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## The Nature Of Humanity By John Locke

The debate over the base nature of humanity has lasted centuries, creating many theories and counterpoints to those theories, yet none have been definitively established as the correct essence of humanity in a state of nature nor has a correct reason been pinpointed for why humanity decides to enter into social contracts. Are humans predisposed to violence and it is only for our benefit that we give up our freedom to preserve our own lives? Or is our nature closer to the belief that although we are given the freedom of all actions, humanity is guided by the law of reason. Popular stances include the theories of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, and many more. In this essay, I will be focusing on the theory of base nature and social contract as presented by John Locke and how his reasons and explanations – when compared to those of his colleague Thomas Hobbes – ultimately appear to be the truest analysis of humanity.

John Locke begins his theory by separating the state of nature from the state of war. He begins the second chapter of his *Second Treatise of Government* by defining the state of nature as “...a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons... without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man” (Morgan 2011, 713) and further defines it as “A state also of equality, wherein all the power a jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another...” (713). These definitions provide insight into humanity in its simplest terms, a species of beings not necessarily collectively at peace with one another, as Locke discusses later on, but one that affords all liberties to each member of the population without approval nor guidance from his fellow man nor the restrictions of laws from a societal construct. The state of nature, according to Locke, is governed by one law as he states, “And reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions” (713). It is this difference that separates not only Locke’s state of nature from the state of war, but also in doing so, makes an important differentiation from Hobbes.

Locke states that the state of war is a state of lack of reason and applies as a contract between individuals rather than over an entire population. The state of war may be entered and exited at will of the perpetrator and it is during the state of war that the victim is allowed to prosecute the aggressor to the degree he believes appropriate. It is the want to avoid the state of war that gives a reason to enter into a social contract, Locke states “For where there is an authority, a power on earth, from which relief can be had by appeal, there the continuance of the state of war is excluded, and the controversy is decided by that power” (717). It is also in part because the uncertainty of life in the state of nature – due to members that lack reason – that individuals decide to enter into a social contract. For although in the state of nature man is free to do as he pleases within reason, the risk that unreasonable individuals present in impeding the enjoyment of that freedom is too great of a trade to properly and fully enjoy that freedom. As Locke states in chapter nine of his *Second Treatise of Government*, “...and it is not without reason, that he [the individual] seeks out, and is willing to join in society with others ... for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and ... property” (744-745).

Contrastingly, Hobbes’ view on the state of nature emphasizes the problems within humanity much more than Locke. Although both share the idea that man is free to do as he please, in

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Hobbes' natural state, humanity is in a continual state of war of all against all, to which Hobbes further details as follows: "So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory" (Morgan 2011, 619), of which the aforementioned causes lead to an undesirable condition described in chapter 13 of Leviathan as follows: "...and which is worst of all [in the state of war], continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (619). Rather than driven to society by reasoning, humanity, according to Hobbes, lacks all reason and forges the social contract out of a perpetual fear for their safety.

On Hobbes' many laws of nature, 19 in total, are decidedly opposite of the assertion previously made that the nature of man is that of a state of constant war. For example, the first law states "that every man ought to endeavor peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war" while laws 10 through 19 are the subject of judgements and possession that are only available in society.

After consideration for both theories, I conclude it is John Locke's theory of man and society that is truest to life. Firstly, I believe it is a misconception to believe that man is without reason and that it is natural for all of man to want war all the time. While there will always be people whom desire violent or selfish acts, it is seen more often than not that the general populace pulls together during events that result in a chaotic state. Therefore, it makes more sense to assume that humanity is capable of reasonable thought most of the time. Secondly, the reason for forging a social contract and the position of power within that contract also fall in line with Locke's way of thinking. If humanity is willing and capable of overturning an ineffective government – and humanity has done so many times – then that shows a willingness to return, temporarily, to the state of nature in order to reconvene with a better social contract. If humanity was to forge the social contract primarily out of fear, and is unwilling or unable to leave that contract because the state of nature is so horrible a tyrant is preferable, then there would not be uprisings, there would only be an uneasy complacency.

Looking to governments around the world today, I have observed at least three government constitutions (Davis, Debré, US Const.) that allow for the revolution of the people should the government fail as well as an international document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which ascertains that it is the people's right to rebel against an ineffective or tyrannical government because the social contract is ultimately a contract in which the people have the power (United Nations para. 3, 1948). Humanity does not fear the return to the state of nature. It is not an ideal state; however, if it is deemed that the current government's primary interest is not that of its citizens with whom it made the contract, then they will simply search for a new one that will.

Proponents of Hobbes' line of thought will point to the many instances throughout history of "revolution", or more accurately labelled "rebellion" showing that humanity as a whole, cannot be trusted to govern itself, as there are far too many whom believe his idea better than the government and will fight for it. This thus proves man's natural tendency to violence, especially in the name of self-gain. For instance, the American civil war: in which a group of individuals wished to end their social contract with the government so that they could profit from their actions of owning slaves, or the June 1832 Rebellion: in which French citizens rebelled against the monarchy due to the rising taxes in an attempt to stabilize the economy. For the latter, it is important to note that a government must be strong to protect its citizens and it is the citizens' fault for the devastation of cholera that followed this time; had the government been strong and

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not fighting its citizens, more resources could have been diverted to managing the outbreak. It is also important to note that rebellion naturally leads to chaos, and it is this period that is closest to what nature would look like.

Furthermore, there had never been a time known to the history of man in which man was lawless and outside of government. Looking as far back as the Neanderthal times, man lived in tribes in which there was a single member chosen as the sovereign to guide and rule over the collective. If even in such a basic time, man was driven to society it shows that the state of nature truly is a terrifying and undesirable state.

To this I bring my argument to a different corner. Reflecting Hobbes' statement of natural life being "solitary" I disagree. There have been multiple studies and articles researching the psychology of humankind, all of which found that humanity is a naturally social species (Young 2008). Therefore, even going to the Neanderthals and before, humanity tended to live in groups for the same reasons the wolf lives in packs or the orca lives in pods.

It is important to note that Locke is not in support of all rebellion, simply of revolution against a government which has stopped serving its people: "...whenever the legislators endeavor to take away and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people..." (Morgan 2011, 769). While I am not of the opinion that slavery is moral nor legal, it was the opinion of the southern states that their "property" was being taken away from them and therefore falls under Locke's definition of an acceptable reason for revolution.

Similarly, if one is to consider the argument of rebellion, one must look at revolution – which is merely a successful rebellion – to determine the reasons for entering a state of war with the government. The American Revolution, named the American Rebellion by the British, falls under the category of justifiable since the British government had stopped serving the interests of the American people. Furthermore, although revolutions usually resort to violent acts, there have been instances of nonviolent revolution – such as the Mongolian Revolution of 1990. It is because of these aforementioned reasons that Locke's theory, used as a basis for many governments today, is truest to the nature of humanity.

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