

Thomas Hobbes and John Locke

Read the primary source excerpts below and answer the five questions below on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Why would the basic nature of humans be a topic of discussion?
2. Why would this be important for developing a concept for an ideal form of government?
3. How would these writers have come up with their point of view?
4. How could Locke and Hobbes have come to such different conclusions?
5. How do Locke's and Hobbes's ideas relate to your own personal experience with people and the role environment plays in forming ideas?
6. Which author do you agree with more? Why do you relate to this particular author?

SELECTIONS FROM THE LEVIATHAN

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

Human Equality:

Nature has made men so equal, in the faculties of the body and mind; as that though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another, yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man and man, is not so considerable. . .

For such is the nature of men, that howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty, or more eloquent, or more learned; yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves. . . .

The State of Nature:

From this equality of ability, arises equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies. . . .

Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man. For war consists not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known.

In such condition there is no place for industry [meaning productive labor, not industry in modern sense of factories], because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building . . . no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Social Contract:

For as it is there called an absurdity to contradict what one maintained in the beginning; so in the world it is called injustice, and injury voluntarily to undo that which from the beginning he had voluntarily done. The way by which a man either simply renounceth or transferreth his right is a declaration, or signification, by some voluntary and sufficient sign, or signs, that he doth so renounce or transfer, or hath so renounced or transferred the same, to him that accepteth it. And these signs are either words only, or actions only; or, as it happeneth most often, both words and actions. And the same are the bonds, by which men are bound and obliged: bonds that have their strength, not from their own nature (for nothing is more easily broken than a man's word), but from fear of some evil consequence upon the rupture.

Whensoever a man transferreth his right, or renounceth it, it is either in consideration of some right

reciprocally transferred to himself, or for some other good he hopeth for thereby. For it is a voluntary act: and of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some good to himself. 7

The mutual transferring of right is that which men call contract.

SELECTIONS FROM OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT

John Locke (1632.1704)

The State of Nature

To understand political power aright, we must consider what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature; without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man. . . 8

The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions: for men [are] all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign master, sent into the world by his order, and about his business. . . . 9

Reason

Reason is what guides men in this state of nature, for if they comprehend that preserving other men will lead to their own preservation, then the state of nature is ideal. If any violation of this natural law occurs, all men are able to punish the offender because that man is disrupting this state of perfect freedom and is thus violating the rights of all men. 10

Men living together according to reason, without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them, is properly the state of nature. 11

God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. 12

Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy. And thus, considering the plenty of natural provision there was a long time in the world, and the few spenders . . . there could be then little room for quarrels or contentions about property so established. 13

Social Contract

So that God, by commanding to subdue, gave authority so far to appropriate: and the condition of human life, which requires labour and materials to work on, necessarily introduces private possessions. 14

Hence it is evident, that absolute monarchy, which by some men is counted the only government in the world, is indeed inconsistent with civil society, and so can be no form of civil-government at all... 15

The only way whereby anyone divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it. 16