Locke's Political Philosophy

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John Locke (1632–1704) is among the most influential political philosophers of the modern period. In the *Two Treatises of Government*, he defended the claim that men are by nature free and equal against claims that God had made all people naturally subject to a monarch. He argued that people have rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and property that have a foundation independent of the laws of any particular society. Locke used the claim that men are naturally free and equal as part of the justification for understanding legitimate political government as the result of a social contract where people in the state of nature conditionally transfer some of their rights to the government in order to better ensure the stable, comfortable enjoyment of their lives, liberty, and property. Since governments exist by the consent of the people in order to protect the rights of the people and promote the public good, governments that fail to do so can be resisted and replaced with new governments. Locke is thus also important for his defense of the right of revolution. Locke also defends the principle of majority rule and the separation of legislative and executive powers. In the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke denied that coercion should be used to bring people to (what the ruler believes is) the true religion and also denied that churches should have any coercive power over their members. Locke elaborated on these themes in his later political writings, such as the *Second Letter on Toleration* and *Third Letter on Toleration*.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/>

Hobbes

## The State of Nature

To establish these conclusions, Hobbes invites us to consider what life would be like in a state of nature, that is, a condition without government. Perhaps we would imagine that people might fare best in such a state, where each decides for herself how to act, and is judge, jury and executioner in her own case whenever disputes arise—and that at any rate, this state is the appropriate baseline against which to judge the justifiability of political arrangements. Hobbes terms this situation “the condition of mere nature”, a state of perfectly private judgment, in which there is no agency with recognized authority to arbitrate disputes and effective power to enforce its decisions.

Hobbes's near descendant, John Locke, insisted in his Second Treatise of Government that the state of nature was indeed to be preferred to subjection to the arbitrary power of an absolute sovereign. But Hobbes famously argued that such a “dissolute condition of masterlesse men, without subjection to Lawes, and a coercive Power to tye their hands from rapine, and revenge” would make impossible all of the basic security upon which comfortable, sociable, civilized life depends. There would be “no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.” If this is the state of nature, people have strong reasons to avoid it, which can be done only by submitting to some mutually recognized public authority, for “so long a man is in the condition of mere nature, (which is a condition of war,) as private appetite is the measure of good and evill.”

Although many readers have criticized Hobbes's state of nature as unduly pessimistic, he constructs it from a number of individually plausible empirical and normative assumptions. He assumes that people are sufficiently similar in their mental and physical attributes that no one is invulnerable nor can expect to be able to dominate the others. Hobbes assumes that people generally “shun death”, and that the desire to preserve their own lives is very strong in most people. While people have local affections, their benevolence is limited, and they have a tendency to partiality. Concerned that others should agree with their own high opinions of themselves, people are sensitive to slights. They make evaluative judgments, but often use seemingly impersonal terms like ‘good’ and ‘bad’ to stand for their own personal preferences. They are curious about the causes of events, and anxious about their futures; according to Hobbes, these characteristics incline people to adopt religious beliefs, although the content of those beliefs will differ depending upon the sort of religious education one has happened to receive.

With respect to normative assumptions, Hobbes ascribes to each person in the state of nature a liberty right to preserve herself, which he terms “the right of nature”. This is the right to do whatever one sincerely judges needful for one's preservation; yet because it is at least possible that virtually anything might be judged necessary for one's preservation, this theoretically limited right of nature becomes in practice an unlimited right to potentially anything, or, as Hobbes puts it, a right “to all things”. Hobbes further assumes as a principle of practical rationality, that people should adopt what they see to be the necessary means to their most important ends.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hobbes-moral/#LawNat>

Montesquieu

### 4.2 Liberty

Montesquieu is among the greatest philosophers of liberalism, but his is what Shklar has called "a liberalism of fear" (Shklar, Montesquieu, p. 89). According to Montesquieu, political liberty is "a tranquillity of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety" (SL 11.6). Liberty is not the freedom to do whatever we want: if we have the freedom to harm others, for instance, others will also have the freedom to harm us, and we will have no confidence in our own safety. Liberty involves living under laws that protect us from harm while leaving us free to do as much as possible, and that enable us to feel the greatest possible confidence that if we obey those laws, the power of the state will not be directed against us.

If it is to provide its citizens with the greatest possible liberty, a government must have certain features. First, since "constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it ... it is necessary from the very nature of things that power should be a check to power" (SL 11.4). This is achieved through the separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers of government. If different persons or bodies exercise these powers, then each can check the others if they try to abuse their powers. But if one person or body holds several or all of these powers, then nothing prevents that person or body from acting tyrannically; and the people will have no confidence in their own security.

