

# Thomas hobbes and john locke assignment

[History](#)



Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were two of the great political theorists of their time. Both created great philosophical texts that help to describe the role of government in man's life, as well as their views of man's state of nature. Even though both men do have opposite views on many of their political arguments, the fact that they are able to structure their separate ideologies on the state of man in nature is the bond that connects them. Both men look toward the creation of civil order in order to protect not only the security of the individual, but also the security of the state.

For Hobbes, the state of nature is a very bleak, dreary place. He believed that people in this state were not guided by reason, but instead were guided by our innate primal, animalistic instincts. Hobbes believed that moral concepts such as the ideas of good and evil did not exist in the state of nature, and that man could use any force necessary in order to protect his life and goods around him. Hobbes called this condition "War" which meant "every man against every man. Hobbes also described the state of nature as having no benefits that people in modern society take for granted: "No commerce, no agriculture, and no account of time, no arts, no letters, and no society." Men in this state live with an overbearing sense of fear and grief, always on the defense in order to protect themselves, and their possessions. Hobbes relates man's wanting to escape from the state of nature and war by looking towards peace, which allows man to dissolve his incessant feeling of fear. In order to obtain peace, he looks to man using reason, which enables man to respond to what Hobbes calls "The Laws of Nature".

It is through these laws that man can seek peace and to enable man's natural right to all things, providing that others will do the same. Hobbes

labeled this mutual transferring of rights between men a “ contract”. Hobbes believed that there still must be some common power in effect in order to enforce the laws, because it was his fear that human’s hunger for power would always be a threat to the contract. Out of the various forms of government, he preferred the idea of an absolute monarch to rule over the people.

He also concluded that there must be some sovereign authority that was created by the people as part of the social contract that would be endowed with the individual powers and the wills of all, and would be authorized to punish anyone who broke the rules. This absolute sovereign, dubbed “ Leviathan” was to be so effective because it helped to create a continuous circle that reinforced the social contract. The sovereign operated through fear; the threat of punishment helped to reinforce the mandates that the laws of nature provided, thereby ensuring the continued operation of the social contract that was in place.

It was through this creation of an absolute ruler, that the idea of the “ Commonwealth” was created. People who lived under the rule of the sovereign in the commonwealth essentially gave up all of their own personal rights to govern themselves to the sovereign. The “ people” in the commonwealth are able to retain their right to self-preservation by endowing the sovereign with all of their other rights. It is through this transfer of power, and entering into the contract with the sovereign in the commonwealth, that Hobbes states how man is able to get out of the state of nature and into society.

John Locke also believed in many of the same ideas as Thomas Hobbes, such as the social contract and the state of nature, however the positions in which he took on them were sometimes polar opposites. In Locke's view of the state of nature, he states that while there were no civil societies yet formed, people basically were able to live in peace, because the natural laws that governed them were an innate quality in which everyone had. He stated that in the state of nature, all people were equal, and had executive power of the natural laws.

Whereas Hobbes believed the state of "war" was a natural part of the state of nature, Locke differed, saying that the two were not the same. Locke believed that the state of nature involved people living together, using reason to govern their lives without the need for a common superior, or leader. The state of "war" occurred when people tried to force things on others, and it was his belief that when this occurred, people had the right to wage war because it was his belief that force without right was an adequate basis for the state of war.

In order to transition from the state of nature into a civil society, he believed that people would naturally want to give up their natural freedom in order to assure protection for their "lives, liberties, and property". He also believed that the best form of government for a civil society would be one that would be run by the majority of people with common views, and that the individual, when entering into the society would submit him to the will of the majority and follow the rules set forth by it.

In transitioning from the state of nature to a civil society, Locke stated that the state of nature differed from a civil society because it lacked “ an established, settled, known law; a known, and different judge; and power to back and support the sentence”. In order to complete this transition into a civilized society, people had to relinquish their natural rights. These rights included the right to do what they wanted within the bounds of the laws of nature, and the power to punish the crimes committed against natural law.

Both rights are given up in order to put oneself under the protection of the executive power of the civil society. In the end the civil society would provide “ a law, a judge, and executive working to no other end, but the peace, safety, and public good of the people. ” Many of his ideals were considered to be very progressive at the time of their creation, and were implemented into the forming of the United States Constitution. Many of the ideas that were put into the creation of the constitution were based on his principles of equality and government working to the advantages of the people.

After entering into a civil society, Locke stated that the government of the commonwealth, using the element of a majority, should have a single legislative body that was used for the creation of laws. He suggests many types of governments such as Democracy, or Oligarchy, but he never states that one is better than the other. This again is another difference in the views between Locke and Hobbes. While Hobbes favored one single person to be the law maker, or absolute monarch, Locke stated that the power to create law should rest within a majority legislative body and that the law created by it should be absolute.

No other body could create laws of its own, and every member of society and the commonwealth must abide by the laws that were created by the legislative majority. While the legislature is an absolute governing body, it does in fact have limits as well. He states that the legislative body must govern by fixed laws that apply equally to everyone, and that the laws that are designed are to be done solely for the good of the people; lastly, the legislative body cannot increase taxes on property owners without the people's consent.

John Locke and Thomas Hobbes ideas about common law governments help to explain, at least from a philosophical ideal, the evolution of man from the animal age to the enlightened 17th century in which they resided in. While I believe the critical difference between their views is the amount of power they each placed in the idea of a sovereign power, they also shared many other different ideals, such as the state of nature in which people resided, and their ideas of how people living in the commonwealth should relinquish their rights.

However, one crucial element of commonality should be noted that existed between Locke and Hobbes. Even though many of their ideals differed their end result was the same; the common good of the people. Though they both may differ on how this plan works, they are able to base at the crux of each of their arguments, the essential need for reason in man's life, and how we as a race are able to better ourselves through the tools of reason and government.