

# Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 – 1527)

- Niccolò Machiavelli, (born May 3, 1469 in Florence, Italy ) was a famous Italian Renaissance political philosopher and statesman, secretary of the Florentine republic. He contributed to a large number of important ideas in Western thought—political theory most notably, but also history and historiography, Italian literature, the principles of warfare, and diplomacy. But Machiavelli never seems to have considered himself a philosopher.
- He advocated the theory that whatever was expedient was necessary - an early example of utilitarianism (do what is practical...what makes the most sense). He also believed it was always better to be feared. He also insisted if an end justified the means, then it was okay to do whatever was necessary to achieve those goals. Ruthlessness was a necessity, and honor a option.
- His two most famous books, *Discourses on Livy* and *The Prince* became general handbooks for a new style in politics. In *The Prince*, he suggested that good rulers sometimes have to learn "not to be good," they have to be willing to set aside ethical concerns of justice, honesty, and kindness in order to maintain the stability of the state. Machiavelli argued that the most successful kings were not the ones who acted according to dictates of law, or justice, or conscience, but those willing to do whatever was necessary to preserve their own power--and thus indirectly preserve the order of the state. His title, "The Prince," in fact, is a subtle mockery of the idea that rulers should be noble in their character. "Machiavellian" became a by-word for treachery, sneakiness, ambition, and ruthlessness.
- Machiavelli influenced other political scientists, including Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), who praised Machiavelli for being such an honest creature, and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), author of *Leviathan* (1651), who agreed with Machiavelli that all people were weak, and needed a strong ruler, else society run to complete decay.

“Before all else, be armed.”

“You should keep your friends close, and your enemies closer.”

“He who wishes to be obeyed must know how to command.”

“It is not titles that honor men, but men that honor titles.”

“The first method for estimating the intelligence of a ruler is to look at the men he has around him.”



# Voltaire (1694–1778)

- François-Marie d'Arouet, better known by his pen name Voltaire, was a French writer and public activist who played a singular role in defining the eighteenth-century movement called the Enlightenment.
- Voltaire distrusted democracy. To Voltaire only an enlightened monarch, advised by philosophers like himself, could bring about change as it was in the king's rational interest to improve the power and wealth of France in the world. Voltaire is quoted as saying that he "would rather obey one lion, than 200 rats of (his own) species". Voltaire essentially believed monarchy to be the key to progress and change.
- As far as religion was concerned, he criticized the Catholic Church and favored an understanding of God beyond institutionalized religion and defended, in *A Treatise on Toleration* (1763), that all men are brothers, regardless of religion, as they are the same creature created by the same God. Therefore, he promoted the idea of freedom of religion.
- Voltaire favored individualism, believed people were born with equal worth. Although he wanted everyone to be free and equal, he thought that a government would never succeed in governing themselves because everyone would have never-ending power and there would be no structure. The government Voltaire really wanted was one with a monarch king, no lords or serfs.
- Today, Voltaire is remembered and honored in France as a courageous man who fought for civil rights, the right to a fair trial and freedom of religion, and who denounced the hypocrisies and injustices of the ancient régime.



- "Love truth, but pardon error."
- "It is better to risk sparing a guilty person than to condemn an innocent one."
- "Common sense is not so common."
- "All murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets."
- "Every man is a creature of the age in which he lives, and few are able to raise themselves above the ideas of the time."

# William Blackstone (1723–1780)

- William Blackstone was an English Judge and professor who produced the historical and analytic treatise on the common law entitled *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. These volumes had a substantial influence in American law. In fact, in American and British colleges used his commentaries for years after his death in 1780.
- Blackstone believed God has built into the universe fundamental laws that are fixed, unchangeable, and must be obeyed. He believed the purpose of human law is to “command what is right, prohibiting what is wrong.” He expressed that human law is not to violate God’s law, but is to decide what are right and wrong in regard to “things in themselves indifferent” . Human law’s most effective tool for producing right conduct and preventing wrong conduct is sanctions – punishment.
- Blackstone's commentaries influenced American law in many ways. For example, the Supreme Court cited Blackstone in *Marbury V. Madison* in its opinion of this case. His theories also influenced the writers of the United States Constitution. Especially in the first ten amendments to this historic document. Two examples of this are in the impeachment clause (to bring charges against a high official) and in the second amendment (freedom to bear arms).

## There are three primary personal rights:

Personal security. The right ...consists in a person’s legal and uninterrupted enjoyment of his life, his limbs, his body, his health, and his reputation.

