

University of Virginia Center for Politics



The Key to John Locke

Purpose: The student will understand some of the basic theories of John Locke including limited government, unalienable rights, equal rights, and authority from consent of the governed.

Objectives:

1. Students will interpret the ideas of John Locke as they relate to limited government, unalienable rights, equal rights, and authority from the consent of the governed.
2. Students will apply their interpretations of specific quotations from Locke to contemporary paintings by Norman Rockwell, *The Problem We All Live With*, by Dave Cutler, *Flag With Male Symbol*, and to a photograph from the 1989 revolt in Tiananmen Square.

Key Words:

consent of the governed
state of nature

natural rights
unalienable rights

treatise

Materials:

1. Overhead with copy of Norman Rockwell's *The Problem We All Live With*.
2. Overhead with copy of Dave Cutler's *Flag With Male Symbol*.
3. Overhead with copy of photograph from Tiananmen Square.
4. Student handout: *Study Guide: A Key to John Locke*.
5. Short Biography of John Locke
6. Extended Biography of John Locke
7. Additional excerpts from Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* are included for more advanced students who want more exposure to his works.

Procedures:

1. Warm up: Distribute copies of the short biography provided on John Locke and ask students to read it. Advanced students can be directed to read more about John Locke using the internet. The following are some possible websites:

<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/l/locke.htm>

<http://7-12educators.about.com/blalocke.htm>

<http://www.evsc.k12.in.us/schoolzone/schools/EMPOWER/harrison/th/locke.htm#Biography>

2. Ask students to answer the following questions:

- What are three of John Locke's beliefs about government?
 - What U.S. document(s) are based on the ideas of Locke?
 - How can Locke's influence be seen in this document?
3. Put up the Norman Rockwell overhead of *The Problem We All Live With* and ask the following questions:
 - What is happening in this painting?
 - Which principles of democracy are illustrated by this painting?
 - (equality, natural rights, liberty, unalienable rights)
 4. Introduce students to the second painting and ask similar questions.
 5. Introduce students to the final photograph and ask what is happening in the picture and how it relates to the topic of limited government?
 6. Pass out copies of the study guide with excerpts of Locke's ideas and direct students to complete these individually or in groups. Discuss their interpretations of Locke's writings.
 7. Using the terms, limited government, unalienable rights, equal rights and authority from consent, ask students to discuss or write a journal entry responding to the following questions:
 - How do you think John Locke would respond to Norman Rockwell's painting? Dave Cutler's?
 - How would John Locke respond to the events in Tiananmen Square?
 - Are all rights equal or are some more important than others?
 - How do we balance a limited government with the protection of equal rights?
 8. Advanced students can be directed to read excerpts included from John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* in place or in addition to the study guide.



The Problem We All Live With
by Norman Rockwell

"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

Unalienable rights are rights that cannot be taken away from anyone, for example freedom of speech.

Equal rights are 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?
(equality, natural rights, liberty, unalienable rights)



Flag with Male Symbol
By Dave Cutler

“The old [traditions] are apt to lead men into mistakes, as this [idea] of [fatherly] power’s probably has done, which seems so [eager] to place the power of parents over their children wholly in the father, as if the mother has no share in it. Whereas if we consult reason or [the Bible], we shall find she has an equal title.”

-John Locke

Unalienable rights are rights that cannot be taken away from anyone, for example freedom of speech.

Equal rights are 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?
- How does this painting relate to the concept of unalienable rights? Equal rights?



June 1989 – Tiananmen Square
Photographer: Unknown

“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

A **limited government** is a government that does not have absolute authority.

Consent of the governed is the political theory that governments gain their authority from their people. A government is not legitimate if the people do not give their consent.

Question to consider:

- What is happening in the picture and how does it relate to the topic of limited government?

Study Guide: A Key to John Locke

Please read the following excerpts taken from John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* and then re-write them in your own words. Finally, circle the number on a scale of 1 to 5 corresponding with how much you agree or disagree with Mr. Locke's quote.

1. "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".

1 2 3 4 5
disagree neutral agree

2. "We have reason to conclude that all peaceful beginnings of government have been laid in the consent of the people."

