John Locke And Thomas Hobbes: Two Views Of The Social Contract Essay, Research Paper

John Locke and Thomas Hobbes were two English thinkers who contributed their ideas to the Enlightenment. There are a few similarities between these two. They were both English thinkers, and they both lived in the 1600s. Locke and Hobbes both lived through the upheavals in England early in the 17th century. That is where the similarities end. They then formed different ideas about the nature of people. Locke stated that people were naturally good, while Hobbes stated that they were naturally evil.

In his book, Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes described man as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” It was as if he was describing an evil creature, when in fact he was describing himself and the people he walked among with. Men were cruel, greedy, and selfish, and if not caged, they would fight, rob, and trouble each other. In other words, man was intrinsically evil. The cage in this case would be the government. Hobbes called it a social contract, where people gave up their natural evil state and entered an organized society, which was in turn controlled by a powerful government. This “powerful government” was Hobbes’ name for an absolute monarchy, where the government had more power than the people. John Locke’s ideas varied greatly.

Locke’s view on man was not as rough as Hobbes’. He believed that man was reasonable and moral. In his book, Two Treaties of Government, Locke stated that all people had natural rights, rights that they had from birth. Life, liberty, and property were the most important of these rights. Governments, in his opinion, were created to help protect these rights. He believed that the ideal government would have limited power and would be accepted by all citizens. If the government failed to do its job as the people intended, the citizens had a right to overthrow it. This idea fascinated many people in the centuries to follow and introduced the concept of revolution. One of the more noticeable effects was with the American Revolution from Britain.

Although Locke and Hobbes might have seemed like similar people as they grew up to become Enlightenment thinkers, as soon as they came up with ideas, they differed greatly. Locke believed that man was reasonable and moral, while Hobbes believed the opposite, that man was evil in his roots. While Hobbes’ ideal government seems more like a cage, the people control Locke’s. As different as they may be, both of these thinkers contributed interesting ideas to the Enlightenment.