Explore

Locke and Hobbes

Who were John Locke and Thomas Hobbes?
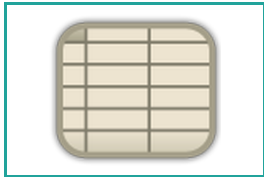
The Enlightenment: Comparison Chart

Use this comparison chart to compare and contrast the Enlightenment thinkers presented on pages 3–5.

Some of the early political philosophers of the **Enlightenment** came from Great Britain. Civil wars tore the country apart in the mid-1600s. One king was executed and the country went through several governments. This turmoil led English philosophers to write about the relationship between people and their governments.

One of the earliest thinkers who tried to look at politics in a rational way was **Thomas Hobbes**. He believed that people were naturally aggressive and that conflict was a normal part of human nature. In his most famous book, *Leviathan*, Hobbes wrote that people could only escape war and violence by giving up their natural rights and submitting to the rule of a strong ruler. Hobbes called this agreement in which people gave up rights in exchange for law and order a **social contract**. Because of this negative view of human nature, Hobbes supported powerful rulers more than the rights of individuals.

John Locke, another important English philosopher at this time, had a very different view of human nature. He believed that people were not born good or evil, but that their characters were determined by their life experiences. In his most well-known political work, *Two Treatises on Government*, Locke wrote that people were born free and that they naturally had certain rights. The most important of these rights were life, liberty, and property.

Locke agreed with Hobbes that governments were formed through a social contract, but he saw the purpose of government very differently. Locke wrote that the purpose of government was to protect natural rights. The only reason people should give up any of these rights was in exchange for a just, or fair, government. According to Locke's idea of a social contract, if a government did not rule justly, or did not protect people's rights, the people had a right to overthrow their leaders.