

John Locke Part 2

It was a battle of ideas. A showdown of words. A clash between two political minds. John Locke and Thomas Hobbes didn't exactly see eye to eye when it came to how people would eventually form and run their own government.

One of the differences between the two men was their view on the nature of government. And when I say nature, I don't mean trees and bunnies. I'm talking about what political philosophers imagined life without government would be like. John Locke argued that there's a law of nature, or natural law, that most people will follow -- that people will form their government around everyone's collective view of nature. There would be no fighting, no arguing, and peace and love would spread throughout the land. People would leave their personal views behind in order to have absolute freedom for everyone.

The problem though is that while I have absolute freedom, so does everybody else. That means some people might present a threat to others' important rights. For instance, what if one person wanted the freedom to listen to music as loud as they wanted all night while their neighbor wanted to get some sleep? That could cause some serious disagreements. Hobbes's vision of a state of nature was one of constant warfare, fear, and insecurity. He thought fighting would erupt if people had contrasting views over personal freedoms.

Locke disagreed and thought these disagreements would be rare. He thought people generally wanted to get along with others, saying, "Most people will respect the natural rights of others or follow this law of nature, this God-given law, almost like a golden rule, that I will treat people the way that I want to be treated."

During the enlightenment there was a greater emphasis on the individual rather than the group. But at the end of the day, Locke believed that these individuals would eventually work together to form a working government for everyone. This theory of his helps to explain the origins of government and what it still stands for today. The people would decide whether the government should have the power to rule -- all in the pursuit of life, liberty, and property.

Locke goes even further to say that if any government fails, it's because the people decided that it failed -- that the government didn't live up to its end of the bargain. Any government that becomes oppressive and does not protect the rights of the citizens is no longer legitimate and should lose its power to rule. It is then the duty of the people to form a new government.

Much of what Locke was talking about would influence one of the most important documents in US history -- The Declaration of Independence. Obviously, his ideas have been pretty important. But as you can see, John Locke's beliefs about nature and his theory for government were based around a group of individuals all agreeing on the same set of freedoms. In other words, can't we all just get along?
