

Social Contract Theories: An Analysis

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These three philosophers Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau were the main thinkers of philosophy. They helped men evolve this social contract theory to what it is now, in this modern day. Socrates believed that if you live in the society you agree to follow the rules. Then the idea of social contract theory was given by Hobbes. Their ideas depends on the social issues of their time and are influenced by the era in which they used to live. A main similarity in their work is that all three of them believed that there should be a sort of social contract, a constitution of a supreme power, such as government in order to govern the rights of man, but they have different views on how social contract should be established and how the government should be formed.



Social contract is an agreement between the members of the community or between the legal sovereign authority and its people. In order to understand the Social Contract Theories Expounded by these philosophers, we have to understand their state of nature. According to Hobbes human nature is selfish and must be controlled while according to Locke humans are rational and Rousseau thinks humans are good and compassionate but have a tendency of corruption in them. Hobbes first imagined that if there is a state of nature where is no law, there would be chaos as war in in the nature of man. A state of nature is a dangerous place according to him. So this thought gave him an idea of social contract theory. Hobbes felt that the man's power hungry nature and the state of war is controlled by social contract. As when there is one visible power, it keeps the men in awe and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their promises and observations of these laws of nature. Locke feels the same that the purpose of law is not the restriction of man's freedom but is rather to grant man liberty. If there is no law there is no freedom because liberty has to be free from violence from others and laws help up with this. Laws promote the idea of popular sovereignty. He (Locke) also believed that laws are made to establish man's natural rights. Rousseau also thought the same that the creation of social contract secures man's rights. He thinks that it's the people who are sovereign. For Hobbes if there is a social contract people are going to live in peace, without rights under the control of monarch. According to John Locke natural rights would be enforced by government created with consent. For Rousseau life is going to fare for everyone. As as we look to the benefits of everyone .Rousseau begins on social contract with his famous quote "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chain" Also he said that social contract is essential if a man has an intention to survive.



Hobbes perception was that man is evil and government is needed to protect public. Government should be powerful and cannot be overthrow. Power should not be shared and executive is absolute. While Locke had this idea that government desires the benefit of public and can be overthrown on some conditions. Power should be shared on legislative and executive. And Rousseau has this point that man nature is good but society screws it up. Government is needed to enforce social contract and power is shared and direct and there is no need of representatives. Hobbes placed moral obligations on the sovereign who shall be bound by natural law. Hence, it can be concluded that, Hobbes was the supporter of absolutism. According to Locke man lived in the State of Nature. It was reasonably good and enjoyable, but the property was not secure. He considered State of Nature as a “Golden Age”. It was a state of peace, goodwill, mutual assistance, and preservation. In that state of nature, men had all the rights which nature could give them. Jean Jacques Rousseau gave a new interpretation to the theory of Social Contract in his work “The Social Contract” and “ Emile”. According to him, social contract is not a historical fact but a hypothetical construction of reason and before the Social Contract, the life in the State of Nature was happy and there was equality among men. As time passed, however, humanity faced certain changes. As the population increased, the means by which people could satisfy their needs had to change. People slowly began to live together in small families, and then in small communities. Divisions of labour started, both within and between families, and discoveries and inventions made life modern and much easier giving rise to leisure time. This all lead people to make comparisons between themselves and others, resulting in public values, leading to shame and envy, pride and contempt. The most important thing he invented was the private property.

Hobbes believed that without subjection to a common power of their rights and freedoms, men are necessarily at war. Locke and Rousseau disagrees to this and set forth the view that the state is to

preserve and protect the natural rights of its citizens. When government fails in that task, citizens have the right to withdraw their support and even The social contract that has been evolved today is because of these political philosophers.