

	Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) English	John Locke (1632–1704) English	Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) French
State of nature: What is life like for the uncivilized?	"Life is nasty, brutish and short." Hobbes believed that, in a state of nature, might makes right, and that we agree to be governed to protect us from living in a state of nature.	People are born good and are corrupted by society. People are created equal not in ability but in rights. All people have the rights to life, liberty, and property.	People are inherently unequal in ability, but this inequality only matters for the corrupted civilized man who deviated from the nobility of savagery.
Natural law: Defines what the basic human rights are in all societies.	The natural law that Hobbes focuses on is survival. He states that, in nature, every being is so concerned with survival that any idea of rights includes only what one can physically protect.	All humans are endowed at creation with rights to life, liberty, and property. These are the basic rights that all people have.	Rousseau describes the state of nature as noble. We only deviate from natural law, in which the needs of each individual are met by the group, due to the corrupting force of civilization.
Social contract	People give up some of their rights in order to gain some protection from the government.	People give up some of their rights in order to gain some protection from the government, but if the government does not do its job, the people must change it.	The social contract is between the people, not the people and the government. Each person gives up all rights to the "General Will" which then incorporates every individual through the legislature.
Role of the state	The state prevents people from taking each other's property and killing each other.	The state protects a person's right to life, freedom, and property.	The state enacts the General Will of the people as expressed through the legislature.
Property	Seen as a limited resource that people compete for.	Ownership of property is among everyone's natural rights.	Property is one of the worst inventions of society, used to manipulate the masses.
Religion	Believes that the state must have only one religion for unity.	Believes in religious toleration by the state.	Abhors organized religion, especially Christianity, but does not reject God.
Favored form of government	Absolute monarchy	Any representative government: constitutional monarchy, democracy, or republic	Complete consensus based on dictatorship of the General Will.
What was his essential question?	How can society prevent chaos and violence?	How can government protect the citizen and his/her possessions?	How can society combat inequality?