1 2 3 4 5
disagree neutral agree

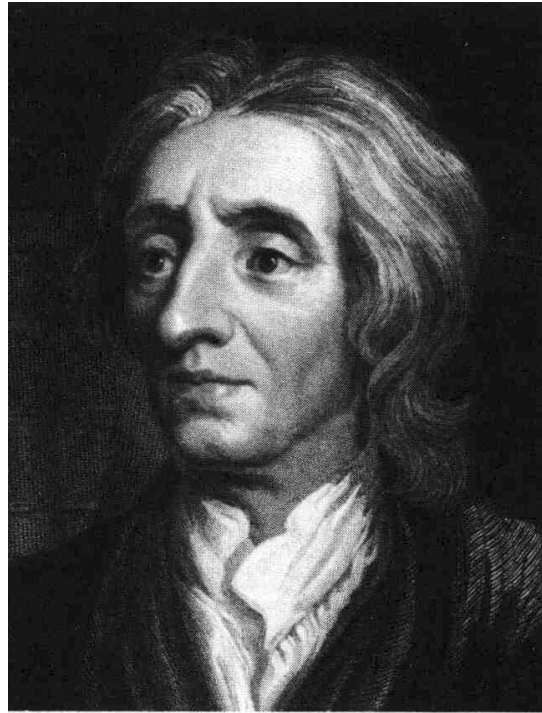
3. "The old [traditions] are apt to lead men into mistakes, as this [idea] of [fatherly] power's probably has done, which seems so [eager] to place the power of parents over their children wholly in the father, as if the mother has no share in it. Whereas if we consult reason or [the Bible], we shall find she has an equal title."

1 2 3 4 5
disagree neutral agree

4. "Whensoever...the [government] shall...put into the hands of any other an absolute power over the lives, liberties, 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."

1 2 3 4 5
disagree neutral agree

John Locke Biography



John Locke

John Locke was born in Bristol, England, on August 29, 1632. Locke's father was an attorney who collected taxes from seaport towns. He wanted his son to become a minister, but Locke rejected this and studied medicine. Locke entered Oxford University in England and 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 of religion. Locke believed that all sides had the right to be heard. Moreover, he felt that all conflicts could be solved if the two could settle their differences by seeking a middle ground and compromise.

John Locke wrote two treatises of government in 1690. In these treatises he said that the government should be like a contract or agreement between the people and the ruler. The ruler is given the power to govern the country as long as he doesn't abuse his position. In brief, Locke argued that sovereignty did not reside in the state but with the people, and that the state is supreme, but only if it is bound by civil and what he called "natural" law. If the ruler didn't keep the contract, the people could overthrow the government. Locke also believed that the people were entitled to **natural rights** such as life, liberty and the protection of their property. Many of Locke's political ideas, such as those relating to natural rights, property rights, the duty of the government to protect these rights, and the rule of the majority, were later embodied in the U.S. Constitution.

Excerpted from: <http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/constitution/locke-bio.html>



Extended Biography

<http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/constitution/locke-bio.html>

(This site provides thorough background information on John Locke, but the web address referenced in the “Procedures” section of this packet is a better choice for additional student research.)

After college, Locke continued to study and read with passion. He expressed his views about freedom of religion and the rights of citizens. In 1682 his ideas were seen by the English government as a challenge to the king's authority. He fled to Holland, and then returned to England in 1689 after the Civil War in England. Shortly thereafter, Locke began publishing his writings, many of which focused on government. Throughout his writings, Locke argued that people had the gift of reason, or the ability to think. Locke thought they had the natural ability to govern themselves and to look after the well being of society. He wrote, *"The state of nature has a law 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."*

Locke did not believe that God had chosen a group or family of people to rule countries. He rejected the "Divine Right," which many kings and queens used to justify their right to rule. Instead, he argued that governments should only operate with the consent of the people they are governing. In this way, Locke supported democracy as a form of government. 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 were formed, according to Locke, to protect the right to life, the right to freedom, and the right to property. Their rights were absolute, belonging to all the people. Locke also believed that government power should be divided equally into three branches of government so that politicians will not face the *"temptation... to grasp at [absolute] power."* If any government abused these rights instead of protecting them, then the people had the right to rebel and form a new government.

John Locke spoke out against the control of any man against his will. This control was acceptable neither in the form of an unfair government, nor in slavery. Locke wrote, *"The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but only have the law of nature for his rule."* In addition, Locke felt that women had the ability to reason, which entitled them to an equal voice - an unpopular idea during this time in history. Despite fearing that he might be censored, he wrote, *"It may not be [wrong] to offer new... [ideas] when the old [traditions] are apt to lead men into mistakes, as this [idea] of [fatherly] power's probably has done, which seems so [eager] to place the power of parents over their children wholly in the father, as if the mother had no share in it. Whereas if we consult reason or (the Bible), we shall find she has an equal title."*

Excerpts from John Locke's
Second Treatise on Government
(1632-1704)

CHAPTER IV
Of Slavery

21. The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on Earth, and not be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of Nature not to be tied by any laws"; but freedom of men under government is to have a standing rule to live by, common to every one of that society, and made by the legislative power erected in it. A liberty to follow my own will in all things where that rule prescribes not, not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man, as freedom of nature is to be under no other restraint but for his rule. The liberty of man in society is to be under no other legislative power but that established by consent in the commonwealth, nor under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but what the legislative shall enact according to the trust put in it. Freedom, then, is not what Sir Robert Filmer tells us: "A liberty for every one to do what he lists, to live as he pleases, and the law of Nature.

