

LOCKE

- **Essay on Human Understanding** = “tabula rasa” - man is born a “blank slate” who is shaped by observation and experience
- **Second Treatise on Civil Government**
 - reflection of views on “social contract theory” - because of the inherent dangers of the “state of nature” and the desire for safety, order, and stability, governments must be formed
 - government allows for the existence of “civil society”
 - people are the sole source of political power = “consent of the governed”
 - people have inalienable natural rights: life, liberty, and property—remember that Locke thought only those of property had a vested interest and stake in government
 - Locke: “The great and chief end, therefore, of men’s uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property.”
 - violation of the “contract” by a government that fails to protect the rights of the people or begins to usurp power gives the people the “right to rebel against tyranny.”

ENLIGHTENMENT PHILOSOPHES “The Political Views”

ROUSSEAU

- Breaks with “salon” culture in the 1750’s as decadent, pretentious, and conforming - he says there must be a return to a simpler time
- “State of Nature” = anarchy, rule by force, no morality, competition for survival
- As a result of the state of nature—some type of civilization is needed
- “State of Man” = the “noble savage” - within civilization man is essentially good as he starts uncorrupted by the influences of civilization but... civilization destroys the individual
- **The Social Contract**—opens with, “man is born free, but everywhere is in chains.”
- **Question:** How can people unite together to overcome the obstacles of the state of nature and protect each other but still obey oneself and remain free as is man’s natural state??
- **“Popular Sovereignty”** - people are source of all political power—people must have a role in making the law to which they submit—if people obey the laws they are obeying themselves
- **“General Will”** - the consensus of the best interests of all the people—people must submit their individual will to the general will which can’t be wrong because it expresses every man’s common will—therefore, to obey the “general will” is to be free. Freedom = obedience to law
- Under certain circumstances people must be “forced to be free” as society is more important than its individual members
- Other concepts to consider: **Majority Rule? Democracy? “Far-sighted Minority”?**
Democratic Totalitarianism?

MONTESQUIEU

- **The Persian Letters**
 - satirical response to the rule of Louis XIV
 - critique through amusing letters “written” by Persian travelers who see and discuss European beliefs and practices
- **On the Spirit of the Laws**
 - critical analysis of the problems of government
 - comparative study of political systems
 - essential question = “what would best promote liberty and prevent tyranny”
 - division of political power = branches
 - advocated the need for a strong independent upper class so that “power checks power”
- NOT a democrat—typical wariness of the common people, uneducated, and the poor
- Preferred system = great admirer of the English system and its balance of power

VOLTAIRE

- Admirer of the English system but ... is too much of a pessimist about people
- Great supporter of “Enlightened Despotism” - i.e. The use of power, even absolute, for the good of the people
- Believes that the best hope for people is a good monarch as humans themselves are not worthy to govern themselves
- He maintained a long standing relationship with the Prussian court at Berlin and Frederick the Great
- Voltaire’s pessimism challenges the philosophe Karl Liebnitz, who at the time, believed that man lived in the “... best of all possible worlds.”
- Voltaire’s lack of optimism reflected in his most famous work, **Candide**—as Candide travels with companions, one disaster after another is encountered—the world is harsh and filled with cruelties— man can only find contentment through private, inner solace—“one must cultivate one’s own garden”