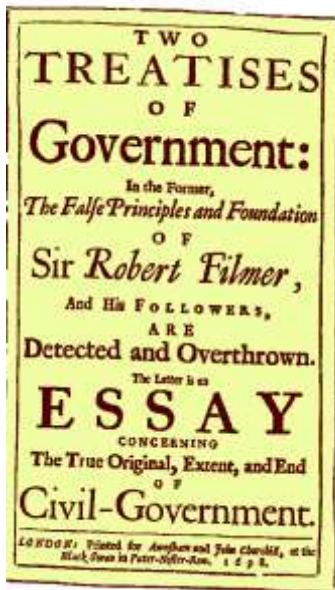


Why do we need a government?



English philosopher John Locke said in his book called *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (1690) that the main purpose of government should be to protect people's natural rights.

What are “natural rights”?

The idea of natural rights means that all persons have these rights just because they are human beings. Everyone is born with these rights and they should not be taken away without a person's agreement.

Most American colonists believed everyone had a right to life, liberty and property.

Many of the early colonists believed people received these rights from God. Others believed that people have them just because it is natural for people to have them.

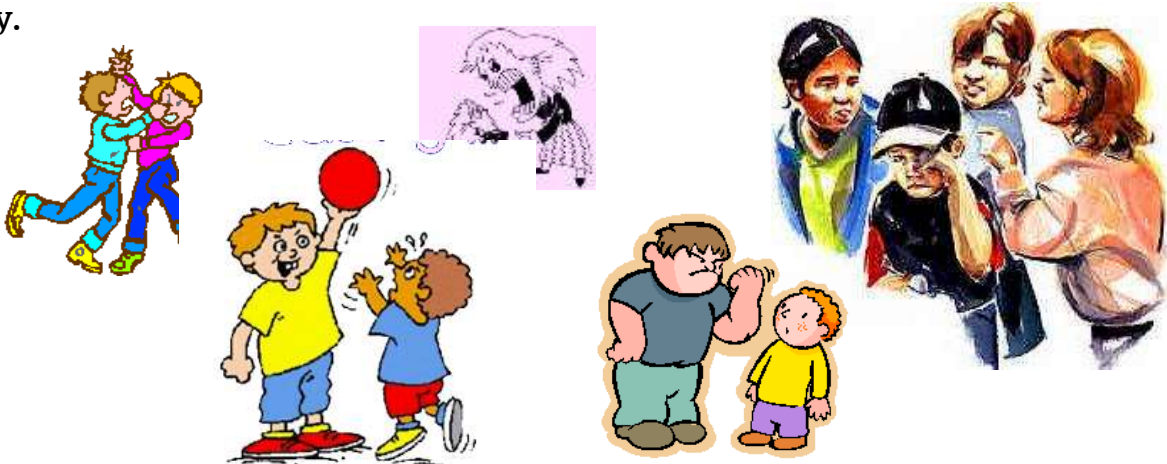
John Locke also said that kings should not have absolute power, that is, power without limits. Kings should not be able to deprive people of their natural rights.



Protecting Natural Rights

Although people agreed on certain natural rights, they worried about how those rights could be protected.

John Locke and others worried about what life would be like in a situation where there was no government and no laws. They called this situation a state of nature. They were afraid that in a state of nature their rights would be taken away.



John Locke and other philosophers developed a solution to the problems that would exist in a place without government.

In a state of nature, people might feel free to do anything they want to do. However their rights would not be protected and they would feel insecure.

Locke argued that people should agree to give up some of their freedom in exchange for protection and security.

They should consent (agree) to follow laws in exchange for the protection that these laws would give them. This agreement is called a social compact or social contract.

A social compact is an agreement people make to create a government to rule them and protect their natural rights. In this agreement the people consent to obey the laws created by that government.

Answer the following questions:

- 1. What is the purpose of government according to the natural rights philosophers (John Locke)?**
- 2. Where does government get its right to govern, according to the natural rights philosophers (John Locke)?**
- 3. What is a social compact?**
- 4. Do you think a social compact is the best way to create a government?**
- 5. What beliefs about rights were important to the American colonists?**