



# **SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY**

by Contractualist Thinkers



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## Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)

- **State of Nature:** Hobbes described the state of nature as a pre-political condition where life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." In this state, individuals were in constant conflict.
- **Social Contract:** To escape this condition, individuals collectively agreed to form a commonwealth and establish a sovereign authority (the Leviathan) to ensure peace and security. This sovereign would have absolute power to maintain order and prevent the return to the state of nature.



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## John Locke (1632–1704)

- **State of Nature:** Locke's state of nature was more benign than Hobbes's, characterized by natural rights to life, liberty, and property. However, without a common authority, these rights were insecure.
- **Social Contract:** People formed governments to protect their natural rights. Unlike Hobbes, Locke argued that the government's authority is limited and conditional upon protecting these rights. If the government fails, the people have the right to revolt.



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## Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)

- **State of Nature:** Rousseau viewed the state of nature as a peaceful and solitary life, where individuals were free and equal. Over time, the development of private property led to social inequalities and conflict.
- **Social Contract:** Rousseau proposed a social contract where individuals come together to form a collective "general will" that represents the common good. In this arrangement, individuals submit to the authority of the general will to achieve true freedom and equality.



# Comparison and Contrast of Social Contract theory:

## 1. Thomas Hobbes vs. John Locke

- **View on Human Nature:**

- Hobbes: Believed humans are naturally self-interested, competitive, and in constant conflict. Life in the state of nature is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."
- Locke: Viewed humans as rational and capable of cooperation. In the state of nature, people have natural rights to life, liberty, and property.

- **Social Contract:**

- Hobbes: Individuals surrender all their freedoms to an absolute sovereign to escape the anarchic state of nature and ensure security.
- Locke: Individuals consent to form a government to protect their natural rights. The government's authority is limited, and it can be overthrown if it fails to protect these rights.

- **Government Authority:**

- Hobbes: Absolute authority to maintain order and prevent return to the state of nature.
- Locke: Limited authority, bound to protect natural rights. Government is a fiduciary entity that can be dissolved if it fails its purpose.

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# Comparison and Contrast of Social Contract theory:



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## 2. John Locke vs. Jean-Jacques Rousseau

- **View on Human Nature:**

- Locke: Humans are rational and capable of cooperation. The state of nature is governed by natural law.
- Rousseau: Humans are naturally good but corrupted by society. In the state of nature, humans are free and equal.

- **Social Contract:**

- Locke: Formed to protect natural rights and property. Emphasizes individual rights and limited government.
- Rousseau: Formed to achieve collective sovereignty and the general will. Individuals gain true freedom by participating in the formation of the general will.

- **Government Authority:**

- Locke: Limited and representative government.
- Rousseau: Direct democracy where the general will is sovereign.



## Summary

- **Hobbes** focuses on security and absolute sovereignty to escape the state of nature.
- **Locke** emphasizes natural rights and limited government, with the possibility of overthrowing a government that fails its duties.
- **Rousseau** advocates for collective sovereignty and direct democracy, where true freedom is achieved through the general will.

Therefore, These thinkers have significantly shaped modern political philosophy by exploring the conditions and implications of social contracts, providing various perspectives on the balance between individual freedoms and societal order.

–*Thanku*