

## Hobbes Versus Locke

by

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The following is a transcript of a televised debate between Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, as seen on November 24, 2093, via Time~Warp Broadcasting Inc.

COM: Television commentator

MED: Mediator of the debate

HOB: Thomas Hobbes

LOC: John Locke

COM: Good evening and welcome to our series featuring some of the most prominent theorists of all time. This week, as promised, we are privileged to be the first to witness what promises to be one of the great debates of all time. First, let me introduce an "English philosopher, born in Malmesbury, and educated at Magdalen Hall, University of Oxford." Over his years he associated with numerous noted thinkers, including Galileo and Descartes. His works include, **Leviathan, or the Matter, and Power of Commonwealth Ecclesiastic and Civil**. Please welcome Thomas Hobbes.

Debating with Hobbes is another English philosopher, born in the village of Wrington, Somerset, and educated at the University of Oxford. Historically, he has attacked the theories of divine rights of kings, and those of Thomas Hobbes. His most notable works, **Two Treatises of Civil Government**, and **On Politics and Education**, are considered among the most important pieces of literature on political theory. It gives me great pleasure to introduce John Locke.

For the benefit of those who have not been following our series, today's debate will follow the usual format. First the mediator will ask a question or pose a statement. One debater will respond to this question or statement, the other will then be given time to rebut any points made. The second debater will then respond to the question or statement, followed by a rebuttal from the original speaker. Remember, rebuttals must be restricted to points brought up in the answering session. You may not rebut points made in a rebuttal. Without further ado, let me introduce the mediator, Dr. David Snell, and bring out Mr. Hobbes and Mr. Locke.

MED: Welcome to our honoured debaters. Historically, the question 'What is the state of human nature?' has been a matter of much controversy amongst thinkers. Please share your views on this point. Mr. Hobbes, you may speak first.

HOB: Man by nature is evil. In the state of nature there is no formal law, no order, no culture, and no hope. In other words, a state of total chaos where no man has any individual rights, and all men are at war. Here, life is a constant battle for power, ending in death. All men, by nature, are equal. "Nature hath made men so equal...[that] when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable." In this state, a man's property is what he can take, and what he can prevent others from taking. If one item is desired by two men, they will become

enemies, and in order to obtain this item, man will attempt to repress or destroy the other. "So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; second, diffidence; third, glory." The first cause is primarily for material gain which involves violence, used generally to become master of your own and other men's property. The second is for personal safety, that is to defend what you have obtained through violence. The third is for reputation and defending ones name. When living in the state of nature, one is in a state of constant quarrel between all men. For Quarrel, "consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known." Living in this world is undesirable to any man, thus from fear of death, men are inclined towards peace. A peaceful state is a necessity for commodious living. It is within each man to draw upon laws of nature in order to create a 'social contract' under which all men will willingly live.

MED: Thank you Mr. Hobbes. Mr. Locke, your rebuttal and arguments.

LOC: Your entire argument centres upon the fundamental notion that man, by nature, is evil. However, this belief is erroneous. The years in which you were raised and derived your theories, were primarily dominated by the English Civil War. Living in a society where famine and violence was rampant, would it not be logical to assume that this hostile environment influenced your rationale in determining that human nature is evil? However, a society of war is not the rule, rather the exception. So would it not be true that living in a peaceful society, one would come to the logical conclusion that man kind, by nature, is good. This is the society that I live in, this is the society that most people live in, therefore, this is the conclusion that I and most people would come to. In my literary works, it was my intention to convey an understanding of political power. To do so we must examine the origins of this power, and determine what state men are naturally in. This state of nature is as follows; "a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their positions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of Nature." Nature is also a state of perfect equality amongst all men. In this state, no one man has more power or jurisdiction than any other man. Being the state of nature, this is not only true of humans, but of all "creatures of the same species ... should also be equal ... unless the lord and master of them all should, ... set one above another, ... by any evident and clear appointment, and undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty." Although this is a state of perfect freedom, it is not a state of licence. Though man has the authority and ability to do with his person and positions as he pleases, he has no authority to destroy himself or any person in his position, as doing such would be in direct violation of the laws of nature. If one is to act in such a way that appears contrary to the natural laws, it is the right and responsibility of all men affected by these actions to judge and punish the offender. In this sense, each man will be the judge of whether his 'rights', as described by nature, have been violated. The right of each man to interpret and enforce the laws of nature as they see fit, may be a source of much

chaos. So, in order to regulate the implementation of these laws, man agrees to a social contract, under which all men are governed by one common ruler.

HOB: Clearly your line of argument is based on the belief that human nature is fundamentally good. I strenuously disagree with this concept, but to refute it would be to repeat my entire argument, and I have neither the time nor the desire to do such. So, I will leave you with this, human nature is evil, and people must agree to be ruled if they are to survive. As to your charge that my thinking was influenced by the war in which I grew up, I feel that my rational is logical and not at all influenced by my surroundings. Furthermore

MED: Thank you Mr. Hobbes, but I have to interrupt you there, because you are not permitted to refute points raised in Mr. Locke's rebuttal. In your arguments you both mentioned a 'Social Contract' of sorts. Please expand on this concept. Mr. Hobbes may again speak first.

