

COMPARISON SUMMARY: ***HOBBS – LOCKE - ROUSSEAU***

Many philosophers have formed theories attempting to synthesize the organizing principles of civilized society. Most tend to highlight the betterment of society and the maintenance of order as the prime motivating factors for such a construction. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one such philosopher, as proven by his monumental endeavor *The Social Contract and Discourses*. Thomas Hobbes was another, as shown by his text *Leviathan*. Both texts are doctrines on how to best achieve an ideal governing body. Both also grant individuals the same initial status; all men are naturally created equal. Yet, when it comes to the execution of their ideas, Hobbes and Rousseau are radically different. Hobbes finds absolute monarchy the only viable solution, while Rousseau champions direct participatory government where the decision-making process is directly affected by the society's citizens. How is it possible that two political thinkers that began in the same place could veer so far apart from one another?

To begin answering this question, we first must consider each man's conception of what man is like in his most primitive, natural state. What are our basic tendencies as human beings and how do these characteristics dictate what form of government can be deemed just? Hobbes proposes the pessimistic idea that we all exist in a state of perpetual war with each other, "bellum omne contra omnes; war of all against all" (Hobbes 185). Rousseau, on the other hand, insists that we are not naturally so cruel and harmful to one another - it is society and social systems which propagate this animosity; "War then is a relation, not between man and man, but between State and State, and individuals are enemies only accidentally" (Rousseau 9) Although both Hobbes and Rousseau agree that men exist in a state of natural equality, it is at this point their theories radically diverge from one another due to this fundamental differing of opinion.

Yet another difference between the two theorists stems from each man's ideas on whether or not power is equal to justice. Hobbes states that in order for society to be orderly, the people must relinquish all of their individual rights and living under the power of an all-powerful sovereign. All of the citizens within a society are equally accountable to this sovereign - all fear and respect his power equally. For Hobbes, it is precisely this fear of retribution that will keep the peace among an otherwise turbulent population. Rousseau, however, states that any power or authority that is gained through coercive means is not just in any sense of the word, as it is not agreed upon and consented to. (Though, it should be noted that Rousseau admits that despotism can lead to a joyless tranquility.) For Rousseau, no one in a society has any sort of moral obligation to accept despotic rule. "Force does not create right, and we are only obliged to obey legitimate powers." (9) He states that in order to form a stable government, man needs to first reconcile his behavior in the state of nature with his need for orderly governance. This reconciliation is accomplished through a social contract under the auspices of which all transactions will take place. The social contract will embody a general will of the people and will allow individuals to make decisions freely while making everyone liable to the whole of the community; "the total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community" (12). Rousseau believed that a man's liberty was the greatest necessity for his happiness; a belief that I will explore while discussing his support of participatory government later on. Let us begin then by exploring the root of Hobbes' argument for monarchy based upon his claim that people (due to their base desires and flaws) are naturally warring and must be pacified through fear and accountability to a single all-powerful sovereign. Hobbes asserts that we are warring creatures due to our insecurities, the scarcity of resources and our vanity. Thankfully, he believes that we

are also creatures of reason and shrewdness, thus we strive to overcome our natural state. To accomplish this great task, it is necessary for people to agree to relinquish their freedom to act "naturally" (meaning, as they would in the state of nature). In a Hobbesian society, a man has only as much liberty against others as he would allow others to have against himself. Equity is established in the form of a covenant between all of the people (not between the people and the sovereign) with the understanding that all agree to abdicate their liberty and freedom to the rule of the sovereign. By removing the masses from the decision-making process, Hobbes renders personal wants and conflicting motives moot. All are therefore equally powerless and their inclination towards conflict is rendered impotent. It is here we realize that Hobbes (or, more accurately, the people) grants the sovereign carte blanche to do as he wishes.

