

# John Locke:

## Summary of Major Works

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In his works “A Letter Concerning Toleration” (1689) and “The Second Treatise On Civil Government” (1690), philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) created what would become the philosophical source for many of the founding principles and founding documents of the United States. Locke believed, among other things, that political leaders are not in a better position to grasp the truth than other men are, and thus have no right to attempt to force their opinions on others. Locke has been called the intellectual founding father of the United States.

1. Locke believed that people form governments in order to protect their rights to life, liberty and property.
2. He also said that, since every person is by nature free, equal and independent, no one can be ruled by a government without his consent.
3. Therefore, absolute monarchy and other forms of non-democratic government are not legitimate.
4. However, no one can refuse to obey the law, just because he or she does not like the law.
5. On the other hand, if a monarch or legislature seizes power that does not belong to him/her or it, or makes laws without the consent of the people, the laws are illegitimate and the people do not have to obey the laws. Indeed, if that happens, they can rebel and replace the government.
6. Locke also argued that laws are legitimate only if they are designed to protect individuals from other people or from other outside forces. In contrast, if a law is designed to protect a person from himself or herself, the law is not legitimate.
7. Although Locke thought that religion is important, he argued that it was wrong to say that governments get their authority from God. He thought that governments get their authority from the People. In fact, he said that peace and friendship are impossible if people think that governments get their authority from God, or if people try to spread religion “by force of arms.”
8. He also said it was wrong to try to force people to follow a particular religion, and that government cannot discriminate based on religion - regardless of whether the person is Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Pagan. However, he thought that governments could discriminate against atheists.
9. Locke argued that people should welcome new ideas, and said that “new opinions are always suspected, and usually opposed, without any other reason but because they are not already common.”