

Big Thoughts from Two of Enlightenment Thinkers

John Locke



English thinker, John Locke (1632–1704), was influenced by the events of the Glorious Revolution. In 1690 he published *Two Treatises of Government*. (A treatise is a long essay.) Locke wrote that all people were born equal with certain God-given rights, called **natural rights**. These included the rights to life, to freedom, and to own property. Like Hobbes, Locke believed in a form of social contract. Locke believed that people agreed to give up some rights and to be ruled by a government. But he believed that if the ruler failed to protect the rights of the people, *the social contract* was broken. Then the people could choose new leaders.

Baron de Montesquieu



French writer Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755) developed the idea that the power of government should be divided into branches. Then, Montesquieu believed, no one branch would become too strong and threaten people's rights. He did not like the idea of an absolute monarchy. Montesquieu called this idea the **separation of powers**.

The Enlightenment thinkers shaped the Colonists' views about government. Ideas about a social contract, natural rights, and separation of powers influenced the writers of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

Other Enlighten Thinkers and their Ides:

NAME	YEARS LIVED	BELIEFS
Thomas Hobbes	1588–1679	People agree to be ruled because their ruler pledges to protect their rights.
John Locke	1632–1704	People have rights to life, liberty, and property that the government must protect for the common good.
Baron de Montesquieu	1689–1755	Separate the parts of government so no one part can become too powerful.
Voltaire	1694–1778	People have the right to speak freely, and this right should be defended by everyone.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	1712–1778	The legislative power belongs to the people.