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## Comparing Locke and Hobbes Social Contract Theories

### **Introduction**

John Locke and Thomas Hobbes are two of the most famous English philosophers. Locke's social contract theory affirms that nature accords human beings natural rights that are more moral than instinctual and the rights derive their authority from God (Waldron 3). Hobbes argued that a "state of nature" is one that is dominated by fear and scarcity. Locke and Hobbes had different opinions about state and government (Korošec 107). Locke believed that human beings could co-exist peacefully without violence and disorder (Dienstag 985). Hobbes is skeptical that a government or any authority would have any impact on changing the 'state of nature' (Hampton 23). The paper compares John Locke and Thomas Hobbes social contract theories.

### **Comparison**

Locke and Hobbes social contract theories had different ideas about the "state of nature." According to Locke, life is full of abundant opportunities that can support all human beings who have been accorded God-given natural rights that are instinctual. Locke argues human beings have a natural right to any part of nature as long as we "mix our labor with that part of nature." According to Locke, one can accumulate as much "natural property" as possible as long

as the property does not spoil and enough property is left for others. Locke suggested that it was possible for property to be accumulated without being injurious to anyone. Locke's theory suggests that nature is in a state of abundance (Waldron 3). Hobbes viewed nature and society as being deficient to accord every human being his needs. Hobbes was of the opinion that all endeavors by human beings are driven by selfishness. According to Hobbes, altruism is impossible. Hobbes asserts that the only law that applies in a state of nature is the law to protect one's interests by use of any resources that are at one's disposal even if it includes murder and violence. Hobbes was very pessimistic in his view of life. Hobbes argued that every living organism obeys the laws of individual survival. Therefore, all human beings are motivated by the quest for power and to further their self-interests. Hobbes did assert that it is impossible for human beings to act out of a selfless concern for the interests and wellbeing of other individuals. Human beings only act in ways that cater for their self-interests. Altruism is impossible, and it is a bad idea. Hobbes affirmed that even though many people have the view that egoism is immoral, many of them behave out of egoism (Hampton 63). However, Hobbes believes that there is an artificial monster (the Leviathan) or a 'regulator' that inhibits man from pursuing their selfish interests in a full blown manner. The "Leviathan" compels a man to take part in some selfless activities out of the fear of being labeled a selfish individual. There are instances of human behavior when the "Leviathan" reigns supreme over an individual (Boucher and Paul 47). Hobbes argued that in a "state of nature," life is short, brutish, short, nasty and brutal. There is no law or morality in the state of nature. There is only one natural law in the state of nature- the right to protect oneself by using any means possible at one's disposal. Any means possible in this context involves violence and murder. In a "state of nature," there is mistrust and rationality is less likely to prevail. In Hobbes's theory, there is no mention of God. Hobbes alleged that there

was nothing like a natural right to property because, in nature, there is only possession, not property. According to Hobbes, as long as a person can get hold of an item and keep it that is his or her possession. Hobbes theory suggests that nature is in a state of scarcity (Korošec, 99).

Locke and Hobbes had different ideas about state and government. Locke believed that human beings have natural rights to pursue their interests without being injurious to other persons (Dienstag 985). Locke was of the opinion that a government was better placed to ensure that natural rights of individuals are respected. Locke suggested that individual political states should be evaluated of how they would protect the natural rights of individuals that live in those states (Waldron 3). Locke did assert that a good state is one that maximizes natural rights of individuals. Locke's social contract theory asserts that an ideal state is one where all citizens consent to be ruled by a government that is elected by the majority as long as the government protects the natural rights of those individuals (Boucher and Paul 78). Hobbes asserted that there is a need for an authority to avert violence and disorder that is likely to occur as every human being pursues his or her interests in society. Hobbes suggested there is a need for authority (a sovereign) with absolute power that would ensure that order and peace prevail in any given society. Absolute power in this context could be a monarch or a parliament. However, Hobbes was skeptical if there is anything that could prevent the sovereign from abusing power. In conclusion, Hobbes affirmed that even though it was inevitable for the sovereign not to abuse power, the sovereign was a better alternative when compared to horrors of anarchy that would take place in a "state of nature" (Korošec 102).

Works Cited

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