
Thomas Hobbes - an English Enlightenment Philosopher

Thomas Hobbes

Thomas Hobbes was an English Enlightenment philosopher who was considered to be one of the founders of modern political philosophy. He is best known for his book *Leviathan* which he wrote in 1651. John Locke was another Enlightenment thinker who was thought to be the "Father of Liberalism". Each philosopher had a unique viewpoint on the nature of man, man's relationship with society, and man's relationship with government. Hobbes and Locke had many differences, but they also had similarities. Either way, they both had a great impact on today's society.

Hobbes and Locke were both great thinkers of their time. Both made great contributions to political science and they both had similar views on where power lies in a society. Hobbes and Locke were both in favor of a popular contract, or a constitution, in which the people have the power to control their own government. They were not specifically talking about a democratic type government, but something basic such as a tribe or as complex as the fictional government described by Plato in *The Republic*. Both also refer to a "state of nature" in which man exists without government. Hobbes and Locke speak about the dangers of a state of nature.

However, Thomas Hobbes is very pessimistic about the subject whereas John Locke speaks of the potential benefits. Like his rival, John Locke, Hobbes hypothesized that in a state of nature men and women were free to pursue and defend their own interests, which resulted in a state of war in which "the life of man" was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Hobbes began work on what would become his "magnum opus" and one of the most influential books ever written: *Leviathan*. Thomas Hobbes argues for the necessity of natural evolution of the social contract. He also proposed a government rule by an absolute monarchy, saying that chaos and other situations identified with a "state of nature" could only be avoided by a strong central government.

A government with the power of the biblical *Leviathan* (a sea creature), which would protect people from their own selfishness. He also warned of "the war of all against all" or *Bellum omnium contra omnes*, a motto that represented Hobbes' view of humanity without government. Hobbes lays out his thoughts on the foundation of states and legitimate government methodically. He says that the state is created by humans, so he first describes human nature. Hobbes claims that in each human can be found a representation of general humanity and that all acts are ultimately self-serving; in a state of nature, humans would behave completely selfishly. He concludes that humanity's natural condition is a state of continuous war, fear, and

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amorality. Only government can hold a society together.

The Founding Fathers of America were greatly influenced by the works of Thomas Hobbes. Locke and the Founding Fathers, however, rejected Hobbes' argument that the government had absolute power over its subjects. Instead, the Founding Fathers embraced Locke's ideas of the protection of unalienable rights and limited government in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Locke argued that because governments were instituted to protect the unalienable rights of individuals, they had no power other than what was necessary to protect such rights. In other words, a free and just government was necessarily a limited government.

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