

Locke and hobbes purpose of government assignment



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Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were political philosophers of the seventeenth century who each attempted to decipher the best form of government. Though they were both naturalists, Locke and Hobbes shared very different views on the natural laws that moved humans and this led to radically different beliefs on what they thought to be the ideal form of government. The first conceptual difference between Hobbes and Locke is the necessity of a central authority for humans to be able to live together in a peaceful and stable environment.

For both philosophers, when humans exist without any acting authority it is known as a state of nature. According to Hobbes a state of nature was a condition in which humans are constantly fearful for their safety and experience only fleeting moments of pleasure. This means that it is almost impossible to have any sort of meaningful existence without the presence of a universal authority, or as Hobbes calls it a Leviathan. In a Hobbesian state of nature, humans are all provided with four things: scarcity, equality, reason and a universal aversion to death.

The scarcity of the world leads to a life or death competition for a limited amount of resources. This competition for basic needs, along with the ability to reason, leads to the understanding that the acquisition of resources for oneself, comes at the expense of another human. According to Hobbes, these rationalizations are always present in a state of nature and this leads to the idea that humans are naturally non-social animals. Hobbes believes that without a central power, humans have no chance of living together in peace.

An important issue that arises both in both Locke and Hobbes is conditions in which a person can legitimately exit civil society. Hobbes' view on the nature of civil society allows him to conclude that societies are held together by reason and not inclination or affection. Hobbes goes on to explain that once a civil society is in place, rationality will make humans hugely averse to any thought involving not having a sovereign or returning to a state of nature. This means that a person who wants to exit a civil society is displaying either severely atypical behavior or is not acting with reason.

In Hobbes' view, there is no way in which a person can legitimately leave civil society. In distinction from Hobbes, Locke believes that it is not at all uncommon for someone to leave civil society. Unlike in Hobbes, the purpose of government in Locke's civil society is to serve the people and if a civil society is not beneficial, it is legitimate for a person to return to a state of nature. Locke believes that the move to civil society is a twofold process and in his view it is common for the members of a society to take a step back and put a different government in place that will be more beneficial to the people.

Understanding the benefits of entering civil society in both systems is important, but it is also significant to understand the different circumstances in which a person may be forced to enter civil society in Hobbes and Locke. One of the principle differences between Locke's philosophy and Hobbes' philosophy is the extent to which the legitimacy of the sovereign's power hinges on its serving the interests of the people. According to Hobbes the Leviathan in a civil society still exists in a state of nature.

This means that he that the Leviathan subject only to the laws of nature and does not actually owe anything to his people. The only real obligation of the Leviathan is to make his presence felt and even then, his power is not based on serving the interests of the people but on maintaining himself as the one and only source of authority. This is far different from the circumstances of Locke's form of government. In Locke's theory the government's powers are totally dependent on being beneficial to the citizens of civil society.

Locke believed that it was totally legitimate and even encouraged to change the government if they were not reflecting the will of the people. These contrary views were caused by the fundamental differences that existed in the purposes of government according to the views of Locke and Hobbes. The purpose of Hobbes' government was to maintain stability and a Leviathan who was subject to the changing interests of the uneducated masses was not stable at all. Locke however believed in government as a neutral judge and the replacement of the government according to the will of the people was an entirely legitimate course of action.