Two Views of the Social Contract

In the 1600s, two English thinkers, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, set forth ideas that were to become key to the Enlightenment. Both men lived through the upheavals that shook England early in the century. Yet they came to very different conclusions about human nature and the purpose and nature of government.

“Nasty, brutish, and short.” Thomas Hobbes set out his ideas in a work titled *Leviathan*. Hobbes argued that people were naturally cruel, greedy, and selfish. If not strictly controlled, they would fight, rob, and oppress one another. Life in the “state of nature” without laws or other control - would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

To escape that “brutish” life, said Hobbes, people entered into a social contract, an agreement by which they gave up the state of nature for an organized society. Hobbes believed that only a powerful government could ensure an orderly society. Such a government was an absolute monarchy, which could impose order and compel obedience. Not surprisingly, Hobbes had supported the Stuart kings in their struggle against Parliament.

Natural rights. John Locke had a more optimistic view of human nature. People were basically reasonable and moral, he said. Further, they had natural rights, or rights that belonged to all humans from birth. These included the right to life, liberty, and property.

In Two Treatises of *Government*, Locke argued that people formed governments to protect their natural rights. The best kind of government, he said, had limited power and was accepted by all citizens. Thus, unlike Hobbes, Locke rejected absolute monarchy and sided with Parliament in its struggle against the Stuarts.

Locke then set out a radical idea. A government, he said, has an obligation to those it governs. If a government fails its obligations or violates people's natural rights, the people have the right to overthrow the government. This right to revolution would echo through Europe, in Britain's North American colonies, and around the world in the centuries that followed.
HOW DID ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS DIFFER ON THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

DIRECTIONS: After reading the document on the previous page entitled “Two View of the Social Contract”, Answer the questions below. If statement is false, rewrite it correctly in the space provided.

1. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were both French scientists. T / F ______________________

2. Hobbes argued in his book, *Leviathan*, that people were born cruel, greedy and evil. T / F

3. “Social contract” means that people give up some of their freedom in exchange for an orderly society to live in. T / F ____________________________________________________________________________

4. Hobbes believed that without a strong government, such as an absolute monarch, people would simply live together peacefully. T / F ____________________________________________________________________________

5. Do you agree with statement #2? Explain why. ____________________________________________________________________________

6. “Most people riot and loot stores during any type of emergency situation (blackouts, natural disasters).” Would Locke agree with this statement? ____________ because ____________________________________________________________________________

7. According to John Locke, the government gives citizens their rights to life, property and liberty. T / F ____________________________________________________________________________

8. According to the Two Treatises on Government, the government has no obligation to protect the rights of its citizens. T / F ____________________________________________________________________________

9. The rule of Louis XIV would have been supported by John Locke. T / F ________________

10. “When a government fails to protect the rights of its citizens, the people must revolt against that government.” T / F ____________________________________________________________________________
LOCKE & JEFFERSON

Vocabulary: justified, overthrow, liberty, property, pursuit

A philosopher by the name of John Locke justified the Glorious Revolution. He believed that the English people had the right to overthrow James II. Let him tell you about his beliefs.

Good afternoon. My name is John Locke. In 1689 I wrote a book with a strange title called Two Treatises of Government. A treatise is like a very long essay. I believe that man has certain natural rights. A natural right is a right given by God. Since God gives natural rights, nobody, not even a king or a government, can take them away.

You are probably asking, "What natural rights has God given me?" That's easy. Everybody has the right to "LIFE, LIBERTY and PROPERTY." Nobody can take those rights from you! If somebody does try to take away your natural rights, your government must protect them. If your government does not protect your natural rights, you have the right to overthrow your government and put in a government that does protect your rights.

That is what we did in 1688 in the Glorious Revolution. The Stuart Kings were not protecting our natural rights. So we overthrew the government and put in a new government that promised to protect our rights. It's that simple!

87 years later, an American by the name of Thomas Jefferson, wrote the Declaration of Independence. He wrote it to justify the American Revolution against my country, England. Jefferson wrote that when a government does not protect your natural rights (he called them unalienable rights, but it means the same thing), such as "life, liberty and the PURSUIT of happiness," people have the right to try to change their government. If that fails, they can overthrow the government. The Americans then got rid of us English and started the United States of America. I wonder where Jefferson got his ideas from?

