



THINKER IN BOXES

JOHN LOCKE

Team: British Imperial Lions

Position: Silly mid off

Status: MIA—presumed “lost”

John Locke (1632–1704) was a Brit with a scary hairdo who also, in his *Second Treatise of Government*, begins with a state of nature.^a However, unlike Hobbes's vision, Locke's state of nature is not a bad place. In his conception, all have natural rights to “life, liberty, and property.” People are social, and since they deal with each other according to the rules of natural law, any social difference among them arises from how hard they work. However, the state of nature can suddenly turn into a state of war when a few people acting like playground bullies seek to violate natural laws and cause havoc for everyone.

Since Locke believed that the state of nature is not as nasty as Hobbes envisioned it, Locke argued that when people come together in a state of nature, they first form a “civil society,” which then creates a government. Thus, the civil society is superior to the government, and the government that is created is a limited one. People surrender only as much of their rights as is absolutely necessary for the government to carry out its primary function, which, according to Locke, is “the preservation of property.” Hence Locke's utopia is one in which the government exists as a subcontractor to the civil society, and this subcontractor continues to work as long as it performs its responsibility to protect the natural rights of the populace. All are free to enjoy their rights (including life and liberty), property, and the fruits of their labor.

Perhaps what is most important in Locke's theory is what is left implicit. If the government does not live up to its responsibility, can it be fired? Do the people have the right to cast off a government that fails to protect the rights and privileges of its citizenry or abuses its power? One answer can be found in the Declaration of Independence, which, building on Lockean theory, proclaims, “That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.” While many think that Locke died, it is rumored that he was “lost” on a tropical island and is now living with a bunch of other survivors of a plane crash.

^a John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, ed. J. W. Gough (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1966).