

Political Science

Q. What is the difference between Rousseau's notion of 'the state of nature' and that of Hobbes and Locke? (20)

1) Introduction:

The question at hand pertains to the discussion on the concept of 'the state of nature' and 'The Social Contract Theory'. The state of nature is the time period before the formation of any social contract between an individual and the state.

All three philosophers differ in the concept of state of nature, social contract and form of government.

Rousseau's state of nature discusses the birth materialism which moved men into inequality and hatred which eventually led to the establishment of a social contract and a state.

The Social Contract Theory is a concept where individuals provide power to the state in order to control and maintain harmony.

However, as defined by Rousseau excessive control of state leads to tyranny. The question will discuss a comparison between Rousseau and, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes Theory of Social Contract.

2) Social Contract Theory of Hobbes:

i. The nature of state:

The nature of the state defined by Thomas Hobbes in his work "Leviathan" pictures the state of nature as 'War of all against all'. He defines the people of that time as egoistic, selfish and self seeking. The selfish nature of a man turns him into

a person with greed of power and spread war among others. To escape this, Hobbes introduces the Theory of Social Contract in which these horrors can be stopped.

ii. Social Contract:

Hobbes explains the concept of social contract as a need to control the worsen nature of mankind. He defines the concept of a sovereign, a king or ruler to whom the masses seek protection from in order to avoid suffering. The desire of every man to protect themselves is the reason to surrender our own liberty in the hands of a ruler. He defines it as a unilateral contract where the masses provide services to the sovereign.

iii. Concept of Sovereignty:

Thomas Hobbes defines sovereignty as a inalienable, and indivisible power over masses. He defines sovereign as an 'Animalistic Beast' who uses force to bring order. Best example would be the dictatorship rule in history. All absolute monarchies are based on this concept such as Louis XIV of France, famous for his absolutism.

3) Social Contract Theory of John Locke:

i. Concept of nature of state by Locke:

John Locke took an optimistic approach while laying the concept of his state of nature. He considers it as a 'Golden Age' of people. He elaborates further by discussing

how individuals live in a perfect liberty. He further defines there to be a concept of **Law of nature** where there were no judges, and no authority. People managed duties according to pre-moral cultures and on coming traditions. He also defines the concept of **Natural Right** of man such as right of life, liberty, and property. He considers this as a key point for a state to understand and protect.

ii. **Social Contract:**

He defines two social contracts for masses in society. One, a common agency for interpretation and other as the executive of law of nature. He develops a concept of limited sovereignty. Naming the state for protection of masses - with the

He identifies how individuals surrender some but not all of their natural rights to the sovereign.

iii. Concept of Sovereignty by Locke:

John Locke properly identifies a limitation on the state. He establishes a concept of limited sovereignty. He expresses the concept that if the sovereign fails to deliver his duties in protection of rights of masses, then they have full right to form a rebellion against the sovereign. Most of the governments around the world follow this concept. The best example would be American Declaration of Independence led by Thomas Jefferson. Hence, major revolutions are based on this concept therefore, is considered among the best.

4) Social Contract Theory of Rousseau:

i. Concept of Nature of State:

Rousseau takes a different approach from Locke and Hobbes. He defines the state of nature prior to the social contract as an equal setting for men. Men were free and were considered as noble savages who live the life of idyllic blissfulness and primitive simplicity. For, Rousseau, the state of nature takes turn when greed enters the man's life making himself the sovereign authority and in this case he defines the use of a social contract in order to maintain harmony.

ii. Social contract:

The social contract of Rousseau sets

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the concept of peoples will. He defines how through popular votes a collective forum would be created. The individuals would surrender their rights to the collective whole in order to get it back in an improved form.

iii. Concept of Sovereignty by Rousseau:

He identifies the concept of popular sovereignty. This philosophy explains the will of people as the most sovereign. He enclaims how the power is not vested in the ruler but in the people. Due to his philosophy many revolutions took place such for example, The French and Dutch revolution of 18th century.

5) Analysis:

The concept of Social contract Theory is defined as a form of government in order to protect the rights of individuals and masses. The theory of Rousseau identifies an ideal form of revolutionary model.

This gives a touch of reality.

The major difference of this with others is the concept of popular sovereignty which can be linked to modern day **Democracy**, therefore the concept of popular vote and will.

On the contrary the other two philosophers, Locke and Hobbes identify absolute sovereignty and limited sovereignty which makes it difficult to appear in reality. **Hume**, argues how the whole concept of social contract is not based on history and is therefore a mere mutual agreement between masses and sovereign.

6) Conclusion:

In conclusion, the theory of nature of state in the social contract theory, identifies the concept of life of humans prior to formation of any laws. As claimed by John Locke how prior to the social contract individuals followed the law of nature which provided justice and kept a harmony among individuals. Later on, with the development of time materials and greed became an issue creating disintegration in the society which has eventually led to the formation of a social contract in order to maintain and uphold peace.

"Your rights ends, when the right of others begins"

- Anonymous.