Baron de Montesquieu

Charles Louis de Secondat was born in Bordeaux, France, in 1689 to a wealthy family. Despite his family's wealth, de Secondat was placed in the care of a poor family during his childhood. He later went to college and studied science and history, eventually becoming a lawyer in the local government. De Secondat's father died in 1713 and he was placed under the care of his uncle, Baron de Montesquieu. The Baron died in 1716 and left de Secondat his fortune, his office as president of the Bordeaux Parliament, and his title of Baron de Montesquieu. Later he was a member of the Bordeaux and French Academies of Science and studied the laws and customs and governments of the countries of Europe. He gained fame in 1721 with his *Persian Letters*, which criticized the lifestyle and liberties of the wealthy French as well as the church. However, Montesquieu's book *On the Spirit of Laws*, published in 1748, was his most famous work. It outlined his ideas on how government would best work.

Montesquieu believed that all things were made up of rules or laws that never changed. He set out to study these laws scientifically with the hope that knowledge of the laws of government would reduce the problems of society and improve human life. According to Montesquieu, there were three types of government: a monarchy (ruled by a king or queen), a republic (ruled by an elected leader), and a despotism (ruled by a dictator). Montesquieu believed that a government that was elected by the people was the best form of government. He did, however, believe that the success of a democracy - a government in which the people have the power - depended upon maintaining the right balance of power.

Montesquieu argued that the best government would be one in which power was balanced among three groups of officials. He thought England - which divided power between the king (who enforced laws), Parliament (which made laws), and the judges of the English courts (who interpreted laws) - was a good model of this. Montesquieu called the idea of dividing government power into three branches the "separation of powers." He thought it most important to create separate branches of government with equal but different powers. That way, the government would avoid placing too much power with one individual or group of individuals. He wrote, "When the [law making] and [law
Thomas Hobbes

Thomas Hobbes was born in London in 1588. He received his college education at Oxford University in England, where he studied classics. Hobbes traveled to other European countries several times to meet with scientists and to study different forms of government. During his time outside of England, Hobbes became interested in why people allowed themselves to be ruled and what would be the best form of government for England. In 1651, Hobbes wrote his most famous work, entitled Leviathan. In it, he argued that people were naturally wicked and could not be trusted to govern. Therefore, Hobbes believed that an absolute monarchy - a government that gave all power to a king or queen - was best.

Hobbes believed that humans were basically selfish creatures who would do anything to better their position. Left to themselves, he thought, people would act on their evil impulses. According to Hobbes, people therefore should not be trusted to make decisions on their own. In addition, Hobbes felt that nations, like people, were selfishly motivated. To Hobbes, each country was in a constant battle for power and wealth. To prove his point, Hobbes wrote, "If men are naturally in a state of war, why do they always carry arms and why do they have keys to lock their doors?"

Governments were created, according to Hobbes, to protect people from their own selfishness and evil. The best government was one that had the great power of a leviathan, or sea monster. Hobbes believed in the rule of a king because he felt a country needed an authority figure to provide direction and leadership. Because the people were only interested in promoting their own self-interests, Hobbes believed democracy - allowing citizens to vote for government leaders - would never work. Hobbes wrote, "All mankind [is in] a perpetual and restless desire for power... that [stops] only in death." Consequently, giving power to the individual would create a dangerous situation that would start a "war of every man against every man" and make life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

Despite his distrust of democracy, Hobbes believed that a diverse group of representatives presenting the problems of the common person would, hopefully, prevent a king from being cruel and unfair. During Hobbes' lifetime, business began to have a big influence on government. Those who could contribute money to the government were given great status, and business interests were very powerful. In order to offset the growing power of business, Hobbes believed that an individual could be heard in government by authorizing a representative to speak on their behalf. In fact, Hobbes came up with the phrase "voice of the people," which meant that one person could be chosen to represent a group with similar views. However, this "voice" was merely heard and not necessarily listened to - final decisions lay with the king.
John Locke widely known as the Father of Liberalism[^2][^3][^4] was an English philosopher and physician regarded as one of the most influential of Enlightenment thinkers. Considered one of the first of the British empiricists, following the tradition of Francis Bacon, he is equally important to social contract theory. His work had a great impact upon the development of epistemology and political philosophy. His writings influenced Voltaire and Rousseau, many Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, as well as the American revolutionaries. His contributions to classical republicanism and liberal theory are reflected in the American Declaration of Independence.[^5]