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did John Locke write Two Treatises of Government?

2. What does Locke mean by "natural rights?" Give two examples

I. Enlightenment Political Philosophers
   A. Historical Background
      1. After centuries of harsh and often cruel monarchs, Enlightenment
         philosophers and writers began to question the kings’ right to rule.
   B. John Locke
      1. English writer who argued that governments are created to serve
         and protect the people in society.
      2. Governments who abuse the “natural rights” of their citizens should
         be overthrown.
      3. The US Declaration of Independence contains the same political
         philosophy as Locke.
   C. Baron Montesquieu
      1. French writer who believed that a government’s political power
         should be split into three separate branches (separation of powers).
      2. His goal was to keep any ruler from becoming too powerful and
         corrupt
      3. American federal government is also split into three sections
         (Executive, Legislative, Judicial)
      4. Each branch has its own functions and checks the power of the
         other two branches
   D. Jean Rousseau
      1. French writer who believed that government must be based on the
         “will of the people”. Also known as “majority rules” or
         “Democracy”
      2. American government is based on citizens exercising their right to
         vote.
ADAM SMITH MEETS KARL MARX

Vocabulary: capitalist, invest, profit, private, property, opiate, dictatorship.

SMITH: My name is Adam Smith. I was an Englishman who wrote a book called THE WEALTH OF NATIONS. The book was printed in the year 1776.

MARX: My name is Karl Marx. I was a German who disagreed with everything Adam Smith wrote about. My most famous book THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, was written in 1848.

SMITH: I wanted to know why some countries are rich and why other countries are poor. I believed that it was industry that makes a country wealthy and great. My book, THE WEALTH OF NATIONS, explains how countries can get a lot of industry.

MARX: Your book was terrible. Because of you there were many classes of people. Some were very rich, some were in the middle, host were poor. That is wrong. Everybody should be treated equally. Why should a doctor get more money than a garbage man? They should each get what they need to live.

SMITH: That is ridiculous. People who work harder should get more. The owner of a factory should get more money than the workers. Doctors should be richer than garbage men. If they did not, why would anyone go to medical school?

MARX: That's what's wrong with you CAPITALISTS. All you think about is money or what's in it for you.

SMITH: If you want businessmen to open factories and INVEST their money, you must allow them to make a PROFIT. The government must let them alone. This is known as LAISSEZ FAIRE. The government must allow the businessman to do whatever he wants with his PRIVATE PROPERTY. If a government does this; businessmen will invest their money in industry. This will lead to an Industrial revolution and make a nation great.
SMITH: LAISSEZ-FAIRE means nobody makes rules. COMPETITION will force industry to make good products and to sell them for a fair price.

MARX: That's easy for you to say. What about all the workers who live and work under terrible conditions? What about the long hours on the job? What about the fact that there is no on the job safety. All this goes on while the rich Capitalists get richer and the poor worker goes hungry.

SMITH: God will punish those who treat their fellow man poorly.

MARX: That is nonsense. There is no God! You Capitalists made him up. All religion is false. Religion is the OPIATE of the people. In a Communist country we will not allow religion.

SMITH: The problem with you is that you blame your failure on the Capitalists who work harder to make more money. It is natural for people to want more. They can have it under Capitalism if they are willing to work harder or go to school.

MARX: That is why all Capitalists must die. I want the workers of the world to unite and to start revolutions in each country. The workers will take over and start a DICTATORSHIP where they are in charge. There will be no religion and there will be no economic classes. Everyone will get the same thing and be equal. Everyone will get the same pay. Everyone will get the same housing. Everyone will get the same health care. It doesn't matter what job you have, as long as you work. That's what Communism is about. We will share everything equally.

SMITH: That system sounds great, but it can never work. Unless you give more to people who work harder and unless you give people a reason to invest their money, nothing will happen. Karl Marx, you are a dreamer. You do not live in the real world.

QUESTIONS:

1. List two things Adam Smith believed in.

2. List two things Karl Marx believed in.

3. Why didn't Adam Smith believe in the ideas of Karl Marx?

4. Why did Karl Marx oppose the ideas of Adam Smith?

5. Would you rather live in a Capitalist or in a Communist country? Explain your answer.