

A possible
explanation why john
locke is such an
aggressive critique of
thomas ho...

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Introduction Writing in the 1650's, Thomas Hobbes sought to address the prevalent problem of war by seeking to obtain those rational principles that will aid the construction of a "civil polity that will not be subject to destruction from within. [1]" Hobbes employs the idea of a "social contract" to resolve that seemingly intractable problem of war and disorder. He begins by imagining how people were in their natural condition i. e. before the emergence of a civil society. According to Hobbes, in that natural condition all men are equal and all possess the power of rationality.

However, they are also "fundamentally selfish" each person's desires are for his (or her) own survival and reproduction. "[2] As people increase in number, they will start competing for resources, glory and love and since in that condition there is no law to put into check human behavior, there will inevitably emerge a state of war. As Hobbes puts it, "...during that time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man..."

And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short"[3] The remedy of such a situation is only possible because all people possess rationality which, as Hobbes argues, will necessarily lead them to "create a government run by a sovereign holding absolute power, because only absolute power is sufficient to resolve disputes that otherwise would precipitate conflict dissolving the commonwealth and threatening the lives of all. "[4] Put simply, Hobbes' Leviathan theory contends that the state should have absolute power and no one should be able to overthrow it.

It took forty years and the person of John Locke, in his Second Treatise of Government, to point out the grave problems presented by the Leviathan Idea. Locke's scathing attack on the Leviathan idea takes a two-fold approach. Firstly, it addresses what he observes as an incorrect description by Hobbes of men and women in their natural condition. To Locke, what Hobbes describes is actually the 'state of war', a condition different from the 'state of nature'. Secondly, and this is the gist of his critique, he argues against an absolute state on two main reasons.

One, according to him, human beings do not have absolute power and therefore they cannot give what they do not have to the state. And two, the possession of absolute power by the state will deny men and women their property yet the preservation of property is the reason for them to form a civil society. In this paper, I explore each of the above-mentioned lines of criticisms by Locke on Hobbes' Leviathan Idea as a possible explanation to why he is such an aggressive critique of the Leviathan idea.

Then, I present a personal reflection that points out some errors in Locke's criticisms but concludes by appreciating that the criticisms by Locke contribute to the advancement of political thought. The "state of nature/natural condition" is not necessarily a "state of war" Hobbes apparently mixes two different conditions which blend into what many commentaries term an overly pessimistic view of the nature of human beings in their state of nature. Locke makes a clear distinction between these two 'states'.

Unlike Hobbes, Locke views the natural condition as a “ state of Peace, Goodwill, Mutual Assistance, and Preservation... (wherein people live together) according to reason, without a common Superior on Earth, with Authority to judge between them. “[5] Here Locke outrightly opposes Hobbes’ Leviathan theory in the sense that he implicitly argues for the upper role that reason takes in governing people’s behaviors while subordinating self-interest and passions.

It is a “ State of perfect Freedom (of men and women) to order their Actions and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature...”[6] This law of nature forbids anyone from destroying himself/herself or any other person for that matter, “ when his (or her) own preservation comes not in competition” and requires everyone to do as much as they can to “ preserve the rest of mankind”[7]

Locke sharply contrasts this ‘ state of nature’ with a ‘ state of war’. He describes the ‘ state of war’ as “ a state of Enmity, Malice, Violence, and Mutual Destruction. ” To him, it is this description of a ‘ state of war’ that corresponds to Hobbes’ view of the natural condition. Against absolute power of the state From Hobbes’ conception of life in the natural condition as I have illustrated in the introduction, Hobbes comes to the conclusion that the only way that people can save themselves is by abandoning that condition and getting into a society in such a manner as if each individual was to say to another “ I Authorize and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man (or woman), or to this Assembly of men (and/or women), on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him (or her), and Authorize all his

Actions in like manner. “[8] By entering into society through this giving up of one’s rights, two implications necessarily follow. Not only do the members of the multitude have no remaining right to question the actions of their sovereign; they have a positive duty to own whatever actions their sovereign may undertake in seeking their safety and contentment. “[9] Hobbes tries to use his account of attributed action to argue that whatever the sovereign will do, will be in the best interest of his/her subjects. Attributed action here means that the acts of the Leviathan are actually nothing other than the acts of individual members of the multitude[10].

Locke fiercely opposes this simplistic way of thinking. First, he argues that men and women in their natural condition do not have absolute power and so they are in no position to give it to the state. Locke argues from the common sense principle that no one can give what he or she has not. Human beings by their very nature do not have absolute power and therefore even if all men and women were to surrender all their power to the state, still it is not logically conceivable that the state will possess absolute power.

Regarding the power of the Leviathan, Locke correctly articulates, “...it can be no more than those persons had in a State of Nature before they entered into Society, and gave up to the Community. For no Body can transfer to another more power than he (or she) has in himself (or herself); and no Body has an absolute Arbitrary Power over himself (or herself) or over any other...”[11] Secondly, Locke argues that allowing the sovereign to have absolute arbitrary power will cause more harm than good in case the sovereign turns against the people.