Aristotle

## 12. Happiness and Political Association

Aristotle’s basic teleological framework extends to his ethical and political theories, which he regards as complementing one another. He takes it as given that most people wish to lead good lives; the question then becomes what the best life for human beings consists in. Because he believes that the best life for a human being is not a matter of subjective preference, he also believes that people can (and, sadly, often do) choose to lead sub-optimal lives. In order to avoid such unhappy eventualities, Aristotle recommends reflection on the criteria any successful candidate for the best life must satisfy. He proceeds to propose one kind of life as meeting those criteria uniquely and therefore promotes it as the superior form of human life. This is a life lived in accordance with reason.

When stating the general criteria for the final good for human beings, Aristotle invites his readers to review them (EN 1094a22–27). This is advisable, since much of the work of sorting through candidate lives is in fact accomplished during the higher-order task of determining the criteria appropriate to this task. Once these are set, it becomes relatively straightforward for Aristotle to dismiss some contenders, including for instance the life of pleasure.

According to the criteria advanced, the final good for human beings must: (i) be pursued for its own sake (EN 1094a1); (ii) be such that we wish for other things for its sake (EN1094a19); (iii) be such that we do not wish for it on account of other things (EN 1094a21); (iv) be complete (teleion), in the sense that it is always choiceworthy and always chosen for itself (EN 1097a26–33); and finally (v) be self-sufficient (autarkês), in the sense that its presence suffices to make a life lacking in nothing (EN 1097b6–16). Plainly some candidates for the best life fall down in the face of these criteria. According to Aristotle, neither the life of pleasure nor the life of honour satisfies them all.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle/#HapPolAss>

What is civic life?

 Civic Engagement is

"working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make a difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."

Thomas Ehrlich, (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching)

http://studentlife.ucmerced.edu/content/what-civic-leadership

The ancient Greek city state or polis was thought to be an educational community, expressed by the Greek term paideia. The purpose of political—that is civic or city—life was the self-development of the citizens. This meant more than just education, which is how paideia is usually translated. Education for the Greeks involved a deeply formative and life-long process whose goal was for each person (read: man) to be an asset to his friends, to his family, and, most important, to the polis.

Becoming such an asset necessitated internalizing and living up to the highest ethical ideals of the community. So paideia included education in the arts, philosophy and rhetoric, history, science, and mathematics; training in sports and warfare; enculturation or learning of the city's religious, social, political, and professional customs and training to participate in them; and the development of one's moral character through the virtues. Above all, the person should have a keen sense of duty to the city. Every aspect of Greek culture in the Classical Age—from the arts to politics and athletics—was devoted to the development of personal powers in public service.

Paideia was inseparable from another Greek concept: arete or excellence, especially excellence of reputation but also goodness and excellence in all aspects of life. Togetherpaideia and arête form one process of self-development, which is nothing other than civic-development. Thus one could only develop himself in politics, through participation in the activities of the polis; and as individuals developed the characteristics of virtue, so would the polis itself become more virtuous and excellent.

All persons, whatever their occupations or tasks, were teachers, and the purpose of education—which was political life itself—was to develop a greater (a nobler, stronger, more virtuous) public community. So politics was more than regulating or ordering the affairs of the community; it was also a “school” for ordering the lives—internal and external—of the citizens. Therefore, the practice of Athenian democratic politics was not only a means of engendering good policies for the city, but it was also a “curriculum” for the intellectual, moral, and civic education of her citizens. “…[A]sk in general what great benefit the state derives from the training by which it educates its citizens, and the reply will be perfectly straightforward. The good education they have received will make them good men…” (Plato,Laws, 641b7–10). Indeed, later in the Laws the Athenian remarks that education should be designed to produce the desire to become “perfect citizens” who know, preceding Aristotle, “how to rule and be ruled” (643e4–6).

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/civic-education/#AncGre>

Rousseau

Amour de soi, amour propre and pitié are not the full complement of passions in Rousseau's thinking. Once people have achieved consciousness of themselves as social beings, morality also becomes possible and this relies on the further faculty of conscience. The fullest accounts of Rousseau's conception of morality are found in the Lettres Morales and in sections of the Confession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar, a part of Emile. In the most primitive forms of human existence, before the emergence of amour propre, pitié balances or restrains self-interest. It is, to that extent, akin to a moral sentiment such as Humean sympathy. But as something that is merely instinctual it lacks, for Rousseau, a genuinely moral quality. Genuine morality, on the other hand, consists in the application of reason to human affairs and conduct. This requires the mental faculty that is the source of genuinely moral motivation, namely conscience. Conscience impels us to the love of justice and morality in a quasi-aesthetic manner. As the appreciation of justice and the desire to act to further it, conscience is based on a rational appreciation of the well-orderedness of a benign God's plan for the world. However, in a world dominated by inflamed amour propre, the normal pattern is not for a morality of reason to supplement or supplant our natural proto-moral sympathies. Instead, the usual course of events in civil society is for reason and sympathy to be displaced while humans' enhanced capacity for reasoning is put at the service, not of morality, but of the impulse to dominate, oppress and exploit.

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rousseau/