The immediate rebuttal to this course of logic is certainly: What prevents the sovereign from abusing his power? Technically nothing. The only justification Hobbes can offer is that being a tyrant would not be in the sovereign's best interest and that he, by virtue of his status, would be inclined to maintain order by practicing restraint. The Hobbesian covenant is rendered void as soon as it dictates an action that places a man in a position to surrender his life - an action Hobbes says cannot be justifiably expected. Furthermore, a sovereign promoting non-suffering encourages peace as a side effect; if people suffer indiscriminate violence at the hands of their sovereign, what possible reason could they have for resisting the urge to revert back to the state of nature? Once the element of 'potentiality' is replaced by 'actuality', in terms of retribution, to follow the compact would no longer make any sense. Another compelling argument for why a monarch might make a better sovereign than a council or a representative body, lies again in the fact that as an individual the monarch is endowed with all of the same natural tendencies as other men; he wishes for glory, fame, riches, and reputation. In a monarchy, the health and prosperity of the kingdom affect the perception people have of its king. Thus, the monarch would be naturally inclined to maintain a healthy and reputable kingdom in order to stoke the fires of his own ego. Inversely, a monarch whose kingdom lay in ruin would suffer the title of a 'failed ruler'. So although a monarch is not directly accountable to the commonwealth over which he presides, he is nonetheless bound by the eternal state of nature, which permeates his actions as a man (Hobbes 48). In contrast, when many people share power, the advent of corruption is much more likely. A body or council has no ego, therefore, its members are more likely to be unscrupulous as their individual reputations are not necessarily marred by the bad name of the body to which they belong.

As I mentioned earlier, Rousseau insists that no political construct can be morally justifiable if it has the effect of denying men their liberty, for "to renounce liberty is to renounce being a man, to surrender the rights of humanity and even its duties" (Rousseau 31). This statement underlies every aspect of Rousseau's political science in that it is a truth that can never be compromised. Indeed, for a society to hold any moral authority, that society must encompass the above writ truth into its political systems. In Rousseau's eyes, man is perfectible. The potential for this perfectibility is present in the state of nature, but is thwarted by the social inequalities present in the civil state where men are subjected to rule. Rousseau states that popular sovereignty is the only means to rectify this dilemma and create a state based not on subjugation, but rather valid and necessary ascension. (Bear in mind that from the outset, Rousseau diverges from Hobbes in what the foundations of the state should be.) The Rousseauian society, or social contract, enables the individual to be absorbed into the common general will without losing his own will. The logic behind this is that the general will is an impersonal force, from which no immoral dependency may arise. In this sense, man loses little and gains in return membership to a society of equals, retaining (to some extent) the equality he enjoyed in the state of nature.

The Rousseauian notion of the general will is one that requires some clarification. The general will is not merely the overwhelming majority, nor is it defined by unanimity. It is more akin to that which is truly and verily for the betterment of all, even if potentially every single person in the social contract believes to the contrary at the time; "The general will is always in the right, but the judgment which guides it is not always enlightened".

Although it may appear self-evident, Rousseau asserts that "people being subject the laws, ought to be their author: the conditions of the society ought to be regulated solely by those who come together to form it". This is, once again, an assertion that the people are in fact capable and worthy of self-rule, that they are not naturally adversarial.

In their attempts to structure a viable political theory, Hobbes and Rousseau, while granting man a natural equality, diverge completely on what is morally right and to what extent the empowerment of the individual is important in society. Hobbes holds stability to be of the utmost importance at almost any cost, while for Rousseau, mere stability without liberty is tyrannical, immoral and falls short of accrediting man with the type of government which he has the potential to actuate. The former seems to hold true in terms of what history has shown us thus far, but it is the latter which lends itself to the humanism many of us wish for.

Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau Comparison Grid

	Hobbes	Locke	Rousseau
State of Nature	The state of nature is a state of war. No morality exists. Everyone lives in constant fear. Because of this fear, no one is really free, but, since even the "weakest" could kill the "strongest" men ARE equal.	Men exist in the state of nature in perfect freedom to do what they want. The state of nature is not necessarily good or bad. It is chaotic. So, men do give it up to secure the advantages of civilized society.	Men in a state of nature are free and equal. In a state of nature, men are "Noble Savages". Civilization is what corrupted him.
Purpose of Government	To impose law and order to prevent the state of war.	To secure natural rights, namely man's property and liberty.	To bring people into harmony. To unite them under the "General Will".

