

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Purpose of Government

by John Locke

John Locke (1633–1704) was an English philosopher who is best known for modern concept of government. It is argued that Locke’s writing, including Two Treatises of Government published anonymously in 1689, laid the framework for the Enlightenment. His ideas of government profoundly influenced the framers of the United States government. John Locke argued that in a state of nature people are born with certain inviolable rights that are life, liberty, and property. People are willing to form a social contract with a government for the preservation of their rights. He further argued that people hold the right to overthrow and change the government if it fails to preserve people’s rights.

Primary Source:

. . .Political power is that power, which every man having in the state of nature, has given up into the hands of the society, and therein to the governors, whom the society hath set over itself, with this express or tacit trust, that it shall be employed for their good, and the **preservation** of their property: now this power, which every man has in the state of nature, and which he parts with to the society...is to use such means, for the preserving of his own property...; and to punish the breach of the law of nature in others... this power...can have no other end or measure,

. . .when in the hands of the magistrate, but to preserve the members of that society in their lives, liberties, and possessions; and so cannot be an absolute, **arbitrary** power over their lives and fortunes... but a power to make laws, and **annex** such penalties to them... And this power has its original only from compact, and agreement, and the mutual consent of those who make up the community. . . .

These are the bounds...set to the legislative power: first, they are to govern by **promulgated** established laws...secondly, these laws also ought to be designed for no other end ultimately, but the good of the people. Thirdly, They must not raise taxes on the property of the people, without the consent of the people, given by themselves, or their deputies...Fourthly, The legislative neither must nor can transfer the power of making laws to anybody else, ...but where the people have...

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Glossary:

preservation: protection

arbitrary: based on random choice

annex: join

promulgate: to put in effect

Citation: John Locke, "Second Treatise on Government," in *Sources of the Western Tradition, Vol. II: From the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Marvin Perry, et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 63.

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Whenever the legislators endeavor to take away, and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people...

Whensoever therefore the legislative shall **transgress** this fundamental rule of society; and ...endeavor to grasp themselves, or 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 the people had put into their hands... and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and, by the establishment of a new legislative, provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for which they are in society.

Glossary:

transgress: infringe upon

forfeit: lose or be deprived of