

Hobbes, Augustine,
Aristotle and Locke's
thoughts on the idea
that a political sta...



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The Political A Place for People to be Happy and Virtuous One of our earliest philosophers regarding the relationship between the individual and the political state was Aristotle. Living during a time when the concept of the Republic was all the rage, Aristotle felt that the political state was the highest manifestation of the natural human. Because it was founded as a means of providing greater efficiency and organization among individuals, enabling more and more individuals to have spare time to pursue other interests or to contribute to the welfare of the whole, the city-state was primarily a means of providing for the health and welfare of its citizens. By design, then, Aristotle saw the city-state as a body intended to help create laws and standards that would further help individuals living in this city-state to live happy and virtuous lives.

According to Hobbes, society is founded upon the principles of natural law, in which it is clear that the guiding principle remains to allow each individual the right to exist and to obtain what is fair and necessary for their continued survival. Because he felt that individuals were, by nature, in a constant state of 'war' with other individuals, it was undeniably up to the political state to ensure that all people adhered to the written laws that were themselves based upon natural law. Natural law, in turn, indicated that all people had the right to exist and to acquire the necessary materials to sustain themselves while respecting these rights of others. Since natural man was in a constant state of war and political states were established as a means of ensuring that natural man adhered to natural law rather than war, it follows that a political state, in Hobbes' view, was essentially created simply as a means of coercing people into living in tentatively agreeable, mutually

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beneficial states that often verged on the edge of competitive detriment.

This is in keeping with the views held by Augustine, who seemed to feel that the laws of the state were more or less attempts by human leaders to coerce power from the hands of the people for their own individual benefit. While he recognized that government was essential to the thriving of a particular state, and therefore the health and well-being of its inhabitants, Augustine never lost sight of the concept that the government was formed more for the welfare of the rulers than the ruled. Thus, while it was necessary for the survival of the state and the welfare of the people, it was also, in Augustine's thoughts, a necessary evil, a part of the retribution exacted upon man for his sins in the Garden of Eden.

This is much the same attitude taken by John Locke in his view of the reason for government. Under his Theory of a Social Contract, it is clear that he viewed government as existing only as a result of mutual agreement among men wishing to protect their property. This was the only reason why they would come together under common understandings at the expense of some of their natural liberty. Thus, the purpose of government is specifically to relieve those who enter into the commonwealth of the burden of leadership, management and external relationships, whether with neighboring cities, counties or countries. As a result of this, the government steps in specifically as a means of providing its citizens with a happier and more virtuous lifestyle.