Comparing The Philosophies By Locke, Hobbes And Rousseau: Human Nature, Government, Religion

Human Nature

With regards to how humans are, Locke and Rousseau have a more gentle overall way of thinking on the subject than that of their fellow philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes, unlike Locke and Rousseau believed that men were inherently evil. Hobbes's view is perhaps the most aligned with The Bible. The Bible has many verses that support Hobbes's view, "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5), and "surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5) to name a few. Locke saw men managed by reason, Hobbes on the other hand, accepted that men were governed by passion, and the most powerful passion was the dread of rough demise, which in turn would make self-safeguarding the most significant concern for men. Hobbes additionally recognized three extraordinary common reasons for squabble among men, rivalry, glory, and doubt; in his view these incredible natural causes for fight made a ceaseless condition of war, "and such a war, as is of every man, against every man" (Strauss 1987, 400). Hobbes additionally opposed Aristotle's concept of distributive justice, which is the convention that expresses that essentially, some men are progressively qualified to direction while others are increasingly qualified to serve; he accepted, that in nature, all men are equivalent, this uniformity present in nature will drive men into contending with one another and inevitably endeavoring to deny the others of their merchandise, with a definitive objective of enslaving other men until there is no danger left to jeopardize their lives.

As previously expressed, Locke accepted that all men were free in the condition of nature with just the law of nature to manage them, "and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it that, being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possession" (Strauss 1987, 477). Locke believed that there were two commitments under the law of nature, every man is obliged to save himself, and every man is obliged to safeguard mankind. As Hobbes believed that every man was a potential killer, Locke believed that "the main threat to the preservation of life in the state of nature lies not in the tendencies of men to hurt each other but rather, as we shall see, in the poverty and hardship of their natural condition" (Strauss 1987, 485). Locke saw the capability of shrewdness in men similarly as Hobbes did, however unlike Hobbes, which accepted every man is a potential killer, Locke saw men turn go to savagery because of their property being undermined.

Rousseau accepted that man in the condition of nature has just two principal interests, the requirement for self-safeguarding and a specific degree of compassion towards the enduring of others of his sort. In contrast to Locke and Hobbes, which considered the state of nature as a condition that one must attempt to escape from, Rousseau saw "that man is naturally good, and that it is solely by our institutions that men become wicked" (Cahn 2012, 542). He accepted that in nature, men would carry on a lot like creatures and utilizations of his perceptions of creatures, both in the wild and hostage, as a base for correlation on how men would be in a state of nature. While Locke puts faith in reason, and Hobbes in passion, Rousseau accepts that sympathy is the power that would drive us in a state of nature, keeping a solid harmony

between personal responsibility, and the conservation of the species. On the aspect of human nature, I believe that Rousseau is the least Biblical of the three philosophers, mainly due to his belief that it wasn't in the nature of men to be hostile, but that man became hostile because of civil society, therefore going against Bible passages such as "Behold, I was brought forth in inequity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5), and "among whom we all once lived, in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Ephesians 2:3).

Human Law vs. Natural Law

All three philosophers tend to agree on at least one aspect of the law of nature, regardless of the reason, self-preservation is the goal of each individual. According to Locke, the law of nature was reason, and it was written by God in the hearts of all mankind, reason "was the voice of God in him" (Strauss 1987, 483). Even though he acknowledged reason as being implanted by God in all mankind, Locke recognized the presence of sin in humanity, and as such he believed that men should not attempt to live under the law of nature, the state of nature was he called it, "an ill condition not to be endured" (Strauss 1987, 485). One of the main reasons why Locke believed in the establishment of a civil society and human laws was because of his view on property. He used the term property in a comprehensive sense that included life, liberty, and estate. Because the state of nature is only guided only by reason, and that the nature of men focuses around evil and self-interest, Locke found the concept of property as being very unsafe in the state of nature. Locke found "civil government is the proper remedy for the inconveniences of the state of nature" (Strauss 1987, 485), a civil government would give men established, settled, known laws, to help preserve their property.

Hobbes's take on the law of nature is somewhat interesting. In his view a man in the state of nature is under no laws, and every man has a right to everything, the concept of justice and injustice is non-existent because they are construct created by laws, and there are no laws outside civil society. According to Hobbes, the basis to understand the laws of nature is to follow the concept of not doing to others what you wouldn't others to do to you, but that was hard to adhere to, because in nature, man is his own judge, and the concept of justice is non-existent. To Hobbes, civil government and its law was necessary because he didn't feel that the fear of invisible powers such as God were enough to keep peace and tranquility in society.

Out of the three philosophers, Rousseau seems to be the only one that thinks that the state of nature and its laws are a better state of being than civil society. In the state of nature, man is free and stays virtually separated from one another. He sees civil society as unjust and purposefully enchains men and because of the inequality caused by the establishment of civil society, the rich were protected under the law, while the poor were oppressed.

In regards to the laws, I find John Locke to be the most Biblical of the philosophers. Locke believed that the law of nature was implanted in all men from the start, and it was the forced that guided them. Locke referred to such law as reason, but it seems to be talking about the conscience, which is something we all have inside us that tells us if our actions or thoughts are good or evil.

The Establishment and Purpose of the Government

When it comes to government, Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau had very different ideas. Both Locke and Hobbes believed that the state of nature was an unwanted situation, and that civil society was necessary for the preservation of the species.

