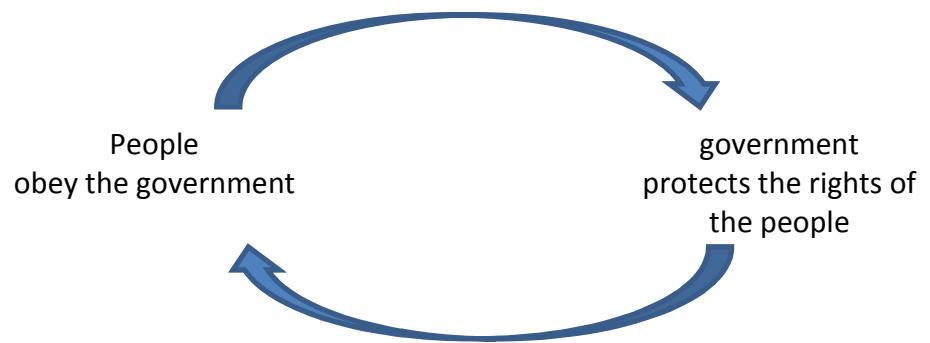


Locke's Social Contract Theory



1. **Natural rights** of man—life, liberty, and property
They are called natural because all men are born with them. These are not rights that are created by government or society; we all have them, before any government is created or introduced.
2. **State of nature**—the only way to enforce your rights is to use violence, and although you have this right, it brings about a continual state of warfare among people
3. In order to avoid this state of continual warfare, the people consent to form a government that will protect their rights.
4. Based on point (3), the only government with a claim to obedience is one that rules by consent of the people, to protect their rights.
 - i. For example, if a king by himself attempted taxation, this would be depriving the people of their rights to property, but for an elected body of representatives to approve of taxes, however, was simply the people agreeing to tax themselves.
 - ii. Committing crimes was a way of warring against the community and its members' rights, and so punishment was seen as self-defense and preservation of those rights.
 - iii. This theory provided a foundation which entirely did away with divine right of kings, or any justification for an absolutist or tyrannical state.

Historical background:

- John Locke's version of the social contract was what the Founding Fathers had in mind. Locke published his *Two Treatises on Civil Government* in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when Britain overthrew its King James II and invited William III and Mary (James' daughter) to rule.
- The fact that many American colonists in the 1600s were Calvinists provided a strong foundation of support for this idea in the colonies, as Calvinists, being persecuted by Catholics and Anglicans alike, were strong adherents of the social contract theory, and of the right to rebel from a tyranny.
- In the 1800s, the idea of social contract fell out of favor, as people began to fear the violence of the French revolution and subsequent French conquest of much of Europe. Rousseau wrote of a social contract in which government had unlimited power, which made many see popular government not as preserving freedom, but as taking it away.
- The philosopher Thomas Hobbes (mid-1600s) held that people had given over (or *alienated*), absolute power to their government, when they consented to live under that government; this is why the Declaration of Independence uses the phrase "inalienable rights"—to stress that the people retained these rights when they consented to live under a government.