Locke observes that the state still is made up of the same men and women who come from the state of nature. This means that those who make up the state are self-interested like everybody else. Giving them absolute power is very dangerous since in case they turn against their subjects no one will be able to stop them. In this light, Locke concludes that even the state of nature with its own 'inconveniences' would be a much better condition to live in than in Hobbes' commonwealth.

He gives his reason that whereas in the 'state of nature' everyone was at liberty to defend their rights against aggressors, in the absolute state they are defenseless and vulnerable to any injury that the state chooses to inflict upon them. Entering into an absolute state is as if people "were to put themselves into a worse condition than the state of Nature, wherein they had a Liberty to defend their Right against the Injuries of others...(and) have disarmed themselves, and armed him (or her i. . the state) to make a prey of them when he (or she) pleases. "[12] To Locke, this is unacceptable and so he proposes that the power of the state should be Supreme not Absolute. The state should therefore be identified with law rather than might in the sense that the law should be above the state so as to keep that very state in check. In addition, Locke asserts "the right of people to resist their rulers when they are misruled by them. [13] By saying this, Locke is reacting against Hobbes' affirmation regarding the rights of the sovereign by institution that the subjects not only cannot change the form of government, but also are not justified in any way to protest against the institution of the sovereign, accuse them or punish them. [14] Locke's criteria of a good government is one that achieves the ends for which it has been formed i. e.

preservation of property. 15] If the end for which it was formed is not met, and the property owners are left miserable, not just once but over a long period, then Locke rests the liberty on the people to overthrow that government and form a new one as they think fit. [16] Critical remarks

Certainly, Hobbes deserves credit for his quite accurate analysis that in the absence of social order and discipline, people are very likely to fall into a state of insecurity and therefore live in fear. Nevertheless, the solution he recommends i. e. a Leviathan " though plausible " is very risky and could be worse in the long run.

I concur with Locke when he advocates for supreme and not absolute power of the state. Locke does a good job by shattering that simplistic view held by Hobbes that the state, though consisting of the same men and women from the ' state of nature' who are self-interested, will always act for the good of all. This way of thinking was quite naive of Hobbes for, being comprised of ordinary men and women, the state could turn against its subjects at any time. In addition, I second his proposal that if a state does fulfill its duties for a long period of time, it should be overthrown and another put in its place.

I, however, disagree with Locke on two grounds. First, his conception of human beings in their state of nature is a movement from a pessimistic extreme of Hobbes to an optimistic extreme. I think that the true state of nature of man consists in a mean between these two extremes. Second, the government, as Locke understood it, applies only to the people that have property. This means that he supposes that those who have no property have no reason to enter into a government. Consequently, he entertains

inequality among the members of the society i. e. the property owners and those that are without property.

All in all, it can be argued that Locke's criticism on Hobbes' Leviathan idea has marked an advancement in political thought because, though he is not entirely correct, he provides very useful insights that can help the formation of a government of the people, for the people and by the people. Conclusion In this paper, I have illustrated that Locke is an aggressive critique of Hobbes due to two possible reasons: firstly, because Locke conceives the 'state of nature', unlike in the case of Hobbes, as different from the 'state of war' and secondly, for the reason that he fiercely argues against granting absolute power to the State.

I have also given a brief personal reflection that has suggested that though Locke's criticisms are not all perfect, still, they have been instrumental in recommending democracy as a better form of government. By Liech Joel Robinson E-mail[(mailto:)]com Tel +256779563023 Bibliography 1. Hampton, J. , ' Thomas Hobbes', in Classics of Political and Moral Philosophy, Cahn, S. M. , ed. , New York: Oxford University Press, 2002 2. Hobbes, T. , Leviathan, London: Penguin Books, 1968 ed. 3. Lloyd, S. A. , and Susanne S. , " Hobbes's Moral and Political Philosophy", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2009 Edition), Zalta, E. N. ?? ed. , [online] Available from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/hobbes-moral/> 4. Locke, J. , Second Treatise of Government, Macpherson, C. B. , ed. , Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 5. Locke, J. , Two Treatises of Government, Laslett, P. , ed. , New York: The New American Library, Inc. 6. Skinner, Q. ,

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and Society: Vol. 1, London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd. , 1963, p. 210 [14] Hobbes, T. , op. cit. , pp. 228 – 232 [15] The word property here is used

to give it collective meaning as Locke used it. It therefore implies not only

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material goods that human beings possess but also life and liberty or freedom. For more reading see Tuckness, A. , “ Locke’s Political Philosophy”, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition), Zalta, E. N. , ed. , [online] Available from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/locke-political/> [23rd April, 2009] [16] Locke, J. , op. cit. , p. 477