Personal liberty. This personal liberty consists in the power of locomotion, of changing situation, or removing one’s person to whatsoever place one’s own inclination may direct; without imprisonment or restraint, unless by due course of law.

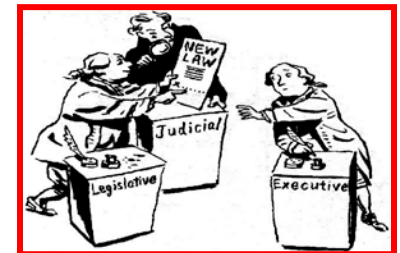
Right of private property: law of the land. [This right] consists in the free use, enjoyment, and disposal [by man] of all his acquisitions, without any control or diminution, save only by the laws of the land.



# Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755)



- Charles Louis de Secondat (**Baron de Montesquieu**) was born in Bordeaux, France in 1689 and became a famous French Philosopher.
- Montesquieu was very concerned about the relationship between religion and violence. He writes in the *Persian Letters*, "I can assure you that no kingdom has ever had as many evil wars as the kingdom of Christ." A character in the *Persian Letters* states strongly, "in order to love and conform to one's religion it is not necessary to hate and persecute those who do not conform to it." Montesquieu argued not for atheism (belief that there is no God), but rather a secular (worldly) morality that is tolerant of many different religions.
- Despite Montesquieu's belief in religious tolerance, he did not feel that all people were equal. Montesquieu approved of slavery. He also thought that women were weaker than men and that they had to obey the commands of their husbands.
- According to Montesquieu, there are three forms of government: monarchy (rule by a king or queen), aristocracy (rule by the noble or wealthy class), and republicanism (rule by Elected leaders). Montesquieu was opposed to absolute monarchy (where no other persons or institutions have any control over the monarch) and believed that a monarchy with limited powers makes countries the most stable and secure. People's role in government, Montesquieu believed, should be based on political virtue (moral goodness) and equality. Political virtue means that citizens voluntarily put their public interests above their individual interests. States should be kept small to make it easier for people to play a role in Government. Montesquieu believed that the success of a government depends upon maintaining the right balance of power between different branches and each branch would check that the other branches did not abuse their power



# Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1788)



- Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born in Geneva, Switzerland in 1712. At the age of 30, he moved to Paris and quickly established himself as one of the most outstanding philosophers of the eighteenth century.
- Unlike most other philosophers of his time, Rousseau believed that people are born good, independent, and compassionate. If left to their own devices in a state of nature people would naturally live happily and peacefully. In fact, such a society would be free and ideal, much more satisfying than the inequalities brought by modern society.
- Although direct democracy was extremely rare outside of Switzerland at that time, Rousseau believed it was the ideal way for people to make decisions. He referred to how nondemocratic governments in Europe had corrupted modern people when he wrote in his book *The Social Contract*, "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains." He believed that even representative democracy (where people vote for other people to represent them)-as in England and the United States-is corrupt. "Any law which the people has not ratified in person is void; it is not law at all. The English people believes itself to be free; it is gravely mistaken; it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as the Members are elected, the people are enslaved."
- Freedom, for many philosophers, meant chaos or anarchy (no government). In contrast, Rousseau believed that people can be both ruled and free if they rule themselves. He thought that governments should exist on the basis of a democratic "social contract," where people have direct say in the way their society is governed. Only through direct democracy, Rousseau felt, can people's freedom be preserved. While Rousseau believed that all adult males should help make the laws in assemblies, those who administer or carry out the laws (like presidents and prime ministers) can be elected as representatives of the people.

# Cesar Beccaria (1738–1794)



- Cesar Beccaria was an Italian judge, philosopher and politician best known for his treatise *On Crimes and Punishments* where he states that individuals have freewill and make choices on that freewill. Beccaria believed with the right punishment the criminal justice system can control the free willed and rational human being. Beccaria expresses not only the need for the criminal justice system, but also government's right to have laws and punishments.
- Beccaria believes that when one chooses to live in a society, then one chooses to give up some personal liberties in exchange for the safety and comfort of a society. (Social Contract). Laws, in his opinion, should be enlightened, rational, logical and should be the greatest good for the greatest number. Rules against vagueness, right to public trial, right to be judged by peers, right to dismiss certain jurors, right against unusual punishments, right to speedy trial, right to examine witnesses, coerced or tortured confessions are considered invalid, right to be informed of accused acts and the right to bear arms are rights that are essential in all society's.
- The U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights were greatly influenced by Beccaria, and many of the rights that he advocated were made the foundation of the United States.

# Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)



- Mary Wollstonecraft, born in London in 1759, was one of the first women during the late Eighteenth century to actively call for the rights of women. She said that women had an inferior role in society because of the environment in which they grew up, and not because women were inherently inferior.
- Women led a restricted life during Wollstonecraft's time. Men generally thought that women had an inferior intellect and considered them weak by nature. She believed that all people are equal and that every person possesses the natural right to determine his or her own destiny. Human nature can be perfected if education is improved and oppression ended. Oppressive systems-which include the rule of masters over slaves as well as the rule of husbands over wives-corrupt both the oppressed and the oppressor. Thus, all of society would benefit from equality and the end of male domination over women. She called to an end to Monarchy.
- I am about to display 'the mind of a woman, who has thinking powers,'“ Wollstonecraft wrote in the introduction of her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. During this period in England, women had virtually no rights of political participation. They could not receive an education, vote, or run for public office. In addition, women were not allowed access to the court system-they could not file a complaint, appear in court, or hire a lawyer. Women were not allowed to hold jobs in government, medicine, or a number of other occupations.
- Inequality between men and women is not the result of natural differences, Wollstonecraft believed, but rather the result of the powerful tyranny (cruel and unjust rule) of men. Women do not have the opportunity to prove their equality because men have keep them in inferior positions. "Let men prove [that women are weaker]," she wrote. If men truly want to confirm women's inferiority, they must first treat women as equals, she believed.

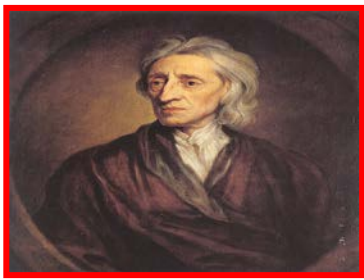




# Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)

- Thomas Hobbes was born in England in 1588. He grew up during the English Civil War which was a time of much social unrest. In 1651 Hobbes became a political philosopher and wrote his most famous work *Leviathan*. In it, he argued that people are naturally wicked and cannot be trusted to govern. Therefore, Hobbes believed that an absolute monarchy—a government that gives all power to a king or queen—is best. He said that democracy could not work because selfish people would always put their own interests ahead of the nation's.
- Hobbes wrote that humans are driven by a "perpetual and restless desire [for] power...that ceases only in death." Because he thought that people act in their own selfish interests if they are left alone, Hobbes did not believe that people should be trusted to make their own decisions. He also felt that nations, like people, are selfishly motivated and in a constant battle for power and wealth. He believed that people should voluntarily give power to a king who would guide the country.
- Hobbes believed the best ruler would be a monarchy because he felt a country needs an authority figure to provide direction and leadership. Because the people are only interested in promoting their own interests, Hobbes believed that democracy—allowing citizens to vote for government leaders—would never work.
- Hobbes reasoned that all people should voluntarily choose to give up their rights to the leader who then would protect people from one another and ensure peace. This idea was not the same as divine right—the belief that monarchs are chosen by God and thus people do not have the right to question their rule. Instead, Hobbes believed that a ruler's absolute power comes not from God, but from people rationally deciding that this is in their best interests.
- Hobbes considered that the ruler could abuse his or her absolute power and become cruel and unfair. However, this problem could be lessened Hobbes believed by appointing a diverse group of representatives to present the problems of the common people to the ruler. These representative would only have the power to present opinions, since all final decisions would be made by the leader.





# John Locke (1632–1704)

- Locke was born in England in 1632 and will eventually leave England because he valued individual freedom of religion.
- Throughout his writings, Locke argued that people have the gift of reason, or the ability to think. Locke thought people have 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 this idea of "Divine Right," which many kings and queens used to justify their right to rule. In his own society, Locke supported a monarchy (rule by king or queen) whose power is limited to ensure that the rights of the people are respected. He argued that governments including the limited monarchy under which he lived-should only operate with the consent, or approval, of the people being governed.
- Governments are formed, according to Locke, to protect the right to life, the right to freedom, and the right to property. These rights are absolute, belonging to all people. Locke believed that ideally government power should be divided equally into three branches of government so that politicians do not face the "temptation...to grasp at [absolute] power." If any government abuses the rights of the people instead of protecting them, the people have the right to rebel and form a new government. He wrote, "Whenever[ the preservation of life, liberty, and property for which power is given to rulers by a commonwealth ] is manifestly neglected or opposed, the trust must necessarily be forfeited and then [returned] into the hands of those that gave it, who may place it anew where they think best for their safety and security." Locke's idea that only the consent of the governed gives validity to a government inspired the founders of new democracy such as the writers of the United States Constitution.