

Thomas Hobbes 1588-1679, England

Hobbes was the first modern political philosopher. He established that the right to rule or “*Sovereignty*” did not come from God but instead came from the people. He founded the idea that all humans should be equal in the eyes of the law. However, unlike most of the enlightenment thinkers he would inspire, Hobbes did not believe humans were essentially good. He was a strict materialist, which means he believed humans were essentially no different from any other physical object in the universe. No spirit, no soul, humans are just “matter and motion.” Therefore, humans are subject to the whims of cause and effect. They are basically machines made of meat who pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Therefore, without laws, humans will do only which gives them pleasure and avoids pain. Hobbes argues that without fear of a government to punish them, humans will do every vile act that would bring them pleasure. In nature, there exists *a war of every man against every other man*.

He stated that humans enter into a society, leaving a state of nature, in order to gain certain advantages. In doing so, they sign an unwritten “social contract” in which they give up certain freedoms in order to gain the benefits and protection from society. He believed that the government that best protects people was an absolute monarchy for it had the least chaos within it and therefore could most effectively administer law and reduce the lawlessness inherent of humanity.

In [nature] there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently [there is] no culture . . . , 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 [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short... -**Leviathan**

“...during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that conditions called War; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man.” -**Leviathan**

John Locke 1632-1704, England

Locke was in many ways a student of Hobbes but came to wildly different conclusions. Like Hobbes, he agreed that humans leave nature to enter into a social contract. However, he differed in what made men evil. He argued that humans are born a blank slate and through their lives are taught their values. Locke therefore believed that humans only learn to be wicked from society. Therefore a government founded on fear, as Hobbes suggested, would teach people to be fearful and consequently wicked.

Locke was a founder of the idea of natural rights—which suggests that all humans have certain rights regardless of the laws of their society. He stated that those rights are life, health, liberty, and property. He

“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.” –**Two Treatises of Government**

“The [goal] of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom.” –**Two Treatises of Government**

argued that no government could remove or in any way impact those 4 things without just cause.

Locke believed the mind was a blank slate. Therefore it makes sense that he also believed education was among the most important things to a good society. He thought that education had 3 parts: to develop the body, to build character, and to teach academic curriculum. He thought that the vast majority of humans are defined by how they were taught so only through good teaching would a good society be born.

Locke was a champion of democracy, which he believed preserved the best elements of the social contract while also not teaching people to live in fear. He also believed that people have a right to challenge and replace their government if it becomes corrupt. He believed that revolution was sometimes not only a right but an obligation.

“I think I may say that of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are—good or evil, useful or not—by their education.” –**Some Thoughts Concerning Education**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1712-1778, Switzerland/France

Rousseau continued Hobbes’ and Locke’s work on the idea of a social contract. However, even more than Locke, Rousseau viewed society as easily corruptible and prone to wickedness and oppression. Rousseau stated that the ideal state of humans is equally distant from wild animals on one side and oppressive government on the other.

To Rousseau, that ideal state is what he referred to as “Noble Savages,” which are humans living in primitive societies. He argued that the people of such societies are happy in that they have moved away from the savagery of nature but have not yet invented the inequality and greed of civilized society.

However, Rousseau did not believe it was possible to return to such ways. Therefore, he believed it was the job of humans to strive as best they can to alleviate the inequality, envy, and fear that comes along with living within human society. To Rousseau, poverty was the thing most wrong with society. He found it to be especially wrong when some lived in poverty and some in fabulous wealth. To Rousseau, that was a sure sign that the social contract had failed.

To Rousseau, the most important work of government was to educate its people. He believed this was the only way they could keep their inherent goodness while also being included in civilization.

"The first man who, having fenced in a piece of land," said "This is mine," and found people naive enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: Beware of listening to this imposter; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody." –**Discourse on Inequality**

“In truth, laws are always useful to those with possessions and harmful to those who have nothing; from which it follows that the social state is advantageous to men only when all possess something and none has too much.” –
The Social Contract

“Nothing is so gentle as man in his primitive state, when placed by nature at an equal distance from the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man”. –
Discourse on Inequality

"Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man" –
Emile, or on Education