – legislative, judicial and executive – have a check over the others. For example, in the U.S., the president can veto a law passed by Congress. Congress can then override the president’s veto if two-thirds of its members vote to pass the law.

French Thinker: Jean Jacques Rousseau

- Wrote *The Social Contract*
- Government is a contract between the rulers and the people
- Believed that government powers should be minimal, and only imposed by governments that were freely elected.

"Man is born free, but everywhere, he is in chains."

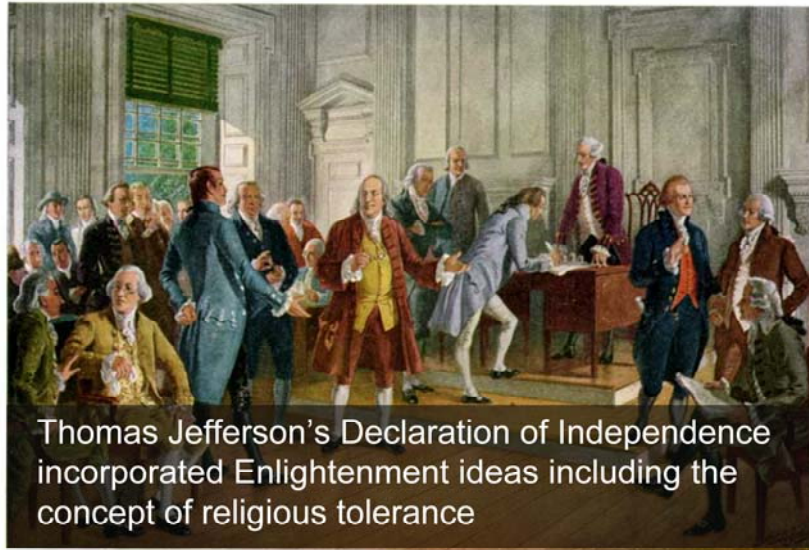


Jean Jacques Rousseau was born in Switzerland, but lived most of his life in France. The main focus of his work was the concept of freedom. In his book, *The Social Contract*, he wrote that, in a state of nature, man was free, however, over time, unjust rulers had forced man to follow unjust laws.

Rousseau believed that that government must derive its powers from the people. In addition, he stated that government should be a contract between the government and the people, and if the government violates the contract, the people have the right to overthrow it and institute a new one. The people agree to obey the government's laws and the government agrees to protect the people – an arrangement known as ordered liberty.

An example of this is when the government sets speed limits to protect people from reckless drivers, and the people agree to obey the speed limit. What happens if someone ignores the law and goes as fast as he or she likes? That's right, they get a speeding ticket.

The Impact of the Enlightenment on Europe and the Americas



Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence incorporated Enlightenment ideas including the concept of religious tolerance

Many of these philosophers' ideas about government spread quickly across Europe by the way of salons. Salons were informal gatherings where people discussed literature, music, and politics. Eventually, the Enlightenment ideas crossed the Atlantic Ocean to the colonists in the Americas. New ideas about people's rights and the role of government encouraged people to seek freedom and equality in society. As a result, these ideas led people to revolt against absolute rulers, colonial governments, and created a cultural revolution where innovations and technologies sped up the pace of life.

Ideas that developed during the Age of Reason inspired the colonists in North America to revolt against England and led to our current system of government. These ideas were written into the Declaration of Independence, such as the belief that humans had natural rights – like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – that governments could not take away. The idea of natural rights came from John Locke, however, Jefferson changed Locke's "property" into "the pursuit of happiness" because he felt that only people who owned property should be able to participate in government, therefore, property did not need to be listed in these rights.



The United States Constitution was heavily influenced by the ideas from Rousseau and his social contract theory. Essentially, the Constitution is a social contract written by the people which gives their consent of the government to rule. Montesquieu's belief that the government should be divided into separate branches to ensure the liberty of the people is evident in articles one, two, and three of the Constitution which established the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. Even Voltaire's beliefs influenced the founding fathers. They believed, like Voltaire, that people have broad personal freedoms such as speech and religion which they wrote out in the Bill of Rights.

There is no doubt that the ideas developed during the Enlightenment were some of the most powerful forces unleashed during the era leading to revolutions in North America and the overthrow of the French government.