

Declaration of Independence Philosophers

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes the state as a large person. Each part has a parallel in the human body. As humans created the state, to understand the state one must understand human nature. In the absence of society, everything that a person does is done purely out of self-interest, even when something is done that benefits another. Any theory must be consistent with this overriding self-service.

In nature, all men are essentially equal, even with inherent differences in size or strength - even the weakest man can kill the strongest. The individual has the right to do anything in nature - even kill another. Quarrel between people is natural. The natural condition, then, is that of constant war and constant fear. This constant fear forces men to find a way to prevent the natural state.

Natural laws derive from reason - they are those things that prevent harm. The first law of nature is that peace should be sought, and when it cannot be obtained, war ensues. The second law supports the first - to have peace we must give up certain rights, such as the right to kill or steal. The transferral of these rights between people is the social contract. The right to self defense is one which cannot be released, as it is the only motive for entering into the social contract.

The third law states that contracts made must be kept. Power must be given to a person or assembly to ensure that the laws are maintained. The social contract tells the ruler that we give up the right to self-government in exchange for requiring others to maintain the contract. Hobbes notes that three forms of government can best maintain the contract: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Hobbes prefers monarchy.

John Locke (1632-1704)

In *Two Treatises on Government*, Locke refuted the divine right of Monarchy, and established a theory where personal liberty could coexist with political order. Labor is the origin and justification for property. Contract or consent is the basis for government and fixes its limits. Behind both doctrines is personal freedom. The state of nature knows no law, but men are subject to moral law (the law of God).

Men are born free and equal. In the primitive world, all that man worked for became his, when there was enough for all. When man multiplied and resources were not so free, rules were needed. Moral law is always valid, though not always kept. Civil society must set rules to punish transgressors. To do this, men agree to delegate this function to others. Government, then, is a social contract with limited powers, and has obligations to its creators. Government can be modified by the creators at any time.

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Charles de Montesquieu (1689-1755)

Expanding on Locke in *The Spirit of Laws*, Montesquieu added the judiciary to Locke's executive and legislature. He admired the English system, and wrote of the separation of powers.

Montesquieu wrote of the three forms of government he recognized: "republican, monarchial, and despotic." He further divided republican government into democracy and aristocracy. He wrote of pure democracy, but quickly dismisses this as folly. He also discounted bodies that advised a monarch, unless the body is chosen by the people. Montesquieu noted that in a republic, education is an absolute necessity. He noted the point of education in the three forms: "in monarchies they will have honour for their object; in republics, virtue; in despotic governments, fear." He felt that democracies are corrupted, and devolve to despotism or monarchy, when the feeling of equality and fairness evaporate. In this way, a fair and objective judiciary is essential to the health of a democracy.

Thomas Paine (1736-1809)

Paine wrote of the two main types of government in *The Rights of Man*: monarchy and republic. He notes that government is formed on two bases, reason and ignorance. Only when reason triumphs over ignorance can the best form of government, a republic, emerge. Otherwise ignorance allows monarchy to survive.

He rejects a mixed government as being driven by corruption. In a mixed government, there is no responsibility, as the King can defer, or blame, the Prime Minister; the Prime Minister can defer to the Parliament; the Parliament can defer to the people; and the people to the King. He expounds on three principles. First, that men are born and remain always free and equal in their rights. Political associations are created solely to preserve these rights. The nation, as it is based upon the people, can only have rights granted to it by the people.

Paine also wrote *Common Sense*, a popular pamphlet that was distributed as the colonies were debating revolution; and *The Age of Reason*, a critique of the Bible, for which he was best known, and loathed for, while he lived.