Locke's theory of mind is often cited as the origin of modern conceptions of identity and the self, figuring prominently in the work of later philosophers such as Hume, Rousseau and Kant. Locke was the first to define the self through a continuity of consciousness. He postulated that the mind was a blank slate or tabula rasa. Contrary to pre-existing Cartesian philosophy, he maintained that we are born without innate ideas, and that knowledge is instead determined only by experience derived from sense perception.[^6]

Locke exercised a profound influence on political philosophy, in particular on modern liberalism. Michael Zuckert has argued that Locke launched liberalism by tempering Hobbesian absolutism and clearly separating the realms of Church and State. He had a strong influence on Voltaire who called him "le sage Locke". His arguments concerning liberty and the social contract later influenced the written works of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and other Founding Fathers of the United States. In fact, one passage from the Second Treatise is reproduced verbatim in the Declaration of Independence, the
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

In his early writing, Rousseau contended that man is essentially good, a "noble savage" when in the "state of nature" (the state of all the other animals, and the condition man was in before the creation of civilization and society), and that good people are made unhappy and corrupted by their experiences in society. He viewed society as "artificial" and "corrupt" and that the furthering of society results in the continuing unhappiness of man.

Rousseau's essay, "Discourse on the Arts and Sciences" (1750), argued that the advancement of art and science had not been beneficial to mankind. He proposed that the progress of knowledge had made governments more powerful, and crushed individual liberty. He concluded that material progress had actually undermined the possibility of sincere friendship, replacing it with jealousy, fear and suspicion.

Perhaps Rousseau's most important work is "The Social Contract" that describes the relationship of man with society. Contrary to his earlier work, Rousseau claimed that the state of nature is brutish condition without law or morality, and that there are good men only a result of society's presence. In the state of nature, man is prone to be in frequent competition with his fellow men. Because he can be more successful facing threats by joining with other men, he has the impetus to do so. He joins together with his fellow men to form the collective human presence known as "society." "The Social Contract" is the "compact" agreed to among men that sets the conditions for membership in society.

Rousseau was one of the first modern writers to seriously attack the institution of private property, and therefore is considered a forebear of modern socialism and Communism (see Karl Marx). Rousseau also questioned the assumption that the will of the majority is always correct. He argued that the goal of government should be to secure freedom, equality, and justice for all within the state, regardless of the will of the majority.

One of the primary principles of Rousseau's political philosophy is that politics and morality should not be separated. When a state fails to act in a moral fashion, it ceases to function in the proper manner and ceases to exert genuine authority over the individual. The second important principle is freedom, which the state is created to preserve.

Rousseau's ideas about education have profoundly influenced modern educational theory. He minimizes the importance of book learning, and recommends that a child's emotions should be educated before his reason. He placed a special emphasis on learning by experience.
Mary Wollstonecraft

The Anglo-Irish feminist, intellectual and writer, Mary Wollstonecraft, was born in London, the second of six children. Her father, Edward John Wollstonecraft, was a family despot who bullied his wife, Elizabeth Dixon, into a state of wearied servitude. He spent a fortune which he had inherited in various unsuccessful ventures at farming which took the family to six different locales throughout Britain by 1780, the year Mary’s mother died.

At the age of nineteen Mary went out to earn her own livelihood. In 1783, she helped her sister Eliza escape a miserable marriage by hiding her from a brutal husband until a legal separation was arranged. The two sisters established a school at Newington Green, an experience from which Mary drew to write Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life (1787). Mary became the governess in the family of Lord Kingsborough, living most of the time in Ireland. Upon her dismissal in 1787, she settled in George Street, London, determined to take up a literary career.

In 1788 she became translator and literary advisor to Joseph Johnson, the publisher of radical texts. In this capacity she became acquainted with and accepted among the most advanced circles of London intellectual and radical thought. When Johnson launched the Analytical Review in 1788, Mary became a regular contributor of articles and reviews. In 1790 she produced her Vindication of the Rights of Man, the first response to Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France. She was furious that the man who had once defended the American colonies so eloquently should now assault the sacred revolution and libel Richard Price, a close friend of her Newington days.

In 1792, she published her Vindication on the Rights of Woman, an important work which, advocating equality of the sexes, and the main doctrines of the later women's movement, made her both famous and infamous in her own time. She ridiculed prevailing notions about women as helpless, charming adornments in the household. Society had bred "gentle domestic brutes." "Educated in slavish dependence and enervated by luxury and sloth," women were too often nauseatingly sentimental and foolish. A confined existence also produced the sheer frustration that transformed these