

# Compare And Contrast the Social Contract theories Of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau

All three social contract theorists have different takes on the state of nature, the implications of the social contract and ideal form of government. Social contract theory is best clear by examining the work of Hobbes, <sup>Locke, and Rousseau.</sup>

## (1) View On Human Nature:

Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and J-J Rousseau have different views about human nature. According to **Thomas Hobbes**, Man is essentially selfish, self-seeking, fearful and competitive to the point of combativeness.

Man shows no sympathy towards his fellow being. He said that Man **is** <sup>has</sup> lust of power and he doesn't believe in other. (Pessimistic)

According to **John Locke**, Man is rational and a social creature and is capable to live

In moral and social order. He feels sympathy, love and tenderness toward his fellow-being. He wants to live in peace and tranquility with others. He thinks rationality is major characteristics of man and all men are naturally equal in the state of equality.

**According to Rousseau,** Nature has endowed man with two distinctive instinct i.e. self-regarding and other regarding. Rousseau agree with Plato that human nature is essentially good. Rousseau says that man is not aggressive and brute as Hobbes has made him. he is rather timid and fearful and more likely to avoid quarrel than to seek it. There are only two instincts that make up man's nature. First is self-love while second is sympathy. Reason and conscience enable man to establish harmony.



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## (2) The State of nature:

According to **Hobbes**, Man was egoistic, moved by fear and glory. There was political equality of all and there was no question of right or wrong, just or unjust. There was war of all against all and life was nasty, brutish and short. Hobbes claims a state of nature with no room for industry, education in which "might is right" and that men are moved by external relevance (Lessenoff, 1990)

**According to John Locke**, the state of nature was state of good will, mutual assistance and preservation. It was state of peace not war which was governed by law of nature. People live under the law of nature, which

in the absence of government, which was the law of reason and Justice. Man had the right of life, liberty and property. Therefore, one could not harm another in his life, health, liberty and property.

**According to Rousseau,** state of nature was equal, self-sufficient and contented. Man actuated by impulse not by reason. Man can only corrupt through a gradual process of moving into society, and contract through which government originates is a clever fraud perpetrated by rich upon poor. However, origin of property created inequality and necessity of state. Rousseau believes that the state of nature degenerates into a condition of war due to growth of population and origin of private property and the dawn of reason and civilization creates the state.



### 43) Law Of Nature:

**Hobbes** says that, there was no civil law and law of nature was regulative of human actions. Hobbes law of nature holds that every man should seek peace and preserve it and if he can't obtain it, he should "use all helps and advantages of war."

**Locke** says that in the state of nature, law of nature is an embodiment of morality and doesn't represent natural impulse but moral law based upon reason to regulate human behaviour.

**Rousseau** says, law of nature was based on instinct, social ability which resulted from feeling and emotions and not from reason. All proper laws emanated from the act of general will. Man was free to enjoy all natural rights

## 4) Social Contract:

Thomas Hobbes theory of Social contract appeared first time in Leviathan. According to him, Man lived in a chaotic condition of constant fear. Life was Solitary, poor, and brutish and there was constant warfare. Man has natural desire for security and order. In order to secure self protection and self-preservation, and to avoid misery and pain, man entered into contract. In order to achieve this, they voluntarily surrender all their rights and freedom to some authority. As a result of this contract, the mightiest authority is to protect and preserve their lives and property. This led the emergence of the institution of "ruler" or "monarch". He was supporter of absolutism. The Social contract was given a common Sovereign Unilaterally, who was not party to social



contract and was bound by the term of Social Contract. Hence, Individualism, materialism, Unilateralism and absolutism are inter-woven in this contract.

**John Locke** theory of Social Contract is different than that of Hobbes. He says Individual entered into Social contract by surrendering some of their rights and created a common authority and to interpret and to execute the law of nature. He was not clear whether the authority was state or government. There is another contract between Sovereign and people. This is known as Government Contract. Therefore common agency was limited in authority and not the people. According to Locke, the purpose of the Government and law is to uphold and protect the natural rights of men, so



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long as government fulfill this purpose, the law given by it are valid and binding but when it ceases to fulfill it, then the laws would have no validity and the government can be thrown out of power.

In Locke's view, unlimited sovereignty is contrary to natural law. Hence Locke advocate the principle of "a state of liberty; not of license."

**J. J. Rousseau** was french philosopher who gave a new interpretation to the theory of social contract in his work, "The Social contract" and "Emile". According to Rousseau, the original "freedom, happiness, equality and liberty which existed in primitive societies prior to social contract, was lost in the modern civilisation. Through social contract, a new form of social organisation, the state was formed to assure



and guarantee rights, liberties, freedom and equalities. For this purpose they surrendered their rights not to single individual but to community as whole which Rousseau use term "general will". The "General will" therefore all purpose was the will of majority citizens to which blind obedience was to given. His theory based on the principle of "Man is born free, but everywhere he is a chain".

### **-(5) Sovereignty:**

Hobbes says that the Sovereignty was unlimited, indivisible, absolute, inalienable and above the law. It was source of law, justice, morality and property. Sovereign had absolute and complete control over all the citizen of state. Thus, he give the concept of absolute sovereignty.



**Locke** believes that the people had surrendered some rights to the Sovereign in order to protect the rest. Therefore, his Sovereign was not unlimited but he was limited to the performance of his duties. The inherent right of man to life, liberty, and property represented a limitation on government. He convinces the concept of popular Sovereignty and not legal Sovereignty. He believes that people's Sovereign power is held in reserve to ~~excited~~ exercised when the government or Sovereign fail to protect the people's rights to life, liberty and property.

**Rousseau** put the Sovereignty in the hands of corporate whole. He believes in popular Sovereignty people are the legal Sovereign. Sovereignty resides in the General will of people. His Sovereign like Hobbes one is absolute.



# CRITICAL APPREHENSION

- 1- Rousseau propounded the state, law and the government are interchangeable, but in present scenario is different. Even though government can be overthrown but not the state. A state exist even there is no government.
- 2- Hobbes concept of absolutism is totally a vague concept in present scenario. Democracy is the need and examples may be taken from Burma and other nations
- 3- According to Hobbes, the sovereign should absolute Authority. This is against the rule of law because absolute power in one authority brings arbitrariness.
- 4- Locke concept of state of nature is vague as any conflict with regard to property.
- 5- Locke concept of laissez-faire is not welfare oriented. Now in a present scenario, every state undertake step to form welfare state.