22. This freedom from absolute, arbitrary power is so necessary to, and closely joined with, a man's preservation, that he cannot part with but by what forfeits his preservation and life together. For a man, not having the power of his own life, cannot by compact or his own consent enslave himself to anyone, nor put himself under the absolute, arbitrary power of another to take away his life when he pleases. Nobody can give more power than he has himself, and he that cannot take away his own life cannot give another power over it. Indeed, having by his fault forfeited his own life by some act that deserves death, he to whom he has forfeited it may when he has him in his power, delay to take it, and make use of him to his own service; and he does him no more injury by it. For, whenever he finds the hardship of his slavery outweigh the value of his own life, it is in power, by resisting the will of his master, to draw on himself the death he desires.

23. This is the perfect condition of slavery, which is nothing else but the state of war continued between a lawful conqueror and a captive, for if once compact enter between them, and make an agreement for a limited power on the other side, and obedience on the other, the state of war and slavery ceases as long as the compact endures; for, as has been said, no man can by agreement pass over to another that which he hath not in himself – a power over his own life.

Excerpts from John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*

CHAPTER X

Of the Forms of a Common-wealth

Sec. 132. THE majority having, as has been shewed, upon men's first uniting into society, the whole power of the community naturally in them, may employ all that power in making laws for the community from time to time, and executing those laws by officers of their own appointing; and then the form of the government is a perfect democracy: or else may put the power of making laws into the hands of a few select men, and their heirs or successors; and then it is an oligarchy: or else into the hands of one man, and then it is a monarchy: if to him and his heirs, it is an hereditary monarchy: if to him only for life, but upon his death the power only of nominating a successor to return to them; an elective monarchy. And so accordingly of these the community may make compounded and mixed forms of government, as they think good. And if the legislative power be at first given by the majority to one or more persons only for their lives, or any limited time, and then the supreme power to revert to them again; when it is so reverted, the community may dispose of it again anew into what hands they please, and so constitute a new form of government: for the form of government depending upon the placing the supreme power, which is the legislative, it being impossible to conceive that an inferior power should prescribe to a superior, or any but the supreme make laws, according as the power of making laws is placed, such is the form of the common-wealth.

Excerpts from John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*

CHAPTER XI

Of the Legislative, Executive, and Federative Power of the Common-wealth

Sec. 143. THE legislative power is that, which has a right to direct how the force of the common-wealth shall be employed for preserving the community and the members of it. But because those laws which are constantly to be executed, and whose force is always to continue, may be made in a little time; therefore there is no need, that the legislative should be always in being, not having always business to do. And because it may be too great a temptation to human frailty, apt to grasp at power, for the same persons, who have the power of making laws, to have also in their hands the power to execute them, whereby they may exempt themselves from obedience to the laws they make, and suit the law, both in its making, and execution, to their own private advantage, and thereby come to have a distinct interest from the rest of the community, contrary to the end of society and government: therefore in well ordered commonwealths, where the good of the whole is so considered, as it ought, the legislative power is put into the hands of divers persons, who duly assembled, have by themselves, or jointly with others, a power to make laws, which when they have done, being separated again, they are themselves subject to the laws they have made; which is a new and near tie upon them, to take care, that they make them for the public good. . *144.* But because the laws, that are at once, and in a short time made, have a constant.

Sec. 144. But because the laws, that are at once, and in a short time made, have a constant and lasting force, and need a perpetual execution, or an attendance thereunto; therefore it is necessary there should be a power always in being, which should see to the execution of the laws that are made, and remain in force. And thus the legislative and executive power come often to be separated.

Sec. 145. There is another power in every common-wealth, which one may call natural, because it is that which answers to the power every man naturally had before he entered into society: for though in a common-wealth the members of it are distinct persons still in reference to one another, and as such as governed by the laws of the society; yet in reference to the rest of mankind, they make one body, which is, as every member of it before was, still in the state of nature with the rest of mankind. Hence it is, that the controversies that happen between any man of the society with those that are out of it, are managed by the public; and an injury done to a member of their body, engages the whole in the reparation of it. So that under this consideration, the whole community is one body in the state of nature, in respect of all other states or persons out of its community.



Excerpts from John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*

CHAPTER XV

Of Paternal, Political, and Despotical Power, Considered Together

Sec. 172. Thirdly, Despotical power is an absolute, arbitrary power one man has over another, to take away his life, whenever he pleases. This is a power, which neither nature gives, for it has made no such distinction between one man and another; nor compact can convey: for man not having such an arbitrary power over his own life, cannot give another man such a power over it; a lasting force, and need a perpetual execution, or an attendance thereunto; therefore it is necessary there should be a power always in being, which should see to the execution of the laws that are made, and remain in force. And thus the legislative and executive power come often to be separated.