Locke felt that entering in a civil society was the only way to preserve property, which is what he believed was the most important of the inalienable rights given to men. Locke was a believer of the social contract theory. In Locke's version, individuals will enter in a social contract with the government in order to better protect their rights to life, liberty, and property. For Hobbes, government was necessary to prevent individuals from killing each other. He did not think that an invisible force, such as God, was sufficient, a government, with solid, established laws was necessary for society to flourish. Rousseau on the other hand, envisioned a working civil society worthy of his respect and obedience only if each individual would give himself entirely to the community, for Rousseau, the main and sole purpose of the government is to follow the will of the people.

Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau also differ on which type of government is best suited for society. Locke believed that government was necessary mainly to promote the public good, and that in order to do so, the individual must transfer his power to the community. The basis of Locke's doctrine of majority rule, the law of greater force, suggests that the greater force in a society will rule, which Locke assumed to be the majority. Locke's doctrine of majority rule doesn't preference one form of government over another, its principles can be applied to any government in which the ruler governs with the welfare of the people in mind.

Hobbes is very specific on what he believes the best form of government is…hereditary Monarchy. In Hobbes's version of social contract, the individuals enter in a contract with the rest, at which point they will elect a leader by vote. Once the sovereign is elected he holds ultimate power, Hobbes did not believe in separation of power, and since the sovereign did not personally enter in a contract with anybody else, he retains all the rights men have in the state of nature. Because the sovereign represents the will of the people, he cannot be accused of injustice, he is also to be obeyed at all times, and subjects are to follow his commands, a refusal to do so, could be punished by death. The sovereign has ultimate power under Hobbes's social contract theory and only answers to higher authority "if he exercises his right contrary to the right reason, however, he, like every man in the state of nature, sins against the laws of nature and therefore is answerable to their author, God, for his iniquity" (Strauss 1987, 408).

In Rousseau's mind, the ideal government was one similar to the city-states of ancient Greece, small states governed by the people that have mutual interests and trust. Rousseau believed that Direct democracy was the best overall form of government, even though as states got bigger, different governments were necessary, typically democracy is suited for small states, aristocracy for medium-sized one, and monarchy for large state. Although he saw direct democracy as the best government, he believed that "if there were a people of Gods, it would govern itself democratically. A government so perfect is not suited to men" (Cahn 2012, 578).

In all three versions of the social contract theory, to at least some degree, the sovereign is in charge of the welfare of the people and should govern with that in mind. Likewise, when a group of individuals enter a civil society, they give up their rights as free men in the state of nature for the peace of mind of strength in numbers.

With regards to the duty of the citizens towards the government, all three philosophers use

pretty much the same platform, all citizens should adhere and obey the rules established when the civil society formed, the key difference is on how to behave when the government fails. Locke believed that the right to resist an unjust government was not a political right, but that it was a natural right only to be exercised when the government failed to function according to its intended function. Rousseau, like Locke believes that once that the people have a right to revolt and overthrow the government if the government fails to fulfill its promise to follow the will of the people. In this aspect, Hobbes has a different take. Hobbes believes that the sovereign must be obeyed under all circumstances, even if its orders go against the prerogative of self-preservation, if the sovereign breaks the law of nature, it's up to the creator of those laws, God, to punish him, having said that, he does acknowledge that the natural punishment for neglecting government is rebellion (Straus 1987, 408).

With regards to government, Hobbes is the least Biblical Christian of the three. There is no situation in which must obey the laws of men over the laws of God. God tell us to obey earthly laws, but in the book of Acts, when Peter and the other apostles are brought in to be questioned by the high priest about not following its orders, Peter and the other apostles replied “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). That passage alone makes Hobbes’s view on the duties of the citizens on go against Biblical principles and cannot be followed. John Locke represents the closest view to Biblical Christianity because he saw the right to revolt, not as a political right, but a natural right, and natural rights are given by God.

Religion

Locke believes that the natural law, reason, is implanted in all men by God. Locke advocated for religious tolerance, but that tolerance only seems to go as far as different branches of Christianity. Locke believed that religious morality is the only kind of morality, therefore, he believed that individuals that considered themselves atheist, had opinions and behaviors contrary to what he believed a human society with good moral standards would have.

Hobbes did not believe in separation of power. His ideal government a Monarchy in which the sovereign would wield total power, including control over the church laws and the judgement between good and evil, “judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgive” (Luke 6:37).

Rousseau has a similar view, like Hobbes, he believed that religion is to be used for political purpose and as such, should not be independent of political control. He acknowledged that no state has ever been founded without religion as its base, having said that, he divided religion into three entities, the religion of man, religion of the citizen, and the religion of the priests. He saw the religion of man, which is the religion of the gospel, harmful to society because it detached citizens from all earthly things; the religion of the citizens taught people that to serve the state is to serve God, making it, essentially a theocracy, a violent religion, places people in a natural state of war; and finally the religion of the priests, which splits the state, having one spiritual leader and one political leader, it prevents individuals from being a devour and a citizen at the same time. Rousseau believed a society of true Christians could not be a society of men, therefore it would not fit in his social contract theory.

Conclusion

After careful studying and consideration, I came to the conclusion that John Locke has the most scripturally correct theory of government. It can be seen from the start, Locke believes that our natural rights are given to men by God, and later on, once we study their presentation of the social contract, he is the only one that includes Christianity in his ideal government.

Both Hobbes and Rousseau have no claims to a scripturally correct government. They either believe that religion has no place in government, or that the presence of religion would bring the eventual downfall of said government. Government, like everything else, is a construct given to us by God, therefore believing that one can have a government without the presence of God is an impossibility.

References

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