

THE PHILOSOPHIES OF THOMAS HOBBS AND JOHN LOCKE

Read the article and respond to the questions in the right column.

In the 1600's, as absolute monarchies began to crumble across Europe, philosophers were thinking and writing about who should govern people and how those governments should function. Two philosophers who lived in England and published books about government are Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. And while these two thinkers agreed on the need for government, they had very different ideas about who should have governmental power.

One area of agreement between Hobbes and Locke was the need for a social contract in society. A **social contract** is an agreement that defines and limits the rights and duties of both a community of people and the government they live under. While Hobbes and Locke agreed that social contracts existed, they had different ideas about who should lead a country and what rights the people should have.

Thomas Hobbes believed that without government, society would be chaos with every person only looking out for themselves. In his book *Leviathan*, he is famously quoted as saying, "...the life of man is nasty, poor, solitary, brutish and short." Hobbes thought the only way to keep life from being brutal and chaotic was for the power to rest solely with one person. This person would be able to rule without any limitations. He believed that people would willingly give up some freedoms and rights in exchange for protection from the absolute ruler.

What is a social contract?

How is society without a government?

What does Hobbes think about life in general?

What type of ruler is best in Hobbes' opinion?

Hobbes thought that once the people had given power to the absolute ruler, they had no right to revolt. By placing all the power into the hands of one person, Hobbes believed that society would be stable for all people.

John Locke had a very different view of people's nature. Locke believed that all people have three essential rights which are the right to life, liberty, and property. In his book, *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke wrote that, "...all mankind...being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions...." He believed that the right to life, liberty, and property could not be taken away.

Locke wrote that the best form of government was one that got its power from the people. The government was not unlimited in power and only acted to protect people's natural rights. Locke believed that if the government overstepped its boundaries, the people had the right to revolt and develop a new government.

As countries in Europe and North and South America moved from absolute monarchies to democracies, both Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were studied and debated. While Hobbes and Locke may have envisioned different governments, their contributions to political thought are of equal importance.

What rights do people have in Hobbes' opinion?

What essential rights do people have according to Locke?

Do Locke's thoughts concerning "life, liberty, and possessions" sound like the thoughts of anyone else studied in history?

What is the best type of government in Locke's opinion?

What rights do people have in Locke's opinion?