

Social Contract
Submission or Cooperation

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for
HUM2230.0M1

11 April 2014

Governments are instituted to further the goals of groups of people that share common beliefs. The ideas of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke concerning the motivations for the formation of government -- either by sovereignty or assembly -- are different but share common elements for the benefits of government. This paper will examine their views and compare them to each other. This paper is not intended to be a point-by-point comparison, but rather a synopsis of the nature of man that each believed contributed to the formation of societies and governments.

The natural state of man is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” and that man’s actions are influenced by “continual fear and danger of violent death” (Sayre 793). Thomas Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan* that “the weakest has strength to to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others that are in the same danger with himself” (Sayre 793). When two men desire to achieve the same goal or to possess the same thing and also where there can be no division of the goal or thing so that only one man will ultimately be victorious, a conflict will arise. All men were essentially equal and do not possess any inherent ability that differentiates one man from another or one group of men from another group. One man can ally himself with others in order to gain an advantage over an opponent and as a response to any physical advantage another may have. The use of a tool or an association of like-minded individuals could potentially equalize any contest of strength or of mind. Hobbes viewed this setting as a natural consequence of human competition just as it is in the animal world where there are finite resources available for consumption. This condition is possible when there is no authority to keep warring factions in check and sets the stage for men to be in opposition to one another. Hobbes wrote that “it is manifest that, during the time men live without a common power to keep them in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and

such war is every man against every man” (Sayre 793). Hobbes further believed that man is inspired to action based on self-preservation and to that end would surrender to an authority some of their rights so that they would be protected from external threats as well as to enforce order within the society. Men will submit to a ruler or create “a common power as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners and the injuries of one another” (Sayre 794). In the absence of that authority, society would revert to a perpetual state of war and conflict.

In contrast to Hobbes, John Locke wrote in *The Second Treatise on Government* that men are “capable of governing themselves” and are “by nature free, equal, and independent” (Sayre 769). Locke also believed that men were essentially equal, but disagreed with Hobbes and believed that men were also reasonable and would form associations with others in the spirit of cooperation to avoid conflict and to preserve the society. Men are able to govern their passions and would choose reasonable actions regarding themselves that did not require them to submit to a sovereign power and that would be in harmony with others. If an individual achieved domination it must be the result of a divine appointment. Locke wrote that men were equal in ability and advantages “unless the lord and master of them all should ... set one above another ... by an evident and clear appointment an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty” (Sayre 795).

The views of Hobbes and Locke may be more similar in the end result so that society is preserved and protected from both internal and external threats. Men will organize into society and combine for the good of the society. The difference being Hobbes believed government is the result of fear and Locke believed it was the result of logic and reason.

Works Cited (Bibliography)

Sayre, Henry M. *The Humanities. Culture, Continuity and Change*. Book 4. Saddle Rock, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012. Print.