HOB: As I mentioned previously, the state of nature is one of total chaos. Living in this society would be undesirable to any man, so it is logical to assume that man would look for a way out of this state of nature. One way out of this state would be for everyone to observe what I call 'natural laws'. These laws are, "justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and, in sum, doing to others, as we would be done to..." However, because these laws are 'contrary to our natural passions', man would not wilfully obey these laws, unless it is beneficial to him. Therefore, in order for man to escape this state of nature, there must exist "the terror of some power, to cause the [laws] to be observed..." One might argue that, since these are natural laws, inbred in all men, simply by existing, all men have agreed to obey these laws. This may be true, however, "covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all." By this I mean, that a bond made with words alone will not convince man that all others will keep their promise, and thus man will not obey. Therefore, if no great power is present in society, or if the power that is present is not strong enough for man's security, every man will rely on his own strengths to secure himself from other men. It is clear that mankind must group itself together, with a leader who is capable of ensuring obedience of these natural laws. However, joining together in small groups will not be effective, because in small groups, the addition of a few people, who hold different views, would be sufficient to destroy the assembly. Thus, small groups would invite invaders, and foster dissent. It is only when this group is very large, and the number of those opposed is but a small fraction of the group, that true security is obtained. In short, to use a modern phrase, safety in numbers. It is only then, that man can escape the state of nature. Once this group is formed, this great power must still be created. This is accomplished by bestowing the collective power of the group onto one man, or one group of men, called an assembly. This assembly represents the collective voice of the entire group, and shall act on behalf of the entire society in matters of law, common peace, and safety. Bestowing your power onto this leader "is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all, in one

and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner, as if every man should say to every man, I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner." It is this agreement that is what I call the social contract, and this contract is essential to man escaping the state of nature, and in the formation of some form of responsible government.

MED: Thank you Mr. Hobbes. Mr. Locke, your rebuttal and arguments.

LOC: In politics, being no different than other disciplines, if you start with an inaccurate assumption anything you derive thereafter is obviously true. Thus, starting with the assumption that man is evil, your explanation of the social contract is accurate. However, if you begin with the genuine conjecture that man is by nature good, you clearly get a different sense of what the social contract is. This social contract is not one to preserve life, but to regulate one's property and one's right to own it. In the state of nature it is every man's right to own, enjoy, and preserve his property. This right should pose no problem at first, because there is more than enough popery for every man to enjoy. However, as the population increases, there will be more disputes over property, and its ownership, and some form of regulation must be adopted. It is for this reason that men join into a social contract. "Every man has a 'property' in his own 'person'. This nobody has any right to but himself. The 'labour' of his body and the work of his hands, we may say are properly his." Furthermore, anything that one has mixed with his own labour, can be said to be his own property. For example, a tree in the state of nature is no person's property. However, if one mixed his labour with this tree, by cutting it down, the tree then becomes his property, because it was by his hands that this tree was removed from its natural state. "Men being, as has been said, by nature all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate and subjected to the political power of another without his own consent, which is done by agreeing with other men, to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living, one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it." When men agree to a social contract similar to this, they are in essence lending their right to judge others and to govern themselves to one government. In this government, the majority holds the right to rule on behalf of the minority, and all men agree to follow and submit to the determinations and rulings of the government. One fundamental question remains. If man in the state of nature is so free, why would he give up this freedom, and agree to be controlled by others? The answer to this is quite logical. It is true that man has these freedoms in a state of nature. However, his ability to exercise these liberties is very uncertain and constantly exposed to the aggression of others. Therefore, the enjoyment of property in this state is very much in question. It is the fear of not being able to enjoy his rights that causes man to join into a social contract with others who have similar intentions to the perpetuation of their lives, liberties, and properties. I see my worthy opponent ready to argue, and

undoubtedly he intends to make the point that men born under this contract are forced to submit to its rule, and have no liberty to start a new one. In response to this, it is sufficient to point out that a government is intended to act for the good of its entire society. Therefore, one born under this government may not have had the opportunity to directly agree to it, the rulings of the government will still be for their good. However, what if the rulings of the government are no longer in the best interest of society? This social contract is agreed to under the provision that the government will not do so, consequently, if the ruler breaches the trust of the people, seriously and often, he must step down if demanded to do so by the people, because without the trust of the people, with which the government took power, the contract is no longer valid. If the leader refuses to do so, he risks a revolution of the people.

HOB: Mr. Locke, you are indeed a wise man and you make your arguments well, however, one question remains. If all men agreed to this social contract, why is there no evidence of such an agreement? Your argument is theoretically sound, however, with no substantiating evidence, you leave me unconvinced.

MED: Thank you Mr. Hobbes and Mr. Locke. I have just been informed that we have used up our allotted time, and are now running into previously scheduled programming. I must now declare this debate over.

COM: On behalf of myself and the rest of the crew here at Time~Warp Broadcasting Inc., thank you all for joining us and good night.

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